

New Images / More Depth:

Escaping into reality rather than from it, a new definition of prosperity.

Global Peace Initiative of Women (GPIW) Conference, Asilomar, CA

© Ayya Santacitta, 2010

When I look at my own and also other religious institutions today, what stands out most is that the images they disseminate are not really effective in addressing our increasingly critical global situation. Our traditions actually offer few practical solutions for transforming society towards more sustainable ways of living. Moreover, all of them still favour men over women for positions of power and influence. That's how these organizations have been operating for centuries, as the spiritual guides of societies that have been longing for a transcendence so total, that we came to consider our existence here on the planet as a dangerous trap rather than a precious opportunity to cultivate wisdom and compassion. Our religious traditions still working from within pre-modern world views today, are greatly hampered in providing the inspiration and guidance necessary for developing the individual and communal will to act in the face of the formidable challenges ahead. The supreme good of patriarchal religion calls for a turning away from life and the world, denying the presence of the sacred in our everyday lives. In the grip of these fatally naïve images we are destroying our planet and threatening the survival of many species including our own.

The urgently needed next step in our evolution as a species is a shift from a consciousness that valorizes separation and differentiation to a consciousness that can balance transcendence and differentiation with an equal recognition of immanence, oneness and inclusion. We have to stop regarding our planet as a purely physical entity, separate and distinct from ourselves, and relate to it as the flow of energy it is - with ourselves as well as all other forms of sentience as manifestations of that flow. The old images of consumerism are killing us and it is essential that we withdraw our consciousness from this dying dream. Our planet is a living organism, not simply a physical place to support and feed us. 'Mother Earth' is not here just to give us what we want, when we want it. The steadily mounting crisis is a wake up call, urging us to accept our role as guardians of the Earth and to develop lifestyles that acknowledge and respect our deep interconnectedness.

And everything we need to fulfill this role is already present! All that is required is to turn towards life itself and to listen deeply, instead of getting lost on the surface of things, avoiding

the task at hand, just because it is stressful and out of our control. A consciousness that looks to the whole for answers is far more powerful than one caught in the fragmented images of a separate and insular identity. In order to take the next step in our evolution we must not limit global consciousness by a desire for personal gain and the forces of greed – including our private concern for spiritual progress. To really participate in life is to give ourselves fully to the here and now, not avoiding or turning away from what is happening - *within and around* us. And then life itself will take us where we need to go, opening the doors for our participation. We can no longer afford to split ourselves in pieces and favour a transcendence to be found by rejecting life, rather than by penetrating into the deep and hidden truth of our daily existence. At the dusk of the patriarchal era our childishness still makes us wait for someone else to save us or to tell us what to do. Instead we must accept full responsibility for ourselves and the planet that is our home.

In order to respond to this urgent call for a shift in consciousness, the masculine and feminine have to work together. Actions in the outer world must be informed by a receptivity to the inner world and the guidance that comes from life itself. We do not have to perform heroic feats or learn complex tasks. All that is needed is a fundamental shift in attitude to recognize what is most apparent: that we are all part of one life, a life that is whole and complete in itself - despite ever-changing feelings, thoughts and emotions - pleasant and unpleasant, light and dark. Without being aware of it, we have been caught in an idealized masculine image, a longing for perfection and definition, that degrades the feminine with its understanding of mystery and immanence. Yet the flow of life needs depth and space for new growth to occur and the feminine holds this knowledge naturally in her body, as mother and giver of life. The role of the 'true' and benevolent masculine principle is to protect and support this growth.

However since the dawn of the modern era (or even earlier), masculine rejection and persecution forced women's instinctual understanding into hiding, even from her own conscious knowing. She still carries this wisdom in the cells of her body, as a deep understanding of the patterns of relationship in life. These patterns of connections are all around us, directly accessible to the feminine principle in women and men, as the pulse of life rather than abstract concepts about life. The earth is crying and women hear it. If women are willing to recognize the sacred dimension of their own experience and the earth's suffering at the hands of patriarchy, seeing that this is *also* part of the mysterious process of the evolution of life, then we can walk forward into the future - *together*.

The masculine and feminine need to deepen their co-creative commitment to each other and to life itself, so that the feminine can fully stand in her place and the masculine give up his

position of dominance. These opposites have constellated so much antagonism, but we can choose to leave them behind. Initially this is most easily done in intentional communities. This is where new ways of life can be embodied and then flow out into society at large; once these groups connect with each other, a dynamic shift on a larger scale will become possible. At a certain point the whole structure will wake up and function as one entity, as happens with any living organism - this is how a higher consciousness becomes activated. Then the energy flow around this web responds of its own accord, answering to the need of the moment and the individuals involved will respond in synchronism.

In these groups we can learn how to listen and tune into the depth of life, where new images are born that can guide us in the right direction - images that affirm global oneness and 'interbeing'. We are in great need of these new affirmative images, grounded in everyday life yet speaking to what is highest in humanity. These images carry a symbolic meaning and life force that belongs to the depths of the inner world, and as such they have been known for their healing powers since time immemorial. Through them the inner processes of life are given outer symbolic form, aligning individual consciousness with the unfolding of the whole and thereby supporting our collective awakening to what is happening in the depth of life and our own being. There lie the keys to recovery, transformation and organic growth. Only *these* images have the power to free us from the grip of consumerism, and they cannot be manipulated by the corporate forces of greed that control our present-day society.

This step towards conscious participation in the birth of life-defining new images is very important and most tangibly supported through ritual or what we might call today 'performance art'. Provided these expressions are truly sincere and reverential, life can speak to us again in its most ancient language - employed long ago by the shamans and healers of the tribe - for the welfare of the whole. As a form of non-verbal communication ritual art touches our hearts directly, breaking through shallow interpretations so deeply trapped in the old images of separation and consumerism. This is potent medicine, allowing us to taste a deep connection to life itself and therefore enabling our best qualities to shine forth. After we have been wandering endlessly in the dull flatland of buying and selling, these images are like a cool drink of water and their transforming power will work amazing magic. We can all support and be supported by this unfolding, as the language of the heart knows no boundaries.

The word 'spiritual' actually consists of two parts, 'spirit' and 'ritual'. To be truly spiritual means to enact spirit in the world and this is what needs to be done in order to evolve consciousness to the next level. If we fully participate and respond to the need of the moment, we will know what has to be done and how to do it. If we really cooperate with life, it will respond and let us

know what needs to be known

Respecting the feminine principle and opening ourselves to the wisdom that comes from the depth of our everyday experience is the lever for this shift to a more inclusive level of consciousness. This is the ground for a different image of prosperity, an image that favours depth over distraction, quality over quantity and care over disconnection. However if our spiritual traditions do not set an example, they will fail to fulfill their original purpose and real role in society. Purely traditional and ethnic expressions of religion operating from within pre-modern worldviews will not be powerful enough to make a difference. We need images that speak in a contemporary language, proclaiming timeless truths in relevant expressions, so that people of our era can respond to them. We need a real refuge and support for this transition, so we can muster the courage to look at our individual and collective shadows, which keep us stuck in the grip of consumerism and apathy. Much energy is trapped in these old patterns. Once we acknowledge this, we will see that all that is needed is already here; we just did not notice it from inside the old paradigm.

This does not mean that we are aiming to dilute or distort the message of our venerable religious traditions, but rather while honouring them as our roots, we are extracting new and relevant implications, that could only become apparent by shining a contemporary light onto our collective inheritance. In this way we are allowing our spiritual traditions to evolve in unison with all other areas of culture and thereby give rise to religious expressions, that are truly nourishing and supportive, that address the need of the moment and communicate relevant images for that purpose. Our spiritual traditions could fulfill a pivotal role by providing sacred spaces, where we can learn of the inspiration and strength that comes from these new images, so we can benefit from their healing power and leave behind old patterns of fragmentation and addiction. Encouraging awareness and 'interbeing' from an early age is another top priority that can facilitate this transition.

Each of us can participate in this unfolding according to our own individual calling. Life will guide us to join with others we most deeply resonate with, by our shared understanding of what needs to be done and how to embody it. If we are willing to stay authentic and live our truth in every moment and if enough people participate for the sake of the whole, our planet will awaken as the self-sustaining system it can be. After all, the true measure of a civilization's greatness is not the things it leaves behind but the quality of consciousness it fosters. This is all part of the most amazing and mysterious love affair called life, which needs us to participate by making conscious those images that communicate inclusion, sustainability and healthful growth.

The real evolution (r-evolution) is the evolution of consciousness. True prosperity stems from cultivating a deep awareness in everyday life, as it unfolds within and around us .This is the work that needs to be done. Though not easy to do, it is astonishingly simple and supremely urgent.