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## Serge's Newsletter April 2015

Dear Friend,

Here are my two articles, the first one is about three ways that we can live life, with one way, I believe, being, if we can manage to live it, the antidote to much that is wrong with our planet today. In other words, if we can live the 'Sattvic' way, I think we naturally become the solution to the problems around us instead of, as many of us unwittingly are, their cause. The second article looks at ISIS and how *we, the people in the street*, need to approach it, as I feel that dealing with this rapacious terror organisation should not simply be left up to our world leaders.

This newsletter will also be on my [website](#) under Newsletters so please feel free to post your comments. Or write back to me. I hope there is plenty of disagreement as it always initiates good creative, healthy dialogue. I have a few rather right wing buddies whom this newsletter goes out to and I would love your replies as I always think it healthy if we familiarise ourselves with viewpoints other than those we like to subscribe to. Sometimes, it can be not unhealthy for our blood to boil a bit!

Also please feel free to send on this newsletter to anyone whom you feel may be interested.



## **MUSINGS BASED ON READING SATISH KUMAR'S BOOK 'SPIRITUAL COMPASS: THREE QUALITIES OF LIVING'**

Satish Kumar's recent excellent and informative book gave me a very interesting and different angle by which to view the world and what is wrong with it, see why some of the terrible things that happen, do so, and also why often, despite good intentions, many things often don't change as much as we might like them to. It allowed me to understand more clearly that how events pan out is so much about what level or domain of being they happen in. Satish begins by informing us that the Bhagavad Gita gives us three main ways to be or, put another way, three different realities that we can potentially 'inhabit'. (Of course, we can delve much deeper and see that there are many levels to each of these three ways, but for the purpose of this short article, I will exclude this for the moment.)

### **Sattvic Consciousness**

The first way or reality is the 'Sattvic way' which is the way of wisdom and right livelihood, and which Satish suggests we are all challenged to embrace if we are to be a 'planetary citizen' and play our part in trying to create a world that works, which is to say a society where harmony and justice reign and which is not full of inequality and violence. Like my old friend John Reed, who also wrote an excellent book on this topic, Satish sees this as the way of 'elegant simplicity'. The person who abides by the dictates of elegant simplicity operates authentically in the world. For them, small is generally beautiful and big is not necessarily better. They stand tall yet they tread gently on the ground and are careful not to over consume and are also not afraid to be themselves and to take stands for those truths dear to their hearts. Consequently, they have humility and are more interested in living what the Buddhists call 'mindfully' than spending their time trying to acquire lots of things. Thus, they are more into 'being' than 'owning'.

The person who embraces elegant simplicity, then, has a natural 'cleanliness' about them as their lives are also not muddied by spending energy courting fame, power or glory, all of which as we know, are activities responsible for so much on our planet that is unworkable. The Sattvic person will always have a deep and quiet natural kinship

with all things living and will treat all human beings they encounter with kindness and respect.

They also don't feel they own nature or are stewards to do with it as they wish. Rather they recognise that this attitude is why nature has been so deeply used and abused. Sattvic man and woman experience themselves as true 'friends of the earth', which means that they feel their role is to honour it and protect its resources from being burglarised for greed and profit. Also, because they feel abundant inside themselves - largely because they are more into the game of 'giving to' life as opposed to 'taking from' it as well as more able to recognise life's inherent sacredness, it enables them to feel great pleasure in, and fully savour, little things. Thus, the smile of a friend or a new interesting idea or a beautiful sunset can be a source of great nourishment.

### **Rajassic consciousness**

The problem, however is that the system or the society in which we all live, does not function according to Sattvic values and will often laugh at people who try to live this way and accuse them of being naive. This is because our society is primarily structured along RAJASSIC lines which are all about bigness and extravagance and where we are conditioned into believing that the main aim of life is to become rich, comfortable, famous and successful and where we must try to live in a house which we hope is bigger than other peoples, so they can envy us! And we may feel a failure if we can't do this. The Rajassic way, then, is the way that much of our politics and economics function. I.e., without much authenticity. It is the way our unsustainable system works; it is the world of 'So long as I'm all right, Jack', and that deifies celebrity and glamour and what is fashionable and believes our planet can only be 'saved' by huge projects, scientific progress and big business. In this domain, it is important for corporations to make a profit at all costs and it doesn't especially matter if it happens to be at the expense of people and planet. From this consumerist model, if something goes 'wrong', you tend either to get rid of it - throw it away - or you feel you have to fight it, try to 'wipe it out'. We see this in our many 'unwinnable wars' against drugs, crime, poverty etc. In this domain there is little sacredness and the innerness of things is given scant attention. The god of reason reigns supreme and the world of tenderness - of the Heart - is given short shrift.

And as I just said, our problem is that this is the world or value system that many of us in the West are brought up in and whose mindset permeates most of the air we breathe and the thoughts we think. It is the domain of the media and big business and politics, where to 'make it' means always to have a higher *standard* of living all the time ( and politicians win elections who promise us this) as opposed to a higher *quality* of living. It is the domain that believes that continual growth is the way out of our current mess and cannot see that this is precisely what is causing it.

### **Tamassic consciousness**

And then of course it is easy for the Rajassic way to degenerate even further. When it

does so - which it does a lot of the time - it becomes the TAMASSIC way which happens when politics becomes solely about control, power, corruption, self-interest and going to war for oil and where human rights get pulverised. Putin is pure Tamassic. Let me give you an example of how it gets to this:

Business is Sattvic when a few local fishermen take out their small boats every day to catch enough fish for their own needs plus to sell a few to make a living. It becomes Rajassic when a large business comes in solely to make it bigger and where the locals may get pushed out of the equation. It degenerates into becoming Tamassic when a large multi national company moves in sensing the opportunity to 'make a killing' and operates with force with the result that everything gets vast and huge nets are put down everywhere resulting in a total devastation of the local economy as all the fish in that area are raked out of the ocean. This is the mindset that is so devastating for our planet. What is needed, Satish suggests, is 'not to give more to the poor but to take less from them'. He sees one of the main problems in the world being injustice, whereby the very rich who own most of the world, keep the very poor in that state. As Naomi Klein( whose latest book I will discuss next month) puts it, many of the very rich don't care about climate change as they feel they have enough money to avoid floods and hurricanes, and for me this attitude is violence. Poverty for Satish is also violence, as is pollution, as is much industrialization and globalisation and where governments, to stay in power, institutionalize violence by waging wars. When the Rajassic degenerates into the Tamassic we have a world where, in Satish's words, ' business is without spirit, trade is without compassion, industry is without ecology, finance is without fairness resulting in a breakdown of society and the destruction of the natural world, which is then divided into a battlefield of nations competing with each other for power, influence and control over minds, markets and natural resources.'

## **The Big Challenge**

And this is so true isn't it? What are you and I to do about this? I think that if we are to have a world that works, we its citizens, need to change our mindset, expand our consciousness, open our hearts, learn to 'be' in the world in a new way, see what we are doing in a new way, so our lives can be the antidote to this. Certainly this was the message of my last book. A lot of this emerges from our evolving a new relationship with Mother Earth. Our problem is that we are constantly trying to grab what we can of it for ourselves because we have not evolved to a place that many indigenous people live out of every day, and where they realise that ' the land doesn't belong to them, they belong to the land'. Therefore, so long as we try to change the world coming from a Rajassic/often tipping into Tamassic mindset, as many of our politicians and scientists and economists and bankers try to do, we will never make any progress as we are still part of the problem and as Einstein reminds us, 'No problem can be solved at the level at which it exists'.

Our challenge is surely to learn to live more Sattvic based lives, where in Gandhi's words, we start to 'become the change that we want to see happen.' From that place, I

believe we can all work miracles. The last thing I will add is that we don't necessarily have to be poor and live in mud huts to tread the Sattvic path. We can be wealthy but still live simply and honourably and see our challenge as being about using our resources to 'make a difference' in the world. I have several good friends who are very wealthy but they live quietly and devote most of their time and energy to supporting those who are less privileged and I think this is terrific. Money is not bad. It is very important. If a better world is to come into being, if a new system is to emerge that is sustainable, it will take many trillions of euros to initiate it. So ask yourself: how much of a Sattvic way of life do I feel I live and what radical changes do I feel are needed to increase my Sattvic-ness, and is this what I want?

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## A FEW THOUGHTS ABOUT ISIS

### What is ISIS?

The rise of ISIS is a uniquely horrendous 21st century symptom of a massively complex and tangled knot at the very heart of the human condition. Pre-modern zealots, facebook jihadist fantasists using modern weaponry and media tactics to combat modern influences, engaging in a blood-thirsty crusade to take the world gruesomely back to the Middle Ages. How is it that this terrible organisation that has nothing whatsoever to do with the very noble aims of Islam, was able to originate? And what, if anything, can we do about it? It is important we ask these questions, as I believe it is not just up to governments to solve the many problems in the world but there are many things that each of us, the person on the ground, can also do. As regards the issue of ISIS, I think we need to understand it a bit better, try to get closer to the root cause of this cancer which has metastasised in such a deadly manner and is now spreading all over the Middle East.

I think one of the first things we need to know is that if we just try to attack the symptoms, that is, kill off all ISIS members as an end in itself, that that of itself is insufficient and that more jihadists will simply emerge in their place. In other words, simply waging a 'war against terror' - that is, using their own tactic back at them - is no ultimate answer. Scilla Elworthy, founder of Peace Direct, has always understood this,

having written ( before ISIS ever reared its ugly head) and probably thinking of al-Qa'ida, that 'terrorism is a tactic rather than a definable enemy. Their numbers are controlled by the level of hate and anger that drives people to join their ranks.'

This is also very true of ISIS and I would add that what makes it even more deadly is the level of violence it practices and how, in order to obtain more converts, it has structured itself very seductively using the social media to appeal to people's need for meaning. Indeed, it is particularly configured to cater to young people's sense of adventure and it presents itself very attractively to confused young men who have never engaged in any rites of passage to initiate them into their true maleness. As a result they remain fixated at immature and narcissistic levels where they are susceptible to its powerful grooming techniques. In addition, ISIS 'warriors' use the media to portray themselves as glamorous and sexy - sort of jihadist rock stars - which can also be appealing to certain vulnerable women. Indeed, ISIS are expert 'groomers' and use many of the same brain washing techniques that cults such as Scientology use, making people believe that joining their cause is to become part of a very important world movement to transform the world. Like all cults, ISIS present themselves as being on the side of 'good' fighting 'bad', and a caliphate based on a bloodthirsty Sharia law is seen as the answer to all the 'evil materialism and militarism and corruption' of the West. Many young people want to 'belong' to something 'bigger' which is not offered by our existing 'Rajassic society' in whose eyes they are merely a 'consumer'. The most worrying fact is that thousands of young children also get pulled into this movement. Images of six year olds holding AK 47's proclaiming their desire to kill infidels is truly scary.

### **How has ISIS emerged?**

No new movements come into being unless there is somehow a 'space' to enable them to do so and the whole unstable situation in the Middle East coupled with its total lack of integration and direction, full of warring tribes and confused and angry people missing the security ( even if given at a price) given them by deposed dictators ( think Saddam and Gadaffi) has conspired to create the opportunity for its emergence. Many in the know were not surprised when ISIS first arrived on the scene. Just as an individual who leads an unhealthy lifestyle and who constantly feels stressed and anxious, and experiences no meaning in their lives, is susceptible to getting cancer, so the disharmonious Middle East society is eminently susceptible to the cancer of ISIS. And America's recent disastrous and unnecessary war to 'rid' Saddam's Iraq of its mythic WMDs coupled with the horrendous way that the war was orchestrated, served as the appropriate trigger.

What occurred was that after the invasion, Saddam's Bathist army was stupidly disbanded which left hundreds of thousands of soldiers - many of them high-ranking commanders - deprived of a livelihood but with all their weaponry intact. Many were imprisoned and while there, encountered jihadists and became radicalised by them, while the former learned from them about military strategies, and as a result a new and

fatal marriage was born. Saddam's military men lost their secularism and when the US armed forces left, they started plotting.

Another factor is that the consciousness of many people in Arab countries is low; many are stuck in having a very, undeveloped or 'mythic' view of the world, very much at odds with the modern world. And ISIS is a particularly pathological expression of this. We are horrified at its beheadings but the truth is that in Saudi Arabia, for example, people get beheaded all the time often for something as minor as stealing and this is seen as quite normal! The fact that many people in these societies have never subscribed to what we may call 'higher virtues' has a lot to do, I think, with the fact that modern values got introduced via Colonialism. Hence many distortions crept in.

Put simply, while many of the young in the Middle East are visionaries and very evolved and aspire to a higher-order freedom - we saw this present in the early days of the Arab Spring - large sectors of society are very uneducated and still hold to an ethnocentric worldview and consequently are hugely against modernisation which they believe could dilute their 'pure values', which of course ties in with ISIS. In other words, many in the Middle East today, see the world through a very fundamentalist good vs evil, black vs white lens which is very, very hard to shift. You can't argue with such people and say 'Look here, this world view of yours is a bit limited!', as you simply won't be heard. The problem is not with the noble religion of Islam. The problem is the 'unevolved level' at which it is interpreted. (We interpret any religion according to the level that we are at.) Talk to any ISIS member ( were that possible) and no doubt they would tell you that if you are an unbeliever - that is, don't see the world as they do - then in their eyes you have no soul and so it is not evil, but indeed their right, to kill you. And they believe that. As I just said, you can't just talk people out of their stages of development - try converting members of the American Tea party to the realisation that climate change really does exist! - and the less evolved a person is, the more their ideas about the world are set in stone.

And this is a huge problem. All the great visionary thinkers have argued that only if, species wise, we human beings evolve to a higher level where we change our ways, move away from our greed and violence etc, can our planet be healed. Is this happening? Philosophers like Ken Wilber inform us that as many as 60 to 70% of the world's population still see the world through a primitive lens. In addition, we have just explored how imprisoned so much of the Western world is in the clutches of the Rajassic and Tomassic. All this makes it that much harder for humanity to move to conditions whereby global peace and harmony can become a lived reality.

### **So how do we deal with the problem of ISIS?**

As I am no expert and as Middle Eastern politics have become so very, very convoluted, I will just make a few general points and start by suggesting that while I believe one of our big challenges today is to find peaceful means to resolve conflict - and to a large extent this is beginning to happen and is in fact happening successfully in many parts of the world - I think there are certain exceptions. Just as aggressive

chemotherapy is the best way of stopping certain highly virulent cancers from spreading, and force had to be used to stop Hitler - the pacifists were wrong and Nazism could have taken over the world if Hitler had not been stopped - so a degree of force does need to be used against ISIS. I am glad that the Arab countries are now also taking responsibility in this arena.

## **Preventative measures**

But force must not be the only strategy. We must also use preventative approaches. One needs to think what are the conditions that have created the emergence of ISIS and one of them surely is financial necessity. If those disbanded soldiers had been paid, would they have done what they did? I doubt it. So: governments can think up ways of offering them work. Pay them to abscond. Cheaper than trying to kill them. Also, much more needs to be done to counter the lies and distortions put out on the web by Isis. Many of those who travel out to Syria to enlist or to become jihadist brides, are not properly informed how truly horrendous life is under this Caliphate, nor do they know that it is mainly other Muslims whom ISIS kill. In other words, we need to find imaginative ways of countering the distorted propaganda that abounds.

Also, parents need to be very careful and stay on top of what their children are up to and the influences they may fall under ( much grooming is done on line), while those who head mosques and Islamic schools need to be very careful that no rogue imams are allowed in to preach the politics of hatred and that no Islamists are allowed to teach. Also, while many complain of an increasingly Big Brother society, I am glad that the 'powers that be' in countries keep a strong watch on any suspects so that potential terror plots may be foiled in the early stages of planning.

I also think that we can do a great deal more than we often do, to welcome Muslims into our Western culture as many need help in integrating. In addition, Muslims who are already integrated in Western societies - and there are many - can perhaps also do more to stand up for the true values of Islam and actively condemn those who bring their great religion into disrepute. Given that we live in a world where everything is interconnected, it also follows that the more our unsustainable system undergoes a metamorphosis and the less we have a world rife with corrosive capitalism fuelling a myriad of injustices, where there is one law for the rich and another for the poor, less and less can the West be accused of being a terrorist ( was not the Iraq war an act of terrorism?) and thus hatred against it will diminish. At one level, ISIS reflects the dark face of the world and the more all the nations get their act together and try to operate collaboratively and start creating a society that is more integrated and workable and a financial system that is fairer and where minorities can begin feeling respected, the less space there will be for the cancer of ISIS to exist. In other words, just as a swamp that is drained results in the eradication of those mosquitoes that were once drawn to frequent it, so as our planet becomes healthier, there will be correspondingly less space for toxic ideologies like ISIS to exist. It follows, therefore, that those of us who, in our different ways, choose to dedicate some part of our lives towards working to create

a better, safer, more harmonious world, are indirectly doing our bit to combat terrorism. When humanity evolves to a point where more of us have hearts full of love as opposed to of fear and terror, we will no longer be a space for this horror to continue existing.

### **'Inner' actions to take**

And this is long term work. But there is a lot we can all do right now. Bearing in mind that what happens externally is always a mirror of our inner individual and collective states of being, it follows that a lot of inner work on our part also needs to be done. As we just saw, the terrorist is a reflection of a deeply wounded part of ourselves that needs healing and so many of us may need to own and confront the terrorist inside each of us and ask ourselves where we feel terror and where we might inflict it.

Certainly if we look back over our past history for the last few thousand years, we see that we human beings have treated each other quite abominably. Rapes, beheadings, executions, mass murders , ethnic cleansings have been the daily lot of mankind for eons and each of us as part of the larger whole of mankind, carry some portion of that dreadful legacy of carnage and victimhood inside us. Perhaps ISIS, at one level, is a left-over or un-integrated chunk of world evil belonging to another era that is re-emerging as it has never been worked through in the past, and consequently is giving us the opportunity right now to do so! But certainly, I believe that the more each of us can do to transform our own evil and destructiveness and release the love, kindness, tenderness and compassion which is also inside us (and which may, in some of us, be equally hidden), the less we conspire to keep alive a terrorist-riven world.

We can also help change things a great deal through prayer and meditation. It has been shown for example, that when groups of people meditate in prime crime areas of big cities, the crime rate goes down considerably. So we need to meditate more on peace in those areas of the world where ISIS evil is most rampant. Perhaps if we had a few more Gandhis, Nelson Mandelas and Mother Therasas alive on the planet, it might just make up for that 60 to 70% of us that , consciousness wise, are still half asleep. Or maybe we have such people but we don't know it for they are working behind the scenes. Indeed, however much we may like to complain about the evil in the world, we must never forget that it really is also full of the most extraordinary people in every single nation, working tirelessly to create a healthier planet. (read Paul Hawken's book *Blessed Unrest*) So can we join their ranks? Are we prepared to make the shift into bringing more Sattvic values into our lives, as I suggested in my first essay? I think we are all being challenged to do so and especially to understand that responsibility today means much more than just caring for ourselves and our own family or tribe. It means caring for the entire planet and embracing what I called in my book , the universal heart, enabling us to experience Gaia as a totality of which we are a part...

Thank you for reading my ramblings. I wish you well.

Much love,



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