HUMAN DESTINY IN THE NUCLEAR AGE

Dr. Karan Singh

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The outstanding feature of the last quarter of the twentieth century is likely to be the final collapse of the materialistic paradigm that has dominated world thought for many centuries. This paradigm, based on an ultimate dualism built into the very texture of matter, has been proved by the latest advances in particle physics and extra-galactic cosmology to be inadequate; and with this, the materialistic philosophies based upon that view can also be seen to be unsatisfactory. With the impact of post-Einsteinian physics, quantum mechanics, Hiesenberg's Uncertainty Principle, and many other conceptual revolutions, the old structures have begun to crumble. 'Solid matter' dissolves into waves of probability, and the new physics seems to be approaching the mystic vision of which seers and sages of all traditions have spoken down through the ages. Consciousness now emerges not as an epiphenomenon of matter, but as the more fundamental factor in our perception of the universe around us. The current intellectual and spiritual turmoil shows clearly that at this crucial evolutionary crossroads mankind is grooping for a new model, a new philosophy, a new paradigm, a new consciousness to replace the old. And it is not a coincidence that this is happening at a juncture when humanity is in supreme peril; not from another species, not from outer space, but from itself. From deep within the human psyche there has developed a terrible destructive power that threatens not only our own generation but countless generations yet unborn, not only our own race but all life on this planet.

Ancient myths often powerfully illuminate the human predicament, and there is the potent Hindu myth of "The Churning of the Milky Ocean" - the samudra-manthana - which speaks to us today across the millennia, symbolizing as it does the long and tortuous evolution of consciousness on Planet Earth. This great myth tells that the Devas and the Asuras, the bright and the dark powers, overcame their age-old animosity and cooperated in the churning of the ocean. This went on for aeons, until at last rare gifts began to emerge: the all-giving cow and the divine horse, the wish-fulfilling tree and the divine elephant. These and other great gifts appeared and were happily divided between the two sides, who assumed that the churning could continue for ever with only benign results, as its ultimate objective was the Elixir of Immortality. Suddenly, without warning, the ocean started to boil with a deadly poison - a new malign dimension of which neither Devas nor Asuras had any knowledge. Rapidly the poison spread through the three worlds - the water, land and skies. The churners fled helter-skelter in terror, striving to escape from the deadly fumes, forgetting all the gifts that they had accumulated. And then Shiva Mahadeva appeared, the great primal divinity aloof from the avarice and materialism of the Devas and the Asuras. He collected the poison in a cup and drank it, integrating it into his being. Then the danger passed, order was restored. Chanting hymns to the glory of Shiva
the participants returned, the churning was resumed, and finally the ambrosial urn appeared and the whole process was successfully completed.

This myth vividly illustrates the human predicament today. Prolonged churnings have given man the great gifts of science and technology. There have been incredible breakthroughs in medicine and communications, agriculture and electronics, space travel and cybernetics. We now have resources and technology which, if used with wisdom and compassion, can ensure for every human being on earth the necessary physical, intellectual, material and spiritual inputs for a full and healthy life. We have over the last few decades raised living standards for billions of human beings and chalked up tremendous material progress. And yet surely the poison is also upon us. Hundreds of billions of dollars and roubles, pounds and francs, rupees and yen are spent every day on the manufacture of monstrous weapons with unprecedented powers of destruction. It is estimated that there are now well over fifty thousand nuclear warheads on Planet Earth, many thousands of times more powerful than the bombs that devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the dawn of the nuclear age fifty years ago; many of them with more explosive force than used by both sides in the entire second World War. There is overwhelming evidence to show that any kind of nuclear war would not only shatter human civilization as we know it, but would poison the air and the oceans and render the planet virtually uninhabitable. When the dinosaurs bowed out after a reign of sixty-five million years, they went comparatively peacefully; but if and when we go, we will probably leave a charred and ravaged planet, incapable of supporting more than extremely primitive life-forms. Whether this happens through political miscalculation, an accident, a flight of geese, or a malfunctioning computer chip matters little. It is unnecessary to go into the catastrophic impact of a nuclear war, even a so-called ‘limited’ one - which itself is a contradiction in terms. The film The Day After, gross understatement though it was, did help to focus worldwide attention on this danger, as did Jonathan Schell’s admirable book The Fate of the Earth, and the study by Carl Sagan and others called The Cold and the Dark: the world after nuclear war. It is now clear that if we embark on a nuclear war we will be committing not just suicide but terricide, the destruction of our planet. And so one possible path in the nuclear age leads humanity straight into unprecedented and irreversible thermo-nuclear annihilation.

The irony of the situation is that in fact for the first time in human history a truly global civilization is being born before our very eyes as a result of astounding technological breakthroughs over the last few decades. In politics and economics, communications and culture the old barriers are crumbling and new worldwide perspectives are emerging. Young people throughout the world, whether in Moscow or Madras, Beijing or Bombay, New York or New Delhi, are dancing to the same rhythms, responding to the same cultural modes in dress and food habits, resonating with the same inner hopes and aspirations, sharing the same vested interest in survival. It is a sobering thought that we are a privileged generation, not because we will be the first to see the dawn of the third millennium after Christ, but because we may well be the last to inhabit this planet. Can we accept the second possibility as passive spectators and drift mindlessly towards disaster? Can we acquiesce in a situation where one quarter of mankind is overfed and three quarters underfed; where millions suffer from obesity and overeating while hundreds of millions waste slowly away from malnutrition, stunted in body and mind; where millions are over-medicated and hundreds of millions lack access to even elementary medical facilities? Can we continue to accept a situation where vast resources of the developed as
well as the developing nations are being sucked into the the black holes of armament manufacture, of creating increasingly efficient engines of death, while billions still go without two square meals a day? Can we close our ears to the cry of the deprived and the oppressed while the world plunges on towards its rendezvous with the ultimate apocalypse?

If the answer to these question is in the negative, as it must be, then we can no longer remain mired in obsolete pre-nuclear concepts. We have to move towards a new, global, consciousness that will enable us not only to survive but to flourish in the global village which we now inhabit. This involves a major conceptual shift to complementarity in place of competition, convergence in place of conflict, holism in place of hedonism. We must heal the split within the human psyche; we must gather the diverse fragments of human consciousness and meld them into a glowing whole; we must effect the transition to a holistic worldview to replace the present fractured and fragmented consciousness of the human race.

There have been several transmutations of consciousness in the past, such as the movement from the oceans to the land, from the trees to the plains, from nomadic to agricultural civilization, and then on to industrial and post-industrial society. But then time ran at a much slower pace, and the required changes in attitudes and comprehension could come about over several generations. For us, time itself has telescoped; we will need to make the transition in our own lifetime if the human race is to survive at all.

This places upon all of us tremendous pressure and responsibility. Transitions are by no means painless; they invariably involve a great deal of physical and psychological distress. It would be interesting to know what a caterpillar feels during its metamorphosis into a butterfly. While the final product may be dazzling and iridescent, the process is not likely to have been a pleasant one for the worm, as it has meant abandoning a comfortable and familiar environment and taking a leap into a new and hitherto unknown dimension. The most crucial of all transitions by mankind, the one to global consciousness, is also bound to be difficult and even dangerous. The more important question is whether it is at all possible. Can there be a substantial enough transformation of consciousness on planet earth in time to prevent its destruction? Or is this particular adventure in planetary consciousness doomed to failure? Is man in fact a creature programmed for self-destruction? No-one really knows the answer, but the Bhagavadgita teaches that we must act in the manner we feel to be right and not be obsessed with the consequences; act not from our inflated or deflated egos but from the deepest recesses of our being. Indeed at this juncture in planetary history, creative action is a spiritual imperative, and lack of commitment an inexcusable dereliction of moral responsibility.

We are then led to enquire what exactly can be done to hasten the transition. I suggest for consideration a five-point programme that could help in the process, provided it is widely-enough publicised and acted upon. Many of these elements are already in operation to some extent, but they need to be coordinated and accelerated so that they can achieve a creative symbiosis. The first requirement is to work out the theoretical philosophical underpinning of the new global consciousness. For this we must draw on many of mankind's traditions, both in the religious and secular modes, including the great Western liberal tradition and the Marxist tradition, and especially upon the latest insights of science. From religion we must reject the intolerance, fundamentalism and fanaticism that have caused so much human misery and suffering for thousands of years, and choose positive
universal principles that can help strengthen the global consciousness. These can be found to a greater or lesser degree in all the religions of the world. In the Vedas, for example, we have ideals that are startling in their contemporary relevance. Such concepts as the spiritual unity of all that exists, the divinity inherent in each human being, mankind as a single family, the harmony of religions, the welfare of all sections of society, which are clearly enunciated in the Upanishads, provide an ideological framework for the new consciousness; and the writings of the great evolutionary thinkers of our century, such as Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin, can greatly help to refine and illuminate the new philosophy.

Once this is done, the tremendous resources of modern mass media must be pressed into service so that the message gets across to all sections of the human race and becomes part of the intellectual structure of mankind. This is a task in which national governments and non-official agencies, as well as international and multilateral organizations, need to be involved. This year the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations is being observed. What better task can there be for the United Nations than to take the initiative in working toward creating the global consciousness? Other UN Agencies, especially UNESCO, the UN University in Tokyo and others, as well as non-official organizations such as Rotary, Lions, Young Pioneers, and so on, should also be actively involved in this process.

Simultaneously the third task is to set up a worldwide network, linking the hundreds of groups and millions of people in the world who are feeling acutely the great pressure of the future. This network must cut across all barriers of nationality and race, sex and religion, ideology and economy. It must unite East and West, North and South, rich and poor, white and black, young and old, believer and atheist, into a massive, coordinated force to save mankind from annihilation. While nationalism will remain an important factor, it can no longer be allowed to hold the entire human race to ransom. In the final analysis, our very sense of humanness must lead to a global consciousness that transcends lesser formulations and ushers in a new mode of thinking more in line with the realities of this nuclear age.

The fourth input is the imperative necessity of halting the suicidal and now essentially meaningless nuclear arms race. With enough fissionable material already available to destroy every human being on this planet fifty times over, the whole syndrome has become absurd, especially when we realise that an equivalent of ten days expenditure on armaments can permanently abolish hunger from the globe. While it is essentially the nations who form the “nuclear club” who will have to cooperate in any revival of sanity, what we can all do as individuals is to try and create a strong pressure of public opinion, and in particular to mobilize religious and political leaders, intellectual and social activists, so that the better conscience of mankind can be heard loud and clear.

Finally, any movement towards the new global consciousness must turn inwards, and relate to each individual’s search for inner peace and certitude. In our own lives we must move towards a realisation of the truth at the core of our being, the glowing higher consciousness that is the birthright of each individual born on this planet; because in the ultimate analysis it is in the crucible of our individual selves alone that the poison around us can be contained and transformed into the new consciousness that we need. In this lies the hope for individual salvation, as well as the survival of planet earth.

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Armed with this five-point programme, we can begin the task of combating and reversing the damage that has been inflicted upon the earth’s atmosphere over the last few decades. The steady release of radio-activity into the atmosphere, and the increasing hazards posed by the disposal of nuclear wastes are only the more dramatic manifestations of the way in which we have polluted the biosphere. Hundreds of thousands of square miles of forest disappear every year, taking with them many more species of fauna and flora. The atmosphere has been poisoned, particularly in the great urban and industrial concentrations, so that in many cities it is becoming increasingly difficult to breathe clean air. The ozone layer surrounding the planet is becoming dangerously attenuated, the cumulative result of which will only unfold in the decades ahead and in the lives of generations yet unborn. The great oceans which were the repository of the earliest life forms, and from which all creatures originally emerged on earth, are being heavily polluted. The unplanned and exponential growth of population in many developing countries also depresses living standards and imposes an intolerable burden on their natural resources. It is in this grim context that the future of human destiny in the nuclear age will have to be evaluated. While fully accepting the great beneficent achievements of science, what is now needed is a new compassion, a deeper holistic approach to the problems of humanity, a more fundamental understanding of the depth and complexity of the issues involved, an unwavering commitment to the dignity and divinity inherent in each individual.

Now that we have broken away from the confines of space and begun exploring the solar system and beyond we are in a better position to appreciate our mother planet, that has nurtured consciousness up from the slime of the primeval ocean billions of years ago. The ancient spiritual tradition of both East and West has always known that our planet is not just a ball of earth and stone, lava and water, but a living spiritual presence. A most dramatic illustration of this was provided by that unique first photograph taken from outer space, which showed us Earth as it really is, a tiny speck of life and light against the unending vastness of outer space, pulsating with spiritual energy and a luminous, fragile beauty. This Earth, our mother, has nurtured consciousness from the beginning of time and has sustained life for millennia. Will we repay our debt by converting her into a burnt-out cinder circling the sun into eternity? Or will we even at this late hour so marshall our inner and outer resources that we succeed in making the vital transition to a new consciousness? It is this most crucial of all decisions that it is the privilege and responsibility or our generation to make; for it is this, in the ultimate analysis, that will mould the contours of human destiny in the nuclear age.
AUROVILLE, a city in search ...

Alan Herbert

Auroville began with a dream, a dream of a place that “no nation could claim as its own, where all human beings of goodwill who have a sincere aspiration could live freely as citizens of the world and obey one single authority, that of the supreme truth ...”

A feature of Auroville from its beginnings has been freedom for the expression of diversity: a refusal to identify with one exclusive viewpoint, with only one form of development or self-expression. In this sense Auroville contains all the contradictions, the hopes and insanities of modern existence. But it also holds a vision: that beneath these surface contradictions there is a deeper Reality which can assign to each person his or her true place, harmonise the discords, and prepare humanity for the next great step in evolution. For our present humanity, as the great Indian seer Sri Aurobindo has pointed out, is not the apex but a transitional stage in evolution - and is therefore inherently unsustainable in its present form. As he put it:

“Even as the animal man has been largely converted into a mentalized and, at the top, a highly mentalized humanity, so too ... an evolution or conversion ... of the present type of humanity into a spiritualised humanity is the need of the race.”

This major transition from guidance by the mind to guidance by a higher spiritual consciousness is being made possible by the working of a new consciousness force, a force which is shaking everything up and preparing it for change, for transformation. What is needed to contact this force is not more technology, but the simplicity, the courage, to open up to something else. Ultimately it is contact with that force which is the raison d’etre, the ultimate sustaining principle of Auroville. All activities here are opportunities for contacting that force, and allowing it to become operational.
INDIA AND HUMAN UNITY

Shyamsunder

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"The whole earth is one family: vasudhaiva kutumbakam. So, O man, regard the whole earth as your own family." This has been among the first pillars of Indian culture.

"sarve bhavantu sukhinah - May all be happy!" This has been among the first morning prayers in India.

"sarvan khalvidam brahman - The whole universe is constituted by the Brahman." This has been among the first statements of Indian seers.

"ahimsa paramo dharmah" Non-violence, in its highest sense, has been among the first tenets of Indian teaching.

"All beings constitute but One Self." This is a categorical statement of the unity of all beings, revealed by the Rishis of yore.

God is seen as the Supreme Self, paramatman. Each individual soul, atman, is a spark from the Supreme Self, and is meant to unite with That. There is the Universal Soul; there are individual souls, there are also group souls. The group souls, like individual ones, are multitudinous, for many are the groupings and collectivities: the clan, the country, the nation, the race, the continent, and so on. And as individual souls tend to unite with the Supreme, so do the group souls - all expressing themselves in diverse ways, often contradicting each other, yet with the same ultimate goal of union.

In manifestation there is the play of Ignorance, the play of multiplicity and diversity, the play of separation and ego - and the One Self is forgotten. In this play of separate individualities and personalities, there is competition, struggle, strife and clash. Be it an individual or a group or a concert, each entity works for itself, seeks its own satisfaction, its own growth, its own fulfilment. The result is division, discord and disharmony. The original Unity stands lost in the maze.

In India the truth of being human is experienced the other way: in self-giving, in mutual help, in collaboration, in mutual complementariness. The self-interest and self-growth of one self coalesces with the self-interest and growth of other selves. Thus the diverse beings work to reveal the Unity which is their source as well as their destination.

In India, the Unity of all creation is not a mere intellectual concept. It is an experience, a perception, a living vibration - revealed and lived by the Rishis and passed on by them to posterity as India's cultural heritage and legacy. Fundamentalism and fanaticism have never been appreciated in India; the most contradictory beliefs and practices have been permitted at the same time; co-existence in this country survives on the basis of the brotherhood of children of That One.

Peace, shanti, is the watchword of Bharat. Peace is invoked at the beginning, remembered in the middle, again invoked at the end: "shanti, shanti, shanti - Peace for all, for all."

No wonder, then, that Bharat is the god-chosen soil for the city of human unity.