



BRAHMA KUMARIS WORLD SPIRITUAL UNIVERSITY

CONSCIOUSNESS AND CLIMATE CHANGE: BUILDING SPIRITUAL CAPACITY TO RESPOND TO GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE

Statement for the
COP 21 – Twenty-first Session of the Conference of the Parties
United Nations Climate Change Conference
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As a nongovernmental organization with consultative status with the United Nations (UN), the contribution of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University (BKWSU) to the UN community is in considering issues, such as climate change, in a spiritual framework, highlighting the spiritual dimension of the decisions facing the UN member states. Our premise in the first in this series of papers (Dec. 2009) was that what the world needs at this time is a profound shift in awareness – a shift in the thinking that is producing our current crisis. We believe that expanding the climate change conversation to include the inner dimension, will ultimately transform the quality of the conversation and the possible agenda for action among stakeholders.

CLIMATE CHANGE AS SPIRITUAL OPPORTUNITY

The dramatic phenomena resulting from climate change have allowed the human family -- within our lifetimes -- to see something we took for granted in the past: the subtle, elegant and balanced systems that have always supported life on Earth. It has also allowed us to see the mistaken assumptions behind lifestyles of excess and waste, dependency on fossil fuels and economies that rely on expansion over balance.

In this way it is a spiritual opportunity, an opportunity to adjust our awareness, attitudes, vision and actions to align with what we have now come to understand. This spiritual trajectory of awareness, attitude, vision and action is fundamental to the Brahma Kumaris knowledge and to that of many spiritual cultures. It is something we have been elaborating in papers since 2009—the link between consciousness and the range of possible actions relative to climate change. [See Brahma Kumaris papers, on *Consciousness and Climate: A Confluence of Two Living Systems I and II*, prepared for the UN Climate Change Conferences in Copenhagen, Denmark, 2009, and Cancun, Mexico, 2010.]

The commitments of nation states and their inability to meet these commitments has been the focus of much of the discourse around climate change, and it will continue to be a focus of these conferences. The hope is that nations and their people will choose a new course of

action, not only because of the threat climate change poses, but also because they understand the moral and ethical imperative and feel compassion for the most vulnerable populations.

SPIRITUAL RECOVERY: TOWARDS RESILIENCE AND RESTORATION

In addition to urging the nation states of the world to take bold action, there is now another focus in the global discourse on climate change: how to respond to the irreversible impacts of the changes already underway in the earth's natural systems. Climate change is sited as a "threat multiplier," as it exacerbates current challenges and threats such as infectious disease, terrorism and conflict over scarce resources, displacement, migration and so on. The chief of the human rights division of UNFPA has recently spoken of the "chronicification of trauma," partly due to the effects of climate change.

Those experiencing traumatic climate events face displacement and a loss of the continuity of life and life's meanings. At a time when we are being called on to be most magnanimous, many hearts and doors are closing to those most in need. This is the time to extend our sphere of connection and concern beyond our own well being to everyone in the human family and to support their resilience and recovery. If we want to cultivate resilience, stability and a sense of hope in the affected populations, which may eventually include all of us, we must increase our spiritual capacity. Spiritual capacity will help us address the spiritual emergencies the world is facing.

What can we affect by building our spiritual capacity?

1. **We can create inner & outer stability.** As we develop individual and societal capacity to stabilize our minds, we can in turn create outer stability and overcome epidemics of fear and uncertainty. Meditation and many kinds of inner cultivation help people to create a stable and clear mind to make better decisions and to remain hopeful in the midst of uncertainty.
2. **We can cultivate restorative narratives.** An unprecedented number of experiences break the heart and scar the memory track, leaving whole populations in extended periods of grief. Recovery, post-traumatic growth and human flourishing are possible in the wake of trauma, but they rely on our ability to develop restorative narratives about these traumatic events -- narratives that acknowledge what has happened and expand the story to focus on purpose, meaning and the persistent inner qualities of the human being such as compassion, inner peace and unlimited love in individuals and in communities. These narratives support the reconstruction of the inner sense of self and cultivate resilience and the ability to rebuild again.
3. **We can offer spiritual friendship.** Our ability to experience and express empathy and compassion to those affected by climate change or those at risk of being displaced distinguishes us as a human family. Traumatic events create dissociation and isolation, the feeling that no one cares, that the world is too busy or too weary of still another tragedy to offer company and support.

4. **We can amplify the life-giving energy of ascent.** A vital capacity of this time is to resist the influence of this heavy and fragmenting energy of descent, which causes people to become confused and to make poor decisions. We need to create a lighter, life-giving ascending energy – an energy that comes when our minds are filled with deep peace, unlimited love and purity. As we broaden this field of lighter ascending energy, we are supporting the transformation of the atmosphere and eventually the renewal of the world.

SPIRITUAL CAPACITY AS COLLECTIVE MOMENTUM

The last several decades have brought global challenges on such a scale that we have been forced to work collectively to face them. We have held conferences, convened dialogues and created protocols. But none of these methods has moved the needle.

To bring stability, resilience and compassionate action on a global scale, we need to develop widespread capacity for a shift in awareness and consciousness through silent reflection, meditation and yoga. This capacity applied by large collectives is the subtle key to creating the kind of inner shift in millions that allays despair and cultivates resilience, allowing people to make good choices that benefit the whole system and to rebuild their lives.

This work is actually well underway. This year 120 countries ratified the creation of a UN International Day of Yoga, which was celebrated worldwide on June 21. A mindfulness movement has reached such influential venues as the British House of Lords and the World Economic Forum.

The Brahma Kumaris have been focused on the development of these subtle capacities for many years:

- We have been holding a World Meditation Hour to support the expansion of peace in the world in 120 countries on every third Sunday for over 30 years.
- Our environmental initiative has been running since 2009 and includes experimentation with yogic agriculture. Under the theme of “Consciousness and Climate Change,” we have participated in the COP Climate Change conferences of the UNFCCC since 2009.
- We have been hosting a blog with relevant information to support those in the disaster areas.
- The Brahma Kumaris are supporting the UNFPA in the convening of a series of reflections and dialogues on Trauma and Human Flourishing in the context of the UN Sustainable Development Agenda.
- A Brahma Kumaris’ media initiative, now an independent US-based nonprofit, Images & Voices of Hope, has spent the past three years studying restorative narrative in the media, especially as it applies to trauma.
- The Brahma Kumaris have been convening silence retreats in many locations around the world for over 2 decades, including two “Experiment-in-Silence Retreats” as a part of its *Call-of-the-Time Dialogues and Retreats* to specifically study how collective meditation might support networks of people.

- For the past 20 years the Brahma Kumaris, in association with the World Renewal Spiritual Trust (WRST), a recognized research organisation has carried out research and development in renewable energies. In our research we focus on solar community steam cooking systems, stand alone photovoltaic micro grids and solar thermal power generation. Our current project, India-One (www.india-one.net), a 1 Mw solar thermal power plant with storage, is under construction in Abu Road, Rajasthan and will be operational in mid 2016. The project enjoys financial support from the German Government (BMUB/GIZ), the Indian Government (MNRE) and is in technical collaboration with the Fraunhofer Research Institute, Germany. In 2014, WRST was chosen to set up an Awareness & Training Centre on Concentrated Solar Thermal (CST) Technologies under the UNDP-GEF-MNRE scheme. Since then, regular training courses on CST have been carried out.

In the history of the world there has never been a coalition like the one that has taken shape to respond to global climate change. Governments, corporations, universities, NGO's and faith-inspired communities find themselves in a rare alliance with a shared vision – of our earth restored to complete health and balance. The Brahma Kumaris believe the seed of world renewal is an awakened consciousness – not only within the spiritual and religious communities – but as a collective capacity of humanity. The world we are all seeking is a pure world, a unified world, a world returned to its original harmony and equilibrium.

Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University

The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University (BKWSU), with its spiritual headquarters in Mt. Abu, India, comprises a worldwide network of centers in 110 countries and is an international non-governmental organization of the United Nations accredited with General Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC);
Associate Status with the Department of Public Information (DPI);
Consultative Status with United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF);
Observer Status to the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
Observer Organization to UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC);
Flagship Member of Education for Rural People (ERP), Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO).

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