

Observations & Views:

Spirit Of Religion: Living In Harmony With Nature

Based on the PBS Program 'Religion & Ethics Newsweekly'
of January 15, 2010

In Thailand, forests are cleared for getting logs and hardwood, or for making room for intensive agriculture. In one instance, a foreign company developed tangerine plantations by clearing a large area of the forest. Cheap labor from Burma was hired to work on the plantations. The locals lost the land and their ability to live off it. The forests went away and the animals too were gone. In 1988, catastrophic floods killed about 300 people. Most experts believe that the flooding occurred because of severe deforestation. Now the monks of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists are trying to save the trees. A Buddhist monk, Sulak Sivaraksa founded the International Network of Engaged Buddhists. He says Buddhism's views of the environment are both moral and spiritual. He said, "Buddhism believes that we are all interrelated, not only among human beings but to all sentient beings, including animals, nature, the river, the trees, the clouds, the sun, the moon, we all related. We are brothers and sisters. So if you harm any of these you harm yourself." According to Jainism, in addition to human and subhuman beings, there are one-sensed living beings that include trees and plants. All living beings and all objects in nature have their role in the scheme of things. Jainism teaches us to live in harmony with nature.

Enterprises such as clearing forests and developing plantations indiscreetly, is the result of unbridled commercialism and greed. It involves total disregard for the welfare of the local population in the name of progress. The common man pays a heavy price of it all over the world. Such practices violate the spirit of religion.

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Alien Influence On Indian Mindset

In 'The Renaissance of Hinduism', D. S. Sarma observes,¹ "The inrush of a totally different civilization put an end to all creative work for a time and an uncritical admiration for all things Western took possession of the mind of the educated class, coupled with contempt for things of native origin. This was the first time the Indian mind was thrown off its balance."

¹ Quoted in 'The Nationalist Movement' by D. M. Brown, University of California Press, 1961, page 1.

Pseudo-karmas And Genetics

Based on some recent researches in the field of genetics, John Cloud has published an article in Time Magazine, entitled 'Why Your DNA Isn't Your Destiny'.² It relates to the Jain concept of pseudo-karmas (NOKARMA). According to Jainism, in addition to karma particles, there are pseudo-karmas (NOKARMA) that influence the life of a worldly being. Pseudo-karmas basically constitute the environment and circumstances of a worldly soul such as body (including the genes), family, school, temple, books, teacher, medicine, climatic conditions, political system and economic atmosphere. Sometimes, these prove to be the determining factors (NIMITTA) in shaping the life of a worldly soul. Some pseudo-karmas are part of the environment of a living being that happen to exist just by chance. Some are accumulated by a worldly being as stated in GOMMATASAAR KARMAKAAND:

DEHODAYEN SAHIO JEEVO AAHARADI KAMMA NOKAMMAM I
PADISAMAYAM SAVVANGAM TATTAYASAPINDA-OVVA JALAM I3I

Due to the association of body, a worldly soul acquires karmic particles and pseudo-karmas (NOKARMA) at all times, just as a hot iron ball surrounded by water, converts the water it is in contact with, into steam.

The pseudo-karmas are not karmas but they appear to play the role of karmas. In other words, the course of events occurring due to the presence of pseudo-karmas may lead to the delusion of fruition of karma particles. Thus many events in the life of a living being occurring on account of pseudo-karmas may be incorrectly attributed to fruition of karmas.

The role of genes on the lives of living beings is well-known. Recently, scientists have found that genetic code can be influenced by the environment. In the article 'Why Your DNA Isn't Your Destiny', John Cloud states, "The new field of epigenetics is showing how your environment and your choices can influence your genetic code – and that of your kids." He continues, "... we have had a long-standing deal with biology: whatever choices we make during our lives might ruin our short-term memory or make us fat or hasten death, but they won't change our genes — our actual DNA. ... What's more, any such effects of nurture (environment) on a species' nature (genes) were not supposed to happen

² 'Why Your DNA Isn't Your Destiny' by John Cloud, published in Time Magazine of January 18, 2010.

<http://www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1951968,00.html>

so quickly.” However, modern researches have established that some of these changes occur sooner than expected. John Cloud remarks, “Bygren and other scientists have now amassed historical evidence suggesting that powerful environmental conditions (near death from starvation, for instance) can somehow leave an imprint on the genetic material in eggs and sperm. These genetic imprints can short-circuit evolution and pass along new traits in a single generation.”

Scientists researched the events that happened in the nineteenth century in Sweden's northernmost county, Norrbotten. There 1800, 1812, 1821, 1836 and 1856 were years of total crop failure and extreme suffering; and in 1801, 1822, 1828, 1844 and 1863, the crops were abundant. So people who had gone hungry in previous years had plenty of food to gorge themselves. Biologists studied the children and grandchildren of people who had experienced these periods of famine and abundance, and found that kids and grandkids of people who went from normal eating to overeating in a single season lived shorter lives.

Commenting on epigenetics, John Cloud states, “It is through epigenetic marks that environmental factors like diet, stress and prenatal nutrition can make an imprint on genes that is passed from one generation to the next.” Unlike the karmas that remain associated with the soul from one life to the next, some pseudo-karmas such as the genes are passed along by one generation to the next. This shows that the influence of pseudo-karmas on our genes may affect our subsequent generations.

Some Facts About Meat

Jeremy Rifkin, author of the book “Beyond Beef: The Rise and Fall of the Cattle Culture”, writes, on the Op-Ed page of The New York Times of March 23, 1992, “The beef addiction of the U.S. and other industrialized nations has also contributed to the global food crisis. Cattle and other livestock consume more than 70 percent of the grain produced in the U.S. and about a third of the world's total grain harvest – while nearly a billion people suffer from chronic under-nutrition. If the U.S. land now used to grow livestock feed were converted to grow grain for human consumption, we could feed an additional 400 million people.”

The New International Coalition: Beyond Beef, in The New York Times of April 23, 1992, has propagated, “The U.S. Surgeon General has reported that 70% of deaths in the United States are related to diet, especially the overconsumption of beef and other saturated fats. Americans now eat 25% of all the beef consumed in the world, a habit that all reputable research has linked to heart disease, colon and breast cancers and strokes.”

*Religion Of Present Times
And
Futility Of Wars*

Two excerpts from 'Reverence For Life' by Albert Schweitzer
Hallmark Cards, Inc., 1971

Religion:

The religion of our age gives the same impression as an African river in the dry season – a great river bed, sand banks, and between, a small stream which seeks its way. One tries to imagine that a river once filled that bed; that there were no sand banks but that the river flowed majestically on its way; and that it will someday be like that again. Is it possible, you say, that once a river filled this bed? Was there a time when ethical religion was a force in the spiritual life of the time? Yes, in the eighteenth century. Then ethical religion and thinking formed one unity. Thinking was religious, and religion was a thinking religion. Because it was conditioned by ethical religious ideas, the thinking of that period undertook to represent reality to itself as it should be. It possessed ethical ideals in accordance with which it transformed reality.

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War:

Today there is an absence of thinking which is characterized by a contempt for life. We waged war for questions which, through reason, might have been solved. No one won. The war killed millions of men, brought suffering to millions of men, and brought suffering and death to millions of innocent animals. Why? Because we did not possess the highest rationality of reverence for life. And because we do not yet possess this, every people is afraid of every other, and each causes fear to the others. We are mentally afflicted one for another because we are lacking in rationality. There is no other remedy than reverence for life and at that we must arrive.

Only through a truly ethical civilization can life take on meaning. Only through it can mankind be saved from destruction, from its senseless and cruel wars. It alone can bring about peace in the world.

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