



BRAHMA KUMARIS
WORLD SPIRITUAL UNIVERSITY (UK)

To Protect the Earth – Owning our Responsibility

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What can we do to help protect our Earth? This is a question on everyone's conscience and one which world leaders are now trying to address as a matter of urgency. The conversation on 7th June explored the spiritual perspective of our responsibility towards the environment.

In her opening remarks, Wendy Marshall, of the Brahma Kumaris, said that governments have only recently begun to accept that western lifestyles are pushing the earth's resources to the limit. The problems are obvious, but the solutions are still not clearly visible. She added that, while science and technology can help to an extent, the real transformation in the world around us will begin when we respond to the challenge of changing ourselves.

Sister Jayanti, European Director of the Brahma Kumaris, noted that back in the 1960s Brahma Baba – the founder of the BKs – spoke of how human aggression and greed would bring repercussions of chaos, with a profound effect on human life. *"It wasn't until the 1990s that others were talking about this, and by then we had reached a critical mass bringing to everyone's awareness that something dangerous is going on with the world we live in,"* she said.

Ranchor Prime, founder of the environmental charity "Friends of Vrindavan", stated that it is a spiritual crisis that has led to this situation, as written about in his book Vedic Ecology. *"It is a step forward that people are now asking "Where have we got it wrong?" Perhaps the mistake is in thinking that money and possessions can buy happiness. Yet far fewer families are claiming to have any quality of happiness in their lives today, even when the desire for acquisition becomes a habit from as young as six years old. When we begin to look within and see the treasures that we have inside the self and connect with these, then we realise that happiness is inside not outside."*

Ranchor also noted that Hindu culture has always valued simplicity. It used to be considered a virtue to keep the economics of life at a local level, to live within one's means and find spiritual happiness.

Sister Jayanti spoke of the paradox found in many spiritual teachings: when things move towards extreme negativity a great deal of goodness emerges at the same time. *"We see spirituality increasing and people searching for an experience of truth. For example, vegetarianism is on the increase as people realise the profound effects it can have on the body, mind and the environment."* She said that it is remembered in the ancient culture of India that the darkest hour comes before the dawn. There is an understanding of cyclic time; that from our present time, the age of death, the age of the machine, will come the age of light and truth. *"The intervening time is a period of upheaval and transformation. We are now at that point where we cannot find a comfort zone. It is a time of huge responsibility for each of us."*



Wendy then invited the speakers to share how they have observed their own change of consciousness and spiritual outlook.

Ranchor expressed how everything changed when he became a vegetarian, suddenly seeing all living creatures with value, reverence and compassion. Yet when he went on pilgrimage to the forests of Krishna in India, he noticed how people would lavish attention on the temples but neglect the natural temple of their surroundings.

Sister Jayanti found that taking up a spiritual life had a profound effect on her. *"Simplicity has made it easier for me to make a connection with the Supreme. The less we have, the more free we can feel. It was interesting to realise how little I actually needed. Gandhi said that there is always enough for everyone's need but never enough for even one person's greed."*

So what are the solutions to the current environmental challenges we face? Sister Jayanti said that peace is the way and the destination. *"It is only when we create a state of inner peace that we will find solutions. For example it was in his bathtub that Archimedes discovered the theory of flotation and the buoyancy principle. When the mind is free, intuition can be heard. We can do this each day, beginning with peace and silence, and making a connection beyond so we see our story from a different perspective."*

Ranchor shared how every morning he goes for a walk and does a short meditation which helps him to stay and value 'here'. He noted that travel has become an obsession these days because people are not valuing the place they live in, due to manipulative advertising. *"We could live a lot more environmentally friendly if we were to travel less and enjoy more,"* he said.

Sister Jayanti concluded by saying that it would be important to focus on the subject of respect: *"If we encourage children and young people to value silence and the self, then self respect develops. This would then bring more respect for others, the environment, and the laws of the universe and for all forms of life."*

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