

# SPIRITUAL IMPERATIVE

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**By Satish Kumar**

**President, Schumacher Society U.K.**

Matter and spirit are two sides of the same coin. What we measure is matter, what we feel is spirit. Matter represents quantity, spirit is about quality. Spirit manifests itself through matter; matter comes to life through spirit. Spirit brings meaning to matter, matter gives form to spirit. Without spirit matter lacks life. We are human body and human spirit at the same time.

A tree too has body and spirit; even rocks which appear to be dead contain their spirit. There is no dichotomy, no dualism, no separation between matter and spirit.

The problem is not matter but materialism. Similarly there is no problem with spirit, but spiritualism is problematic. The moment we encapsulate an idea or a thought into an "ism" we lay the foundations of dualistic thought. The universe is uni-verse, one song, one poem, one verse. It contains infinite forms which dance together in harmony, sing together in concert, balance each other in gravity, transform each other in evolution and yet the universe maintains its wholeness and its implicate order. Dark and light, above and below, left and right, words and meaning, matter and spirit complement each other, comfortable in mutual embrace. Where is the contradiction? Where is the conflict?

Life feeds life, matter feeds matter, spirit feeds spirit. Life feeds matter, matter feeds life and spirit feeds both matter and life. There is total reciprocity. This is the oriental world view, an ancient world view, a world view found in the tribal traditions of pre-industrial cultures where nature and spirit, earth and heaven, sun and moon are in eternal reciprocity and harmony.

Modern dualistic cultures see nature red in tooth and claw, the strongest and fittest surviving, the weak and meek disappearing, conflict and competition as the only true reality. From this world view emerges the notion of a split between mind and matter. Once mind and matter are split then debate ensues as to whether mind is superior to matter or matter is superior to mind.

This world view of split, rift, conflict, competition, separation and dualism has also given birth to the idea of separation between the human world and the natural world. Once that separation is established, humans consider themselves to be the superior species, engaged in controlling and manipulating nature for their use. In this view of

the world, nature exists for human benefit, to be owned and possessed and if nature is protected and conserved then the purpose is only for human benefit. The natural world; plants, animals, rivers, oceans, mountains and the skies are denuded of spirit. If spirit exists at all, then it is limited to human spirit. But even that is doubtful. In this world view humans too are considered to be nothing more than a formation of material, molecules, genes and elements namely earth, air, fire and water. Mind is considered to be a function of the brain, and the brain is an organ in the head and no more.

## SPIRIT IN BUSINESS

This notion of spiritless existence can be described as materialism. All is matter; land, forests, food, water, labour, literature and art are commodities to be bought and sold in the marketplace and not in your local farmers' market or pannier market or street market but the world market, the stockmarket, the so called 'free' market. This is a market of competitive advantage, a cut throat market, a market where survival of the fittest is the greatest imperative: the strong competing with the weak and winning the biggest share of the market for themselves. Monopolies are established in the name of free competition. Four or five supermarket chains control 80% of food sold in the U.K. Four or five giant multinational corporations, such as Monsanto and Cargill, control 80% of international food trade. Small and family farms cannot compete with the big players and are forced to retreat. This is the world where spirit has been driven out. Business without spirit, trade without compassion, industry without ecology, finance without fairness, economics without equity can only bring the breakdown of society and destruction of the natural world. Only when spirit and business work together can humanity find coherence purpose.

## SPIRIT IN POLITICS

As materialism rules economics it also rules politics. Instead of seeing nations, regions and cultures of the world as one human community, the world is seen as a battlefield of nations competing with each other for power, influence and control over minds, markets and natural resources. One nation's interest is seen in opposition to the national interest of another. Indian national interest is opposed to Pakistani national interest and vice versa. . Palestinian national interest, Israeli national interest, American national interest, Iraqi national interest, Chechen national interest, Russian national interest and so on...the list is long. And so we have polarized politics "If you are not with us you are against us," has become the dominant mind set. And if you are not with us you are not only against us, you are part of the axis of evil.

This is politics denuded of spirit. What can we expect from such politics other than rivalry, strife, the arms race, terrorism and wars? Politicians speak of democracy and freedom but they pursue the path of hegemony and self interest. How can a particular view of democracy and freedom suit the whole world? There can be no

democracy and freedom without compassion, reverence and respect for diversity, difference and pluralism. Compassion, reverence and respect are spiritual qualities – but the politics founded on materialism considers the values of the spirit to be woolly, flaky, utopian, idealistic, unrealistic and irrational. But where has the politics of power, control and self interest led us? The First World War? The Second World War? The Cold War? The Vietnam War? War in Kashmir? War in Iraq? The attack on the Twin Towers of New York? Again the list is very, very long. Politics without spirituality has proved to be a grand failure and, therefore, it is time to bring politics and spirituality together again.

## SPIRIT IN RELIGION

Sometimes the words spirituality and religion are confused, but spirituality and religion are not the same thing. Politics should be free from the constraints of this, that or the other religion but should not be free of spiritual values.

The word religion comes from the Latin root *religio* which means to bind together with the string of certain beliefs. A group of people come together, share a belief system, stick together and support each other. Thus religion binds you. Whereas the root meaning of spirit is associated with breath, with air. We can all be free spirits and breathe freely. Spirituality transcends beliefs. The spirit moves, inspires, touches our hearts and refreshes our souls.

When a room has been left closed, doors and windows shut and curtains drawn, the air in the room becomes stale. When we enter the room after a few days we find it stuffy so we open the doors and windows to bring in fresh air. In the same way when minds are closed for too long we need a radical avatar, a prophet, to open the windows so that our stuffy minds and stale thoughts are aired again. A Buddha, a Jesus, a Gandhi, a Mother Theresa, a Rumi, a Hildegard of Bingen appear and blow away the cobwebs of closed minds. Of course we don't need to wait for such prophets, we can be our own prophets, unlock our own hearts and minds and allow the fresh air of compassion, of generosity, of divinity, of sacredness to blow through our lives.

Religious groups and traditions have an important role to play. They initiate us into a discipline of thought and practice, they provide us with a framework; they offer us a sense of community, of solidarity, of support. A tender seedling needs a pot and a stick to support it in the early stages of its development or even the enclosure of a nursery to protect it from frost and cold winds. But when it is strong enough it needs to be planted out in the open so that it is able to develop its own roots and become a fully mature tree. Likewise religious orders act as nurseries for seeking souls. But in the end each one of us has to establish our own roots and find divinity in our own way.

Young students go to schools of art and music and learn certain techniques, rules, skills, traditions and disciplines of painting or drawing, singing or playing an instrument. But then a time comes when they need to leave the school. Then they

need to forget the rules and techniques which they learnt. Only then can they find their own inner artist and discover their own voice. They need to feel gratitude to the alma mater but not to think that their school of art or music is the only right school and all other schools are wrong or misguided. Religious traditions are like schools where we train ourselves to be in harmony with ourselves and with the world. We should always offer thanks to the traditions and to the teachers. But then we should move on rather than holding on to any dogma and confining ourselves to literal adherence to a tradition.

There are many good nurseries, many good schools, many good religions, many good philosophies and many good traditions. We should accept all of them and accept that different religious traditions meet the need of different people at different times, in different places and in different contexts. This spirit of generosity, inclusivity and recognition is a spiritual quality. Whenever religious orders lose this quality, they become no more than mere sects protecting their vested interests.

At present the institutionalised religions have fallen into this trap. For them the maintenance of institutions has become more important than helping their members to grow, to develop and discover their own free spirit. When religious orders get caught in maintaining their properties and their reputation they lose their spirituality and then they, too, become like a business without spirit. As it is necessary to restore spirit in business and in politics we also need to restore spirit in religion. This may seem a strange proposition because the very *raison d'être* of every religion is to seek spirit and to establish universal love. The reality is otherwise. Religions have done much good but also they have done much harm and we can see all around us that tensions between Christians, Muslims, Hindus and Jews are major causes of conflicts, wars and disharmony.

The rivalry among religions will cease if they realise that religious faiths are like rivers flowing into the same great ocean of spirituality. Even though the various rivers with their different names give nourishment to different regions and different peoples they all provide the same quality of refreshment. There is no conflict among the rivers. Why then should there be conflict among the religions? Different religious traditions have evolved at different times in different parts of the world according to climatic and cultural conditions but the essential spirit is the same. Such as do no harm, seek truth, know thyself and serve others. Their theology or belief system may differ but the spirituality is the same. It is this spirituality which is paramount. Respect for a diversity of beliefs is a spiritual imperative.

## SPIRITUALITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

As business, politics and religious institutions need to return to their spiritual roots so do the environmental and social justice movements need to embrace a spiritual dimension. At present most social change movements concentrate on negative campaigning. They present doom and gloom scenarios and become mirror images of the institutions they criticise.

The real impetus for ecological sustainability and social justice stems from ethical, aesthetic and spiritual visions. But this focus gets lost when campaigners get caught in false goals such as their desire to attract media attention or their need to gain more members for their organizations. These concerns become ends in themselves and the presentation of a holistic, inclusive and constructive vision is forgotten. Love of nature and the intrinsic value of all life, human as well as other than human, is the essential ground in which environmental and social justice movements need to be rooted. The basis of all campaigning is reverence for life and this is a spiritual basis. There is no contradiction between pragmatic campaigning and a spiritual overview. Mahatma Gandhi's political programme was founded upon spiritual values. Martin Luther King's Civil Rights Movement was rooted in a spiritual vision. Contemporary environmental and social justice movements also require that broad world view rather than be limited to the science of ecology and the social sciences.

## SPIRITUALITY AND SCIENCE

Often it is believed that science and spirituality are like oil and water. They cannot mix. This is a mistaken notion. Science needs spirituality and spirituality needs science. When science forsakes the restraints and constraints of moral, ethical and spiritual dimensions and strives to achieve everything that is achievable, experimenting with everything without limits and irrespective of consequences then science leads to the technologies of nuclear weapons, genetic engineering, human and animal cloning and poisonous products which pollute soil, water and air. It is dangerous to give science carte blanche to dominate human minds and to subjugate the natural world. Contemporary science has acquired such status of superiority that it is presently commanding the total adherence of industry, business, education and politics. Some of its experiments have become so crude and cruel that it reaches beyond the constraints of civilization. Ethical, moral and spiritual values are essential to moderate the power of science.

As science needs spirituality, spirituality also needs science. Without a certain amount of rational, analytical and intellectual skills spirituality can easily turn into woolly, flaky, airy-fairy, sectarian and selfish pursuit.

I was a monk for nine years pursuing my own purification and salvation. I saw the world as a trap and spirituality as a way of liberation from the world. Then I came across the writings of Mahatma Gandhi. He said that there is no dualism between the world and the spirit. Spirituality is not just for saints. It is not confined to monastic orders or caves in the mountains. Spirituality is in every day life; from the growing of food to cooking, eating, washing up, sweeping the floor, building the house, making clothes and caring for neighbours. We must bring spirituality into all parts of our lives, into politics, into business, into agriculture and into education. And we must do so with a scientific approach.

That was such an inspiring insight that I decided to leave the monastic order and return to the world of everyday life.

## MEETING SPIRITUAL NEEDS

We human beings have our bodily needs and also our spiritual needs. Food, water, shelter, warmth, work, education and health are our essential needs. We need to engage in economic activities to fulfill these needs. But once these needs are met we need to find a sense of contentment and satisfaction in order to be happy and fulfilled. We need the wisdom to know when enough is enough. If we go on with economic activities, even after our essential needs are met, then we become victims of greed and desires. Many of our social, political and environmental crises are crises of desire.

Those who profit from endless economic activities put enormous effort into persuading us that by having more material goods we shall be happy. But happiness does not come from material things alone; we also have social and spiritual needs. The need for community, for love, for friendship, for beauty, for art and music. We need to use our imagination and our creativity. We need the opportunity to make things with our own hands. We need time to be still and contemplate, we need spaces to appreciate and enjoy. These spiritual needs cannot be met by turning ourselves into consumers of goods provided by companies who make vast profits at the cost of the environment and ethics and at the expense of future generations. Materialism has become their new religion and they want everyone to be converted to it and become loyal members of their faith.

This religion of materialism is obviously unsustainable. If the six billion citizens of the world were to live the lifestyle of western consumers and use the energy provided by fossil fuels we would need five planets, but we haven't got five planets, we have only one planet. Therefore, we need to invent a lifestyle of elegant simplicity where earth's gifts are shared among all human beings fairly, without compromising the needs of the more than human world as well as of future generations. Such elegant simplicity is the way to discover spirituality. We embrace simplicity not only because the consumerist lifestyle is unfair, unjust and unsustainable but it is also the cause of discontent, dissatisfaction, disharmony, depression, disease and division. Even if there was no problem of global warming, of resource shortage, of pollution and waste we would still need to choose a more simple lifestyle which is conducive to and congruent with spirituality. Because a simple lifestyle, a lifestyle uncluttered with the burden of unnecessary possessions is the lifestyle which can offer the opportunity to explore the universe of the imagination and to find boundless joy in that universe.

The Buddha was a prince, he possessed palaces, elephants, horses, land and treasures of gold and silver but he realized that all his wealth was holding him back, that wealth was keeping him chained to greed, desire, craving, pride, ego, fear and anger. The idea that wealth and power would make him happy was an illusion, joy though material possessions was a mirage. So he embraced a life of noble poverty which meant voluntary acceptance of limits. There was no population explosion at that time, the Buddha faced no shortage of raw materials or natural resources, there was no problem of global warming and yet he preferred the path of spirituality and

simplicity. Because that was the way to meet the needs of the soul as well as the body.

## SPIRITUALITY AND CIVILIZATION

My land, my house, my possessions, my power, my wealth are the cravings of small minds. Spirituality frees us from small mind and liberates us from the small I, the ego identity. Through spirituality we are able to open the doors of big mind and big heart where sharing, caring and compassion are the true realities. Life exists only through the gift of other lives, all life is interdependent. Existence is an intricately interconnected web of relationships. We share the breath of life and thus we are connected. Whether we are rich or poor, black or white, young or old, humans or animals, fish or fowl, trees or rocks, everything is sustained by the same air, the same sunshine, the same water, the same soil. There are no boundaries, no borders, no separation, no division, no duality; it is all the dance of eternal life where spirit and matter dance together. Day and night, earth and heaven all dance together and wherever there is dance, there is joy and beauty.

The religion of materialism and the culture of consumerism which have been promoted by western civilization have blocked the flow of joy and beauty. Once Mahatma Gandhi was asked, "Mr. Gandhi, what do you think of western civilization?" he replied, "It would be a good idea." Yes, it would be a good idea because any society discarding spiritual values and fighting for material goods, going to war to control oil, producing nuclear weapons to maintain its political power cannot be called a civilization. The modern, consumerist culture built on unfair, unjust and unsustainable economic institutions cannot be considered to be civilized. The true mark of civilization is to maintain a balance between material progress and spiritual integrity. How can we consider ourselves to be civilised when we don't know how to live with each other in harmony and how to live on the earth without destroying it? We have developed technologies to reach the moon but not the wisdom to live with our neighbours, nor mechanisms to share food and water with our fellow human beings. A civilisation without a spiritual foundation is no civilization at all – or it is an ugly civilization.

The way we treat animals is a clear example of our lack of civilization. Cows, pigs and chickens live as prisoners in factory farms. Mice, monkeys and rabbits are treated as slaves as if they feel no pain; all for human greed and human arrogance. Western civilization seems to believe that all life is expendable in the service of human desire. Racism, nationalism, sexism and ageism have been challenged and to some extent eradicated but humanism still rules our minds. As a result we consider the human species to be superior to all other species. This humanism is a kind of speciesism. If we are to strive for civilization we will have to change our philosophy, our world-view and our behaviour. We will have to enter into a new paradigm where all beings are interbeings, interdependent, interrelated and interspecies.

## SPIRITUALITY BEGINS AT HOME

Where do we begin this spiritual revolution? We begin with ourselves. Self transformation is the first step towards social, political and religious transformation. All transformations start at the bottom and move upwards to embrace the larger world. That is the law of the natural world. The great and mighty oak begins with the sowing of an acorn in the soil. After the seed is sown, for a few weeks or months no one knows whether that acorn is living or dead or whether it will ever emerge into the world. But that unseen transformation under the earth's surface enables the acorn to emerge out of the soil as a tiny tender shoot. It is still small and insignificant but only from that insignificant beginning starts the process which eventually results in the mighty oak tree. A journey of a thousand miles starts with the first step. The Great Wall of China began with the laying of the first stone, so never underestimate the power of small beginnings and the potential of the act of a single individual. The movement of the wing of the butterfly is felt at the other end of the world.

My mother used to say "It is better to light a candle than curse the darkness, but, before you can light other candles you need to light your own candle. Be your own light. Then you can offer yourself to help others. How can you make someone else happy if you yourself are not happy? But your happiness is born of your kindness to others."

So personal, social and political transformation go together because when we are free from fear and anxiety and at ease with ourselves then we are able to engage with the community around us and with society at large to bring about social and political changes to improve the lives of all. That selfless act of altruism in turn brings us a greater sense of fulfillment, satisfaction and happiness. Thus personal and political interact.

## THREE PRACTICAL STEPS TOWARDS SPIRITUALITY

### 1: Trust

So let us explore a few areas of spirituality. First and foremost among them is removal of fear and cultivation of trust. If we look deeply we will realize that many of our psychological difficulties stem from fear. A sense of insecurity, the ambition to be successful, the desire to prove ourselves, efforts to impress others, craving for power over others and to be in control, addiction to shopping, consuming and possessing, all are ultimately related to fear. This personal fear expands into social insecurity and political insecurity. So the first step towards spiritual renewal is to look at the phenomena of fear in our lives and realize that much of this fear is aggravated by more fear. Fear breeds fear and fear is led by fear. We go to great lengths to build psychological and physical defences but they only increase our fear. Even when we have nuclear weapons to protect us we are not free from fear.

Moreover, history has proved that nuclear weapons are no defence and bring no security. The attack on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre in New York proved that ultimately all defences are futile. The attackers can attack with a knife or a razor blade so where is the justification for spending so much effort, time and resources in building nuclear warheads when they bring no defence and no security? The most powerful country in the world, the USA, is also the most insecure country in the world. Paradoxically the more defences we build the more insecure we are. Western societies seem to be obsessed with safety and security and go to great lengths to ensure themselves against all eventualities. Such obsession has a paralyzing effect.

We plan every details of our journey and every aspect of our life to such an extent that when something goes wrong we are shocked and surprised and we overreact. Whereas a trusting mind is prepared for a certain amount of risk and is equipped with imagination to find spontaneous solutions.

The first step into the spiritual sphere is to understand fear and cultivate trust. Trust yourself. You are as good as you are. You embody the divine spark, the creative impulse, the power of imagination which will always be with you and will protect you. Trust others; they are in the same boat as you. They long for love as much as you do. Only in relationships with others will you blossom. You are because others are and others are because you are. We all exist, flourish, blossom and mature in this mutuality, reciprocity and unity. Give love and love will be reciprocated. Give fear and fear will be reciprocated. Sow one seed of thistle and you will get hundreds of thorny thistles. Sow one seed of Camellia and you will get hundreds of Camellia flowers. You will reap what you sow, this is the old wisdom. And yet we have not learnt it.

Then trust the process of the universe. The sun is there to nourish all life. Water is there to quench the thirst; the soil is there to grow food. Trees are there to bear fruit. The moment a baby is born the mother's breast is filled with milk. The process of the universe is embedded in the life support system of mutuality. Hundreds of millions of species; lions, elephants, snakes, butterflies, all are fed, watered, sheltered and taken care of by the mysterious process of the universe – trust it. As St. Julian of Norwich said "All shall be well, all manner of things shall be well."

## 2: Participation

The second spiritual quality is participation. Participate in the magical process of life. Life is a miracle, we cannot explain it nor can we know it in full but we can actively and consciously participate in it without trying to control it, manipulate it and subjugate it.

Participation is easy and simple. We have been given two wonderful hands to cultivate the soil and grow our food. Working with the soil in the garden meets the need of the body as much as the need of the mind. Industrial farming has taken away our birthright to participate in the cultivation of food. Large scale mechanized and chemicalised farming is born of our desire to dominate. Small scale, natural,

local farming, still better, gardening, is a way of participation with the rhythms of the seasons. England should be gardened not farmed. Animals should be freed from the prisons of factory farms. Growing food is one example of the principal of participations. Baking of bread, cooking of food, sharing the meal with family, friends and guests are as much spiritual activities as they are social and economic activities. The culture of fast food has deprived us of the fundamental activity of participation in the daily ritual and practice of physical and spiritual nourishment. It is wonderful that people all over Europe are inspired by the Italian movement of Slow Food. Slow Food is spiritual food. Fast food is fearful food.

Slowness is a spiritual quality. If we wish to restore our spirituality we have to slow down. Paradoxically only when we go slower can we go further. Doing less, consuming less, producing less will enable us to be more, to celebrate more, and to enjoy more. Time is what makes things perfect. Give yourself time to make things and give yourself time to rest. Take your time to do as well as to be. It is in the dance of doing and being that spirituality is to be found.

Once the Emperor of Persia asked his Sufi Master, "Please advise me, what should I be doing to renew my soul, revive my spirit, and refresh my mind so that I can be happy in myself and effective in my work?" The Sufi Master replied, "My Lord, sleep as long as you can!" The Emperor was surprised and amazed to hear this answer and said, "Sleep? I have little time to sleep. I have justice to perform, laws to enact, ambassadors to receive and armies to command. How can I sleep when I have so much to do?"

The Sufi Master replied, "My Lord, the longer you sleep the less you will oppress!" The Emperor was speechless; he saw the point of the Sufi sage. Even though the sage was blunt, he was right.

Western countries are in a similar position to the Emperor of Persia. The longer we work, the more we consume: we drive cars, fly in planes, burn electricity, go shopping and produce waste. The faster we do these activities the more damage we inflict on the environment, on the poor and on our own peace of mind. So true participation is to live and work in harmony with ourselves, with our fellow human beings and with the natural world. Participation is not about speed and efficiency; rather it is about harmony, balance and appropriateness of action.

### 3: Gratitude

The third spiritual quality is a sense of gratitude. In our western culture we complain about everything. If it is raining then we say, "Isn't it awful weather, so wet and cold". When it is sunny we complain, "Isn't it hot, so hot!" The media is full of complaints and criticism. Debates in the parliament are mostly concentrated on the negative aspects of government policies. The Opposition blames the Government and the Government complains about the Opposition. The national culture of blaming and complaining permeates throughout, even in our family life and in our work place. Because of the dominance of a culture of condemnation we learn to condemn ourselves too. "I am not good enough," is a widespread feeling. Whatever we do we don't appreciate it. We think we should be doing something

different, something else, something better. Then whatever other people do we don't learn to appreciate it either. "I had a terrible childhood," we complain. "My school was awful," we reflect. "I'm never appreciated by my colleagues," we grumble, and this kind of criticism goes on and on.

In order to develop spiritually we need to balance our critical faculty with the faculty of appreciation and gratitude. We need to train ourselves to turn our minds to recognize the gifts we have received from our ancestors, our parents, our teachers, our colleagues and our society in general. We also need to express our thankfulness for the gifts of the earth. What a wonderful Gaian system it is, that we are part of. It regulates climate, it organizes the seasons and provides abundance of nourishment, beauty and sensual pleasures to all creatures. When we are in awe and wonder at the workings of the sacred earth we can feel nothing but blessed and grateful. When food is served we are filled with a sense of gratitude. We thank the cook and the gardener but also we thank the soil and the rain and the sunshine. We even express our gratitude to the earth worms who have been working day and night to keep the soil friable and fertile. However green a gardener's fingers are, without the worms there will be no food. So in praise we say, "Long live the worms," and further we join the poet Gerald Manley Hopkins and say, "Long live the wet and the wilderness yet." It is the beauty of the wild which feeds our soul while the fruit of the earth feeds the body.

The generosity and unconditional love of earth for all its creatures is boundless. We plant one small seed of an apple in the ground. That tiny seed results in a tree within a few years and produces thousands and thousands of apples year after year. And all that from a tiny pip, sometimes self-sown. When in the autumn apples ripen with their fragrant, juicy, crisp flesh we eat to our heart's content. The tree knows no discrimination, it asks no questions. Poor or rich, saint or sinner, fool or philosopher, wasp or bird, one and all can receive the fruit freely. What else can we feel for the tree but gratitude? And from our gratitude flows humility as arrogance comes from complaining and criticism. When we are critical of nature we come to the conclusion that nature is not good enough: it is imperfect and unreliable. Nature needs our technology and engineering so we go to great lengths to improve on it but we end up destroying it. With a sense of gratitude we go with the grain of nature, we work in harmony with it and we appreciate its miraculous qualities.

## CONCLUSION

To summarise, the point I am making is that there is no dualism and separation between matter and spirit. Spirit is held within matter and matter within spirit but we have separated them and have made spirit a private matter and have allowed matter alone to dominate our public life. We need to heal this rift urgently. Without such healing the material world, the earth itself will continue to suffer catastrophic consequences and spiritual insights and wisdom will continue to be seen as idealistic, esoteric and otherworldly practices totally irrelevant to our everyday existence.

When we are able to heal this rift we will be able to instill spirit in business, in commerce and in the economy. We will be able to create a politics which works for all. Our religions will not be divisive; on the contrary they will become a source of healing and resolving conflicts. The movement for environmental sustainability and social justice will inspire rather than agitate and, personally, human beings will be at ease with themselves and with the world around them. The marriage of matter and spirit, of business and spirit, of politics and spirit, of religion and spirit and of activism and spirit is the greatest union required in our time.

People are hungry for spiritual nourishment; this hunger cannot be satisfied by material means. Therefore, the great work we have in our hands is to create space and time for people to discover their spirituality as well as the spirituality of others.

It should not be necessary for me to make a case for spiritual space but because in the last few hundred years western culture has been in denial of spirit and has been busy elevating the status of matter, so our society and culture has lost its balance and wholeness. In order to restore this balance I have emphasized the importance of spirit. In an ideal world people would recognize that spirit is always implicit in matter. Traditionally that is how it was. People took pilgrimages to holy mountains and sacred rivers, life was considered sacred and inviolable. We recognised the metaphysical dimension of trees. The speaking tree, the tree of knowledge and the tree of life express the implicit spiritual quality of the tree. Regaining this perennial wisdom is life's greatest imperative.

Satish Kumar can be contacted at [Satish@resurgence.org](mailto:Satish@resurgence.org). Or Tel: 0127 44129