

## THE COMPASSIONATE MIND

### Bhupendra Vora

The purpose of evolution is to enable consciousness to experience terrestrial existence in the various kingdoms of life. Through this experience it is provided with the impetus to develop from the grosser levels of existence to higher and higher levels of unfolding and potentialities. Nature's preordained design is for the progressive movement of consciousness from the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms to the human kingdom.

In the human experience self-consciousness arises and the distinction between the self and others as separate entities is cognised at the outer level. In the evolutionary journey nature intends for the unit of consciousness to progress from being self-centred, and involved only in its own interests, to a being that is concerned with the welfare of others. Progressively it has to learn to work in harmony with the Universal Laws and thereby assure its own progress as a part of the Whole.

The occult doctrine describes the journey of consciousness from the un-manifest levels of Being to the manifested outer world, where through experiences in the various kingdoms of life, it reaches the state of manifested perfection. At the pinnacle of the evolutionary journey are the incarnations of love and compassion like The Buddha and The Christ.

At the heart of the Universe is love and compassion that is manifest in all the creation. The Divine Intelligence that is the architect of this creation caringly caters to the needs of all its creation with great intricacy and love. A Divine desire to lead each species of life to its perfection and ultimately to the pinnacle of evolution can be discerned in this vast creation. This is evident in the myriad species of life with special abilities granted to them by nature for their survival. There is variety in the fauna and flora of the Earth with their intricate designs and forms. It is amazing that each species of life has been provided with its own particular form of defence mechanism to protect itself from other forms of life.

For instance a chameleon changes its colours to blend in with the foliage on which it is perched so that it does not easily attract attention from birds and other carnivorous animals. Some varieties of insects and small creatures have been provided with glands to eject poisonous substances or odours to deter other animals from attacking them. Nature in its infinite compassion provides all of them with the means to protect their lives and the right food and environment for survival. Equally there are species of life that support each other and live in harmony with natural laws.

Lord Mahavira, the great teacher and reformer of the Jain faith preached non-violence and compassion as the basis for a true morality. He declared that all life had the right to exist and evolve on its own evolutionary journey. He further stated that it was not enough to declare non-violence as one's creed, but to also empathise with all living beings in their struggle for existence. His message to human beings was to live and help other forms of life to live as well. In doing so he would not only respect the rights of all life to live and progress but also ensure the delicate balance of life on this planet. This is in accordance with Nature's plan for consciousness to experience life through all forms of manifestation.

How can a new mind set emerge in the 'New Age' in the human consciousness that has the sensitivity and compassion to live in accordance with this principle of 'Live and Help Live'?

Scientific research is proving that there is interconnectedness and interdependence of life at all levels of being and disturbance of this harmony causes disasters in one form or the other. An understanding of this truth, not merely intellectually but at the deeper level of experience and understanding, transforms the consciousness into a caring and compassionate one. However self-centredness and limitation in understanding the plan of evolution binds human beings to their individual existences. They are therefore unable to perceive the larger design of nature for the evolution of life! The human mind is caught up in this island of self-interest and unable to perceive the larger design for its rise to a higher level of consciousness.

When we aspire for a 'New Mind' for a 'New Age', it is for a different mind-set from the one in which human beings are trapped. The mind imprisoned in the conditioned way of thinking is unable to make this change without understanding that conditioning. There can be no liberation from this conditioning until there is clarity of perspective of the purpose of life; and of the relationship and the dependence of the different species of life upon each other.

In the Eight-fold noble path of the Lord Buddha, the first step of 'Right View' has been considered to be of paramount importance, on the foundation of which the remaining steps are constructed. 'Right View' indicates a true understanding of the nature of things or the world as it is, and not how we perceive it through the colouring of the senses and the mind. This implies an understanding of the laws of nature under the operation of which evolution proceeds. It also means an understanding of the Oneness of all Life and the interconnectedness of everything with everything else. When the understanding is correct the subsequent processes of thought are correctly founded and lead to right actions.

When the Buddha was asked whether this meant that belief in some form must be accepted blindly, he replied: "No, but you must know for yourself three great things-that only upon the Path of Holiness and good living can man finally attain perfection; that in order to attain it he moves through many lives, gradually rising higher and higher; and that there is a Law of Eternal Justice under which all these things work".<sup>i</sup>

In the teaching of the 'Four Noble Truths' the Buddha explained that there was suffering and a cause for it. This is 'Trishna' or desire. As long as we are caught up in the web of desires of one kind or the other for wealth, fame or power this suffering continues and as 'The Light of Asia' describes:

If ye lay bound upon the wheel of change,  
And no way were of breaking from the chain,  
The Heart of boundless Being is a curse,  
The soul of Things fell pain,  
Ye are not bound! The soul of Things is sweet,  
The Heart of Being is celestial rest;  
Stronger than woe is will; that which was Good  
Doth pass to Better-Best".<sup>ii</sup>

These beautiful verses describe graphically, that there is suffering in the world and as a result of ignorance the cycle of death and birth inevitable. Through right understanding liberation is possible from this cycle of suffering. The Buddha taught that man's suffering is as a result of the choices that he makes. In the words of 'The Light of Asia' man "Whirls upon the wheel of life and hugs and kisses its spokes of agony", of his own free will; no one forces him to make the choices that he makes out of ignorance. This bondage to the cycles of birth and death takes place as a result of his desires that tie him to the wheel of causality.

Ignorance of the real purpose of life is reflected in the vain search for wealth, power and position from which the hope is to acquire happiness and contentment. The mind that is self-seeking is caught up in this struggle of life that results in suffering. That there is much suffering in the world is evident everywhere and makes no distinction between the rich and the poor.

The human mind conditioned by many things like race, religion, caste etc. is trapped into an established way of thinking. It is constantly conditioned by impacts not only from outside but also by impulses from within by all those factors that create division. The thinking is therefore not holistic but divisive. Freedom from such a state can be realised when the conditioning of the mind is explored through observation. A detached observation of the thinking process reveals the things that influence our thoughts and actions.

The Buddha once put a problem to his disciples: How would you untie a knot? The pupils gave very learned answers. Then the Buddha said: 'If you want to untie a knot, find out how the knot was tied'.<sup>iii</sup>

To understand the human conditioning we must find out the causes of that conditioning. To arrive at the unconditioned state of mind, we must know how the mind gets conditioned. In this connection Krishnaji said: "The totality of our conditioning can be broken – not bit by bit, which takes time, but immediately, by directly perceiving the truth of the matter. It is the truth that liberates, not time or your intention to be free".<sup>iv</sup>

To understand the conditioning process, the impacts of the outer consciousness operating through the senses on the inner state of the mind and conversely of the mind on outer actions and thoughts must be observed. In all the thought and action processes this conditioning can be observed. This needs awareness. An awareness that can perceive the influence of some previous experience on the present experience is an alert awareness.

We create images of our past experiences that influence all our present actions. So differences of race, religion and many other forms of division are created by the mind. Images of past experiences and prejudices affect our present experiences that we see through preconditioned eyes. The action in the present is therefore never right action nor compassionate. Therefore preconceptions of people based on religion, race, nationality, sex and a thousand other things are created that hinder true understanding. There is pre-judgement of people, on the basis of these artificial divisions, without an attempt ever being made to understand them. To understand this working of the mind is the way of wisdom and compassion.

To have genuine understanding means putting ourselves into the shoes of others, and to see where they are coming from in terms of their outer behaviour and beliefs. However our own conditioning makes us intolerant of others and hinders a true perception. To understand this conditioning requires deep insights into our own nature. It then becomes evident that we have pre-established views that influence our present experiences and views. Our present is therefore never free from the images of the past. The recognition of this conditioning comes from awareness and deep contemplation.

Therefore to understand the present human condition we have to analyse those things that divide human beings and prevent them from becoming compassionate and mindful about others. Firstly it is self-centredness. This arises as a result of lack of comprehension about the purpose of life. It results in a very selfish attitude that considers only that which one likes or wants, to the exclusion of the interest of others. This self-centredness rises from the self

at the individual level and from there to the family, the group to which one belongs, race, religion, nation and so on. In this way innumerable numbers of separate interest groups are created by human beings that are divisive and do not help in creating harmony.

As long as there is exclusivity and separative tendencies there will be conflict. When he was addressing the European Union Parliament, Dr. A. P. J. Kalam who was then the President of India, referred to the thoughts of the Tamil poet Kaniyan Pungudranar who was quoted having said far back in time: "I am a world citizen and every citizen of the world is my kith and kin. Where there is righteousness in the heart there is beauty in the character. Where there is beauty in the character there is harmony in the home. Where there is harmony in the home there is order in the nation. Where there is order in the nation there is peace in the world." In a similar way Krishnaji said that the individual must change before society can change. It is only when our inner conflicts cease and we are in harmony with others that the world will change. There are many serious social issues with broken homes or unstable families because of individual self-interests and lack of true love; a love that is not self-seeking.

Where there is love and understanding in the family there is stability and security in the children born in that family. Where there is selfishness and a lack of understanding of the other person's point of view there is unhappiness and instability. A true relationship whether between a husband and wife or any other member of a family is based on selflessness and love. In such a home as the poet Kaniyan said there is harmony.

But this is far from what many homes have under the influence of the present electronic age of computers, mobile phones and other gadgets. A relationship between a husband and wife is usually based on expectations that are self-centred. There is therefore an unwillingness to accommodate the views or interests of each other in the relationship. Hence there are broken homes and children who become social problems. The need is for right values and right forms of education that result in responsible and compassionate individuals. It is fine to have institutions providing technological and other forms of learning. But this development is lopsided without the balancing of right values of life. There must be fundamental grounding in ethical and moral values which would create compassionate and caring human beings.

Is a society based purely on material progress the right one? Should there not be a balance between the material and spiritual aspects of life and an understanding of the social responsibilities that go with this? The drive towards greater and greater material progress is creating extremely competitive societies where there are tremendous pressures on individuals to perform more and more. The resulting pressures on family life are tremendous and often result in broken homes and unhappiness. These add up to the miseries and suffering in the world.

There is the story of an Australian couple, the husband a lawyer and the wife a mathematics graduate who got tired of their materialistic life and came to India to find out whether a simpler mode of living could bring contentment and happiness in their lives. They have been living in a slum in Delhi for more than a decade and raised two sons there. When interviewed they expressed great contentment with their simple life. They also experienced the kindness and generosity of the poor people who were their neighbours. This is perhaps an exceptional and extreme example that is not possible to be emulated by most people but it does indicate that happiness and contentment are not based on the things you have or the kinds of houses you live in.

There is much that is not right in a society that is based on material values only. Should there not be a sensitivity and compassion of the mind to share the limited resources of the world with those that are less fortunate! But what is visible in many places is the extreme greed of people who accumulate wealth through unfair practices without any thought of the harm they are doing to others. Often illegally obtained wealth is siphoned off to safe havens and is never used even by the perpetrators of such immoral acts. So we hear of immense amounts of money deposited by crooked politicians and others in foreign lands that could be used for the development of their countries.

Lord Mahavira taught that a disproportionate accumulation of wealth was a form of violence because it prevented others from having their share of the Earth's resources. So any inequitable distribution of the resources of the earth is a form of violence against others. Right education should inculcate ethical and moral values and foster responsible use of the earth's resources.

The challenge for the new age is rightful thinking and living. A new way of thinking and living should evolve in the human consciousness that is based on a holistic perception of life. What stops this happening is the limited, self-centred mind that is concerned only with its own interests and not with the welfare of others. To understand life requires sensitivity of nature and compassion. A compassionate mind is one that has the sensitivity to respond to the suffering of others and is not preoccupied with the self. Such a mind is very different from the worldly mind that is only concerned with its immediate circle of interest. The average human being lives a life in which the mind is occupied in matters of self-interest only. There is no concern for the well-being of others outside the circle of family, friends and other specific groups. When we observe the world around us we see this as the general human condition everywhere. This is so at the individual, societal or national levels.

There is either a lack of understanding of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all life or the understanding is only at the intellectual level without the sensitivity and empathy that is required to feel this. A compassionate mind on the other hand has the sensitivity to perceive the oneness of life and to respond constantly to pain and suffering in the world. Such a mind has deep compassion and empathy for the progress and happiness of all life. It was the compassionate mind of the Buddha that saw the suffering in the world, through old age, disease, death etc. and his subsequent effort to do something about this suffering.

However the influence of materialism on the human mind is so strong that it craves for more and more of the worldly goods at the expense of inner contentment and peace. A mind like that caters only for the self and not for others. At the national level the same factors of self-centredness are multiplied. Hence at world forums nations are unable to come to agreement on issues that are vital to the survival of the planet and its resources. Whether it is matters of the pollution of the oceans of the Earth or the depletion of its resources, the economic interests of nations and large corporations are the deciders of actions.

Human greed is the cause of much suffering in the world and no resources of the planet have been left untouched by this greed. In the continent of Africa, for instance, many countries are in a state of civil war or internal strife. There is great human suffering and the exploitation of women and children. At the core of these strifes are the vast natural resources of the continent. Therefore you have trade in what are termed the 'blood diamonds' and other valuable stones. These are sold in the world markets and the proceeds used for the purchase of armaments that fuel the wars on the continent and support the vast armament industries of the world. So these cycles of wars, human exploitation and the destruction of the planet's resources continue.

Another example of human greed is the demand for ivory and rhino horn in the Far East. The result of this greed is the slaughter of these wonderful animals and the near extinction of the species. Similar exploitation of the resources of the seas has resulted in the near extinction of many species of life like the whales and dolphins. In some countries animals are killed for sport. Such animals are recorded to have displayed great fear and anguish at the time of their death. Unless the demand for these animal products is curbed, the suffering of the animals will continue.

A petition was recently circulated by an activist organisation concerning extreme cruelty towards dogs, which are boiled alive so that their meat would become more tender and succulent for eating. Many voices of protests from all over the world were lodged in the petition to stop such inhumane practices. To stop such practices of animal cruelty a larger and larger number of people must raise their voices of conscience. It is not enough to be negatively good; there must be positive efforts in the direction of stopping such cruelty. In this connection Radha Burnier writes in her book 'The World Around Us':

"Compassionate living in the modern world seems to be hardly an ideal as it comes in the way of making large and quick profits out of business, and also conflicts with the desire to find new pleasures and satisfactions. People are seeking to introduce into their diets novel tastes, eating the flesh of wild animals and creatures which were not counted previously as sources of meat. Eating the brains of living monkeys for example, and regarding it as a culinary delicacy is a new pleasure open to tourists travelling around the world and getting acquainted with alien customs..... In the midst of the gruesome inhumanity being practiced, there is a glimmer here and there of a different mentality and approach to life. This keeps alive the hope that humanity is not altogether ceasing to be humane".<sup>v</sup>

The other factor of division amongst people and nations is religion. It is the cause of much suffering and division in the world. Instead of spreading the message of love and compassion that is at the core of all belief systems, we have bitter divisions and hatred. In a very vivid commentary on the state of religions 'The Mahatma Letters' describe the influence of the priests of institutionalised religions on their flocks. Indoctrination of the followers turns them into fanatics who are willing to kill in the name of their God. Immense suffering is caused by such fanatics of all faiths on the followers of other faiths in the name of their religion. Even within the followers of different sects within the same faith there is so much mistrust and violence that it has resulted in suffering for thousands of people. The priesthood of the various religions who are entrusted with matters of faith inculcate feelings of mistrust and hatred for the followers of other faiths.

The indoctrination of people into certain belief systems continues to be carried out in the name of their faith. Places of worship become hotbeds of violence and extremism. How can this extremism be replaced by understanding, love and compassion for others? Only through right education and the upliftment of communities that have been economically disadvantaged, can the problem of extremism be vitiated. It is the lack of education and the economic hardships under which many people live that create the conditions for social unrest and religious extremism.

An example of a courageous stand against extremism is that of the remarkable young girl Malala Yousufzai who has been fighting for the rights of girls to education. In her speech at the United Nations she spoke about education that would foster liberal thought and nonviolence. She quoted the examples of the Buddha, Jesus Christ and Prophet Mohamed for their compassionate lives and those of Mahatma Gandhi and Pashtun leader Badshah

Khan for their principles of nonviolence. This example shows what the courage and right belief of one individual can do to awaken world opinion.

Right education creates stable and compassionate human beings with ethical and moral values. They in turn create a caring society. With right education that fosters freedom of thought, the causes of poverty, conflict and many other ills in the human condition can be reduced to create a more just and equitable society. However instead of tackling the core issues to alleviate suffering, vested interests use illiteracy and poverty for indoctrination into extremist ideological thinking that encourages violence. Politicians use these large vote banks to acquire power and wealth, without making any real attempt to help such people.

In order for any real change to take place the individual must change. This means that we have to examine our own conditioning. What divides us from others and why do we create islands of separation from other people on the basis of race, religion, caste etc. This may be out of fear, insecurity or the lack of understanding of other people on the basis of their belief systems or cultural traditions and many other things. Unless an attempt is made to understand other people and their traditions or belief systems peace cannot be realised.

The question that we have to ask of ourselves is whether we can make a difference. The majority of the people in the world are decent human beings who abhor violence and extremism. But they remain as a silent majority who shy away from giving voice to their views. The small minority holding extremist views seem to prevail everywhere because of the silent acquiescence of the large number of moderate human beings. Right thinking people must ask of themselves whether it is morally right to remain passive. Is it not morally incumbent upon them to raise their voices when issues concerning the well-being of humanity and life generally are affected?

The inaction may be as a result of underestimating one's own strength or ability to do anything significant. In reference to this human tendency, Nelson Mandela the great humanitarian and statesman said:

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light not our darkness that frightens us. We ask ourselves, “Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and famous?” Actually who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightening about shrinking so that people won't feel insecure around you. We were born to make magnificent the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us, it's in all of us. And when we let our light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

A mind that has the sensitivity and compassionate concern for the wellbeing of life would be involved in proactive action. If a new age is to mean an age of an equitable and a just society then the right values must be cultivated. Glimmers of such sensitivity and compassion are visible in the altruistic actions of some people and organisations around the world that are increasingly taking up issues concerning the welfare of all life. This creates hope that a more humane society is evolving.

<sup>i</sup> The Masters and The Path. C.W. Leadbeater-1975 Edition p287.

<sup>ii</sup> The Light Of Asia. Book The Eighth.

<sup>iii</sup> Krishnamurti and Sant Kabir p78.

<sup>iv</sup> Krishnamurti And Sant Kabir- p78.

<sup>v</sup> The World Around us- Radha Burnier, p619.