

Toward a New Global Economic Framework: Integrating Inner and Outer Development

A Gathering of Spiritual Leaders during the G20 Summit



**Nice, France
November 2-5, 2011**

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As heads of state gather in Cannes, France for the G20 Summit to explore ways to address debt, stimulate national economies and restore growth, it is incumbent on spiritual leaders to simultaneously seek to highlight some of the underlying spiritual causes of the global economic crisis.

A growing number of people recognize the urgency of the economic and ecological crises facing us today, which are greatly interlinked. There is also a growing sense that there is an inherent contradiction in the efforts to tackle these twin challenges, and that by addressing one, we will experience setbacks in the other. Can we continue to grow our economies as we have been and at the same time reverse the decline of our environment and planet? As we transition to clean energy technologies, can economic growth as we know it be sustained, or do we need a new paradigm of growth and prosperity? Do we need a new vision of sustainable abundance that values quality of life above all else? Do we need a new framework that balances outer development with inner development, one that nurtures a different kind of growth than can be measured by the GNP?

Political and financial leaders have focused on the external aspects of these challenges – how to bring down debt and create jobs, how to reduce the carbon footprint, etc. But who is looking at the underlying causes of these dysfunctions? Crises in the outer world evolve from an internal cause, less visible and more difficult to discern.

Over the past several decades, our societies have become critically unbalanced. This is reflected on many levels, most notably in the growing wealth divide. There have always been the rich and the poor, but in the last few decades the accumulation of wealth in the hands of

the few has become more pronounced than perhaps ever before. Globally, control of resources has been consolidated, leading to a degree of inequity not seen before. At the same time, the growth of the human population and rapid development are straining the earth's resources to the breaking point. Humankind's material development has outpaced the collective spiritual development, leaving us lacking the wisdom for a balanced and sustainable way forward.

Despite the sense of gloom on the part of many, there are promising signs. There is new born interest in exploring systemic changes to existing structures and to envisioning what some call, 'whole systems change'. Greater interest in contemplative practice across the religious traditions could help develop the wisdom and compassion needed for the transition to a more advanced economic and governing paradigm that is based on principles of sustainability, sharing and caring for the more vulnerable. It could help deepen the understanding of interconnection – so that we know by hurting any segment of society, or of the earth, we hurt ourselves. We cannot flourish if everyone does not benefit.

There is a growing collective of engaged spiritual practitioners who are coming together to create a vision of a new economic and social paradigm, based on universal spiritual principles. This is a positive creative force, not a negation of what exists, but an affirmation of what is emerging. Many are beginning to recognize that just as we need to start engaging a new understanding of "growth", so we need to embrace a new value system to inform our global economic system and structures. Such a vision needs to address, from a whole-systems perspective, both global and local levels, strengthening the local and re-envisioning the global.

One of its key features is the movement towards movement of re-localization, to support and revitalize local communities, as a progression from the globalization of the last few decades. Many new initiatives in this area are already underway, with the aim of bringing resilience and new energy to local communities – to improve environmental conditions and social equity, to bring agriculture, manufacturing and finance back into the hands of local people. This movement is community based. It sees community as a vital resource. It recognizes compassion as the foundation upon which communities ultimately will flourish.

At the same time many are starting to envision, at the global level, what the bigger picture of a new whole-systems approach might look like, one which would accommodate both our need for creative freedom and cooperative interconnection at the global as well as local levels. This vision emerges from the understanding of interdependence, and the need for cooperation it implies, on both local and global scales. This is a new understanding of "globalization" – the

deep recognition of our interdependence and Oneness, with each other and with the earth, and the creation of social and economic structures which honor and support that.

At the center of this vision is care for life giving resources on which we depend –rivers and oceans, forests and mountains, and that which lies within the mountains. Their health is our health. Their wise use is our future.

Among the most debilitating diseases afflicting global society are greed and endemic corruption in its many forms, fed by greed. No society or sector is spared. Can we have a truly healthy global economy or reverse environmental damage without addressing this? Corruption and greed go to the heart of the human problem. It is the result of a society that focuses almost exclusively on outer development – on consumption and acquisition – without the necessary inner development and the accompanying internal monitors that serve as guides to human behavior.

This spiritual forum during the 2011 G20 meeting is designed to further this collective reflection on how to address the deeper causes for the economic and environmental imbalances that are causing distress today and that have the potential for far greater suffering in the future.

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