

The Inner Dimensions of Climate Change

A Retreat for Young Professionals, Environmentalists and Spiritual Practitioners

September 5-12, 2011

Rishikesh, India

Climate change is already beginning to impact the wellbeing of the human community and the earth's life systems. While awareness of the issues at stake is growing, significant changes in behavior will only come when there is greater understanding of the deeper crisis that has brought us to this brink.

When heads of state, senior government officials, scientists and economists met in Copenhagen, Denmark for the United Nations Conference on Climate Change in 2009 and again in 2010 in Cancun, Mexico, they were joined by tens of thousands of citizens from around the world, including thousands of young people calling for action. Unfortunately, political and economic considerations prevented the nations from reaching a satisfactory outcome, and very few concrete steps were agreed upon to save our planet from further degradation. Although the results were disappointing, what was clear was the strong commitment of young people to ensure a sound environment for their generation and generations to come.

Climate change is more than a political, scientific and economic matter. It is a reflection of the spiritual and moral crisis that has gripped the global community. It is a result of the increasing commodification of earth's resources – where water, forests, minerals and lands have become commodities to increase the wealth of a few, rather than resources to nurture life and enhance the wellbeing of the community. A new relationship with the natural world is essential and a new way of understanding prosperity, where wealth is measured in terms of wellbeing and happiness, the degree of dignity afforded by a society, the degree to which compassion and beauty are valued, as well as material development and growth. A reassessment of values is essential for

us to create truly sustainable communities, where we borrow from nature what is needed and leave much for future generations.

The Global Peace Initiative of Women (GPIW) organized working sessions on the moral dimensions of climate change at the UN conferences in Copenhagen and Cancun, and we are planning similar sessions for the upcoming UN Climate Conference in Durban, South Africa in December 2011. In spring 2010, GPIW organized a retreat for young professionals, environmentalists, and spiritual aspirants from North America at the Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association Retreat Center in upstate New York to explore the moral and ethical dimensions of the climate crisis. This retreat in Rishikesh is a parallel initiative for young people from throughout Asia. The aim of the retreat is to help build a network of young people who can work to enhance understanding of the ethical and spiritual issues at the heart of the climate change crisis.

The retreat will be a combination of sharing of experiences and projects, learning about climate science and the state of the earth's resources, spending time in spiritual practice and discussions with mentors. We will discuss forecasts of climate scientists, receive guidance on the relationship between spiritual practice and our ability to foster a more compassionate and sustainable world community, and learn about the role of rituals in religious traditions in preserving earth's vital ecosystems.

Some of the themes to be explored are:

- The multiple meanings of the “inner dimensions of climate change”
- The changes needed to shift our collective perceptions and relationship with nature and the natural world
- The values needed to cultivate a more sustainable and peaceful society
- Practical action steps that can be taken to address the inner and outer dimensions of climate change
- How spiritual practice can help cultivate the wisdom and compassion needed to address the challenges of climate change