

The Inner Dimensions of Climate Change

A Retreat for Young Contemplatives

May 12 – 16, 2010

Dharma Drum Retreat Center
Pine Bush, New York

Climate change is threatening the future of our planet and all humanity. When heads of state, senior government officials, scientists and economists met in Copenhagen for the United Nations Summit on Climate Change – COP 15, they were joined by thousands of global citizens, including tens of thousands of young people anticipating action. Unfortunately, political and other considerations prevented the nations from reaching a satisfactory outcome and very few concrete steps were agreed upon in order for us to save our planet from further destruction. Although the results were disappointing, what was clear was the burning desire among young people to ensure a better future for their generation and generations to come.

Climate change is more than a political, scientific and economic debate. It is a reflection of the spiritual and moral crisis occurring in our global community. It is the result of tension between consumerism, economic growth and the sharing of the Earth's natural resources. Religion and spirituality have an enormous role to play in directing humanity toward action for the benefit of the common good through contemplative wisdom and the recognition of our universal interconnectedness with one another and with the planet.

For this reason, the Global Peace Initiative of Women led a delegation of religious and spiritual leaders from all faiths to Copenhagen with the goal of inspiring a shift in thinking that would build an understanding of the inner dimensions of climate change. Their presence and interactions at UN meetings and at public forums made a powerful impression on the people they met and on each other as they realized even more their mutual awareness of ecology and their connection to the earth despite their different spiritual practices. In order to address the outer dimensions of climate change, we need action that emerges from deep awakening of wisdom and compassion that occurs through inner transformation. The power of contemplation can benefit all sectors of society and serve as a uniting force. Social change begins with the individual and young people and civil society can be mobilized to make this shift in thinking.

As a follow up to the Copenhagen gathering, the Global Peace Initiative of Women aims to bring together for the first time, young contemplatives in America to support an urgent global transformation to address climate change. Their actions can help to mobilize other young people to tap into their inner resources to address climate change from a deeper level of awareness. These young people recognize their future is at stake, but can they learn to utilize their spiritual practice to make the vital and critical transformation necessary to address more than climate change, but the root causes of a global moral crisis? Climate change is a symptom of this crisis and we must find new long-term solutions to combat abject poverty, deforestation, desertification, food security, conflict and other global concerns to support sustainable lifestyles that can help mitigate and slow the impact of climate change.

This spiritual retreat will bring together between 40 and 50 young people, ages 21-35, who are engaged in spiritual practice and seek to be a force for positive change in their community, especially in regard to environmental issues. They will be accompanied by religious and spiritual leaders who will serve as mentors throughout the retreat. As a group, they will discuss the inner and outer dimensions of climate change, explore opportunities to educate others and strengthen the demand for action to stop human activities which accelerate climate change through contemplation, meditation and prayer which recognize the oneness of humanity and our interconnection with nature.

While many activists have highlighted the negative impact of climate change, spiritual leaders can be a guiding force in encouraging contemplative action that unites the human community. These young practitioners also play an important role in encouraging others to change towards a more sustainable lifestyle and mindset. A critical shift is needed that will put less emphasis on consumerism and materialism and focus more on compassion and the well-being of others and all living things.

Objectives

The main objective of this retreat is to create a group of young contemplatives who can convey the deeper spiritual significance of climate change and how their individual spiritual practice can affect the outcome. This gathering will deepen their collective understanding of the interconnectedness of all living things and motivate them to take individual action to combat climate change and influence others to do the same. Convening the group at a retreat center in upstate New York will also strengthen their connection to nature.

As a group, we will seek to explore and contemplate the following questions:

- How does our spiritual practice impact the world around us?
- What are the changes needed to shift our collective perceptions and relationship with nature and the natural world?
- What are the values needed to cultivate a more sustainable and peaceful society?
- What is the science of interconnection?
- What practical action steps can be taken to address the inner and outer dimensions of climate change?

Anticipated Outcome

The creation of a young contemplative alliance or network dedicated to promoting contemplative action and a shift in mindset to address the inner and outer dimensions of climate change. This means looking at both the values and attitudes towards nature and others and the behaviors and activities which either accelerate or mitigate the impacts of climate change in our global community.

Facilitators/Mentors (work in progress)

Venerable Guo Chan Fa Shi- Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association, USA
Dena Merriam – Founder and Convener, Global Peace Initiative of Women, USA
Sr. Miriam MacGillis - Co-founder, Genesis Farm Ecological Learning Center, USA
Sraddhalu Ranade - Sri Aurobindo Ashram, India

Pir Zia Inayat Khan - Founder, Sufi Order International, USA
Dr. Amir Al-Islam - Professor of Islamic and Religious Studies, USA
Native American leader - *To be determined*

Agenda - Program Themes

The Science and Message of Climate Change – What may lie ahead and how do we interpret this, looking at some of the major issues, such as food security, water, environmental refugees, etc.

Inner Dimension of Climate Change – What is the spiritual response to environmental change and how can we best address them?

Relationship between spiritual practice & the larger world community – How to mobilize large scale public involvement and a shift in values?

Tapping into Spiritual Resources and Contemplative Practice – What are methods and techniques for tapping the spiritual resources necessary to address and adapt to climate change.

Young Leaders Contemplative Network – How can we awaken awareness of environmental issues in young people and empower them to lead efforts to create long-term solutions such as a shift in values and behaviors to ensure a more sustainable future?