

## POLITICS AS UNUSUAL

Spiritual seekers tend to be liberal in their political outlook, and there are several very good reasons for this. They are first and foremost seeking truth. This leads to habits of mind in which they listen closely, pay attention to as much as they can, and consistently separate the wheat from the chaff, the important from the unimportant, in what they hear. This is perennially the best defense against acting in response to group pressures and being out of tune with one's innate sense of values. To become lazy in this regard is to drift into the dangerous position where one can easily be led astray, as history has reminded us again and again.

On the other hand, those who are not consciously seeking truth are often more complacent. Such people tend to be content with what other people tell them, and are willing to subsume their sense of truth to the beliefs of their congregation, be it within a familial, tribal, national or religious affiliation. Since such groups often demand of their adherents that they subordinate their personal values and sense of truth to the dictates of the leadership, this leaves complacent people vulnerable to the manifold manipulations of a managed, media-drenched society, which so often serves the few at the expense of the rest.

Those who are currently called conservative are really adherents to a radical anti-human business corporatism that is anything but conservative. They view human beings on the one hand as a cost of production to be minimized and on the other as "consumers" of their goods and services. They have built for us a new religion based on the worship of money, or "markets" as it is euphemistically referred to. Unimpeded by social conscience, they tinker with the very web of life itself, while their advertising program is busy substituting the image of the multinational corporation for God in the popular imagination. In a few years such hubris has so far had only a modest success, but Madison Avenue has at least been extremely successful at turning people into unpaid walking advertisements for their "caretakers." The

people and places of America, at least, are covered with corporate logos from sea to shining sea.

Spiritual seekers tend to feel a kinship with all of nature, and are often motivated to try to mitigate the effects of their life on the environment. Many realize we can bring human life to a premature end by the careless handling of our world, and seek ways to limit the damage we cause by our presence on it. But some would have us believe that God put the earth here strictly for our economic benefit, to use as wantonly as we desire. Once we use it up we can get another or go to a heaven somewhere. Obviously, such an attitude dovetails nicely with the desires of global corporations to take as much as they can of our finite resources for their own profit, and leave it for the poor suckers in the future to deal with a devastated planet.

Narayana Guru wants us to care for all aspects of our life here, including the environment, since we are not ever going “somewhere else.” He reminds us, in verse 20 of *Atmopadesa Satakam*:

Other than this the world has no reality;  
“there is”—all such that people say is without reflection;  
even if to a numskull it appears to be a snake,  
will a fresh flower garland ever become a serpent?

The Guru wants us to always act with care in the present, and not be deluded by spurious promises of future compensation into abandoning our fair share in what takes place around us. In this regard he distances himself from the fatalism that has crippled human endeavors throughout the millennia and still holds us in its grip even in the so-called Age of Science.

Seekers of truth are usually aware of their own failings and shortcomings, which are often an important element in impelling them to a lifetime of self-improvement. Being conscious that within the transactional world we are not perfect, but subjected to and bent by powerful disruptive forces, breeds compassion: a sympathy with all other human beings, who struggle constantly

with their problems and succeed only in varying and limited degrees in freeing themselves from them. Seekers agree with Narayana Guru, who says (v.43, Atmopadesa Satakam):

Even those of good action are caught by nature  
and whirled around in vicious circles;  
one should know that non-action does not bring release  
from perverted action,  
only the non-desire for the fruit of action.

The corporate religious approach, which in America has also become the political approach, is to severely punish anyone other than the wealthy who makes a mistake. They think those who believe as they do are God's chosen people, and therefore not subject to error. Only non-believers are sinful, and they should be punished for their non-belief as well as any other behavior that can be made illegal. In other words, they feel that non-action *does* bring release, as in the "just say no" drug policy. This "zero tolerance" program has led to criminal punishments for moral, "victimless" crimes far in excess of those for rape and murder, for instance. Yet the most egregious crime of exploiting a gullible populace for massive profit is praised as "exemplary behavior" in line with "God's will."

We are at a crossroads in human life on planet earth. Many of us have seen in our lifetimes the transition from a nature-dominated planet to a human-dominated one. God is not going to step in and save us from our folly. We must act soon and definitively, or our children or grandchildren will see the end of our species, perhaps of the whole biosphere. But we find, as we attempt to implement even simple and obvious reforms, that an invisible force is holding us back. What prevents us from doing what so plainly needs to be done? Somehow we have abdicated our innate power for harmonious and beneficial action, and the global corporations have rushed to fill the vacuum, placing their employees in positions of leadership. These leaders actively oppose any restraints on their employers' rapaciousness, and

essentially treat humans as second-class citizens whose needs are subordinate to the demands of business.

The multinationals have worked hard and thoughtfully to achieve their ability to control all the variables, and to make market capitalism the new religion. In the US, they have put politicians in place everywhere. They have enlisted friends in religious organizations to preach on their behalf. They have hired scientists and lawyers to dispute common sense in every public forum. And most importantly, with their seemingly endless troves of money they have bought up all the media outlets: radio, TV and print. In a system where everything is for sale, truth has become a commodity that can be readily controlled by money.

For every election in America these dollar-worshippers stage an elaborate fraud. Sycophants of two seemingly opposed political parties compete for the available posts, but their real purpose is to keep power in corporate hands. The media follow it like a sporting event, which is very exciting. First one is ahead, then the other. Who will win????? No one ever speaks of issues of importance. When an outsider occasionally appears to challenge the “two party” system, all voters are brought on board by the threat that the outsider might take votes from one and give the election to the other. It is made out that this will actually matter, because there *are* shades of difference between the two official candidates. One would cut down ten trees, the other eleven. One would allow a lot of factory pollution, the other a little less. One would appoint a very conservative judge, the other an extremely conservative judge. Of course, they both agree we should have a lot of prisons, and we should put a lot of people in them. Unpaid prison workers are already widely employed as the new slave labor force in corporate and government menial jobs. (Who says the South won't rise again?)

Most centrally, both candidates agree that unfettered global capitalism is the only solution to all our problems, and that information only makes people discontented. But by exploiting the minute differences in the official candidates, the media has been able to derail progressive politics through all of modern history. As

long as phrases like “A vote for Nader is a vote for Bush” continue to sap liberal sensibility, America will never have a progressive movement capable of putting spiritual principles to work for the good of the world we live in.

Guru Prasad, in his *New Millennium Greetings* in this magazine two issues back, put it this way: “We have unwittingly allowed industrialists and their vested interests to guide our life. It is no wonder then, living as we do under the yoke of industrial interests, that we find ourselves living restless and worried lives [and] not knowing why. We have to make ourselves human beings who live our lives with the awareness of who we are.”

Narayana Guru has pointed out the way humanity needs to go to make our planet a heaven-world instead of a hell-world (v.23, *Atmopadesa Satakam*):

For the sake of another, day and night performing action,  
having given up self-centered interests, the compassionate  
person acts;  
the self-centered man is wholly immersed in necessity,  
performing unsuccessful actions for himself alone.

The current world belief system is to act for oneself alone. It is time to turn that around and implement the loving approach of the gurus. Time to derail global capitalism and reinvigorate local activism with the compassion and common sense already pulsing in our hearts.

Scott Teitsworth, 2000