

Sounds of Love

Societal Changes in the Next Decade

Ed note: This talk was originally given during the early 1980s.

The title of this talk is Societal Changes in the Next Decade. In order to say something about future changes that one may expect in the next decade, it is necessary to see how did we come to this point in society. Where do we stand now? What kind of society have we evolved on this planet Earth up to this moment? When we consider this question, we go back into the history and evidence of the old, billions of years that have passed since this planet was first born and brought up different kind of species leading up to the homo-sapiens, the human being, which now inhabits as the prime resident of this planet.

This planet, Earth, has had varying degrees of development of the human being on different parts of the Earth. There are societies still living on this Earth who have not changed for the last seven thousand years. And there are societies which are changing so fast that the kids of today feel themselves so different from the parents of yesterday with a gap of only a decade or two decades. Therefore, the rate of change in society and its values has been varying on different parts of this Earth. But one thing is certain, that there has been a change going on in the norms, values, behavior, activities of society on this globe.

I have had occasion to see some very interesting societies - people who have lived on this Earth seven thousand years ago and still live like that. Did you know that there are certain islands in the Indian Ocean called the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, some of which are inhabited by people who have had no contact with the civilized world for seven thousand years. Only recently archeologists, anthropologists, and other scientists have tried to investigate what kind of society was there that lived seven thousand years ago. Because the people living there now on these islands have not changed very much since those days. There are also many more Aborigines and tribal societies and communities living in different parts of the world and you find a large number of them in the Third World – in Asia, in Africa, some parts of Latin America, till today. You find some of these societies even in the United States, if you look in the old, remaining, original Indians, who you call American Indians. I saw some of the old Hopi Indians living in the basin of the Grand Canyon and I find some similarities in the old societies, whether they exist in this part of the Earth or other parts. But the oldest I found were the ones living in the islands of Indonesia called the Andaman and the Nicobar Islands. In that society, people are human, but they are different from the civilized humans that we have become in the rest of the world.

What is the difference? I will tell you a little incident that illustrates the difference. A chief of one of the islands that we captured and wanted to investigate for anthropological reasons, he came over and was given a drink of Coca-Cola by the civilized man. Before being given the Coca-Cola drink, he had been paid thirty-five thousand rupees, the local currency, as the price, the compensation for the island which the government had secured by force from him. When he drank his Coca-Cola, he was asked to pay for the drink because he had just consumed it, so he paid thirty-five thousand rupees for that drink. The local government officials said, “You don't have to give all your money to pay for the drink.” The chief said, “Well, he gave me all the drink, so why shouldn't I pay all the money for it.” It looked such an absurd thing at one point that people said, “Does he have no value for money? Does he have no value for how much it is?” When a study was made of the value system for that society of which he was a chief, it was found that because of this lack of value for money, because of the non-consideration of how much it is, he had no possessiveness. He had no greed, no avarice. On a further study of the island, it was found nobody on that island had any greed, avarice,

possessiveness, rat-race for making more money; and, therefore, the kind of competition that creates jealousy, bitterness, and hatred amongst human beings.

This was a startling revelation, that one such little attribute can lead to the absence of hatred, absence of strife, absence of animosity between people. Another was, that because of this kind of society, they loved each other. Because there was no hatred, they had no other alternative but to love each other. Because they were not possessive, they were generous. They were giving. Their generosity was a way of life. They did not have to learn how to be generous. Nobody taught them to be generous. Of course, they were short-statured. They did not eat the same food that people in civilized societies ate. They did not do the same kind of exercises. They did natural hunting, ate the berries of the trees. And had nothing except wooden pieces to use for building their homes. They lived a very simple life. But they lived a life without hatred, without jealousy, without competitiveness, without anger, without having to feel that you are inferior or superior.

Have we acquired these traits of hatred, jealousy, being superior or inferior, rat-race, psychological problems, problems of relationships, emotional disorders? Have we acquired this as a price to pay for civilizing ourselves? Later, human beings who come as our inheritors, in due course, may wonder if we did not pay too heavy a price to civilize ourselves. What kind of civilized society have we created at such a huge cost? People today suffer so much because of these sacrifices they have made in basic values which led to happiness, joy, understanding, peace, harmony amongst human beings. Today, we have replaced them by competition, strife, misunderstanding, fights, doubts, jealousies. What kind of society are we creating? Where have we moved? And the more we move in the so-called civilized society, the more we find these attributes growing in human beings. And the fundamental attributes of being loving, understanding, being one, knowing all things common for all of us – that disappears. We become war-mongers instead of peaceful citizens inhabiting this Earth. We become devilish instead of the angels that we were planted to be on this Earth. What are we doing to ourselves? And why are we doing it? Why could we not develop a society that retained those basic values?

The students and observers of societal changes have a very easy answer to give. They have observed that the present state has come into being because we did not bother to care for the spirit, the soul of the human being. We only cared to nurture the body and the mind; to nurture the sensory systems and the pleasure centers in the body. We were so much given to deriving pleasures and joys from the sensory apparatus of the physical body to create so much creature comfort, that in the process we did not realize we were sacrificing some very basic values of the human spirit itself. We were virtually strangling the human soul in order to create more comfortable conditions for the body, the senses and the mind. The more we tried to help the mind, the senses and the body to grow, the less we bothered about the human spirit. And, hence, we have reached a point when there is violence, hatred, jealousy and all these negative attributes in human beings while they have all the good technology, creature comforts, and a better way of physical life.

This is something strange, but true. Are we going to keep on going in the same direction? Is there not a point of saturation when human beings should look back and say, “What have we done to ourselves?” Which is that point of saturation? Many people have tried to observe a strange pattern taking place in society at the present moment, specially in the Western society, which has saturated itself more than the Eastern societies by way of affluence, greater creature comforts, higher use of technology, a better means of feeding the brain, the mind, the body, the senses. Having achieved these fulfillments and satiation, they are now beginning to wonder, “Was this all we were working for?” “Is this the society we expected to create by all our work so far?” And they are having a fresh look on what can happen to societies in the future if we keep on going on this suicidal course.

Then there is hope. There are people who are looking at society differently. There are people who are wishing

to know if we can do something to save ourselves from these negative attributes, even now. What are they trying to see? They are trying to see how we can re-nurture the human spirit, the soul in a human being, and not give all the importance to the mind as we have done so far in developing the present norms and values of society. I, myself, look at this world as at a point of change. I cannot help observing this great change taking place now. And, therefore, I make bold to say that the next decade on this Earth is a decade of great significance. I make bold to say that if any changes have to take place because of this saturation point reached in negativity, this is the time when it should take place. If it does not, and we keep on the suicidal course of hatred and war, what will happen?

We have already evolved enough instruments of destroying ourselves so that we can destroy the whole fabric of society before we know it. If we do not take charge of ourselves, and do not make the necessary changes in society at this time, we may come to a point of no return and see that we have just destroyed this particular evolution of society upon this Earth. I do not believe that this is going to happen. I believe that human consciousness and human awareness, after an experience of pain and struggle, does come to a point when it looks for an alternative that gives peace and happiness to the human soul. And I think that point has been reached now.

Therefore, I have hope that in the next decade there will be dramatic changes in the structure of society. The reason for this is that at many points on this Earth, people are fed up with what has happened. I travel all around the world. I meet people everywhere. I meet people in the East and in the West. I meet people in the Oriental countries and in the Occidental countries. I meet people trained in the Western civilization process and people trained in the Oriental systems of values. And I find that many areas, people are fed up of this big race to improve only mentally at the cost of spiritual development. They say, "Let us cry a halt and change society while we still have the time to do so." The time to do so is now. And this is when I can perceive the changes taking place. There is another very interesting point which I notice – that at this point because of the satiation through influence and technology, the changes may be triggered off in that part of the globe which was unexpected.

For example, nobody expected that the East, which has been the harbinger of all religious, spiritual development, could become a copycat of the West for technology, industrialization, and developing more creature comforts for the human being. But that is what has happened. If you look at Eastern countries and Eastern societies today, you will find what are they trying to do. They have reoriented their value systems to chase the same material goals that the Western societies gathered, enjoyed, and are thinking of giving up because it did not give them real happiness. Therefore, it is quite possible that the triggering off of the new changes may take place, not in the East, but in the West. The East, lagging behind, trying to copy and imitate the Western culture. The Western culture may be the ground for triggering off the new revolution in values and new societal changes.

In the West, there are several countries where these changes can begin. One of the countries where the changes are most likely to begin is the United States of America. I am not saying it because I am sitting here and talking to you in the United States of America. I've said the same thing in Europe. I've said the same thing in Asia. I've said the same thing in Japan. And the reason for saying so is not the great affluence of the United States, but the feeling of the inhabitants of this country where you claim that only the brave and the free will grow. It is this bravery and freedom that you claim that has made you realize the futility of affluence in the matter of giving ultimate happiness. It is here that you can experiment with what makes for happiness. In fact, I had a very interesting experience as far ago as twenty, twenty-two years ago when I first went to school at Harvard in this country. I went to study economics, economic development, business, business management.

But in the course of my studies, I got fascinated by how much connection there was between economic affluence and people's happiness. Everybody was in the rat-race to make more dollars in order to have more happiness. So I thought it would be a good exercise to find out if this kind of economic affluence does lead to real happiness. I conducted a survey as part of one of my courses of study. I decided to send out a questionnaire to a sample of one thousand Americans, picked up at random from a telephone book in the Boston and Greater Boston area, and to get their views on what constituted happiness.

The results of my survey were remarkable because an overwhelming majority of the Americans who were questioned on what constitutes happiness gave almost the same answers. And the answers were very simple. You should have a nice, pretty home. You should have a good life partner, a good wife or a husband. You should have obedient children. You should have good health and you should have plenty of wealth. If you get all this stuff, you are happy. I had also put in the questionnaire the opposite questions to be sure that they understood what my questions were. So I had asked, "What constitutes unhappiness?" And the answers were, again, remarkably consistent. If you have bad health, if your wife or husband doesn't live with you, wants to run away, fights with you, if the children are disobedient and rebel against you and run away, if you don't have money, you are poor ... if you have all these absence of these affluent qualities, then you are unhappy. These were the answers uniformly turned in in response to the questionnaire.

But then came the most interesting part of the exercise. When I picked up a handful of these responses, and went to interview the persons who had given these simple definitions of happiness and unhappiness, I found those who had the ingredients of happiness, as stated by them, in interview confessed they were the most unhappy. I found people who had good health, lot of money, a good wife and kids were unhappy.

And I had to really ask them what made them unhappy if they had all the goodies of life. Whatever they said made for happiness, if they had all those qualities, what was making them unhappy? And they explained to me that they were unhappy because although some of them had ten million dollars, the uneducated neighbor who grew up with them had twenty million dollars. It was in relation to what the others were doing that made their happiness or unhappiness.

I found that it is a strange phenomenon of societal changes that when you have affluence, it is not the absolute nature of affluence that determines your contentment or happiness, but its relationship with others. Therefore, that competitive spirit which led to the creation of affluence, which led to the development of industry and technology, itself, bred a feeling of unhappiness because somebody else did well or did better than you did. This was a strange conclusion. And it went through all the segments of society that I investigated. I asked blunt questions. "Have you found happiness through affluence and technology?" The answer was a positive, "No!" It has not solved the problem of unhappiness as we expected. That, in spite of all this, the sense of loneliness is still there. That, in spite of all the money we have made, in spite of all the technology we have garnered, we are still unhappy. We have not found a solution to the problem of unhappiness, of our own loneliness. The more we have made money, the more isolated we have become. The richer we have become, the more alone we have become. These were the responses they gave.

Sounds strange. But it is true. Affluence has not brought the kind of happiness that society expected. Therefore, it was natural for them to turn to something else. And they turned to those very basic values which I find still provide happiness to the oldest aboriginal tribal communities in the world today; those qualities which emphasize the importance of the human spirit; the importance of intuition; the importance of love; the importance of simple joy and beauty of life. Those attributes still make for greater happiness than all the other assets and physical wealth that we have collected in this world. Therefore, it still remains true that unless we

turn to those basic values, we will not be able to achieve happiness. And if man, today, has realized that this societal development, this civilizing process has not brought real happiness, he has turned to a seeking of the true answer to the problem of unhappiness. And the true answer has to be found in societal changes which change the way we have developed so far.

What do I expect to see in the next decade? I expect to see people put affluence and the rat-race for making money in its proper place. It has preoccupied our attention disproportionate to its results; disproportionate to the compensation it has given us. It is time we looked at the other avenues of happiness and joy than mere working for affluence and more dollars and more currencies and more money, more bank balances. What are the other alternatives? What kind of values can we have? Obviously, there are the spiritual values, which existed with us before and are being sacrificed now.

Society, in the next decade, will turn spiritual. Society, in the next ten years, will be looking for changes that are in the direction of looking towards the spirit rather than towards physical creature comforts and working only for the well-being of the mind, the senses, and the body. I predict that in the next ten years there will be so much interest growing in spiritual values, that true happiness, which can only come from the spirit, will be discovered from that area. I also predict that the teachers who will draw attention to the importance of the spirit, as against the importance of the mind, the senses, and the body, will emerge in greater and greater number in the Western segment of society so that they can be the leaders in telling the people, generally, on this planet Earth, that what we did before was only one way of development of the human personality. It was not the only way, nor was it the best way. It did not lead to ultimate happiness.

And, therefore, they will be able to see that it is spiritual development ... it is development of intuition, development of love, development of joy and beauty that can lead to the kind of happiness they have expected from civilizing processes. In ten years, you should expect to find a large number of spiritual Masters, the type that we have had in the East for centuries as mystics and gurus. You should find genuine, real Masters coming up more and more in the Western society. And from here, spirituality will spread to all over the world. And this is so evident that, even today, before the commencement of the decade, you can see those startling movements taking place. But remember, spiritual teachers are teachers who come with higher consciousness. They come with intuition. They come with real love. They come with joy and bliss that has not been experienced by people who are only in the rat-race. Therefore, they come to give to us. They do not come to take anything from us. If you find that in the interim that many teachers come and think it's good business, good trade to come and make money out of spiritual teachings, forget it. That's not what I am talking about. The teachers I am anticipating to see in the new society in the next ten years, will be teachers who will give rather than take; who will not use it as a trade; who will turn society into one of intuition, love, joy through the sheer beauty of spirituality as against the ugliness of sheer affluence and sheer rich wealth.

Thank you.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmnQT4EmcGs>

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