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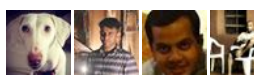
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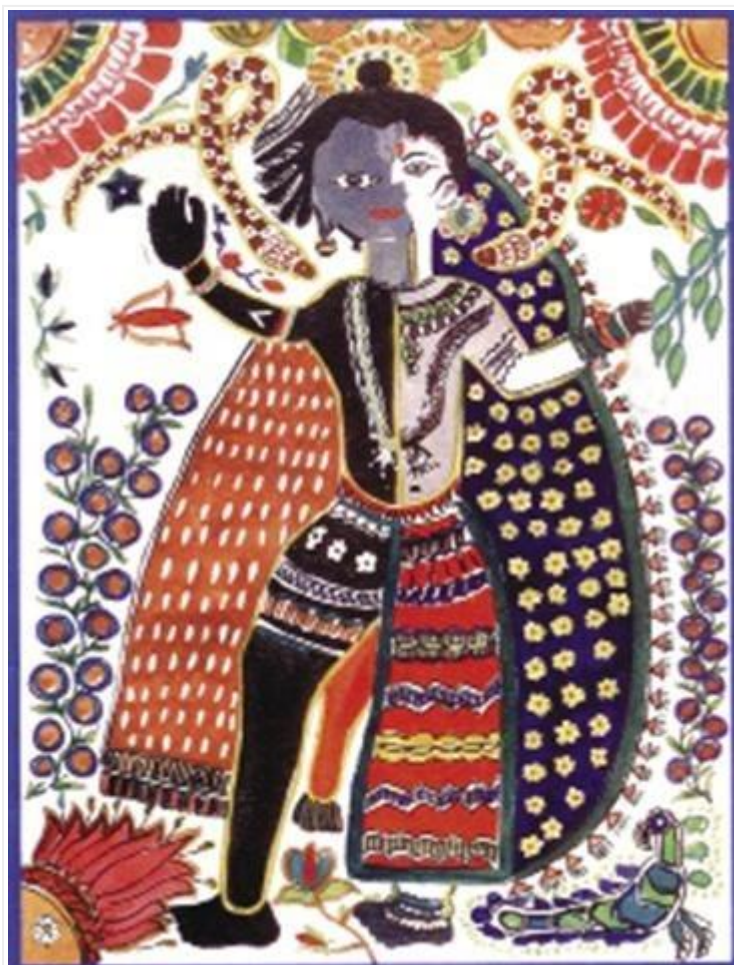
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I Know What To Do, But Don't Do It.



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G. Gautama

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traditional painting - artist unknown

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About The Author

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G.Gautama is the director - Secretary of the Chennai Education Centre (Paathshaala and Outreach) of the Krishnamurthi Foundation of India (KFI). He was Principal of The School, KFI from 1991 to 2009, where he guided several initiatives such as Active Learning, Mixed Age Group Learning in Junior and Middle school and a dynamic and wide learning programme for High School students.

One of the questions that man has always had to live with is about the nature of his actions. On the fringe of one's action choices we may have doubts – was it truly the best I could do? Or do I really know all the other solutions that have been tried?

It is time to check our bearings. Human civilization started a few thousand years ago and we can say we are young as a species or old as our civilization. A reality that we need to grasp is that, as a civilization, we seem to be compounding the mistakes of past years. Human folly seems to be gathering more energy and volume, much like a snowball on its descent down a mountain. It is time to check if we have learned something in the course of our journey, something that we can apply now, as a sensible solution to our problems which also holds some promise of sanity and ecological well-being. Should the manufacturer not take responsibility for the life cycle of the product?

Not only do we have knowledge about the follies, we now have knowledge of the parameters of ecological living. Should the manufacturer not take responsibility for the life cycle of the product? We know with certainty today that if we produce something, we need to see it to its end. We know now that if we do not do this, we bestow a legacy on future generations that will only attract their curses. Nuclear waste, chemical waste, oil spills, mining wastes, polluted atmosphere, dead rivers and sad oceans are not things that any human being, however loyal to development, will condone or accept as a legacy.

The challenge to change

Unfortunately our journey on earth has made us very sluggish, very resistant to change. The settling down that took place during the agricultural age, seems to have robbed us of the vital adventure that was part of the hunter-gatherer phase of our evolution. When we see something sensible and essential for our well-being or survival even, we don't seem to be able to embrace it. The time has come when change will be a much bigger part of our life as a species and for each individual human being. The technological and information revolution have shown this. What we did yesterday we can't continue today. Will the human being, supposedly Nature's prime creation, accept the discomfort of breaking habits and adapt to a new lifestyle cheerfully or will he have to be dragged, squealing and shouting, towards an inescapable destiny.

The way we use water is completely untenable. The precious drops that come in torrents or as snow, filtered through the beautiful soil into underground aquifers, cannot be used as we have till now. We have to use water in a sustainable manner. Adding poisonous chemicals, to clean our floors and bathrooms cannot be continued with impunity, however much we like snow white tiles. Water for flushing of toilets also does not have much of a future. We now know that human waste can be made free of pathogens in 6 to 8 months just through storage and desiccation, and then used to enrich the soil; and that human urine forms a sterile nutrient that can be harnessed for plant growth – replacing chemical fertilisers. The mode that the Romans used of getting running water to take away human waste cannot continue very long through the 21st century.

Must we not discover our legs - walking, cycling, running? Must we not use more public transport which is less polluting, less devastating in terms of waste generated than private cars? There is no way except for us to reorganize living around the biological energy that we all have. Yes, we will have to accept that fast and exciting shiny cars are not viable for the 21st century. But more importantly, we will have to see that the

roads that make the automobile possible, divide land in a manner that nothing else has done, not even frontiers between nations. Human beings and animals slowly experienced division between the left and the right and felt stranded, anxiously, on one side of the highway. Is this fragmentation the best that we have learnt from our history of togetherness in communities and villages?

There is a bigger problem that our civilization faces. Even if individuals are able to make the shift in terms of perspective and lifestyle, the large mass of humanity continues almost untouched except superficially. Human beings are finding it extremely difficult to work together and decide together collectively, with a deep sense of cooperation. What we now call cooperation is mostly deal making, compromise, adjustment. For human society to live with a sense of environmental sanity, a sense of the whole, fears of the neighbour neighbor, the tribe, the nation, other human beings would have to subside. Death, calamities and the compulsions of other human beings may not be in our hands. We have built walls, barriers and weapons of war because of our fear of them. As long as fear and killing occupy our hearts there can be no environmental sanity. Krishnamurti succinctly said "you are the world, and the world is you." Unless there is a fundamental transformation in our way of relating to ourselves and others, little may change.

The challenge of environmental sanity today is no longer an absence of good ideas, ignorance of the past or of being able to obtain information and know-how. It is time to speak about the individual and the impact that individuals have on the largest crisis of mankind. After all each of us has only that space in our hands, the space of our actions within the constraints of our times.

Human civilization faces a dilemma of knowledge. Knowing and knowledge places a great burden on the person who knows. I am reminded of the words of a young ten year old student, Prashanti. She said, "I know what to do, but I don't do it. I want to do it, but I can't do it."

These words symbolize the human existential dilemma. Has knowledge become a burden? Have we assumed that with knowledge right action will flow? The words "but I don't do it" is merely a statement of fact. Extrapolated to mankind or a global scale it is as true as it was for that young student. The aspirations of thinking human beings, that we live sanely on this planet, inclusively, without violence and growing in wisdom, is a statement of hope. The most poignant statement is "I can't do it". I am reminded of Gulliver, strapped by little strings, unable to move. Or the statue of Colossus of Rhodes - huge, powerful and yet unable to act.

The challenge is to the spirit. It depends on whether we, as a society, as a civilization manage to resolve the existential situation that we find ourselves in. There are no easy answers. We are driven as much by primordial conditioning as by habits acquired recently.

Last not least, the present situation poses a big challenge to attitude and well-being. We are challenged to be cheerful in the face of this situation and to meet it with what wisdom and resourcefulness we can muster. Also challenged to face ourselves and our fellow human beings with a sense of compassion and understanding, knowing that all human beings are frail and fallible.

We know now that quick solutions can lead to new dangers and vulnerabilities. We need to walk carefully, slowly studying the impact we have when we take a new step. It is not acceptable to silence the non-ecological voices. The ecological crisis is also about how human beings have responded to the multiplicity of all views and opinions, the meta- text of conversations, is about material things – soil, water, air. No one has articulated the subtle issues involved in our journey towards ecological, same living better than EF Schumacher. Capitalism is manufacturing needs for the goods we're producing - a disastrously far cry from producing useful goods to meet real human needs

E. F. Schumacher advocated production and manufacturing from local resources for local needs. It is not a question of choosing between modern growth and traditional stagnation, Schumacher advised, but rather of finding the right path of development, the Middle Way between materialist heedlessness and traditionalist immobility.

If we move from need to desire as the prime motivator, then we are only a short step away from saying that the citizen needs to consume to prove his patriotism and democracy means 'a bewildered herd'. Gandhi's words are a reminder - that the earth has enough for all our needs but not our greed.

But how do we choose our needs? And choose we must in the labyrinth of words, feelings, opinions and compulsions –

"Each person must define what his needs are."

"How can another define my needs?"

"Do you say that I should not be comfortable?"

Distinguished author and senior fellow at Demos (www.demos.org), Benjamin Barber offers an incisive portrayal of global capitalism at its worst. It's what he calls 'Push Capitalism': Manufacturing needs for the goods we're producing a disastrously far cry from producing useful goods to meet real human needs. Barber explains in his 2007 book, "Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole", that capitalism seems quite literally to be consuming itself, leaving democracy in peril and the fate of citizens uncertain. In it he offers a vivid critique of the market's fabrication of needs and its branding and commercialization of just about everything.

The struggle for the soul of capitalism is a struggle between the nation's economic body and its civic soul: a struggle to put capitalism in its proper place, where it serves our nature and needs rather than manipulating

and fabricating whims and wants. I quote from The Nation (2009)- "Saving capitalism means bringing it into harmony with spirit - with prudence, pluralism and those "things of the public" (res publica) that define our civic souls. A revolution of the spirit".

G Gautama is the Director of the Chennai Education Centre of the Krishnamurthi Foundation of India. He has been the Principal of The School, KFI, for about two decades, where he has been responsible for developing several innovative programmes and processes of institution building.