MY TURN
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MANKIND, CONSCIOUSNESS AND NATURE

Singh, Karan In all the great religious and spiritual traditions of the world there can be found the idea that this earth which we inhabit is not merely a geological and geographical formation, but a living, pulsating entity. The concept of Mother Earth, known as Matri Bhoomi in the Hindu tradition and Gaia in the Greek, has influenced the thinking of millions of human beings from the dawn of history up until quite recently, when the mechanistic view became predominant in the western world.

The Hindu tradition, however, goes far beyond the limited concept of Mother Earth. In the great figure of Siva Nataraj's, Lord of the Cosmic Dance, we have an arresting symbol of the entire cosmological process, covering not only this tiny speck of matter which we call planet earth, but the billions upon billions of galaxies that exist in the unending cosmos.

Mother Earth is most dramatically represented in the unique photograph of our planet taken from the moon, which, for the very first time, shows our world as it really is, not an endless resource to be ruthlessly exploited and devastated by an avaricious race of human beings, but a tiny speck of life and light against the darkness beyond, so beautiful and yet so fragile. Siva Nataraja is even more powerful, because it portrays the entire pulsating cosmos as a manifestation of the same light and power which pervades all creation. Between them, these two archetypal images, one planetary and the other cosmic, evoke from us a creative response, and it is against their background that I would like to consider the relationship between consciousness and nature.

I have preferred to use the term "consciousness" rather than "mind," because, as I understand the word, "mind" is only that element of awareness which manifests itself through the human cortex, while "consciousness" is a much wider and deeper term. Semantic considerations apart, the basic point is that consciousness is not merely the chance outcome of what Bertrand Russell called a "fortuitous

conglomeration of atoms." Just the reverse, it is consciousness flowing from the initial impetus that led to material manifestation in the first place. That consciousness must be looked upon as the primary phenomenon, pervading and transcending what we call nature, and also human awareness itself.

For the last few centuries, human civilization has been dominated by the dualistic-materialistic approach to reality. Once we lost the awareness that we are part of nature and of the cosmic manifestation, the earth became merely an object of exploitation, and the great achievements of science and technology extracted a terrible price. Man's ability to intervene in the natural environment has increased tremendously, with no commensurate growth in wisdom and compassion. As a result, there has been a ruthless and rapacious plundering of nature, based upon materialist philosophies which deny the spiritual dimension to Mother Earth and look upon it as merely a material substance to be manipulated at will. The anthropocentricity of modern civilization has reach neurotic proportions, so that ultimately the race itself is in danger of committing not only collective suicide but terricide, the destruction of Planet Earth.

Each one of us alive on this planet today bears a unique responsibility, because what we as individuals think and do can make a crucial difference to the final outcome. This is the special challenge of our generation, to which we must offer a creative response. We are neither mere material manifestations, hopelessly dragged along by chance collisions of atoms, nor are we equally helpless victims of a capricious Divinity. Each one of us embodies the spark of undying light and power; we are luminous beings, and it is our task on earth to become aware of this luminosity and reflect it in our lives and actions.