

# Technology and Soul in the 21st Century

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*'All problems are psychological, and all solutions are spiritual' Thomas Hora*

## Science and spirituality

I shall be exploring the impact of the physical sciences on life, society, and the environment, and especially on the young mind. Since I'm particularly interested in the perspective of the soul, I'll need to begin by saying something about the difference between scientific and spiritual realities.

Science addresses material reality - the physical world of the five senses. It enquires into what things are made of, how things happen, and the way things interact. Science claims to be free of the cultural prejudices that shape our social world, being driven instead by a single moral imperative - to discover and communicate the impartial truth.

Science has told us much about the workings of the universe, both within the range of our sense perception and beyond - first X-rays and now the whole field of particle physics. Its world-view is like seeing a house constructed from the various materials brought to the building site. This is 'bottom-up' theory, also known as upward causation; the bricks are made, as it were, from sub-atomic particles which stick together and which have evolved over billions of years into complex molecules that form the physical universe and everything it contains. This house never needed architect's drawings. It self-assembled

Since the only reality that science traditionally acknowledges is gained from the five senses, the universe as understood by classical Newtonian physics is a complex mechanical system made from solid objects, people, things, planets, separated by air, water, or space - a cosmos that has no purpose or ultimate meaning but is simply there. Most scientists hold that any talk of a spiritual world, or of the soul, is a mere product of the imagination. If you can't measure it, it doesn't meaningfully exist. This is why consciousness is such a thorn in the side of science.

We might have hoped that science, founded on rationality, would not suffer from prejudice but unfortunately it's the nature of the ego to over-identify with its own interests. People become convinced that they are holding not just a belief but the truth and don't like being challenged. In the history of religion, radical thinkers have been branded heretics. In our own time, scientific investigation into anomalous phenomena that cannot be explained by the laws of physics, survival after death, for example, has been met with hostility or incredulity. Research workers are pilloried and their papers

turned down by leading science journals on the grounds that the findings are 'impossible'.

Yet the ego is essential for human development. It excites our curiosity, drives forward our emotional and intellectual development and engages us in relationships, families, parenthood and more. It has been our most powerful evolutionary tool. At the same time, being rooted in the biology of fight and flight, it is ever ready to take offence, as much over concepts and beliefs as the literal defence of one's country, hearth and home.

Spiritual traditions have a 'top-down' approach. The whole house, so to speak, already exists in the supreme consciousness known the world over as God, and manifests in this physical domain of space and time. As Meister Eckhart, the 13<sup>th</sup> Century theologian and mystic said 'We are all meant to be mothers of God... for God is always needing to be born'.

The top-down premise cannot be disproven, for there can be no proof that something does not exist. However, these days the consensus view is physicalist. Take the field of mainstream mental healthcare, which from Sigmund Freud onwards has been strongly aligned with material realism. The secular view of the mind argues that we needed to invent a parent god to give our lives a sense of purpose and relieve us of our fear of death.

And yet one branch of psychology, the transpersonal, has been investigating a whole range of phenomena that challenge material realism. There is now substantial research into the Near Death Experience, Out of Body Experiences and After Death Communications that raises questions conventional science cannot answer.

Given the scepticism of so much mainstream science, we are grateful to those physicists at the cutting edge of quantum mechanics and cosmology who are entirely at ease thinking outside the box. The billiard ball picture of stars and planets in space is being replaced by a new perspective. We now know that only 5% of the universe is accessed by our sense perception. The other 95%, of dark matter and dark energy, weaves a single field that is thought to be *infinite and timeless*, in which every point in the universe is connected to every other point comprising one unbroken whole.

I want to mention one more example, that of the hologram. A laser beam, shone on photographic plate imprinted with an interference pattern, will continue to generate the same picture of, say, a three-dimensional apple, whether the plate is cut in two, ten or in twenty pieces. Each piece produces the same image, although the smaller the piece, the fuzzier it is. Yet the whole image is always present, for no matter how small, *the part still contains the whole*. Studies of fractals demonstrate the same 'Russian doll' effect. Magnify the edge of a snowflake and you find it is composed of myriad smaller flakes of the same pattern. Such patterns are replicated over and over from the very large to the very small, suggesting that the universe is structured according to a fundamental holographic design.

There is a profound implication for us human beings; not only are we physically made from the dust of stars, but our consciousness mirrors that of the universe itself. Once the clamour of the human ego is quietened, as happens in meditation, contemplation and prayer, we become aware of the innate spiritual quality of this consciousness of peace, acceptance, gratitude and love.

These qualities may be felt in a bodily way - often people will place a hand on the heart - and hence we speak of the soul. Yet the soul is not something we possess, a kind of a metaphysical organ. It is the essence of who we are; indeed we are the eyes and ears of the spiritual universe. We are even its voice - although I am reminded now of a mediaeval order of Capuchin monks where speaking was allowed 'only if the words were as beautiful as silence'.

Meister Eckhart puts it thus: 'the soul is not in the body; the body is in the soul'. In the same way we can speak of the collective soul of humanity, and also the anima mundi, the soul of the Earth. The soul isn't interested in the exertions of the ego. There is simply love and compassion without exception for humanity and for all life.

Until some 4,000 years ago, the soul mediated our connection with Nature. Humankind's relationship with mother earth was treated as sacred. Every animal, tree, flower, mountain, valley, river, was regarded as an emanation of spirit and honoured with ritual and ceremony through the seasons and cycles of life.

Ann Baring, in her exceptional book 'The Dream of the Cosmos: A Quest for the Soul', calls this participative culture the lunar era, the moon being archetypally female and symbol of fertility. We might be tempted to write off the lunar era as an age of superstition characterised by animistic thinking and magical propitiation of the gods. Yet it tells of a time when 'God' had not been personified and enthroned in some far-off in Heaven but was manifest everywhere, and when humankind did not stand apart from the natural world but flowed with it.

Jesus pointed this out when he remarked 'The Kingdom of God is spread out upon the Earth and men do not see it', and 'Cleave the wood and I am there; lift up a stone and you will find Me there' (Gospel of Thomas, sayings 113 and 77). It is ironic that Christ's teaching should be at variance with the cultural epoch that was shaping civilisation, for humankind was now busy taking dominion, by divine edict, over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the air, the cattle, and all the earth... (Genesis 1:26).

Anne Baring calls this new age the solar era, in which a radical shift brought the masculine ego into the ascendant. The male principle is particularly dangerous when uncontained by the feminine. Men have been responsible for killing something in the order of 100 million human beings during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more than in all of preceding human history.

God of the Abrahamic faiths belongs to the solar era. Since He (note the gender) stood aside from the physical world once creation was over, there remained nothing

inherently sacred about Nature. Instead, the new image of God served as a ready projection for the exercise of institutional power and control. Women, guilty by association with the temptress Eve, were excluded from clerical life and deprived of education and human rights, as still happens in many countries today.

Yet men have suffered too. Distrust of women deprived them of much needed emotional intimacy, and healthy sexuality had to be repressed. According to Scripture, the whole human race now carried the burden of original sin and only baptism and divine grace could bring salvation.

Little wonder, then, that in overthrowing the strictures of the Church in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, an age of Enlightenment was deemed to have arrived. Yet while the Renaissance was opening the natural world to scientific enquiry there was, tragically, a loss that would have far-reaching consequences. Spirituality had become disenfranchised from both Nature and daily life, reinforcing the belief that material reality is all that there is.

The stamp of material realism is embedded deep in the culture of modernity. It opened a window to a magnificent scientific understanding of the universe and tragically it closed the window on the human soul.

### **The age of material realism**

The material advantages enjoyed by the developed countries today owe more to a history of territorial conquest and economic exploitation than compassion for humankind. Our societies are held together by the government, the judiciary and the military. Social cohesion is strengthened by pulling together in the face of a common enemy, whether real or imagined. Eight trillion dollars were spent on the Cold War and around 1.5 trillion dollars are being spent on weapons every year.

Given that human consciousness is in its infancy, it is understandable we have not advanced beyond tribal mentality. The problem is that the cultivation of the ego coupled with the scientific revolution has led to manipulation of the material world in ways hitherto unimaginable, some of which are extremely dangerous.

How can this have happened? From a neuroscience perspective, Iain McGilchrist, in his remarkable book 'The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World', argues that what we are seeing is the result of a breakdown of communication between the left and right hemispheres of the brain. The right cerebral hemisphere is largely concerned with the kind of consciousness that developed in the lunar era, awareness, appreciation and integration of the whole, while the left hemisphere is the seat of ego function, including language skills, problem solving, and categorisation, characteristics of the solar era. Unfortunately, in the course of evolution, the left brain appears to have run away with itself and doesn't listen much to the right brain anymore.

Technology concerns the practical application of the physical sciences to life, society, and the environment and is the crowning glory of the ego. It began in the Palaeolithic era around 1 million years ago with the invention of stone tools by Homo habilis, since when it has been intrinsic to the evolution of human culture. It is in the DNA of Homo sapiens and very likely a powerful epigenetic spur to our development. Nor can technology be blamed for even the worst crimes against humanity. As the saying goes, a knife can be used to kill or cut bread

Being a young species in terms of planetary time, it's no wonder we have become enchanted with the inventions of science. We are like children in a toy shop. But the problem is this: if we are to survive as a species, science needs to be taken out of the hands of the ego and put to use in the service of the soul. Otherwise, it's about as safe as giving a child a gun that fires real bullets. I'll attempt to show why with a small selection of evidence.

### **The rise of 'techno-pathology'**

I must preface this next section by emphasizing that I am well aware of the countless benefits science has brought humanity. Aside from my appreciation of the medical sciences in general, state-of-the-art surgery some years back gave me a new lease of life for which I am profoundly grateful. But here the subject of my concern is with the misuse of science and the extreme harm I believe we are doing to humankind, as well as our precious planet.

I'll begin with a reminder of how the advance of science has impacted on one current lifetime - my own. I belong to a generation that barely saw television before their teens. In my childhood, families took time to sit down to eat together, or gathered around the wireless as it was then called, with tea unhurriedly brewed in the teapot. There were two stations, the Light programme and the Home service; no violence, just music, news, comedy and even then, the Archers. It was all very innocent. We played in the local park and strangers were not feared. Favourite toys were a Hornby clockwork train and dinky cars. There was no Top Ten, only scratchy gramophone records played over and over. Books were in abundance and local libraries flourished. On train journeys we children would crowd around the big steam engine while the driver, leaning out of his cab window, would spare us a few kindly words.

Nostalgia plays its part in these memories, yet I'm describing a world centred on people being together and doing things together. Cars motored at a leisurely pace since there were no motorways. If you belonged to the AA the patrol officer would spot the badge on your car and there was time to get and give a salute as you drove by.

Compare this with life today. One study from the US showed that children spend three and a half '*meaningful*' minutes a week talking with their parents and an average of four hours a night watching television. By the age of 18, a young person will have

seen 360,000 commercials and witnessed at least 60,000 murders. Two thirds of families now eat while watching television and by the age of 65, a person will on average have spent 9 years in front of the screen.

Television floods children with sensory overload while attention span is reduced because of the breakneck speed of scene change. Once obesity has set in due to physical inertia combined with junk food, there is even less interest in exploring into the real world and the child's creative imagination falls into disuse. Instead, the restless mind goes channel hopping in search of stimulation. Can we really say all this has nothing to do with the prevalence of ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) when 650,000 prescriptions of Ritalin were dispensed last year in the UK, 50% up on the year before?

Most worrying is the relentless exposure to violence and crude sexuality. A number of studies show a clear link between early exposure to violence on screen and subsequent aggressive behaviour change, with loss of the capacity for empathy. We are being shown our future for 'the child is father to the man', as William Wordsworth put it, not only psychologically but in the formation of neuronal networks in the brain.

The other invention that impacts on everyone's life is, of course, the silicon chip. Letter writing has all but disappeared, and even emails are on the decline. Texting, tweeting, blogging, Skype and Facebook are the younger generation's preferred media. Many users of Facebook worry if they have less than 100 'friends'. But how genuine are these friendships, existing in a virtual domain that has no reality checks and based on what people choose to post about themselves for public consumption?

There is now great concern about how the internet can endanger young people through grooming via chat rooms, as well as exposure to the brutalising effect of pornography and images of child sexual abuse, This has led to an on-going ethical debate about the need for censorship, very much in contrast to the libertarian optimism of the early days of the World Wide Web.

Video gaming deserves special mention. It is growing fast and analysts predict that by 2015, the global industry will reach sales of \$91 billion. It has been argued that gaming improves co-ordination and concentration, and that multiplayer games using sophisticated platforms enhance interactional skills. Yet more than half the top 25 games being played today are dedicated to shooting and killing while addiction to video games, known as 'problem gaming' affects up to 4% of players. Since more than 90% of young people under the age of 18 are playing videogames regularly, this tells us that problem gaming must affect around 120,000 children in the UK. One study from the USA finds that the average young person has spent 10,000 hours of gaming by the age of 21, the same length of time it takes to become a concert pianist, or a world-class athlete.

In 2012, the UK charity ChildLine received 1.5 million contacts from children in distress. Here are the main reasons for seeking help:

- Family relationship problems (up 18% on the year before), notably with communication problems cited most often - 195,000 contacts
- Physical and sexual abuse - 165,000 contacts
- Bullying (including cyber-bullying and cyber-blackmail) - 150,000 contacts
- Self-harming (up 68%) -75,000 calls
- Depression and Mental Health Problems (up 19%) - 75,000 contacts
- Risk of suicide (up 39%) - 60,000 contacts

Whatever other benefits technology may bring, it does not seem to have helped the world of the child to become a happier, more secure and nurturing environment.

The consumer society is the shop window of secular technology. It promises happiness but the best it can give is pleasure and when the excitement of the latest 'must-have' is over, the need for the next one takes its place. Compulsive pleasure-seeking has the same root cause as much alcohol and substance misuse - warding off feelings of emptiness and futility. It arises as the consequence of growing up without an appreciation of spiritual values such as the pleasure in helping others; a sense of kinship; the lightness that comes with honesty and openness; appreciation of the gift of life; and the confidence to speak from the heart. These attributes of the soul are awakened by loving relationships, for which no machine or electronic device can compensate. The less time that is found for face-to-face human intimacy, the more impoverished the child and the greater the handicap for the adult-to-be.

There's not time here to go further into developmental psychology but it isn't hard to see how growing up in a world of things rather than people can leave a person unskilled at relating, unconfident of love and vulnerable to depression, substance misuse and eating disorders. One in four women and one in nine men suffer serious depression during their lifetime. Eating disorders, with a prevalence of over 1 million in the UK carry a 50% risk of depression. Overall, there are more than 5,000 suicides per year in this country. One adult in 13 is dependent on alcohol and 33,000 people die each year due to alcohol-related incidents or associated health problems while around 10% of the population of the UK take illicit drugs resulting in some 1800 deaths a year.

In some areas the benefits of scientific enterprise appear to be unarguable, for instance, the provision of clean running water, sanitation, the technology of food production and life-saving advances in medical care. Yet we need to think hard about the consequences of even these most benign technologies.

### **The population explosion**

By removing the checks and balances that Nature applied to the human species over hundreds of thousands of years, first agricultural, then industrial and more recently medical advances have triggered a rise in the human population from 1 million 10,000

years ago, to 1 billion 200 years ago, to over 7 billion today. Just supporting this number, let alone future rises, is destroying the earth's ecology. In his recent book '10 Billion', the scientist Stephen Emmott offers a devastating analysis of the current degradation of the planet's ecosystems, the atmosphere, the hydrosphere (the planet's water), the cryosphere (ice sheets and glaciers) and the biosphere (plants and animals). Some of the evidence he provides has been challenged, but the fact remains that eco-scientists are deeply worried.

We now have toxic levels of the greenhouse gases carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide, global temperatures are rising accompanied by extreme weather conditions with severe floods and droughts, the oceans are warming, fish stocks have been decimated, biodiversity is plummeting, with accelerating species extinction, tropical forest and woodland is shrinking and global fresh water supplies are failing. Yet more cars, ships and planes are being made than ever before and energy demands continue to soar. Just the other day, the Government approved nation-wide fracking for natural gas.

People respond in different ways, from outright denial to deep concern. Some are prepared to take any measures that may help. Some are happy to sign up to the 'green' economy but don't go much beyond that. Others are resigned to the view that nothing can stop the inevitable and that all we can do is knowingly live on borrowed time. Not least, there are opportunists behind the scenes who continue to manipulate the system for power and profit. Speaking about them can make one sound like a victim of conspiracy theory. Yet such machinations of self-interest and unconcern for the fate of humanity represent the egotistical extreme of the solar era, despite the endeavours of other good-hearted people doing their best for humanity.

### **Breakdown of trust**

Peter Joseph, who directed the controversial documentary-style *Zeitgeist: The Movie*, released in 2007, was roundly condemned for his critique of the history of duplicity and corruption in the Catholic Church; the claim that the US government had forewarning of the attacks on 9/11 but stood by so that there could be justification for a subsequent War on Terror; and that a cabal of international bankers effectively rule the world by manipulating money markets with complete indifference to human suffering. Blending fact and fiction is a dangerous gambit, but 50 million people have viewed *Zeitgeist* and this 'docufiction' has only served to deepen distrust of the great political, economic, military and religious institutions. There has since been the revelation of child sex abuse in the Catholic Church, the world has suffered a global banking crisis and the War on Terror, which looks to be of indefinite duration, funds evermore advanced weapons technology and the industry it supports.

Disinformation is well-known in the corridors of power. One tactic is to dismiss investigative reporting as paranoid scaremongering. The secrecy surrounding

geoengineering projects illustrates the problem, as highlighted by the website Geoengineering Watch. Take the construction of HAARP (the High Frequency Active Auroral Research Program) based in Alaska. An array of 180 radio antennas over 33 acres can beam a signal of 3.6 million watts modulated to extremely low frequency (ELF) into the ionosphere. This instrument allegedly has the power to punch holes in clouds, divert hurricanes, create storms, trigger earthquakes and tsunamis and target and destroy communications systems anywhere in the world. It is funded by a consortium in which the US military have the largest share and is unaccountable to the wider electorate.

A second example concerns 'chemtrails'. These are described as similar to the condensation trails created by aircraft but unlike ordinary vapour trails which disperse, a chemtrail is formed by releasing an aerosol containing nanoparticles of aluminium that persists in the upper atmosphere. The sky becomes a patchwork quilt of trails, which gradually merge into cirrus-like clouds that can last for days. The aim is to reduce global warming, the cloud layer of aluminium particles reducing the penetration of sunlight.

HAARP is acknowledged to exist, although charges that it has been used as a military weapon or for weather manipulation are strongly denied. Chemtrails are conceded as a potential strategy for what is known as 'solar radiation management' by the geoengineering lobby, although there is a blanket denial that they are already in use. Nevertheless, dozens of videos of alleged chemtrails can be seen on YouTube. There are numerous reports of dying trees and vegetation in North America and Canada, and rainfall tested in Australia has showed high levels of neurotoxic heavy metals including Aluminium (3000 times safe limit), Manganese (1700 times safe limit) and Boron (5000 times safe limit). Manganese is an electrical conductant that enhances the carriage of extra low frequency radio waves and it is claimed it is being added to chemtrails to potentiate transmissions from HAARP. Boron induces male sterility at high doses and this has raised fears that it is being covertly tested in a population-control programme.

These are extreme views which most people would find incredible. Nevertheless, concerning aluminium, it is a fact that in 2009, a US gene patent for aluminium-resistant seeds was granted, so someone is getting ready to make a killing! Nanoparticles of aluminium readily cross the blood-brain barrier and we know that aluminium is implicated in neurological degenerative disorders including Alzheimer's disease, which now affects 1 in 3 over the age of 80 years.

Not surprisingly, the alarms raised on the internet are dismissed by sceptics as conspiracy theory, while eco-activists are convinced they have lifted the lid on truly nefarious practices by an elite unaccountable to public office. For instance, the USA has been accused of using HAARP to trigger the Japan earthquake of 11<sup>th</sup> March 2011. Magnetometer readings from HAARP show broadcasting at 2.5 kHz, the known seismic-inducing wavelength, from 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> March. Just prior to the

earthquake luminescent cloud formations typical of HAARP were seen over Japan accompanied by a sudden rise in the electron content of the ionosphere over its epicentre.

What motive could there possibly be? It is alleged that the USA was determined to stop an imminent trade agreement between Iran and Japan. Iran was due to receive nuclear technology from Japan in exchange for continuing to export oil to Japan. (Japan is entirely dependent on oil from Iran, taking 12% of its oil production.)

What are we to believe? I have seen enough of human nature over my lifetime to be surprised at nothing. Human beings are capable of doing very good things and very bad things and we have to decide on the evidence for ourselves. Either way, there is now a major problem of lack of trust. If a person does challenge the status quo, he or she will be seen as paranoid, gullible or plain eccentric. All this may be true but it doesn't necessarily mean the person is wrong. It's a sobering thought that 1 person in 25 is a sociopath, and that clever, ambitious sociopaths relish nothing more than wielding power.

Finally I want to comment on the problem of nuclear technology. Aside from the insane current stockpile of 17,000 warheads (94% of which are American or Russian) and the risk from terrorism or computer malfunction, we are now living with the consequences of the meltdowns at the Chernobyl and Fukushima power plants.

The Soviet Union did not report the Chernobyl disaster of 1986 (it was left to Sweden), and children living in the area were not given potassium iodide tablets to protect them against the cloud of radioactive iodine<sup>131</sup>. Over 200 have developed thyroid cancer to date. One study carried out in 2010 by Alexey Yablokov, President of the Russian Centre for Environmental Policy, predicts an excess mortality close to 1 million worldwide due to the global radioactive fallout, a figure vigorously denied by the International Atomic Energy Agency. The Chernobyl reactor core was eventually sealed inside a massive concrete sarcophagus. However, this is known to be structurally unsound and has now begun to degrade on account of water penetration.

The Fukushima Daiichi disaster in Japan in 2011 has left 10 million people living in highly radioactive areas, and around 50,000 children have been found on scanning already to have thyroid nodules. The meltdown at Fukushima was three times worse than Chernobyl and radioactive waste is pouring into the sea. There remains the likelihood of further meltdown if there is another explosive release of hydrogen gas, or more seismic activity. There is no way to decommission either Chernobyl or Fukushima. Both will remain intensely radioactive for millennia.

Most of us are too busy getting on with daily life to think much about things like geoengineering and nuclear fallout. That is true for me - until recently, when I had to do some research for a paper I was giving. I experienced a powerful and disturbing emotional reaction when I began looking into issues of disinformation and conspiracy theory. Was I going mad, or has the world gone mad, or both? I was made acutely

aware that when insularity breaks down and the comfort zone is breached, paranoid mechanisms are activated. These are very black and white along the lines of 'who is not for me is against me'. The 'them and us' become highly charged, not least because of the difficulty in getting a handle on reality checks.

I was reminded of having once asked a sheep farmer why his sheep didn't stray through holes in the hedge. He explained, 'one in a hundred sheep is a roamer, and finds the holes. Then the others follow'. I asked him what he did about it. He replied, 'We take out the roamer'.

At the level of a psychological response we either engage our defence mechanisms or we feel the need to fight back. The ego defences most widely used are denial, projection and splitting. Denial negates the emotional reality of what we are hearing about, so that what should be profoundly shocking sinks into the flotsam and jetsam of news. Splitting enables us to split off what we don't like to admit to in ourselves - the shadow side - and projection allows us to feel virtuous by blaming someone or something else for the same thing. The spin-off is to reinforce tribal cohesion, as with the dynamics of the Cold War, in which we may substitute nations for tribes. Sometimes internal sectarian splits predominate, as in Afghanistan, Iraq, and now Syria and Egypt.

### **Engaging the soul**

If we try to oppose techno-pathology, we face three problems. One is that activism in which the ego is invested always runs into equal and opposite forces. This is Newton's third law of motion at work, which epitomises the world of dualities in which we live. The second is a multiplicity of agendas that is overwhelming. The third is the problem of remaining sane!

When we respond with our individual perceptions, our individual emotions and indeed our individual personalities, we are up against all three. The ego likes nothing better than a good fight - ostensibly in a good cause - and by engaging in mental combat with the opposition, we end up battling with dualities from which there is no escape. The control and command dynamics of the solar era, which enable institutional oligarchies to exercise power with minimal accountability, show no sign of moderating, and whistle-blowers like Bradley Manning and Edward Snowden get 'taken out' like the sheep that roams.

What, then, is to be done? It's clear to me that science and technology are fuelling a runaway train in which the driver, Mr Everyman, appears to be unaware of the buffers at the end of the line and is hopelessly intoxicated with the power and speed. The passengers travelling first class are still enjoying good food and wine. The economy class can't afford to eat, but at least sex doesn't cost anything. Some passengers have realized the train is out of control and are praying to God to apply the brakes,

although prayers of petition don't seem to be having much effect. A handful of passengers are beseeching the driver to slow down but he either can't or won't listen.

Those of us who give primacy to the spiritual universe (and this doesn't mean wholesale rejection of the material world - a good definition of 'the spiritual life' is when spiritual reality means more to a person than material reality) comprehend that only love can have any effect on this train. We can't *know* that the train will stop in time. We hope it will, for we have lives to live, let alone those of our kith and kin and, ultimately, the whole human family. We are mindful of the great purpose behind this train journey which has all of humankind on board - through our incarnation to express, so far as is possible, the perfect love and intelligence of the supreme consciousness we call God, consciousness without form but that is omniscient, eternal and infinite.

This is not the emotional kind of love that belongs to the world of dualities; emotional love twins with hate, just as pleasure goes with pain and happiness with sorrow. These emotions are all on board the train aplenty and are proving entirely ineffectual.

Spiritual love is beyond duality. Its values include compassion, kindness, reverence for life, joyfulness, and our involuntary response to beauty, goodness and truth. None of these can be weighed or measured, for they are infinite and eternal and destined therefore to remain beyond the reach of empirical science. And yet, the non-personal, non-conditional benevolence of spirit can touch the heart of the most hardened material realist.

This is never something achieved by intellectual persuasion alone. It happens when we are moved by the expression of spiritual love. The problem of the runaway train has to be faced, for it's no good ignoring the elephant in the room. But arm twisting is not a faculty of the soul. That comes from the ego, along with the ringing of alarm bells, premonitions of doom and the fear of death, and it doesn't help.

Soul awareness brings equanimity, not to be confused with indifference, for such equanimity comes from deep awareness of the primacy of the spirit. Since the vision of the soul is unitive, there's no question of wrestling the ego. The soul doesn't measure its actions by success or failure; it continues in the only way it knows how, which is to disarm with kindness and compassion. As in Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:3-8), while some seed is sure to fall on stony ground and some is swallowed up by thorns, where it falls on good ground it produces a crop and multiplies. We dearly wish the train to stop in time, and perhaps it will. But if not, it won't be the end of the world!

My very elderly home help - now deceased, bless her - used to say to me 'We are all flowers in God's garden'. This is one very big garden, infinitely big in fact. When one flower dies, another grows. Evolution has brought us to the threshold of 'make or break' and unless we find a way that merits our continued existence, we will be shown the door, most probably either from pandemic, starvation or drought. On the other hand, if we can harness the achievements of science with the soul values of

inclusiveness, harmony, wholeness and love, then we deserve every chance. Whatever the future holds, we shall at least know we tried our best and if, as many of us believe, the soul continues its journey into the Great Beyond, it will leave this place having helped sow the seeds of a new understanding in the mind of humanity.

The evolution of our social history mirrors the maturation of the individual. The world of the child is lunar in its sense of timelessness, mystery and wonder. Then, with progressive mastery of the environment, the ego embarks on a journey into the solar world. Later in life the pace eases and the lunar returns, a precious opportunity for those that want to take it to become more cognisant of the soul's wisdom.

I would wish this for the future of humanity. Left to the devices of the ego, humankind will destroy itself with the technology we have at our disposal today. Let's hope that by tomorrow we'll have discovered how much better it is used in the service of the soul.

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