

## INNER SUSTAINABILITY

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The person who *is* vibrant radiates vibrancy to the planet.

How to *become* vibrant? We won't be able to "save the planet" without knowing how to save ourselves. How can we create a sustainable environment or sustainable community unless it effulges from a sustainable human life? Even as we race from one meeting on "sustainability" to the next, we can feel the flagging energy.

*Sustainability is not just about buildings and eco-environments. It is also about the people who live in them.*

The wisdom that comes from my discipline of religious studies is quite emphatic: *social change stems from inner change*. The Dalai Lama said – "inner disarmament first, and then outer disarmament." You can pass laws that make it really hard to get a gun. But if someone is very angry inside, that anger will find a gun. The end of the arms race will come only when there is an end to the anger, hatred, and fear that contaminate the human spirit.

You can pass a policy that requires consumers to be sustainable in their purchases, but if someone is greedy inside for a certain thing, that greediness will have its way in spite of the law.

Gandhi said, BE the change you want to see in the world. This is the inner revolution taught by every great spiritual master.

Story from Swami Satchidananda:

Swami Satchidananda is one of the great 20<sup>th</sup> century spiritual teachers who came to the West from India. He was the principal teacher of Integral Yoga in the West. One of his disciples asked: "Swami, we hear a lot about peace. Could you tell us how to find it?" The Swami answered: "The peace should be found within oneself first. If you do not have the peace within yourself, you cannot find the peace outside. This reminds me of a small incident." He told this story...

Once, a businessman was having a serious conversation with his friend but they kept being interrupted by his young little son. And so the father found a world map and tore it into pieces to form a jigsaw puzzle. He gave the pieces to his young son saying, 'Son, will you please put the pieces together again to form the world?' The boy said, 'Okay, I'll try.'

The father thought, 'Oh it will take him a very long time to put the world back together – he won't interrupt us for a while.' In fact the young boy knew very little about world geography. Yet, all of a sudden, he turned one piece the other way. There, he saw a small part of nose sticking out. Then he turned over another piece

and saw a hand. The third piece showed a leg. Then he turned all the pieces upside down to find different parts of the human body. As you know, it is very easy to locate where the hand should go, where the head should be, where the feet should be. And so, very easily he arranged the whole human body in the proper order and then he turned the whole thing over to see the world in order. In grand excitement, he ran to the father with this material. The father was surprised!

He asked: 'How could you do this so quickly?' 'Oh Daddy it was easy!' The father was amazed. 'But how can it be easy?!' His son explained: 'I turned the pieces over and saw the parts of a human body. So I put together the human body and the whole world fell into place!'

When you heal yourself, the world is healed.  
Anything that happens in one place affects what happens everywhere.  
Sustainability emerges from the inside-out.

Inner sustainability comes from the wise management of our inner resources. Each of us has a rich system of energy resources. Unlike outer environmental and economic resources, these inner resources are not limited by our age, location, financial condition, or any circumstance. Every person has, potentially, an abundant supply.

Sadly, we don't hear about energy management – only stress management. This is bizarre – why would you want to “manage” stress? We manage that which is precious to us – our families, our stock portfolios, our data, our time. Stress doesn't need to be “managed” because stress is not even necessary.

Stress is the sign of an energy system on the verge of non-sustainability. Acute stress occurs when we face a temporary situation that triggers fear, anger, or hopelessness. Chronic stress is a lifestyle characterized by a stress response that has become so routine that it is viewed as “normal.” Such a person even feels depressed or worried if they stop their busyness; they cannot relax.

Stress is not necessary at all. It is not caused by outer circumstances, but by an inner response to the circumstances. There are people who are stressed out by public speaking and those who love it. There are people who are stressed by flying in an airplane, and those who love it. It's not the flying or the public speaking that causes stress, but a person's feeling about it.

Inner sustainability is marked by an internal environment that is resilient and peaceful, flexible and compassionate. It is not negatively affected by external “stressors.” It is the capacity to self-generate inner energies that are vital, expansive, and supportive of life in oneself and others.

Some energies bring healing, accomplishment, mutual success, happiness, compassion, and long-term vibrancy. Other energies deplete our inner environment

and we become sluggish, blocked, diseased, and depressed. Because we are connected to the whole, our energy state either enhances or drains the world around us.

The life-supportive energies of courage, love, joy, acceptance, reasonableness, and compassion radiate a beneficial and healing effect on the world, verifiable in the human muscle response, which stays strong in the presence of love and truth. In contrast, negative energies such as shame, guilt, confusion, fear, hatred, pride, and hopelessness induce a weakening response in our muscle and immune systems.

Truly, we change the world from the inside-out. The most important influence we have on the world is the inner energy we radiate. As my beloved teacher, Dr. David R. Hawkins, said, "We change the world not by what we say or do, but as a consequence of what we have *become*."

Meditation, yoga, self-inquiry, dream work, music, bonds of love, being in nature, contemplative prayer, T'ai Chi Ch'uan, and Qigong are a few of the time-honored methods used to cultivate a radiant inner life.

Human history teaches us that, even in the direst of circumstances and deepest suffering, an energy system that is well cultivated will attain to greatness and thereby lift the whole sea of human experience for generations to come.

Nelson Mandela overcame bitterness toward his apartheid oppressors who imprisoned him for 27 years. Out of the alchemy of his inner transformation from anger to forgiveness, a whole country was transformed. When an interviewer asked him how it was possible to endure 27 years in prison and walk out with his hand extended in forgiveness, he replied: "I had 27 years to accomplish the most difficult task in life, which is to change *oneself*." By changing himself, he changed the world. He walked out of prison with his hand extended in forgiveness to the apartheid oppressors, and they worked to build a democracy in S. Africa – truly worthy of the Nobel Peace Prize they received.

*The oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed. A man who takes away another man's freedom is a prisoner of hatred.*

Viktor Frankl, the Jewish psychiatrist and founder of logotherapy, recounts in his book *Man's Search for Meaning* about the horrific conditions of the concentration camp. Emaciation, starvation, arbitrary beatings, physical and psychological torture, bare subsistence on a few spoons of watery soup with a pea or two, digging ditches all day in freezing conditions with hardly any clothing, walking in snow with shoes that didn't fit or cover the cracked and swollen feet.

He survived, he said, because he focused his mental attention on the image of his wife in his mind – not knowing where she was or if she even lived. He united with

the energy of Love within his being and could sustain his life through the most trying of circumstances:

*Love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which [we] can aspire. . . . He who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss in the contemplation of his beloved.*

*Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.*

Nelson Mandela and Viktor Frankl cultivated *consciously* two of the greatest human energies: Love and Forgiveness.

Gratitude, also, is one of the most sustainable human energies, and it can be generated anywhere at any time. It's free. There's no petition to sign, no donation to pledge, no training you have to attend, no special equipment you need to purchase. And significant progress can be made with just a little bit of time.

If you were to do a Gratitude meditation for 5-10 minutes each day, you would greatly increase the sustainability of your own energy system. Over time, it would become a way of being in the world – natural and effortless.

Often we cultivate subtle resentment, not gratitude. We look back over our life or our day and think, "Oh! All the love and acknowledgement that I didn't get!" We focus on what we wanted from others that we didn't get – acknowledgement, approval, love – and we feel deprived.

In Gratitude meditation, we look back and acknowledge that we, in fact, have been the recipients of much love and caring. Or else we wouldn't be here. It takes love from others and the environment to survive even for a day. The fact that we are living is proof that we have been loved and supported. There were those who cared for us when we were infants. As infants, we were helpless. We received shelter, water, food, gravity, air, and encouragement. Perhaps we didn't receive all of the love that we had hoped for. However, what we needed was there, or else we wouldn't be here. There were seen and unseen people and forces of life that provided us with breath, belonging, meaningfulness, protection, and guidance. There were all those who went before us, who looked out for us, who loved us, and who received our love.

If you want to change the world, a good place to start is to change the only world you ever really have control over: your inner world. Being grateful for the gift of life is a powerful way of sustaining Life.

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