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A LETTER TO THE NEXT GENERATION

Deva Rashid

Trumpeter

Deva Rashid has been working on and directing various forestry, agricultural, ecological and environmental projects in Europe, Asia and the United States for the last fifteen years. He currently lives and works in India.

Beloved children,

This year the Demoiselle cranes never came to our part of India. Over the years I have stood by the lake at sunset to await the migrations.

First you hear the distant calls, then, gleaming white on the violet sky, endless lines of cranes come into view. They circle around at great height, until suddenly, one by one these elegant birds start falling out of the sky like paper bags before the wind. Sometimes they drop four or five hundred feet before they resume a gliding circuit of the lake.

When darkness has finally enclosed the landscape a few mud banks have blossomed into beds of giant white water lilies of a thousand birds. In the subtle weaving of ecology's multiple webs, who knows with the cranes not arriving what threads have here gone amiss?

Around 25 years ago when you were conceived the world was a different place and I, a budding parent, was a different person. There was no feeling in those days that the world was accelerating into a terminal crisis. I had hoped then I would leave my children the inheritance of a richer, more loving world. But now, seeing that this will not be realized, I have one final bequest, a key, that I would like to pass on to you.

During the last few months I have been researching the ecological breakdown of our planet, collecting data on air and atmospheric conditions, on oceans, rivers and underground aquifers, on the toxification of the Earth and its increasing desertification. I've looked at volcanic patterns and seismic activity, at reports on global weather changes, and at predictions of global warming, or the advent of an ice age. I've read about the destruction of our forests, our marine and wetland systems, about the elimination of thousands of species of plants and wildlife, and their essential links with the health of air, water and soil.

I looked at figures on nuclear power and nuclear weapons, on nuclear contamination and the disposal of nuclear waste. I've read all the available data on populations, birth rates and death rates, average ages within nations compared to per capita income, on the techniques of birth control and who uses them. I then waded through massive amounts of information on: AIDS, diseases associated with the environment, child mortality, crime rates, suicide rates, divorce rates and the world-wide problems of drug abuse and child abuse. All the while new issues unfolded (the Alaska oil-spill, the October earthquakes, the ever-growing refugee problems in the Far East and Eastern Europe) and new information

kept changing the perspectives (advances in nuclear fusion, immune systems being transferred from animals to plants and so on.) As my brain assimilated the information, a mounting turbulence stirred within me.

While on the one hand I was horrified and overwhelmed by the evidence of our Earth's impending biospheric collapse, on the other I was rejecting it — unwilling to accommodate such a possibility.

Suddenly, one early morning the penny dropped and I saw myself as a man in a threadbare dream, sharing the illusions of a disintegrating humanity. In a moment all the facts and figures came together in an image of shocking clarity and I saw that, as things are, humans have no future. The scale, the complexity of decay, is too huge, the repair work underway too minuscule, the will of humanity too enfeebled for us to be able to survive.

Yet this powerful image became for me, not devastating, but invigorating and liberating. If it's true that there is no future we are dumped fairly and squarely in the present, which in reality is the only place there is.

If there is no future, whatever we do is for the joy and satisfaction we derive from doing it now. If there is no future there is no fear, no hope, no greed.

From that moment in the early morning there flowed a stream of insights that revealed the key to lock the door facing humanity.

Nothing I am going to say is original. Yet there are few Western writers, scientists, philosophers, religious persons or ecosophilosophers who have made the connections that I want to make. Humans are accidentally or deliberately, directly or indirectly, causing the dramatic breakdown of our Earth's biosphere. The human mind, therefore, must be the central issue of global ecology.

I am going to run through, at a fast pace, what it is about the human mind that creates such trouble, how humans come to be this way, and why with the best of intentions we find it so difficult to be anything else. Then I will present the key, the practices leading to transformations which will help to get us out of this mess.

In early historical times humans had to live with Nature in a cooperative way.

As the social groupings of the early humans evolved, hunter/gatherers gave way to cultivators, and "property" was invented. The 'successful' groups became patriarchal, emphasizing the male-mind attributes of doing, controlling, and competing to the exclusion of the female-mind attributes such as receiving, feeling, cooperating.

In more recent times, starting in Europe, a new social order came into being, of which we are the manifestation; it is called Capitalist/Industrial society. Male-mind characteristics became more and more pronounced. Rational thought was

promoted as the highest expression of consciousness. "I think, therefore I am," became the cornerstone of our ontological system.

Other aspects of consciousness such as intuition, sensation and feeling were at best ignored, at worst persecuted. They found their place on the shrinking margins of society in some religions, the arts and the insane asylums.

But the mind that society has moulded in its members is now proving inadequate for dealing with the realities it has created. Modern physicists show us that the facts we have taken for granted since Newton point in one direction, while the truth lies frequently elsewhere.

What has brought us to the brink of ecological disaster, the mind that we have evolved, has led us to think that we humans are separate from Nature, and that because we have the power we have the right to dominate Nature. But we should beware of changing our natural environment. First we have to change our own minds.

Mind is often likened to an iceberg, a little tip of consciousness showing above the submerged bulk of subconsciousness. A more workable metaphor is to think of mind as a bio-computer programmed by our parents, our culture, our religious and our political systems.

Our parents, from the moment of our birth, when we were not free to decide for ourselves, poured into us their values, their hopes and fears, expectations and denials. They instilled in us a belief that we belong to them, that we have duties to them, that we have a responsibility to be the way they would like. They compared us to others and insisted we do better. They taught us that some feelings, thoughts and actions are acceptable and others are not. From the very beginning we were split, divided within ourselves.

Some religions have often exploited this split for their own power purposes. They have given us a future based on greed and fear, which they call heaven and hell; they have given us a past heavy with guilt. The primal energy of human life, sexual energy, the most obviously natural and 'good thing', they have persecuted, suppressed and made bad, thus emasculating the individual, who then permanently feels guilty and is more easily manipulated and enslaved. The politicians in their pursuit of power collude with the religions. And why do they seek power? Because they are even more fractured and internally impotent than the rest of us. We give them power because of our own fragmented sense of ourselves, which finds relief in letting others decide for us.

To patch over these splits within our psyche society gives us labels to which we adhere. I am British, you are Japanese, he is Jewish, she is Hindu, we are Republicans, they are foreigners, criminals, anti-social elements, and so on down to the smallest detail of our lives. I am intelligent, you are untidy, she is creative.... We think of ourselves as free, self-motivated individuals, but deep

down we feel insecure, uncertain and divided.

Imagine, for a minute, two babies born in a Belfast hospital, one of Catholic and the other of Protestant parents. By mistake their identification tags are switched. By the age of eighteen one will be hating Catholics, when he would otherwise have been loving them, and the other will be hating Protestants instead of identifying with them. Simplistic though this example may be, it is in essence a picture of how all our minds function. Our perception of ourselves comes from others. Yet it is an image that we cherish, polish, defend and even kill for.

Our conditioning, the programmes that our bio-computers accept, are primarily given to us not in our own interests but in the interests of 'society'. 'Society' has its own aims, its own needs and these aims can conflict with the needs of the individual, and take him away from his own nature.

The pay-off for society is that it secures control over people, the pay-off for the individual is, he does not have to take responsibility for his own fragmented and deviated nature. What most disturbs society is a free and integrated individual. To break this chain, to cut loose from a past contained in our heads is the ultimate challenge that will determine whether humanity has a future. Can a species that invented fire and moon-walking, cathedrals, lap-top computers and ecstatic music not find its way through this impasse? I don't know — because it all depends on you and me. Not them, or Him.

The problems are global, they permeate all social structures and the crises are current and imminent. World-wide, individuals are stirring, protesting, demonstrating their desire to live harmoniously with each other and with Nature. World-wide, scientists are moving into a more subjective appreciation of their disciplines.

The most intelligent voices in the spiritual, sociological scientific, new-age, and ecosophical worlds are all declaring that in some way humans need to change themselves, to make a radical re-evolution, a quantum leap, a paradigm shift...but how? We have not got much time.

The golden key, which might open the door which we help us resolve our problems is within ourselves. We are the only animals that have the capacity to look at ourselves. By using this self-reflective capacity we can bridge the gap between who we suppose we are and who we really are.

To find our way forward it no longer suffices to look 'out there', to science, to God, to a new revolutionary political or religious system. The place to start is right here with the split in our own psyches. Whatever cure or solution to the globe's problems exist within ourselves. Only an integrated human being in touch with his own truth will be ecologically viable, will know that he IS nature, with no split between subjective and objective, spiritual and material.

The only scientific method ever worked out for the transformation of human beings has been in use for thousands of years in the East. It is the science of meditation. It is not an objective science but THE subjective science. Just as physics is the science of the outer world of matter, so meditation is the science of the inner non-material world. It is an experiential process, not a phenomenon you observe but one you become. The word "meditation" comes from the same root as the word "medicine." It denotes the healing of the inner, the making whole of the disparate parts of ourselves. Meditation has techniques but no dogma, no belief system, no theology, no philosophy. It is the expansion of consciousness; it helps us discover what we are beyond body, beyond mind, beyond heart. It is a journey to the center of existence resulting in an explosion that transforms everything. Through it we can feel a tremendous energy of which we were not previously aware. Our intelligence and creativity are released from the bonds of the past.

Without the key, the golden key of meditation, I do not see how it is possible for humankind to open the door to a changed world. At present we have no other tools to free ourselves from the deeply ingrained and mortally destructive conditioning of our cultures.

In the words of the Zen Master, Osho, who has lived for many years in a condition of deep meditation:

A simple method of watching your breath is enough.... You just sit silently and witness your mind process, while keeping attention on the breath. Just be a witness, a watcher, looking at the traffic of the mind. Thoughts, desires, memories, dreams, fantasies pass by. Simply stand aloof with no condemnations, no evaluations. These things are important:

1. A relaxed state
2. Witnessing
3. No judgements.

Meditation creates a gap between you and the mind.

There are many different types of meditation, but if witnessing is at the core, then you can feel assured that the meditation is a genuine one.

This then, is the key, the precious master key that I present to all you of my children's generation. From my own experience I can say that meditation is transformational. Not that "I" have changed. It is more that much that was

extrinsic to me has dropped away. Much that is intrinsic to me has acquired new vitality. I remember my teacher saying to me ten years ago, "I give you that which you already have. I take away from you that which you don't have."

Amongst the meditators with whom I live, I have seen over the years the melting away of all the labels of nation, class, religion, race and gender. I have seen the gradual dissolution of the barriers of fear, anger, ambition and competition.

The processes are on-going. We are all like apprentice frogman learning to navigate the waters of the unconscious, conscious and super-conscious minds. It is not that meditation has any purpose other than that of knowing oneself and becoming whole. The side effects of the knowledge — and the knowledge of the lack of knowledge — transform the way you see the world.

Right now humanity knows the world only through the patterns we have inherited or received from others, and we are seeing that these patterns are inherently destructive.

Right now we do not even know what constitutes a 'good' ecosystem. In our unconsciousness we are probably destroying more useful information about our habitat than we are discovering. So yes, let us mount holding operations that seem appropriate. Let us all plant 150 trees each year, let us delete the nuclear weapons from our national budgets, let us protest at every turn the despoliation of our habitat. But an on-going priority also must be the exploration and healing of our own inner ecology.

If there is to be a future for humanity, it will come only from an increased awareness of ourselves, our motives, our connectedness with the whole. So far as I know, there is no technique other than meditation by which this awareness can be directly nurtured and enhanced.

Out of the process of meditation new personal and social inspirations will spontaneously and painfully (we must admit it) arise. They will be the worthwhile ones because they will come out of experiences of wholeness, of unity, of harmony, of beauty, of lovingness. A world of meditation is a world where laughter re-appears, where authenticity is the norm and where freedom is synonymous with life. In the future these experiences will be our only guides.

As I fumble with these last lines a young kestrel alights on a branch not three meters from my window. The questioning gaze of that encircled eye seems like an exhortation and a benediction. The passing of this key is my response to the hawk's look.

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