



Charlie Hebdo, God and Earth Spirituality

"Human beings experience hurt and pain. They seek refuges from hurt and pain. They seek refuge in wealth, they seek refuge in other men, they seek refuge in knowledge and they seek refuge in the idea of god.

They can see easily that neither wealth nor other people are true refuges. The other two refuges are beliefs and they unleash much violence before their falseness becomes evident.

It is only when a person gives up his search for refuges that he takes the first step to ending dukha"

Gautama the Buddha

This paper was written as a preparation to a 3-day 'Research and Contemplation' dialogue on Earth Spirituality conducted by Sumedhas, Academy for Human Context at the Fire Flies Ashram. The first part of the paper outlines a framework through which the idea of Earth Spirituality can be examined; it uses the recent spate of hate killings to illustrate the idea. The second part of the paper reflects upon the experience of the Dialogue.

Part 1: The Prologue

The Hypothesis

We don't have to protect our environment, nor do we have to protect our idea of God, we only have to discover how to transform the violence that seems to be the defining characteristic of man.

The Framework

We need a shared framework through which we can examine this hypothesis and discuss its merits. Groups function through the dynamic balance between three ways in which human beings interact with each other. These three ways are collaboration, confrontation and collusion. The ground this stands on is a shared idea of self and the other.

The Religious groups:

Groups that stand on the idea of in-group solidarity and out-group violence share a world-view that says; "the other is an oppressor (actual or potential) you are a victim (real or potential) and I am your savior". The one who claims to be able to be the savior is the leader of the group, and the group is therefore premised on dependency. This idea is easy to understand since all of us experience hurt and dukha and seek a refuge, a place like heaven where there is eternal peace. Peace here would mean "all my wishes are fulfilled, and I pay no price for it. No one opposes me or blocks me in the slightest".

It is vital for the survival of such groups that there is always the potentially devilish other, there is fear of hurt and violation, and there is the person who stands up against the devil on ones behalf and assures one of a safe haven. The collaboration that these groups achieve is based on ensuring that the members of the group collude to keep the fantasy alive, confrontation is directed outward. Norms and dogma have to be enforced so that the energy of confrontation does not turn inward. The fantasy needs an honorable name with which to buffer itself: belief; Belief in the savior, in the goodness of the in-group and the devilish nature of the out-group. We call this state of mind the 'Religious State of Mind' and the groups anchored in this state of mind the Religious Groups ('R- Group').

The Spiritual groups:

There is another possible way for the dynamic of collaboration to play out. This is when the group does not posit the other as the oppressor and therefore has no need for the savior; you and I are not different, not divided. This group starts with the premise: human beings experience hurt and pain, they seek refuges to ensure that pain and hurt will never recur. However, all such search is in vain. There can only

be an inward ending of fear of hurt and ending of desire for its opposite to take place.

In this group, all experiences are an invitation to reflect on oneself, to confront one's own reality 'as is'. There is no collusive process that says, "Yes I will guarantee you a heaven"; there is no fantasy of a refuge, no belief to reinforce the fantasy. Collaboration in such a group is a product of a sense of responsibility, a result of insight into the nature of reality and recognition of mutuality. We call this state of mind the 'Spiritual State of Mind' and the groups formed by Spiritual-Seekers the 'S- Group'.

The group in its relationship to the other

R-groups will constantly generate conflict and war; reinforce belief through dogmatic theory that molds minds through the threat of excommunication. The 'Religious State of Mind' is very susceptible to manipulation through fear and greed. S-groups will nurture exploration and discovery, develop hypothesis, and engage in dialogue. All their engagements will be reflexive, as will be their books. The 'Spiritual State of Mind' will be autonomous and self-reliant. It cannot be manipulated, it has to feel evoked from within to act.

R-groups will demand of the other: convert or perish. S-groups will ask of the other: what is your truth? While R-groups are threatened by difference, S-groups will thrive on difference.

If the earth has to survive, we need a proliferation of 'Spiritual State of Mind' and S-groups. R-groups and the 'Religious State of Mind' will destroy the earth and destroy each other as they strive to ensure a totally safe place for themselves.

However, the 'Spiritual State of Mind' is the acme of human development and the 'Religious State of Mind' is the norm. With the spread of terrorism, materialism and the 'battle for God' the R groups are on the rise, since the 'Religious State of Mind' is more easily 'understood'.

How does one enable the 'Spiritual State of Mind' to grow? Is it at all possible? Is it an inner realization one has to hope for?

Can the mind transform?

Let us examine this question through the framework of Chakras. We will first advance a simple but fairly accurate idea of the chakras. Chakras are envelopes of thought feeling and action, they are nurtured by assumptions and conclusions about the nature of man and the nature of the world.

The Moolaadhaara chakra anchors a sense of belonging and seeking of safety. A mind located here works with an entrenched idea of 'us' that is sourced in identicality. The 'other' is a source of mystery, and potentially demonic.

The Swaadhistaana chakra anchors heroism. The 'other' is either an enemy to be vanquished or an ally in ones journey which is essentially a lonely path.

The Manipooraka anchors discipline and role bounded-ness. Truth is revealed through divine means and one lives essentially to earn merit and easy passage to the world beyond.

The Anaahatha anchors curiosity and discovery. The 'other' is an object of enquiry and evokes affection and empathy.

The Vishuddhi anchors creativity and self-expression. The 'other' is a reflection of oneself, and a source of beauty and inspiration.

The Aagnya anchors transcendence. The 'other' and the 'self' are expressions of a primordial Intelligence.

When we look at the groups and the individuals who populate them, a pattern emerges:

The 'Religious State of Mind' is a product of motivations rooted in the Moolaadhaara and the Manipooraka, and therefore the R-groups are a product of a deep fear of the 'other', a need to suppress and repress ones so called 'animalist' sides. They project the undesirable parts of the self on to the other and demonize it.

One can enter and comprehend the universe of the Anaahatha only when fear and the urge for self-preservation end. The 'Spiritual State of Mind' emerges when a person appreciates this world and initiates a quest within for ways to transform oneself, and transcend the self centered pulls of the first three chakras. As one matures in the quest, the Vishuddhi and Aagnya become a reality, and one enters more and more sublime levels of perception and action.

Earth Spirituality

If we now re-engage with the question 'how do we live in harmony with the earth' we can see the contours of the challenge we face. Both the 'Religious State of Mind' and the 'Spiritual State of Mind' have been attempts to manage, control, overcome and dominate the mind referred to as 'animalist'. However, what we call progress is

the living evidence of the manner in which the forces of desire and greed have triumphed! This mind has used and developed technology for self-aggrandizement and acquisition. The Anaahatha propels scientific discovery, but in the absence of a deep and well-rooted anchorage in this universe, the discovery gets converted into 'useful and pleasure giving' technologies, i.e., pulled to the motivations of the first three chakras. Thus a love of the earth and a genuine respect for the 'other' does not emerge. We call this the Acquisitive/ Animalist Technological Mind (the ATM:).

The challenge

It should be obvious to any discerning observer that we are a living proof of the failure of the 'Religious State of Mind' in dealing with the ATM, which is what it purports to do. The mind and groups fueled by fear have been manipulated by the mind that is fueled by desire and greed. The more acceptable forms of this failure take the shape of organized religions, nation states, and business organizations. The more unacceptable forms are cults, warmongering nations and rapacious business organizations.

If we now return to our hypothesis we can see that Charlie Hebdo being lauded as the champions of 'free speech and democracy' are the symbols of the ATM, and the 'Muslim Fundamentalists' are the symbol of the 'Religious State of Mind'. The ATM seek refuge in wealth and knowledge, the 'Religious State of Mind' seek refuge in other people and in the idea of god! The discourse around the recent violent episode is framed in the classical binary. But is this the whole story?

The 'Spiritual State of Mind' is a mind that is ready and willing to experiment with life. In fact that might be its defining characteristic, it is not holding on to dead and dreary habits or the dubious anchorage of authority out of fear. Our hope lies in the movement of many people from all walks of life into the 'Spiritual State of Mind'.

Earth Spirituality has therefore to be more profound than the 'Religious State of Mind' and the ATM minds. If we wish to see the emergence and unfolding of the 'Spiritual State of Mind' and Earth Spirituality, we cannot play the game of projection on to the other and externalizing our untouchable self. The positive dynamics of the world we have created are also the outcomes of our foundational chakras and play an important part in our psyches and our lives.

We cannot lobotomize our brains and say " no more belonging, no more heroism, no more norms and rules". We cannot reverse the idea of money and technology. We cannot recruit people to the 'Spiritual State of Mind' in ways that the 'Religious State of Mind' and the ATM do, namely, through the use of fear and or desire.

For example, one of the ways of focusing people's attention on the problem has been to use the 'doomsday scenario', (a favorite ploy of proselytizers) and paint a scary picture of the possible futures awaiting us. It will inevitably lead to the formation of a new form of oppressive leadership and control. The 'Religious State of Mind' mind will act from dependency and seek a messiah, the ATM will seek ways of concentrating more wealth and power onto itself and build 'impregnable castles' (only, the moats will be bone dry!).

The ways of the Anaahatha chakra and beyond have always been with us, and many Yogis and Bodhisatvas have walked the path. There is little more to be said or demonstrated about the path. Honest scientists have described the possible futures, and shown the ways of using technology in a manner that respect the earth and are sustainable.

Will this movement of a sufficiently large mass of people into the 'Spiritual State of Mind' come through a mutation of the brain? Will there be many small pioneers who become role models of the new ways? Now that we have declared our intention to take Buddha's insight seriously, to go beyond the envelop of the first three chakras, we do not have the luxury of praying to a god that we invent!

What do we do?

*"It may be that when we no longer know what to do,
We have come to our real work
And when we no longer know which way to go,
We have begun our real journey."*

Wendell Berry

Part 2: The Epilogue

Let me start this part by recounting a story that has become somewhat of an anthem for me:

A Yogi sat under a tree in deep meditation. Two cranes started their courting dance in the clearing next to the tree. Their love dance was loud and our Yogi was disturbed from his meditation. He opened his eyes and stared at the birds. Lo and behold! The birds were burnt to ash. The Yogi was delighted. With his newfound sense of accomplishment he went into the nearby village to beg for food, as he was wont to do every day.

He stood at the gate of the lady who had always greeted him with affection and offered him alms. But, today she was late. The Yogi was irritated by this delay and as she came out with her offering he glared at her. “Do you think I am one of those birds?” she remarked casually. “My husband is a little unwell and my child is restless, I had to tend to them before I could respond to you”. The Yogi was ashamed and humbled by the mind of the woman. “How did you come to achieve such profound capabilities?” he asked. “There is a butcher in the market place, he taught me all that I know she said”

As the Yogi walked into the market place searching for the butchers shop he heard a voice call to him “ah! So you are the arrogant Yogi, who burnt the birds and whom the lady has sent so that you can learn Yoga. Come sit down, wait till I am through with my days work and then we will go to my little abode.”

In one version of the story (the one I prefer) the Yogi is supposed to be Gautama Maharishi who wrote the Dharma Sutras after a long period of discipleship with the butcher. This story reminds me also of the Zen challenge “If you have gained Satori, come show it in the market place”.

The Living Laboratory

The 27 people who came together for the contemplative conversation came from diverse backgrounds. There were activists who had spent many years working with the down trodden, some who were experimenting with alternative life styles, artists, teachers and professionals. Swastika, Naveen, Siddhartha and I co-anchored the process.

Creating the shared ground

Day one was very evocative. Each one shared why they were drawn to this exploration and the focus of their work. We then spent the rest of the day understanding the framework so that we would have a shared language. I introduced the idea of the chakras by using a more accessible language. We played a 'card game': cards were distributed to the participants, and after some discussion about the universes that these cards represent they were asked to collect the cards that were from the same family together. Each card has a statement, and the statements have a sequence. To illustrate, the first card in the sequence speaks about how one listens when one is anchored in a particular universe. The next card looks at how a particular type of listening will lead to 'giving and receiving gifts' and this in turn will lead to 'building a narrative' and this narrative then triggers questions and the upshot of all this is 'what is one really doing'?

The universes we discussed were the following:

- Clan
- Arena
- Clockwork
- Network
- Ecological
- Holonic

When one is anchored in the Moolaadhaara, one creates contexts that are 'Clans'. Clans are characterized by a strong need for belonging and protection. Swaadhisthaana drives the 'Arena' where the urge to deploy ones strength and fulfill ones desire become dominant. Manipooraka forms the basis of shaping 'Clockwork' universes. These are the familiar hierarchies that we have lived with for the last few Millennia. They are characterized by the enforcement of roles and boundaries. We have evolved to a state where curiosity impels us to observe our world and discover how things work. The Anaahatha energizes this universe that we call the 'Network'. In a network we are no longer "cogs in the wheel of a machine", we enjoy a greater sense of purpose and act autonomously to pursue our goals. Individuals who are anchored in the Vishuddhi are able to recognize the 'other' for who they are, not as members of ones intimate group, not as enemies to be vanquished, not as fellow followers of shared dogma, nor as collaborators useful for one's goal accomplishments. The world that values different voices and searches for meaning we call the 'Ecology'. The 'Holonic' is the universe that is the outcome of actions emanating from the Aagnya chakra. A 'Holon' is an autonomous whole that is part of a greater whole. For example, all living beings are composed of cells and these cells in their turn are composed of RNA, DNA, mitochondria and so forth. This universe deeply resonates with the energies of the cosmos and lives in a profound harmony with nature. We introduced these worlds through word association followed by short non-verbal plays.

Processes	Clan	Arena	Clockwork	Network	Ecological	Holonic
Listening	Only to elders; translate all that is heard into the language of the clan.	Listen from a core of vigilance and opportunism.	Framed and filtered through the injunctions of ones social system.	Attentive to opportunities and threats; studying data and facts.	To the many voices that reveal the unfolding pattern.	From a meditative core to discover 'what is'.
Giving and receiving Gifts	To create bonding and seal obligations only from/to trusted people.	Extract what one wants, give to enhance reputation or bargain for loyalty.	What is prescribed by norms.	What is negotiated and ensures utility.	Meaningful exchanges between mutually dependent entities.	Exchanges that enliven self and the other.
Building a Narrative	The lore of ones tradition is the only narrative and it must be preserved as received.	What I recreate of my victories and victimhood.	The authorized grand narrative becomes ones own narrative.	The narrative of ones pursuit of goals, success and failure of self, team and systems.	The collective narrative of evolution and ones own struggles to adapt.	Co-creating the future, playing a part in the unfolding.
Questioning and enquiry	Totems and taboos block all questioning of the received wisdom.	Seek objects of power; hold on to what one possesses.	The revealed word of authority has all the answers to ones questions.	Enquiring into the Measurable and tangible world; seeking tools and techniques for acquiring capability.	Examining multiple perspectives and exploring possible futures.	Deep enquiry, and staying suspended between the question and the answer.
In doing what I am doing what am I really doing?	Ensuring my safely and belonging.	Establishing territory.	Ensuring obedience.	Advancing my own goals and shared purpose.	Being Fair and inclusive.	Living ones Dharma.

(This table has been developed by TAO Knoware Pvt.Ltd based on the work done by Ashok Malhotra on the Existential Universes Mapper. It cannot be copied or used without permission)

The presentations that took place reflected a sound understanding of the universes and were very evocative as well. We only worked with the first 5, i.e., up till the Ecological Universe. Our experience tells us that our embodied understanding of the

universes starts to wane from the Network Universe. The Holonic often becomes a fantasy.

The experiment

On Day two we decided to turn the shared space into a living laboratory: we would bring in our concerns and our struggles to create a sustainable and equitable world around us, but, we would simultaneously reflect upon the question “In doing what I am doing what am I really doing? Where is my action sourced? What universe am I creating?”

The process was intense and had its highs and lows! The ability to be self reflective in the midst of vibrant action was a challenge. The pull to get into ones own need for self expression, or the pull to have a uniform norm and structure imposed upon the group, or when the enquiry became intense, the need for fun and relaxation kept getting played out. Like a flock of birds caught in a net, each of us tried our own favorite ways of shaping the collective into an Ecological space. But one person’s solution was often another persons’ problem! For example when one person was given the space for self expression, the group found itself moving from a space of evocation to a space where the group had become an audience and an instrument of the individuals need for affirmation. We had become a beautiful Arena! One member of the group needed the space to think and feel and proposed the norm that every one should be silent for a minute after any one spoke. While on the surface the space became disciplined and manageable, many other members experienced a polite but choking oppression. “If you need silence to think, recuse yourself from the group, like I have done. Why impose your need on the group” was one participants outburst. We had become a ‘Clockwork’ collective. We moved into small groups and deeply examined the struggles of a few participants. While each group was able to experience the play of curiosity and the joy of a shared enquiry, the whole group had become a set of Clans. The broad time planning we had done for ourselves could not be adhered to, and when ever an individual differed from the group or felt the need for protection they expected the so called ‘facilitators’ to intervene. It was not clear at all how they were invoking a hierarchy into the experimental space. And of course everyone had an idea of what it meant to be a good ‘facilitator’ and hoped that the so-called facilitators would do exactly what they thought was right. It was very difficult for people to see how this is the currency of Power and Politics☺

Review and reflection

We spent the greater part of day three reviewing the experiment of day two. We realized that each of us came into the dialogue with our own conditioning and our own expectations. When the space became an open experiment, there were no facilitators to orchestrate the proceedings. The only organizing principle was the shared decision to see what emerges and reflect upon what each one saw, and raise hypothesis on what it takes to create a world that is Ecological, a world that is replete with Earth Spirituality. We came to the following conclusions:

- All of us shared a deep concern with the way mankind is living and where we are headed. This was the commitment that helped us persist with the experiment.
- When the space as it emerged triggered our unconscious hurts, expectations and conditioning, we fell back on the older structures of thought, feeling and action. We either expected the ‘authority figure’ to recreate our familiar world, or when this ‘authority’ failed us, we acted from our own ‘solutions’.
- These attempts invariably pulled the group back to familiar worlds namely the Clan, Arena or Clockwork universes.
- The distance and observational capacity required for being self-reflexive in a group setting was a big challenge. When hypothesis were offered (especially when it came from the ‘facilitators’) they were experienced as a challenge or as a judgment. This capability may be critical to sustaining a Network universe.
- We discovered that the Ecological Universe is not an embodied and lived experience for us, and became the ‘aspired-for’ universe. Many of us realize that it is probably the next step in our evolution and if enough of us do not make this space a lived reality, the global crisis we face today cannot be engaged with meaningfully.

Contemplating on the whole experience

The group wished to have specific times for meditation. This made me wonder whether what has come to be understood as ‘meditation’ is another refuge. If one examines Buddha’s life, studies the Yoga Sutra or listens carefully to J.Krishnamurti, the idea of meditation seems very different. The sutra “desha bandhaha chittasya dhaarana” states unequivocally, that, “staying with an enquiry is the first step to meditation” (Chapter 3 sutra 1). Elsewhere the Yoga Sutras state that being attentive to the seeds of Avidya within us is Dhyaana (Chapter 2 sutra 10 & 11). Many of J.Krishnamurti’s statements point us in the same direction: any movement away from ‘what is’ is not meditation. He often asks with a great sense of urgency “can you look at the seeds of violence within you?” He also says that the insight that emerges when one can look at ones subtlest movements with total attention then ones structures of thought feeling and action get transformed.

We started this exploration with Buddha’s invitation to each of us to abandon a search for refuges and confront our sorrow directly. We put forward a hypothesis to examine: “*We don't have to protect our environment, we don't have to protect our idea of God, we just have to discover how to transform the violence that seems to be the defining characteristic of man*”. We have implicitly said that attentiveness to our own inner processes and a commitment to collective unfolding is a central feature of Earth Spirituality. We must conclude that while we may have glimpses into what an embodied Earth Spirituality might mean, we as collectives have a long way to go.

Earth Spirituality