

The Spiritual Way, the Gandhian Way



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Earth's pain is becoming humanity's pain. We have consistently ignored the dark side of development and we continue to do so. Earth, which is our home, and home to all living creatures, has been used ruthlessly and mercilessly and unsustainably. The very existence of life on Earth is at stake. We must reverse this trend if life on Earth as we have known it for millennia is to continue.

There is also emerging a growing yearning for the individual's and Earth's healing. The Earth Charter is a response to this wide-spread yearning for the spiritual healing of humans as well as Earth God's creation and Mother Earth, as others call it. At the heart of the Earth Charter is the need to consider and strengthen the inner spirit of humans, to make moral and ethical choices, to move towards a technology with a human face, and towards a non-violent economics that would cooperate with Earth and with nature rather than exploit it.

The Earth Charter, we hope, will be a turning point in our history. We live in a world which has obsessive preoccupation with growth and unlimited confidence in new technologies. Modern technology has been responsible for our disappearing forests, disappearing rivers and wetlands, disappearing biodiversity, disappearing fossil and mineral wealth, and increase in deserts, arid lands, and wastelands. We have pursued the philosophy of

the cancer cell which grows and expands on its host, eventually killing it. We are behaving like the cancer cell, killing Earth with our expanded economic growth.

The Earth Charter has become necessary if we are to survive. It recognizes the crisis is not only in our economic growth and in our consumerism, but also recognizes the crisis in our social, moral, and spiritual life. The confidence that scientific and technological methodologies are the only valid approaches to truth and knowledge is changing. In the last two to three hundred years, science and technology in the West have been extensively used by man for his greed, and for acquiring power. In the process, he has deeply damaged and poisoned the Earth and also deeply damaged and spiritually contaminated himself as well. The Earth Charter provides the vision, the spiritual and the ethical basis, the direction and limits of the scientific and technological change. It helps in having an holistic, an ecological, and an ethical view of knowledge a view which in many ways is similar to those of mystics and of spiritual religious people.

The Earth Charter holds Earth as sacred, as did the belief systems of indigenous people, and of Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists. They treated Earth as sacred and did not exploit nature without concern for its well-being, for its sustainability.

As Gandhi said, "Earth has enough for our needs, but not enough for our greed." If we are concerned about sustainable development, about poverty and equality, about violence and crime and wars, we must turn to Mahatma Gandhi, a man of deep spiritual, moral, and ethical values, as well as a man of action who could transform millions and lead a non-violent revolution. If we are to save Earth and move towards a sustainable future we have a great deal to learn from the Mahatma.

Gandhi's method was "satyagraha" – the literal meaning being "holding on to truth." Essentially satyagraha is a moral principle, converted into a method to fight for social and political justice.

In everything Gandhi did, he introduced the spirit of religion in his politics. When he was asked whether he was a saint or a politician he replied, "I could not be leading a religious life

unless I identified with the whole of mankind, and that I could not do unless I took part in politics.”

If the general principles of the Earth Charter are to be achieved and transferred into action, the action must be religious, spiritual, and political as Gandhi’s was. We will have to apply Gandhi’s principles of truth and non-violence if the Earth Charter is to be won for humanity.

In the Earth Charter, we propose a new paradigm for development, a people-led development, a development which is pro-poor, pro-nature, and pro-woman. Like Gandhi, we must practice what we preach. If Gandhi was concerned about the poorest of the poor, he adopted a life style reflecting his constituency. “If I come in my loin cloth,” he said, “it is because I represent the half-starved, half-naked dumb millions of India.”

And we know from Gandhi, if the voice of the Earth Charter is to become a living reality, then the starting point of change is with oneself. If we cannot change ourselves, we cannot change the world. We need the inner strength to be able to say to ourselves and to the world, “My life is my message.” If we cannot do this, the Earth Charter will fail.

Ultimately, Earth’s sustainability is based on deep spiritual and religious experience. Earth is sacred and spiritual and needs to be treated as such. In India, we have Vedic hymns dedicated to Earth, which have been recited and sung over the centuries, for at least three thousand years or more. The Earth Charter also needs our dedication and our commitment as the Vedic hymns do, and I promise it will change the world. We must treat the Earth as sacred, with respect and compassion, and use it only as sustainability allows us.

Like the Gita, the Bible, the Quran, or whatever holy book you may follow, the Earth Charter, too, requires serious consideration, re-reading, re-interpreting, and mediation. It will help us to reconnect with what our cultures consider sacred and spiritual. We need to weave the Earth Charter around our own living traditions, our values, and our concepts of sacredness and spirituality. ●