Earth's Survival Questioned in Moscow
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Unique Global Forum Seeks Change in Human Attitudes, Chants Om in Gorby's Kremlin

Flying for hours over a vast, snow-covered USSR, they gathered in Moscow from the far corners of the earth - 83 countries by one count - to discuss nothing less than survival of the planet and by extension its passengers, including the human race. A few were ensnared in visa Red tape and languished at home, but those 1,000 spiritual leaders, parliamentarians and technical/media experts who made it were serious about the work before them and somewhat euphoric to find themselves in this icy place at this pivotal time. They would be part of history, some attending the first public celebration of a Soviet Christmas held in 70 years and others standing for hours in crowded Russian Orthodox churches where the once covert faithful now flock "to simply stand prayerfully before God." This is in a nation that until recently suppressed religion among is people.

For weeks Moscow and Mikhail Gorbachev held centerstage in an international drama that was thawing the Cold War and bordering on civilized revolution, and these men and women knew their discussions would be watched by the Soviet leader whom Time had just called the Man of the Decade and whom they would meet at the lavish Kremlin on the final day of their January 15-19 conference.

What none among the delegates of this Superbowl of Peace and Survival knew was that two seminal announcements would be catalyzed by their presence. The first came from Gorbachev himself, calling for a USSR ban on nuclear weapons testing. The second was a land-mark Muslim statement on family planning. Both were ignored in the American press.

Another surprise awaiting delegates as they entered the heavily-guarded Kremlin

on the final night was that by a series of fortuitous circumstances the opening prayer would be given by a Hindu monk. Facing over 2,000 participants and guests was a 8-foot grey-brown granite statue of Lenin looking down placidly upon Mr. Gorbachev, Foreign Secretary Sheverdnazi, Dr. Velikhov and the key organizers of the Global Forum, including its visionary executive coordinator, Akio Matsumura. Together they had or chestrated a week of exchanges which was coming to a close.

At Om in the Kremlin: Before Mikhail gave his remarks to the delegates, Paramananda Bharati was called of offer a blessing to all gathered. The Sringeri monk, who had been a physicist before renouncing the world, approached the podium in his saffron robes, carrying the traditional danda or staff. He removed his slippers and strode to the podium. Before him were the leaders of all the world's major religious traditions and political councils. Before him were scientists, artists, media, UN representatives and experts in the fields of ecology, population, deforestation, global warming, urbanization, water management, agriculture and more. As they grew silent, the swami began his prayer, "We are in an age of disillusionment, confusion and panic. We do not know from what point to commence our journey to enlightenment, in what direction and at what speed. Fortunately, there exists one course of knowledge which determines all of these parameters. That is the immortal Veda. Here I give two hymns from the Veda. These are prayers to the Gods pervading the various celestial bodies like the sun, the moon, the stars, nay, all the five elements of the environment. Herein we pray for Shanti, that is for peace in the kingdom of the animals like cows, peace in the kingdom of the humans. Let this Shanti, this peace descending by the grace of God, reverberate in the depths of our hearts to give each one of us everlasting bliss. Let it augur peace and prosperity to the leaders and to the people of this great nation, our host country, to the rest of the world and to the Global Forum.

Swami Paramananda Bharati then chanted from the Vedas. His sweet Sanskrit filled the Kremlin Hall. He closed by asking all present to join him in saying aloud Omkara, the all-encompassing sound, three times. Swami chanted Om and lifted both hands to invite all to join. A deep, resonant Om filed the chamber. A second time and then a third the Swami chanted and the audience responded, each time more forcefully. Few could believe that it was actually happening. It was a powerful moment, as though the whole world was chanting together, sharing a language that all understood, that transcended their differences and arose from their underlying oneness. Later that evening, Soviet Jews joined their brethren from abroad to pray together and celebrate the Sabbath in the Kremlin - an equally historic event and another gauge of the week's remarkable encounters.

The President's speech which followed gave notice of his country's newfound emphasis on the environment. The USSR, once indifferent to ecological help from other nations. No wonder. Fifty million Soviet citizens are exposed to health-degrading pollution levels that exceed safe limits by as much as nine times. Gorbachev said his nation would cooperate in an International Green Cross, an environmental version of the Red Cross, which would respond to natural and ecological disasters anywhere in the world.

Forum Content: While scientists, media groups and others held mini-forums in their specialties, the formal work of the Global Forum on Environment and Development participants took place in the Sovincentr, a 21st century complex built by American millionaire Armand Hammer and gifted to the Soviets as a gesture of US/USSR goodwill. Mornings started with a prayer from one of the major spiritual traditions of which the first, and one of the most touching, came from Audrey Shenandoah, clan mother of the Onondaga, a native American nation. In a soft voice she gave "thanks for another day of life here on this earth" and brought" greetings of respect and acknowledgment and thanksgiving" from her people to the peoples gathered in Moscow. She explained that "all cultures carry on the original instructions of the spirit. In my tradition there is no word for nature, so holistic was their view. It is foolish arrogance for man to think himself superior other creatures. How can one fell superior to that upon which one depends for life? Now our life support system is being severely abused and mismanaged. There can be no life without the waters. Water should not be a commodity for profit. Corporations should restore the waters, restore the woodlands. My tradition says that we should not hurt, we should do nothing that would hurt others for seven generations. As a mother, I demand that our sons not be raised to die in war. Spiritualism must be our foundation, not materialism. All societies which have peaceful coexistence with nature were possessed of a strong spiritual tradition."

This theme would arise again and again, albeit ever to subtly, during the week. While those of the Semitic traditions would propound the view that God gave man dominion over the things of earth, the Hindu, Buddhist and indigenous faiths would assert the unity and interdependence of man and creation.

In the afternoon of Monday, January 15th the sessions began, centering on information-rich, often repetitive examinations of the many-faceted human predicament. Lester Brown, President of WorldWatch Institute offered the overview, "Every second an acre of forest disappears forever from the earth. Each year we lose 24 billion tons of topsoil and gain 90 million new inhabitants of the planet. As croplands diminish, population increases, creating a new series of crises. Rising

infant mortality rates will be among the first visible sign of social stress brought on by environmental degradation. We may well see food security replace military security as a preoccupation of governments. When I look ahead, I foresee that there will be virtually no fossil fuels used by the year 2030. Solar power will provide a renewable energy. Third World debts will have been forgiven by necessity. Values will change. Materialism will not survive. By the year 2030 status will derive less from what we have than who we are. The principle goal will be away from growth and toward sustainability."

Urban experts, the most eloquent being Dr. Leonard Duhl, noted that 60% of the human family now lives in cities, where the sense of closeness, of community, is often absent. Thus man, a social creature, is slowly being deprived of relationships which have always provided him with a sense of well-being and belonging. Simple human social values such as caring and consideration have been discarded, bringing a spiritual vacuum, an emptiness and aloneness not experienced before. Children suffer. Families suffer. Health deteriorates and entire societies feel the impact. One of the appeals repeated throughout the week was a return to traditional values, including good, old-fashioned caring.

Contribution from Science: Astronomer Carl Sagan outlined four of the gravest challenges we face. The first is nuclear weapons, of which there are 60,000 worldwide, 25,000 attached to delivery systems. Many people, he said, are feeling less threatened by such facts, appeased by new peace treaties. "But," he warned, "the INF treaty deals with only 3% of these weapons, and START (another treaty) will at best reduce the warheads a mere 30%, from 60,000 to 40,000. We need massive reductions. There are 500,000 scientists working worldwide on weapons of destruction."

The second threat, according to Sagan, is the loss of our ozone layer, which protects us from dangerous ultraviolet light. If the ozone layer is further broken down, plants in the sea would be imperiled, and the food chain disturbed. Dr. Alex Yablokov of the USSR later stated that 3% of the ozone reduction over the USSR result in 10,000 more cases of cancer every year there-after. He suggested that unless major changes are set in motion, "people will be forced to use umbrellas and to were gloves for protection." The third threat comes from global warming, caused mostly by the CO_2 created when coal, wood and warmth and the fourth problem is world population growth.

US Senator Al Gore focused on how "Something very different is taking place within our own lifetime. There were only 500 million people on Earth when Columbus discovered America in 1492, and one billion in 1776. By 1945 there were two billion, and today there are 5.23 billion. Just think, it took 10,000 lifetimes for the human race to reach 2 billion and just one lifetime to reach an estimated 10 billion by the year 2030. Obviously, we have to deal with this or face massive environmental penalties. He made the observation that no two democratic nations have gone to war in modern times.

During a question and answer period, Om Prakash Sharma, president of the national Council of Hindu Temples in the UK, offered this: "The cause for these problems is greed. The cure is simple living and high thinking," Sharma also suggested that people consider adopting vegetarianism, noting that earlier speakers had described the animals as "brother fish and sister bird." Maybe the animals are our relatives, but Sharma's appeal was received with roughly the enthusiasm of a businessman politely asked to please stop making so much money.

Dr. Yablakov warned that "scores of species are dying everyday. While we have learned to save some of the larger animals like whales and eagles, we need now to discover how to protect the less conspicuous creatures, the insects and microbes."

Dr. Evguenij Velikhov, vice president of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and an instrumental organizer of the Moscow forum, offered some local views, 'In my country the Ecological Commission is now the strongest. We have realized how powerfully we can change our environment and that ecological imperialism is no longer acceptable. We must strive now for ecological ethics. What must be done? We must ban chemicals, open information to the public on all kinds of chemicals. We have to establish a diplomatic structure to report on climate changes, move more toward use of natural gas and toward more effective use of existing energies. I propose a culture of non-violence be cultivated, following the principles of Tolstoy, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and Sakarov. We plan to develop lessons on non-violence and to offer them to any school in the USSR. Also, children must become more involved in environmental issues. Remember, as one Soviet poet said, "We did not inherit the earth from our forefathers, we have borrowed it from our children."

In this regard, HINDUISM TODAY had prepared a paper on Ahimsa: The Hindu Ethic

of Non-Violence which was given to 500 of the participants. We urged that the dharmic principles of non-injury be applied to both the environmental and the social issues under discussion. Specifically, we suggested that children be taught the value of not hurting others, of not causing harm to the earth, to its life-giving waters and soils and air. Ahimsa, as Dr. Velikhov suggested, is an essential an pragmatic value which the human race needs to rediscover.

The Forum's Firestorm: After two days of morning-go-evening meetings, there arose among the spiritual leaders a shared sense of disappointment that the voices of science and politics were dominating the forum while the spiritual dimension, the very relevant issue of human values, was being muted. Priests from Africa, kahunas from Hawaii, rabbis form Israel and swamis from India all concurred that their contribution, which they perceived as essential to the process, was being shortchanged, even slighted. A quiet rumble could be heard, and in fact our own publisher, Gurudeva Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, hear it loud and clear, but kept silent.

That is until a chance comment provoked him to speak out. On the morning of the second day the 82-years-old Rev. Fuji offered a Buddhist prayer and noted that, "We have forgotten the teachings. Our greed is increasing. We must once again learn to control our desires." As he ended the meditation, Erica Terpstra a former MP from the Netherlands and a soulful forces all week, thanked him and announced innocently to the one thousand delegates, "Now we can get on with the real work before us."

Despite sincere intentions (she later apologized). Erica had set the cat among the pigeons. Her offhand comment shook the spiritual leaders, for it proclaimed aloud an unspoken attitude they had sensed - the belief among politicians and scientists that the spiritual community present was somehow irrelevant, was not genuinely part of "the real work."

Erica's words proved to be a blessing. In an afternoon working commission of about 70 delegates Gurudeva stood up and boldly shared the concerns of the spiritual community, "It is not right that you are ignoring the spiritual leaders. The Global Forum went to great effort and not a little expense to bring us here, from many nations. But do you ask us even one question about how we feel, abut the solutions we may have brought? No. Not one. Instead you sit us down and lecture to us for hours. I must have heard six or eight times about the Greenhouse Affect. I

understand it. There is no need to waste our time and say the same things over and over. Instead, why not ask the American Indians for some guidance? Why not bring the elders forward from Africa and from Hawaii and see what they have to say? They have so much wisdom, and you are not even the slightest bit interested in inquiring about it."

Those in charge of the panel were stunned. Discussions up to this point had been controlled, subdued, non-confrontational, and this was a potentially troublesome topic. They tried to appease the swami, to quiet him, but he continued, "Don't shut me up. You have already shut up most of the spiritual leaders here in Moscow, asked them to sit, to be still, to be quiet. I have a message to share and I intend to say it. Take a look at your Global Forum logo. Two people standing together, one spiritual and the other parliamentary, each holding up the world. That's the Forum's vision, isn't it? If you want the Global Forum ideal to go forward, you have to bring the spiritual side forward more. They are not spectators. Make them equal partners in the dialogue. Let them speak, let them present their ideas to the delegates, and not just tell them to offer a five-minute prayer and then sit down while the so-called real work continues. Alternatively, you should redesign your logo. Have just the politicians holding the world aloft. Leave us out. Let us stay home where we can continue with our own work." The chairman tried to call Gurudeva to order again, but he walked out of the room.

The rest of that day and night the firestorm spread. A deep-seated consensus arose that the week, so far, had been one-sided. "I feel irrelevant here," one Buddhist told Siva Palaniswami. "We appear to be mere window dressing, brought here to be on display," complained another. To their immense credit, the organizers listened and acted. One stayed up all night drafting a proposal that would integrate the spiritual contribution into the rest of the week's discussions. Indeed the final days heard more fully from the wisdom of the many traditions represented. Thus, Gurdeva's forceful words, in-tended to break through the conference's misapprehension that "everything's all right" provided a needed impetus for everyone to reflect on things and ended with a deeper communication between the two major pillars that define the Global Forum's purpose.

On Thursday, January 18th, Dr. Karan Singh, who just days earlier had been urged to resign as Indian Ambassador to the US spoke on global education. He began, "Though it is freezing outside, our hearts are warm inside as we seek global solutions to our shared problems. Humanity is transiting to a new time, a time when conflict and confrontation must make way for cooperation and compassion. In today's world knowledge proliferates, but wisdom languishes. All national

educational systems are postulated on pre-nuclear beliefs and models. By fostering negative attitudes towards others, we hinder a global and compassionate consciousness. There is a need to base future educational systems on the premise that human survival depends on such a caring consciousness."

This was the final plenary speech to the conference and Dr. Singh outlined five principles which he termed "not a dream, but a necessity:" 1. that the earth is a single living entity and that the differences in race and religion must no longer divide us; 2. ecology of the planet must be preserved; 3. the sinister forces of hatred, bigotry, fundamentalism and fanaticism must be understood as corrosive to our humanness and in their place we must teach love and understanding toward others; 4. that the world's great religions must no longer war and 5. that the common people on the Earth must urge their leaders to adopt more global policies.

An Upbeat Artistic Finale: No one was quite prepared for the final moments of the conference, for the surprising and uplifting message the poured forth from the expanded hearts of Issac Tigrett and Ruth Warren. They represented the cultural committee, the artists who had enriched the days with musical interludes, Bolshoi and Moscow Circus visits.

Issac, a long-time devotee of Sai Baba, spilled love all over the room in an impassioned closing statement, "Beauty is God, and love is God. We here are all dressed so distinctively, and our many outfits seem to create a sense of difference. We cannot forget that there is no otherness. There is only one language, and that is the language of love. My Indian master asked me, "Where is God?' 'He is in my heart, swami,' I responded. 'No, it's like a fish in water. We are like the fish. He is above us, below us, within us. We are all swimming through God.' We think we are the body, we think we are the mind. But we are all consciousness. The message we leave you with is only of love. The language is love. We ask you all to take that home and share it with your brothers and sisters."

U.S. Press ignores Two Key Moscow Statements

When major conferences and held, with all the attending expenses and effort, one of the few tangible fruits are major shifts in world policy. Unfortunately, the US

press decides what is news for the world, and these critical statements, made to an international gathering of rare magnitude, have so far gone unnoticed. Maybe the press didn't here them, but Mikhail Gorbachev received a standing ovation in the Kremlin when he told Forum participants that his country is prepared to ban nuclear weapons testing once and for all, if other nation will reciprocate. His environmental comments did get a full page in Tune.

The second announcement was a courageous statement made by Syria's Grand Mufti Sheik Ahmad Kuftaro, supreme judge of Islamic civil law. The Grand Mufti outlined the Islamic view of family panning: "This is the stand of Islam on population. Islam has set a limit to population. Increase in family members is not fixed and unchangeable. Increase in family is under the dictates of the welfare of society and the welfare of the families themselves. I have listened to the scientists here describe the burden of population. We have to birth control for the global welfare, without exploiting it at the expense of one nationality over another." The impact of his words, which are controversial among Muslims, will be crucial in another global war - population control.

Hinduism's USSR Impact

One-sixth of the Earth lies in Russia and 1/6th of mankind is Hindu. The Hindu/Indian contribution in Moscow was strong and the message of dharma heard in varied ways:

* Swami Paramananda Bharati's Sanskrit prayer in the Kremlin.

* Dr. Seshagiri Rao, Vice-President of the World Hindu Federation, "Spiritual leaders have a unique contribution to make which the naturalists and technocrats cannot offer. I suggest that the development we have in mind for the future must have a spiritual dimension of selflessness, love, surrender to God. All this must be there if we are to teach that there is more to reality than the material…In education, it is essential to realize that to teach young Ashok anything, we must know the child Ashok better. True education is not a matter of just conveying facts.'

* Om Prakash Sharma: "We acknowledge that there is too much sensational and bad news. Perhaps the Global Forum could take steps to get the media to play a more useful part in spreading the good news of humanity for broadcasting global educational values."

* Father Raimundo Pannikar, "We all talk here and agree we need new approaches, still we seem to fall back on our western feet. I urge us to remember that India alone needs 16,000 new schools each year. I call on the world to adopt a cultural disarmament."

* Dr. Ashok Kosler, president of Delhi's Development Alternatives, who called for "innovation for sustainable development, human-scale technologies that generate things needed in the villages, solid rewards for the people. Our own headquarters in India is made of mud bricks and 100 people work there. People also have to change their ideas about ownership and replace notions of excellence with ideals of relevance."

* Sushil Kumar gave a Jain meditation, sharing that the Self is God, that all must seek light within and calm the mind, especially by chanting Om.

* Karan Singh's final description of the love and reverence Hindus have for Mother Earth. He offered Maha Lakshmi as a new symbolism for those who would preserve the planet from ruin, and described in detail Maha Lakshmi, "seated upon a great while lotus, which is rooted in the mud, yet rises toward the sun in splendid glory. In Hindu iconography Mother is full-breasted and deep-navaled, for she epitomizes motherhood. Earth's citizens need the healing power of the Divine Mother, to give us the courage and strength."

* Pundit Reepu Persaud, from Guyana: "What we do here together should not be hidden, but unfold in practical from. Hinduism from the beginning recognized the need to protect the earth, which is the major theme here in Moscow. That the forum has brought people of diverse interests and faiths and that they have sat together in a cordial atmosphere is itself a fantastic achievement. What is necessary now is for us to rise from being tolerant of each other and begin to truly respect one another. Let us together move toward building a world in which all can enjoy fulfillment, prosperity and bliss."

* Senator Sat Paul Mittal's (member of India's Upper House) exuberant speech at the Kremlin just prior to Gorbachev's was practical and very human, full of the insight and wit for which he is known.

* Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, our publisher, was interviewed several time by TASS and other Soviet TV and radio stations. His message: "We need to hear more from the women, from the mothers who raise us, who use the technologies and are most affected by the problems discussed here in Moscow. They can be our peacemakers if we allow them. And we need to cultivate more love, more trust for one another."

* Siva Palaniswami, our editor, urged the adoption of a pledge from delegates "to go home and plant a tree, do practical things in our own lives to exemplify for others how to live in harmony with nature, how to live without injuring others." He also called upon delegates "to take what we have learned about preserving species which are the diversity of genetic life on Earth and apply it to culture and thought, to protect all forms of human diversity and to resist any effort to destroy the beliefs or the ways of others."

* Chidananda Saraswati gave a Rudraksha mala to Gorbachev who asked what it is for. Muniji said, "For your health and posterity," and put it on his neck. Mikhail then offered it to wife Raisa. Muniji's USSR motto, "We must work together, walk together, talk together."

* Sister Jayanthi of the Brahma Kumaris outlined her institution's peace efforts and conferences at Mount Abu and provided a serene and dignified presence.

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