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Reflections From Moscow

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Sometime in the 1930's two elderly German matrons set sail for India in search of Truth, Light and the Good Path. For months they endured arid austerities and boiled water as they searched out and spoke with every sadhu and holy man they could find. Locals stared unabashedly as the pair navigated dusty roads in long frilly dresses, lace gloves and sun-thwarting parasols. Traveling south, the ladies eventually crossed the Palk Strait and entered Sri Lanka. From Colombo they made their way north to Jaffna where, it was said, one of the Great Ones lived.

They found Yogaswami in his small thatched ashram, little more than a hut, really, with dung floor and holes for windows. Offering their obeisances, the two seekers sat on the woven mat he offered and drank dark Ceylon tea with this dark-skinned master who listened to the story of their pilgrimage and to their queries about the nature of Truth. "So, you asked these same questions to others?" Yogaswami inquired. "Yes, swami," they replied. "What did Ramana Maharishi tell you, then?" "His only words to us were 'One God. One World.' "I can do no better than that. You may go," Yogaswami said abruptly, and the ladies left cherishing the darshan of one of this century's enlightened souls.

Simple words, great truths. One God. One World.

As much of this month's issue reveals, your publishers and I just returned from a not-so-similar pilgrimage, a seven-day Siberian sojourn where ice and snow were the prime physical reality and the sun was never seen. As different as our journey was, those we met were all repeating "One God. One World." Granted, they were less efficient in their language than Ramana Maharishi, but that's easy to explain - he thought about it a lot before speaking.

In Moscow everyone was thinking about it while speaking and that tends to up the word count by a few magnitudes. Still, the spirit of the Global Forum was precisely to state the oneness of things divine and material. Imagine a room roughly the size of an airplane hanger filled with beautiful and colorfully-costumed souls from every corner of the globe all discovering their shared cosmology, all remembering that this fragile earth is our only home, all learning now we have foolishly polluted our only sanctuary and all determined to protect it. Imagine that and you will have a good idea of what the Global Forum experience in Moscow was all about.

The strong delegation of indigenous peoples there - from Africa, North America, Hawaii and elsewhere - reminded me of how valuable these traditions are and how much they are still ignored. They are like fragile cultural gene pools, seeds of an earlier wisdom which man once amassed, then squandered and now needs to sow again. One elder rightly suggested that we are all Earth's indigenous people. It seems to me that Hindus are the natural allies of these traditions. Without imposing, we should offer them resources they might find useful and speak up of their behalf whenever we can.

Moscow was also about learning that man has become the major predator on the earth, so much so that he is preying on himself in an unnatural cannibalism. Unless the present course is altered, we may be responsible for a kind of racial suicide. Experts tell you this in quiet, modulated tones, as though the morbid and savage implications of present global social and environmental degradation cannot be bluntly spoken. You don't tell a loved one he or she is dying. You say just enough and hope your oblique intimations suffice. Unfortunately, the subtle verity of our predicament is often lost in the academic's arcane language. Let me translate into plain English what was said in Moscow: If we don't change our attitudes, if we persist in our present habits and practices, we will not thrive, we may not even survive. It can be said even more simply: Change or perish.

That is rough stuff, I know. Having said it, let me also say that the requisite changes are possible. I believe they are inevitable. The Earth will heal once we stop hurting it. She is like an abused friend who is struggling to get better, but whose abuse has not yet stopped. Wars will cease when they are no longer acceptable to human conscience. Pollution will cease when nestfouling is no longer acceptable to human conscience. Species extinction will cease when it is no longer acceptable to human conscience. Fundamentalism will cease when it is no longer acceptable to human conscience. And they will no longer be acceptable the minute we understand the terrible alternative.

One message we heard often in Moscow is that we already have the tools. We hold them in our hands. They are simply these: the love for others which all faiths teach but do not always practice and the care for the natural world which all cultures teach but have stopped acting upon.

In the old days when confronted by calamity, tribes would send their elders to a sacred meeting ground. By prayer and discussion, these elders would evoke divine guidance which they took back to their clan. I find that things have not changed all that much. The Global Forum has assembled an informal Council of Elders, drawn from our diverse tribes, who are praying and discussing and seeking guidance. Its very existence, whether it does anything official or not, is hopeful and helpful. In fact, its informality empowers it uniquely. It is after all people, not institutions, who draft the story of human history.

The staff at Hinduism Today makes a rare appeal to our readers to participate in the Global Forum vision. Everyone can contribute financially, whether a few rupees or a king's ransom. One Japanese philanthropist who helps handicapped children find ways of healing themselves, gave \$1 million to the Global Forum, convinced the humankind is in need of spiritual healing. Hindus need to become full partners in these enterprises. I urge our readers to join us in this effort by writing to (and sending generous checks to) the Global Forum on Human Survival, 304 East 45th Street, 12th floor, New York, NY 10017 USA. Think of it not as a gift, but as a savvy investment.

I had intended to write this editorial about the sacred moments of January 19 when 2,000 indigenous earthlings sat in the Kremlin with Gorbachev, listened to a Hindu prayer for peace and chanted Om together. Somehow the tougher lessons of that week seemed the more urgent message. Still, it was a remarkable event, a minor miracle hinting at a spiritual bond which exists between India and Russia - but that's another editorial. If you would like to receive a cassette recording of that brief experiences, send \$5 to me. I'll make you a copy.

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