

The Answer to the Crisis Behind the Crises

Pulse of Spirit

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DAVID KARCHERE is a speaker and workshop leader who assists people to renew their Primal Spirituality—an experience that virtually all human beings know at birth, and that ideally grows as they mature.

Here are three facets of what we face globally as humankind. All of them have implications for our personal lives.

Climate change. The United Nations Climate Conference, *COP 28*, is currently taking place in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris announced a pledge of \$3 billion to the Green Climate Fund on Saturday.

Meanwhile, the event is filled with controversy. The BBC reports that the United Arab Emirates is hosting the conference to strike oil and gas deals. Sultan Al Jaber, the oil executive leading the conference, has claimed that there is “no science” that says that phasing out fossil fuels is necessary. Today, Al Gore lambasted the United Arab Emirates for producing vast amounts of fossil fuels.

Amid the mixed motives of some, there are

earnest people concerned about the future of humanity, looking for a solution to an issue that is no longer theoretical. We hear about erratic weather conditions that result from global warming almost daily. And many people around the world are directly impacted by those conditions.

War. After a brief truce, war has resumed in Gaza. The issues are so complex and so horrific that they seem beyond any reasonable solution, and any lasting peace is nowhere to be seen. And there is the risk that the conflict could spread.

Loneliness. In October, Gallup and Meta announced the results of a global study involving 142 countries. Nearly a quarter of the world’s population suffers from loneliness. The survey found the highest rates of loneliness among young adults 19 to 29 years old.

Loneliness is known to have profound social and health implications. One study found that it is the health equivalent of smoking a half-pack of cigarettes a day, and the effect it has on mental and emotional health is massive. Governmental agencies are struggling to keep up with the rising impact of loneliness.

The challenges these three crises present are immediate and profound, especially for those directly involved. After the dreadful attack they suffered, the Israelis are now left to wonder: *What do we do? How do we protect ourselves from this barbarity?* And so it is for residents of Gaza who are enduring rockets and bombs.

People who experience the despair of loneliness perhaps go to a psychiatrist, who prescribes a drug. Some take matters into their own hands and resort to self-medication.

Scientists and political leaders facing global warming seek a remedy. Eliminating the use of fossil fuel and carbon sequestration—sucking carbon out of the atmosphere and storing it underground—are two leading contenders. People caught in the results of global warming—tornadoes, floods, forest fires, and more—try to escape these natural phenomena or protect themselves from their impact.

It is so understandable—in the global context and closer to home in our individual lives—that when we face an immediate crisis, we look for an immediate solution. The problem is that we are unlikely to see the root cause of the crisis we face on that basis. And we are unlikely to find a permanent solution. Rockets and diplomacy alone don't bring

lasting peace. Climate conferences alone don't help humanity thrive. And drugs don't eradicate loneliness.

Stepping back, what is the root cause of the crises we have? What is the crisis behind the crises?

The Scientific Revolution in 16th- and 17th-century Europe created a new worldview. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* puts it this way:

By the end of this period, it may not be too much to say that science had replaced Christianity as the focal point of European civilization.

Directly following the Scientific Revolution was the Age of Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th centuries. The values of individual liberty and religious tolerance proliferated, along with a rejection of monarchy and ecclesiastical authority.

These trends profoundly shaped Western civilization, which has, in turn, shaped world culture.

The United States of America was born out of these two thought movements. The founders of the U.S. hadn't turned away from spirituality. But they had turned away from the co-opting of spirituality by government and religious institutions. They turned away from a doctrinaire, dogmatic approach to spirituality. They rejected the regulation of religious practice by governments.

Thomas Jefferson went so far as to create his own version of the Bible. Benjamin Franklin advocated a doctrineless, moralized Christianity. He commented, *I have found*

Christian dogma unintelligible. Early in life, I absented myself from Christian assemblies.

Fast forward to today. We live in a largely secular culture, at least on the outside. Our belief in science and humanistic values has only increased since they originally blossomed hundreds of years ago. While many still participate in organized religion, the number of people who don't find that the spiritual void that is sometimes felt as loneliness is growing. Those people want more than doctrines, stories, rituals, and icons. And for some, there is an immediate rejection of anything that carries even a whiff of organized religion.

Where does this cultural context leave us? We still have many of the tendencies that have plagued humanity for millennia, like war, famine, and disease. With the scientific revolution and the development of technology in the past century, we have brought on additional threats, like climate change, pollution, and advanced armaments, along with some technological solutions to those threats.

For many, while facing these challenges, our culture has airbrushed any awareness of spiritual presence out of the picture, leaving a profound emptiness in the heart, experienced as loneliness. Meanwhile, we are left to confront the issues of life, one by one, often without seeing what is missing at the core of the experience of humankind that is the root of them all.

Some say we should all go back to that *old-time religion*—to the fundamental traditions of Christianity, Judaism, or Islam. And yet, there is a reason we look for something more

than what we have found there. We are looking for something beyond belief in religious doctrine, beyond the icons of faith or the well-worn stories from out of the past. Our hearts yearn to be filled with an experience of a spirituality that is real to us now.

Contemporary innovators attempt to fill the gap. Authors and teachers in the new-age/self-help marketplace offer new experiences acceptable in our post-modern world dominated by secularism. Westernized versions of Eastern traditions sometimes evade people's repulsion toward traditional religious structures. Many individuals cobble together practices, experiences, and a pattern of thought and belief that changes them—bringing new creativity into their lives.

And still... Who we are collectively, what we are here for, what is behind us, what makes us one human family, is largely unexperienced—at least not consciously and consistently.

What I am contending in this article is that the empowering answers to these questions were promised by traditional religion but largely undelivered. And though some of what is currently available in our culture is wondrous, innovative, and imaginative, it is not the fullness of what we need. It is not enough to fill the hole in the heart of humanity. It is not enough to answer the crisis behind all the crises we face as humankind.

I do not say this out of desperation or pessimism. I make this contention with the faith that we can answer the need. Yes, *we*. I certainly have no illusion that this is just mine

to do. I have faith in *us* to see the issues and address them with clear-eyed truthfulness and passionate resolve. I have faith that we can go beyond nibbling away at the problem and offer the full solution.

Will you think with me about the issues we are facing and the answer to them?

Religion manifests through beliefs, stories, icons, and rituals. They can all be so powerful—the belief that God is Love and that Buddha experienced awakening; the stories of Mohammed, Moses, and Jesus; the icons of Mother Mary and angels; and the ritual of communion, praying toward Mecca, and celebrating Shabbat.

All these, and so much more, can speak to the human soul. And yet, we want more. We want more than a story about someone else's experience. We want more than a belief in something. We want more than an icon or a ritual. We want to know. We want experience. We want to realize something in the living of our life.

Beliefs, stories, icons, and rituals can lead to an actualized experience. They can lead to spiritual empowerment. But if they do not, they leave us wanting. For many people, this is what is behind the disappointment with spirituality as religion has presented it. This disappointment is a huge factor in the spiritual crisis behind all other crises in the world today. People feel they have been hoodwinked—that religion has promised something it has not delivered.

How do we move beyond that disappointment ourselves to know the truth? Rejecting any representation in form of an invisible

spiritual reality leaves us with no starting place. And yet, clinging to religious forms as if they were the reality means we don't fulfill the longing to know reality. Both these human tendencies fail to acknowledge and relate to the massive spiritual presence and power right at the heart of humankind.

Think of our solar system. There are huge differences in mass and energy between the planets and the Sun. The Sun is so much larger than Planet Earth that 1.3 million Earths would fit inside it. The Sun's gravitational pull is commensurate with its size. On average, 342 watts of solar energy a year reaches every square meter of Earth. In total, this is 44 quadrillion watts.

Almost unimaginable.

Planet Earth doesn't complain about this tremendous disparity in mass and energy. And neither do we, its human population. We find ourselves positioned at just the right distance to enjoy the Sun's light and warmth and to appreciate that it keeps us from flying off randomly into space. And we don't worry about the Sun outshining us.

The same principle is at work at a spiritual level within the body of humanity. We are a Soul Family. And just as the family of planets of our solar system revolve around the Sun and enjoy its radiant power, at our center is the Supreme Soul of this Soul Family. The original urge behind any true faith was to introduce a conscious experience with this Supreme Soul and establish a creative relationship with it. And just as the radiance of the Sun is distributed among the forms of nature on Planet Earth, powering them to live, the Light and Love and the Supreme

Soul can be distributed among the Soul Family, shining through us all.

This is how we are made as humankind. Is it any wonder that if we airbrush this central feature out of our Soul Family, chaos ensues? And we feel the horrible emptiness left when the warmth of the Supreme Soul that is meant to be in our hearts isn't there? Trying to function as human beings without an experience of the Supreme Soul of our Soul Family is like the planets of our solar system trying to exist without the Sun.

As we know the Presence of the Supreme Soul, we know its radiant Light and Love. We know that Presence is our own Presence and the Presence of the Soul Family. We bring this Presence to the world.

Here is the answer to the crisis behind the crises. This is the basis for lasting peace. It is the basis for knowing how to engage with the natural world in a way that leads to a flourishing planet. And this is the answer to the emptiness of the human heart.

Herein lies the answer for any individual human being and for all of humankind.

Behold the Presence of the Living God!

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