



# Spirituality and Social Action

Sharon Henshall & Sophia Foster research the claim that spiritual growth will lead us to take wiser social action. By deepening our connection with a higher force, can we then deal with problems without resorting to war and conflict?

**SEATED AMONGST** the current financial rubble, most of us, hopefully even our bankers, recognize that things must change! Our situation is highlighting that individual greed has no place within the heart of a healthy society. So how do we adopt a new perspective - one that offers a more wholesome and unselfish approach to living?

There are whispers through the optimist's grapevine that 'spirituality' combined with 'social action' could be the natural resources required to ignite a brighter future. Deep wisdom, clarity and universal strength will all contribute to the recipe of change where interconnectedness is our focus, rather than separateness.

In its current form, our society continually leads us away from a sustainable and peaceful existence. Individually and collectively it is time to explore the areas of imbalance and seek alternative, more harmonious, lifestyles. With plenty of information at our fingertips, we can arm ourselves with knowledge during these testing times and learn what we can each do to make a positive difference. Economics, natural resources, food production and consumerism are just some of the many topics requiring a fresh approach. Personal development and deeper understanding of the self, as well as dialogue within communities, cultures and religions, will help create a more peaceful co-existence.

Social activity and spirituality have both existed for a long time. Many believe this is the generation to integrate the two and experience the changes this could bring. Vimala Thakar recently passed away after many years as a leading speaker in this area. She highlights that "In this vision

of complete wholeness and supreme interconnectivity, spiritual enlightenment becomes a social responsibility." Personal growth for the greater good is the primary purpose of our spiritual endeavors. Gandhi reminded us to "be the change you want to see in the world," and he was a man who lived true to his words.

We need social activity and spiritual approaches to integrate within our daily lives. Inner development takes dedicated hard work, balance and focus. It will lead us to wholesome and positive actions within our community and our personal lives. Krishnamurti, an Indian sage, claimed, "Transformation is the key, not to accept things as they are, but to understand it, go into it, to examine it... To give your heart and mind and everything you have to find out... a way of living differently." Einstein was another who recognized the worth of working on the self. "We need to mature beyond the belief that the thinking that got us into this mess is the level of thinking that can lead us out if it."

So how do we mature and change our level of thinking? A fundamental part of stepping into, and maintaining, a new direction is regular periods of both silence and reflection. Before spring's spurt of fresh growth, nature provides the

“humanity's biggest problems cannot be solved. They must be outgrown”

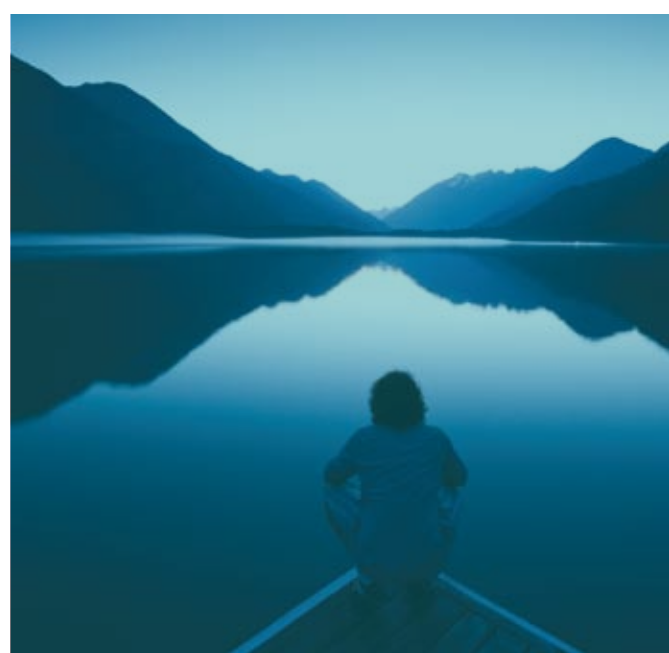


stillness of winter. Have you noticed how hectic our western world is? How busy we all are? Spiritual practice is about returning within, away from those external demands. Within is where we can connect with the whole. This is where our spiritual development will aid our social action. By learning to get off the treadmill and release ourselves from man-made pressures, we can see afresh, regain perspective and calm our over-stimulated brains. Then, we will receive clarity and unite with a power and strength greater than any external sources that may try and steer us away from our truth.

By becoming more accepting and less critical of the self, we can connect more peacefully with others. It is vital to recognize our self worth, as that brings about confidence and sincerity in our actions. A balance of work on the self, along with giving to others, is extremely healthy as it keeps us from becoming self-absorbed within our practice. Honesty with the self is imperative for spiritual growth. Our personal motivations, priorities etc. need to be understood and checked on a regular basis.

Spirituality can enter our actions when they are done with care, regardless of how small and insignificant they may seem. This is not an easy path at first and there are no guarantees of the outcome. "We can do no great things, only small things with great love," said Mother Teresa.

There is no solution outside of ourselves any more than there is a quick-fix solution within. By tapping into our inherent wisdom we can begin to trust our intuition and step away from old patterns. Spiritual growth brings wisdom. Change can ignite anxiety but wisdom helps us know when to step forward, which direction to take and when to stop and renew our strength. Psychologist Carl Jung believed that humanity's biggest problems cannot be solved. They must be outgrown. Our personal growth is fundamental to a happier future. Strengthening our mind,



body and soul will move us closer to peace and clarity and ensure our social actions stem from solid ground. For spiritual development, we can consider meditation classes, spiritual books, silent contemplation and reflection, yoga, walks in nature... anything which connects us with our inner self. Balancing this with service to others is important; even if it's just being considerate to those we meet throughout the day. Compassion and staying emotionally connected with each other keeps us united.

Social action involves participating within our communities and associating with positive approaches to life. We can bank with ethical banks and buy electricity from green, renewable sources. We can grow our own fruit and vegetables without using chemicals in the garden, or

**“As a generation, our moral imperative is to end war, to somehow move beyond the idea that war is an acceptable means of solving problems.”**

buy locally grown produce. We can reduce unnecessary purchases and shop with ethical companies. Our carbon footprint needs to be reduced by whatever means possible. When we get involved with like-minded people and are tolerant within our communities we learn from each other.

"The aftermath of violence is tragic bitterness, while the aftermath of nonviolence is the beloved community," were the words of the great Martin Luther King. There is much learning to undertake if we want our grandchildren to inherit a peaceful and stable world. We need to take care of ourselves and the community alike. Marianne Williamson, a peace activist, reaffirms "As a generation, our moral imperative is to end war, to somehow move beyond the idea that war is an acceptable means of solving problems."

We have some great spiritual teachers, both past and present, and we all know in our hearts what our individual responsibilities are. There will always be issues and testing times. Yet, with more wisdom and clarity these can be resolved without war and conflict. "Spirituality is the seed," said Vimala Thakar, "and social action is the fruit born of it."

So, for bankers and non-bankers alike, social change needs to be our new currency, rooted from continual spiritual growth, positive action and honesty. This investment of ours will, undoubtedly, have a ripple effect around the world and heighten our chances of leading an enriched and worthy existence.

