

Clear Vision and Sane Living *

By Radha Burnier

In every tree and plant, in the sound of birds, in insects and minerals, sky and water, there is astounding beauty. Each atom and every living creature is a miracle of meaning and loveliness. The more one knows of its anatomy, physiology, activities, and relationship with other creatures, the more one is struck by the wonder of Nature. A spider's web with gossamer threads, symmetrical shape and iridescent colors has marvellous strength, proportionately greater than that of many outstanding constructions of humans. The little spider—itsself a thing of beauty—creates and recreates with ease. The tiny banyan seed grows into a mighty tree; the helpless infant becomes a grown man or woman. Growth, birth and death, these too are marvels. Mr. J. Krishnamurti says:

You saw a dead leaf, yellow and bright red, a leaf from the autumn. How beautiful that leaf was, so simple in its death, so lively, full of the beauty and vitality of the whole tree and the summer.

Thus beauty is everywhere, as things die, as they grow, as they are born.

There is beauty in shapes and colors, in sounds and textures, the things that we perceive with our senses, but it also lies in things to which we may never give our minds, that is the mutual relationship of all things, the functions they fulfill and their hidden purposes. An Adept associated with the Theosophical Society wrote:

Nature has linked all parts of her empire by subtle threads of magnetic sympathy and there is a mutual correlation even between a star and a man.

Beauty is an expression or facet of a hidden significance not associated with anyone's desires or need. It is intrinsic to each living thing. The significance of a tree is not in its usefulness as fuel; the value of a lamb is not in its flesh. Purpose and value are inherent as Thomas a Kempis points out:

There is no creature so small and abject that it representeth not the goodness of God.

He suggests here that beauty inheres in the source of life, God.

* This article has been slightly edited. British spellings have been replaced by the Americanized version, and the language has been modified to become gender neutral.

Human beings are part of the world of Nature, its loveliness, significance and subtle relationships, but we do not know it, and that is our tragedy. We are taught to believe that the “world” is the world which we create and build—our constructions, railways, electronic miracles, political institutions, social structure, wars, divisions and so on. All this is human society, but to most people this is the “world.”

In the present day, for millions of people who live in urban areas, Nature is physically far away. They know nothing except streets, noise and artificial objects. Even people who live in the midst of Nature in rural areas are unaware, because poverty compels them to labor from morning till night. Because they are poor, for them everything is an object to get and use. Others are so conditioned into thinking that what is important in life is to struggle and make themselves better that they are prisoners of their own self-centered activity, unaware of the real world.

Reality is different for each person. What is real to one is not so for another. When a person is in imminent danger of losing their life, if safety lies in letting go of property, it ceases to have the reality it did earlier. Unfortunately, people think that their “reality” is certain, and so their desires and conflicts, anxiety, irritations, hopes and disappointments, dislikes and tensions are taken too seriously and never questioned.

Human society has its own rules, like a game of football or hockey, with a fixed framework. The rules say that the ball must not go out of the demarcated field. Why not? Because that is how the game has been fashioned and whoever plays it has to follow the rules. These rules do not originate in truth or a high source; they belong to an artificial system which enables the players to compete, win or lose. Human society is like that with artificially built rules. They may be called laws, but they are nonetheless contrived, built by convention, tradition, rulers or priests. Modern society tells you that you have to fight for success, be at the forefront, gain as much as possible. So, people play the game, and the more intensely it is played, the less the players can see. Can a football player in the thick of the game observe something outside? Ask him to watch a bird on the wing, so pure in the sky. He cannot do it while he is in the game. Likewise, human beings who are caught in the “play,” whether it be war, politics or economic competition, cannot see. They are unconscious of the ugliness and brutality of the game, the insensitivity which it creates, the innocence which is lost. Nor do they perceive the loveliness outside the structure of human society. For them, the meaning of life is far away. Their pursuits, ideas and ideologies are like heavy clouds which shut out the sun of truth.

Now let us consider what is sane or insane, from the common sense point of view. Insanity is to be out of contact with what actually exists, what is true. The insane person experiences a reality that has nothing to do with actuality. When somebody calls himself Jesus Christ, Cleopatra or Mahatma Gandhi, others say he is crazy because that

idea exists only in his mind and is not a fact. Since unreality seems reality to him and it is not shared by others, it is called insanity. Reason, logic, consistency and order are absent in the projections of a crazy person's mind. It is so little related to the world of facts, values and significance that he cannot engage himself in effective action.

Is the human mind generally very different from that of the insane? It is full of contradictions and illogicality. It is divorced from the truth of Nature that we spoke about, its glory, meaning and splendor. Because the vast majority of people live in the unreality of their struggles and ambition, it is not a more valid reality. Bertrand Russell pointed out that people tend to accept action by masses which they do not accept in an individual. When an individual kills another, it is "murder"; but if masses kill other masses, it is "patriotism." Similarly, if one person's mind has no rationality or consistency, no relation to facts, he or she is said to be crazy. But because most of humanity behaves in this way, no one would dare to call it insanity. But it is insanity. There are glaring inconsistencies and contradictions in all systems, religions, and societies. The Hindus glorify the Upanishadic statement that all is Brahman, the supreme truth, and yet institute a system of outcastes, punish and humiliate widows, thus giving proof of insanity. Other groups have killed in the name of love, of religion and their Teacher. Governments promote tobacco cultivation and help people to get diseased and then undertake projects to cure them. People like food depleted of nutritive elements but reinforced with vitamins. Every field of life, political, educational, social, economic and personal, all over the world, provides examples of absurd activities and shows our inability to see contradictions. Are human beings children who build houses of sand only to flatten them out, or schizophrenics split by internal conflict? We may not like to discover in ourselves either the infantile or the insane, but perhaps they exist.

When we become conscious of these things, what is our response? Generally, there is an urge to do something about it. Action is what most people believe in, but their action arises from a mind which is not aware of what really is. Each person sees a fragment to the extent that it affects them. The animal brain in the human being, inherited from the long past, is capable only of reflex action. Even when we pause to cogitate and understand what we are doing, most often there is no real reflection, but a mere reshuffling of ready-made ideas, gathered from here and there, put together in the illogical context of the mind's contents. So action proceeds without understanding. Therefore, despite the many revolutionaries, idealists and reformers, the world proceeds on its mad course, perhaps towards self-destruction. Without the clear seeing which is understanding, without knowing the wholeness and actual nature of things, action is blind and destroys sensitivity. Thus gradually, one becomes less and less capable of looking and watching, of receiving the beauty and meaning of life and learning what is truth.

Human effort is directed to become something, to achieve, to shape others, to manufacture and twist relationships according to convenience. The desire to act and achieve in this manner breeds a false sense of usefulness, because life seems fulfilled for the time being, until an event or accident, some unforeseen disaster shatters the person's illusions. Desire for achievement is the parent of fear, anxiety and strife. The Chinese sage Chuang Tzu said:

The mind of the perfect man is like a mirror. It grasps nothing, it expects nothing, it reflects but does not hold. Therefore the perfect man can act without effort.

Most people strive hard to make life meaningful by grasping and holding. This is futile effort. Meaning is everywhere in life. We do not have to "make" meaning; we do not have to "create" relationships. Relationship is part of life, at a profound, subtle level as well as at the outer level.

People who are struggling and "doing" think that conflicts are outside; that is part of their blindness. It is only by looking that one sees that conflict is within. Problems, too, are not outside; they are within. So a jealous person sees things according to their jealousy; the fearful individual imagines dangers everywhere; one who is proud finds insults. When problems and conflicts are thought to be outside, people do not hold themselves responsible. They do not see that the madness of society is of their making. But we are society, we are creating it all the time; our attitudes are building the outside. The confusion and aggression which are within our minds come back to us in different forms and are the source of our sorrow. Unfortunately, we do not see this. We think that sorrow comes from somewhere else. So it is important that doing should not come first. We must learn to see clearly. The Lord Buddha taught that right vision, clear vision (*samyak drishti*) is the first step on the Path. If we cannot see clearly, deeply and fully, and understand the whole nature of what is, then our action is bound to create a mad environment. He alone who sees clearly both the ugliness of human society and the beauty of life experiences significance without looking for it.

We rarely look at a plant or a mountain or a fellow human being, but when we do, what do we see? Perhaps imperfectly the form, without awareness of the life within the form. Our past thoughts crystallize into an image or concept and project themselves between the mind and truth, which may be in a leaf, in a rock, in a human being, anywhere, everywhere. And because thoughts intervene, the object takes on a different appearance. The subjective content appears as the object, the projection of the mind as the truth. Only when the mind is like the mirror of which Chuang Tzu spoke, free of the dust referred to in *The Voice of the Silence*, it sees. As long as the mind is loaded with content in the form of reactions, ideas, ideology, judgements, analyses and so on, it cannot reflect truly. So, the mind must be pure, free, undistorted without

contradictions, to see clearly. This means looking at oneself. It is by self-knowledge, by understanding what is happening within the mind, that clarity comes. Then the mind becomes freer and purer and has greater energy.

Contradictions deprive the mind of vitality. Anxiety, ambition, misunderstanding, etc. are subtle forms of conflict and therefore drain away energy. When there is a freedom and purity, there is great strength in the mind and it can go much deeper into itself as well as into the nature and significance of life. Let us hear Thomas a Kempis again:

The more a man is united within himself and becometh inwardly simple [and pure], so much the more and higher things doth he understand without labour; for that he receiveth intellectual light from above.

The contents of the mind, the contradictions and judgements, the ideas and struggle, all that is the self. It is the substance to which you can give identity, which you remember and say “this is me.” But the identity is based on nothing. The self to which everyone desperately hangs on, of which they think so much, is part of the insanity. Because it is so flimsy—an airy nothing—it has to struggle continually to maintain, assert and build itself. Because of its struggle it cannot see; therefore there is no sane living. As we have already noticed, insanity comes out of non-seeing. Therefore, as self-assertion decreases, there is health, wholeness, clarity of vision and the discovery of meaning and beauty.

For thoughtful people the question arises, “What is the meaning of life?” The thoughtless think that they can capture meaning by achieving something; sometimes they try to find it in a husband, wife, or a child. But it is unnecessary to *find* meaning in life. Watching a sunset, nobody asks, “What is the meaning of the sunset?” Beauty is its own meaning. The sunset exists, and that is enough. All of life is like that. The more we turn away and build a world of artificiality, with its own rules, to play a game, the less are we blessed by the experience of significance. But by self-understanding and clear seeing, an ever-new hitherto unknown world of joy and beauty, goodness and blessedness could open up.