

Economic Crisis as a Catalyst for Spiritual and Community Renewal

People take notice when “officialdom” makes pronouncements like this one from Bank of England Deputy Governor Charles Bean regarding the economic situation back in 2008--- “This is a once in a lifetime crisis, and possibly the largest financial crisis of its kind in human history.”

What an amazing time to be living---a time of great extremes—we are living on the edge. While the economic crisis may be the worst in human history, it could be paradoxically the greatest impetus to spiritual renewal and awakening of humanity to finally build a society that works for all—starting in each of our communities.

I am reminded of something our friend Dr. A.T. Ariyaratne of Sri Lanka (leader of the world's largest grass-roots organization) once told me about 15 years ago. He told me that a time would come when the trillions of dollars of daily circulation throughout the financial system would cause what he termed an "overheating" and would melt down. I have been thinking about that a lot.

It is obvious that there is no "center" holding our economic system together--there is no foundation other than getting us to buy and consume more stuff. This view is shared by both political parties. President George W. Bush told us to shop more after September 11 and recently, Congressman Barney Frank, a Democrat head of the House Finance Services Committee, told us to do the same thing.

Washington elites are encouraging us to do the same crazy thing that got us to this place. Many people, corporations, and governments have been living beyond our means through debt financing like credit cards, using our homes as ATM machines, or creating bizarre ideas like Derivatives to make more money. And now we are told to do more of the same. The external world has never made us happy. Seeking more of the same will not change this fact.

I believe we are now coming to realize that without a sound foundation of universal spiritual virtues within ourselves and the institutions that we create, we are doomed to repeat the same fatal flaw that every great civilization/empire has suffered in the past 6 thousand years. They fall apart from moral and spiritual decline. Every single one of them. No exception. Today, we are not exempt from this universal Moral Law and thus stare into the precipice.

As the old world of narrow self interest, power, and control falls apart, let's not focus on the surface appearances of chaos. If we focus on this, our awareness will go to fear and self-preservation. This is natural for us to react that way. Deeper down, though, as the old is stripped away, a new Spirit has been and is now bubbling up in new forms of smaller groups throughout millions of communities throughout the world who hunger for authentic spiritual community. This Spirit will be able to balance the material AND spiritual needs in harmony with the Earth. What is happening today is that we are being forced to make this change.

What would happen if a healthy percentage of the 100's of millions of people being forced into "involuntary simplicity" right now can choose to live this way for good? I know I have been making concrete steps towards this end---simplifying my life and my family life as a permanent change. Imagine the effect of consciously simplifying life, not for some ideological reason, but to allow the Spirit and the spiritual life to be the ruling force of our being. Imagine the profound effect on the whole economic system—a system where more than 70% of Gross Domestic Product is accounted by consumer spending. Now that kind of change would be a revolution.

What about the billions of people who struggle on \$3 dollars a day? How can we reduce the consumption of our own lives to free up time and money to be in solidarity with those in need right in our own communities so that we can finally overcome the paradox that has always destroyed civilizations---the gap that develops between rich and poor.

This is a time to reflect on what is really important in life. Start with gratitude for what we have--our health, our families, our friends and co-workers, and others right next to us each day. This is a time to strengthen ourselves spiritually, and to do an inventory of our lives, stripping away what does not serve in the awakening of ourselves and the communities that we inhabit.

This is a time to break down the barriers that we ourselves have erected that only serve those who would divide us and keep us from seeing the fundamental Truth right in front of us and within us---we are one interconnected family.

Now is the time to demonstrate what has never happened in the whole history of the human race--to consciously choose to build a new society from within the old that does not reproduce the ignorance of the past.

Are you ready to break out of the cycles and powers that have ruled us for thousands of years? Each one of us are needed and each has a gift to share in making this a reality. Start, right within yourself, your family, build this kind of covenantal community with the people around you and help connect those who are already working to make the world better into a power for real and lasting change.