

JUST ANOTHER WAKE-UP CALL

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It had rained so heavily last night. But now the dawn has brought so much soft light on the wet boughs and silken flowers. Everything appears fresh and clean. The sky bears an amazing touch of blue. From where I sit on the low balcony of my house I can see right up to the end of the street where it turns sharply to the left and right hiding beyond the heavy laden trees. Now there is a shower of insects. There are termites all over the place. Crows, mynas, drongos and magpie robins are dashing in and out of the strange volcano-like eruptions from the ground. Millions and millions of tiny winged creatures zoom about only to be devoured in hundreds by these birds and other little lizards and hairy mongooses which join them. This is certainly a protein rich repast for them. Nature is so strange. Each one thrives on the other. Life is one long unending chain. And yet the survival of each species is ensured through different means. The termites might be food for the birds but their sheer numbers makes them outlive their predators. It is not the time span or specific niche in the food chain that ensures this, for after all in nature time means different stuff for different species.

They say that the Mayfly has the shortest life span of all living creatures. It lives barely for one day. And within this short life circuit the entire drama of birth, growing up, reproduction and the ensurance of the species and death comes full circle. Some moths and butterflies live a little longer and dragon flies live up to a week. While on the other hand, the longevity of elephants and tortoises takes them close to a century and beyond sometimes. All life forms on earth have their own intrinsic space and time, and one significant point we have to bear in mind is that they are there for themselves and they play a significant role in the biosphere and ecosphere. We can say they have intrinsic significance which means they have essential rights to exist independently of what we humans might consider their worth. Of course we human beings have the definite capacity to decide their fate and destiny because of our might and forceful histories. We have become the dominant species on earth the masters of all our universe (until we encounter such superior alien creatures in other planets or stars which is a future possibility.) But for the present we humans have absolute right of control over all of this planet earth, this third rock from the sun.

I once heard someone state over the television that Americans have such superior weapons nowadays that they can destroy the entire earth nine times! This immediately made me wonder how such a threat is feasible! Simply because once the earth is destroyed there would not be another to destroy a second time let alone till the ninth! But the threat is obviously a bit exaggerated for the sake of its magnitude! Of course humans do have the power to annihilate all life forms including ourselves. This is certainly a potential threat to all nature.

But nature thrives through creation and destruction. Even the giant reptiles of the Jurassic age had to face extinction through the great ice age. Nevertheless nature did find a continuity in ensuring the success of life by permitting new and newer life forms to germinate even after such a massive catastrophe. It is said that even after a horrendous chemical warfare cockroaches can survive to live another day! Perhaps they have evolved their own biological

adaptations after encountering repeated attacks from us humans inventing and reinventing several chemical and biochemical atomisers and such stuff to eradicate what we hold as pests from our domestic spheres! Life does find new ways!

We humans are indeed great consumers. We gorge on our planet. And down the centuries as we read in our history books we have been exploring and conquering new territories inside our earth as well as on the surface and even above our earth. We have created cultures and civilizations, languages and technologies that have helped us spread all over the globe. There is virtually no place on earth which has not felt the shadow of a human being! Our great creativity and adaptability has ensured our survival and success. There is little doubt that us humans are the sole owners of this mass of rock from the sun. We might defend ourselves by saying that we have every right to ensure our own survival because we are the dominant species on earth. We can command the fate of all else. And now, even if we do produce a mass of garbage which might pollute our earth and water and air around us we can eventually find new scientific means to get rid of all that. There are many among us who would strongly advocate for human beings alone as the apex creations of god—after all we are the direct decedents of god—he or she produced us in their own image (this is what our religions would teach us)

This I have heard: humans are not the only creatures who leave debris behind. Large herds of wandering elephants pull down and destroy innumerable trees, thorny shrubs and bushes. Aren't they then culprits of destruction of nature and habitat? With the discovery of fire human tribes have torched and scorched miles and miles of bush and terrain down the history. So then, why only blame our present day generation solely for habitat destruction?

Having said that, we come to realise that the axe and the fire have laid waste miles and miles of living land through countless generation. But the point is simply that now we have reached such a pass that we do not have any more chance: we have reached a *cul de sac* in our history and the history of our planet. We have the first wake up call.

We have built up our civilizations and cultures with us humans as the centre of it all. When we put our interests in front of everything such a view is called anthropocentrism—human centred world views. Little do we recognise as the intrinsic rights of all other non-human stuff to exist. But nature as we have come to realise through all our learning and pursuit of science, is something that cherishes what is called biodiversity. There are innumerable living and non-living things that are besides the human existence and they too have a need and necessity to exist side by side. In fact it is through the continued preservation of this vibrant harmonious web of life that we can also aid in our own survival. Ecology teaches us that everything in our universe is interlinked with every other thing else. We break one and it makes a dent in all others as well. When each animal, each bird, each amphibian, each insect is deprived of its survival space—its biological habitat—we also are making dents in the other interconnected chains. We are locked in with everything else that exists. Some we can see and make out, others are invisible to us but nevertheless exist. We have so little right to assert our own right over everything else. But yet, this is exactly what we have been trying to do so far. Our history, or rather our environmental history is so full of our own footprints and finger prints. We are the culprits.

Our second wake-up call is one that tells us our earth is not a garbage dump! All the nations of the world produce waste and they are of several levels from chemical to bio-chemical to nuclear waste. What do we normally do when we are left with some waste? We simply dispose of it over our wall; if it is in our neighbour's yard it is safe beyond our sight. Now that we have come to realise that all of this is our home where shall we dump our waste? Is there space beyond stars? Can we find a distant galaxy where we can heap all our waste?

These are not mere lists of facts or a fanciful array of fantasies—but his could be a clarion call to stay awake and recognise our responsibilities.

There has been no time in our histories as in the present when our wake-up call has been so persistent. It is screeching. We have so polluted our earth, our waters—including fresh water lakes, rivers and the seas—and our air. We have to change our ways of living. Before that we need to wake ourselves up. Do we need to wait till the last and final call has to go? Was it indeed Mahatma Gandhi who said that we have not just inherited the earth from our forefathers but simply borrowed it from our children!

My reverie is rudely broken by the door-bell. Someone is at the door. I need to go and get the front door. The sunlight outside has become warmer and shadows have started to shrink. The sun is moving beyond the tree line up into the blue skies. The termite volcano appears to have subsided. The crows have already left. Satiated no doubt with their fill of sumptuous protein-rich meal. Only a couple of stray Mynas still hang about pecking at this and that. A couple of squirrels dash in and out of the bushes. Probably the late comers. It dawns on me suddenly that I have left the lights on inside my rooms. It is imperative that I conserve whatever is left, including our electricity. I definitely do not want that doorbell to be the third and final wake-up call. I am up and about in no time!

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