

Faith Based NGOs and the Common Good, Ted Reeve

How do we respond, how do we bring what we are learning this weekend back to our communities? He asks the audience what our gut reaction is to the “inconvenient truth” presentation this morning? How did it make us feel? Answers: -duh. -determined -urgency – hopeful -sos -motivated -worried excited -frustrated -desperate

He had similar reactions from students in his ethics class- first were overwhelmed, then moved into being bristled and denying the problem because it is just too big. Then the conversation shifted in to how to manage the problem. What we have done, are doing. In “the upside of down” the first level of response to a problem is denial, second is to try to manage our way through it. We can't manage our way through this problem, we need to respond creatively to it

Tries to make his students think about this problem in four different ways : Ethical Quadrilateral

- experience -presenting/debating the facts -for people of faith, what does scripture say and how do we respond? (Green Rule posters showing quotes of this idea from different faith communities were provided for participants in the conference) This is ancient wisdom and wisdom that can carry us into the future. We need to get back to holding a sense of awe and respect for nature.
- Tradition. How are our faith communities responding to this problem?
- By coming at the problem from these four different ways, we frame the complexity of the issue in a helpful way

How is it that Al Gore's video was so popular? For him, it was the personal experience of it. Gore draws the audience in to his life at an experiential level. Somehow we have to be able to engage at the gut, personal level in responding to the environmental crisis. Ted a few years ago told Suzuki he would go out and brings thousands of faith community members to the “nature challenge”, handing out checklists of things that they could personally do. He was stunned at the tiny percentage of people who actually responded and committing to make changes in our lives. Why? What is it in ourselves and our communities that will give us the courage and the hope to take the first steps and get engaged?

“Greening Sacred Spaces” offers the practical side as well as a new understanding. They found after the Suzuki experiment that they needed to demonstrate to people that these changes are possible, through replacing lighting caulking around windows and assessing energy use

On the Theology side, they did a documentary this summer on how spiritual practice can be used to inspire others, help in this time of crisis? Could have different religious leaders finishing each other sentences, because the same deeper principles of connecting to the world and respecting it are present in all traditions. The Vedic fire ritual is almost a talk on thermodynamics. Judaism- connections to food, land, sacred ways of living. Ideas like what is Kosher require thought about practice and theory and bringing what we want to be to what we are.

On the Practical side, it has been exciting to see people engaged in the temple in pickering, where there are 10,000 people come through in a weekend to whom food would be served on styrofoam and now dishes are washed. Seeing dishwashing as an opportunity for service. IN a mosque, young people noticed up to 5,000 people coming through performing ablutions use a lot of water. Now they have changed all faucets to be low flow. St. Gabriels Roman Catholic church, constructed to make a connection with the earth, has carbon sensors which only circulated the airs when people are breathing there, heating and air only go 8 feet up in the room. IT is very exciting to be a part of these changes and help people to see even their homes as sacred. A synagogue uses its gardens to feed low-income people, and each way they live in the synagogue is connected to their spiritual beliefs.

We are living in a volatile age when you add up all of the problems on the horizon, with the huge number of people in cities who need gas, energy. How do we respond? Dixon offers “catagenesis” that breakdown and renewal are a natural process which we need to learn from. Offer writes off faith communities as living away from reality, but our experience of changing our spaces and have the

courage to face this problem is valuable. It is the little experiments in living differently that will enable us to face the tribulation ahead of us.

Sylvia Karlsson

First very briefly through the link between energy and climate change, then what is governance, then looking at what we have. And then the application of one spiritual virtue at each of the levels of governance.

Energy use is enormously different around the globe. There is enormous energy poverty in the world, which has implications for health and well being. We do not even have to think about climate change to be motivated to change the way energy is used in the world.

“governance” is far more than government, including us as individuals and other organizations and institutions, at all different levels from local to global. It is clear that energy use is a common affair. We need more governance at all levels to address the problem of climate change.

Probably have never seen the headline of “global energy governance” The only UN focus is on nuclear energy. There are other orgs involved in providing energy aid to poorer countries. But there has been very little discussion for the forming of energy policy on an international level. There have been a few beginnings in the past few years. Because of the realization of the impact of energy poverty and on climate change there have been discussions, but no agreement could be reached. How strongly should the UN be involved? Many countries disagreed. She lists roles for energy governance on her slides.

She shares a quote from Baha'u'llah “The light of Men is Justice” and emphasizes the enormous disparity of responsibility and suffering from climate change. Developing countries cry for renewable energy as they realize how vulnerable they are. Renewable energy is available everywhere, though in different forms.

National energy governance.

Rules, regulations, economic steering influence. Basic rules for what energy forms are subsidized are made. Major decisions are made governing our energy patterns, including public transportation. The number of stakeholders involved are small, mostly companies and few NGOs. Also a male-dominated sector. (she lists what we need from national energy governance).

She shared the quality of Trustworthiness as the most needed in this area. “Trustworthiness is the foundation of all virtues” Countries blessed with abundance are also the most prone to corruption. Elected officials have to have a lot of trust in and from their electors, because they will be under a lot of economic pressures.

Individuals, families, communities

There is a lot to be done on this scale. She offers the spiritual principle of contentment. “Be content with little” This isn't easy, as soon as we save money in one area we want to spend it somewhere else.

If we each reflect on how we cultivate virtues, we will find a million ways to cultivate love and respect without using energy.

Tahirih Naylor

Extends warm greetings on behalf of the Baha'i international community at the UN

Thomas Homer Dixon's model

July 11, 2007, a call for world leaders to unite on climate change. This challenge and what we do about us will define us. Business as usual is not enough, we need complete agreement. BIC says it is not only governments, but all of us who must be involved.

Western liberal societies public discussions are impoverished. When we don't conflict we don't talk about it. See many things as value neutral judgements. Income gaps, climate change utilitarian values- simple likes and dislikes. Where do we moral values- concerning fairness and justice.

Existential- things that give our lives meaning. Why am I here? We ask these questions until we become uncomfortable. Often we are told what, and not how, to think. Because we are unable to talk about the second two, it takes over consumer society.

We can't be afraid to talk about the ethics and values which inform our decisions. The current state of affairs has been determined by economic and national priorities, not founded in what the real issues are.

"we cannot expect market observations to provide answers to the ethical issues at hand.

What are some of the questions we must ask ourselves?

Responsibility to reduce greenhouse gas emissions- what countries and how do we determine how can developing countries continue to develop without emitting huge amounts of pollutants. How can leapfrog

to what extent is climate change precipitated by failures in the economic system?

Intergenerational responsibilities. How much money, time, resources are countries willing to

is access to scientific knowledge on climate change a universal right?

These are complicated issues, requiring everyone's involvement. BIC tried to apply an ethical approach to climate change and bring it to UN discussions. A focus is sustainable development. Invited five different experts to come and consider what the moral and ethical issues involved in climate change. ALL expressed appreciation for this consideration. This presentation is on youtube.

The children and youth caucus appealed to world governments to focus on the ethical and moral side. They did not pretend to know the answers, but facilitated a dialogue.

The BIC has been thinking about what they would like to offer. Climate change is an opportunity to learn to discuss in a new way.

Offer three principles

International solidarity- more than a call to cooperation, has implications for structures of society. Nations must expand their understanding of who belongs to their community of concern, to include the rest of the world and future generations. The current machinery for environmental issues is unwieldy. Developing nations are unable to participate in this level of meeting time required. A recognition that the individual nations are as parts of a human body, each with different responsibilities

Universal access to education- limitless resources to come to bear on climate change.

Gender equality- men and women experience and contribute to climate change differently. The majority of those in poverty are women and the children they care for, who are grossly underrepresented in policymaking discussions. Women are often more vulnerable to disaster (tsunami, European heat wave) but can also be key agents in adaptation.

We hope to generate a discussion of the implications of climate change, to generate the will and momentum to respond to this global issue.

Discussion:

-A whole lot of people can change their minds quickly by working together, where there is friendship, consultation and learning together. Center on spiritual values that focus on service to others. From the Baha'i Writings "blessed is the spot and the house and the place and the city and the heart and the mountain and the refuge and the cave and the valley and the land and the sea. . . " Thinking about sacred spaces.

Ted: we organize green teams, a couple of people getting together creates a catalyst for change. Their energy can multiply. Stay focused on small, dedicated actions.

Sylvia: in all our activities we need to integrate the idea of humility towards the earth as we do other principles such as the equality of men and women, oneness of mankind. What we do to the environment is also done to other people.

-It is the people who already know who go to conferences like this, we need to work on informing a grass roots movement. Kristine has started working on a booklet and invites anyone interested in helping her to let her know. We also need to address the global issue on a global level with world government laws which will get things done. We cannot solve the energy crisis without international authority.

-In western societies, for survival's sake we are desensitized to a lot of problems. She lived in a small village in the Pacific, where people were so sensitive and could immediately relate to other humans struggling. We really need to make an effort to put ourselves in other people's shoes. Do we think about what it would feel like to be the victim of a natural disaster? This increases our international solidarity.

-we hear a lot about feeling guilty in the west and about what we should do less of, but we should also do more of being involved, connected in our communities. This will build a

-why did I come to this conference? Moved her belongings on her bicycle because she had committed to never owning a car, realized she would be left behind if she kept going in this vein. What grabbed her was Al Gore's ideal in youth- the realization of climate change. We need to pursue difficult, uncomfortable questions. We can't stop asking difficult questions.

Gordon- the process of education changes a person. How do we become knowledgeable? What happens inside of us before we are triggered to action. Baha'u'llah says that spirituality is moving from love to action. When individual initiative surges on a collective level. What would be a wise way to surge and act? How do we attract people to a greater level of commitment?

Tahiri: work within people's perspective. There is not one answer to how we can move forward. We can become very involved in just learning about our own faith tradition, but what is exciting is to learn how to apply what we are learning in a useful way that moves the issue forward.

Ted: the challenge is trying to imagine the better future 15-20 years from now. How are we going to get there?

Sylvia: our concern and fear when we hear these scary projections, we need to step back and see the bigger picture. We should not think that climate change is the only reason we need to work together and change the world. We cannot only rely on grass roots initiatives, but also at local, national and international levels.