



## **The Rise of Spiritual-Centered Social Philosophy**

**By Ravi Logan**

There are four basic psychological orientations to the philosophies of humanity: dogma-centered, matter-centered, self-centered, and spirit-centered. The philosophies of religions are often dogma-centered, as are many philosophies having rigid or totalizing doctrines. Materialist philosophies are matter-centered. Philosophies that stress self-interest or individual enjoyment and accumulation are self-centered. And philosophies that treat the world as sacred, that acknowledge oneness, and that value inner realization are spiritual-centered.

In the present world, we find peoples or nations which are guided by dogma-centered, by matter-centered, and by self-centered philosophies. Dogma-centered philosophies predominate where religious fundamentalism is the characteristic outlook of a society. Matter-centered philosophy is preeminent in the few remaining communist societies. And self-centered philosophy prevails in capitalist countries.

### **Spirit-Centered Philosophy**

Nowhere is society guided by spirit-centered philosophy. Spirit-centered philosophies exist, of course, but they do not provide the core values nor guide the social outlook of any modern nation. However, there is rapidly growing interest in spirituality. And this shift toward a spiritual orientation to life is having impact in the realm of political philosophy. This impact can be seen in the ideas of deep ecologists, ecofeminists, liberation theologians, bioregionalists, ecological postmodernists, postdevelopment theorists, economic decentralists, indigenous peoples movements, visionary futurists, and others.

### **Spirituality and Human Development**

Any philosophy that aims to guide social development must promote the needs of people — including their spiritual needs. A society that fails to support peoples' spiritual aspirations will stifle human development. Suppression of spiritual aspirations is not only detrimental to the individuals whose spiritual needs are denied, but is also detrimental to society as a whole. For spiritual development nurtures such human qualities as compassion, altruism, cooperation, sacrifice, mental balance, joy, and love. Where these spiritual qualities abound, exploitation, inequity, and repression are less likely to afflict society, and the movement of strong and free individuals toward a collective ideal can more readily occur.

Spirituality dissolves alienation and nurtures connectedness with other people, other living beings, and the larger creation. Out of this awareness comes values that express respect and concern for the welfare of all life. These are values that foster collective prosperity, expansion and freedom in society, and that promote a balanced relationship with the created world.

### **Spirituality and Religion**

Sectarian religious beliefs tend to create divisions within humanity, justify the oppression of one group by another, and allow the plundering of the natural world. These effects occur because religious doctrines contain beliefs that lack rationality and constrict the natural expansion of the human intellect. These dogmas impede individual and collective development.

Religious dogma and spirituality are not the same, and to reject spirituality by confusing it with religious dogma is a mistake. This mistake limited Marxism's ability to have a more humanistic effect on society. Marx was justified in objecting to the harmful effects of certain religious beliefs, but he failed to recognize the vitalizing effects of spirituality. As a result, Marx's social vision degenerated to the brutal materialism of communism.

### **Spirituality and Materialism**

Materialism, as is now recognized by many, has failed both as a philosophical outlook and as a motivating pursuit in life. Materialism has not brought deep fulfillment to human beings, even to those who have most enjoyed the fruits of material abundance.

While materialism is limited in its ability to meet human needs, humanity is certainly not willing to reject material development for an otherworldly religious approach to life, such as occurred under medieval religious culture, or for a world-denying philosophical idealism, such as impeded the material progress of South Asia.

But neither is humanity willing to equate material progress with personal fulfillment. For many recognize that putting accumulation of physical wealth at the center of the collective dream has brought destruction of natural environments, disruption of local communities, evisceration of traditional cultures, and exploitation of workers and consumers.

What is needed is an holistic approach to socioeconomic development which amply provides for our physical needs while at the same time nurturing the development of subtler human capacities – and that does this in a way that promotes the welfare of all, and that is not destructive towards nature.

### **A New Philosophy for a New Era**

The dominant political ideologies cannot accomplish this. They are too immersed in materialism to grow beyond their limitations. A new, spiritually-based approach to socioeconomic development must be adopted. Should this not occur, increasing imbalance and unsustainability will cause the human society to face dead-endings.

The Progressive Utilization Theory (PROUT) meets humanity's need for a post-materialist, spirit-based social philosophy. It is a social philosophy grounded in expanded humanism, in love, and in hope. It is an idea whose time has come.