

The Economy and the World – A Spiritual Perspective

"No one can tell whether they are richer or poor by turning to their ledger. It is the heart that makes a person rich. One is rich according to what one is, not according to what one has."

-- Henry Ward Beecher

Thousands of years ago, the Mayan nation, a highly evolved civilization, predicted the world as we know it would end in 2012. Many today are wondering, with eyes wide open, vigilant and somewhat terrified if this prediction is coming to pass.

Our financial markets are crumbling, many of our corporations and institutions are in grave jeopardy of failure, millions of folks have seen their 401k retirement programs evaporate, job losses are mounting not in simple mathematical proportions but in geometric proportions, and we are drowning in debt – nations and individuals. In addition, global warming is increasing, our ecosystems are being destroyed and millions of folks around the globe are starving to death daily.

Many are curious how the mortgage fiasco in the U.S. has had such disastrous ripple effects around the globe - that when Wall Street sneezes, the world catches cold.

Game theory and interconnectivity

From a spiritual perspective there is no surprise. The concept of the zero-sum game might help us understand what's happening and the Universal Principle of Interconnectivity might help us find a solution.

In game theory and economic theory, zero-sum describes a situation in which a participant's gain or loss is exactly balanced by the losses or gains of the other participant(s). If the total gains of the participants are added up, and the total losses are subtracted, they will sum to zero. Zero-sum can be thought of more generally as constant sum where the benefits and losses to all players sum to the same value of money, pride and dignity. In essence, cutting a cake is zero-sum because taking a larger piece reduces the amount of cake available for others. Simply, if you get yours, I won't get mine. It appears that much of our economic struggles are driven by the mantra, "How can I prevent others from getting theirs so I can get mine?"

So what happens if I live my life from a zero-sum perspective? How readily would I be willing to help you "get yours" if I know that by you getting yours, I'll lose out on me "getting mine"? Zero-sum folks interact from a fear-based place, living a life based on greed, egoism, hubris, disconnection and dishonesty. What we see happening in the world marketplace is the result of folks living a zero-sum game - millions suffer for the sake of the few, class warfare and cash-warfare. Increasing poverty and financial insecurity, once the fear of lower classes are now permeating middle and upper middle classes around the globe. Recession now looms large, affecting most every class, every family and every individual in some way, shape or form.

As the number of zero-sum gamers increases, and it is increasing, the number of folks living from a place of love and caring for others decreases.

Whose fault is it anyway?

The spiritual quality of love created this planet. Lack of love will undoubtedly, if not destroy the planet, cause serious harm on many levels. We are witnessing this harm economically, environmentally, institutionally and in our relationships.

Many ask, "Are we being punished?" Interesting use of the "passive voice" as though someone is "doing this to me." The truth is that no one is doing anything to us. We are doing it to ourselves. I repeat, we are

doing this to ourselves. The daunting fears gripping us daily only exacerbate our current economic situation in a zero-sum environment as long as folks choose to act in a disconnected fashion. The anomaly is that the more we act and treat others in a disconnected fashion, the more we all suffer.

The greed and fear permeating the planet moves from hemisphere to hemisphere, country to country, state to state, city to city, town to town, family to family, individual to individual.

Ego-inflating behaviors based on greed and fear create an environment that cannot sustain life in a healthy way. Our national mental health statistics show increasing spikes in dis-eases of the mind, heart and body. Illnesses like cancer and depression are increasing at astounding rates as are diseases of the immune system - no surprise when we live from a place of greed, anger and fear. The greater the greed anger and fear, the greater the pain and suffering; it's a vicious cycle.

The more time we spend blaming others, fighting for "mine", and living in fear and anger, the more we are moving towards some flavor of the 2012 deadline. As Pogo said, "We have met the enemy and he is us."

Is there a solution?

Pure and simple. Love-based connection.

What if each one of us, from a heart-felt place, were to take personal responsibility for the problems the world now faces? What if we were to take responsibility and choose to believe each one of us can change the world for the better in some way, right here, right now in our own small way?

Interconnectivity and economics

"Economy is not a plan for construction, but it is a plan for destruction. It is economics which have brought us to destruction. It is the heart quality, it is the spiritual outlook which will change the world".
— Sufi expression

In the Buddhist tradition, for example, there is a symbolic image known as Indra's Net – a three-dimensional net filling the whole of space – a network of golden threads at the juncture of each is a jewel which, upon closer inspection, reveals the reflection of every other jewel in the infinite network and as the sparkle in one jewel changes, it is reflected in the sparkle of every other jewel. The metaphor being – each of us is profoundly connected in a web of life and complex social relationships stretching across the globe.

Looking down on our planet in 2008, there is a clear understanding that we have failed to understand the intimate connections that exist within our ecosystems, between our self and the world, between our lifestyles and the economies of the developing countries, between our use of chemicals in daily life and their effect on our oceans and streams, between our zero-sum greed, affluence and luxury and the poverty and hardships of others.

The Thai monk Bhikkhu says, *"The entire cosmos is a cooperative...when we realize the world is a mutual, interdependent cooperative enterprise...then we can build a noble environment. If our lives are not based on this truth, then we shall perish."*

Interconnectivity in the realm of economics is reflected in "spiritual capitalism" or "spiritual economics" where ethics plays the important role of defining goals and constraints. Spiritual capitalism and economics would require: non-violence, non-stealing, telling the truth, and a focus on right livelihood (e.g., making money honestly without cheating or misleading advertising). The underlying principle of spiritual capitalism focuses on being "stewards" of wealth, accumulating wealth ethically, and not becoming

attached to it, generously using wealth for the good of all. Underneath spiritual capitalism or spiritual economics is the principle that economics and a moral and spiritual life are neither separate nor mutually exclusive. There is no emphasis on "self-benefit."

Why is there resistance to spiritual economics?

One reason so few are able to either understand the notion of connectivity, or live from a place of interdependence, is they are caught up in a fear-based, emotional reactivity that precludes them from accessing their frontal cortex (the rational and thinking part of their brain) and, stuck in their limbic (emotional) and amygdala (reptilian, reactive) brains, can't make "sense" of the concept of spiritual economics. Remember, they are living a "zero-sum" game, fear-based emotionally reactive existence. One other reason is that many folks are separated from their hearts, their True, Real and Essential self. Without a spiritual understanding, an understanding that comes from a practice of self-reflection, mindful awareness, meditation, and a deeper, essential understanding of ethics, a spiritual or heart-felt approach doesn't make sense. Cognition alone, without accessing the wisdom of one's heart, will almost never lead to compassion, and so, greed, hatred and ignorance prevail and the root cause of, and solution for, suffering is never addressed. The self-destructive beat goes on.

From the spiritual perspective, we're engaged in a huge wake up call. Over and above our economic crises, we continue to lose our land to the oceans as the tide rises around the world. Unknown and untreatable diseases are increasingly baffling the medical experts, increasing numbers of folks are experience abuse in some form, and many continue to perish from starvation.

Oddly enough, even though we have increased our ability to "connect" with each other over the Internet, supposedly more able to bridge the gap between all cultures, we have lost our ability to "relate" on a deeper, spiritual level. We seem to be using the Internet not to positively influence each other, but to perpetuate our own egos to garner more for "me" in a more globalized form of the zero-sum game.

The final choice

Interestingly enough, in the weeks, months and years ahead, we'll no doubt read numerous new books, treatises, white papers, theories, insights and positions on the creation of "new visionary economic systems." The sad truth is probably none of these will point to one way of approaching economics - based not on "futurism" but on the ideas taught in the East 2500 years ago, namely, the fundamental interconnectivity of people and nature. That's the challenge. That's the choice. Life is choices and we live and die by our choices. The Buddhists and the Mayans knew something. Will we choose to learn from them or simply search for another way to reinvent the zero-sum approach to economics?

Through spiritual development, through our acceptance of the oneness of human life, through our spiritual growth we can evolve. Perhaps this requires old paradigms to collapse to make way for a brand new economic order that reflects humanity's rising consciousness. The Mayans would say we have about four years to figure it out. What if they're right?

Some questions for self-reflection are:

Do I believe life is a "zero-sum" game"? If so, why?

Do I ever consciously reflect on my thoughts, words, feelings, motives and actions around money?

Do my thoughts and actions around money consistently and congruently reflect higher values?

Do the way I make, spend and invest money result in harm to others or to the earth?

In all of my endeavors, do I seek to realize the highest good for all?

What beliefs did my parents and other influential adults have about money when I was growing up? Am I carrying those beliefs. Are they serving me?

How could I achieve financial stability and sufficiency? Would I need more income? Would I need to trim back my lifestyle? Would I achieve this by refusing to purchase on credit? What can I do now that would move me one step closer to having control over the money in my life?
Do I experience a general feeling of malaise, resentment, anger and agitation much of the time?

" Unless we have inner abundance, our material abundance works against our own survival."

- Torkum Saraydarian

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