

Document 5: Notes and Reflections by *Lhundup Dukpa*



Taking Diversions and U-Turns: Conversations and Dialogues on Sustainable Futures and Spirituality, Loyola College, Chennai; 11 – 13 February 2015

My Notes from the Un-conference

Day 1: Feb. 11, 2015 – Opening Session

(U-turns (spiritual diet) – awaken the spiritual consciousness)

United Nations Information Center for India and Bhutan, New Delhi – Director (Kiran Mehra Kerpelman)

Presentation by:

Ecological Footprint Concept (spiritual diet) – measures how much land and water area a human population required to produce its resources and accommodate its wastes.

- US – 24 acres per person
- World – 4.5 acres per person

Two pronged approach:

1. Improving Efficiency – building energy efficient buildings and reducing energy consumption
2. Education – raising awareness – conservation ethics – decrease in the use of resources and reducing wastes – recycle

The New IEs Facility launched in Sept. 2013

- Green buildings – green dormitory – 410 green dorm – using low energy, reducing wastes and reducing consumption – students compete in low consumption and reducing wastes.
- 91 geothermal wells – 500 ft deep
- 3100 sq ft green house
- 2 aquaponics facilities
- Biodiesel lab – biodiesel runs college shuttle buses
- Research lab
- Every student is required to take an environmental based course regardless of their majors – this is done to promote environmental literacy
- Farmer's market
 - Biodiesel program
 - Recycling

- Rooftop vegetable garden
- Winthrop lot garden
- LUC Farmer's market
- Students' environmental clubs
- Loyola University Retreat and Ecology Campus
 - Students learn about nature
 - Student run organic farm
 - Restoring wetland
- Healing Earth textbook – e-book on environmental science for 1st year degree students

Sessions:

What makes you uncomfortable when we talk about 'sustainable development and spirituality?'

Open Space 1:

Principles:

1. The Law of Two Feet – whoever comes is the right person
2. Hosts – Bumble bees – butterflies

Open Space on Healing Traditions – spirituality and sustainability

Ayurveda – 5 different systems

- ✓ Emotional
- ✓ Spiritual
- ✓ Sensorial – environmental and relationships
- ✓ Physical
- ✓ Metabolic

12/01/2015

Day 2 Round 1

Q: How do you see the global political-economy impacting you, your work, your community, your ecosystems? From your own personal experiences, do we need to wake up to and pay critical attention to about the global political-economy? What are the key assumptions, foundations, frameworks, myths, metaphors driving the global political-economy?

Responses:

- ✓ Social responsibility – socially responsible business/economy
- ✓ Food and clothing flow – imported
- ✓ States can become a problem in a corrupt society
- ✓ Notion of scarcity
- ✓ Illusory happiness/efficiency/scarcity
- ✓ Happiness – what do people need? (as opposed to wants) – contentment/interdependence
- ✓ Equitable and distributive wealth – trickle down does not work
- ✓ Buddha against scarcity – emptiness
- ✓ Can companies be forced into socially responsible behavior?
- ✓ Enabling individuals to prosper
- ✓ Nature worship – the art of questioning - Piyush – co-opforest Jungleclub@gmail.com Salem citizen
 - Nature worship and its relationship with pollution

- Healing the earth
- River pollution – someone down the stream drinks your pollution
- Borrowed money from banks to clean up lakes and rivers and wetlands
- Can we use monks as messengers for nature preservation and protection?

Day 2 Round 2

Q: From your own personal experiences, do we need to wake up to and pay critical attention to about the current model of education? What are the key assumptions, foundations, frameworks, myths, metaphors driving the current model of education?

Responses:

- ✓ Jesuit education model – supposed to make education free but because there is no state support the schools are heavily dependent on tuition fees collected from the students for survival
- ✓ Malaysian education system is business driven – market oriented – no arts subject. Booming private schools because public schools are failing to provide quality education
 - Public school teachers engaged in private tuitions resulting into poor school performances
 - No alternative schools for vocationally oriented students, such as vocational education
- ✓ India – too much academic studies
 - Education is disconnected from the real world
 - Centrally designed curriculum often by high economic class – no relevance to poor communities/farmers
 - No interactive learning in the class “schooling against the wall” very much enclosed within the four walls – no interaction with the nature and the communities
 - 21st century booming business around two sectors – health and education
- ✓ Thailand – education is heavily privatized and caters only to the rich
 - Thatcher Way – new world order – capitalistic movement – privatize everything
 - No moral values or spirituality – only technological development – know-how
 - The focus of education was all about creativity and imagination and lacked spirituality
- ✓ Bhutan – faces similar situations. Learning happens within the four classroom walls. Teaching is dominated by lecture method and education is exam oriented. Curriculum is overcrowded. Syllabus coverage is the focus of teaching – we need to uncover the syllabus. Private school industry is booming.

Q: in specific ways, how would a spirituality engaged world-view change the way we think/imagine/feel about the idea of learning, pedagogy and people formation? How do we heal from the damage created by factory-schooling? What is new/ancient language, frameworks, proverbs, experiments, and stories that you can share to bring this alive?

Responses:

- ✓ What is the objective of learning?
- ✓ Are you able to apply in your real life what you have learnt in the class?
- ✓ What is the role of a teacher? Is it to facilitate learning or translate the textbooks?
- ✓ Schools are cut-off from the natural habitat – the real world
- ✓ Children are studying to fulfill the false promises of the business world and pursuing false dreams created by the corporate world e.g. out of 100 students in an engineering college only 4 get employed. Today more than 3 million IT graduates are unemployed – why do we keep on investing in IT education when there is no job in this sector?

- ✓ Bhutan – how low quality education will impact Bhutan’s political and socio-economic development of the country?
 - Recent newsbreak in Bhutan – the government sponsored the training of 400 primary and secondary teachers and after 4 years of training only 120 graduates were employed. Doctors are limited in Bhutan. Why not educate more doctors?
 - What result will it yield if we had invested it in farming? Bhutan imports 90% of foods and exports about 10% of food products. Driving cars and owning cars have become fashion in Bhutan. Yet Bhutan does not produce a liter of fuel or a nut bolt. We do not even have a good mechanic to fix these cars? About 90% of mechanics in any vehicle repair workshops are imported laborers. The worst thing about importing cars is that 99% of the cars bought are on bank loans. Building houses have also become a fashion but again on borrowed money. Farm lands are being converted into towns. The most fertile paddy fields of Yangtse, Paro, Babesa, and Wangdi have already been converted into towns.
 - Education is free but heavily dependent upon donor funding and so is our health system. Self-reliance and GNH is our development philosophy but the enabling conditions for our country’s development is still donor driven. We do not even have self-sufficiency in basic necessities like food, medicine, and education.
 - Bhutan’s economy is based on tourism and hydro-power. In my analysis both are unreliable. We have dammed our rivers and hollowed our mountains to build hydropower stations. Our rivers are fed by glacial lakes which are fast melting due to global warming. Natural disasters, such as earthquakes and floods are quite frequent.
 - India is the only country importing electricity power energy from Bhutan. Any political snags between the two countries will stall all our hydropower stations. Sustainability is a big issue facing this industry. We could have limited the power stations in just one or two for exports to India and internal consumption must be based on sustainable small hydropower stations which are cost effective and affordable for us to maintain and repair.
 - Tourism is not reliable too as it heavily relies on political and economic fluctuations around the world. Any health hazards like disease breakouts in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Thailand would ground our airplanes. Any economic crises in the West and European countries would mean less dollars for Bhutan. Time for rethinking economy in Bhutan which means we need to rethink our education system.
 - Bhutan’s tourism industry is isn’t paying back to the country. Apart from the taxes the majority of the public does not gain much from the tourism industry. Bhutan targets high end tourists – who can pay – and unfortunately they land up staying in high-end five star hotels which are owned by the 5% high-end rich people. Everything earned from the industry does not necessarily get reinvested to create jobs or supporting children’s education through scholarships. All scholarships come from donor countries and the local scholarship is just 10% or even less.
 - We do not exactly know where the income earned from the tourism industry is going but public speculates that the money ends up buying expensive SUV cars, third country holidays, constructing buildings, pooling lands, in their children’s education in some expensive private schools outside of Bhutan. Had money being invested in creating jobs for the youths the government would not have to look for the 10,000 odd unemployed youths in other countries like Thailand, Australia and so on. Bhutan has a small population but it has no place for its youth to work. Analysts have warned that Bhutan’s economy will worsen if it continues to send its young workforce (youth) outside of Bhutan.
 - If the rich had invested in improving the health system the government would not have to spend millions on operations and cancer treatment in other countries. Most Bhutanese

suffer from diseases which are related to diet, food habits, eating unhealthy foods, by eating imported chemically fertilized vegetables and so on. Most people suffer from preventable diseases which are caused by lack of awareness and poor knowledge and information about basic health and care.

- Our education system could be much better if the rich could have helped in improving the quality of our teachers. Quality of education in Bhutan is hampered by poor teacher quality.
 - Bhutan is a buffer zone for two giant countries – China and India - which has a history of bitter conflicts. Any political conflicts between these two countries would threaten our security and livelihood.
 - Modern education is creating refugees – unemployed youths
- ✓ Education should build relationship and help each other through sharing of knowledge and expertise and ideas - help each other prosper not compete with each other.
 - ✓ The impact of media is another serious concern that is affecting the quality of children’s education
 - ✓ Job in relation to survival and fear of survival is promoted by the business world – that academic qualification is must to get a job.
 - ✓ Education should address key issues faced by the communities. Instead education is producing voluntary slavery for the multinational companies
 - ✓ Engineering should focus on architect to build affordable houses – earth houses and alternate energy
 - ✓ Ladakh – education needs to be contextualized – must be grounded to realities of the community life
 - Education is trying to fulfill what the master (business) wants and not what the community needs
 - Education is far removed from our living experiences – need to localized not globalized
 - Education is competing behind the numbers
 - ✓ Good practices in Tamil Nadu, India – once in a while children from schools are invited to the Farmers’ Field Schools – where a group of farmers have volunteered to teach children about agriculture and local wisdom and traditions – finding traditional solutions for modern problems. Together farmers identify key problems facing the communities and conduct experiment by applying traditional alternative methods to find solutions, thus contributing to innovation in farming
 - ✓ Native doctors help children to identify medicinal plants as part of their education. Children spend one week in schools and spend another week in the field/natural environment
 - ✓ Children are engaged in farming during the cultivation and harvesting season which is part of their syllabus. When there is no farming they go to school and when there is farming activities they spend their time in the farm – learning about farming and so on
 - ✓ Education must be based on real life learning and must be need based – must be local and culturally rooted
 - ✓ School Leaving Certificate implies that schools have produced typists to type letters for someone
 - ✓ Today education is becoming a problem and not a solution – education is suffering from nature deficit disorder
 - ✓ Education caters only to the elite group
 - ✓ Educating for Gross National Happiness (GNH)
 - Social life styles – living together and helping each other
 - Culture preservation – arts, festivals, architecture promoting harmony and peace
 - Spiritual development – (education for the development of mind – the mental and spiritual part, body – the physical world and speech – communication – language/messages) psychological wellbeing, moral values, (mindfulness – living mindfully – zero wastes, contentment – reducing consumption, non-materialism, compassion, tolerance); awareness

- being aware of cause and effect – from where does food come from? What is the role of natural environment?
- Human being as part of the natural environment/eco-system; and consciousness – conscious living – impact of human behavior on the earth, building relationships etc.
- Respect for humanity - diversity – religion, beliefs – shamanism (caste system, slavery, religious conversion, sale of tobacco are considered unlawful in Bhutan)
- Physical health – human relationship with the four cosmic world – air, water, fire, earth and how it impacts the world and the symbiotic relationship. Food literacy, health literacy etc.
- Sustainable economy – green economy – green energy – eco-tourism
- Good governance – uncorrupt leaders – decentralized governance
- Teaching approaches – promoting cooperative learning, collaborative and interactive learning – appreciative enquiry, brain-based learning, active learning strategies, promoting multiple intelligences
- Natural environment – promotion and preservation of natural environment – 65% forest coverage by constitution and 60% reserved forest as national parks. Export of raw timber is prohibited and domestication of wild life is unlawful
- Knowledge is growing at a tremendous pace but there is a big gap in the integration of spiritual development.

13/02/2015

Day 3 Guest speaker - Fabian

We are spiritual beings with human experiences and not human beings with spiritual experiences.

Integration

Q: What kind of holistic healing and innovative actions

Day 3 Round 1

Seeing the whole – planetary wisdom

1. If the animals could speak to us what wisdom would they offer us?
2. If the unborn child could speak to us what wisdom would they offer us?
3. If the mountains, rivers, and the trees could speak to us what wisdom would they offer us?
4. If the other missing voices could speak to us what wisdom would they offer us?

Animal voices:

- I am the voices of the caged birds, the chained elephants and the monkeys, the fin less sharks and the hunted whales of the oceans, the bleeding bulls in the Spanish entertainment ground, the live skinned foxes in the fur firms in China, and the numerous other animals held in captive by you the human beings. The meat loaf you just ate was one of us which were fattened with chemical injections to make us grow faster and fatter. The fur coat you wear was the just skinned from a fox. He was skinned alive hung upside down right in front of my eyes. With his skin gone and his bloody naked body shivering all over he bled to death.
- We are all part of the eco-systems as you are. We need you as we need us – we are interdependent. Your survival depend upon us as we are responsible for the reproduction or regenerations of the foods on Earth. We disperse the seeds so that the plants can grow again as your food. We maintain the fertility of the soil and control the pests so that there is no hunger on the earth.

- Do not cage us. Do not chain us. Do not spear us because you love the sport. Do not mock us by making us to entertain you. We are not your clowns. We are better off the way we are. Stop this insanity and give us the freedom. In fact you can learn from us. Learn to live peacefully with each other, like we do. Be content and not be greedy. We do not kill each other for sports. We do not kill each other to make money. We do not commit suicide because we are not stressed due to nonfulfillment of the greed. We do not want more. We are content with the green grasses and the food around us.
- Stop destroying our homes. Stop cutting down the trees. Stop hollowing the earth. Stop dropping bombs. Stop killing each other. We have no lawyers to take you to the court for justice. We have no armies to arrest you and imprison you. We have no technology to cage you. But if you do not stop this madness you will soon face a slow and painful death. You will soon stop breathing because the air is being polluted. You will soon go thirsty because the water is polluted. You will soon go hungry because the earth is being polluted. You will soon die of cold and heat because of the global warming. Your water sources will soon dry out because the glacial lakes on the mountains are melting fast. Listen to us and start healing the earth.

Voices of the Unborn child

- I am your unborn child. I am waiting to be born as your daughter and son. I can see you all from here, above you. I am pained by the sights that I see in the world. I am choking because the air is polluted. I can see you consuming chemically polluted food. You are always fighting with each other. You are always agitated with each other. The child you just bombed was someone's daughter. The woman you just blasted with bullets was a breastfeeding mom. The man you just beheaded was the father of a child. I am afraid of the madness that is going on. I am scared to be born again. For my sake and for the sake of the survival of the humanity I implore you to live together in harmony and peace.

Voices of the mountains, rivers, and trees

- I am the mountains, rivers, air, and trees. I am your home, food, and your protector. I am also home and food to the millions of living species on the earth. I am the river Nile, the Brahmaputra, River Ganga, the Yellow River, and the Oceans. I water your gardens, clean your homes, provide food to all living beings, and build your homes. Yet you disregard my existence. You treat me like a garbage bin. I have become the dumping grounds of your chemical wastes and sewage systems. My aquatic living beings are choked to death. They cannot breathe as usual and their foods are poisoned. Every second your wasteful behavior is harming me. The more you harm me the less you have and the shorter your life will be. Therefore if you wish to live longer and live happily you must nurture me and revive me to my original state of clean and serene conditions. For you human beings alone are responsible for the pollution. It was not the animals and the plants and no other beings have done this to me.
- I am the mountains and the trees. I provide food and shelter to all living beings on the planet earth. You are not alone on this planet. You behave as if everything on the earth belongs to you. The planet earth is a shared home. It belongs to all living beings. You are just a part of me. You are not the master and you don't own anything. You are simply taking shelter in my nature's arm. I have nurtured you and seen you grow with intelligence. You are misusing your intelligence. Instead of protecting, nurturing, and helping me to grow and feed the living beings, you have become greedy. You are living in an illusionary world. It is time to wake up my child. Wake up and gain your consciousness. Be mindful and live mindfully.

Voices of the invisible children (orphans/abused/child-labor), tribal groups, street beggars, house maids, prostitutes, and the disabled (mentally and physically challenged).

- We are the invisible voices, orphaned by wars, abandoned by poor parents, the kidnapped, women forced into prostitutions, the disabled, and indigenous groups. We have no access to education, information, knowledge and skills to make a living. We have no freedom of self-expression. We have no control over our own lives. We are shipped and sold in the markets like factory products. We work in the most devilish working conditions under extreme poverty. The high heel shoes you danced on, the red carpet you lie on, and the fur coats you wore on the Catwalk ramp were the products of our tender hands worked for long hours often under starvation. The next time you buy one of these products I hope you will give a thought to it.
- We are the tribal people who lived for million years in harmony with nature. We had enough space for shelter and adequate food for everyone. There was greenery everywhere for the animals to live. Our rivers flowed clean and mountains stood green and tall. But all these changed since you showed up on our door steps promising us with glorious modern life. You showed us your flashy cars and colorful wrappers. You promised us jobs, happiness and luxurious life. You took our land for mining and snatched our mountains for lumbering. Our mountains were ripped and peeled off giving way to landslides and flashfloods. Our animals disappeared from the barren mountains and along with it our livelihood. You lured us into this fancy crazy life devoid of any values. You lied to us. For this last time, please leave us alone. We do not want your flashy cars and the jazzy music. We have had enough of your materialistic and greedy life styles.

Voices of the spirits and invisible beings

- I am the voices of the spirit and the invisible beings. I see everything that you do. I have seen you robbing the mountains dry of its trees. I have seen you chopping off the tusks from the elephants, murdering the rhinos for its horns, and the limbs of the mountain gorilla just to fill up the greedy antique hoarders. You are living a meaningless life. Listen to me now. Let me be your guide. Support the ecovillage movement and follow the principles of gross national happiness. Its time you reform your education – make education free and let no child shop for education. Reform your governance system. Follow the ancient wisdom of cooperative leadership. Learn to live together in harmony with self, the community, and the world.

Day 3 Round 2

Q: How are we seeing examples of a deeper spirituality showing up in creative conversations, frameworks, and projects around the world?

Open Space:

Alternative to development

- Organic pedagogy – using environment pollution/wastes as themes for teaching different subjects. Good practices – inventing cloth pad as an alternative to synthetic non-bio-degradable tampon or sanitary napkins through local cottage industry. – ecofemme.org . using wastes as teaching aids.
- Nature worship - Adoption of rivers/mountains/lakes/trees/birds as symbols of goddess. River polluters as devils/evils including the producers of these products.

Day 3 Round 3: Imagination

- *How can we deepen/amplify and grow these small miracles and the larger movement for U-Turns and Diversions?*
- *What are the critical tensions and differences between us and how do we hold these tensions?*
- *If our success was completely guaranteed, what are some of the boldest, wildest, most ridiculous, elegant next steps we could imagine?*

Earth Hour

- Eco schools
- Eco villages
- Eco monasteries
- U-Turns from the planetary concerns
- GNH 1972
- Green movement – hazel nut plantations in Bhutan– entry of multinational companies
- Eco-tourism – Aman and Uma Resorts in Bhutan – change in food culture – using only the red meat from the pork and dumping the whole meat – how long does it take to rear a pig – amount of food fed to the pigs – Bhutanese culture – using all parts of the pig – including intestines, hair etc. everything is used except the digested foods.
- GNH – happiness brand of Coca-Cola – drink Coca-Cola for happiness advertisement
- To experience true happiness and happy society – need to revisit our roots right down to the village culture in Bhutan.
- Villagers becoming aware of environmental hazards – villagers in Bhutan rejected the proposal of the government to start mining in the village – crop damages, pollution of streams and ponds, dusts killing animal fodder plants, inhaling and polluted water killing cattle, and soil degradation and drying of water catchment areas.

4:30 pm I had to take leave to catch my flight to Kolkata. I missed the closing session – the integration part.

My reflection on the modality of the un-conference and the entire three days experiences at Loyola College.

This was my first experience attending an un-conference. It was indeed a diversion and a U-turn for me with such a life changing experience. I like the structure of the dialogues and the un-conference method. The questions raised were very powerful that challenged the participants to think beyond their comfort zones. The Open Space was an innovative model which I wish to replicate it in my future workshops and dialogues. This can be applied in our classroom discussions.

The last session, the integration part, sharing on the planetary concerns was the most powerful tool which can bring out the inner/deepest feelings and expressions from the participants. As the participants assuming the voices of the concerns took turns to speak out it sounded like the voices of the spirits speaking to us. I cannot forget this experience.

This journey was a healing process for me where I listened to people who shared similar views about the modern life and release the suppressed pains and expressions. Even without speaking we could feel and hear each other's dreams and wishes. I am hopeful that with such strong and committed individuals nothing can withstand the change that is needed very urgently in this world. I am fortunate to have met such wonderful and self-less individuals working hard to realize and showing the path to the new diversion and U-turns steering the rest to get-off the high way.

Please accept my sincere gratitude to you Dr. Nat for bringing us all together to this wonderful gathering of minds and dreams. Thank you for your leadership. Many thanks to the management of Loyola College, in

particular to Dr. Lazar and his team. Mr. Manish Jain and his co-facilitator for intelligently steering and leading the discussions. The un-conference management team and the funding agency for sponsoring this important event. Lastly I wish to convey my heartfelt acknowledgement to all the action groups of volunteers, activists, social workers, and NGOs and Civil Society Organizations for bringing such rich experiences. I wish we had a little longer time for discussions and sharing. I hope to keep in touch with everyone. I have already created some networks. Thank you Dr. Nat and the Global Center for the study of Sustainable Futures and Spirituality (GCSSFS) for this rare opportunity.

(By Lhundup Dukpa, lhunduprec@gmail.com)

Get Off the Highway
TAKE DIVERSIONS AND U-TURNS

