

## *From the Kitchen*

18 January 2012



In my last post I ruminated on the role of money in the way we value ourselves and what we do. Is community life possible without money or its equivalent? A related question is, can a family or a small community be truly independent of all others?

An increasing number of people is contemplating or already experimenting with the idea of self-sufficiency. But can there be true self-sufficiency without recourse to goods and services from 'outside'? Is it even desirable to have a large number of people be self-sufficient? On the other hand, do we want to continue on the path of ever-increasing and almost total interconnectivity? Is the phenomenon of the 'global village' the driving force behind our increasing pillaging and degradation of everything around us, or is this a separate, unconnected development? Or do both come out of a common origin?

Are we, as some spiritual teachings would have it, all one, or are we basically alone, individual and unable to truly connect? It is possible that wealth for the individual can be measured in terms of the ability to feel at-one with all that exists, that it has nothing to do with external objects or how we are considered by others. According to some teachings and supported by quantum physics, everything we apprehend with our five 'normal' senses is an illusion. What is 'real' is to be sensed and interacted with in a different way. The question then arises, does everything in the 'real' world actually matter? If the material world – the world we commonly interact with – is an illusion, is there anything of value to be found there?

If our physical universe is only a part of 'all that is', or one aspect of it, or a projection of it, how important is it? There are many and disparate beliefs about who we truly are and what our relationship to everything 'not us' is. Many of these beliefs involve the notion that we (humans) are soul or spirit inhabiting a physical body. Because these beliefs are held by humans with physical bodies, they are mostly predicated on our being in this physical world, in physical bodies. They differ in their details of where we would be if we could no longer exist physically.

To many people, all this is very esoteric, if not irrelevant. They 'exist' totally in the physical world and this informs how they live. Their notion of value comes completely from their relationship with the physical world and with the other people who inhabit it. They appear to have no notion of the world around them other than in terms of how it impacts on their personal value. Exploitation is normal and conservation is irrelevant and even damaging to their own value in the world.

I would argue that, the less that people believe there is anything other than the physical world, the more they are bent on exploiting that physical world and the less they have a notion of an essential interactivity and interdependence of everything in that physical world. They are, therefore, prepared to destroy the world around them in order to survive.

I do not think that it can be denied that there is an increasing degradation of our physical environment on this planet and I think it would be difficult to argue that the behaviour of humans is not largely responsible for this.

Even those people who believe that the physical world is all we need and all that there is seek environments – whether periodically or permanently – that nourish them in a largely indefinable way. They try to surround themselves with things of beauty and pieces of ‘nature’; or they go on holidays into the mountains or by the sea or in the forest or on farms; or they simply seek to escape from the day-to-day effort of adding to or maintaining their perceived personal value. Yet, the gaps in their struggle for material value are where they nourish themselves: the moments of stillness; the periods of daydreaming; the annual holiday away from home; the walks through an art gallery or a park; the few hours at a concert or at the pub or in a restaurant; planting flowers or vegetables; spending ten minutes reading someone’s musings on a blog.

For many people it is these gaps that make the relentless pursuits and activities bearable. Some people have cottoned on to this conundrum and have inverted their lives, so that their sense of value lies in what others would consider a ‘hippy’ existence and they pursue monetary value only in order to support their choice of lifestyle.