

LETTERS TO THE EDITORIAL OFFICE

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Time for the Intellect to Take Over From Mind

O racjonalnym myśleniu i kierowaniu się emocjami

Any person actively committed to sustainable development, when he/she keeps his/her eyes open to happenings in society, catches behavioural signals which when analysed by his/her intellect against the backdrop of his/her personal commitments and beliefs, seem to be deterrents to efforts being made to usher in sustainable development. Toying around with these niggling irritants in one's mind strengthens one's resolve to speak out, write and make the *deluded* brethren understand that they are often sadly mistaken. More often than not, these individuals are essentially those who are enslaved by their emotions and attachments to sensory objects in the material world. *Mind* and *Body* individuals in other words, who refuse adamantly to allow their *Intellect* and *Soul* to take charge and bring their minds and bodies under their sway.

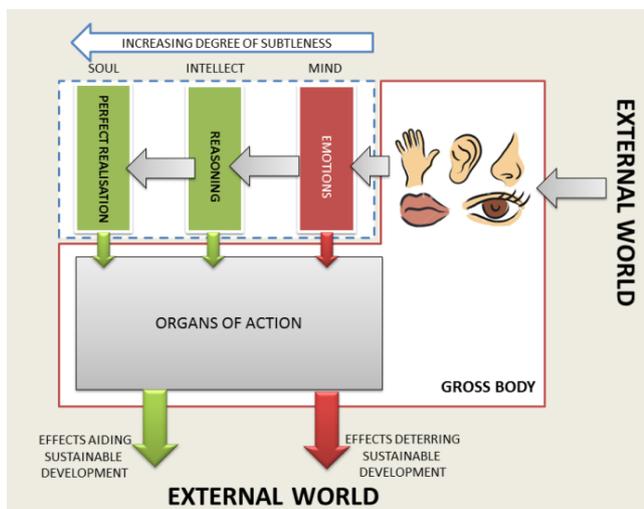


Figure 1. Body, mind, intellect and soul & sustainable development

We can start off with Figure 1 which illustrates the gist of the introduction above (adapted from *The Holy Geeta: Commentary by Swami Chinmayananda*, published by the Central Chinmaya Mission Trust in Mumbai, India). The gross body is the physical envelope including the sensory organs, organs of action (legs, hands etc.), and the internal physical constituents of the human body. The mind (seat of emotions), intellect (seat of reasoning) and soul (seat of perfect realisation) are the other facets

of human existence, in increasing order of subtleness. The sensory objects of the external world through stimuli of sound, taste, smell, touch and sight, interact with the sensory organs which pass the stimuli back to the mind. A thinking, reasoning individual will involve the intellect (and the soul, if the individual is a self-realised person) before instructing the organs of action to act (or abstain from acting). An emotional person – the *Body* and *Mind* individual alluded to earlier, will be spurred on by his/her emotional attachment to the external world. The actions of the former – when the individual is committed to the cause of sustainable development – would be blessings for the society and the world; while the actions of the latter would be deterrents to sustainable development.

Rebound effect

Seven years ago, in Singapore, as a student at the Nanyang Technological University, I was having lunch at one of the university eateries. A Chinese colleague of mine seated opposite me, got up leaving a half-full plate of food on the table (which was duly consigned to the trash can by the cleaner woman later). I looked at the plate and up at his face and made a futile attempt to conceal my annoyance, as thoughts of famished, ill-nourished children in sub-Saharan Africa flashed across my mind.

What? He challenged me arrogantly.

Why have you wasted food? I said with the utmost self-restraint.

Singapore has a very efficient food-waste handling system. You should know that. They make biogas out of all this food waste. He smirked and walked away.

I did not want to wrestle with the smart Alec. I let the matter rest.

Yes, that is right. The food yields a lot of biogas. But it also takes a lot of effort and energy (both manual and fossil) to make it. Also, more importantly, there are others who would need it for its primary purpose – nutrition. Some would say that they are using their money to buy food which they waste, and not someone else's – so it is not anyone else's problem. It may not be anyone else's problem, but a problem it is, for sure, for sustainable development. The so-called rebound effect of setting up efficient waste collection and material/energy recovery systems; or a type of the same.

More recently, in Trondheim, at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, where I am employed at the time of writing, as a post-doctoral researcher, I asked a colleague who was about to

throw away a stack of papers, one side of each of them plain and not written or typed upon, to hand them over to me. I have developed a habit of using paper optimally and writing on both sides of each sheet with pencil (which aids in the reduction of chemicals usage during the recycling process). The proclivity to writing first, before typing matter onto a laptop screen, has come in handy. The colleague studied me with a *where-has-this-guy-come-from* look and quipped – *We all know that there is 100% paper recycling in this country. So, do not bother. Sending more and more waste paper to the paper mills is a good thing!* The rebound effect again!

One talks about the rebound effect when it comes to consumption or purchase of goods. It is rarely talked about when the end-of-life is in focus. One needs to get to the root of these misunderstandings and effect a permanent healing. While these two real-life observations prove that changes which *prima facie* are deemed to be good are sometimes not so, when one acts on impulse, spurred by emotions and force of habit. He/she is loath to subject his/her mind to the examination of the intellect (It would be good not to refer to the Soul here, as this article would then fail to motivate atheists and people professing faiths which do not believe in the Soul). Surely, every human being would agree that there is a Mind and an Intellect with each one of us. Paper and food were instances which came to mind when yours sincerely recalled these incidents. There is however a more common failing, universal and often unresolvable. It is worth giving a thought to this, in the paragraphs that follow.

Gifts – a new perspective

The difference between the Lake of Galilee and the Dead Sea is that the blessing (river Jordan) flows in and out of the former, while in the latter, it flows in and stays there. The Dead Sea is absolutely dead – no fish can survive in it. The Lake of Galilee is full of vivacity and vibrancy. This is attributed to David Steindl-Rast & Sharon Lebell (Music of Silence, 2002).

A blessing is a divine gift, and the goodness associated with it and happening as a consequence of it is meant to be shared and passed on to envelop the whole of the sea of humanity (Venkatesh, Gift of the Tyagi, www.upanishabd.com, 2009). If the Earth had been blessed by God with abundant resources, they were meant to be shared and equitably distributed to enable the whole of mankind to reap the benefits thereof. Alas, we all know that it has never been so. *Keep what you need, and spread the others around to those who do not have access to the same.* A much-hackneyed spiritual message, which sadly languishes in books. The bridge between practice and precept, walking and talking, is widening in the post-modern era.

While that takes a macroscopic view of the material bounties that mankind has been thriving on over the years, one can apply the same spiritual message to gifts exchanged among individuals. Gift-giving, which is more satisfying for the giver, in its purest form, is an expression of all that is noble in man. Of course, the act of giving gifts also has darker connotations – bribes, obligatory acts, *inter alia*. While receiving a material gift often compels man to view it as an obligation to repay the kind deed (with material objects), it also impels him to shower other acquaintances and friends with gifts, often motivated by the wrong reasons. There are often *lock-ins* when man, owing to emotional clinging and sentimental attachments to material objects, refuses to part with them. The *blessings* get stored up and stagnate, and in due course of time, the functionality associated with the objects is lost – quite like the Dead Sea being absolutely dead. At times, gifts are white elephants and more than the happiness they confer in the beginning, they also turn irksome when they demand periodic maintenance in the form of cleaning, dusting, restoring, relocating etc. The fact that they were once items of sentimental value is overshadowed by the angst and anxiety that their deterioration with time lead to.

If my brother for instance gifts me with something, as a symbol of fraternal affection, he would be the happiest person in the world if I, after finding use for the gift, pass it on to someone in greater need of the same, than I. It is his gift which finds a medium through me to bring joy and happiness and add value to a third person's life; and perhaps many more later on, if this third person also thinks as I do. The *blessing* thus moves on, helping several people during its *physical lifetime*, rather than being locked up for its sentimental value in the *almirah*, showcase or a suitcase.

The receiver multiplies the satisfaction of the giver, if he (the former) passes it on. A book gifted by my father for example, certainly has incomparable value. But the value is enhanced when I donate it after reading, to a library wherefrom it will be accessible to thousands, maybe millions during its lifetime. The earlier I donate it, the better – the impact of the *blessing* will be much greater, available to many when needed. At a later date, the need for the same may not exist. A delayed donation – after the book has spent many years in a book-case – may not really spread the *blessing* as effectively. Sentimental attachment to material gifts is also materialism, though not as stark as the craving for objects of comfort and luxury. Memories of good deeds last forever and do not need items of paper, cloth, glass, rubber, metal or leather to serve as mnemonics. While the material component is to be appreciated, enjoyed and promptly shared, the underlying subtle component is to be preserved in the lake of Galilee that is found within each one of us. Blessings graze past an evolved mind, nourishing

and calming it, leaving behind traces of the uplifting subtle. The multiplier effect is played out and the value of the gifts fully realised. By passing on gifts, the receiver has expressed his thankfulness exceedingly well, augmenting further the giver's stock of virtuous deeds. This may be an entirely new perspective. It is however not to dub sentimental and emotional human beings as irrational or wrong in any way. This may just serve as food for thought – accepted or rejected. De-stock, give and free yourself. Blessings flowing in should flow out as well – the subtle traces remain nevertheless.

En passant

It is good to keep our eyes and ears open, observe and attempt to mend the ways of people around us...calmly, patiently, while remembering that the *You are wrong, I am right* approach fails to yield the expected results.

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