

# People, planet and climate change

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We have been led to this human gridlock just in a matter of three hundred years or so. Traditional communities who have nurtured their life styles for millennia wiped out in the twinkling of an eye. Until quite recently the human race - both rebels and conformists, the ignorant and the enlightened, whether in small self-governing communities or vast empires, barbarian tribes or points of high civilization - functioned unconsciously within natural, unwritten boundaries. It had an intuitive disposition to live within the Fitra, the patterning of the natural world, though this was only achieved by a conscious recognition of the existence of a superior force, the Divine. But as Richard Tarnas<sup>1</sup> put it in his reference to the period of European enlightenment, there has been a psychological shift in allegiance from the Divine to the human. We have cut ourselves adrift from our souls and our hearts.

People who lived in pre-enlightenment times, that was before we were told that nature was there to be plundered, were basically no different from us. They had the same positive and negative human attributes, but the results of human profligacy were contained by the natural order of things, which transcended technological and political sophistication and even religious disposition. Excess in the natural order was contained because it was biodegradable. When old civilizations, however opulent, profligate, greedy, or brutal died, the forest just grew over them or the sands covered their traces. They left no pollutants, damaging poisons or nuclear waste. By contrast, and assuming we survive as a species, archaeologists excavating our present rampant civilization are going to have to wear radiation suits.<sup>2</sup>

The following quote appeared in the London based Guardian newspaper on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September, “The evidence that economic performance can be enhanced even as carbon emissions are cut has been powerfully brought together in the new report of the [Global Commission on the Economy and Climate, Better Growth, Better Climate](#). The report builds on a growing consensus on the benefits of low-carbon growth among leading international economic institutions, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank and the UN Development Programme.”

You see - someone is trying to tell us that we can have our cake and eat it. This is a manifestation of a refusal to recognize that climate change is but one lethal cause amongst many that will continue to degrade the planet. It is the tip of the iceberg, if this metaphor is apt. What lies submerged in the reckoning of events if we grow as envisaged, is continued species extinction, bio diversity destruction, deforestation, air, land and sea pollution, population disruption and indeed population growth.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Tarnas, Passion of the Western Mind.

<sup>2</sup> Parts of this analysis first appeared in Fazlun Khalid, Guardians of the Natural Order, Journal of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), Our Planet, Vol.8 No.2, July 1996.

So no wonder the Conference of Parties (COP) process is about economics. Every nation state that is represented at these climate meetings has a growth agenda. And the survival of politicians depends on them telling their people that they have squeezed out of the consultative process as much as they could get. And the fact is, the more powerful you are the harder you can squeeze and if you study the COP process you will discover what the powerful and more prosperous countries have been getting up to aided and abetted by the aspiring BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) nations closely followed by the MINT (Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria, Turkey) group.

If we are really serious about this, and that is why we are here, we need to look at this from a root and branch perspective. That is re-examine our political paradigm and by that I mean the relationship between the political establishment and the banks. As Shaykh Abdal Qadir as Sufi, the Scottish convert to Islam, said in one of his discourses, “democracy is the service industry of the banks”. The one salutary outcome of the financial meltdown we appear to be resurfacing from, is that the cat is out of the bag. Banks exist to create money out of nothing and this nothing acts like a virus on the natural world.

If it is social justice we are after then we have to look at this squarely in the face. Individual nation states have their own priorities and agendas. But, the common denominator however is growth based on fictitious money. While those ahead in the race are able to create more money to stay ahead, like quantitative easing (simply money out of the clouds) for example, those behind engage in an almost impossible game of catch up. The victim of this game is planet earth and climate change is the result. Moderating this appears to be what the COP process is about and this requires the rich nations particularly, to tighten their belts as hard as they can whilst those behind loosen theirs’ ever so gently. Otherwise by going down the road of the millennium development objectives we will be creating other problems whilst attempting to solve one. There is no gain without pain.

Current growth rates steal from the legacy that by right belong to future generations. It would seem that faith communities, Muslims not least amongst them, have surrendered their responsibilities in allowing to be swept away by forces intent on destroying the natural world in the name of economic growth.

I would like to conclude with two thoughts both from the Qur’an, the first addressed to my fellow Muslims and the second addressed to my brothers and sisters in the wider world –

وَفِي الْأَرْضِ آيَاتٌ لِلْمُوقِنِينَ

There are signs on the Earth for people with certainty

(51:20)

You see the Qur’an describes the natural world as signs (*ayat*) of Allah and this is exactly the same term used to describe the verses in the Qur’an. This would allow us to say that

desacralising the natural world is not a great deal worse than doing the same to the Qur'an itself.

And finally for all of us

وَلَا تَمَّشِ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَرَحًا ۚ إِنَّكَ لَنَ الْأَرْضَ تَخْرِقُ وَلَنَ تَبْلُغُ طُولَ الْأَجْبَالِ

Do not strut arrogantly on the earth.  
You will never split the earth apart  
nor will you ever rival the mountains in height.

(17:37)

The Earth is rotating on a finely defined axis at an optimum distance from the sun. The moon at just the right orbit controls the tides. The ozone layer is in place to protect us from the Sun's dangerous cancer inducing radiations. The right proportion of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere working with the jet stream and ocean currents gives us balanced weather patterns. The whole thing was designed for us by the Supreme Systems Engineer - one planet for one people.

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