

Deep Ecumenism and Hinduism - Part I

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Good morning.

We're talking this morning about Meister Eckhart and deep ecumenism, and his interaction, you might say, with Hinduism by way of Ananda Coomaraswamy, an amazing human being, who wrote an important book in the 1930s called *The Transformation of Nature in Art*. And it really is about spirituality and art, and one whole chapter is dedicated to Meister Eckhart.

Now as I point out, I read this book in 1976, and it blew my mind, the chapter on Eckart, because I'd never really worked on Eckhart before ever. I'd heard his name never in my training as a Dominican, but I did hear his name at the University in Paris, and so forth.

But no one dwelled on him at all. And of course, I read some things about him, but it was reading Coomaraswamy's article that blew my mind, because there were whole sentences from Eckhart that he quoted in his article that I published the year before! These sentences that I had made up in an article I did on sacred space and sacred time, a year before!

It really freaked me up so much that I didn't finish the article. I put it on a shelf. It spooked me. And I went back to it gingerly a few months later and finished the article.

And it was evident; it hit me, 'Hey, Eckhart and I have a lot in common!' Including the fact that we were Dominicans, and I was still a Dominican then. As it turned out later, also that I got in trouble with the Vatican, as did he near the end of his life. I, more in the middle of my life.

But that's one overlap that I have with Coomaraswamy.

But just so you know something about his story:

He was born in Sri Lanka with an English mother and a Sri Lankan father. When his father died, he went to England to study geology, botany, and languages. But the first World War came along when he was in England, and he refused to sign up for it, because, specifically, England was still colonizing India and his people.

And, you know, we--most of us--have images of the English as very polite, gentle men and women, with umbrellas and all the rest. But the truth is that England was an empire back then. And they were very severe on Coomaraswamy because he refused to join the English military, because he didn't want to fight for his colonizing oppressors.

They threw him out of the country! Not that gentlemen English would throw people out of the country, but they did! And they threw him out and he landed in Boston. And that's where he spent his career, really, as a curator of Indian art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, for many years.

And as I pointed out, it's really shocking. He says to me, he was fluent in 36 languages! I mean, that just makes me stop and...pause and...admire him!

So, he's the conduit to Meister Eckhart from Hinduism. And he certainly has a lot to say, as we'll see in today's meditation, but also in the next two days as well.

So I think he's an amazing figure for his broad understanding of spirituality and art and history, and the interplay, the overlapping of cultures. And of course, that's at the basis of deep ecumenism, isn't it? That we acknowledge the beauty and the wisdom of all the world traditions, and cultures, languages, art, and religions.

And we have to get back to that kind of starting point to really prepare ourselves now, immediately, because we have only 10 years left for the big work ahead, in the context of climate change. And religion has to prove that it can provide, including the vision, the courage, the sense of the sacredness of the earth and other creatures, not just the humans, and, of course, the sacredness of the humans.

All this we want to preserve in the next 10 years. And it's going to take sacrifice, among other things. It's going to take creativity and technology. And certainly it's going to take the will of our nations--to put survival ahead of all of our ideologies of nationhood, and everything that compels us, apparently, to go to war, to bring that reptilian brain out. We have to tap more fully into our mammal brains in our capacity for compassion and caring, and thinking about future generations--those who are to come. And not just the future generations of humans, the future generations of all these marvelous beings with which we share the planet.

So this is the path of deep ecumenism in a time of climate change crisis. We're all facing our extinction together after all.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.