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Leadership and Technology of Organizing: The Sangha, University, and State

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Overview

Past and present of India have been defined by intensive and extensive interchanges with its near and distant neighbors. Novelty of ideas, in leadership, organizing and management of state and society, scholarship and education, was facilitated by its open windows to ideas and doors to people from all parts of the world, without aggression against others. Mandela’s leadership to unify South Africa, Buddha’s technological innovation of creating Sangha as a corporation—a new kind of perpetual entity, Kautilya’s principles of organizing and managing state and society, great universities such as Takshila and Nalanda that functioned as seats of learning over 1,800 years, and the welcome mat for persecuted refugees from many parts of the world since time immemorial are example of this unique culture and its influence. It is important to separate history from myths because in society, as in biology, convergent evolution often leads to similar but independently arrived at phenomena. Perspective on world as a single community is the underlying principle of globalization.

Leadership

The story of Nelson Mandela is widely known. Under the apartheid regime in South Africa, a small white minority imposed harsh racial and ethnic oppression on majority black and colored populations of the country. Most Africans lived in utter poverty, tormented by police, attacked by their trained dogs, deprived of property, education, jobs, roads, housing or other public services. After decades long, mostly non-violent struggle and resistance, combined with international

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pressure, the apartheid regime was forced to release Mandela from 28 years of solitary
imprisonment in 1990; his crime was to lead the movement for independence and democracy.

When Mandela was elected the president of South Africa in 1994 in which its heretofore
disenfranchised majority voted for the first time, the white minority expected, not surprisingly,
that their lands and other exclusive privileges including monopoly of political, economic, police
and military powers will be taken away by new regime. With the help of supporters who had
served and trained in police and armed forces, many of them organized armed militias to resist,
oppose, threaten, and create chaos by acts of terror.

Out of the jail, Mandela had the responsibility for governing a large country with extreme
inequalities, pervasive hostilities, unfulfilled hopes of the deprived and impoverished majority
and apprehension of the privileged and educated whites who controlled almost all the land and
other resources; the country was at the verge of a civil war—a ticking time bomb ready to
explode.

Mandela realized that he needed to build trust and get cooperation of everyone to reduce fear
and tensions and start rebuilding a broken society. Many blacks, including his suffering and
impoverished support base, favored at least stripping the whites of their accumulated property
and privileges. Many wanted revenge for generations of injustices and killings. Yet, most
educated human capital and skills were in the white community whose cooperation was
essential to rebuild the society. How could he bring his country back from this precipice, and
generate trust to create a democratic society? He found a startlingly novel solution to this
impossible predicament.

He knew that to build a future for South Africa, he had to work with his Afrikaner captors and
tormentors, and to do that, he had to understand them. In normal life, positive aspects of
interaction between whites and blacks in South Africa were limited to master-servant
relationships; other interactions were far worse. Mandela had not wasted his years in jail; he
taught himself the Afrikaans language and befriended some of the prison guards to learn and
understand their beliefs, attitudes and thoughts. The understanding he worked so hard to gain
during years of incarceration served him well when he was released in 1990 and elected president in 1994.

During the last years of the Apartheid era, South Africa had been banned from international competition in most sports. Mandela knew that the Afrikaners passionately loved the game of rugby, and the all-white South African national team Springboks. Unfortunately, the Springboks were also the ultimate symbol of apartheid and black oppression, and hated by blacks, who cheered when they lost to foreign teams and when they were excluded from international competition. The boycott was frustrating for the Springboks and deeply resented by the Afrikaner population.

With little money or access to credit, a largely uneducated workforce, no tradition of democratic history, institutions, or trust among the population, Mandela had been dealt a cruel hand. He managed to arrange the 1995 Rugby World Cup tournament to be held in South Africa — astonishing the white Afrikaners who had seen him as the enemy — persuading the incredulous black community that he was not selling out. Against all odds, he convinced the whole country of South Africa that it needed to stand behind this team as one — a team which was the ultimate symbol of apartheid and had never allowed a black player in an overwhelmingly black country to play. The team had had no black fans.

Also, he personally adopted the team and visited their practice sessions wearing a Springbok cap and jersey. Neither the blacks nor the Afrikaners, not even the members of the team, could believe their eyes.

After years of the international boycott, the Springbok team was hardly fit for World Cup competition. Yet, with the whole country exhorted by Mandela cheering for them, the Springboks not only reached the finals, they even beat the favorite All Blacks team of New Zealand to win the Rugby World Cup. The whole country—whites and blacks—celebrated and became one country behind one team under impossible circumstances for the first time in their history.
How Mandela transformed and united a tense and polarized society full of hopes, fear and revenge, at the verge of violent civil war to begin to accept one another, using thought, understanding, foresight, and wisdom is a unique example of leadership. John Carlin’s book, Playing the Enemy, and a Morgan Freeman film, Invictus, are sources of inspiration on how to think originally and creatively to find novel solutions to difficult challenges. The original footage of these inspiring events is available in a documentary film, The 16th Man. I hardly need mention that Mandela was an original thinker, and a century earlier, Mahatma Gandhi had practiced and perfected his struggle against injustice with civil disobedience, ahimsa and love on the soil of South Africa before returning to India. Mandela and Gandhi led, not by following the passions of the crowds, or hating or dehumanizing their enemies, but by thinking of new ways of dealing with problems, and persuading others to do the right thing.

Organizing and Managing

Organizing individuals beyond small groups in larger networks of bilateral and multilateral expectations, contracts, exchanges, and relationships, and managing them as social structures over sustained periods of time, has been the essence of human civilization over some five or six millennia. Let us consider two such organizers from Indian history, Gautama Buddha who organized the Sangha in the sixth century BCE and Kautilya who organized the Mauryan state in the third century BCE. These foundations were so sound that they form the basis of organizations we see all around us in our time. After identifying the principles they formulated and implemented, we shall look at examples of a unique kind of organization that arose in India’s ancient past – the university, or a place of learning and scholarship of all subjects for all people. This organizational form was destroyed in India, reinvented and flourished in Europe and the US in the recent millennium, and is being redeveloped again in India.

Gautama Buddha

Buddha created the organizational structure of Sangha to create long-lasting organizational technology that enabled them to grow well beyond small group of monks, nuns and initiates gathered around individual teachers. Most such groups did not survive for more than a few generations, but the organizational structure of Sangha has lasted for twenty-five centuries. Let
me mention a few things in my limited knowledge from lectures of Prof. Shailendra Mehta, and four volumes of the collected essays of Prof. Gregory Schopen who has conducted extensive studies of *Mulasarvastivada-Vinaya* and other original works on the subject.

Three of Buddha’s four great creations are well-known to the world: religion (way to get rid of life’s suffering), philosophy (*pratityasamutpada*—analysis of causality and system thinking), and meditation (*Vipasana*); his fourth contribution to the world was the constitution and creation of a unique new form of organization -- the *Sangha*. He created *Sangha* as a perpetual corporate entity with a distinct identity of its own; its individual members come and go, but the *Sangha*, being perpetual, continues to this day over 25 centuries. This radical innovation of a perpetual entity whose participants themselves are transient is the essence of the concept of corporation.

Over the past four centuries, we have come increasingly to think of corporate entities as routine, and many believe it was a European innovation with the creation of British East India Company, the Dutch Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC), and other trading companies founded in Europe. There is clear evidence that Buddha created the *Sangha* as a perpetual corporate entity in spiritual domain just as *shrenis* (similar to trade and craft guilds in medieval Europe a couple of thousand years later) existed in the commercial and trading communities. There is extensive evidence of economic and financial support to the *Sangha* from the *shrenis*.

Siddhartha was born a prince, and was educated and trained to rule a kingdom until he gave it up at 29. He was well versed in military, political, economic, and social environment of his time, and used his knowledge of managing the kingdom and its organizations to invent the new technology of *Sangha* as the first corporation. Within his lifetime, he set the goals, organizational structure, rules, and values that have sustained his organizational technology to this day.

Buddha set democratic rules for functioning of monasteries by majority vote. Minority was not forced to accept the decisions of the majority; schism was not only permitted but encouraged, and any five persons were free to form a *sangha* of their own. The monasteries were open to all irrespective of their background and origin (caturdissi), were egalitarian, and there are many

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examples of monks from foreign lands elected as the heads. Most importantly, Buddha himself did not nominate a successor and left that decision to the Sangha. I am not a scholar of this history, but Schopen (1997, 2004, 2005, 2014) and Mehta’s (2016, 2019) work, especially from Mulasarvastivada Vinaya, have helped me learn what little I know.

Mulasarvastivada Vinaya (8,000 pages, 4,000) folios is a little-known masterpiece of world literature. The original Sanskrit manuscripts were lost when Indian universities were burned, but fortunately, some of its parts in Tibetan and Chinese translations have survived (although they remain to be translated). Buddha permitted creation of akshaynidhi (a-kshaya-nidhi, non-depleting fund or endowment) from donations from citizens and shrenis for support of the Sangha. In order to be sustained as self-perpetuating corporations, monasteries had provisions for documentation, loans, collateral, written contracts, dated, witness, notary, and guarantor for twice the amount. Twenty-five centuries later, in his history of charitable trusts, Zolman (1984) wrote: “Charitable impulse is not known amongst people who are non-Christian.

Kautilya and Arthasastra

Arthasastra is a Fourth-Third century BCE Sanskrit treatise on statecraft, economics and management. Its first English translation by Pundit Shamasasya (1915) is available online: (http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00litlinks/kautilya/index.html). This work had been lost for many centuries and, until its recovery a century ago, it was known only by the citations and quotations in other books.

Fortunately, in 1911, someone left a copy of the manuscript in Grantha script (a variation of Tamil script) in the Royal Library of the State of Mysore in India, and Pundit Shamasasya prepared the first English translation. Of course, today many other English translations are available: Kangle’s three volumes of translation and interpretive essays (1960-65) are considered the definitive English version. Three chapters of Arthasastra define and discuss business, accounting, auditing concepts and practices. As the mentor of Chandragupta Maurya, Kautilya shared great insights into management of organizations including the state.

Let us touch briefly on Kautilya’s thought on organization of state. For example, the agency theory, often said to be a major contribution of the twentieth century managerial economics, is
given in *Ardhasastra* (2.9.33) in this simple and clear example: “Just as it is difficult to know if a fish swimming in water is also drinking it, it is difficult to detect if officers appointed for carrying out works steal the king’s wealth.” In a single sentence, Kautilya expressed the essence of what has come to be known as “agency theory” centuries later. And he expressed this fundamental problem of managing an organization in a way that everybody can understand immediately, without further explanation.

For managing the affairs of state, Kautilya’s instructions to the ruler are explicit and could have been written today: For example:

- Deliver stability and order so commerce, trade and industry can flourish; protect population from anti-social elements and natural disasters; ensure their welfare, well-being, and material prosperity.
- Good intentions and virtue of a noble king are insufficient to preserve, sustain or enhance the state or to improve the lives and livelihoods of the people.
- Material well-being dominates because the spiritual good and sensual pleasures depend on it.
- It is the responsibility of the ruler to safeguard and increase the size of the treasury.
- Ensuring that treasury resources are adequate, safe and available requires clear exposition of concepts and principles of accounting and control. Sufficient and reliable treasury is crucial for kingdom’s success.
- Hence the need for planning and budgeting, accounting principles and rules, integrity of civil servants reinforced by penalties and incentives.

Some examples of Kautilya’s advice on economic management and regulation of the state:

- Investment of capital is required to increase productivity and generate resources for growth and prosperity of the realm.
- Director of the Marketplace (like US Federal Trade Commission and Consumer Products Safety Commission) must:
  - Protect the consumers from irresponsible traders.
  - Inspect weights and measures.
• Prevent stolen goods from being sold as second-hand goods.
• Sample goods to ensure quality and mislabeling.
• Prevent sales of adulterated foods and medicines.
• Prevent collusion among traders to raise prices through artificial scarcity.
• Ensures that the goods are sold at fixed prices and the profit margin of the merchants does not exceed 5% of the full cost (price level or margin maintenance is unclear).

Balance the interests of the traders by providing exemptions and assistance when the goods are damaged by unforeseeable circumstances.

Among other things, *Arthasastra* makes provision for accrual accounting, auditing, separation of management and control, good financial reporting, and rewards to and protection of whistleblowers who report on wrong doing by servants of the state. Finally, I should mention the scientific spirit that pervades *Arthasastra*, labeling the regard for the other world, and fondness for auspicious days and constellations as a human flaw: “The objective slips away from the foolish person who continually consults the stars before deciding what to do.” (9.4.26).
Universities

India has had extensive and intensive interchange of thoughts and people with the rest of the world over many millennia. Buddha’s creation of corporate technology in the form of Sangha encourage and enabled the gurukula tradition (in which pupils lived with and learned from their teacher) to grow and flourish into large universities where subjects covering all knowledge—religious and secular—were taught by the faculty. Seven great universities, starting with Taxila (originating in pre-Buddhist era in modern day Pakistan near the capital city of Islamabad), Nalanda (near Rajgir in Bihar), Vikramshila (near Bhagalpur in Bihar), Udantpuri (near Nalanda), Vallabhi (near modern day Bhavnagar in Gujarat), Jagaddala and Sompura (both in Bangladesh).

Why were most of these universities predominantly Buddhist? Though most of them also covered Hindu and Jain philosophies, Buddha created the organizational structure of Sangha to create long-lasting organizational technology that enabled them to grow well beyond the traditional gurukula traditions to be large true universities covering all known knowledge of the time including religious and secular domains. Let me mention a few things I have learned from studies of Prof. Shailendra Mehta and books of Prof. Gregory Schopen.

- Universities were interconnected, with intensive exchanges and competition among them and internationally, with respect to ideas, people, and debates (Mehta 2016). Great institutions of learning cannot exist in isolation.
- Academic freedom and free speech was a foundation principle of these universities. The classical dialogs of King Minandross of Bectria and Buddhist monk Nagasena are legendary examples (Pesala 2001).
- According to Mehta (2019), archeological evidence suggests that foundations of Takshila go back to 8th c. BCE to pre-Buddhist times.
## Remains of Ancient University Campuses

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<tr>
<th>Taxila (near Islamabad, Pakistan)</th>
<th>Nalanda (near Rajgir, Bihar)</th>
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<td><img src="image1.jpg" alt="Taxila" /></td>
<td><img src="image2.jpg" alt="Nalanda" /></td>
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<th>Vikramshila (near Bhagalpur, Bihar)</th>
<th>Jagaddala (near Paharpur, Bangladesh)</th>
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<td><img src="image3.jpg" alt="Vikramshila" /></td>
<td><img src="image4.jpg" alt="Jagaddala" /></td>
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- University at Nalanda had an endowment, admissions tests administered to applicants at each of its six entrances by a professor, and Indian as well as international faculty.

- Mehta (2019) suggests that Dr. B. R. Ambedkar may have used his Pali knowledge and scholarship to use *Sangha* as a model to shape India’s constitution.

- For some 1,800 years, Mehta (2016) suggests that Indian universities innovated in at least sixteen aspects (study of all subjects, residential, global, peer review, case-based reasoning, financial aid, public funding, endowments, certification, library, admission
standards, competition, academic freedom, corporate form, women’s education and centralized administration).

- Mehta (2016) is also careful to list the innovations introduced by European (scientific method, research focus, and learned societies and journals) and U.S. (unitary control, alumni governance, and rights to inventions under Bayh-Dole Act) universities during most of the past millennium.

History shows that in 1193 CE Bakhtiayar Khilji destroyed Nalanda University and burned its libraries which are said to have some 9 million manuscripts in its collections after more than seven centuries. Most other Indian universities were also attacked and destroyed during this period. Universities were known for their scholarship, debates, and education, but the state in which they were embedded apparently had not provided for defence against violent forces hostile to the very idea of open discussion among people with diverse perspectives to resolve their differences.

**Huen Tsang (Xuan Zhang) In India**

One of the best-known scholars and writers to visit India was Chinese monk Huen Tsang (602-664 CE) who traveled to and from India (629-645 CE) via the hazardous and long Silk Road through central Asia to collect and translate Buddhist texts. After spending many years traveling to just about all parts of India, he returned to China with more than six hundred manuscripts. His travelogue (*The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions*) is an important source of historical first hand information about India. A semi-fictional account of this famous journey is the well-known Chinese classic *The Journey to the West*. He spent two years at Nalanda to study Sanskrit, logic, grammar, and *Yogacara* Buddhism under master Silabhadra. He also visited Vikramshila and scores of other cities and Buddhist sites before another perilous land journey to return to China with manuscripts, statues, and Buddhist relics. His return was celebrated, and honored by the Tang emperor, but he chose to remain a monk all his life.
On a personal note, in August 2019 during a visit to Taiwan, I traveled to a popular tourist destination—the Sun Moon Lake in Nantou county in central Taiwan. After a boat ride in the lake, we came upon a surprise: a beautiful Buddhist temple that turned out to have been built in 1965 to house the relics (skull) and manuscripts of Huen Tsang. The two photographs below show a map of the itinerary of his travels on walls of the temple, and the temple itself.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Huen Tsang (Xuan Zhang) Travels In India (629-645 C.E.)</th>
<th>Temple of Huen Tsang (Taiwan)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Itinerary (China, Central Asia, India)</td>
<td>(Photographs by the author)</td>
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Do Your Duty

“Karmanye Vadhikaraste Ma Phaleshu Kodachana”

Bhagwat Gita (2.47)

I would like to share a story that I witnessed personally, and summarizes what I have learned during these years about teaching and scholarship. After receiving my PhD from Carnegie Mellon University, I joined the University of Chicago faculty in 1973. In 1974 the University started the tradition of an annual lecture by a distinguished member of its own faculty to the campus named Ryerson Lecture after the Chairman of the Board of Trustees. In 1975, Professor S. Chandrasekhar, the renowned astrophysicist, was asked to deliver the Ryerson Lecture and he chose to spoke on “Shakespeare, Newton and Beethoven.” (https://www.parrikar.org/essays/shakespeare-newton-beethoven/). There was so much of great value in that lecture, but I shall mention only one.

In introducing Prof. Chandrasekhar, the University President John Wilson mentioned how difficult it is to run the university under tight budget constraints, especially during the difficult years of the Second World War. Being an astronomer and astrophysicist, he spent most of his time at the University of Chicago’s Yerkes Observatory which was located 100 miles away from the city of Chicago (in order to shield its telescopes from the city lights). Wilson said that every week, Chandrasekhar drove 100 miles to and from the campus to meet a class of two students for the whole semester. How many deans and department heads would permit that today? But the value and meaning of this tapasya became clear a few years later in 1957 when the Nobel Prize for Physics was announced. The prize went to the whole class? Here are the two students—Lee and Yang--from the Republic of China who won the prize, even before their teacher’s early work (on structure and evolution of stars) was recognized with a Nobel Prize in 1983. For many decades, Prof. Chandrasekhar did what he thought was the right thing to do.
Open Doors (Padharo Mhare Des or Welcome to my country/home)

A Unique feature of Indian culture is the welcome it has accorded to persecuted minorities and refugees who fled to India throughout history. These minorities have been allowed to live in peace without persecution or pressure to convert to the majority faith of their surrounding community. Many groups of Jews came to India from the Middle East and Europe starting as far back as 592 BCE according to some accounts. Christians, Apostle St. Thomas, and according to some accounts, Christ himself came to India. With the 7th century CE destruction of Zoroastrian empire in Iran by Islamic forces, the Parsees also fled to India and have lived there since. Prophet Mohammad’s own family is said to have fled to India to seek shelter with the ruler of Sindh. In the recent decades, refugees from Tibet, East Africa, Sri Lanka, and erstwhile East Pakistan sought refuge in India.

Perhaps not so well-known is the story of Cleopatra and Julius Ceasar’s young son Ceasarion. Why would Cleopatra, the last pharaoh of Egypt, send her only son to find shelter in India? After Julius Ceasar’s assassination, his successor Octavian (who later became emperor Augustus Ceasar), defeated Mark Antony, and Cleopetra feared for the life of her 17-year old son
Ceasarion. When Octavian’s Roman army invaded Alexandria, Cleopetra sent Ceasarion south to Ethiopia where her ships stood by on the Red Sea to take the young man to India to escape Octavian. The young Caesarion was accompanied by his tutor – Rhodon and a select crew of Rhodian sailors. Far from reaching distant India, Caesarion did not even reach Ethiopia where the ships waited. His tutor Rhodon betrayed him, and in the hope of earning a reward from Octavian, hatched a plan to hand him over to the Romans. Rhodon and the crew had Caesarion agree to change the plans and go to Pelusium instead to rent a ship and sail to friendly Media. Caesarion agreed, and on reaching Pelusium, Rhodon handed him over to Octavian’s army. On August 29th, 30 BCE the son of Caesar and Cleopatra was strangled in the Alexandrian prison on the orders of Octavian. Makes one wonder about why the emperor of a great civilization thought that far away India that she had never visited would be a safe refuge for her only son.

Separating Facts from Myths

During millennia’s long history, between India and the world, it is important to separate facts from myths and presumptions because, in societies as in biology, independent but convergent evolution of similar ideas and institutional forms often arises.
Indian and Egyptian civilizations worshipped many of the same gods: sun, cow, snake, river (Ganga vs. Nile), *ardhanareeshwar* (half man-half woman), but may have done so quite independently.

Explanation of cow worship (Hathor) in Egypt (no anger, even when angry, does not fight, gives everything—milk, calves, dung, meat, skin, horns, etc.—to man.

**Convergent Evolution: Egyptian and Indic Gods** (Photographs by the author)

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<tr>
<th>Egyptian Pharaoh under Protection of Cow Goddess Hathor</th>
<th>Snake God</th>
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<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Egyptian Pharaoh" /></td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Snake God" /></td>
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<th>River Nile God (Half Man, Half Woman)</th>
<th>Monkey Gods (Thoth, A’ani, Baba)</th>
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<td><img src="image3.png" alt="River Nile God" /></td>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Monkey Gods" /></td>
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Without compassion, there can be no mutual trust, faith, loyalty or close relationship in a human society. It amounts to putting ourselves in the position of others and sharing their feelings. Nelson Mandela learned the Afrikaner language during his 27 years in jail to understand and to empathize with his tormentors. He learned how they felt about rugby and the Springbok national team of South Africa. He gave them the unimaginable gift of bringing the 1995 Rugby World Cup to South Africa, supporting the team, wearing its colors, and persuading the alienated majority to accept the team. His act of compassion was understood, and even reciprocated by the white community, and saved the country from impending conflict and disaster.

Trying to understand others’ point of view, empathizing with and understanding others is a major theme in all religious traditions of the world (Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam). It often appears in the form of the Golden Rule: Do unto others what you would have them do unto you.”

- In Sanskrit Ekadashi Tattvam: daya is treating a stranger, a relative, a friend and a foe as one's own self; seeing everyone's suffering as one's own.
- Compassion for all life, human and non-human, is central to the Jain tradition.
- Mencius: “Moral cultivation as developing the initial impulse of compassion into an enduring quality of benevolence.”
- Dalai Lama: "If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.”
- Rabbi Hillel the Elder: "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah.”
- Christianity challenges us to forsake our own desires and to act compassionately towards others, particularly those in need or distress.
- Islam: “Allah the Compassionate, the Merciful” to its believers.

The spirit of universality is captured in a simple Sanskrit phrase written about 2,500 years ago: *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (*Maha Upanishad* Chap. 6). It translates approximately to “The entire earth is one family.” How broadly we interpret “earth” is up to us: All the people we know, or
all the people who are alive now? Or all the people who live now and will come in the future? Or all living beings, now and in the future? It is up to us how we interpret the phrase: we are all one family. If it is not clear sitting here on earth, it becomes blindingly clear from space looking at this picture of earth rising above the lunar horizon, and realize that all seven-plus billion of us were born and will die on that blue marble, sharing the same fate. No wonder, this photograph of earth taken from space gave rise to the environmental movement and a new perspective on ourselves. It may even help us all leave a better world behind us.

List of References


The Sixteenth Man. 2014. Dir. Clifford Bestall, Narrator Morgan Freeman. ESPN.