

Jayanti Kirpalani: Peace and sustainability through spirituality



by Maura Campelini ([click here for the original article in Portuguese](#))

Director of the Indian organisation Brahma Kumaris in Europe, spiritual leader and teacher for over 50 years, Jayanti Kirpalani is a pioneer in the defence of earth care from a spiritual base. For her, materialism and consumerism have moved human beings away from nature, which has passed from a sacred place in all cultures, to something to be explored. The most visible result today is the climate change caused by this lifestyle.

Jayanti was born in 1949 in India and emigrated to England with her parents in the 1950s, when she came to have education and cultural influence from the West. At the age of 19, she left the pharmacy course at the University of London and returned to India, when she began her meditation studies and moved on to the Brahma Kumaris. The organisation is a spiritual movement aimed at personal transformation and the spread of a culture of peace in the world.

A representative of the Brahma Kumaris at the United Nations (UN) since 1982 and at the annual climate conferences since 2009, Ms. Kirpalani seeks to insert spiritual principles into the discussion tables of politicians, economists, business leaders and scientists. In January 2018, she led meditation sessions at the World Economic Forum in Davos. She did the same in December at COP-24 in Katowice, Poland.

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How was your awakening to spirituality?

At the age of 19, in 1968, I decided to spend more time in India, to know more about our culture, although before that I didn't lose my contact with the country, where I went with my family to spend my vacation since we moved to England. My mother was already in contact with the Brahma Kumaris and I sought out one of their meditation centres for something that would help me make better decisions in life. I spent six months studying and pursuing my personal development. There I met the

founder of the organisation, Brahma Baba, who asked me what I wanted to say to the world. At that moment, I knew that my desire was to be a spiritual teacher and to inspire people. And that was my journey.

In January 1969, Baba passed away and it was a turning point for the organisation, when two women became the leaders. This was possible because, since the Brahma Kumaris was created in 1937, there was a clear vision that if we wanted a world of peace, we needed gender equality. That is why there has always been training of women, such as those I have participated in, to be leaders. This posture was revolutionary at the time in India and throughout the world.

Were you the first person to take the Brahma Kumaris out of India?

Yes, in 1969, I went back to London thinking about starting the organisation's activities in Europe. I spent two years making contacts with various organisations until, in 1971, a delegation from the Brahma Kumaris went there to introduce their philosophy to the Western community and we founded the first meditation centre outside India. In 1981, we were in 30 countries with our philosophy of individual and world peace. In 1986, when we coordinated activities for the UN International Year of Peace, we set up the first international office in London, of which I am the leader, to facilitate communication between countries. Today, we are in every continent.

What is the affinity between the Brahma Kumaris and the UN?

We are affiliated to the UN as a non-governmental organisation. Our purpose is peace, which is also the goal of the United Nations, so we are connected. One year before the International Year of Peace, in 1985, there was the **Live Aid Festival**, to fund the fight against hunger in Africa. We saw that people wanted to donate more than money. We wanted to ask for something more valuable and invited them to donate time, minutes to pray, meditate or have pure thoughts for peace. A school that decides to dedicate three minutes of an assembly with a thousand students to this would represent three thousand minutes of thought for peace.

The **Messenger of Peace Project** came from there. It was a simple technique to make people aware that they can do something for peace in the world. The goal was that they begin to have peaceful thoughts to experience the peace that exists in every human being and begin a journey towards peace. We reached billions of minutes for the cause in 60 different countries.

With this project, we won several recognitions from the UN and we were considered the most active non-profit organization in the cause that year. From then on, we began to develop various programs at the UN for women, the elderly, health, and sustainable development. In the last ten years, we have been connected with the theme of climate change. My visit to Brazil, this time, happened because it was the way to the annual meeting of the Climate Convention (COP-25), which would be held in Chile. With the change of location - Spain accepted the UN's invitation -, I'm going straight from here to Madrid.

Was the peace campaign continued?

The UN was interested in our work and asked us to continue with it, which resulted in the Global Cooperation for a Better World Project, which lasted from 1988 to 1991 and brought together 128 countries. In it, we asked people: What is your vision for a better world? How do you see the relationships in this world? How do you see it? What practical steps can you take to make this better world a reality?

Everyone could do whatever they wanted. For example, a family in Greece made the decision to take a room in the house to be a complaint-free zone. Shine boys from Brazil, who fought a lot with each other, decided that they would cooperate, lending their equipment, such as brushes, to each other.

Why did the Brahma Kumaris become so strongly involved in climate change?

We work with the UN to show that there is a spiritual dimension in everyone. But human consciousness has created a materialistic way of living. We became a consumerist society. Materialism and consumerism distance us from nature. Spirituality reminds us that nature is something sacred, so it is a theme so close to what we do: seeing nature as part of the system of life and not something to be explored. How do I see a forest? Like wood and dollars or like a sacred system? All cultures used to consider nature sacred, but today they exploit it.

When we cut wood manually, for our needs, it was something laborious and time consuming. A chainsaw ends up with an entire forest quickly. Then we need roads to transport the wood and also for the large number of cars. The same can be said about when we want to be fashionable and always have a new wardrobe. Consumerism means using all the resources of nature and is the great factor connected to climate change. Since 1999, at the COP-5 in Bonn, Germany, we have been addressing the theme of spirituality and climate change.

The idea is that if we bring consciousness back to spirituality and realize that our happiness does not depend on jewelry, clothes or the house we live in, we can greatly simplify our lives. We should do more to reduce, reuse and recycle, a different concept from today's society, which is to throw everything away, including relationships.

Two years ago, during the COP-23, also in Bonn, Unesco coined the theme *Change minds and not change the climate*, when it brought to light the ethical consequences of climate change. If small islands, which will be especially impacted by climate change, are submerged, many cultures will be lost. Unesco is alarmed and asking for urgent action from everyone to address these issues.

Christiana Figueres, executive secretary of the Climate Convention between 2010 and 2016, and one of the main architects of the Paris Agreement, became a close friend and, from our conversations, understood the role of religiosity in the climate issue. In 2014, she organized a meeting in New York for religious leaders in which she spoke of the need for the heart and not just the head to solve this enormous challenge (they supported the Paris Agreement).

Solving the climate crisis, however, requires practical and urgent action. How do you see this issue?

The Brahma Kumaris have already planted millions of trees at their headquarters in Mount Abu, India, a community of approximately 25,000 people. At our retreat place in Serra Negra, here in Brazil, we planted 10,000 trees to recover the riparian forests. In India, we are also the largest users of renewable energy. In 2011, we started the *India One project*, which today produces 24 hours a day of solar electricity, and our community is self-sufficient in electricity. We preach the vegetarian diet and many of our members are also vegans. We know that one kilo of animal protein uses eight times as much water and land as one kilo of vegetable protein, and cattle have a major impact on greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, a yogi's lifestyle is naturally simple. We strongly believe in changing consciousness, but also in practical lifestyle changes.

What do you consider to be your personal mission as an activist?

First of all, to develop my being and plant seeds of spirituality in the people I meet. As the challenges and problems in the world increase, my goal is for people to find inner resources to be strong. If they are willing to take one more step, they can know God and take that power directly from Him.

As you said, the problems are increasing, and today we live in a polarized world, where we see several setbacks. How to act in this scenario?

Two opposing energies are at work. One is the negative energy of anger, arrogance and greed. And this energy is bringing us down. On the other hand, there is an energy that takes us up, such as the environmental movement, young people becoming environmental activists, people interested in more holistic lifestyles in architecture, health, education. There is also greater interest in meditation and the vegetarian diet.

All of this has become visible in the last 20 years, although it started earlier. Each of us has a personal choice: do I continue with this majority and lose my life force or am I able to get out of the comfort zone and go in search of what I think is true? Although this rising energy is still in the minority, it is the energy of truth and is growing fast. I believe it will reach a critical mass point very soon because we will recognize that it is the only way we can continue.