

Canada Day: Slavery and Climate Change

According to the Better Life Index, Canada, is the third best country in the world to live in after Sweden and Norway. Canada is known for its affordability, access to education, and healthcare system.

It has a life expectancy of 83.99 years, 3.24 years higher than its neighbor to the south, the United States.

Canada outperforms the average in income, jobs, education, health, environmental quality, social connections, and life satisfaction, according to the [OECD's Better Life Index](#).

But:

CANADA—In a concerning development, Canada has slipped to 62nd place out of 67 ranked countries on the latest Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI).

With Canada's global reputation at stake, experts are demanding immediate action, including stringent emissions caps, a transparent progress report on the Emissions Reduction Plan, and climate-aligned financial regulations. As the world looks to Canada for leadership in climate politics, urgent and decisive measures are needed to address the escalating climate crisis.

Text: "The earth is the Lords and all it holds, the world and all who live in it. Who has the right to worship the Lord and to stand in His holy place? The person whose hands are clean, whose heart is pure, whose soul does not pay homage to worthless things, and who never swears to a lie." Psalm 24.

The fate of mankind, as well as religion, depends on the emergence of a new faith in the future. Armed with such a faith, we might find it possible to re-sanctify the earth. Al Gore

I want today to look at the lessons that came out of the abolition of slavery and apply them to climate change. Structural change is the

hardest kind of change to make. Ending slavery involved structural change. So does ending global warming.

Abraham Lincoln made structural changes in a world that had embraced slavery. We can apply the lessons learned from that piece of history in order to implement the structural changes necessary to deal with climate change. The challenges are remarkably similar and the reason I am addressing these changes from a pulpit is because climate change is the greatest spiritual crisis of our day.

Why spiritual?

Because when people deny the massive scientific consensus about climate change, and say that it is not happening, that is a spiritual crisis; Why? Because when we don't let the truth set us free and instead swear to a lie- that is a spiritual problem.

When we know that the burning of fossil fuels is killing us and the planet and we keep on using them and exporting them because of special interest lobbying, that is a spiritual problem of greed.

When we run an economic system that exploits the earth and its natural systems- that is a failure to nurture the earth, its animals and plants and human beings. It is a failure of connection for spirituality is always about connection and that connection is between all living things. But this connection has suffered. Witness this fact:

Every year between 18,000 and 55,000 species become extinct. That is a failure of connection and a failure to look after creation- again spiritual problems.

So, what spiritual skills are we going to need to survive climate change and eventually reverse it, if indeed that can be done at this late date?

Thinking outside the box, wherever can we look for these skills?

From the abolition of slavery we can develop expertise in the following skill sets: **Timing, Persistence, Foresight, Resilience and Hope**. All these skill sets were necessary to abolish slavery.

1) Timing

At the time of the civil war when Abraham Lincoln was President of the United States, he knew something that his followers and critics did not. That the time at the height, of the civil war, was the best most opportune time to end slavery permanently. When the war would be over slavery would likely reignite in the South. For Lincoln, now was the time to end it permanently. It was not to be a bargaining chip to end the war. It was to be non-negotiable. History proved him right.

The timing to end carbon emissions and switch out fossil fuels is definitely now. Why now? We are in increasing crisis: we are experiencing frightening weather all over the planet. Tornadoes, hurricanes, storm surges, floods, ever higher temperatures, unwanted persistent heat domes, drought, sea level rise, forest fires that are increasingly more difficult to control. Worldwide polls show that the world and the General public know that we have a problem. They are believing the scientists at last. What does this have to do with a spiritual skill set? Timing is a spiritual skill that comes from being able to set aside ego and ideology and look objectively at the facts and then act when the situation is most opportune to get results.

2) Foresight :

Lincoln could see far enough into the future that if the action was taken immediately even when the war was at its height, the future would be changed permanently. Lincoln had the gift of being able to see into the moral future. This is a prophetic spiritual skill found in many religious traditions. Prophets are seers. They see forwards beyond the mists. Foresight is a spiritual gift that can be asked for as a gift from God. To be able to see forward is not an easy gift to live with. It can be a painful burden to ask God for, but if ever we needed such a prophetic leadership, the time is now.

3) Persistence:

Persistence is a spiritual skill taught by many faiths. Jesus was big on it, particularly when it came to prayer. Islam and Buddhism endorse persistence as a virtue. It is persistence in doing good that these faiths

teach us- not to give up when the odds are against you. This is not a foolish persistence but a moral one- persistence when the Greater good is at stake.

Lincoln was a persistent man. He lost every attempt to achieve political office except one- the Presidency. When it came to getting the 13th Amendment through Congress against huge odds he persisted. He was counseled that it was political suicide for him. He went on anyway and the following words became the law; **“Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.”**

Persistence will be required if we are to go on into the night of climate change. What is coming down the pike is truly frightening as our scientists are being proved every day to be correct. The weather has become the main news all over the world. The recent heat dome is a harbinger of what is to come. Over 1,000 people have died on the Haj pilgrimage.

It will take all the persistence we have got, just to survive against the odds. But for the greater good we must persist to break our addictions and live lives that will serve the greater good of all species for the rest of time.

4) Resilience:

Resilience is a compendium of skill sets. It requires flexibility, adaptability, humility before what we don't know and have yet to understand. Resilience requires the use of imagination and creativity.

Lincoln told a story. A man had come to him and suggested that he needed to follow a moral compass and stick to his principles. Lincoln said to him that yes, a moral compass was necessary. It told the direction **but not how to get there.** There might be mountains in the way, or swamps. Was he to proceed through the swamp and get stuck in it following his compass or seek a way around the swamp?

In other words, was he to think outside the box to get where he needed to go and was that more moral than sticking to principles?

Many of us talk of sticking to principles no matter what. But that can get us stuck in the swamp of political deadlock as it has in the United States. Spiritual resilience doesn't do that. Jesus said in this regard: "Be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves."

If a pragmatic move, rather than an idealistic move would win the day, is that allowable?

In the film Lincoln, on the floor of Congress, one congressman attempted to trap another into saying that all are equal and therefore the negro question would open up unacceptable alternatives such as voting or even the enfranchisement of women. The Congressman replied that all are not in fact morally equal or equally gifted. Some people are in fact morally despicable and some not very intelligent, but even the morally despicable and mentally challenged, like his opponent on the floor, had a right to equal treatment before the law.

The issue of climate change inaction has been around the world's political process for far too long. But it has not been for want of trying to address climate issues, When Governments are frozen in place the spiritual skill is to recognize the swamp and go around it for the greater good. We will need to do this in a thousand ways whenever Governments follow an ideological compass into the swamp. In Canada, let's not go there with them! The world needs our leadership.

5) Hope:

The last spiritual skill I want to lift up today is the decision of staying hopeful, no matter what. You say Hope is a decision? I thought it was something you had or not- some kind of a feeling that could come and go?

Not so for Lincoln! Hope for him was the creation of a united nation. When half the country wanted to split the union up, Lincoln would have none of it. Lincoln held firm to the hope of Union.

This what he said about that hope and it is memorable. “My dream is of a place and a time where America will once again be seen as the last best hope of earth.”

Where does the hope for climate action lie! **Politically it is found where policy follows the science.**

According to climate science, fossil fuels are no longer in the National Interest. We need to sunset fossil fuels yesterday.

For far too long we in Canada and America have dragged our collective feet on climate change and to our peril. Being 62nd in the world in terms of ranking for action on climate change is nothing to boast about.

In North America we still consume and burn more fossil fuels than any other countries, with China and India racing to catch us up. Third world governments use our bad example to prevent any serious reform of practices that foster climate change, saying that this is the way the Developed world has come and they must follow until they catch up. Then they will change! What does science say? That will be too late.

So where is the hope? It is in our dedicated climate scientists. It is in the solar collectors, the electric cars, the recycle programs, fair trade organics. It is in switching out of fossil fuels into things like hydrogen. It is in awareness groups across the world who act as the conscience of the planet. It is in little church services all over the world for congregations who are aware and teach that awareness. It is planting trees and making individual sacrifices to maintain the hope going forward.

Here is some more hope:

If Western Nations were to move in an earth friendly direction, if we were anxious to get out of the swamp we have created, we would lead climate change initiatives. We have the brains, the skill sets, the research models, the climate computers and the wealth. All we lack is the moral courage and the political will. But you say that is huge!

Yes it is! But some world leaders get it.

The Dalai Lama says this :

Instead of an economy that emphasizes profit and requires perpetual growth to avoid collapse, we need to move together

towards an economy that provides a satisfactory standard of living for everyone while allowing us to develop our full (including spiritual) potential in harmony with the biosphere that sustains and nurtures all beings, including future generations.

He says; If political leaders are unable to recognize the urgency of our global crisis, or are unwilling to put the long term good of humankind above the short term benefit of fossil fuel corporations, we may need to challenge them with sustained campaigns of citizen action.

I believe that this is starting to happen across the world. But we must also be aware that to every reaction there is an equal and opposite reaction. That is why right-wing parties who don't care about climate change and instead want to drill for more oil are in the ascendancy. If the truth that will set us free is to follow the science, then the folks who resist that, for whatever reason, will have to swear to a lie.

Disinformation and lies will be their weapons and we must recognize that and counter those campaigns with the truth and fact checking. We must depoliticize something as important as climate change. All political parties must be humble enough to follow the science and cooperate together if we are to survive as a species and keep the earth as a home to all living things.

But how much better it would be if we did not have to do this at all! How much better would it be if science and religions and governments got together and got down to work for the greater good? How much better it would be if we depoliticized the issues and cooperated with each other all across the planet for the greater good? I believe we can do this. Under the Secretary General's leadership of the United Nations that is what the UN is trying to be about. He says:

"Climate finance is not a favour; it is a fundamental element to a liveable future for all."

He says: People around the world are "far ahead of the politicians".

"Make your voices heard and your choices count," he implored, adding that no one country or institution can solve the climate crisis on its own.

“This is an all-in moment. The United Nations is all in, working to build trust, find solutions and inspire the cooperation our world so desperately needs,” said the Secretary-General.

He thanked the climate activists at all levels of society who have pushed for action so far.

“You are on the right side of history. You speak for the majority. Keep it up; don’t lose courage, don’t lose hope.”

The slave trade was global at one point, not just a phenomenon in America. But it was ended with timing, foresight, persistence, resilience and hope.

As we learned in Western History, the American people and its Congress and the English people under William Wilberforce could become formidable forces for good. Canada did well as a refuge for slaves as the terminal for the underground railway! Canada could become the world’s environmental leader. The position is vacant at present...Certainly we don’t belong in 62nd place!

Those who worked to end slavery did so against formidable odds. Ending slavery was fraught with the lobbying of special interests which is still the major problem with the ending of fossil fuel use. It was not easy to do that.

Neither will it be easy to put the long term good above the short-term benefit of the powerful few, who make money as they wreck the earth.

But if we are able to do this, then we will live closer to the incredible ideals of our faith. For many in power in the world have chosen to forget something absolutely major. The earth does not belong to us at all. It belongs to a Great Someone else? Who might that be?

Scripture says:

The earth is the Lords and all it holds, the world and all who live in it. Who has the right to worship the Lord and to stand in His holy place? The person whose hands are clean, whose heart is pure, whose soul does not pay homage to worthless things, and who never swears to a lie.

Those who save the planet will have clean hands, pure hearts and they will have given up worthless things. They will be committed to always speak the truth that sets us free.

We must save planet earth as a home for all creatures for the rest of time. That is the hope for our children's children.

And under God we can do this. But as Secretary General Guterres says we must be all in!

Thanks be to God the Creator and sustainer of the universe and all that is.

Amen.