

Flow

MINNI JAIN

co-authored with Rajendra Singh & Philip Franses



**WHEN THE FLOW OF WATER STOPS, THE FLOW OF LIFE STOPS
WHEN THE FLOW OF WATER STARTS, THE FLOW OF LIFE STARTS**

Flow is present in all things – animate and inanimate. It is present in all processes. Animate and inanimate. The two interconnected flows that will be explored here are – **individual flow** and **universal flow**. There is an ongoing, ever present flow which is peculiar to each individual that keeps them moving onward. There is an ongoing, ever present, universal flow that enables all life to always be moving forward. These two flows are interconnected, enabling each other, moving in tandem with the evolutionary cycle. It is when these two flows get entangled and stuck, the harmony in life and its systems starts grinding to a painful crawl. We then begin to see resultant problems as we are witnessing today, in the break-down of social systems coinciding with the moral turpitude of human beings and this feeling of being lost with no inner direction.

When we speak of flow, it feels important to realize that it is not something separate from ordinary experience. There is not some special world of flowing energy into which we withdraw until we are forced to come back out into the clunky and lumpy world of the everyday. Nor is it the same withdrawal into something for a system. Flow is what happens continuously in the background, self regulating and ever vanishing and ever creating. In that sense, it is the same for the individual and for the universal.

Water

The analogy with water here is very clear. Water was the fluid in which all life began. Water plays the supremely important role of being present in all life and keeping it alive and pure (individual flow). And water itself has the ability to remain pure in its constantly moving state, bumping over rocks and outcrops, eddying in pools and moving on again (universal flow). Without this flow of water there would be no life as we know it – just take a look at the planet Mars or indeed any of the other planets on which man is so desperate to find life but till now hasn't succeeded. They have found evidence of frozen water being there a few billion years ago but no liquid there any more. And no form of life there either. Is it a coincidence that the only planet in the universe with life on it (at least till now), is the only planet that has liquid flowing water in it?

The stethoscope of modern thinking has pronounced many traditional rural cultures and self-sufficient societies as backward, obsolete and incapable of sustaining themselves without comprehending or admitting to the causes of disruption and destabilization of the independent self-sustaining rural societies.

Yet, in many parts of the world examples of sustainable management systems can be found in only such rural communities. In India, small water reservoirs in the desert areas were part of a complex inter-linking natural resource management system. It is based on this knowledge of natural resource management that all civil society movements for water harvesting in India are being built up and restoring the flow of balance between man and nature.

This systematic process of conservation, beginning with recharging of groundwater by percolation tanks, protecting the scant vegetation and allowing it to regenerate shows people's understanding of flow and their very own model of development based on that understanding.

In these civil water harvesting movements, there is the creation of a deeper understanding and restoration of flow that is required for all life to maintain the balance between man and nature. Without this flow and balance, all life will eventually come to a halt.

The world economy today is like a river run dry. Pour in money, any amount of it, and it still disappears into the cracks leaving the land ever more parched & dry. Where is the flow that nourishes and gives every creature life?

The whole system has started to collapse and – collapse spectacularly! The flow of money from the producers to the consumers and vice versa is drying up, and money has become this dark behemoth going round and around in an ever decreasing small pool which receives no replenishment or movement to keep it fresh and alive...

Restoring Flow

The stream has an impressive ability to adapt, to change the configurations, to let power shift, to create new structures. But behind it this adaptability, making it all happen, is the water's need to flow.

Margaret Wheatley “Leadership and the New Science”

Yet flow can be restored. With suitable intervention at the right points, any system can regenerate and start flowing again. A case in point is the work of the villages in Alwar, Rajasthan, India that has been instrumental in reviving seven dried up river systems in that area. They have shown focussed action, leading to clear results instead of only talk and fantastic theories about flow.

The individuals of those villages got together and by understanding that collective flow was required, they created a series of interventions which then plugged into the universal flow and allowed man and nature to work together to restore the balance of the area they are living in. These actions were informed from age-old wisdom that was already present in their past histories and which had been forgotten at the altar of modern development.

Their recent reliance on modern systems which did not follow the principal of flow, led to aridity and desertification and the resultant loss of livelihoods and of life of that area. When they understood the principle of flow, they were able to tap into the wisdom of the past and work in the present with a vast number of complex systems to restore that flow which gave their lives back to them. Lives that are individually flowing as well as flowing in tandem with the universal flow.

In understanding and working together with flow in the real systems of water in Nature, we can allow that learning to help us re-adjust and make healthy all the various systems of our lives, be they economic, spiritual, environmental, financial or all others. Man-made systems per se, work to man's advantage only when they can use this understanding of the natural principal of flow to re-define the health of their systems. This will help restore some of the urgently needed balance in the world today.

How can we bridge the current contradiction between man-made economy and natural economy? Greed destroys. How can we be rid of greed?

How can we revive the flow between Health, Economy and Nature?

Flow comes with:

- *Community initiated regeneration*
- *Traditional wisdom informing present day action.*
- *Rejuvenation of the balance between man-made economy and the natural economy*
- *Bridging the wisdom of the East and the West to re-create a global flow*

A story

On 2nd October 1985 (birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi), four youths left Delhi for the villages in arid Rajasthan with a mission to move the people out of their feeling of helplessness in the face of the ravages of nature and an indifferent administration.

These four youths included Rajendra Singh. Inspired by the Gandhian model of rural-development they started a school for children but soon got very depressed seeing no response from the villagers. Three of the others left thinking nothing could be done. However, Rajendra was not willing to give up. Seeing the others leave and Rajendra so despondent, a wise old man of the village consoled him by saying “...you have not understood what is needed here. We want WATER first. You need to build a Johad (traditional rainwater structure) so that the water does not run away but is held back to percolate into the ground...”

The real problems in the world are all about flow – or the lack of it.

He started building a Johad (rainwater harvesting traditional structure) single-handedly until other villagers stopped finding him amusing and joined forces with him. Once the first small Johads were ready, the villagers saw water and the ecology below the river change in the very next monsoon. Water gathered in the Johads

raised the water table in the entire catchment area of the river. This in turn, enriched the forest in the same area. Forests and scrubs helped to retard the run-offs of monsoon waters. This way, in a decade, the river Arvari came to life from a dried up dead water-course. Today, the river-flow continues the year round.



(The river 40 years ago & the river today)



SEVEN dry rivers in that region were regenerated over the next few years.

The system is simple - the community contributes their labour; the NGO arranges some funding and provides support to the villagers in studying the topography and soil type, assessing the water needs of the village, preparing a labour-sharing plan based on the benefits accruing to individual households and, finally, helps in the construction and management of the johads.

The way that flow happens is when you allow the freedom of those taking part to find their own way together in coming to a solution. Flow happens when a community is trusted to merge their individual freedoms into a collective response.

In realising this flow of freedom, the following social outcomes are also apparent:

- Expansion or restoration of social and cultural values;
- Finding a balance between human and natural resource development;
- Bringing women forward in the process of decision making;
- Improvement of the level of education in the community;
- Incorporation of better health facilities for the community;
- Energising human power, especially youth power, to harness energy in value-defining rural development and ecological restoration;

The unique part of their modus operandi for development is to make the community self-reliant. This happens when you invite the community to participate at every stage of development-work for them.

Conclusion

In India, Rajendra Singh revives traditional learnings about flow recalling in communities the ancient wisdom of how the mystery of the source could be channelled through the activities of life. This opening to the understanding of life's relation to the mystery, allows that our journey too is alive with direction. The flow of understanding is brought from the high terrain of spirituality into the midst of our daily concerns through these ancient ways of honing existence to its dynamic essence.

So the east gives us another perspective on educating from the standpoint of recognising the same flow in ourselves as in all life. With its own law, prosperity, opportunity, meaning can transform our landscape. The

flow of ideas returns to the starting point, as the villagers agree that the way to revitalise their community is to hear again the old one talking.

At the centre of all these experience is the coherence of a mode of inquiry that is called the river. Perhaps now may be a good time to go back to the drawing board to examine and revive the thinking and understanding of flow that is required in all systems for modern living. How can we do that? Perhaps simply by learning from those simple villager folk whose understanding of flow has shown us spectacularly that using age old innate wisdom was the precursor to book knowledge. Traditional wisdom had that indefinable flow – which held everything together in all its dimensions and allowed life to flourish. Mere book knowledge has only one dimension, and is limited in that it can only teach us of concepts. It cannot teach us the flow between nature and humans. That can only be experienced and understood in the real.

In February, various professionals from across the world are coming together in Rajasthan, India to articulate their understanding of flow alongside the living experience of seeing the rivers that Rajendra has helped regenerate.

Discussions and themes for the days will be around freeing the flow in their own professional fields & the communities they live in. See below for further details.

References

- Agarwal, Dr GD, (1995) An Engineer's Evaluation of Water Conservation Work of Tarun Bharat Sangh in 36 Villages of Alwar District , Private Copy
 Drucker, Peter F, (1990), Managing the Non-Profit Organisation, Butterworth-Heinemann.
 S Mishra, Anupam, (2009), The Wisdom That Was, <http://www.indiawaterportal.org/node/6260>
 Salina, Irena, Flow: For Love of Water, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DlbWsWPgUx8>
 Sauder, Tim, Water: The Great Mystery, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tB-YPDirNH0>
 Wheatley, M. (2006), Leadership and the New Science Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.;
 Young, Shinzen on Flow <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtZTL5mV478>

Minni Jain was born and brought up in India, and has been living in the UK for the last 8 years. Her work includes assessing community projects in India and the UK; organising and planning international & local ecological events, initiating local food projects, helping create clean water systems as locally controlled initiatives and fostering women's empowerment from the personal and pioneering experience of breaking many social taboos that exist for women in India. minni@earthlinksall.com



Rajendra Singh is a well known water conservationist from Alwar district, Rajasthan in India. Also known as the "Waterman of India", he won the Ramon Magsaysay Award for community leadership in 2001 for his pioneering work in community-based efforts in water harvesting and water management. Using traditional wisdom, he has helped revive 7 extinct rivers in desert Rajasthan. In 2008, The Guardian named him amongst its list of "50 people who could save the planet". tarunbharatsangh.org

Philip Franses is the originator of the **Process and Pilgrimage** inquiry forum which he began in 2009. He teaches Complexity Theory and Goethean science at Schumacher College. He is also the Chief Editor of the Holistic Science Journal. Academia's dull explanation of the world inspired Philip on a counter-journey into the depths of experience, travelling and a re-sensitisation to quality. philip@schumachercollege.org





Flow Family 1st gathering ***15th – 22nd feb 2013***

At Alwar, Rajasthan, India

You are invited to join the first round of creation, exploration, and deep discussion of the **Flow Research Institute & Network**

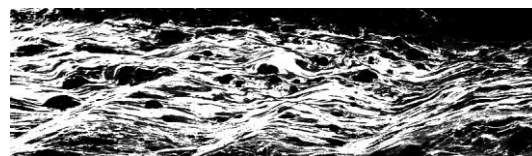
At the heart of every human being is a desire to live in harmony with their surroundings and their communities. They want a life of peace and prosperity, with challenges coming not from the harshness of the land around them but from the internal struggles towards spiritual realisation. In Alwar, India, with the work of the Tarun Bharat Sangh in reviving the flow of their extinct rivers, **these villagers have understood something crucial about the revival and meaning of flow in life. A meaning that transcends boundaries, cultures, nations, lands and which we all need to understand and revive in our own lives today.**



Come and be a part of this quiet revolution taking place in the villages of arid Rajasthan, and go back with ideas and learnings that can make the difference between lushness and aridity in your own lives.

This first gathering is being held at the ashram of Tarun Bharat Sangh in Alwar, Rajasthan, along the banks of one of the seven rivers that have been revived.

The Flow Research Institute & Network is being started with the main objective of reviving the flow between Health, Economy and Nature. How can we bridge the current contradiction between man-made economy and natural economy? Greed destroys. How can we be rid of greed?



What will this give you?



Just like with water, by making suitable interventions at the right points, any system can un-stick, regenerate and start flowing again.

This program will give you first hand experiential learning of flow with village communities in programs LED by them.

It is a unique opportunity to share, learn and gain new insights of flow from these villages and their regenerated rivers.

Cost for the week (incl. all accommodation, meals & internal transport for 7 nights and 7 days) £450

Bursaries: We are able to offer this program on a sliding scale fee, dependent on what you can afford. How much are you able to contribute towards the program fee? For those on higher incomes or with available financial resources, paying more if you can, enables others to attend who could not usually afford to come. **When contacting us please indicate how much you would like to pay.**

To book or enquire please email:

minni@earthlinksall.com journeyschool.org

Only 40 spaces! Book now to secure your place!