



Before the ice melts, the ego must: The real crisis behind COP30

FIRST
Column

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The 30th UN Climate Conference has opened in Belém. The world meets in a burning forest to discuss how to stop the fire. For decades, we have spoken of cooperation but practised postponement. Finance is sidelined, attendance is thin, and the absence of the United States, the world's second-largest emitter, is dismissed as "less disruptive than expected". Yet the Earth does not hear declarations; it registers only emissions.

The Thresholds We Have Crossed

We are well past uncertainty. The world has already crossed the 1.5 °C threshold above pre-industrial levels. Each of the past eleven years has been the hottest on record. The planet's fever mirrors our own: restless, rising, unwilling to abate.

The Global Tipping Points Report 2025 confirms the first irreversible Earth-system collapse: warm-water coral reefs, more than 80 per cent bleached since 2023, are dying, threatening nearly a billion people who depend on them. The Amazon is nearing dieback below a two-degree rise; 17 per cent has already turned to savanna, releasing more carbon than India emits in a year. The Greenland and West Antarctic ice sheets are destabilising, together capable of raising sea levels by up to five metres.

The Arctic is warming 3.5 times faster than the global average, releasing methane and fuelling record wildfires. The United States has already endured fourteen billion-dollar climate disasters this year, with losses exceeding \$100 billion. Global emissions, instead of falling 44 per cent by 2030 as pledged, have risen by 3 per cent. Even if every COP30 promise is kept, we remain on track for 2.3–2.5 °C of warming. The fever will not subside because the disease lies not in the atmosphere but in ambition.

Policy and Technology Alone Will Not Help

Governments cannot impose what voters refuse. The same person who demands climate action as a citizen demands consumption as a buyer. No political system survives long by asking its people to live with less, so nations sign accords and return home to preserve comfort. The richest five per cent of



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humanity produce most emissions, and the levels generated by the top one per cent are criminally excessive. Yet those who contribute least will suffer most. We worship technology as our saviour without examining the worshipper. Technology is the new theology. Each new gadget is a prayer for redemption without reflection. Electric vehicles may halve lifetime emissions, yet the same mind that buys a "green" SUV demands wider roads on which to drive it faster, and then buys additional green SUVs.

Yes, we need renewables and carbon removal. But technology without wisdom is surgery performed on a patient still drinking poison. The tools are innocent; the user is not. Until wisdom guides invention, cleverness will remain our curse.

The Existential Root

The deeper crisis is an artificially implanted existential sense of incompleteness. The two drivers of the climate crisis — population growth and consumption — share a single root: the illusion that consumption brings fulfilment. The richest produce most emissions; the poor almost none. A

billionaire's jet may emit more in one flight than a farmer emits in an entire lifetime, yet both, as human beings, are driven by the same restlessness to acquire and accumulate. Beyond the biological hardwiring of loneliness, social forces work constantly to make people feel incomplete so that they keep buying. Loneliness is sold as a problem and products as companions. Relationships and family become engines of commerce. We exploit the Earth for the same reason we exploit one another: because we feel hollow within. Climate change is the symptom; ignorance is the disease.

Two centuries of industry have given us immense power but not the wisdom to use it. Real sustainability begins not with technology but with wisdom. With wisdom, restraint is not even required, because excesses are not desired. A mind that knows itself needs no slogans to behave sanely. Consciousness is the ultimate regulator; when it shifts within, systems shift without.

Pledges to consume less, save the planet, or generate less waste matter only when they arise from insight. Otherwise,

one buys fewer plastics but more gadgets. The storm within rages on: the urge to upgrade and display. That same storm heats both the mind and the planet.

Self-Knowledge for Right Action

Destructive attitudes arise from flawed notions of self-identity. One feels a void within, clamouring to be filled, yet ignores it. The result is a simplistic conclusion: I must consume the world to feel fulfilled. This urge for consumption, born of an absence of self-knowledge, lies at the root of the climate catastrophe.

When one observes her thoughts and the predictable outcomes of her actions, she begins to check her tendencies. Change begins with attention. Before clicking 'buy', she pauses and asks what she seeks: the object, or a fleeting sense of fulfilment through the object.

Self-knowledge is solid action. Inner clarity can take social form. Cooperatives in Europe run solar grids owned by residents rather than corporations. Bhutan's "Gross National Happiness" demonstrates that even states can measure success using internal parameters rather than external growth.

One begins voting for policies that curb planned obsolescence, limit luxury emissions, and reward circular design. One demands that governments tax waste, not work, and that corporations disclose ecological facts rather than glossy pledges. One supports a green cess and a carbon border tax. And all this arises not from morality or ethics but from the same inner place that, if left unexamined, leads to destruction.

Can personal transformation reshape political reality? It must, because politics ultimately reflects the consciousness of the populace. When enough individuals see through manufactured desire, industries lose their grip. When consumption is recognised as compensatory behaviour, markets adapt or collapse.

Multiply inner awakening a millionfold, and industries will shift, because demand creates supply. Policy without inner change breeds resentment; introspection without public action is hypocrisy. The atmosphere will not cool while the mind burns. Humanity has always had insight, but wisdom was rarely lived by the masses. Religion became ritual rather than realisation; belief rather than understanding. The Gita calls Kama (desire) the destroyer of knowledge; the Buddha named Trishna (craving) the root of suf-

fering; Lao Tzu counselled knowing when enough is enough. Yet economies were built on stoking desire.

What went wrong? Wisdom was kept separate from commerce, confined to temples while society walked blindfolded. The crisis is not that wisdom was absent, but that it never left the books to challenge the factory floor. Forests fell while prayers rose; rivers died as shrines multiplied.

The philosopher's task does not end with meditation or publication. He must enter society and ensure that the light he has seen becomes the living light of the common man. He must be both rebel and builder: challenging the system while shaping new institutions. If he retreats, his self-absorption becomes the planet's ruin.

Reclaiming Joy and Responsibility

Be cautious of your role models. Celebrities and gurus who preach freedom while flying private jets or endorsing luxury brands are educators of desire. Cricketers marketing lifestyles obscenely high in emissions, actors presenting consumption as virtue, influencers monetising aspiration, and politicians selling deforestation as development — all profit from planetary harm. Stop funding them through your wallet, your vote, and your like button.

Demand public disclosure of celebrity carbon footprints; hold fame to the same scrutiny as factories. Concert tours that burn millions of litres of fuel and sporting events that leave mountains of plastic waste are industries disguised as entertainment.

Above all, seek deeper joy. Would you burn fuel if a book brought you joy? Seek retail therapy if music could heal you? Scroll endlessly if one conversation could move you? Watch a five-hundred-crore spectacle if a simple wisdom talk touched you more deeply? Chase distant resorts if a nearby forest could quieten you? Yearly upgrade devices if you saw that technology cannot fill an inner void? Buy status symbols if self-respect no longer needed proof? Hoard possessions if you discovered that lightness is freedom? Accept the extinction of species once you recognised consciousness in all beings?

When joy is rediscovered within, compulsive consumption loses its power. A person with self-knowledge cannot be sold dissatisfaction. The greatest cleansing force on Earth is consciousness.