

## Chapter 14

# What is a Culture of Peace and What are the Obstacles?

A culture of peace is a culture that promotes peace.<sup>1</sup> But what is peace? I have two metaphors.

The first metaphor is *health*, like ‘peace is to violence what health is to disease’. A person can be healthy, a person, a group, a state, a nation, a region, a civilization can be peaceful. A world can be peaceful, at least better than today.

But we also talk of peace between persons, groups and so on. The second metaphor is *love*. Love is the union of body, mind and spirit, or, to be more precise, the union of those unions. The miracle of sex and physical tenderness. The miracle of two minds sharing joy and suffering, *sukha* and *dukkha* as buddhists would say, resonating in harmony. And the miracle of two persons having a joint project beyond themselves including reflecting constructively on the union of body and mind, and spirit.

The body that is the economy. The mind that is the polity. And the spirit, that is the culture, particularly the deep, collectively shared, subconscious culture. I have left out the fourth source of power, the military. My concern is *peace by peaceful means*. And to all those working on ‘just war’ in these days of USA-Iraq crisis I would suggest as an exercise to explore ‘just slavery’, ‘just colonialism’, ‘just patriarchy, suppressing women’ first. Maybe the idea occurs that evils should be abolished, not justified.

Unfortunately, many institutes and universities doing peace studies are actually doing war studies, counting violent conflicts meticulously, analyzing them, sometimes looking into how they ended, the cease-fire. But one thing is a cease-fire process, sometimes with a third party stepping in, punishing them if they break the cease-fire, rewarding them if they do not, making the cease-fire pay for itself.

This may or may not be a good approach to peace, but it is not the same as a peace process. Peace, as pointed out using the love metaphor, is a positive relation between parties, of union, togetherness. The condition is mutual respect, dignity, equality, reciprocity. In all three areas, spirit, mind and body; culture, polity, economy. Let us look at all three.

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<sup>1</sup> This text was first presented at The Barcelona Forum, Barcelona 29 August 2004.

Each culture, in my experience, has some kind of gift to a world culture of peace, like the Western *equality for the law*, the Polynesian *ho'o pono pono*, the Somali *shir*, the Cheyenne *calumet*. Sometimes we have to dig to find it. And the idea of a big world parade of contributions to that world culture is excellent; even I am a little bit less convinced about the Peace Olympic games. It could be too competitive, with gold, silver and bronze medals when we need dialogue and mutual learning.

To demonstrate the point about spiritual richness permit to list what I in my little life, a tiny second in the history of world cultures, have learnt from the world religions:

*From Judaism:* that truth is not a declaration of faith but a process through dialogue with no end, like in the *Talmud*.

*From Protestant Christianity:* the Lutheran *hier stehe ich, ich kann nicht anders*, here I am, I have no alternative; the significance of individual conscience and responsibility; and equality in the face of the Creator.

*From Catholic Christianity:* the distinction between *peccato* and *peccatore*, between sin and sinners, of a stand against the sin but at the same time pardoning, forgiving the sinner.

*From Orthodox Christianity:* the optimism of Sunday Christianity as opposed to the necrophilic Friday Christianities of the other two: Christ has arisen, is among us.

*From Islam:* the truth of Sura 8:61, when the other shows an inclination toward peace that so do you; peace breeds peace. And the truth of *zakat*, of sharing with the poor.

*From Hinduism:* the trinitarian construction of the world, as Creation, Preservation and Destruction. Applied to conflict this means: pursuing creation by seeing conflict a challenge to be creative, preserving the parties, avoiding destruction.

*From Buddhism/Jainism:* nonviolence, *ahimsa* of course, but then to all life, bringing in the whole earth, not only the human part, and the earth-human interface. And as a part of this what in Japanese buddhism is known as *engi*, that everything hangs together, causation is co-dependent, no beginning, no end; nobody is totally guilty or totally innocent, we all share responsibility is reducing *dukkha*, suffering and increasing *sukha*, fulfillment, liberation for all, including ourselves.

*From Confucianism:* the principle of isomorphic harmony, harmony inside ourselves, inner peace, in the family, school at work, in society, in the country and the nation, in the region and the civilization; with all levels inspiring each other.

*From Daoism:* the principle of *yin-yang*, the good in the bad and the bad in the good, and the bad in the good in the bad and good in the bad in the good and so on; a complexity far beyond Western dualism.

*From Humanism:* the idea of *basic human needs*, to some extent reflected in the *basic human rights* as a general guide-line for human action in general and politics/economics in particular.

Recommendation: pick the best from all, don't waste time wrestling with strange, obscure, even anti-peace messages. Let nobody tell you cannot do that,

that you are not permitted to pick and choose, and not permitted to be eclectic. Drink from the world's wisdom to your heart's desire!

The major sociopolitical obstacles to a culture of peace, is, indeed, a culture of war and violence. Like in the media.

We see it on television. The minor factor is the display of unbridled violence with the victim lying in his/her own blood and the perpetrator escaping. The first major factor is the lack of display of the invisible effects of violence, the sorrow suffered by the bereaved, the trauma, the hatred, the urge for revenge and revanche; and the sense of glory in the perpetrator who got away with it. And the second major factor is the lack of display of alternative ways of handling conflict, through conflict transformation, empathy, nonviolence, creativity. No 'TV violence study' has covered all three adequately.

From interpersonal violence there is a direct link to interstate wars. There is a war journalism that systematically focuses on violence and who wins, like a soccer game, leaving out the invisible effects and the alternatives. Peace journalism starts with two questions. What is the conflict about? And what are the possible solutions? A president who has nothing better than "the conflict is between good and evil" and "the solution is to crush evil", will not survive sustained questioning. Except as sheer war propaganda, in a war culture.

But the war culture is also based on what is said; like being a *Chosen People* by the Almighty, accountable only to Him. The world order has their God on top, then the Chosen People under God (leaving no space for international law and human rights), then Chosen Allies, then the Rest, including the UN. They see themselves as exceptional, with the right, even the duty to be in breach of human rights and UN resolutions, whether the Almighty is Yahweh, God or Alla'h.

Peace can only be based on equality and equity. A structure with basic inequality, inequity, asymmetry—not giving to others what they demand for themselves—is a recipe for basic trouble, sooner or later. *Equality for the law* is a Western contribution to a culture of peace; exceptionalism is the opposite, hence anti-peace. This goes for genders and generations, for the groups in society, for states and nations, for regions and civilizations.

The war culture is based on Chosenness, Glory and Trauma, backed up by Dualism, Manicheism and the promise of a violent encounter, and Armageddon. CGT, DMA. These days we hear it from fundamentalist terrorists and fundamentalist state terrorists. So,

*Moderates all over the world unite! we have only fundamentalists to lose. In a peace culture of Empathy, Creativity, Nonviolence.*

The human spirit is capable of accommodating cultures of war and cultures of peace; like the human body is capable of hosting both pathogens like HIV dangerous to self and other and sanogens like vitamins. The same goes for the culture of any society. We have to open our hearts to the immense significance of the human spirit for a more peaceful civilization, driving out anti-peace!

But peace is made neither by culture alone, nor by politics and economics alone. It is made by all three, synergistically. The formula for peace is always equality, equity, and mutual respect. We have to learn to celebrate not only the

peace elements in our own culture but also in others. “I celebrate your gift to humanity and you celebrate mine” is a good basis.

But how do we nonviolently stand up against naked aggression, like the United States in Iraq? Learn from Gandhi, participate in a massive boycott of US export products.

There is talk of boycott of US products all over, building on successful action against the apartheid regime in South Africa, against Deutsche Shell in the North Sea, and against the French nuclear testing in Polynesia. The purpose of the boycott is to turn US corporations against US belligerence and disrespect for treaties and world cooperation.

The boycott would cover *consumer goods* from movies, CocaCola-MacDonald to cars and gasoline, *capital goods* of all kinds and *finance goods* like dollars (use euros, yen and others) and US bonds and stocks, demanding that governments do not buy and that corporations divest from US firms, starting with the most reprehensible corporations.

The average profit of a US corporation is around 6 %, meaning that even modest participation will have major impact. Even a 3 % decline in sales will place the trustees/executives in a dilemma between loyalty to Washington geofascism and their own profits.

Likely counter-measures against a boycott will include:

- pressure on governments to outlaw boycott; problematic because market freedom is a major part of neoliberal ideology;
- corporations asking Washington for compensation; problematic given the US economy in general and the federal budget;
- decreasing expenditure by laying off more workers; problematic because collective protests are now increasing very quickly;
- US boycott of products from boycotting countries; problematic given US consumer dependence on foreign products, and solidarity, buying from US-boycotted countries.

The boycott should be informed by gandhian nonviolence. The purpose is to reduce and eliminate the US military and economic grip on the world, not to kill US children. An emergency relief program for those who suffer in the US should be considered. The target is the US Empire, not the US Republic.

What happened to dealing with the USA with dignity? The dignity is there, but not for the illegitimate aspects of US foreign policy; they have to be resisted. A policy like this, making a strong distinction between the US Republic and the US Empire, is not “anti-American”, meaning being against everything American. There is good in the bad and bad in the good; relieve the USA of sin by refusing to cooperate, and then have the best possible relation with that marvelous people.

Put differently: there is nothing in conflict and peace theory saying that we shall build compromises to everything and treat everybody equally. The conflict between slave and slave-owner, between colonialist and colony, was not solved by compromise but by resisting evil. Incidentally this resistance is also a part of the Hindu, not just the gandhian, tradition and found in other spiritual traditions as well.

Some words about the economics of peace. Taking basic needs and equity as our guidelines the first goal is satisfaction of basic needs, probably best done locally and nationally. And the second goal is equity, equal exchange guiding trade relations in the global space. What could be more important goals for economic activity than to give people a life in dignity, and build relations between countries that are equitable?

We cannot permit an economy to kill people at the tune of 100,000 a day, a quarter of that starving, the other three quarters suffering the deficit in affordable health services. And we cannot permit trade relations grabbing the natural resources of other peoples, and even protecting the robbery by military means.

In short, we have work to do. Let good spirits guide us.

## Further Reading

Galtung J, MacQueen, Graeme, (2008): *Globalizing God: Religion, Spirituality and Peace*. (Transcend University Press, vol 4) ([www.transcend.org/tup](http://www.transcend.org/tup)).