

Peace Makers

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While in every community, country and culture, there are people who have violent consciousness and create conflict and war, there are others who promote harmony and peace. Some of them create peace in their families, schools and local communities, while others create peace at a national and international level because they want to be part of creating a peaceful world together.

To create peace on earth we need to decrease all those factors that contribute toward creating violence, conflict and war, and increase all those factors that help in resolving conflicts peacefully. We are all aware that, like health is more than absence of illness, peace is also more than the absence of war, at a local, national and international level.

To have a better understanding of the dynamics of peace I have been studying Nobel Peace Lectures for the last few years. During that study I became acutely aware that peace is like a rainbow and has many colors and each color is a significant component of creating a peace rainbow. Let me share a few colors of that peace rainbow.

Economic Peace

Those communities and countries where there is a wide gap between the rich and the poor, the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’, are quite vulnerable for an outbreak of violence. Those who live in huts and see their children go to

bed hungry while their neighbors live in palaces, become angry with an uneven distribution of wealth and resources. Those who are deprived of the basic necessities of life – food, shelter, education, health care and work – start losing hope, self respect and dignity. They become so frustrated that finally they become desperate and violent and want to destroy the system that has not served them well. They want a social, economic and political system that will provide them safety

and security, justice and peace.

There are many economists, sociologists and socialists who believe that economic conditions are intimately connected with peace. To create a peaceful world we need to fight poverty. Mohammad Yunus from Bangladesh is one of those wise people who has been fighting pov-

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erty and hunger and has been quite successful. That is why he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006. In his Peace Lecture he shared that after discussing world-renowned economic theories in university academic circles, he realized that poverty must be fought in the streets and huts rather than in lecture halls. He started the Grameen Bank, a Village Bank, in Bangladesh and arranged small loans for women to start small businesses. Over the years the bank expanded and more and more women took loans to raise their standard of living above the poverty line. At the time of the Nobel Lecture there were nearly seven million women, from 73,000 villages, who had benefited by that bank. Helping seven million women had helped seven million families in Bangladesh.

Mohammad Yunus believed that since ‘*poverty is a threat to peace*’ fighting poverty will pave the way for peaceful living and create peaceful communities and countries. Yunus also helped many beggars to start their own businesses and lead a respectful and meaningful life.

Yunus believes that globalization is a mixed blessing. On the one hand it connects different parts of the world, but on the other hand it helps Multinational Companies to prosper and progress while making it very difficult for small companies and businesses to thrive. He compares globalization as a global highway with one hundred lanes. On that highway big trucks and vans survive while small rickshaws are pushed away in the ditch of desperation. He suggests that economic progress needs to be linked with social progress so that when big companies and organizations succeed, they are required to share their wealth and profit with the poor and help them become successful, so that the gap between the rich and the poor decreases and we create a more just and bal-

anced world. Yunus highlights that “poverty is not created by the poor.” It is rather created by the policies of rich people that serve a minority rather than the majority. Over the years, Yunus’s concept of the Grameen Bank has been adopted by many poor and developing countries.

Social Peace

Alongside economic peace we also need social peace. To create social peace people from different ethnic, racial, religious and cultural backgrounds have to get along and learn to resolve their conflicts peacefully. Such an environment is created when the state has laws that respect human rights, people have developed social consciousness and a humanist attitude, and communities have risen above the tribal mentality.

One of the leaders of the 20th century that fought for social peace was Martin Luther King, Jr. who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 for his involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, a movement that took a new turn in America when an older Black woman, Rosa Parks, would not offer her seat in the bus to a young White

man. The movement escalated when Blacks went on strike, boycotting buses and walking to work. That was the time when Martin Luther King, Jr. made passionate speeches until the unjust law was changed. He believed that “it is better to suffer in dignity than to accept segregation in humiliation.”

In his Nobel Lecture, King highlighted that Blacks in America have been suffering for a long time because of the color of their skin. He wanted that injustice to end so that Blacks could live with dignity and self-respect. He believed that “oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever.”

King was against relying on violence. He

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was a peaceful leader and wanted to accomplish peaceful goals with peaceful means. He did not believe, like many leaders of his time, that the end justifies the means. He shared his philosophy about the psychology of violence in these words, "Violence, as a way of achieving racial justice, is both impractical and immoral. I am not unmindful of the fact that violence often brings about momentary results. Nations have frequently won their independence in battle. But in spite of temporary victories, violence never brings permanent peace. It solves no social problem: it merely creates new and more complicated ones. Violence is impractical because it is a descending spiral ending in destruction for all. It is immoral because it seeks to humiliate the opponent rather than win his understanding: it seeks to annihilate rather than convert. Violence is immoral because it thrives on hatred rather than love. It destroys community and makes brotherhood impossible. It leaves society in monologue rather than dialogue. Violence ends up defeating itself. It creates bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers."

King and his followers were willing to sacrifice, even offer their lives, for their ideals but were not willing to take lives of others. King was a follower of Mohandas Gandhi, the prophet of non-violence, who was a disciple of Leo Tolstoy, a prophet of peace. Followers of the Tolstoy / Gandhi / King tradition of the 20th century struggled to create a peaceful world by peaceful means. They promoted human rights for all races.

Human Rights and Peace

In the 20th century social consciousness of the whole humanity reached a level that created the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Such a declaration offered a promise that all human beings, irrespective of their race or religion, ethnicity or gender, sexual orientation or language, would be treated equally by their countries, communities and cultures. It was a major breakthrough in the human rights and peace movements. Unfortunately those ideals have not become a ground reality in many parts

of the world but at least people have the ideals to strive and struggle for. Millions of people all over the world are still suffering but human rights activists are fighting for their cause. One of them is Shirin Ebadi, the first Muslim woman who was given the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003.

Unfortunately, however, this year's report by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), as in the previous years, spells out the rise of a disaster that distances mankind from the idealistic world of the authors of United Declaration of Human Rights. In 2002, almost 1.2 billion human beings lived in glaring poverty, earning less than one dollar a day." Shirin Ebadi, from Iran, like Mohammad Yunus from Bangladesh, strongly feels that poverty is a grave threat to human rights and world peace.

Ebadi feels strongly that while millions of poor and desperate people are suffering in the poor countries of the third world, the rich and the affluent of the first world are becoming insensitive to their needs and are making policies that deprive others of their basic human rights. Governments of the first world do not respect the human rights of the people of the third world. One such example is the large number of prisoners of war on terror. She said, "...hundreds of individuals who were arrested in the course of military conflicts have been imprisoned in Guantanamo, without the benefit of the rights stipulated under the International Geneva conventions, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the [United Nations] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. These practices make it very clear that the American government does not practice what she preaches in the whole world.

Harold Pinter, the British playwright, winner of the Nobel Award of Literature, in his Nobel Lecture challenges the international community with these words, "What has happened to our moral sensibility? Did we ever have any? What do these words mean? Do they refer to a term very rarely employed these days....conscience? A conscience to do not only with our own acts but to do with our shared responsibility in the acts of others? Is all this dead? Look at Guantanamo Bay. Hundreds of people detained

without charge for over three years, with no legal representation or due process, technically detained forever. This totally illegitimate structure is maintained in defiance of the Geneva Convention. It is not only tolerated but hardly thought about by what's called *international community*."

Harold Pinter was very critical of American foreign policy that not only undermines human rights but also threatens world peace. He highlights the character of America's relationship with other countries in the last few decades in these words, "Direct invasion of a sovereign state has never in fact been America's favored method. In the main, it has preferred what it has described as 'low intensity conflict'. Low intensity conflict means that thousands of people die but slower than if you dropped a bomb on them in one fell swoop. It means that you infect the heart of the country, that you establish a malignant growth and watch the gangrene bloom. When the populace has been subdued – or beat-

en to death – the same thing – and your own friends, the military and the great corporations, sit comfortably in power, you go before the cameras and say democracy has prevailed. This was a common place in US foreign policy..."

Political Peace

Over the centuries a number of nations and tribes have developed a historical animosity and have been killing each other's children and grandchildren for generations. In the 20th century a number of leaders have brought to the attention of their followers that they can continue their wars and lose more lives or make peace and end the cycle of violence.

I will quote two examples where two sets of political leaders, who were each other's enemies for years, even decades, rose above their animosity to break the cycle of violence and shook hands to create peace. One example was more successful than the other.



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The first example was when Yitzak Rabin, the Israeli leader, shook hands with Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian leader. Both of them received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994 admiring their efforts to create peace in the Middle East. It is interesting to note that both leaders were involved in armed struggle before they embraced peace.

In his Nobel Lecture Yasser Arafat stated, "We started the peace process on the basis of land for peace, and on the basis of UN resolutions 242 and 338, as well as other international decisions on achieving the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people." The same day Yitzak Rabin, in his Nobel Lecture thanked Yasser Arafat and his followers "who have chosen the path of peace and are writing a new page in the annals of the Middle East." It is sad that before Rabin and Arafat could bring their peace pregnancy full term, they experienced a political miscarriage because one fundamentalist, militant, extremist Jew assassinated Rabin because in his view he did not want to see his leader shaking hands with the enemy. Rabin had to pay a heavy price for peace.

While Rabin and Arafat experienced a political miscarriage, Mandela and de Klerk had a full-term political pregnancy, delivered democratic elections in South Africa and received Nobel Peace Prizes. In their Nobel Lectures both shared their peace philosophy. Mandela shared his vision of new South Africa and a new peaceful world in these words, "We live with hope that as she battles to make herself, South Africa will be like a microcosm of the new world that is striving to be born. This must be a world of democracy and respect for human rights, a world freed from the horrors of poverty, hunger, deprivation and ignorance, relieved of the threat and the scourge of civil wars and external aggression and unburdened of the great tragedy of millions forced to become refugees."

Mandela's partner in peace de Klerk in his Nobel lecture shared that, "There can be no real peace without justice and consent." He stated that peace is a frame of mind as well as a framework.

"It is a frame of mind in which countries, communities, parties and individuals seek to


resolve their differences through agreements, through negotiation and compromise, instead of threats, compulsion and violence.

"Peace is also a framework.

"It is a framework within which the irresistible and dynamic processes of the social, economic and political development can be regulated and accommodated."

The more political leaders and their followers all over the world develop peace consciousness, the more they will find ways to overcome violent consciousness and to create a peaceful world. Economic, social and political peace, are just some of the colours of the peace rainbow that peaceful human beings are creating with their efforts.

Dr Khalid Sohail is a poet, a humanist and a psycho-therapist. His books include From Islam to Secular Humanism: A Philosophical Journey and The Next Stage of Human Evolution: Essays on Science, Psychology and Humanism.



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