

*En Route*

## Peace within ourselves?

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**T**he work of peace movements and civil society organizations is important. Peace curriculum in schools is important. A society's general values about peace, tolerance, conflict resolution and how we can all live more peacefully together are indeed important. Parents, especially mothers, kindergarten teachers, grandparents and everyone else who deal with children, try to instill good values in them. Well, maybe not always tolerance. However, almost everyone try to hold high virtues like kindness, consideration for the weak, not making fun of others, and that every human being has the same value. All this is also taught in the holy books of our religions.

But if we really want this, how come that we leave it to military men and some women to keep peace and solve major conflicts? The ministries of defence and the military are trained to solve conflicts using force, not all those things I mentioned above. Can we not find other ways of preventing conflicts from occurring and solving them if and when they do occur? It is perhaps totally wrong to leave it to the military to be our main peace keepers – especially since we also know that most conflicts occur because of inequalities, injustice, discrimination, and historical and other animosities. Religion is often used to justify conflicts but it is rarely the real reason.

I discussed the topic for this article with some friends and greater thinkers than I am. Muzaffar Mumtaz, a Norwegian lawyer and poet of Pakistani background and Scottish education told me that he thought that peace could neither be created nor kept through bureaucratic institutions. I said that I thought we could learn to be more peaceful and that we could find strategies for discussing and solving conflicts before they developed too far and get stuck in the minds of people. I think Muzaffar may have agreed to some extent. Yet, he argued that peace can only be created if we look into ourselves, if we try to follow the teachings of thinkers like Buddha and Jesus, the practice of Gandhi, and many, many others who have spoken for thousands of years. But we have not listened. We seem to like to talk instead. We seem to be arrogant, not humble. We seem not to seek God within ourselves, but everywhere else. If we turned the other cheek, if we tried to do to others what we want them to do to us, and if we tried to change ourselves rather than everyone else, then we would be on the right path. We should become like children, the way we were created in the first place, and then we could find God, peace and tranquility within ourselves and with others. Sadly many religious leaders have often become administrators of religion. They are bureaucrats who may even keep us from seeing god, the opposite of what they actually want, of course. To seek and find God we must look in ourselves. We must reflect, meditate and pray. We must try to become the good human beings we were meant to be.

Politicians all want us to change. They want us to listen to them and follow their ideas. But how many have taken time to think and reflect and seek God in the way I have suggested above? Maybe the politicians and the other leaders we have are indeed keeping us from developing more peaceful societies with greater equality. Maybe capitalism, the world's economic system in our time, can never lead to peace neither at local nor global levels. Maybe it is intrinsic to the system that conflicts will occur because of competitiveness and the inevitable in some becoming losers. Such a system can only solve conflicts if it uses force, even military force when, when that is required as see from the perspective of the strong. We can even ask if the nuclear non-proliferation treaty is there to secure peace or if it is for status-quo so that the strong can maintain power.

Thus far, I have mentioned three ways of thinking about peace. First, the way we think about it as parents and teachers. It is not an alternative way of thinking but rather a part of the military way of thinking, and it softens its edges. All states, except for Costa Rica, have a military, usually called defence since no state will admit that it has any aggressive intentions. USA alone has over half of the world's military expenditure, and in

spite of being the only state that has used nuclear weapons, it is allowed to remain the largest nuclear power and also the main policeman for peace and war in the world.

Above, I have also discussed briefly the deeper philosophical way to think about peace, to seek peace within ourselves. It is indeed possible that that is, or should be, the way we must think, and the only way in the longer-term to see peace growing roots. Yet, we also have to be realistic and then we remain with two options, the raining military thinking, and the thinking of peace movements and pacifists, including the relatively half-hearted thinking of parents and teachers. I say that it is half-hearted because it is sometimes just a softer version of the military thinking. I should hasten to add, though, that I also believe that the military men and women, with the political leaders, usually want to keep peace and solve conflicts with as little force as possible. But the solutions are usually shallow and based on power and force.

We have in the recent decades had two major wars in our region, notably in Iraq and in Afghanistan. Hundreds of thousands have been killed, mostly civilians, and millions have been displaced. The durable solutions can not be made by the military, and in the end we always have to find political solutions, yes, after all the damage has been done. In Syria, it seems that the debate focus on whether there should be a foreign intervention or not. It should have been on how to find the causes for the conflict and how to negotiate fair and just solutions.

Yes, all states have a military and a defence force. But why are the strategies not in place for how to solve conflicts peacefully before the conflicts arise? Why have the schools, the media and the peace movements not been allowed to play a proactive role in teaching peace beforehand? It is not that conflicts come out of the blue; they are usually relatively easy to see and they take long before they flair up in outright armed conflicts and wars. Also, conflicts that are not directly violent should be debated and agreements sought, for example, when there are major political disagreements about issues, often ethical, moral and religious issues, which people feel deeply about.

How short we have come to understand and implement peaceful actions! How blindfolded we seem to be! No wonder then that conflicts do arise and the military gets into business, yes, maybe that is a hidden, structural agenda since some have an interest also in armed conflicts and wars?

Obviously, the peace movements and the many great school teachers, parents, journalists and others agree with me, but alas, they are not given resources and support to carry out the work before conflicts arise. They may be called upon to help solve conflicts, but that is often too late. Preventive care is better than curative care, as medical doctors would say. Well, sometimes peace negotiators can do wonders, just now such as the work brokered by the Norwegians and Cubans in Colombia, trying to find a durable solution to the violent conflict between the government and the FARC guerilla.

I have a Norwegian friend, Ingeborg Breines, who is the co-chair of the International Peace Bureau (IPB) in Geneva, the world's oldest peace organization. She was UNESCO director in Pakistan earlier and last year she taught peace education at the University of Gujrat. She once said that she only had one more ambition as for positions in this world, notably to become defence minister in Norway. I thought she had had a sun stroke in Punjab! No, she said, she wanted to be the last minister of defence, because later, she wanted Norway and all other countries to ministries of peace. They can do the things I have been discussing in this article. They can help us discussing peace and cooperation before conflicts arise at home and abroad. Norway, a small and peaceful country, would be an easy place to test Ingeborg's wish. And she would need all the good forces in the schools and society at large with her and her new ministry of peace, including the religious and philosophical leaders and public preachers. In the short term, she would make the society less competitive and unjust, so that peace and justice can grow roots. In the longer-term, after you and I may no longer walk on this earth, we would also be able to reach peace within ourselves, the deeper peace that my friend Muzaffar believes in. Although he believes less in the teaching people peace than Ingeborg and I do, I am still sure that he will join hands with us in a positive, all-inclusive peace movement that eventually can reach his high goals.

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