



SPIRIT OF
HUMANITY
FORUM

PEACEFULNESS



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The Spirit of Humanity Forum

2017

Introduction



During 2015 and 2016, the Guerrand-Hermès Foundation for Peace (UK/France), in partnership with the Fetzer Institute (USA) and the Reykjavik Centre for Peace in Iceland, hosted a series of dialogues on the nature of peacefulness. These events were undertaken in preparation for the Spirit of Humanity's Forum to be held in Reykjavik on 27-29 April 2017.

Those who were present at these various dialogue events are also participants, contributors and supporters of the Spirit of Humanity Forum. A list of these dialogue contributors will be found at the end of this booklet.

What follows is a brief report on what was learnt from those conversations, and in particular, provides some insights into possible steps towards peacefulness that arose from this sharing of thoughts, experiences and questions.

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The Story of Peacefulness

This work began because it was felt that the story of peacefulness was not being told.

Peace studies are most often undertaken within the context of warfare and violence: peace as an alternative to war; peace as the goal of conflict resolution; peace as something 'out there' to be imposed upon disorder and violence.

We believe that the only way to truly appreciate peace is by studying it not in the context of something which it is not, but by understanding it in and of itself, most especially by exploring our innate peacefulness, our private and public flourishing and well-being.

This can be done at three dimensions:

First, there is inner peacefulness; then, there is interpersonal and intercommunal peace; and, third, there is peace in the public realm, which in turn, creates the conditions for peacefulness to be cultivated and nurtured in each person. This third dimension, at which most Peace Studies work is undertaken, is complex and challenging, and must be approached from a proper understanding of the first two. Even the first of these matters, inner peace-fulness, can only be studied properly when we understand who we truly are. For as long as we are obscured by the wrong image of ourselves, we will not be able to see peace clearly. As long as we allow the increasingly discredited, but still dominant image of humanity as selfish, aggressive and separate to continue to shape our understanding of who we are, we will be trapped into having to see peace only in the context of violence.

Peacefulness at the Core of Human Nature

Instead of seeing violence and war as an intrinsic part of being human, many have argued that peace is the most fundamental of all human values and peacefulness a human virtue and disposition. It is a fundamental character of the universe – a wholeness and unity, in perfect harmony.

Biologist Humberto Maturana and his colleague Gerda Verden-Zöeller, in their book *The Origins of Humanness in the Biology of Love*, make clear that we are by nature a loving species; that by nature we are communal and nurturing. Because this is so, living within a culture of assertive competition, disconnection and greed is very destructive for us. Not only does it destroy our natural environment, it also makes us feel unwell.

The great teachings in religions and cultural traditions have urged us to love one another and to see that true abiding lies in loving-kindness, compassion, joy in and for others and equanimity. Both in history and at present, our collective journeys have shown that human beings, irrespective of our differences in language, geography, faith, ethnicity, race, social class, age and gender, have been able to express peacefulness. So many stories have illustrated that we are able to imagine innovative ways to live together and create peace and harmony amongst people, groups and societies, and between humankind and other beings on the planet.

Indeed, despite the many years of conditioning that might have eradicated our natural inclination to care for each other, in our most intimate and private realms, we do.

We care for each other and we ask to be cared for.
We thrive in relationships and want to be loved.
We desire wholeness and long for harmony.



Seeking Peace and Peacefulness

So the principal quest, it seems, is in how we can cultivate and extend our natural inclinations for, and hence need for, love and peacefulness in three dimensions: first from within ourselves, at a personal level; then into our communities – our families and the communities in which we live and work, at a collective level; and finally, into our public lives, at the socio-economic and political level.

What are the conditions that would make this possible?

What are the institutional structures that would enable this?

What forms of economy and society would foster this?

Here lies an important footnote to this story. Urgency!

In the recent years, violent and selfish ways of being have brought humanity close to catastrophe. We are now facing urgent problems of widening social disparity, political divisiveness, global financial instability and climate change. The qualities that will enable us to resolve these problems reside not in furthering those that have been the causes, but in developing and sustaining those that bring us together and help each other.

Perhaps for the first time as a species we face questions about our survival, and this makes it ever more necessary that we return who we truly are, *Homo-sapiens amans*.

A Possible Pathway to Peacefulness

The Spirit of Humanity Forum's Peace Dialogue Series explored all three dimensions of peacefulness – within each one of us, collectively and socio-politically. In addition to peacefulness being primarily a human and spiritual attribute, we also conceive peace as a set of relations, which includes the relation that a person has to herself or himself, interpersonal and inter-communal relations, relationship with our personal and collective past. This also applies to relationships at an institutional, socio-economic and structural or systemic level.

Nine possible steps were identified as a possible pathway to peacefulness.

1. Beginning with ourselves

The starting place for this exploration of peacefulness is within ourselves, in our innate dignity where all human lives are considered as intrinsically valuable and all human beings matter equally, and, indeed, in the respect that we give to all that is, not least our Planet Earth. So the driving impetus of peacefulness at the personal level is love and not fear, wholeness, rather than divisiveness, seeking deeper inner experience of peacefulness.



2. Being peace in a spiritual way

Our peacefulness is sustained and nurtured by an acceptance of the sacred, the transcendent, and by the highest purpose, meaning and value in life. This carries with it the need to make peace with oneself and each other through forgiveness and compassion, and care for the other in an openness, empathy and positive intentions. Peacefulness is fostered by habits of prayers, reflection, tuning in to innermost voices, meditation, stillness, solitude and more.

3. Cultivating peacefulness in daily life

Cultivating peacefulness requires a commitment to peacefulness as one of our most desirable character traits and virtues. In our lives, we integrate consistent daily practices such as open self-inquiry, examining ourselves first and foremost as a bridge to reach out to others, and an alignment between our innermost ethics and values and our actions in the world. Likewise, we dedicate ourselves to relationship, dialogue, listening, and inquiring into the needs of others.

4. Ensuring women's part in building peace

It is pivotal to engage women in building peace, and to incorporate feminine wisdom, especially through the power of love and compassion, in creating a culture of peace and peacefulness on the planet. The fostering of peacefulness can be strength-ened where women's voices and participation are ensured in governance and leadership. Equally, There is space for women to play a proactive part in dialogue and conflict transformation.



5. Developing peaceful institutions and practices

A culture of peace must be instilled within all public institutions. Key ideas include, for example: Globally, replacing Ministries of Defence with Ministries of Peace; Regionally, setting up Peace Councils and Listening Circles to create spaces for dialogue and conflict transformation; Nationally, creating Compassionate Cities or Peaceful Cities to inspire and empower citizens as peace agents; In organisations, having Circles of Trust for listening, trust-building and relations.

6. Investing in peace not arms

Peacefulness requires redesigning our global economy, removing all subsidies for arms manufacture and ending weapon sales, and supporting complete disarmament. There should be an intention to reduce all armies of force and all military presence. Investment in weapons should be replaced by investment in all forms of peacefulness and in creating conditions for peace to flourish, eg. converting defence budgets into programmes for healthcare, clean water, small-scale farming, education and more.

7. Promoting peacefulness in economy

We need a new theory of economics to enable the flourishing of all, including all beings in nature. An economy of peace love and peacefulness will benefit people and society, through creative entrepreneurship and universal living income. Corporations will take into account these qualities in their decision-making and promote an ethical code of "do no harm". Within businesses, there will be humanising cultures, and the practice of greater equality.

8. Rethinking media's responsibility for peace

To build a peaceful world, we must rethink journalistic responsibility in relation to peace. For instance, press and media can develop and promote new language of humanisation and compassion in reporting conflict and there should be more stories on creative and non-violent conflict transformation and peace building. Journalists will take the task of presenting stories from every side, disclosing root causes of wars and offering alternatives to violence. Where possible, media and press should report on restorative narratives that help heal the wounds of history and bridge the divides.

9. Cultivating peacefulness in education

Peacefulness should be at the centre of education, the aim of which will also focus on nurturing human qualities and virtues, and not just the development of knowledge, capabilities and skills. Education for peace should be framed within concepts of respect, dignity and dialogue. Learning is underpinned by human relationships and schools are to be established as learning communities where children and adults come together on the ground of common values and pursue a shared journey in learning and flourishing. Through curriculum and activities, children are helped to practise different ways to transform conflicts peacefully and creatively. In all settings, from formal institutions such as schools, colleges and universities, to informal learning spaces such as youth centres and family environment, all educative processes should be the embodiment of love, care and responsibility and this should be central to cultivating peacefulness in each of us and in the world at large.



Questions for SoH Forum 2017

From the Dialogue Series, the following questions were posed for the Spirit of Humanity Forum 2017:

- How can we discern, nurture and express our own innate and inner peacefulness?
- What is the role of our local and international communities in supporting and fostering peacefulness, being the bridge between private and public realms?
- How might we express the deep spiritual nature of peacefulness and make our society more peaceful within the context of a political system such as a nation or a city?
- What are the criteria for a nation or a city and its peoples to be deservedly called "peaceful"?

A list of Contributors to the Peace Dialogue Series

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