

## Notes

- (1) See **Self & Society: European Journal of Humanistic Psychology**, Vol.X No.5 (Sept/Oct 1982), pp. 233-239.
  - (2) For a discussion of the concept of species being see Easton, Loyd D. and Kurt H. Guddat, trans. and ed., "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts (1844)", in **Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society**. New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1967, esp. pp. 293-296.
  - (3) Maslow, Abraham H. **Toward a Psychology of Being**, New York: Van Nostrand, 2968, pp. 11-12.
  - (4) Singer, June. **Androgyny: Toward a New Theory of Sexuality**, New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1977, p. 32.
  - (5) *Ibid*, pp. 225-226.
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### BUILDING PEACE

Building peace is the most urgent task of our time. Humankind is on the very brink of multiple catastrophe; nuclear war, environmental degradation and gross inequality threaten our very existence. Yet there has never before been so much knowledge about each other, or such opportunities for collaboration and mutual learning. The time for action is now. We have the ability to create a good future for ourselves.

Peace is not just stillness or the absence of destructive *conflict*. It implies a natural state of balance and harmony with elements of joy, exploration and excitement. Simple passivity would never satisfy human beings because we love adventure. The world is a beautiful and complex place with immense opportunities for learning, exploration and positive excitement. War fulfills no useful purpose.

The task of building peace starts within the individual. People are a blend of body, mind and spirit. For an individual person to be truly at peace with her/himself and hence able to create peace around her/himself, there needs to be harmony between these aspects. Body, mind, spirit need to be fed and to be used. The "feeding" of body, mind and spirit is about giving and receiving love. In the process of giving and receiving love, people are healed and become whole

and at peace, able to build peace simply by being themselves. No individual can become fully integrated and fully functioning by her/himself, we become whole only by loving and being loved.

The task we have if we wish to build peace, is awe inspiring. It is no less than to build a world society whose guiding principle is neither greed nor fear but love. There is no person in the world who does not share this wish at some level. Every organization has an interest in it, too, because the present system can only lead to chaos and disintegration with the end result the destruction of a very beautiful planet.

The process of building peace is multilayered. People who "sacrifice" their family life to the cause and create unhappy families do not provide models which are credible to others. They can become fanatics. Far better to conduct "peace building" in a way which gathers family and community support! This is stronger because of the base of psychological support and provides a model people can identify with and follow. As "peace" is a natural, harmonious state this implies that the process of peace making should also be natural and harmonious. "Building peace" then becomes a matter of supporting and strengthening processes that are already operating in that direction, rather than imposing aggressively "new" processes which may create antagonism and resentment.

The natural processes include the world wide communication revolution which has the potential to provide accurate information about the beauty, vulnerability and interdependence of our planet. There is an extremely rapid diffusion of ideas and good practices throughout the world and growing awareness of the threats to peace. Collaboration around issues about peace across national frontiers is increasing dramatically and "ordinary" people are taking determined stances. Above all, people are starting to discover the hope that lies beyond despair. If we start to realize that if we do nothing we die but that in doing something we may just live, then action becomes imperative. The process for building peace is to support others' efforts as well as initiating our own. A letter to someone who is taking a courageous stand can be enormously powerful. So can listening supportively to people who are in fear or doubt.

Natural processes of peace making operate also at a local level and are very important. The resources of a single community are enormous and if harnessed could make a fantastic difference. Harnessing won't happen until community spirit is developed, so that people feel supported enough to want to engage positively with the outside world.

Creating support/community spirit is of course valuable in itself. How about community picnics and festivals, or creating informal networks and settings where people can start to help each other and create fellowship across the cultural, racial and economic dividers? This feels awfully risky but is really no more so than the risk of **not** doing anything? Not acting leads in the short term to community disintegration, violence and decay and in the long run to chaos. When community spirit is developed, the caring community can diffuse the caring of its members more widely even across national frontiers.

Building peace is not as easy as this sounds. There are blocks which primarily are located within the individual. These arise out of the hurt and misinformation we have all experienced. They can be overcome!

The most common block is "splitting". We split (e.g.) home and job and while attempting to create a peaceful loving home may work for an industry that makes and sells destructive products or an organisation that exploits human weakness. Living with this "split" will eventually destroy our inner peace as well as the world's. The cost of denying conscience is an enormous one. It can lead to stress related illness, unhappy family life (e.g. confronting adolescent children) and premature aging and death.

Nothing is achieved without sacrifice and sacrifice is unavoidable! There is a great deal of fear about doing practical things about building peace. In my own case, it is mainly fear of failure "it is so big it's not worth starting" and fear of looking foolish - people will only knock my efforts and say "I'm out of touch with reality, what can ordinary people do?" It's funny that these fears sometimes seem more compelling than the fear of dying in a radioactive desert or leaving our children a barren wasteland . . .

Another block is being competitive, building peace must involve collaborative effort. It is too big and complex a task for anyone to do alone. Yet somehow dreams are the last things we share. It is a terrible insult, not a compliment, to be termed a "visionary" or an idealist, but without vision or ideals there is no long term future.

If action is required something has to be done. Many people believe wholeheartedly that peace needs to be built but have great difficulty in seeing where to start. Here are a few ideas, based on the principle that lasting peace is best achieved through love not fear or greed.

- 1) Make a new friend, later plan with him/her a peace building - activity.
- 2) Talk through your anxieties about getting involved with a friend: plan to do something, however small.
- 3) Identify one thing you are good at and see how to use it to build peace, locally and nationally.
- 4) Write a letter to someone in authority about a specific problem: put a possible peace building solution.
- 5) Build or join a supportive network organisation with an interest in peace building close to your own.
- 6) Put interested people in touch with existing organisations or each other.
- 7) Have a neighbourhood party or picnic to celebrate a happy event. Encourage conversation about peace building there.
- 8) Offer your help to an individual or organisation involved in building peace.
- 9) Run or support a local peace festival with music, theatre, games. Invite prominent local people, lobby them by offering your help in promoting peace.
- 10) Organize a conference.
- 11) Write an article outlining your ideas and vision.
- 12) Your own favorite idea!

If these or other activities are to work, they must model the process you want to create. It's no use to have a solemn, formal, conflictual peace conference or party, if you see peace as happy, enthusiastic and joyful! Make sure the people have plenty of time and opportunity to get to know and value each other in a warm and friendly atmosphere. Above all, do what you enjoy doing and what you believe in. You are responsible for your own peace!

## PS Education and Peace

Education appears to focus on talking, not listening and competition not cooperation. Listening and cooperating skills are essential for building peace and indeed, in achieving anything with other people. If you don't listen to others, you can't understand them and if you don't understand them, how can you work together? The increasing interdependence and uncertainty of our world demands a change in direction, fast. These skills are needed for economic as well as social and spiritual survival.

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*NEW DIRECTIONS is a counselling and consultancy organisation which helps individuals and organisations deal effectively with the challenge of change. Details from 43 Roe Green Close, Hatfield, Herts.*