

National Seminar on  
**BUILDING PEACE: LEARNING FROM INTER-FAITH DIALOGUES**  
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**Building Peace through Learning and Understanding**

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Peace is the inner most and inherent inspiration of human beings. A peaceful surrounding is required even for animals to live in. We have seen that if we create disturbances in the habitats of wild creatures, they start deserting it soon.

In Buddhism, one of the four cardinal doctrines is "Peace is virtue, and Nirvana is the peace". Nirvana is not just a final resting sphere where nothing happens; but it is a state of complete cessation of problems created by our mind and our actions. In Nirvana, there is a spirit of pure activities devoid of defiled thoughts and acts. It is not a realistic approach to expect everyone to embark on the path to Nirvana. The point here is to see whether the peace within the world is something achievable. I see two extreme tendencies in the search for peace. The first is to talk about the "world peace", a world without any destructive weapons and not even enmity and a world where every nation celebrates peace treaties, lot of festivities, smiling faces... The other extreme is to think and say that peace can be achieved only through looking inwards, see the nature of your mind and so on. But my contention is that peace cannot be achieved in isolation of human spirit, human dignity, and justice.

Peace is something in-between that has lot to do with both of them, but more with the mind and spirit. I feel we have to talk about working towards creating inspiration and atmosphere of peace through human actions. Obstacles of peace are mainly created by human thoughts and actions. Therefore, peace also has to be achieved through collective and individual human actions. The acts which help to reduce hatred, tension and jealousy need to be directed towards benefit for individuals, communities and nations, blocks of nations. That is what I call peace work.

Leaders of different faiths and spiritual workers for peace have to ponder on the following two aspects of path to peace:

A. Imparting Ethical Education

B. Promoting Moral Culture

A) Ethical precepts of Great religions show the unanimity. The mosaic rules:

- 1) Do not kill
- 2) Do not steal

- 3) Do not commit adultery
- 4) Do not swear
- 5) Do not covet

They are the five great vows or mahavrata of Jainism. They essentially correspond with five good conduct or Panchasheela in Buddhism and Yamas of Hinduism. The principals of these conducts are self-control and humanity. These ethical ideals undoubtedly have the great religions as their sources, but if you don't link these to the GOD or future lives, they are perfectly secular in nature.

We must accept our limits and must not try to achieve high goals from the beginning itself. We should rather take these ethical as target of highest aspiration, and start from small steps. People of high-level ethics are an example of possibility.

If you are facing a danger of getting drowned in a big lake, first thing you try is to keep your head out of the water, so that you are able to breath. Or if your house is on fire, first thing you do is trying and save your life and perhaps few most valuables. If you try to fill a bucket of water to douse off the fire, it may be too late for saving yourself.

Two extremes are to be noted. One is the altruism and the other is self-centeredness.

It is said that morality is possible without religion, but religion is not possible without morality. The first half of this sentence is what I am interested to address and try to find a formula.

## B) Moral Culture

### 1. Non-aggressive culture

We should try to find out why some people are so aggressive and others less. Most of us are brought up in an aggressive society; and aggressive culture is imbibed in us.

There are three doors of action. Mind is the first and the foremost. But it is not visible until it is expressed either through verbal or physical acts. Normally, verbal expression comes first. Harsh words or hurtful utterances precede harmful physical actions. We should not forget that there is another form of aggression. That is show off of money power. Thought and acts of bullying on you because he can spend money on you is an example.

### 2. Culture of Truthfulness

Truthful means not only abstaining from telling lies, but keeping the words given to someone. A small example is timing of meeting, agreeing to call back etc. To learn to say "No" when we mean "No" is a better culture. It is

much better than saying I will try even when we mean "No". Trying to shift blame from oneself to others is also an act of untruthfulness.

### 3. Moderation

Moderation in dealing with people and in enjoyment, if you are moderate in relation with society, there are less chance of others taking advantage. On the other hand, if you are too generous and too gracious, or too soft, you may have to regret for it later. Similarly, being too stingy also leads to unpleasant situation in the surrounding. These are just examples for easy understanding.

I believe that there should be alternative means of enjoyment, so that people do not think of taking to drink erotic ideas as the only way of enjoyment. Music and dance which are soothing to one's spirit are always both source of enjoyment and good ways of spreading peaceful atmosphere.

### 4. Fairness to others

To eradicate selfishness is possible in theory, and examples are found only in literature. But thinking only one self, completely ignoring others and environment can be minimized gradually. Genuine feeling about others that they don't deserve that much hardship is a seed of altruism. In early Buddhism, we find mention of benefit of many people, which was replaced in Mahayana by all sentient to signify the great mind. The great Bodhisattva literature mentions that one should pay back harm done to oneself with good deeds. Great indeed; but I would say that we should first learn to repay good by good and kindness by kindness.

I have an assertion: if 10% of the humanity practices 10% of the great moral ideas of our ancient cultures, this world will be much better place to live.