

**SAVE THE WORLD
IN 500 WORDS:
AN EXERCISE IN COLLECTIVE WISDOM**

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An Exercise in Collective Wisdom

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Reception for ASDP scholars and faculty with Evergreen's President, Les Purce. Olympia, WA, January 2009.



By Way of Introduction

Hirsh Diamant

How am I to live my life? How can I honor the diversity and sovereignty of cultures when confronted with lack of tolerance, hatred, and continuing practices of genocide? How is it possible that religious and cultural intolerance is fueled by sacred traditions?

In today's world, globalization is complimented by ramped nationalism and extreme fundamentalism. As I listen to news and in my work as a teacher in the college, I am continuously confronted with the question of whether or not it is possible to make the world a better place; whether it is possible to have a common sacred ground.

In my learning about cultures I am inspired by the concept of Silk Roads that connected cultures of China, Central Asia, the Middle East, Europe and the New World. Not only did silk and other luxury or medicinal products traveled on these roads. Buddhist monks, Christian and Manichean missionaries, Muslim converts, artisans, musicians, storytellers, and scribes were traveling with merchants' caravans and exchanging cultural and religious ideas. These spiritual, artistic and scientific exchanges transformed cultures and changed world consciousness.

In the winter of 2009, with support of Evergreen students and faculty, I helped to organize a symposium and community forum that focused on Asian Studies. We wanted to bring together scholars, faculty, students, and community members to learn how an understanding of

sacred traditions (that inspired Asian cultures and our collective wisdom) could help to envision a more peaceful and just world.

We organized the forum around the central question:

"Our world is full of struggle and conflict that is often based on irreconcilable differences between what religious and spiritual traditions hold as sacred. Hindus are killing Christians, Muslims are killing Hindus, Turks are killing Kurds, and the list goes on... Do you think that beneath the differences there are, or could be some commonly shared notions of sacredness? If yes, what would they be? Do you see a way that what's held in common as sacred could help promote social justice, environmental sustainability, and peace?"

We asked for the answer to this question to be limited to about 500 words. The answers that scholars offered to the forum and the continuing conversation with community members, students, and religious leaders, became a basis for this publication. All submitted essays were published electronically and can be found at <http://blogs.evergreen.edu/asdp/>

This publication would not be possible without encouragement and support of students and faculty of Living in the Sacred Garden academic program at The Evergreen State College, including faculty Marja Eloheimo and students Lisa Bartels, Jeff Hulme, Angela Golinvaux, Samantha Ezgar, and Chelan Weiler.

Our sincere "thank you" goes to all the participants and to the organizations that supported the forum including Asian Studies Development Program, Freeman Foundation, Evergreen's Deans and Academic Programs, President's Diversity Fund, Olympia Community Fund, Olympia Federal Savings, and the Chinese Language and Cultural Research Foundation.

Hirsh Diamant

The Evergreen State College, May, 2009





Everything is Possible

From a talk by *Krishnammal Jagannathan*, transcribed by David Albert

What a joy to spend a few hours with you at Evergreen State College, and how pleasing it is to hear the word “green” in the title.

As you know I come from an extremely poor Dalit (“untouchable”) family. There were 12 of us, six of whom died in childhood, and my mother became a widow at 32. She used to collect grass from the fields and take it to the market to sell, and bring some food home to cook long after we had gone to sleep, and each day would begin anew.

How to overcome this poverty became an obsession of my heart. When I was 12, I came across a Tamil saint, Ramalinga, whose words fit the feelings of my mind. After 9 years of meditation as a youth, he came to the conclusion that there is a divine light in every human being, in the plants, in the insects, in all the trees that provide us with shade. He would cry at the sight of a plant decaying. So he developed a spirit of love and compassion, and through this compassion the light within would grow. He discovered there were seven curtains – from greed to pride - in the heart that prevented us from realizing this light freely.

In college I began to spend time with the working people, those who worked in the kitchen who made it possible for us to study. For this I was condemned. Meanwhile I would spend time alone with nature, where I use to think of the trees and plants and flowers just bending their heads, bowing their heads to the Creator, the Divine.

Meanwhile, and in keeping with Ramalinga, I continued with self-analysis, self-inquiry, seeking for the bottom of knowledge. And I had the opportunity to meet Gandhi, and to come into contact with his nonviolence, which is a science of the soul, a science of living, and living for force of love and compassion. The question is how to apply it, not only to make it possible for foreign rulers to leave the country, but to end poverty and exploitation of the masses of people through nonviolence.

That has been my life's work, finding people who are living in the dark and taking the light; turning them to see the light within. When I have done this, when I have that kind of feeling in my heart, my prayer is answered. I find plenty of opportunities to go out in the world and help others give expression to the light within.

As I explain, every individual sitting here, and you studying at the University, or at home, you are all gifted with an urge in your heart to do something good in the world. Look at the tree. It is living. What is the duty of the tree? It offers essential service to the community, giving shade, fruit, and flowers. The magnificent tree standing here all alone is doing its duty. What are YOU doing? Every tree is questioning you. What is your human existence, why are you living, what is the purpose of it? The trees are questioning it all.

Yes there is misery in the world, conflict and misery about religion. Everywhere politicians want to have majorities, and they divide us by religion, or by whatever other tools they have at their disposal. Religious differences and the like often powered by greed, and the quest for power. And with them comes conflict.

But I come from among the untouchables. We have learned to find joy in the land and the soil, even though we are considered dirty by others. We use our physical labor along with our braining to producing food and vegetables to feed the people. Now, I have spent more than 40 years making it possible for some 13,000 families to work their own land, and to take pride in their labor. I wish all people of whatever religion and of goodwill would take up similar struggles so that we can end poverty, and build peace and social justice in the world.

I have a prayer that I take with me everywhere that “everything is possible”. I am a living example, born as I am of the greatest poverty. There are miracles born everyday, and each and every one of you can be among them.





Discarded Crosses, Chimayo, NM.

Photograph by: Jeff Hulme



Conflict and Violence are Deplorable

Peter Hershock

Conflict and violence are deplorable. This is a statement that most people would agree with, most of the time. But most people would also state, with equivalent conviction, that there are times when conflict and violence are unavoidable. A good many would also go on to argue that it is differences—in respect of religious beliefs and practices, or political ideologies, or economic strategies, or patterns of social inclusion and exclusion, or cultural norms—that lie at the roots of conflict and violence, and that affirming our common nature and seeking common ground is our best means of alleviating or averting conflict and violence. We can overcome our differences by discerning how—underneath all appearances to the contrary—we are essentially the same.

The force of such appeals to commonality can hardly be disputed. But I think it is important to question whether such appeals help us to identify the roots of conflict and trouble or to simply pave them over with intentions that, however good, seem always to end up leading us back toward one form or another of hell. Maybe we need to seek the end of conflict and violence in and through our differences, and not in celebration of some essential—and so necessarily abstract, if not fictitious—sameness. Fictions can be very useful; but we should not lose sight of the fact that between the telling of a fiction and a lie there stand only our intentions and the values informing them.

How it is that although human beings wish to live peacefully, they

nevertheless end up living in enmity, harming one another, and so on. Why, in other words, is the *intention* of living in peace and harmony insufficient for doing so? When the Buddha was asked this question, he responded by saying that cutting through the roots of conflict—and indeed all forms of trouble and suffering—can be accomplished by considering all of your actions and pursuits and their results. Only if a course of action leads to increasing what he called *kusala* eventualities and decreasing those that are *akusala* will the roots of conflict and suffering be cut through. Importantly, while the term *kusala* can be translated as wholesome or skillful, and *akusala* translated as the opposite, *kusala* is actually a superlative. The key to relating freely and peacefully is to go beyond “good and evil,” conducting ourselves with intensifying excellence or contributory virtuosity. Conflict is ended by enhancing the value of the situations and relationships in which we find ourselves.

Now while it is tempting to look to the ways in which we are all the same or equal to end conflict and violence, perhaps through some shared notion of the sacred, the fact is that the space for contribution and enhancing virtuosity comes only through our differences. The challenge we face, then, is how to activate our differences as the basis of sustainable contributions to our ever-intensifying welfare. Conflict will end when we realize, moment by moment, how to go beyond noting how much we differ-from one another to how we might best and most virtuosically differ-for one another.





Peace and Social Justice are Possible

Chungliang Al Huang

Indeed, the world is full of struggle, conflict, and irreconcilable differences between religious and spiritual traditions. I believe these differences are caused by a concretization of literal meanings and rules from these sacred traditions. Also, power struggles created arbitrarily borders and divisions between country and country on this Earth which in herself is a WHOLE world without divisions and borders -- In essence, all the people in the world must eventually realize that in spite of the outward differences of race, color, geography, and national identities, we as human beings are essentially the SAME.

Somehow we have lost the ability to read and see through symbols and metaphors in our sacred texts and teachings to realize this essential sameness. There is a superficial thinking that sacredness and secular are two different things, just like thinking that puts an “and” between yin and yang. Ultimately, what important is the constant use of opposites to find the middle ground; to find the connection. If we continue to focus on opposites and differences, we will always be torn.

We can always use opposites as a way to stretch our true thinking as human beings and to combine the 2 sides of polarity into one whole. In the tai ji way we realize what a gift it is to be stretched and not to be torn apart. Instead of getting torn apart we have the wonderful ability to bring opposites together to make them richer, more whole.

In China throughout the ages, there has always been tolerance and acceptance of differences in religious and spiritual traditions. When Marco Polo left Quanzhou in Fujian Province during the Yuan (Mongol) Dynasty this port city already had Muslim mosque, Jewish synagogue and Christian churches alongside Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist temples, existing harmoniously side-by-side.

For thousands of years, regardless of how history has gone through tyrant rulers and in-human short and violent dynasties, most Chinese people believed in the religious and spiritual practices as living philosophies, and have tried to abide in their intrinsic wisdom and practice.

In China, the three most important religious and spiritual traditions are Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism; they are the "Three Pillars of Living Wisdom", co-existing and interdependent. In fact, we need them all.

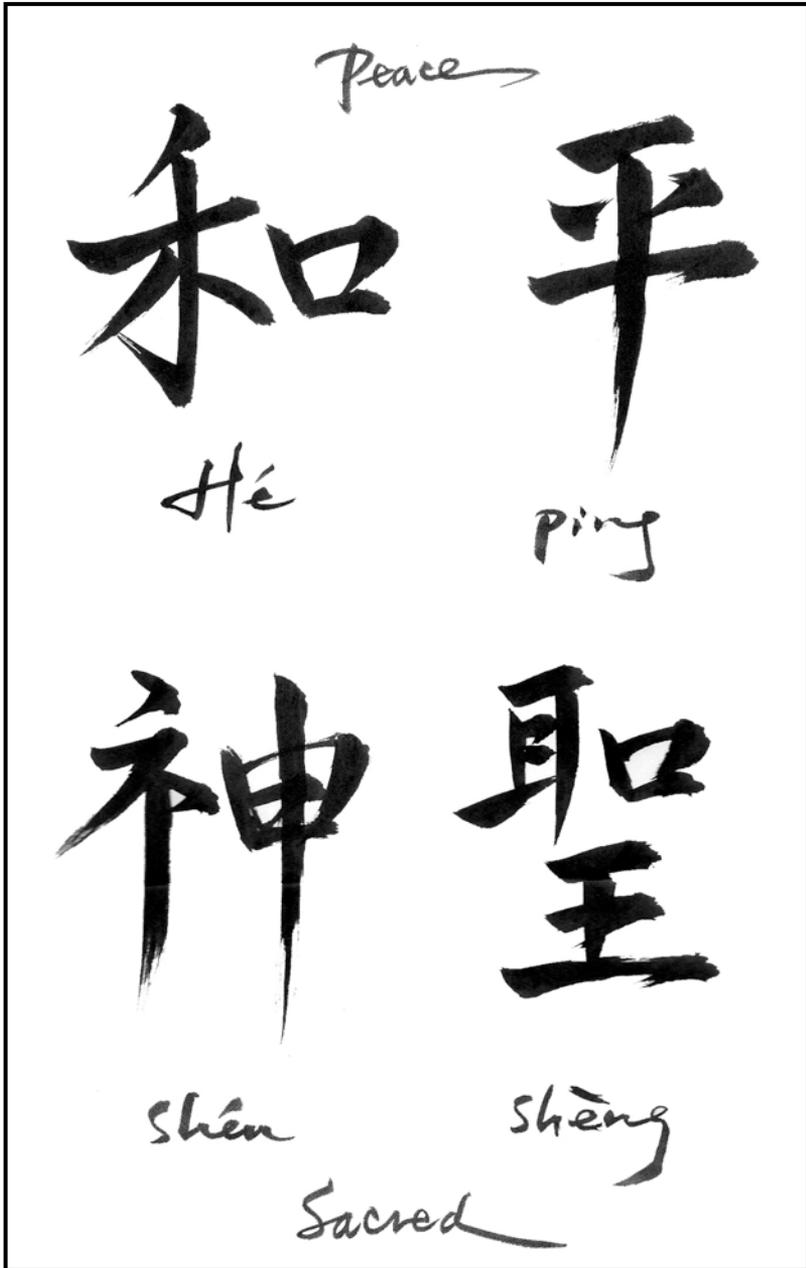
For instance Confucian ethics and regards for harmonious human relationships are important in family, community, society, and extending into world diplomacy. Taoist teaching intertwines Nature with human nature and brings awareness to environmental issues. Buddhist understanding of compassion for human sufferings is an all important learning for becoming a good human person.

In China, we acknowledge that a wise person should wear the Confucian hat at work (in career), don the Taoist robe at home (in retreat and retirement), and slip into a pair of Buddhist sandals in repose, and while aging, to contemplate life and death's cyclical continuity.

From this ancient Chinese perspective, I also believe that social justice can only be achieved by the true understanding of how to realize harmonious human relationships.

Environmental sustainability can only be learned through our awareness of the inseparable connection of our human nature to mother nature. Every person's relationship to the earth and our individual responsibility are integral parts of the sustainability of the whole.

Peace, in Chinese thinking, can only be attained when there is no more hunger -- Chinese word for Peace -- *He* is a symbol depicting food/grain for every mouth; all will be fed, and the word for Balance -- *Ping* is a symbol depicting a game, like ping-pong, with the referee in the center. Peace is also possible only when wealth can be distributed properly to eliminate poverty, and power struggle will cease when there will be nothing to win or to fight about. Peace is possible through a total understanding that the World is One, and we are all brothers and sisters of one big Global family, honoring the privileges of being the custodians of this Earth, and taking full responsibility to sustain her well-being.





The renown Tai Ji master, Chungliang Al Huang, came to participate in Asian Studies program at Evergreen. Master Huang's teaching is characterized by humanitarian optimism, wisdom, and soulful engagement. In the Tai Ji workshop Master Huang urged us to be open to experiences and to be filled with wonder. Inspired by this workshop, Chelan wrote a poem "Just say Wow!" Perhaps if we would be filled with wonder and reverence our conflicts would lessen?

Say Wow!

Chelan Weiler

each day before our surroundings become
flat with familiarity
and the shapes of our lives click into place--
dimensionless and average as tetris cubes,

before hunger knocks from our bellies
like a cantankerous old man
and the duties of the day stack up like dishes
and the architecture of our basic needs
commissions all thought
to construct the 4 door sedan of safety,

before gravity clings to our skin
like a cumbersome parasite
and the colored dust of dreams
sweeps itself obscure in the vacuum of reason,

before we think 3 grams of fiber! and
 how's my serotonin?
 and what would jesus or Oprah do?

each morning, before we wrestle the world
 and our hearts into the shape of our brains

look around and say, Wow!!
 feed yourself fire,
 scoop up the day entire
 like a planet sized bouquet of marvel
 sent by the universe directly into your arms,
 and say Wow!

break yourself down
 into the basic components of primitive awe
 and let the crescendo of each moment
 carbonate every capillary
 and say, Wow!

yes, before our poems become calloused with
 revision
 let them shriek off the page of spontaneity
 like tourette's syndrome

and before our metaphors get too regular,

notice all the boilers lit in the east
 and let the sun stay
 a conflagration of homing pigeons
 that fights through fire
 each day to find us.



Reverence as a Gateway to Peace

Don Johnson

Perhaps we humans have to take up the task of constructing "the common sacred." To begin with, the discourse of empiricism is the wrong tool for this task. We need the other realm of discourse, that of "visceral ethics" - the poetic - to limn "the common sacred." Martin Heidegger catches this quality in his claim: "Poetically we dwell on the earth."

Consistent with the project of constructing "the common sacred" and the discourse appropriate to it, a subjective approach to the sacred might be expressed in reverence, a virtue which can be cultivated through practice. John Woodruff's meditation on reverence shows that this quality runs through quite a number of diverse traditions. Reverence characterizes a relationship to the order of things, to an other that is larger than ourselves, to the earth, and to each other. Focusing on reverence can help us to avoid objectifying the sacred and each other, for misplaced concreteness is what reduces us to fighting over conflicting definitions of the sacred.

Reverence as a shared practice helps promote justice, sustainability, and peace-in part through the empathy that comes from sharing and listening to each other's stories, which Martha Nussbaum (in *Cultivating Humanity*) shows is a dynamic, community building process.

The dialectical relationship between two Igbo proverbs sums up some of the dynamics of such a project of constructing "the common sacred":

"Let the hawk perch and let the eagle perch."

"All stories are true."



Domesticated, Dead, Slaves

C. Campbell

I have a serious problem with this prompt. Actually, multiple problems. It begins by basing the main conflicts of our world on religious differences rather than the individuals and institutions that create, promote and force those ideologies onto humans. It then goes on to list various mainstream, and Abrahamic religions in conflict (which definitely does not include all sources of faith) with each other and then mentions Turks killing Kurds. Where did that come from? In my minimal research of the conflict between Turks and Kurds it was not faith-based but rather governments and 'higher authorities' dividing up the Middle East—whilst disregarding the needs of the people occupying the land.

In the next paragraph the 'prompter' asks if there are any underlying similarities that we can all open our eyes to that will “promote social justice, environmental sustainability, and peace”, in contrast to the struggle and conflict we must endure daily in our society. My answer is Yes, but with a catch. I believe that struggle and conflict are a part of life. I don't desire a world where every day is 'peaceful'. How is that honestly even possible? Would I never be allowed to feel angry or sad or any negative emotion, ever? And if I had a problem, would I not be able to deal with it? Would that cause too much conflict? I don't want peace. I want a life filled with mad desires, joyous ups and downs, fights with resolutions, love without limits, and freedom.

But my answer is still in the context of a world that is the utter opposite of the one we are currently living in. So, if I were asked this same question, but in the context of how I believe the 'prompter' is asking it (in the context of the same systems just with different names), then most definitely No. In a society that promotes every sort of 'ism' in the book, in a society where we are no longer free, wild, or living but rather domesticated, dead, slave animals, in a society where everything I hold dear to me is ripped away from me, killed, assaulted, or put in jail, in a society based on fear and death, it does not matter what religions exist as an escape from this horrendous society, or what conflicts they create. They are a given. We know they are going to happen when they exist.

The root of the problem is just that: the root. Right now, this 'prompter' is looking at the branches of this dying tree trying to figure out how to mend one branch when she should be looking further, deeper really, into the problem. It is everything we have known since the rise of agriculture and the dawn of civilization that is the catalyst for all of these conflicts. Everything that you and I have grown up thinking is the only way for the world to work. If we can do away with this plague right now, if we can fight for it until it is gone. Then, I believe, we have the potential for a free, wild, and beautiful wonderful glorious world that we should have had since the day each of us were born.



This is my re-interpretation of “The Last Supper.” I guess you’re wondering why Jesus and his disciples are robots? This is because after talking to many Christian who believe in Jesus I’ve realized that they have mixed views of Jesus’ ethnicity. Some Christians think Jesus was white, some Christians think Jesus was black. But robots don’t have a race and neither should religion. God is too big for just one race or religion.

~Brandy Allen



Resolve the Root of All Our Problems Within

*Lama Anam Thubten Rinpoche - Interviewed on 11/26/08,
transcribed by Lisa Bartels*

(Hirsh) How can we find something sacred underneath the differences of cultures and spirituality? (Original answer of Rinpoche: LOVE.) This is also message of Christ, we have heard this message for 2000 years, but somehow we don't get the message. Why can't we get it?

(Rinpoche) I think we don't get the message because we are not dealing with the very root of our problems. It's a very wonderful message to say, "Love your neighbor, love everybody, be generous", but if we don't resolve the root of all our problems *within* then we will never be able to bring such a message into our lives. The root of all our problems is inside each of us, that is principle of Buddhism we call primordial ignorance. "avidya." Avidya means lack of wisdom or ignorance. And here ignorance means that we have a fundamental erroneous perception of who we are and what reality is. And basically it comes down to the fact that we are holding onto many belief systems. Those belief systems are ultimately erroneous; they have nothing to do with truth. Basically we have to find the more enlightened religion, religion that goes beyond all belief systems or "ism's". And ultimately we have to transcending the, the attachment to the sense of self. When I say "self" I'm not really speaking about in the sense of a person but in the sense of the idea that we are separate from everything else. And so, of course this is very

challenging to humanity in going beyond the whole belief systems, but this is of course the only thing that separates us in the end.

(Jennie) People feel separate from what's happening in the world and don't see how it's really a part of them too. I think that is a problem.

(Rinpoche) Unfortunately. Maybe this is not Christ's intent or Buddha's intent, but all the spiritual traditions attempt with a lot of belief systems and a lot of concepts and those belief systems don't really have nothing to do with truth, has nothing to do with love. They are obstructions to the truth indeed. The human ego needs some sort of a belief system in order to feel true and to be somehow made comfortable. Well, when you read the teachings of Buddha you will find that there is no, really, belief systems, it is purely what we call dharma, the way of life, the enlightened way of life, life of love and awareness. It's not even religion. But unfortunately you will find that all of those elements in the teachings of Buddha or the teachings of the Arabic (?), things that have been hijacked throughout history. It is the work of the ego, the work of ignorance. Though now, I think, we are entering into a new phase of human history, we hope that some of humanity is going to awake. Going towards the truth and say goodbye to all the belief systems that are no longer working for us, no longer benefiting, because they are destructive. You see that most of - many, many countless wars have been declared in the name of God, in the name of religion, in the name of truth. So I believe it is time for humanity to recover.

(Jennie) So as teachers and parents, what can we do to help the youth to wake up?

(Rinpoche) That's a very good question! Can you really change the world? We can't and we can. In some sense, we can't. We are one person and the world is too big. And the task is too immense. But in other ways, we can also change the world too. We don't have to be remarkable individual like Mahatma Gandhi, though we are remarkable on our own. We all have ability to change the world. The

real process begins by changing oneself and when we begin to change our self, the immediate result is that our environment begins to change, our family begins to change. Perhaps you don't, but I notice when I am in a state of love and kindness, my family tends to be quite happy and I see that the power of love and kindness can change your environment immediately. So as a spiritual being, I think we can change the world by simply being kind, goodhearted and also meditating path. Perhaps the best spiritual practice, even Buddha said the way to be awakened is through the meditating. He said meditating not about praying here or worshipping entities. Meditation as an inquiry and also level of your being. Buddha often talked about meditation as an inquiry. He said, "Do not take to my word as the truth out of faith. Even you must investigate my word. If it is truth, then you take it. If it is not truth, reject even my word." Even Buddha himself, it sounds crazy, he tells us to reject even *his* word if it doesn't have the truth. So, this is what meditating is about, inquiry. Inquiring, "Who am I?" Inquiring, "What the truth is?" And in the process of inquiry we begin to lose all our mental conditions, all our, whatever, belief systems that we have inherited from our society and we begin to let go of everything and then we get close to the truth. And truth set us free! (giggle)

(Lisa) Is there one truth?

(Rinpoche) I believe there is only one truth. It's a big problem if there's too many truths than one truth. And that truth doesn't belong to Buddhists or Muslims or Christians, doesn't belong to anybody. It is a universal truth. But it is not true that we can and somebody conceptualize, and then when we do that then we create a belief system and sectarian movement and then we created the other problems. Truth is ineffable. I love that word, ineffable. Truth is totally ineffable and we can never find it in any scriptures or in ceremonies or rituals. We can only find it when we are totally openhearted and let go of all our belief systems. Then truth provides itself.

(Jennie) Truth comes from within each individual?

(Rinpoche) Yes, nobody can really, in an ultimate sense, show that we have to find the ability to the insight. Spiritual teachers can of course guide us on the path, but at the end, we are the ones who are going to find it.

(Hirsh) original ignorance – why are we born in bliss and end up in misery?

(Rinpoche) This is almost like the concept, the big scheme that universe is playing upon us. I always regard universe as mischievous, very mischievous. Plays almost a prank on us. There is a dance happening between delusion and awakening, it's just a fact of life. The moment you are born, you are kind of realizing, not consciously, but unconsciously we are free from everything and then as we grow we struggle with ego structure and we begin to stir up all the information and belief systems from all sides and then we have a choice and to awake or to continuously reality, the big separation. It just seems to be a fact of life that the majority will all have to go through and some people never pick up, they just decide to keep sleeping and some people decide to raise. It is a great mystery, but never doubt it is the cycle of life. And it very much depends on the individual.



A Story as Old as Time

Heidi Barta-Cole

To have a voice; to be heard; to listen: these are most sacred. We each have a story that holds a piece of a bigger picture. When we share our stories with each other the picture becomes complete and we see that underneath it all we are the same. This thought has come through the following exploration:

In my second quarter of college I participated in a heritage studies workshop called, *Finding Our Stories*. Not finding my story or your story, but *Finding Our Stories*. The speaker that day brought up an interesting scientific discovery from the 1980's that had traced our heritage through our mitochondrial DNA, which never changes, as far back as 150,000 years to Africa, where scientists believe humans began. If this is true than in our mitochondrial DNA the original structure from 150,000 years ago still exists. In a nutshell, all we would be is recycled mitochondria...and that would make all of us related; brothers and sisters in every sense of the word. What struck me so powerfully in this concept is the stories that must be in our mitochondria; under all the anguish, war, hatred, separation, segregation, struggle and strife that our history books are filled with, there must be a time when peace existed and perhaps the first humans lived in harmony with each other and the world around them. Think of our DNA as an old growth tree. The outside keeps growing and changing, year after year, so that you never see the original stem that started it all but inside exists this unchanging core. Perhaps this core of humanity holds the original story of our existence.

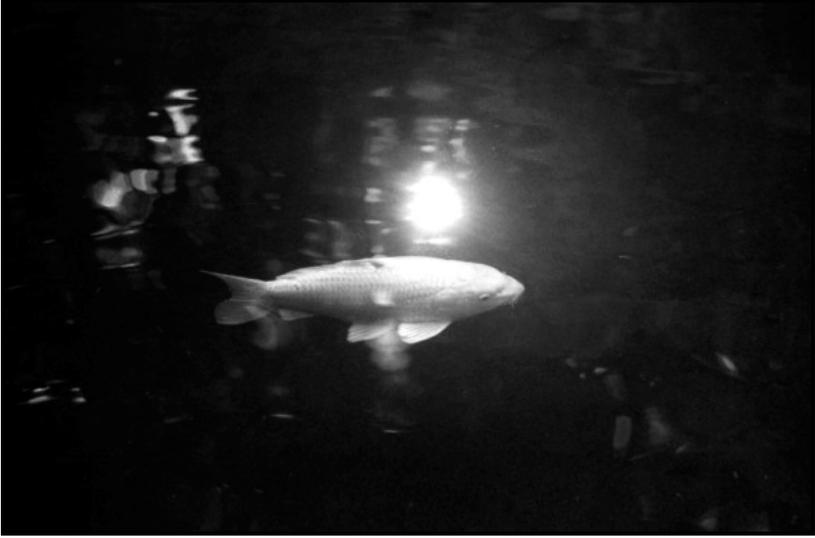
I believe in telling our stories. I believe it is an important way to keep the flow of life moving along; not allowing it to stagnate within us. Life requires flow and flow requires movement; specifically flow requires expansion and contraction; inspiration and exhalation. Without this contrast the flow stops and life flat lines. The earth has her mechanisms of expansion and contraction and of inspiration and exhalation that keeps her flow in motion and life currents moving. And although it is true that we are all connected, humans are an entirely different species capable of reducing, reversing and stopping their own flow. I believe stories may be the primary mechanism that humans have to keep their flow going. Stories are like a giant beating heart pumping us along. For the heart of humanity to keep pounding the essence of life across the earth, stories must be told and must be heard.

“Stories have to be told or they die, and when they die, we can't remember who we are or why we're here.” - The Secret Life of Bees

Tell your story! Tell it so that you remember who you are and why you're here. Tell it any way you can. Inspire the world through your exhalation!

Listen to the stories of others. Listen so that you can remember who you are and why you're here. Listen any way you can. Breathe in so that others may exhale.





Radiant Koi, Portland Japanese Garden
Photograph by: Lisa Bartels



Sacred Question

Morris Rossabi

Attributing such conflicts to Man's innate bellicose nature would be a straightforward, if facile, response. Yet history provides examples of kind and generous peoples and individuals engaging in violent behavior against the Other. As late as the twentieth century, "pacifist" Buddhists and Hindu, abetted in part by religious leaders, have mistreated or attacked the *burakumin* in Japan and Muslims in India. Orthodox Jews, prodded by rabbis and elders, have moved into Arab lands, provoking animosity and violence. Muslim fundamentalists in West and South Asia have sanctioned the use of suicide bombing as legitimate. Earlier in the twentieth century, fundamentalist Christians in the U.S. provided Biblical rationales for suppression and exploitation of Afro-Americans. The list of such egregious religious support for belligerence is, though not infinite, still troublesome. Emphasis on the sacred, especially dependence on formal religion, does not appear to provide solutions.

To be sure, some religious organizations have offered solace to many and have been active in social welfare efforts that government has ignored. I myself serve on the Board of Directors of a Church food pantry which not only provides food but also nutrition classes, ESL, social work assistance, and legal advice, among other services. However, this support system reveals the government's abdication of its responsibility to maintain a social safety net. This is not to question religious organizations' sincerity and dedication to fundamental implementation of the Social Gospel ideal, but their

increasing involvement exposes the government's failure to offer basic services to the poor, the weak, the homeless, and the unemployed.

Unlike President Reagan, I believe that government ought to be the solution for the conflicts and problems societies face in the current world. Shared sacred beliefs or toleration of other sacred views are insufficient to foster social justice, environmental sustainability, and peace. These goals can best be achieved by reversing a thirty-year era of denigration of government. This laissez-faire policy and the attendant lack of government regulation have contributed to the present economic debacle. At the same time, the U.S.-promoted Washington Consensus emphasized minimalist government for countries requiring assistance from the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank, a policy that fueled ethnic and religious antagonism, income inequality, and environmental depredation.

In short, a strong government which acts as a countervailing force to the excesses of pure market fundamentalism, not simply sacred means, is essential to tackle the problems which confront the world. Big corporations and their managers retain their power, Big Labor has declined over the past thirty years, and the government has not fulfilled its duties. If governments protect the interests of the defenseless, who have few champions, then gross income inequality, social injustice, and proper regard for the environment could at least be dealt with. Secular problems require secular solutions. We should not expect sacred means to cope with what are secular problems. Dependence on the sacred might obfuscate the underlying issues.



Wake Up!

L. Bartels

The answer lies in the simplest place...right at the end of our collective noses. The problem is that we're all too shortsighted to see it (or too afraid to look it in the eye.) Or maybe we even see it, but we think it's too big for just one person to tackle. Or maybe we feel frustrated or aggravated or too busy with all of our own personal life details to care. Or maybe we just hope it'll go away (you know, like garbage on garbage day.) This is someone else's problem, right? I mean, none of *us* has killed in Jesus' (or Gaia's or anyone else's) name, right? Certainly we're not singularly responsible for genocide or dioxins in polar bears' breast milk. Those things are happening so far away from where we are, in fact, they might as well not even be real. As long as we wear our cool hemp shoes, meditate, use fluorescent lightbulbs and drink soymilk it'll all be ok.

Ignorance is bliss, we sing, like it's going out of style...

Forgive me my cynicism, but I think we're screwed. At least in a short-term sense. I believe that there is a massive cleansing that needs to happen worldwide, one giant cosmic colon cleanse. Mother Nature is all backed up and becoming toxic from here to kingdom come. You see, this isn't damage that we've created in one generation's time. The impacts of the historic choices of humankind are far-reaching and numbingly enormous. We are living on the brink of extinction but, unlike the poor dinosaurs, we actually know what's coming. Still, we keep plodding along on the same course...

faster; bigger; more! Remind me how we're the intelligent ones again? Seems like we sorta deserve what we've got coming.

At this point in time, we are too separatist, too individualistic, too self-actualized to see. Too absorbed in our own mirrors to consider our part in the destruction of all that exists. I think it's (unfortunately) going to take a real, honest-to-goodness crisis to shake us up enough to pay attention, to propel us forward.

What we need to do now is open our eyes. Really, truly be willing to see. It ain't pretty what's goin' on, I tell you what. But that doesn't make it less real or important. We have to stop believing that everything will be ok if we repent for our sins, yet keep on sinning. Now is the time to be honest and take responsibility - for ourselves and for the next seven generations. This is our work to do. Regardless of color or creed, we have our work cut out for us. Time to roll up our sleeves and get to it! If there is any hope at all, it lies in us. In our willingness to act, in our willingness to say, "Enough's enough!"

Time to let all the bullshit fall from around our shoulders, let go of our egos, and WAKE UP.

*How many times must a man look up
 Before he can see the sky?
 Yes, 'n' how many ears must one man have
 Before he can hear people cry?
 Yes, 'n' how many deaths will it take till he knows
 That too many people have died?
 The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind,
 The answer is blowin' in the wind.*



On “the sacred”

Edward Slingerland

I am convinced that through genetic or cultural evolution, or a combination of the two, human psychology is prone to seeing a “sacred” order to the universe, which then in turn serves to mark social groups, ground moral judgments, and facilitate prosociality within groups. Although I am personally as subject to this psychological bias as anyone, I think the best current empirical evidence suggests that it is a cognitive illusion—though one that has been adaptive for most of our evolutionary history. I am therefore quite skeptical of the claim that beneath the variety of religious claims we see across the world and throughout history lies some sort of common, sacred reality. A commonly heard but very weak argument is that the universality of human belief in the sacred suggests that there must be some truth to this belief: that the earth sits still and the sun revolves around it has also been a universal human belief until quite recently. The power and inescapability of our psychological intuitions tells us nothing about the ontological status of their objects.

On the other hand, I am open to the idea that, because of universal psychological mechanisms or convergent cultural evolution, ideas about the sacred across cultures tend to share certain very general features, which might in turn be used as a basis for dialogue across religions. Some of these might include the idea that there is something special about humans that gives us a status distinct from mere things and uniquely worthy of respect, as well as certain

intuitions about the desirability of compassion, justice, and generosity. However, the fact that one of the main functions of religious beliefs seems to be to mark in-group, out-group boundaries prevents me from being too optimistic about an eventual ecumenical convergence. In-group, out-group psychology is one of the most powerful and easily-triggered features of human social psychology, and my worry is that the attempt to break down religious group barriers is a Sisyphusian task: break down one barrier, and another one will spring up along completely unexpected, and perhaps arbitrary, fault lines.



Sharing Our Heart Songs

Ashley Ryder

Why do belief systems cause so much war and hatred? I've met people who believe that their religion is completely right, and all other beliefs are completely wrong. I've met people who try to convert others to their way of believing. I've met people who will not pray with someone unless they have the same beliefs. I think this is a very limited way to view the world, and very limiting to the connections we can make with each other. If we could learn to open up and share our beliefs without the intention of converting or convincing others to believe what we believe, and more importantly, open up our ears and hearts and *listen* to what others believe, perhaps we would make contact with the similarities between us.

“One of the most powerful techniques for creating bridges between ideological enemies is to have each person share the story of how he or she came to hold his or her beliefs. This is one way in which we can allow our common humanity to shine through our differences.” --*The Tao of Democracy*

It seems to me that most religions (if not all?) hold in common the belief in a divine creator of the Earth and all that lives here. Would not then, all of creation be inherently sacred? And if all of creation is inherently sacred, should we not then treat all of creation (people, plants, land, water, ourselves) with respect and love? We all come from the same source. We are all kin, regardless of whether we worship God, Allah, Vishnu, or The Great Spirit present in the cedar

tree in our backyard.

At Rainbow Gatherings, many different religions and belief systems are represented. Some people form camps based around certain religions. There is usually a “Jesus Camp” and a “Krishna Camp”, there’s another Christian camp called “Bread of Life” where you can get your feet washed and your sandals repaired for free (regardless of whether or not you believe in Jesus). There is a Baha’i camp and often the “Chai Baha’i” stand which serves free chai tea to anyone who comes with an empty cup in hand. Anyone is welcome to come pray, sing, and eat (for free) at any camp and talk and learn about each other’s beliefs.

One of the ways that all of us, regardless of where we are, can use our leadership to support resonant intelligence is simply to share. All kinds of sharing support the process of resonance: sharing of ideas and stories; of possessions and wealth; of interests and fears; of hearts and meals; of activities and conversations; of singing and dancing; of the past, the present and the future.” --*The Tao of Democracy*

On the Fourth of July, (Interdependence Day at the Gathering), everyone who wishes to comes together in a huge circle to Om for world peace. Countless belief systems and religions are represented in this united circle. The tone of the Om is not representing any one religion. It is grounded in our united intention of love and world peace.

I think the idea of sharing our beliefs and listening respectfully and openly to other’s beliefs would go a long way towards promoting social justice, environmental sustainability, and world peace. When we *understand* each other, we feel a stronger *connection* and *common ground* to one another. We feel a stronger sense of responsibility to care for the whole, and not only ourselves. When we see that we all share a sacred connection (to each other and to the Earth), we understand that everything we do affects the whole, including

ourselves. The hope is that we learn to create the space to open up to each other to share and listen. The more we do this, the more it will catch on. As more people begin to feel our common connection, we will move to work together to better the whole, care for each other, and unite under a banner of love and respect.





"When I was drawing this piece I was thinking about the ways in which all the beings in this universe seem to mimic each other. Plants, animals, humans, even the land we live on are all shaped by the same forces and elements. We each must find our own center and maintain a healthy balance. This can be difficult when there is so much happening all around us, but if we can learn to channel the forces and appreciate the wisdom of the universe, we will live in harmony. We will make the world a better place, and it will make us better people."

~Hannah Baker



The Sacred and the Idea of the Self

By Wimal Dissanayke

It is indeed true that our world is full of struggles and conflicts and that they are often based on strong differences emanating from different understandings and interpretations of religious and spiritual traditions; these are frequently related to the concept of the sacred. However, it is also true that if we are willing and prepared to interpret the idea of the sacred in more discerning ways, religious understandings and the idea of the sacred can pave the way towards social amity, religious harmony and the betterment of the human race.

One way of achieving this aim is to re-interpret the idea of the sacred in more socially significant and human terms. We need to de-transcendentalize it and make it a living force in the our immediate social world. In order to do this, we need to re-examine the concept of the self which is at the center of so much social strife and communal antagonisms. Indeed, the concept of the self has becoming a driving force in modern battles among nations and societies. But it also needs to be understood that properly inflected, the concept of the self can become a constructive force generating social harmony and concord. The self needs to be understood in more comprehensive terms. This means paying due attention to the moral and spiritual dimensions.

The eminent American philosopher, William James saw the concept of the self in terms of three important dimensions. The first was the material dimension. It signified the properties and physical

belongings with which our selfhood is invariably associated - cars, houses, etc. The second is the social dimension. It refers to the image that we construct for ourselves through our interactions with other people in society. Man is a social animal and his behavior is socially conditioned. The way we form notions of ourselves, of our identity in relation to others in society is a significant part of our understanding of ourselves. These two dimensions of the self have a way of fuelling social antagonisms in complex ways. Unfortunately for us, we seem to be paying attention to these two dimensions to the exclusion of the third aspect of selfhood that William James focused on. It is the spiritual dimension. This includes our religious feelings, moral values, ethical imaginations and so on. Very often, we tend to ignore or underplay this dimension. It is very important that we call attention to this dimension of selfhood. This effort is closely linked to what I referred to earlier as the detranscendentalizing of the idea of the sacred.

The spiritual self that William James talked of is vital to understanding the nature and significance of selfhood. It seems to me that a proper understanding of this aspect of self is significantly connected to the idea of the sacred. The sacred is not something that us removed from social interaction and the nurturing of the self; it is something inseparably connected to it. By pointing to the spiritual dimension of selfhood, William James was focusing on the way that the idea of the sacred pervades social existence. The spiritual me not only complements the material me and the social me that I alluded to earlier; it provides a template, a framework with which to assess the success of the material and social me.

The eminent philosopher Charles Taylor made the following insightful observation. ‘Who am I? But this can’t necessarily be answered by giving name and genealogy. What does answer this question for us is an understanding of what is of crucial importance to us. To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done,

or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand.’

When discussing the concept of selfhood, it is normally assumed that the material and social dimensions fall into the category of identity values and the spiritual side into the category of moral values. This is misleading; spiritual values are also forms of identity values. It is by adopting such a stance that we would be able to convert the sacred into something immanent and a turn it into a constructive force that guides us towards racial harmony and social amity.





That One

Jacob Peck

ah hmmmmm.....

and yes,

so 'twas what will that 'cannot be',

a question whose answer IS

obviously...

our subtle secret to usher us all Home coming,

The Open Mystery that is our Becoming,

it's the one little, semi-forgotten something,

the Greate Liberator

to Know See Be

The One Thing

These "irreconcilable differences"...irreconcilable?! That is utter hogwash pah tooty poo! Indeed it is madness. These differences are but the slightest of blemishes upon a single flesh shared by all. Yes! The ways of the unseen aborigines who dance for The Mother and know eating brain brings knowledge, while seemingly unequivocally different than the ways of moderners whom will scold their mothers and consume hogwash knowledge nightly from 6 til 10... while seemingly so disparate, divergent and different, they are ways of being that, really, are but a slight shimmer of a shade of that one,

integral something reflected by and from the same nature of mind-soul-body.

These differences that we enshrine, espouse, condemn and cling to, they are but houses of cards teetering on the edge of Real's immanence. What remains when they fall? But of course... What unites us all! Our minds' habitual unwillingness to see beyond the fallacious forms and ideologues of fallacy paves a road of misery... a very long one that we've collectively been walking since times immemorial. For far too long, we've been looking at the lines and not the spaces in between, we've run from and condemned the shadows instead of seeing what casts them, and oh, I dare do say, we've been missing the forest for the trees since before Socrates.

But, rest assured, all *is* well. Everything is cradled in a cosmic sort of well being. Even though people are being massacred daily, psychopaths are attempting to orchestrate the happenings of our world, and the biosphere is straining, it truly is All Good... While these unfortunate facts of war and repression do put a damper on our being cosmically cradled, it is our duty as conscious citizens of the cosmos to transcend the shackles of seeming separateness and acknowledge what it is that unites us, to acknowledge and embrace what's holding it all together, that it is all sublime shades and shimmers of the same song.

To acknowledge essence brings peace. It may be hard to see in this carnival of disparate distraction, but essence is, *essentially*, there... always. We could call this essence mystery. We are united in the mystery that is is-ness, in the very mystery of our being in the moment. All our knowings and certainties are trumped by this blatant fact, that *it is a mystery*. To breathe and dream and live and love, it all arises from an unknowable, immanent mystery of being. To delve deeply into this truth is, I believe, to reveal beauty, love, and that transpersonal understanding necessary for a peaceful, harmonious world.

By working to acknowledge and honor that which is shared by all, we are taking steps to create that world we all dream of and bring into conscious knowing our being cradled in cosmic wellbeing. Peace of heart and mind are direct counterparts to this sort of seeing. Typically it seems strife begins by seeing that some believe this, while some do not. Hence, war. How can it be unseen and unacknowledged that that we both *believe!*? That we both have values, dreams, hopes, ideas, ceremony, loved ones?! Our driving forces are the same. If we see this, understanding is inevitable.

Our young eyes (we all, young and old alike, have young eyes) seek the seemingly separate so as to so fallaciously solidify a fleeting sense of solidarity in self. This is a poisonous sort of pride which has sent leaders over the edge, unhinged artists, poisoned populations, and brought inconceivable misery to the planet and its children. All our hearts are beating to the same beat, to that eternal cosmic groove. To fully acknowledge and embrace this reality will bring peace. We are jamming a tune with Creation, and strife, hate, and control just don't flow harmonious.

By working towards direct experience of unity, of innate harmony, by working towards realization of being's coalescence, we bring into our waking life a deeper realization of the fundamental nature of reality, a reality whose true nature transcends "irreconcilable differences" and seeming separateness. By working to see the One in all, we come to a much greater vantage point of this masterpiece we call the universe. The more we see and understand that the whole is far greater than the sum of its parts, that within the eye of the other I am always meeting myself, the more we realize that there is no me, but that it is always *we*, and the closer we come to our birthright and destiny of true wellbeing and fulfillment.



Peace Among All

Samantha Ezgar

Throughout history there have been many wars between countries and even within countries because of differences in religious belief. People have focused on the subtle differences while overlooking the major cornerstones of religion which are generally the same. Beneath the nuances and cultural differences of all religions there is strong common ground regarding moral code and all religions require faith.

At the heart of every religion is a moral code: do not covet, do not steal, do not lie, do not cheat, do not kill, etcetera. These are what should be emphasized and appreciated before names, dates, and holidays. I do not understand why people have put these moral codes in the backseat to their specific religious traditions for thousands of years for the end result of disorder and death. All religions value peace and community; I hope for a day when the peace and community reaches over all boundaries to people of all races and faiths, and I hope it reaches to the animals, plants, soil, earth, air, and water. The Dalai Lama once said, "*Every religion emphasizes human improvement, love, respect for others, sharing other people's suffering. On these lines every religion had more or less the same viewpoint and the same goal.*" This is beautiful wisdom that is the true common ground for all people who are spiritual and/or religious.

A person who has faith in G-d has made a conscious choice to believe and internalize a concept which he/she may have knowledge about but probably doesn't have undeniable evidence of. This act of being able to trust and believe in a power higher than oneself should bring

all people of faith together. Not all people are willing to believe in something which he/she cannot hold in his/her own hands. I believe people who have faith or who are spiritual have another dimension to themselves because they are willing to step out of a mostly logos life into a mostly mythos concept and this is a great piece of common ground to connect upon.

All religions empower people of their own sect and discriminate against other religions by having pride and teaching only one point of view. This is a fact of religion and human nature and I believe there is a possibility that people of all religions can acknowledge this competition and work to compete in a positive aspect rather than in war or politics. An example of positive competition might be about literacy rates or competition in environmental respect and conservation.

If people of all religions worked harder to collaborate together the diversity of ideas, traditions, and solutions to problems would supersede what has been previously accomplished. People's lives would be much richer and maybe their faith would even be stronger if they knew and deeply understood other people's needs and beliefs about spirituality.

Many people of different religions do not hold personal grudges against people of other religions; many Jews are friends with Muslims, and Muslims friends with Christians, and so on. The larger destruction and obstruction to peace is perpetuated by governments of countries or leaders of government who have an agenda regarding inequality of religion. I have faith there will come a day when people acknowledge their faults and past mistakes as well as their common ground and begin to work to build a brighter future for the planet with those moral codes and laws about respecting nature as the main concept.



Sacredness of Joy and Sorrow

Tsering Shakya

Throughout history, in the name of religion, race and nation, people have slaughtered each other and it would appear that our beliefs and the concomitant idea of our sense of self rests on our hatred of others who are of different faith or we see as simply being different. If we are able to mourn the loss of our own, then, why can't we mourn loss of others?

All world religions and our ethical values abjure harming others. But it would appear the sanctity of human lives does not extend to those who are seen as outside of our own community. It is precisely the exclusion of others within our moral community that allows inflicting pain and suffering on others. Why is it that we fail to feel the pain and see the injustice suffered by others, whilst we weep at the pain of our kinsmen?

What binds us is neither our faith nor our sense of belonging to a race or nation but our ability to feel pain, suffering and joy. All mothers weep at the loss of a child, such emotion has no boundary nor is it confined to a particular race or religion. If we take the definition of sacredness as "worthy of veneration and respect" then what should we venerate? If there is one common idea that would constitute sacredness to all religions it must be human life itself. All religions value human life and it is precious to all beings. All beings do not seek pain or suffering and desire joy and happiness. This reminds me of a quote from Shakespeare "If you prick us do we not bleed?" We

need to feel empathy for the pain, suffering and injustice felt by others and venerate life itself. Our common humanity and the emotions of pain and joy should be the basis for our common notion of sacredness.



Sacred

Tyler Vince

As I sit here writing this essay there are young people fighting across the seas in Iraq, women in Afghanistan are struggling to be recognized as equal to men, Israelis are fighting Jews, Turks are killing Kurds. Our world is full of struggle and conflict and it has been this way as long as recorded history. When people define who they are by their sacred beliefs or religion, the differences become the source of conflict. It is not the differences but people's need to identify so strongly with their own traditions that is the real source of the conflict still so alive today.

Sacred is often used to refer to something worthy of respect or devotion such as holy land or religious texts, a commonly held belief that is the basis for a religion. Sacrifices have and still are made, of animals and humans, in the service of some higher good, a young American soldier dies in Iraq 'fighting' for freedom while at the exact moment a young Iraqi falls to his death, he too, 'fighting' for freedom.

The opportunity for a peaceful existence, where there is social justice and environmental sustainability, will only come about when the majority of the population on this planet has reached a level of awareness where their primary interest is not for the survival of their ego and the need to 'protect' their own religious and spiritual traditions. Peace will be obtainable when the love for all beings and

life forms on earth overcomes the need to protect one's religious and spiritual traditions and one's ego.

Differences in people's spiritual and religious traditions are not the cause of the conflict and struggles on this planet. The real cause is the egos, the need to be defined by certain beliefs and traditions that create separation and ultimately lead to conflict. Identifying with one religion or spiritual tradition to such an extent that one is willing to strap a bomb to one's body and to die for the 'cause' demonstrates the extreme desperation that individuals are prepared to make in order to protect their beliefs.

Irreconcilable differences between what religious and spiritual traditions hold as sacred would be irrelevant if people were more present and less identified by their ego. For ultimately, the truth that we all share can only be realized and experienced when we have the awareness to leave the past and all traditions behind us, all the elements that divide and keep us from living and experiencing life, in each moment.

Beneath our individual differences there is a unifying collective awareness that lives in all life, radiating love. Love is sacred, without love we perish. By being myself and fully present, this is the only way that I know that I can have any effect on promoting social justice, peace and environmental sustainability. For it is only when we truly know who we are that we are unable to hurt 'another'.

The Truth is sacred and this is what I am seeking. The truth is the one thing we all have in common, it is the one thing that unites all mankind, and living forms. Life is a sacred journey and takes many forms; we all take our places on the stage.





The Choice is Simple

Nichelle Barber

Humanity has been trying to destroy one another since the beginning of time and unfortunately it is hard to tell if this power struggle will ever end. It seems that every group of people is fighting for the freedom to pick and choose their own values. They are fighting for the right to live the way they find successful in the eyes of nature and/or a higher being.

Everyone wants the right of happiness, spirituality, health, security, stability, abundance of necessities and privacy. All people want to be left alone to live the way they feel is sustainable and comfortable. However, the fighting begins when one group disagrees with another's values. If everyone could somehow stop thinking that they know best and instead focused on themselves, conflict would be obsolete.

Power will always be an issue, it is impossible to completely remove the conflict gene we all possess. Someone will always want to be a leader and someone else will always disagree and want to change the way things work. However, there is no problem that can't be solved and I feel that with a fair and honest system, that the majority of a group of people can be happy and that the minority will never go unnoticed or unheard. A healthy system will keep reworking itself through time until everyone agrees. This may seem like too high a goal to set, but I believe that with addressing issues and concerns all fears will be put to rest leaving only reassurance in its place.



Is world peace a possibility? I would like to think so, even though immeasurable odds are against us. Yet, if everyone can spend centuries of energy on trying to figure out how to destroy one another in the name of “what is right” then I see no reason why we cannot take that energy and convert it into a positive force. With a little elbow grease, hope and hard work we can create a world where everyone can live in a sustainable fashion and be happy within their own guidelines and values.

The Golden Rule is simple and yet so difficult to truly follow. If everyone could treat others as they would like to be treated, all of our problems would slowly disappear. Acceptance can be one of the most difficult traits to master, but if humanity could collectively make a whole hearted agreement to try to accept other people, cultures, values, faiths and ways of life then we could all be a massive ball of diversity. We would learn from each other and grow with one another and become better and more rounded people than we ever thought possible.

There really is no competition with our two choices. Either continue fighting and destroy the earth and each other, leading us to misery and eventually death, or come together, put in the work and live peacefully, harmoniously and become better people for it



Expressions of Peace: The Season for Nonviolence

Mukti Khanna, Ph.D.

The ASDP Question speaks directly to the need to transform cycles of violence. The Asian Studies Development Forum was auspicious to be held during the twelfth annual Season for Nonviolence. The Season for Nonviolence is observed globally in the 64 days between January 30 (death anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi) and April 4 (death anniversary of Martin Luther King) as a time to engage in both inner and outer transformation to promote social justice, environmental sustainability and peace. (www.agnt.org) The Season for Nonviolence invites us to deepen the theory and practice of nonviolence in families, our communities and ourselves. Transforming enemy images in the psyche before they are expressed in words, conversations and actions is foundational to peacemaking and bridging irreconcilable differences.

Person-centered expressive arts dialogue expands the ground breaking work of Carl Rogers in working to promote peace between groups in cultural conflict to include the use of intermodal creative connection processes based on movement, art, writing and theatre grounded in person-centered core conditions of empathy, congruence and positive regard (Rogers, 2000). In these venues, the arts not only affirm life, but also offer an opportunity to express and transform a whole range of human feeling:

When grounded in color, movement or drama, even the most powerful rage can open into a larger, more elemental

world: a greater reality which includes these feelings, but can transcend them. When anger is expressed in color, it is possible to see it as a basic elemental force, such as fire, and then to become energized by its power, rather than destroying it ... Participation in the arts offers one of the few opportunities for these forces to be expressed, even appreciated without destroying life ... The transformative power in making art is the most powerful force I know in making a world community. (Siegal, 1987, pp. 9-11).

From Northern Ireland to South Africa, expressive arts are being skillfully integrated into dialogue processes to promote healing and reconciliation in groups with historical conflict. Many participants have experienced a dimension of Universality that may emerge unexpectedly when participating in expressive arts dialogues, described as a sense of the numinous, unity and connectedness with all of life (Khanna, 1989). Gandhi has described this experience as Heart - Unity. Heart - Unity affirms the radical interconnectedness of all life and embodies this by relentlessly challenging any form of structural violence and oppression that distorts or undermines this oneness. (Butigan cited in Slattery, Butigan, Pelicarić and Preston - Pile, 2005, pg. 122-124). Witnessing inner images created through expressive arts allows community members to experience each other at a Heart – Unity level, catalyzing profound insight, understanding and transformation.

Talking about traumatic situations too soon can have an unintentional retraumatizing effect and create more pain (Levine, 2005). The skillful integration of expressive arts languages into community dialogues can prevent retraumatization and transform cycles of violence by engaging our imagination, intuition and spiritual capacities in restoring culture and community. The Season for Nonviolence invites us to deepen in our own understanding of a shared notion of sacredness and awaken our own Mahatma – “Great Soul” potential in service to the evolution of humanity and greater cultural understanding.

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Recognizing True Sacred

Ben Radville

In a world that has recently undergone the process of globalization, humans have been granted a greater consciousness of the world as whole. It is unfortunate that, as a negative side effect, humanity has used this to benefit things like imperialism. It takes work to break old habits, as it would take work to destroy the boundaries of this modern world. In order for war and the general destruction of ourselves and our planet to cease, it may be necessary for a greater spirituality to emerge. It could not be confined within the realms of steadfast religion, though it is inspired by the same things that must have inspired Jesus, Mohammed, and Buddha alike. We must look to nature (the divine artist), art itself (which is all around us), and the sacred feminine from which we all came.

In nature, we discover the laws that are eternal and true. We find ourselves provided for, so long as we recognize the act of giving back. The give and take of nature is arbitrary and therefore humbling. The turns of the season may dictate life or death. The only sure thing is that the balance will remain. In this, I find it possible to see life as a struggle and a gift at once. I see the fat tree fallen and the surrounding trees wrapping it with their vein-like roots, as a gift in death that is without sorrow. Sacrifice seems to work best in the simplest form of survival, with no strings of ideology attached. We need food, not philosophy.

Nature always presents itself in a form that I consider to be artistic genius. The berries in the brush are the simplest art, to be admired by the bird whose hunger will cease. Every form of nature, striving toward life and harmony with the conditions of the earth, is to be revered. Food, painting, and music all spring into our minds from the eternal medium of nature. The birds must have sung before our choirs. All we need is around us. The human mind has outdone itself in creating invisible conflict that manifests in wars.

If we are to be any way rooted amongst our human selves, let us be in the sacred feminine. From the womb we all sprung, and to our mothers we owe ourselves. The bearing of a child is something I will never experience as a man. It is unfortunate that we are not always taught from an early age, the mythology of our early existence; how our mother saw life with the prospect of death and more. Late history seems to show brutish paternal figures shamelessly running the show. This strength knows taking without giving. I see cowardice in the great rulers. I see more bravery in the act of giving birth to a child. I see a type of humble compassion that has been taken advantage of by males.

It is from our most basic providers that we must glean insight into our existences as humans. Our time is brief like the seasons, though the seasons turn on and on. The arbitrary give and take must humble us. A suicide bomb does not seem to build soil or feed our mothers. The physical and metaphysical constructs of the human mind are not as permanent as nature. It would be most beneficial to stop diving into the darkness of these constructs, recognizing that simplicity will calm our erratic and typically human behavior.





Golden Vine Maple Leaf, Portland Japanese Garden
Photograph by: Lisa Bartels



Question About Sacred

Kathleen Moloney

Since the beginning of my college career, I have begun to realize the difficulties that are inherent in describing the true essence of anything, particularly the word, “sacred.” Humans are gifted with both curiosity and their ability to comprehend on a deep level. With the rise of civilization, humans began to spend less time focusing on survival, and more time pondering the great mysteries of life. This shift from nomadic to stable lifestyles created a time gap that was first filled with questions, which then people began to formulate answers for. This was the birth of organized religion.

When I think of the fundamentals of sacredness, words such as love, caring, holiness, passion, and power of good come to mind. These ideas are the foundations of most religions and spirituality. With these ideas as a cornerstone, most religious teachings have good intentions. If our cultures and systems were built upon these common beliefs and foundations, and were then acted upon in a positive way, there would be a greater chance of environmental sustainability, social justice, and peace. Many of the world’s conflicts, struggles and wars are seemingly caused by religious differences but are truly a result of power struggles and fear. It seems that when religions become formally established, there is a need to create a hierarchy of power, and as is shown throughout history, power can feed corruption.

In addition to the evidence given by history that power corrupts, it is

also important to note that conflict is inevitable, regardless of religious beliefs and power struggles. Meaning, without religion, conflict would still exist.

Maybe it is not so much the “irreconcilable differences between what religious and spiritual traditions hold as sacred” that people are fighting over, as it is their similarities. Everyone wants freedom, health, safety, prosperity, and a place to live and people will fight to protect these liberties. Another shared belief throughout all cultures is a reverence and respect for life, (though unfortunately not every culture believes in this equally for all living things.)

As human beings, we all began our lives in our mother’s womb. A recent scientific discovery has proven our relation to each other through a “Mitochondrial Eve,” whose mitochondrial DNA is found within all humans. Therefore it could be said that we all came from the same mother. I believe that it is this shared maternal connection we see represented across ethnicities and despite religion. Now is the time to act upon our common values to make the world a better place.



A Spiritual Understanding

Richard Weiss

I think that the answer to the question of how a common sense of sacred could promote social justice lies in a development of true diversity. Based on Peter Hershok's distinction between diversity and variety, diversity involves a deeper interdependence among members of different religious and social cultures.

However, I do not believe that there is a clear formula for how to achieve diversity out of variety. Perhaps there is no formula, just as there may be no universal moral code, although there are universal ethical principles. That is, we know it when we see it, but we can't give a prescription for achieving it.

I think that the growth of diversity involves a spiritual development. We have seen in many examples of globalization which involves the interchange of cultures. This was one of the most important aspects of the Silk Road, even after the commercial aspects had waned. Yet globalization does not necessarily produce diversity. With diversity, there has to be understanding and interdependence. On the other hand, globalization can produce animosity, where cultures clash even when there is a shared religion. Tsering Shakya's discussion of Chinese-Tibetan relations is an example of this. What was missing? I think it is the spiritual or sacred connection and understanding. Tibet and India have had a very friendly relationship, and they share a common religion in Buddhism. Tibetan scholars have translated many texts from Sanskrit into Tibetan, which is an example of

cultural exchange which has had the effect of increasing harmony and understanding. This did not happen with the Chinese, even though Buddhism was widespread in China before the Communist Revolution. There was little spiritual-cultural exchange. In Olympia, we see cultural exchange between Muslim and Jewish communities, which fosters understanding. At one time, that was more common in Jerusalem, but political forces worked against it. I think that the cultural exchange by itself is not sufficient for the development of diversity if it does not involve some spiritual element, which need not involve sharing a religion. Many religions have common principles, and the recognition of these shared values leads to a spiritual understanding which goes beyond a specific religion or culture. When I talk with Muslims, I hear principles such as generosity, compassion, respect for others, and devotional prayer. I would call this a spiritual understanding that we share.



Sacred Can Disrupt Binary or Dualistic Thinking

Bryan Hull

Professor Slingerland mentioned in his answer to the seminar question that the in-group/out-group dynamic that humans are prone to (“either you are with us or against us”) is central in creating and maintaining conflict. Thus, it seems possible to look for ways in which we can disrupt this either/or binary way of parceling out the world. Part of the answer perhaps can be found in the ways that the sacred disrupts binary or dualistic thinking.

Professor Dissanayake noted that the imagination can be thought of as part of the spiritual self. Thus, we might look at the artistic creations that we experienced during the seminar for possible examples. First, in the Hong Kong film *The Killer*, John Woo disrupts genre and identity categories. A few obvious examples include: good cop vs. bad killer; masculine action film vs. feminine melodrama; sacred ritual vs. profane murder; aesthetic beauty vs. ugly violence. Much in the same way, in the Orissi dances we saw on Friday night, each performer continually created a character or persona (male and female; child and parent; hunter and hunted) only to dissolve each character by flowing naturally into either its antithesis or another scene. At the destruction of one character, a new one jumped to life ... and the dancer embodied all of the conflicting characters in one body.

Sacred texts and traditions use similar strategies as the artistic texts mentioned above. The Hindu Vedas, as well as a long line of Sanskrit

and Bhakti poetry, sketch dualistic categories only to find different ways to disrupt their discrete boundaries. The sexual is seemingly intermingled with the sacred, the householder's life with that of the isolated ascetic. Much in the same way, in *The Heart of Islam*, Seyyed Hossein Nasr argues, "The traditional religious life of a Muslim is based on a rhythmic movement between poles of transcendence and imminence, of rigor and compassion, of justice and forgiveness, of the fear of punishment and hope for mercy based on God's love for us." (5)

There are those people who focus on one aspect of the duality, at the expense of the other. They are not careful readers. And it is our job, I would argue, to disrupt the rigid walls and fences that are erected continuously, those that keep people from feeling understanding or compassion for the one another.



Totem Pole at Squaxin Island archaeological dig,
Photograph by: Zoe Farabaugh



**Vi Hilbert’s Translation of Chief Seattle’s Speech:
Healing Words & the Art of Oratory to Transform Conflict**

Rebecca Chamberlain

Vi Hilbert, Upper Skagit Tribal elder, author, storyteller, professor, and great-grandmother said, “The strength and integrity of our culture has given our people the pride in our heritage that endures the passage of time.” She spent the last decades of her life preserving Puget Salish language (Lushootseed), stories, and culture, and reminded us of how indigenous peoples of Puget Sound and the surrounding Salish Sea relied on inner strength, character, and nobility to negotiate struggle and face conflict. Despite repeated abuses, broken treaties, and the devastating loss of land, language, and culture, native people continued to act with generosity and compassion. She said, “How could we have acted with anything other than integrity? We are good human beings.”

As part of her work recovering traditional wisdom and philosophy, she translated Chief (siʔaɫ) Seattle’s speech back into the original Lushootseed Language, and translated Chief Seattle’s native philosophy into the modern world for English speakers. Chief Seattle was an important Duwamish leader who urged diplomatic solutions to the conflicts his people faced. He gave his famous speech sometime around the treaty signing of 1855. Seattle’s words were recorded by Dr. Henry Smith who wrote them in his journal and then printed them thirty-three years later, in 1887, to eulogize Chief Seattle in the *Seattle Sunday Star*. Smith said that his translation “was only a fragment of his (Seattle’s) speech, and lacks all the charm lent by the grace and earnestness of the sable old orator”(Smith 1187).

Vi Hilbert translated Henry Smith's version of Seattle's speech back into the native Lushootseed language so people could have an understanding of the beauty and elegance of traditional oratory. Both Vi and Seattle had a deep philosophical worldview grounded in native teachings and oratorical traditions. Many of the images and concepts in Seattle's speech were not familiar to Henry Smith or his peers of the 1850's. However, these themes were part of a vital oratorical tradition that still continues in native gatherings and ceremonies today. They are part of an ancient practice of oratory that sees words as healing tools for transforming inner and outer perceptions and building community.

Chief Seattle's speech is a philosophical document that teaches us that we are not powerless in the face of irreconcilable conflict, hardship, pain, suffering, and loss. Though his words may have changed form, their message remains the same. Through "healing words," we have the power and awareness to transform our individual and communal experience. They encode a sophisticated understanding of ancient metaphysical teachings that include: knowledge of an inner benevolent power that transcends time and space, life and death; an awareness of the loving bond that people have towards the earth; respect for the beauty and mystery of life; and acknowledgement of a deep connection that underlies all things.

A selection from the speech, chosen by Hirsh Diamant for the ASDP Forum, appears below.

bəkʷ čadbid ʔə tiʔəʔ swatixʷtəd gʷəl kʷiʔat dxʷʔal tiʔəʔ dʔiišəd.
every part of this land/earth/world well, sacred to these my-people

bəkʷ čadbid ʔə kʷi sbabdil.
every part of the little-mountain/hillside,

ʔi kʷi cəkʷdup,
and the flatland

ʔi kʷi bəkʷ čadbid ʔə tiʔə swatixʷtəd
and the every where of this land/earth/world

gʷəl ʔəskʷiʔatil litʔal tiʔit stab tudəxʷəshiičəʔ
well has-become-screed by-way-of those things we-were-happy-about

xʷəʔub tiʔəʔ stab gʷətudəxʷəskəʔətəʔkəʔ
even these things which-made-us-sad

ʔə tiʔit tudsqʷuʔaʔkʷbixʷ.
of those who-were-my-tribespeople

qəbət tiʔəʔ čəʔəxʷaʔ xəʔti ʔəsxʷəʔixəʔ
even these little-rocks seemingly be-without-mind/intellect

ʔal tiʔəʔ səsqʷəlils ʔə tiʔəʔ tukʷat
right here as-they-get-hot by this sun

ʔilgʷit ʔə tiʔəʔ ʔəskəʔlucid xʷəʔč
along-the-shore of this is-silent salt-water/sound/ocean

ʔəsʔiabcut ʔugʷəxʷisad ʔal tiʔit xusəslaxdxʷs
self-important does-thrill as that when-they-remember

x(u)tusuhuy ʔə ti tushəʔlhəʔiʔ ʔə ti tudʔiišəd.
past-activities of the were-living of the my-relatives/people

gʷəl ʔal kʷi tuxʷiʔil ʔə kʷi ʔitlaq ʔaciʔalbixʷ
and when that it-will-be-no-more of the last Native-American

tuiʔal tiʔəʔ swatixʷtəd
from this land/earth/world

gʷəl tiʔəʔ tusdiʔaʔs ʔəsqʷuʔ ʔə tiʔiʔəʔ paspastəd
and that they-were-here together with these white-people

gʷəl xʷuʔəxʷ tuxʷəyəhub,
well, it-will-only-have-been will-be-a-myth/legend

bəkʷ čad ʔal tiʔəʔ ʔilgʷit kʷi tuxʷa
every where at/on the shore hypothetical will-exist

ʔə tiʔəʔ xʷ(i)ʔaxʷ gʷ(ə)adsəsʷuuc skayuʔ
of these not-now that-you-can-see dead

ʔə tiʔəʔ dsqʷuʔaʔkʷbixʷ;
of these my-tribespeople

“When Chief Seattle (siʔat) Spoke”

From: *A Time of Gathering: Native Heritage In Washington State*

Translation by: Vi Hilbert taq^wšəblu. Upper Skagit Elder (1918-2008)

Every part of this country is sacred to my people.

Every hillside,
 every valley,
 every plain and grove
 has been hallowed by some
 fond memory
 or some sad experience
 of my tribe.

even the rocks which seem
 to lie dumb
 as they swelter in the sun
 along the silent seashore
 in solemn grandeur thrill
 with memories
 of past events connected with
 the lives of my people.

And when the last red man
 shall have perished
 from the earth
 and his memory among
 the white men
 shall have become a myth
 these shores will swarm with
 the invisible dead
 of my tribe.





Quit Fighting, Please.

Angela Golinvaux

Religion is a set of steps which are thought to lead the followers to such treasures as enlightenment or a solid relationship with the Divine. Each step is a definite rule about what is (or is not) acceptable and often must be followed closely if one is to ascend to higher levels.

Many of us have taken another approach, which is to strap kaleidoscopes to our eyes and stilts to our legs and then hop around all of the staircases, selecting palatable truths from each. This can be called transcendence. We are not so linearly inclined; the individual experience is more important and we pioneer our own spiritual journey. I believe we have a job here; we buffet-style spiritualists are objective enough to wade through various religions and pick out the truest sounding truths and we are deep enough to care--therefore, we can assimilate and present the common ingredients to help restore peace.

After many years of sampling, I have concluded that compassion is the most effective of the truths for the specific purpose of bringing people who are at odds to a place of evenness. Compassion often leads to its root, which is love. When one recognizes that we are all part of a whole, it's far more conceivable to love one another; they are you and you are me...we're we! As we love our own thumbs, so can we love another because we recognize in them a likeness--not just our own likeness, but the sameness of divinity which exists in

each of us (and every existing thing). This holistic application of loving-kindness would ultimately restore connection and kinship, and subsequently, peace.

Marja Eloheimo remarked in class about the common truths having potential to “heal (the) artificial separation” and I think that’s just what we’re intended to do. We developed imaginary fissures, looking something like culture and including religion, but their divisive forms no longer serve us. The assimilation of the partial truths that each of us has been given reminds me of something I overheard at a basket weaving class, and I will retell my version of it:

Once upon a time, a loooooong time ago--it was yesterday--a big family of strong-headed people had a quarrel. The tiff split the family into fractions, each believing themselves to be in the right. They were so upset with each other that they refused to inhabit the same space, much less speak to them. The only person who remained neutral on the fight was the grandfather. Grandfather was a teacher; along with the other elders, he taught the people the traditional skills so that they might be well-fed, clothed and comfortable. Grandfather updated his curriculum and gave a different portion of his knowledge to each sub-section of the family--this way, they would always need each other.

This is applicable to what we are now currently experiencing. It is time to put our pieces together and reverently admire the beautiful whole. Potluck, anyone?

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