

TRUTH, OPENNESS AND HUMILITY

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Introduction

It seems, at least to us, that the concept of peace in our personal lives, much less the ability of entire nations populated by billions of people to be peaceful, is often viewed as something that is not attainable. We ask then: if peace is not attainable in our personal lives, how can it possibly “happen” between nations, among billions of people? From this perspective, peace is seen as something which might be possible in a far distant future, something which is “out there,” beyond and unattainable. By many, achieving peaceful coexistence is viewed as an idealistic fantasy, a utopian ideal. When asked if one believes peaceful human existence will ever be achieved, the reply is “No, it has never happened before.” Looking around at the events in the world today this might sadly ring true. The problems in the world appear so immense and overwhelming that it seems impossible for any one person to make a difference at all.

Our approach here today is to take a look at the options of *being peaceful* from a philosophical perspective through the eyes of three living examples of this reality: Mahatma Gandhi, Gabriel Marcel and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. With their help, we wish to establish that being peaceful is a fundamental possibility for human beings, something which is a personal possibility that is attainable for each one of us. Being peaceful is something that each person can do. That is to say it is not something which is instantly and totally attainable but rather is something about which one makes a conscious choice. It is something that one can work toward, something one can bring to life even if only in a small and tentative way. Being peaceful is something that develops, changes and grows. It evolves. When viewed from this perspective, being peaceful becomes a personal goal and a directing motive in the activities of everyday life.

Bringing peace into the arena of personal choice and action makes being peaceful accessible. It becomes something within reach. Being peaceful is a possibility to be *lived*, not an ideal “out there” in a distant beyond but something up close and real. This shift in perspective brings with it a significant impact on perception and thinking. It shifts the perspective to take into account that we, as human beings are both individually and collectively, expressions of the continuing evolution of human consciousness. Looking from this view, each person is an active agent of change. This also means that being peaceful is not a submissive, passive

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acceptance of the way things are now or have to be but an active, energetic, perhaps one could almost say, passionate action directed toward bringing something new into fuller and more focal existence.

Turning now to the way that this can be more deeply explored, we continue by discussing three central themes around which the work and lives of the three philosophers mentioned above flow. They are: Truth, Openness and Humility.

Truth

From first glance it might appear that, at least philosophically speaking, we are beginning with a theme that is just as, if not more elusive than peace: Truth. To find an appropriate access we turn to the life and work of a person whose efforts managed to move an entire nation into freedom and self-governance by living in Truth. Gandhi. In his works and by his life, Gandhi proclaimed that above all the qualities essential for being peaceful, is Truth. For him, living in Truth is the way to peace. Now, what does that mean? For Gandhi, being peaceful is not something to be achieved by sitting back, quietly meditating, removed from it “all.” It is not what has been called “mountain top” bliss. No, Gandhi’s was a life engaged in action to the maximum, a life of ceaseless activity, thought, speech and struggle. For Gandhi, non-violence is the key and he reminds us that being violent does not necessarily mean doing bodily harm to another. Gandhi proclaimed that it is possible to be violent by staying home, by not participating or by withdrawing from the world. Staying home, he says, can be more violent than fighting with a true purpose which might be considered non-violent. So for Gandhi, violence is the destroyer of peace. Being inactive can be violent while fighting can be non-violent. On what basis can this distinction be made? How can one determine whether or not staying home might be considered as an act of violence while fighting might be considered non-violent?

Gandhi himself best answers the question above when he says, “What is not included in it is not Truth, and so not true knowledge; and there can be no inward peace without true knowledge.”¹ That is, according to Gandhi, living in Truth. In Gandhi’s view, living in Truth is living for humanity. This should be the motive that directs all of one’s actions and the basis on which to make the determination of whether or not one’s actions are violent or non-violent. Accordingly, per Gandhi, “There should be Truth in thought, Truth in speech, Truth in action.”² Every action taken must be rooted in Truth. “All our activities should be centered in Truth.”³

Moving from Gandhi’s work which describes being peaceful by a person whose actions are rooted in Truth to the works of Marcel who has written extensively on the nature and qualities found in authentic forms of

interpersonal communication and relationships, we find that, “It is therefore in the light of truth that we succeed in mastering within us the permanent temptation to conceive or represent reality as we would like it to be.”⁴ This also means that the quality of relationships shared with others around us derive their nature and quality from our ability to live in Truth. If Gandhi’s thought is given credence and leads to living in the service of humanity, without a trace of self-interest, then the way in which other persons are perceived and valued are permanently changed. For if one is living for others rather than for oneself (which might be difficult for most of us), then the quality of the relationship shared *Inbetween* persons is one of freedom, the true expression of liberty. Teilhard whose writings are filled with a great passion for science has said, peace is “the supreme expression of liberty.”⁵ From his perspective, it is precisely because of the nature of the human being that the evolution of humanity can end in nothing other than peace. He says, “Mankind is not only capable of living in peace but by its very structure *cannot fail eventually to achieve peace.*”⁶

Openness

One of the most prolific writers on the quality of openness in human interaction is Marcel. From his work emerges the idea that personal human existence, in its deepest ontological structure, is intersubjective. He says, “In its own intrinsic structure subjectivity is already, and in the most profound sense, genuinely intersubjective.”⁷ We are born into a world with others from whom we learn who we are and what it is possible to become and some of the best ways to get there. Marcel describes authentic interpersonal human relating as marked by a specific quality that he calls resonance. Resonance is a ground of mutual interpenetration and allows the persons involved to enter into a reverberating synergetic harmony. What makes this possible is that each person is open and receptive to the other, is willing to *listen* and to *respond*.

While Marcel focuses on this close, intimate and intensely personal way of relating to one another, Teilhard places human relationships within the context of the dynamic unfolding of the evolution of humanity. This is an ever developing, changing and hopefully growing with purpose, within a meaningful, universal and even cosmic evolution of the earth itself. In this universal flow towards its ultimate Omega point, the “branches of life” eventually, through adaptation and change, meet at some point in space and time. At this point they either converge or one is eliminated and the other supersedes. Teilhard puts it this way, “converging branches do not survive by eliminating each other; they have to unite.”⁸ So it would seem for populations of people, the “branches of humanity.” Going on with Teilhard, human synthesis is peace and peace is the supreme expression of liberty. By uniting with others one finds freedom in peace. Gandhi would agree with

this as earlier noted, Truth is the basis for freedom and serving humanity is living in Truth. All our actions must be centered in Truth.

Based on these ideas, it now seems appropriate to pursue in a deeper way just how intersubjectivity, the interpersonal realm of coexistence might best be understood. When considering relationships of human beings in this spiritual dimension we call this *Inbetweenness*. For example, the relationship between two bicycles can be alongside and beside one another. They can be separated and it makes no difference. But with human relationships we are already with one another. To take one away makes a difference. The relationship with bicycles is external while with people relationships are internal.

The human capacity to listen and respond to an appeal can only arise from the fundamental ground of openness. This is never an assured disposition but must be made again and again. Openness and availability go together. Availability and fidelity go together too. Fidelity is centered on the effort to understand how it is possible to make a promise. The promise of peace is to take responsibility to be for others. It is to call into being authentic relationships, no matter what changes time may bring. This is the openness of the promise, to be able to co-operate with others' efforts to be free. For Marcel and within the context of the thoughts presented here, for human beings, openness is the, "co-articulation of life with truth."⁹

Humility

It might seem to be an unusual choice to present humility as the third theme in our philosophical approach to understanding possibilities for peace. But this humane attitude which being peaceful allows to blossom in those who can live in peace is for us, essential. Humility is something that cannot be taught. It is something natural in one's heart. This indicates that humility is integrally related to another quality of human existence which is essential to being peaceful, compassion. As Marcel has noted, at the root of humility is the affirmation of others. This means placing oneself at the disposal of something greater. Disposability, for Marcel, is the co-partner of openness. They work hand in hand toward unanimity of spirit. We must constantly aspire toward unanimity and consciously strive for its realization. It must be supported by a passionate faith in human aspirations. That is not to say that we must all think the same and live in the same way. Diversity in ethnicity, culture, perspective and individual preferences are to be respected and cultivated. From these things personal meaning and identity are derived. It is finding qualities in others one does not possess and enjoying them, recognizing and appreciating the values of others that serves to enrich our own lives. As Teilhard points out, "It is through education, by the progressive spread of common viewpoints and attitudes that the slow convergence of minds and hearts is proceeding."¹⁰

For Gandhi, humility is one more kind of action. This is not surprising, as Gandhi's path to peace is one of ceaseless activity, of non-stop action, an integral approach. His was an active, impassioned, relentless effort to reach peace. Following his line of thought we see that when each of us eventually realizes that we are one with others, even sleep is action. Accordingly, Gandhi says, "Humility should make the possessor realize that he is as nothing."¹¹ Certainly Gandhi's activities during life and the legacy left behind after his tragic death affirm him to be an exemplar of humility in action. Being peaceful resides in truth and thrives in an environment of openness, in the intertwining lives shared with others. Human compassion is at its very heart. Going back to Gandhi's conception of Truth in thought, Truth in speech and Truth in action, he says, "True humility means [a] most strenuous and constant endeavour entirely directed to the service of humanity."¹²

Concluding Remarks

From the foregoing it can be proposed that from a philosophical perspective the possibilities for peace begin in the deepest inner sense of each person on an individual basis and through the continuing evolution of human consciousness. Its proliferation can be enhanced through engendering interpersonal relationships based on openness and disposability. In this way, being peaceful is brought into the arena of interpersonal relations. But in order to realize peace *Inbetween* persons those involved must first learn to live in Truth, in thought, in speech, in action. These qualities of human existence, when accompanied by the practice of true compassion and humility are accelerators of the transformation of human consciousness. This is one way by which being peaceful can emerge and flourish. Philosophically speaking, this possibility can only be realized in its actuality, both its hope and its promise already rest within each of us.

Notes

- 1) Gandhi: Selected Writings, ed., intro Ronald Duncan (Harper Colophon Books, 1972), p. 42.
- 2) *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- 3) *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- 4) Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being, I: Reflection and Mystery*, trans. G.S. Fraser (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1960), p. viii.
- 5) Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man*, trans. Norman Denny (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 158.

- 6) *Ibid.*, p. 157.
- 7) Marcel, *The Mystery of Being, I: Reflection and Mystery*, *op. cit.*, p. 224.
- 8) Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man*, *op. cit.*, p. 156.
- 9) Marcel, *The Mystery of Being, I: Reflection and Mystery*, *op. cit.*, p. 235.
- 10) Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man*, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
- 11) *Gandhi: Selected Writings*, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
- 12) *Ibid.*, p. 47.