



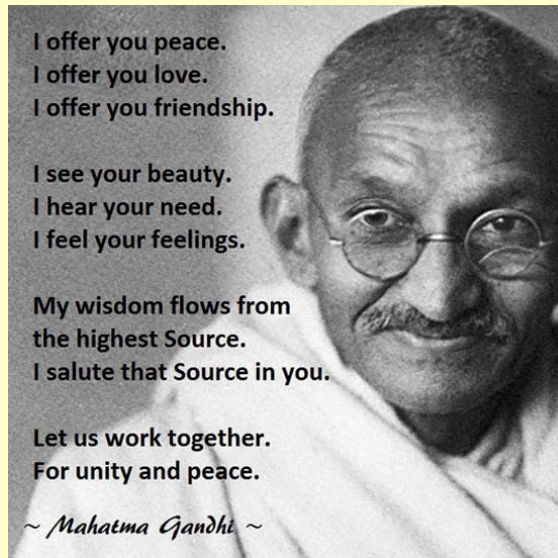
XVII Global Connections Seminar

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**“Peace Education within Faith
Diversity”**



Daly College, Indore, India



"If we are to teach real peace in this world, and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with the children."

- Mahatma Gandhi

As Andrew Wright puts it: "An education that fails to equip children to address world view questions in an appropriate breadth and depth, will simply end up imposing one or other prevailing world view by default. The result will be at best a benign educational paternalism and at worst a religious exercise in indoctrination: either way, schools will end up imposing preconceived answers to fundamental questions about ultimate reality and human flourishing. The task of enabling pupils to appropriate their world view wisely and critically is not one that an open society can afford to reduce to a mere optional extra. Each of our pupils has but one short life span, and if they are to flourish as human beings they must be empowered to develop appropriate levels of religious literacy."

Wright further argues that religion should be included in the national curriculum, not primarily because of any moral or social imperative but on account of its intrinsic value.

Religion is both a cause and a solution to many intractable conflicts. We hear on a nearly daily basis the news stories that portray religion as a cause of seemingly intractable conflict the world over. Some, in fact, trace the view of religion as a source of conflict all the way back to the religious wars that ravaged 17th century Europe. **What does not attract attention is the peace building power of religion.** All of the world's major religions have a significant strain emphasizing peace.

In the Indian context, Mahatma Gandhi was a "deep" peace educator given his efforts focussed on transforming the structural violence of the status quo – efforts that included changing internal caste-systems as well as transforming colonial rule and the related colonized consciousness of the masses. For Gandhi, religious and moral education in

the overarching framework of non-violence was complementary in nature and formed the core of peace education.

According to Mahatma Gandhi, “a curriculum of religious instruction should include a study of the tenets of faiths other than one’s own. For this purpose, the students should be trained to cultivate the habit of understanding and appreciating the doctrines of various great religions of the world in a spirit of reverence and broad-minded tolerance. This, if properly done, would help to give them a spiritual assurance and a better appreciation of their own religion. The study of other religions besides one’s own will give one a grasp of the rock-bottom unity of all religions, and afford a glimpse also of that universal and absolute Truth which lies beyond the ‘the dust of creeds and faiths’”.

Excerpts from the book: ‘Unity in Diversity- Comparative Religions in India’ by Dr. Sumer Singh:

The Essence of Religion

India is a land of diversity, especially in the number of religions Indians follow. It is therefore interesting to read how in spite of the many religions that evolved in different places and in different ages, the essence of all religions is the same.

Religion is essentially about believing in God, in a supreme creator of all that we see and who is greater than our minds are able to comprehend. It is about believing in good and in rejecting evil; in helping those less fortunate; living in harmony with other men and all of nature; and in striving as an individual to emerge from the darkness of ignorance into the light of truth, wisdom and understanding.

It also implies that when man dies, his good and bad actions are weighed against each other and judgement is pronounced which carries its own form of reward or punishment.

Religion when taught to the ignorant and illiterate has been explained through stories and identified through symbols. Sometimes this embroidery has been elaborated so much by the priests that the rituals and ceremonies have become more significant than the essence. When religion has been thus complicated beyond the comprehension and affordability of the common man, a section of people have rebelled and deliberately or inadvertently established a new sect, even a religion, or sometimes initiated a mere

purge within old religion. The new simplified religion that emerges is unfortunately again apt to be made complicated by the new priests that emerge.

Religion is however, essentially a matter of personal faith which provides strength in times of adversity and helps us to develop a righteous, compassionate, loving and optimistic outlook. It is therefore so unfortunate that we tend to view peoples of other religions as different to ourselves and sometimes even with suspicion. How many of us have actually chosen to belong to one religion or another or; for that matter, how many of us have even read the scriptures of our professed religion?

When we do find the time or the inclination to actually read not just our own scriptures but that of others we may be surprised as to how similar the essential message is.

Jalal-ud-din-Rumi, the Sufi Saint said, *"The differences among men results from the outward name; when you reach the inner meaning you reach peace. Oh marrow of existence! It is because of the perspective in question that there is a difference between a Muslim, a Zoroastrian or a Jew."*

Buddhism teaches us, *"The narrow minded man thinks and says: This man is one of us; this one is not, he is a stranger. To the man of noble soul the whole of mankind is but one family."*

The Guru of the Sikhs saw the futility of comparisons when he said, *"Men quarrel over diet, dress and ritual and over caste, community and creed, and have thus torn man from man. My mission is to restore mankind to a single brotherhood. So how can I love one kind of man and hate another.... I believe in one God, not two or three, for me no one is infidel save one who denies His Presence."*

Hinduism is explicit and declares that *"All mankind is a single family... Truth is one, the wise call it by many names."*

And an optimistic appeal is heard from the Baha'is, *"Nations and tribes of the world, who are always at war, turn you face towards unity and let the brightness of its light shine upon you."*

Non- violence

If religion, as we have seen so far, advocates the universal family of mankind, the oneness of God, the need for good to triumph over evil, and the concept of service, then it will follow that non-violence is also an essential part of religion. Non-violence would mean non-aggression and refraining from causing pain to other living creatures.

Islam tells us that *"God does not love the aggressors"*. Buddhism explains, *"All beings tremble before danger, all fear death. When a man considers this, he does not kill or*

cause to kill". Buddhism goes on to say "He who for the sake of happiness hurts others who also want happiness, shall not hereafter find happiness. He who for the sake of happiness does not hurt others who want happiness, shall hereafter find happiness".

Sikhism advises us that *"Holy is he whose mind is holy, who does injury to no one and serves everyone"*. And Hinduism teaches us that *"Non-violence, truth, freedom from anger, renunciation....peace from greedy cravings....these are the treasures of the man who is born for heaven"*.

Nothing that has been quoted above goes against logical good sense. It is also good sense that in order to be able to implement these thoughts into action, man must be in harmony with himself, with others and with all of nature.

Social Service

Religion tells us that beyond fighting evil with good, we must actively be involved with social service. The concept of service is a vital part of Sikhism as is obvious from the words of its tenth Guru. *"I wouldn't accept any offering from a hand that has not served another....he who while he lives serves others, he attains a seat in the presence of God."*

Zoroastrianism tells us that, *"he who treads the path of Righteousness, path of Service, that thou have best decreed, shall march across thy Judgement Bridge."*

Islam proclaims *"Blessed is the reward of those who do good works"* and Hinduism tells us that *"even as the universe work selfishly in the bondage of selfish works, let the wise man work unselfishly for the good of the world"*.

Buddhism expresses the same sentiment in the following words: *"As from a large heap of flowers many garlands and wreaths can be made, so by a mortal in his life there is much good work to be done."*

Christianity's expression of service can probably be best understood in the Indian context through the example of Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity who have given hope and a future to millions of abandoned children.

Hinduism says, *"set thy heart upon thy work, but never the reward there of."*

Relevance of Religion

Man is certainly influenced by his environment and much depends on the family and the society to which he belongs. A youth in modern secular society will not have the same exposure to religion as his counterpart in theocratic society where religion is part of everyday life.

Apart from such differences of environment, it may be generally said that man turns towards God in his moments of adversity. When his normal life is thrown into chaos by the loss of a dear one or the loss of his economic or social stability he turns to God to provide him with the inner strength to continue to believe in himself and in the future.

Similarly man turns to God when, in the later stages of his life, he has time to reflect on his past actions and is keen to make peace with himself, his fellow man and his God in preparation for the final judgement. Even those who have never professed a belief in God begin to worry about denying the possibility of His existence. Religion therefore, is something intangible, which can provide security and comfort in an otherwise complex and changing world.

It is therefore, understandable that some of the great religions have explored the cause of suffering and have tried to provide the answers to end this sorrow. Buddhism in particular, is an example of a religion, which is essentially concerned with this problem and its solution.

“From lust arises sorrow and from lust arises fear. If a man is free from lust, he is free from fear and sorrow. From craving arises sorrow and from craving arises fear. If a man is free from craving, he is free from fear and sorrow.” Again Buddhism explains, *“Those who are slaves of desires run into the stream of desires, even as a spider runs into the web that it made. Therefore some men cut their fetters and start to walk on the Path, leaving sorrows behind.”*

Sikhism tells us *“It is only ones lack of understanding which makes one indulge in joys of life excessively and when these pass man suffers...Men who go for the pleasures of the moment lose the joy of the everlasting.”* It further states that one should burn ones desires.... *“...the mind can be steadied from the activity of life by yoking it to God in whatever one does.”*

Islam says *“Those that desire the life of this world with all its finery shall be rewarded for their deeds in their own lifetime; nothing shall be denied to them. These are the men who in the world to come shall have nothing but hell-fire. Fruitless are their deeds and vain are all their works.”*

And Hinduism advises us that *“wisdom is clouded by desire, the ever-present enemy of the wise, desire in its innumerable forms, which like fire cannot find satisfaction....when a man surrenders all desires that come to the heart and by the grace of God finds the joy of God, then the soul has indeed found peace....and without peace, can there be joy?”*

Zarathustra taught, *“Great evil surrounds this world of ours and there is sorrow and pain amongst our people in different lands....to break this evil force and to bring joy and happiness to all people I have travelled far and widethe eternal truths he has made known to me are Good thoughts, Good words, Good deeds – follow these self-evident truths and yours will be the life of joy and happiness”.*

It is therefore the purpose of religion to try and replace sorrow and suffering with happiness and this surely makes it very relevant to each of us, whichever name we may call Him by.
