

EPILOGUE

Cultivating Peace

*What is Evil, except Good
tortured by its own thirst?*

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Lebanese poet, philosopher, and artist

Violence Is Not Natural

I increasingly believe that in contrast to what I was always taught at school, to what I studied during my psychology lectures at university, and to what I have heard the world over, violence is not the expression of our true nature. Rather, it is the expression of the frustration of our true nature. That is my working assumption. Violence expresses our needs that are not recognized or met. If our needs are recognized, or—even better yet—met, of what use is violence? I believe less and less in the wickedness of people and more and more in the power of bitterness and fear, as well as the power that feeds on frustration. Basically, wickedness is an expression of the bitterness of people who have not taken care of—or had the opportunity to take care

of—their suffering. If we could speak our bitterness or our fears, even the most secret ones, the most taboo ones, and share our frustrations, even the most unavowed ones, or work on them, do you not think we could coexist without aggressing each other? So much acting out stems from the fact that our frustrations not only aren't in our consciousness, they also are neither spoken of nor shared compassionately.

Violence, an Old Habit

Most people, including all too many world leaders, have gotten into the sad, old habit of believing that the final solution for solving conflicts is violence. We have allowed ourselves to be programmed like that—to be sold a bill of goods. We now know that there are other ways of solving conflicts. So we can start deprogramming our violence. We can begin disentangling ourselves from these old patterns and start dreaming that one day, side by side with the war museum, there will be a museum for family, marital, tribal, political, ethnic, and religious violence where our great-great-great-grandchildren will learn that even in the era of e-mails and the Internet, most human beings were still unable to express themselves or listen to themselves or, of course, truly understand one another.

Nothing infuriates me more than such obsolete beliefs as “Man is a wolf for man . . . We have always beaten each other up . . . Humanity never changes.” This kind of resignation, this cynicism, is what is both heralding and ushering in future violence, paving the way for the next pedophile, arming the next war. I want each of us to become aware of our own individual power to contribute to change, to deprogram ourselves out of violence, and to work toward a new shared awareness.

Like Martin Luther King Jr., I have a dream that I nurture every day, convinced as I am that it is our dreams that take us across the oceans, the deserts, or the heavens to discover new worlds. If jeans and T-shirts, Coca-Cola and multi-bladed razors in the space of just a few years have become known and used

throughout the world—to such an extent that they constitute a sort of common world culture—it’s because they meet needs: comfort, well-being, simplicity, identity, and belonging to a world community for clothing and Coca-Cola . . . hygiene, ease, and efficacy for razors. Although I’ve met many people on the various continents of the world who have taken on parts of this common culture, I’ve often observed the same people also are vigorously attached to their local or family traditions. Why, therefore, not contribute to a mode of communication that is also worldwide, without compromising our need for identity?

Nonviolent Communication, along with other similar approaches, fits in with the search for a mode of relationship suited to the global village for several reasons:

- It has a versatile nature, which I referred to in the Introduction.
- It suits the relationship with ourselves, interpersonal relationships in couples and families, as well as professional and social relationships.
- It respects all religious, spiritual, philosophical, political sensibilities.
- It advocates values that seem to me to be the common heritage of our human race.

Like Jacques Salomé, a writer and trainer in relational ecology, I’m hoping that communication will be included in the curriculum in schools throughout the world, like any other subject, as basic as languages or data processing. Imagine what the world would be like if all those who have been trained today in mastering a foreign language or data processing were also to learn this language of the heart?

I hope one day to meet visionary ministers of all nations—the minister of national education, the minister of public health, the minister of national security, the minister of justice, and (why not?) the minister of defense—who will be willing to invest in sustainable changes to our modes of relationships, because they will have become aware that durable change in the

world is possible only when the impetus comes from the center of human beings. These leaders will accept being personally involved by starting out in developing their own awareness of themselves, then carrying the message to the citizens of their country. Just imagine more and more human beings becoming aware, once again paraphrasing Hubert Reeves, that violence and noncommunication constitute not one major problem but rather seven billion small problems. As our numbers grow, we are invited to take seriously our responsibilities regarding our day-to-day behaviors—and to take care of keeping a healthy consciousness, “What I say, what I do, the thoughts I nurture, my intentions, the plans I have . . . do they contribute to unifying or to dividing, to reconciling differences or to aggravating hostilities, to peace or to war?”

That consciousness will enable us to live in this new world, still so little known, with ease, safety, and joy. Would that not be a fine goal for the third millennium?

Cultivating Peace

I believe that each one of us, with our human dignity, receives our share of responsibility. I hope—this is the dream alive in me—that more and more men and women will become aware and joyfully recognize this responsibility and assume it in their daily lives, happy to contribute in this way, wherever they are, with whatever means they have, to the welfare of the global family of humanity. Indeed, I further believe that there won't be genuine peace in our world until growing numbers of us take care to understand our need for inner peace, then cultivate and nurture it as lovingly as gardeners tend to flowers under their care—every day.

Let us begin by cultivating peace within. It will then radiate out. Peace, my friend, is contagious!