

Building Cultures of Peace: Four Cornerstones*

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How can we end the cycles of violence that cause so much suffering? When we envision a world of peace, what does it really look like? And what can we do to help build the foundations on which this better world can rest?

My research over several decades has focused on these questions. They are questions deeply rooted in my own life experience, in my flight as a small child from the Nazis after Crystal Night, the first official night of terrorism against Jews in Germany and my native Austria.

One result of my research has been a new set of social categories: the *partnership system* and the *domination system*. As Einstein said, the same thinking that created our problems cannot solve them. Building foundations for a more peaceful and equitable world requires thinking that goes beyond conventional categories such as capitalist vs. socialist, East vs. West, religious vs. secular, technologically developed vs. undeveloped, and so forth. None of these categories tell us what kind of cultural configuration supports, or alternately inhibits, peace.

Another result of this research has been a new perspective on modern history, showing that underlying seemingly random events lies the tension between organized challenges to traditions of domination – from the “divinely-ordained” right of despotic kings to rule their “subjects” to the “divinely-ordained” right of men to rule the women and children in the “castles” of their homes to the “divinely-ordained” right of one race or nation to rule over another – and enormous dominator resistance and periodic regressions.

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This research also shows something of pivotal importance that is still ignored in conventional analyses. This is that to build cultures of peace we have to pay particular attention to how a culture structures the most fundamental human relations: the relations between the female and male halves of humanity and between them and their daughters and son.

The reason, simply put, is that it is in these primary human relations that people first learn either respect for human rights or to accept human rights violations as only normal and even moral.

Indeed, if we look at history from this larger perspective, we see something else ignored in conventional analyses. This is that those who would push us back to more autocratic, violent, and unjust times uniformly work to maintain or impose rigid rankings of domination in gender and parent-child relations.

A top priority for the Nazis was getting women back into their “traditional” place in a “traditional” family – code words for a top down, male-dominated, authoritarian family. This was also a top priority for Khomeini in Iran and Stalin in the former Soviet Union. And it still is for so-called religious fundamentalists today – be they Eastern or Western – people who also believe in “holy wars” and authoritarian rule in the state or tribe.

But ironically, for many progressives, women’s rights and children’s rights are still “just” women’s and children’s issues. This is again why we need a new language: social categories that show that the cultural construction of gender and childhood relations is key to whether cultures are peaceful or violent, equitable or inequitable, sustainable or unsustainable.

Two New Social Categories

Underlying the many differences in societies, both cross-culturally and through history, are two basic cultural configurations: the domination system and the partnership system.

Societies adhering closely to the domination system have the following configuration:

- top-down authoritarianism in both the family and state or tribe
- the subordination of the female half of humanity to the male half
- a high degree of institutionalized or built-in violence, whether in the form of wife and child beating or in the form of warfare and terrorism, as violence ultimately backs up rankings of domination
- Beliefs that present rigid rankings of domination – beginning with the ranking of male and “masculine” over female and “feminine” – as divinely or naturally ordained.

Moving toward the partnership side of the spectrum - and it is always a matter of degree - we see a different configuration:

- a more democratic organization in both the family and state or tribe
- both halves of humanity are equally valued, and stereotypically feminine values such as caring and nonviolence (which are considered "unmanly" in the domination system) are highly regarded, whether they are embodied in women or men
- a less violent way of living, since violence is not needed to maintain rigid rankings of domination, be it in families or the family of nations
- Beliefs that value women as well as stereotypically "feminine" feminine traits and activities – such as caring, nonviolence, and caregiving – whether they are embodied in women or men.

Unlike conventional categories, the partnership and domination systems take into full account the most foundational human relations without which none of us would be here: the relations between the female and male halves of humanity and between them and their daughters and sons. They fully recognize that these relations shape how people think and feel, how they vote and how they govern, what they think is normal or abnormal, moral or immoral, possible or impossible.

These categories also make it possible to identify key interventions with a cascade of systemic effects: interventions that are unfortunately still generally viewed as secondary to more "important" matters.

The First Cornerstone for Peace and Partnership: Childhood Relations

The physical structure of the brain - including the neural pathways that will determine not only intelligence, but creativity, predisposition to violent or nonviolent behaviors, empathy or insensitivity, venturesomeness or overconformity, as well as other critical behavioral developments - are not set at birth. They are largely determined during the childhood years. Coercive, inequitable, and violent childrearing - dominator childrearing - is foundational to the imposition and maintenance of a coercive, inequitable, and chronically violent social and cultural organization.

Through our intimate relations we learn habits of feeling, thinking, and behavior in all human relations, be they personal or political. If these relations are violent, children learn early on that violence from those who are more powerful toward those who are less powerful is acceptable as a means of dealing with conflicts and/or problems.

Fortunately some people reject this teaching. But unfortunately many replicate it not only in their intimate relations but in all relations – including international ones.

In short, if relations based on chronic violations of human rights are considered normal and desirable in these formative intimate relations, they provide mental models for condoning such violations in other relations.

A global campaign against violence and abuse in childhood relations is needed. This has a number of core elements.

The first is education: raising awareness of the consequences - personal and global - of either dominator or partnership childhood relations, as well as education providing both women and men the knowledge and skills necessary for empathic, sensitive, nonviolent, authoritative rather than authoritarian childrearing.

The second component is legal: the enactment and enforcement of laws criminalizing child abuse as well as legislation funding education for nonviolent, empathic, and equitable childrearing.

The third component relates to changing the mass media: raising consciousness of the constant representation of violence as a means of resolving conflicts and of the presentation in so-called comedies of situations in which family members abuse and humiliates each other.

The fourth component is engaging spiritual and religious leaders to take a moral stand on this pivotal issue of intimate violence – the violence that every year blights, and all too often takes, the lives of millions of children and women, and perpetuates cycles of violence in all relations. This is the mission of the Spiritual Alliance to Stop Intimate Violence (SAIV) that I co-founded. Please see www.saiiv.net for resources and information.

The Second Cornerstone: Gender Relations

How a society constructs the roles and relations of the two halves of humanity – women and men – is central to the construction of every social institution, from the family and religion to politics and economics as well as to the society's guiding systems of values. It is even central to a nation's general quality of life. For example, *Women, Men, and the Global Quality of Life* – a study based on statistics from 89 nations by the Center for Partnership Studies (www.partnershipway.org) – found that the status of women can be a better predictor of general quality of life than even GDP or GNP, the conventional measures of a nation's economic health.

One reason for this is of course that women are half the population. Equally important is that, despite myriads of philosophical and religious pronouncements that values such as caring, compassion, and nonviolence should govern human relations, in practice these values remain subordinate and excluded from social governance as long as the half of humanity with which they are primarily associated – the female half – remains subordinate and excluded from social governance.

This is not a matter of women against men or of something inherent in women rather than men. Stereotypically feminine traits, such as caring and nonviolence, can be found in both women and men. Stereotypical women's work, such as taking care of children and maintaining a clean and healthy home environment, can also be performed by both women and men. However, in cultures or subcultures adhering closely to the domination system these traits and activities are considered appropriate only for women and inappropriate for "real men."

A sign of hope is that there is today strong movement towards real partnership in all spheres of life between women and men, along with a blurring of rigid gender stereotypes. Men are nurturing babies and women are entering positions of economic and political leadership. But this movement is still slow and localized, and is in some cultures and subcultures fiercely opposed; for example, by so-called religious fundamentalist leaders.

What is needed is for the world's progressive leaders to give policy and fiscal priority to a global campaign for equitable and nonviolent gender relations. Giving priority to such so-called "women's issues" has enormous implications for the environment, peace, population, economic equity, and political democracy.

We cannot really talk of representative democracy as long as women still hold a small minority of political positions. We cannot realistically expect to end the arms build-ups that are today bankrupting our world and the terrorism and aggressive warfare that in our age of nuclear and chemical warfare threaten our species' survival as long as boys and men continue to be socialized to equate "real masculinity" with violence and control - be it through "heroic" epics or war toys or violent and brutal television shows. Nor can we realistically expect an end to racism, anti-Semitism, and other ugly isms as long as people learn early on to equate difference – beginning with the fundamental difference between female and male – with superiority or inferiority, with dominating or being dominated.

The Third Cornerstone: Economic Relations

Under present economic systems, the problems of polarization of wealth, hardship, and suffering have been escalating. The gap between haves and have-nots has been growing both between and within nations. Poverty is an intractable problem. Speculation is rampant, as are insensitive and ultimately destructive financial practices. Current economic policies have even endangered our natural life-support systems. As is developed in my book, *The Real Wealth of Nations*, we need a new way of visualizing and structuring economics.

The real wealth of nations is not financial; it consists of the contributions of people and nature. We therefore need what we have not had: economic indicators, policies, and practices that give visibility and value to the most important human work: the work of caring for people, beginning in childhood, and for nature. We need a caring economics. And we need this not only for human and environmental reasons, but for purely economic ones.

To create the “high quality human capital” needed for the postindustrial information/knowledge we must recognize what both psychology and neuroscience tell us: that this capital largely depends on the kind of care children receive. We need strong social support for the caregiving work performed in the household economy.

There are important trends in this direction. For example, most West European nations offer monetary assistance and increasingly also education for parenting, along with paid parental leave, health care, and high quality early childhood education. Satellite economic indicators are beginning to count the economic value of this work. For example, the Swiss government found that if it were included it would constitute 70 percent of the reported Swiss GDP.

But the general failure to give real value to this work in large part accounts for the fact that poverty and hunger have proven intractable. Indeed, it makes no sense to talk of hunger and poverty in generalities when the mass of the world's poor and the poorest of the poor are women and children. Even in the rich United States, women over the age of 65 are according to U.S. statistics twice as likely to be poor as men over 65. Most of these women are, or were, caregivers.

We need economic inventions such as caregiver tax credits, Social Security credit for childcare, and a more accurate system of economic

indicators that give visibility and value to this essential “women’s work” – whether it is performed by women or men.

Development policies also need to shift their focus to women. Many studies show that in most regions of the developing world women allocate far more of their resources to their families than men do. We must include the work of caring and caregiving still performed primarily by women worldwide into national and international systems of economic measurement and accounting.

We should encourage and reward economic and social inventions that give value to caring and caregiving work in both the market and non-market economic sectors. For example, we have national programs to train soldiers to effectively take life - and we have pensions for them. By contrast, we have no national programs for training women and men to effectively care for children - even though we have solid scientific knowledge about what is and is not effective and humane childcare.

People need meaningful work. The negative income tax or guaranteed income for doing nothing is no solution. Clearly the most important and meaningful work is that of caring for other humans, particularly our children and our growing elderly population, and for our natural environment.

Redefining productive work also imbues work with what it lacks in a domination system - where it is primarily motivated by fear and the artificial creation of scarcities through wars and misallocation and misdistribution of resources. Giving value to caring and caregiving imbues work with meaning. It gives work a spiritual dimension, since at the core of all spiritual traditions is the valuing of compassion and love.

The Fourth Cornerstone: Stories, Beliefs, and Spirituality

We humans live by stories. Unfortunately many of the stories we inherited from earlier times teach that dominating or being dominated are the only alternatives. That there are today stories offering a partnership alternative of relations built on mutual benefit, mutual respect, and mutual accountability is a sign of a major revolution in consciousness.

But for this revolution in consciousness to succeed, we need more than the emergence in bits and pieces of new stories. We need a concerted effort through the arts, music, and literature, as well as through science, to show that a partnership way of structuring human society is a viable possibility. We need to show that the struggle for our future is not

between religion and secularism, right and left, East and West, or capitalism and socialism, but between traditions of domination and a partnership way of life. In short, we need the new language for describing societies offered by the partnership system and domination system.

These changes in language and in stories have enormous implications for both spirituality and morality. Spirituality becomes not so much an escape to otherworldly realms from the suffering inherent in a dominator world, but an active engagement in creating a better world right here on Earth. And rather than being used to coerce and dominate, morality is imbued with caring and love.

Conclusion

To spread the consciousness that we can, and must, change traditions of domination requires courage. It takes courage to challenge domination and violence in both international relations and intimate relations. It takes courage to actively oppose injustice and cruelty in all spheres of life: not only in the so-called public sphere of politics and business but in the so-called private sphere of parent-child, gender, and sexual relations.

It may not be popular, and may even be dangerous to do so, since domination and violence in intimate and intergroup relations are encoded in some religious and ethnic traditions that are our heritage from a more rigid dominator past. But it must be done.

We are at a time when the mix of high technology and the domination system can take us to an evolutionary dead end. High technology in service of conquest and domination – whether of people or of nature – is not sustainable.

We urgently need to shift from domination to partnership worldwide – and every one of us can play a role in this cultural transformation. If we consciously and concertedly build these four foundations for a partnership way of living we can move from a violent dominator culture to a more equitable, joyful, sustainable future for ourselves, our children, and generations still to come.

*“It is not enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it.
And it isn’t enough to believe in it. One must work at it.”
Eleanor Roosevelt*

