

**Building Peace in a Stormy World:  
A Journey of Service, Hope, and Faith**

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I am very honored to be selected as the final speaker in the Lenz Distinguished Lecture series and to reflect with you on the joys and challenges of my journey as a peacebuilder, psychologist, activist, and Dharma student. Naropa has always captured my attention. Your vision and mission align with my core beliefs in the integration of contemplative practice and spirituality within our academic and social endeavors. Naropa also builds bridges across disciplines, which is an essential aspect of my life path as a psychologist, peacebuilder, and Dharma student. With respect for all that Naropa offers, I hope that you continue to thrive, helping future generations find ways to join mind and spirit, self and society, and compassion with wisdom.

In this talk I will reflect on how the abundant spiritual, psychological, and social teachings available to seekers at Naropa and elsewhere have permeated my life and guided my vocation. I will especially focus on three core teachings of the Buddha that illuminate my understanding of the dynamics of violent communal conflict and that shape my responses as an international peacebuilder.

My current career as a peacebuilder has emerged through a half century, born of passion for social justice, abhorrence of war, belief in personal agency, and faith that what we do matters in the world. I came to Buddhism in midlife, practicing Vipassana at the Insight Meditation Society in Massachusetts. The practice I learned to follow there and the great teachers with whom I was privileged to study offered me spiritual fulfillment and breathtaking insights into human psychology and social relations. In my new profession, confronting extremes of human experience, I find the teachings of Buddhism extraordinarily relevant.

I embarked upon a mid-career change from counseling psychology to peacebuilding through which I clambered up a steep learning curve, adapting old skills and learning new concepts as I changed venue from consulting rooms to refugee camps and bombed-out cities. I have spent these last decades attempting to integrate three compelling and inter-related disciplines: Buddhism, psychology, and the theories and practices of social change.

My first attempt to integrate disciplines arose when I wrote my doctoral dissertation in the 1970's on the relationship of Buddhist meditation to contemporary psychotherapy, at

a time before transpersonal psychology emerged as a concept and practice. I lived in a small cabin on a pond in rural New Hampshire, where I had a typewriter in the center of a saw-horse table surrounded on one side by a pile of Dharma books and on the other by an equal size stack of humanistic psychology texts. I wanted these books to talk to each other, so that I could connect the self-story line of therapy to the no-story and no-self of Buddhist practice, and understand how these seemingly opposite polarities could coexist. I highly valued my experiences as a therapist and a client and could not discount the benefits of psychotherapy for my own evolution as a young adult. Simultaneously, I could not deny the alternative universe of Dharma that now presented itself.

Over time, I learned to move in and out of psychological and Dharma paradigms more fluidly, understanding them as distinct and yet mutually reinforcing interpretations of reality. Self and no-self do coexist, even live happily together in mutual support. Dharma practice can liberate the ego from its narcissistic demands for feeding and attention. Buddhist training helps us crack the delusion of a separate, independent, and unchanging self and allows us to join the flow of consciousness without clinging and attachment to self and story.

A second integration challenge arose for me as I endeavored to reconcile my appreciation of psychology with my passion for social change engagement. As I encountered psychological theory and practice decades ago, it was largely centered on the individual, the project of the evolving self, whereas social change work focused more directly on community, interconnection, and responsibility to a larger vision. In recent years, we have learned that we need both emotional and social intelligence, and that these capacities are linked as the individual and society are linked. Practicing psychologists and their academic counterparts have expanded social psychology and all the new family, group, systems, feminist, and political psychologies to address emerging contemporary problems, and created such associations as Psychologists for Social Responsibility to move the field into a greater acceptance of its wider role in issues of peace and justice. The integration of these disciplines serves the emerging needs and nimble minds needed to navigate our diverse and complex society.

Because I came of age during the significant and irresistible social movements arising on the streets in the 1960's, I swept into young adulthood as a social change activist. Living near New York City and studying at New York University's Graduate Center for Human Relations, I partook as fully as possible in the movements supporting civil rights and opposing war. I was jubilant about people power, the capacity of well-organized masses to subvert the dominant paradigm, removing kings as occurred in Nepal in 2006, bringing down dictators as with Marcos in the Philippines in 1986, raising anti Vietnam War and pro civil rights consciousness in the US, or ending Communist rule as happened in Prague in 1968, all of it reflecting Gandhi's nonviolent defeat of the British Empire in India. As the 1960's movements went on, however, I observed our self-righteousness and blaming, divisive behavior. We were making enemies that to this day impact national politics. I did not know much about the roots of my own emotions or responses, and I doubt if my compatriots had more self-awareness than I had. I thus found myself drawn to psychology to understand my own angst, anger, alienation, and aspirations.

My commitment to psychology was personally significant and professionally rewarding, drawing me into the creative art of psychotherapy and later as professor of counseling psychology. I found myself attracted to group therapy work, to social relations, and to feminist therapies that offered a sense of solidarity and social awareness, countering the isolating tendencies of individual therapy, useful though that model is. I was especially drawn to the human potential movement and to Carl Rogers, with his emphasis on unconditional positive regard, which would later re-appear in Dharma practice through the language of compassion and loving-kindness, or *karuna* and *metta*. Along with gratitude for the considerable self-development and profound healing offered by psychotherapy, over the decades I became concerned with both the lack of social analysis in psychotherapy as well as a kind of self-preoccupation that minimized issues outside the consulting room. Eventually I grew restless, wanting a vocation that would embrace the vast problems that confront societies, such as war, poverty, prejudice, injustice, and oppression.

In the midst of my years as a therapist, however, I accepted an invitation to attend an insight meditation retreat, and my world turned upside down again. Here was yet another discipline, knocking down what I thought I knew and believed, touching unfathomable feelings and experiences unknown to me as a therapist, client, or social change activist. I was curious, and then I was hooked. I had not known I was looking for this, but when it arrived there was no question that I was in the realm of the profound. Buddhism would change everything, including my behavior and attitudes, my professional approach to clients, and eventually my life goals. I found ways to include mindfulness in psychotherapy and later to create courses in Buddhist psychology with like-minded colleagues at Antioch Graduate School. We taught these courses at universities and meditation centers, thus bringing together much that I valued. But the tug of the fractured world captured my consciousness and demanded full attention. I resonated deeply with the spirit of loving-kindness, compassion, and generosity, and I wanted to engage these practices in the wider world.

When we reach such junctures in our professional lives, it is time to summon our courage and respond to the call. It is new life wanting to breathe through, and often it will not be ignored. I questioned what I could do to integrate my passion for social justice, my attraction to the insights of psychology, and my relationship to the profundity of the Dharma. I waited, perhaps not always patiently, for answers to emerge. I became active in the Buddhist Peace Fellowship and the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, and that led me to Burma and thence to international peacebuilding, which is my current and very wonderful professional home.

For the past fifteen years, I have worked diligently to develop my skills as well as contribute to the overall field of peacebuilding, which until recent decades barely existed as an academic discipline but now enjoys academic respectability, high-level research, and graduate programs worldwide. Practitioners apply and hone skills and insights accumulated over decades of engagement in war-torn or war-recovering communities, hoping to reduce the endless recurrence of war and improve the conditions for peace.

Becoming a practitioner in this demanding field refines every dimension of my awareness and sensibilities, leaving me awed by the human capacity for resilience and reconciliation, as well as for mindlessness and destruction.

In joining my colleagues in international peacebuilding, my analysis of conflict and plans for interventions are shaped by years of social engagement, psychological practice, and contemplative study. As I interact with those who have been isolated by walls, harmed by wars, and shunned by encrusted prejudices, I find myself encouraging reflection, kindness, and compassion as well as structural change and nonviolent action, so that victims and violators can experience the restoration of self as well as acceptance and safety within the human circle. In that sense I am still doing the work of healing, but in circumstances far removed from the coziness of the consulting room. I am also living and teaching engaged Dharma, and actively promoting social change. My teacher Jack Kornfield calls this the Bodhisattva path of tending the world. He quotes Gandhi, who said: *“Those who say that spirituality has nothing to do with politics do not know what spirituality really means.”*

In 1994, I founded an NGO that I named Karuna Center, with the hope that the essence of compassion might be present in all aspects of our peacebuilding. In our programs, it is our intention that parties involved in conflict be able to experience the security and recognition needed to confront their own suffering and extend their relationships to the enemy other. At their best, Karuna Center trainings help participants wake up to our interdependence, our common humanity, and our mutual need for one another. I use the vocabulary of conflict transformation rather than conflict management or resolution, as it carries the twofold plea for transformation of our attitudes and behaviors as well as transformation of the unjust institutions that contribute to human suffering.

Peacebuilding, for me, is compassion practice in action. Karen Armstrong, an expert on world faiths, reports that compassion is at the center of all the world’s religions, where it is often best expressed as the Golden Rule. She believes that *“Compassion is the only test of true religiosity. When we feel with others, we dethrone ourselves from the center of our world and we put another person there. Love your enemies; honor the stranger.”*

Karuna Center began its engagement with compassion in Buddhist countries in Southeast Asia, primarily Burma and Sri Lanka, but soon we were invited to offer programs in the Balkans, Mid East, Africa, South Asia, and elsewhere, carrying the word *karuna* to Muslim, Jewish, and Christian, as well as Buddhist and Hindu communities. Our unusual name provides an opportunity for workshop participants to investigate the power of compassion. As seminar participants engage in dialogue with those who represent the “enemy-other,” compassion can ease their first postwar encounters, which are so vital to relational reconstruction. We also explore extending the boundaries of compassion to the widest possible circle, and observe the consequences of exclusion and marginalization from a circle too narrowly drawn. We cite Mother Teresa who said: *“The problem with the world is that we draw our family circle too small.”* We then might simulate our own circles, noting who is left out and giving voice to the excluded, perceiving how their unmet needs contribute to future cycles of communal violence.

Selecting from the unfathomable richness in the Dharma, I have identified three concepts for this talk that, along with compassion, especially shape my understanding and responses as a peacebuilder. These are interdependence, impermanence, and the three poisons of greed, anger, and delusion.

## **Interdependence**

Fostering, cultivating, and nurturing awareness of radical interdependence might be the most hopeful practice for our fractured world. The concept of separateness is lethal, enabling us to divide, dehumanize, and destroy. Interdependence is our full, lived, daily reality, so obvious and yet so threatening to the mantle of separate identities we each wear. It is essential to foster this realization of our deep and profound common humanity and interdependence, and our need for each other, because none of us can survive without some form of human exchange. Interconnection does go against the grain of rugged individualism and self-promotion, but these are fruits of a deluded worldview that we can no longer afford. Interdependence is certainly not only a Buddhist realization. You may remember Dr. Martin Luther King's succinct and prophetic statement that "*We will either live together as brothers and sisters or die together as fools.*"

Our global environmental crisis now hammers home that message more forcefully than ever. By way of one striking example, two billion Asians receive their water from the rapidly melting glaciers of the Himalayas. Their wars and boundaries, religious struggles and identity politics, competitions and self-promotions, already seem like pale sideshows in comparison to their completely interdependent future, where they must live together as brothers and sisters, humble before nature and able to collaborate for survival.

Buddhist sages explain interdependence with poetic metaphors. Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh, who founded the Order of Inter-being, speaks about inter-being as the interconnectedness of all things. If you are a poet, he writes, "*you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud, there will be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow; and without trees, we cannot make paper.*" All phenomena, Thich Nhat Hanh explains, are interdependent and endlessly interwoven. The elements that make up the world are mutually embedded and exist in relation to each other. The elements that compose a community are equally embedded. The psyche pays a high price for harming any one element of that community, as seen in the traumatized veterans who return to our shores, scarred from the dreadful and dehumanizing task of killing those they have been taught to regard as enemies.

In another illustration, Buddhist scholars use the image of Indra's Net, first articulated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, where infinitely repeated mutual relations exist throughout the universe. Indra's net has a shimmering jewel at each joining of the web, and each jewel is reflected in all the other jewels. This image, as well as Thich Nhat Hanh's cloud floating in a sheet of paper, is a peacebuilder's dream vision of interdependent relationships. If each is a jewel, whom can you harm?

Maha Ghosananda, the beloved and recently deceased Supreme Patriarch of Cambodia, also known as the Gandhi of Cambodia, frames interdependence another way: “*A peaceful person makes a peaceful family. A peaceful family makes a peaceful community. A peaceful community makes a peaceful nation. A peaceful nation makes a peaceful world.*” With this simply expressed formulation, Ghosananda helped Cambodians to see the importance of interdependently nested systems from family to government, and encouraged rebuilding of community in a country whose collective soul was shattered by war. I walked with this great monk through devastated villages, touched by his people’s reverence toward him as they offered branches with which he could sprinkle them with water blessings.

I frequently find myself in such war-shattered communities as Cambodia, working with groups of people who have experienced violence and victimization at the hands of the other. In such circumstances, participants feel separate, hostile, and fearful, each individual and group wearing the psychological armor of protection. Coexistence is still not conceivable, much less interdependence. One of our tasks is to create the container and conditions where group members can share their perceptions and experiences in an environment of safety and intimacy, so that it becomes feasible for them to see each other differently and relate to each other in new ways. When people truly listen to each other, they rediscover their common vulnerability and open to the truth of their interdependence. These discoveries are transformative, deeply healing, and often surprising, for we are taught to believe that our enemies are less human than we are and should never be trusted again.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu speaks compellingly about *ubuntu*, a concept embedded in South African traditional cultures and Bantu languages that defines individuals in their relationships with others. Ubuntu, usually translated into English as “*a person is a person through other persons,*” is akin to the understanding of inter-being and interdependence. Archbishop Tutu says that his “*recipe for peace*” is in remembering: “*We cannot be fully human alone.*”

A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he and she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are.

Because of the reinforcing influences of Dharma, community engagement, and relational psychology in my background, I am drawn to *ubuntu* and to this challenge of cultivating interdependence and reweaving the bonds of community. I have seen repeatedly that empathy increases as we know others in their rich humanity and that we can learn to approach diversity in a spirit of curiosity and liveliness rather than from fear and dread of difference. I have led intergroup dialogues in dozens of countries and communities and never failed to see deep change in previously estranged participants as their fullness is revealed to each other. Israelis and Palestinians in the Mid East, Hindus and Muslims in South Asia, Bosnians, Serbs, Kosovars, and Croats in the Balkans, Hutu and Tutsi in

Rwanda, all can learn together, feast together, dance together, and pray for peace together. In many of these cases our dialogues take place in contexts where communities have committed great injustices and violence to each other, and yet members of the group rooted in those communities reach out to the enemy-other and overcome their long-held stereotypes and enemy images. On some level, community members recognize the futility of further war and the inevitability of creating a shared future, and thus undertake the first steps on the long road to rebuilding trust and mutual acceptance.

To further this project of global interdependence, fourteen years ago I created an annual Summer Peacebuilding Institute called CONTACT, or Conflict Transformation Across Cultures, that takes place each June in Vermont for about 60 people from perhaps 25-30 countries. In this mix each year we contain the world's major religions, most continents, hundreds of languages, ethnicities, and cultures, and almost every imaginable difference of context, circumstance, privilege, and historical narrative. In our three intense weeks together, genuine transformation happens, as does the acquisition of the skills and theories of peacebuilding. We create an intimate, intense, interdependent, consciousness raising, self-reflective learning community, a crucible in which our participants grow and stretch, reaching out to all the forbidden others. By the time of our closing ceremonies, the learning community has been transformed into something like Martin Luther King's vision of the "*beloved community*." It is one of the most profound experiences of my life, year after year.

Recently, we developed a CONTACT South Asian Program to foster interdependence of thought and action among community leaders in this war-torn region that includes Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. I felt as an American whose government is now deeply embroiled in wars in South Asia, that I had a responsibility to contribute to peace in whatever humble way possible, and my way seems to be as a teacher and facilitator. In February we gathered fifty participants from the region who brought with them a full set of prejudices, fears, and stereotypes about each other's nations, religions, cultures, and ethnicities. In short order those prejudices fell away as they discovered each other at deeper levels where they all struggle with the volatility of armed conflict, extremist teachings, oppression of women, grinding poverty, and those melting glaciers that threaten their existence.

With tears and humility, Shreya from India apologized to the Pakistanis for hating them all her life because a Pakistani killed her grandmother. Shafqat from Pakistan acknowledged to the Bangladesh participants the harms caused when East and West Pakistan were divided into two countries. Arun from Bangladesh in turn acknowledged to India the potential harm to be caused by a huge refugee influx should Bangladesh go under water as global temperatures rise, recognizing that they had no plan of rescue or protection. In a bonding dialogue about gender, the men apologized for their own past behaviors and took responsibility for serving as allies to women in their countries. And I apologized to the Afghan and Pakistan groups for America's wars in their region, which are causing great harm. This learning community tasted great compassion, *ubuntu*, and interdependence, which I know will whet their appetites for more of the same.

Here I want to read you first an excerpt of a letter from Shafqat Mehmood, a Pakistani senior peacebuilder and former military man, and then a letter the CONTACT community received from Moussa Bambara, a 2009 participant from USAID Mali.

Shafqat writes:

As I look back at my professional career of almost four decades in various fields, especially as a trainer/resource person in hundreds of workshops in Pakistan and abroad, I admit that CONTACT South Asia was the best interactive exposure of my life.

With all the relevance to conflict, its nuts and bolts and transformation, the most pronounced aspect was that it brought a cross cultural bouquet (the participants) to a deeper place of understanding and perception of the prevalent environment in the region, which no other exercise could produce. For many days I have been wondering why anyone didn't think of such a program much earlier with such an unequivocal impact across cultures, and we lost years and years in contemptuous bitterness of internal/external conflicts and mistrust.

Besides having command over your subjects, it was for the first time I saw such senior and experienced trainers deeply and personally engrossed in the proceedings and emotional currents of a workshop. I cannot forget the moments when you allowed us to share our common humanity and grief. At that juncture we could sense the pain you felt, as tears ran through your eyes.

The letter from Mali, in a very different tone, colorfully illustrates the change of perceptions and movement of the heart that is possible in peacebuilding and that gives me the impetus to keep working at this craft.

### **Moussa Bambara, USAID Mali**

Brothers and Sisters,

I am now back home and I feel alone without you citizens of Contact 2009. I am really blessed to be part of this training. Through this journey in Brattleboro, I gained on two sides.

**1.** You know in my country (Mali, West Africa), we don't know much about Arabic countries and even not much about the true realities of some neighboring countries. All we know is from newspapers, TV, or radios. You agree with me that sometimes there is some bias at these levels. **BUT** at Contact 2009, I got the wonderful opportunity to see, know and understand more about others. **I am definitely transformed.**

My experience started the very first night of my arrival in Brattleboro. At the airport we were received by some program associates. Among them we had a lady from Yemen (Fatima). I said to myself: "Hey an Arabic in US? I wish there is no terrorism during my stay here!"

We spent this first night in a hotel and I shared the room with a guy from Palestine (Ashraf). Thinking of what I used to see on TV, Hooooo dears, my fear started growing. And I spent a blank night because I was looking at him. I even did not want him

to turn off the light.

The next day, we were brought from the hotel to SIT for breakfast. The first guy I met there is from Afghanistan (Bashir). I could not eat well. Right after breakfast, we were taken in the dorms. There again things were not easy for me. I shared the room the Mohamed from Pakistan. In the room facing mine, Joe (Liberia, West Africa) was there. Everybody knows about the sad tragedy of Liberia. Next to my room, again another Liberian (Lorma) with a loud voice was there. Hussein (Iraq) and Alan (Sierra Leone, West Africa) were sharing the same dorm with me in addition to Sonam (India). “What a dangerous place!” I was saying.

I started asking myself if I am in the right place simply because I never had a good story on these people and their countries in the past. I was shy at the beginning of the training because I did not feel secure among these people and I could not sleep.

**BUT AGAIN** at the end of the first week, I started having another view on these people simply because we were in CONTACT. We played volleyball together, and we discussed all the events at night. The name of this training is the best. I understood that if you want to know somebody, you need to be in contact with him. I saw that we are all the same human beings with good hearts and willingness to make peace for a better future of the world. I have truly brothers and sisters in all the world because of CONTACT. What a positive experience for me!

2. Considering the job I am doing with USAID Mali, Contact 2009 was one of the best opportunities for me to gain knowledge, skills and confidence in myself as a conflict transformer and development agent.

## **Impermanence**

We understand that the Buddha’s last words were, “All conditioned things are impermanent. Strive on with diligence.” Moussa Bambara confronted impermanence as he faced the incongruity and dissonance between his stereotypes and the realities he encountered in the CONTACT Program. Diligent striving includes the intense mental effort to see and understand changing conditions and to cultivate the open hand and open heart that can let go of attitudes, positions, and responses that perhaps once were appropriate, but no longer serve the fluid and transcendent cause of peace and harmony.

It is critical to the waging of war or peace that leaders and citizens recognize the ongoing movement and continuous flow of life and its constant state of flux, where everything is subject to change and where there is no fixed existence, no permanent enemy, and no war to end all wars.

An exemplar of this wisdom is Nelson Mandela. As leader of the African National Congress, he made himself an inspiring emblem of total resistance to those who had imposed the evil of apartheid. When he became President of the new multi-racial South Africa, however, he understood that changing circumstances required him to lead his aggrieved followers to forgive the gross injustices and incalculable debts of the old regime. Simultaneously, Mandela courted the former, often unrepentant enemy, using all his considerable skills and charms to enable the former apartheid leaders to participate in building the emerging multi-racial state.

The great accomplishment of the post-apartheid South Africa led by Nelson Mandela are currently challenged by the stubborn persistence of poverty, gross and subtle racism, inequality, and lack of opportunity. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of ten years ago offers little consolation to today's angry and disadvantaged youth. South Africa's gains are also subject to impermanence; yesterday's responses are not suitable to today's realities.

Most of us feel threatened by the constancy of change and the ephemeral nature of our own existence. We find it equally difficult see through the illusion of permanence as regards nation, boundary, and cultural identity. Much of the violent conflict in the world is caused or exacerbated by attachment to identity-based longings for permanence of state and symbols. Flags, patriotic ceremonies, anthems, and school curricula all support and reinforce the illusion of a solid and immutable political and social reality that is hardly questioned. Buddhist nations are not immune from the delusion of permanence. Burma's military dictators brutalize its long-suffering population and its elected leader Aung San Sui Kyi to permanently maintain power and personal privilege. In Sri Lanka, Buddhists violate the core precepts of their religious tradition by support of war to restore the pure and inviolate Buddhist state that they imagine existed in the third century when Buddhism arrived on the island.

In the Hindu epic Mahabarata, Yudhishthira is asked: "*What is the greatest wonder in this world?*" He replies, "*People see death all around them but do not believe they are going to die themselves. This is the greatest wonder.*" Since it is so difficult to believe in our own deaths, it is no wonder that we resist the certainty that our cultures and nations will be subject to the inevitable sequence of arising and passing away. Americans sense our global hegemony slipping. Many react with feelings of anger and humiliation that breed a belligerent nativism or self-righteous nationalism. We may as a result cling to a hardened concept of ourselves that is at increasing odds with changing global conditions. As we do so, our ability to make wise choices and skillful accommodations declines. Clinging to fixed ideas about our country, we become evermore a danger to ourselves and to others.

Our identities are no more fixed than our bodies, boundaries, and nations, yet we repeatedly shed blood in the name of identity. A colleague from the Balkans describes himself as having been seen by others as a Yugoslav, a Communist, a Bosnian, a Muslim, and a Bosniak, all within one lifetime. In the 1994 genocide, Rwandans of mixed heritage were forced to declare themselves with a fixed identity of either Hutu or Tutsi, yet in the past one could switch identity from Hutu to Tutsi through the acquisition of cattle. Citizens of the US are asked to select one or more of several optional identities on the census form, which do not fully recognize the fluid and multiple nature of identity. The racial and ethnic composition of the US and Europe are changing rapidly, countering long-held identities. Accepting and embracing this reality, with its gifts of multiculturalism, might save us from the creation of punitive and racist immigration policies that offer false protection against these demographic changes.

Many of our current global conflicts reflect the very visible reality that local cultures, languages, religious practices and customary ways of life are imperiled by modernity,

globalization, and mass communication. The faster the acceleration of change, the greater becomes the potential for anger, fear, and violence. Fundamentalisms rise up to staunch the flow, pushing communities backward in misguided attempts to prevent change, and creating cataclysmic conflicts as change meets resistance. In our South Asian CONTACT Program, we invited participants to widen their circles of inclusion by attempting to speak from the voices of Taliban fundamentalists. Through this exercise in discerning the possible mind-states and motivations of others, comments emerged about fear, desire to belong, pressure to take revenge, poverty, humiliation, need for cultural preservation, and resistance to change. The antidote to the discomfort that is natural to people faced with rapid change is not reversion to the past, which occurs but is harmful and doomed, but rather full participation and inclusion in shaping the changes so that they hold the promise of good for themselves, their neighbors, and their communities.

Impermanence is the condition of our lives. As a peacebuilder and teacher, I also must awaken from the dream of a permanent Garden of Eden. Despite my hopes for a world without war, in reality there is no straight line to peace. History is like a kaleidoscopic image of changing causes and conditions to which the efforts of all peacemakers contribute only a small refraction. The flow of events, some rooted in human wisdom or folly, some in forces beyond human reach, determine the geography of our lives and leave suffering and gladness in their wake. Gandhi arrived at the correct conclusion: *“Everything you do will be insignificant, and yet it is crucially important that you do it.”*

### **The Three Poisons of Greed, Anger, and Delusion**

Currently, I spend much of my time each year teaching peace and conflict in seminars and workshops around the world, as well as to graduate students in the US. We begin by thoroughly examining the multiple and inter-related causes of violent conflict, which we discover are complex and enmeshed. We look at social, political, spiritual, economic, resource-based, psychological, historical, and geographic roots of mass violence. We probe to discover the interdependent causes of conflict and observe that they all are contained in Indra’s net, reflecting and impacting each other. We seek the deepest roots in the system, so that we might learn to prevent future conflict. Participants attending workshops in conflict zones carry an urgency to understand what happened to them. How did Rwandan family members turn on each other in a frenzy of killing? How did trusted neighbors in Bosnia betray each other? How do Hindus and Muslims in India dehumanize and violate one another in city-wide riots that leave death and destruction in their wake? How is the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan dividing families and tribes bonded by centuries of shared existence?

As I search for answers to these conundrums, I find the deepest resonance in the Buddha’s teaching of the three poisons: greed, anger, and delusion. Delusion is the root, and greed and anger are the shoots. We wish things to remain as they are, but that is not in the nature of existence. Change disturbs us, makes us fearful that we may be hurt, that there will not be enough. Our fear sinks us deeper into the other great delusion – that we are separate selves, myself or my group in competition with other “selves” and their groups, that my happiness, security, and well-being is endangered by your aspiration for

the material basis of a more affluent life.

The Buddha frames greed, anger, and delusion as toxins in the mind. Synonyms for greed include selfishness, desire for what belongs to others, attachment, avarice, coveting, gluttony, lust, envy, and jealousy. In impoverished and overcrowded Rwanda, Hutus were promised the victors' spoils of land and cattle at the end of the battle. In Germany, Nazis grabbed coveted homes and material goods of deported Jews. In contemporary warfare, we fight for oil wells and pipeline routes that are as coveted as land and cattle. Greed is endemic in war and conflict, and at the source of our desire to retain power, gain economic advantage, exploit others for self-benefit or self-prestige, restore wounded egos, and feel protected. Competition for fresh water in the face of melting glaciers and for arable land in the context of rising seas and increasingly mobile populations will no doubt cause fearsome 21<sup>st</sup> century conflicts.

Desire and competition create and reinforce greed and grasping, whether for oil wells, fresh water sources, or dominance over others. Fear of not having enough, and distorted notions of sufficiency, is the fire that underlies armed conflict. An economist called hoarding the principal economic sin. Accumulation and hoarding are seductive and its offers of protection are delusive. Gandhi reminds us that: *"The world has enough for everyone's need, but not for everyone's greed."* How do we build a 21<sup>st</sup> century world of growing populations and shrinking resources on the basis of shared need rather than fear-based greed?

Anger works in similar ways. From anger flows hatred sufficient to dehumanize and destroy others, aversion that results in prejudice and oppression, determination to avenge perceived past wrongs and historical narratives, and the hot inferno of fury. In the former Yugoslavia, Milosevic rose up by marching into Kosovo in 1989 to avenge the battle of 1389 lost by the Serbs, a history tied to Serbian pride and nationalism that was consciously reawakened in a brash and tragically successful bid for power. The US acted in its self-justified fury against Afghanistan and Iraq, evoking our own wounded pride and nationalism, setting off a new chapter in history whose outcomes will impact us all for generations to come. Israelis and Palestinians are caught in competing historical narratives of victim and victimizer, unable to extract themselves from cycles of revenge and delusions of separateness that might allow them to build a shared future.

Uncontrolled anger fuels conflict at all levels, from the family to the nation. Contemplative practices can contain the arousal of anger and greed, allowing the powers of observation to neutralize the poisons. Unfortunately, in this world contemplation and self-awareness are rare, especially under conditions of violence and oppression. Unbridled anger causes great harm to those we love and those we have been taught to hate, and becomes even more dangerous when greatly magnified as a social pathology.

Delusion is the third of the poisons in the mind. What is delusion? It can be described as ignorance, false belief, incorrect inference, inability to distinguish what is real, or lack of wisdom or insight into the nature of reality. From delusion, all other errors flow: the mistaken notion of a separate self, of what belongs to me or mine, and in fact the very

existence of a me or mine, the delusion of independence, the false idea of permanence, the wars to end war and the killing to stop killing, the delusion of happiness gained through greed and materiality, and the belief that my welfare is not inextricably bound to your welfare wherever on this planet we live. These are the fruits of delusion; these are the poisons that crowd our mind and fuel our violent conflicts.

Our current global capitalism does its best to promote competition, material attachment, and personal gain in a context of winners and losers, with little regard for the common good and the public commons, including the protection of our shared commons, planet earth. We seem trapped in this capitalist paradigm, falsely protected by it, and terrified to extricate ourselves. Our greed and desires are fed by warfare and domination, which we know is both unsustainable and unethical. We have endless enticements but few good models of modest satisfaction.

There are antidotes to these poisonous delusions. They are found through lives dedicated to loving-kindness, compassion, generosity, and wisdom, to the happiness and protection of all beings, and to the advancement of human consciousness. We have the capacity to meet the core material needs of the world's population, and the insight to simultaneously address their security concerns and their quest for inclusion, participation, recognition, and respect that foster human dignity. We also have the means to protect the planet. We lack only the will to replace our greed, anger, and delusion with our generosity, wisdom, and compassion. It is easy to succumb to despair. The choice to go forth into the world in a spirit of joy, service, and optimism may be as difficult for us as the Buddha's decision to forego the enjoyment of his enlightenment in order to go out into the world and teach.

As a way forward, we might follow the Bhutanese guide to Gross National Happiness as a path toward manifesting Dharma practice in national politics. The four components of Gross National Happiness include: cultural preservation, economic justice, environmental protection, and responsive government. An emphasis on these national priorities, based on wisdom and compassion, would be reparative antidotes to the plagues of greed, anger, and delusion.

Generosity is a wonderful practice. We cannot embrace our children with a closed fist. We cannot offer greatly needed reconciliation and forgiveness with a closed heart. We are drawn to the abundant generous heart of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, to Archbishop Desmond Tutu, to Nelson Mandela, and to others who light a path of peace for us to follow.

Peace is found in the truth that we are tightly bound together in a bountiful and trustworthy web of life. Gratitude for, and trust in this generous, ever-changing universe, compassion for all its inhabitants, and the knowledge of our profound interdependence is the secret of personal happiness in this suffering world, and the key to the peaceable and just kingdom we dream of for all.