

SELF-TRANSFORMATION AND EXTERNAL FORMS OF WORLDVIEW DIALOGUE

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For more than twenty years, he has been conducting the Self-Transformation Seminar in twenty countries around the world and he had also given courses on stress management, leadership, corporate culture building, marital harmony, parenting, transformative education, comparative religion, theosophy, meditation, happiness and the spiritual life.

For two thousand years, the world has undergone conflicts among groups of people that have resulted in hatred, fear and wars. These are in various fields such as politics and religion, as well as in racial and cultural conflicts. The situation has become worse in the 20th century, where there have been more people who have died due to such conflicts than in any other century. We have progressed in knowledge and technology, but we seem to have retrogressed in harmony and understanding.

We will notice that it is not through progress in political structure, science, technology or economics that we are able to attain unity or harmony among people. A deeper change is required — not an outer change, but an inner change. The lessons of history have told us that if we want to attain social transformation, we must start with inner self-transformation.

How can we go about this? To achieve this, we must start with self-understanding. The sources of conflict and misunderstanding among people does not come from external factors but from inner attitudes.

Since the ancient times, sages have made a distinction between the higher and lower self, as well as the higher and lower mind.

The lower self is the personality, which is developed by upbringing and conditioning. It consists of the habits and conditioned behaviors of our physical body, the emotional nature and the lower mind.

There is an important distinction between the lower mind and the higher abstract mind. The higher abstract mind is the truly rational faculty. It is impersonal and objective. The lower mind, on the other hand, is closely linked to the emotions so that they constantly influence each other. Thus, when a person likes or desires something, whether an object or an idea, the lower mind is inclined to choose that object or idea, even if the higher mind knows that it is harmful to oneself.

For example, if you give me a criticism and I feel hurt, I will not be inclined to listen to you even if what you say is true. In such a case, the crucial factor is not about the truth that you said, but the emotions that I have.

The lower mind and emotions have strong likes and dislikes that prevent us from seeing the point of view of other people. It will defend its preconceptions and biases. The mind will even justify a contradiction if it feels a loyalty towards an idea, ideology or belief system. It will justify the wrongdoing of a relative, the actions of a corrupt politician friend or the absurdity of a religious belief. This is the source of prejudice, bias, injustice and fanaticism. This is the main reason why dialogues fail among people of different religions, political groups and cultures. Many people are more interested in defending their views and beliefs than finding out what is the truth.

On the other hand, we have a higher self which consists of the abstract mind, intuition and spiritual consciousness. Intuition and spiritual consciousness are often not active or awakened yet in most individuals. But the higher or abstract mind is more or less active in most people. It is the basis of mathematics, philosophy and the science. The way it perceives things is not based on what one likes, but what is the truth as perceived objectively and impersonally. $2 + 2 = 4$ is a reality, even if I don't like it because I will lose in a game. The higher mind immediately recognizes such realities, regardless of one's feelings or prejudices. It is impersonal, detached and different from the likes and dislikes of the personality. It is linked to inner will of the individual as opposed to the desires of the lower mind.

If your son or daughter is a contestant in a competition, your lower self will want that your son or daughter should win. But the higher mind will instantly recognize that the best contestant should win, even if it is not your son or daughter. Thus there is a constant conflict between the perception of our higher mind and the lower self. What will prevail will depend upon which one is stronger.

This is where self-transformation comes into the picture. Two things are important:

1. The higher abstract mind should be made active from childhood so that a person will grow to be rational

2. The lower personality should be trained to respond and follow the inner will, which is based on the abstract mind for most of us.

When two persons or groups are discussing something and they are mainly active in the lower self or the personality, harmony and understanding can often be difficult because the discussion may not be founded on the search for truth but based on emotions, commitment, loyalty or pre-judgments. On the other hand, when they speak from the level of the higher mind, they will easily recognize something that is contradictory, illogical or absurd, and be willing to change their views or opinions. True dialogue can only come when two parties discuss from this higher level. It becomes a shared quest for impersonal truth rather than an attempt to convert each other.

In the history of mankind, the quest for truth has frequently been blocked or delayed because certain people, groups or religions insist on adhering to a dogma even if the evidence against such a belief is already overwhelming. Galileo, for example, based on astronomical observations, declared that earth was going around the Sun, and not the opposite, as believed by the Church at that time. The Church refused to examine the evidences offered by Galileo. He was imprisoned for life and prohibited from publishing anything. On the basis of such dogmas, intolerance and unwillingness to be open in their views, human progress and knowledge have been delayed or obstructed. People have waged wars and killed millions of people through the centuries because of the unwillingness to view things more objectively.

Majority of the people of the world think primarily from the lower mind. It is for this reason that there is so much conflicts among religion, culture or politics that result in bloodshed and violence. It seems that we will have to wait until a larger portion of humanity has awakened and

developed the higher mind before we can have peace, understanding and harmony in the world.

How is this higher mind developed?

A major avenue for the development of the higher mind is through right education. When teachers or parents expose children to logical thinking or the scientific method, they develop the faculty of impersonal thinking. A fact is a fact regardless of whether we like it or not. When the evidence is strong, then the mind will give it strong consideration even if it goes against one's current belief.

There are four aspects that are part of one's self-transformation process from childhood to adulthood that will help us us arrive at a genuine capacity for wholesome dialogue:

1. First, a child or a young person must grow up with a minimum of fear, anger or resentment. These strong emotions can easily produce irrational or distorted views and decisions. Examples are fear of punishment, criticism, rejection, hell and others. When they develop anger or hatred towards a person, a group, a religion or an idea, then it is very difficult to see things objectively or impartially.

In schools, therefore, children should be encouraged to explore ideas and opinions without fear of punishments or ostracism. The Socratic approach of investigating ideas still remains one of the best ways of finding out about the truth in such an open manner.

2. Second, young minds should be taught the laws of rational thinking. They should learn the laws of syllogism, of recognizing contradiction and fallacies.

3. Third, they should learn the principles of evidence and the scientific method. When a belief goes against well-established evidence, then a person must be willing to change one's opinion about it.

4. Fourth, they need to be in touch with their inner intuition and moral sense, to recognize that a fact or a reality can have ethical dimensions. A country's law may be in force but it may be unethical. Hence something can be legal but still wrong in a deeper sense.

All these are impersonal quests for reality and what is true. They are not dependent on personal preferences or positions. It is on this basis that true and open dialogue is possible. It leads to learning from one another, arriving at a common ground, and thus reaching a better state of harmony and understanding.