

Creating Peace: The Task of Right Relationship

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The Dances of Universal Peace have brought us together in a mutual goal of love, harmony, and beauty. The noble ideal of helping to build understanding and peace among the world's religious traditions by sharing and embodying their sacred phrases through these circle Dances is a wonderful movement. We are all continually blessed to participate in it. Yet, despite the ideal, shadow forces within the human psyche cause Dance leaders to disagree and even disengage, and be unable to co-lead in the atmosphere intended and embodied in the Dances.

The human ego is more fragile than we would like to believe. Also, this is often true for seasoned spiritual students. Even though we have the highest intentions, many of us unconsciously hurt others in our struggles to find the right balance for relationship and *co-leadership*. On the one hand, this is very sad because it means the ideal of peace has not imprinted itself deeply enough upon our souls. But on the other hand, it means there are many opportunities to deepen this work and understanding of peace as we resolve to work through our problems and heal past and present wounds. It is part of being a human being.

I have personally had difficulties with co-leading the Dances, and have also heard tales of many other Dance leaders who had discordant co-leading experiences throughout the years. In fact, when I brought the topic up on the MTG listserv, our beloved Radha responded calling it "the elephant in the middle of the room." The fact is, despite the power and beauty of the DUP, we still have problems in creating authentic peace. It is our human responsibility to engage in the healing process.

A couple of years ago, I met with an anthropologist from the United Kingdom. She was visiting our Aikido dojo with the intention of interviewing its senior members. Aikido is a Japanese form of martial art, which translates into "The Way of Harmony of the Spirit." During our talk, I shared that I was dedicated to two forms of movements based upon peace and harmony: one was Aikido and the other the DUP. I shared that, through the years, my experiences with the dojo members far exceeded my experiences with co-leading the Dances. (Dojo is a Japanese word for a sacred place for learning and practicing one's martial art.) I pondered about relationships as we threw one another around the mat. I questioned if there was something about this relationship that could illuminate my understanding of the problems that I had encountered with other Dance leaders. Aikido practitioners are consciously building power through being centered and unafraid when attacked. They are equally enhancing compassion 1) through healing their own aggressive responses to these attacks and 2) by treating the opponents with care to assure that no one is injured when being thrown. This training offers a beautiful balance of compassion and power.

Issues of Power

As a psychologist and long time spiritual practitioner, I do believe that issues and balances of 'power' are a leading cause of problems. Perhaps this is the area where the shadow sneaks into our minds and behaviors. Many people want to feel they are contributing in some way to the betterment of humanity. Some Dance leaders may have this need met through their professional lives, whereas others are longing for an opportunity to exercise more authority in the world. (This can also be influenced by unconscious developmental issues and previous life experiences.) Many people are afraid to think about or even use the word "power," but then their shadows manifest in hidden ways. This can be one of the many potential unconscious factors that cause disruptions in Dance co-leadership. The remedy may be simply to honestly recognize one's desire for the 'power' that supports the inherent authority within leadership, and to assure that it is motivated by the heart's desire to contribute to a greater good. This is a very important issue and one that needs to be examined deeply within each individual heart, especially when problems are occurring in this area.



People with a lot of leadership experience may need to let go of some of this power and share the responsibilities with others. People who are beginning leaders may have to watch that the desire for more leadership power, and related insecurities, does not take them over. This is the area where projections upon the other can occur. Territorial issues are power issues. They can manifest when a new Dance leader visits or moves into town. Is the new Dance leader embraced? Does the new Dance leader find fault with the established one in order to create a new power structure (one that acts in his or her favor)? There are many versions of territorial issues that can occur, and they will continue to occur until we root out negative patriarchal influences—and we all have them. Co-leading the Dances represents a balance of power. It is *power with* rather than *power over*.

The Problem with the Sacred

There is also the danger of what we deem to be “sacred.” This problem is evidenced throughout religious history wherein a certain self-righteousness sneaks in under the pretence of guarding what is sacred. One Dance leader may be “offended” by another’s style or some other version thereof. This impairs the relationship, and the purpose of the Dance work is forgotten. The work is to keep looking within and establishing a right balance within our own hearts. Compassion helps heal this blight.

Compassionate Communication, Reconciliation and Truth

There are many ways to find this right balance of power and beauty. Let us examine Marshall Rosenberg’s *Non-Violent (Compassionate) Communication* and South Africa’s *Truth and Reconciliation* movements for they offer ways to heal and better our personal relationships. Both organizations tell us that it is important to question ourselves deeply in order to see what we can do differently to free our hearts to truly listen with compassion and right motivation.

In practicing compassionate communication we carefully examine our behaviors and the conditions that affect us. This is done without negatively criticizing one’s self or the other person. Instead, one listens to the deeper needs on both sides without diagnosing or judging, and, in so doing, finds a depth of compassion within one’s self—listening with the heart instead of the mind. According to the Center for Nonviolent Communication’s website (www.cnvc.org/nvc.htm), the NVC model “encourages us to focus on what we and others are **observing**, how and why we are each **feeling** as we do, what our underlying **needs** are, and what each of us **would like** to have happen. These skills emphasize personal responsibility for our actions and the choices we make when we respond to others.” This model represents a beautiful way to free us from our defenses. It offers an open form of communication.

The Navajo have a peacemaking process, currently known as *Restorative Justice*. The process examines the cause of the problem, and brings offenders, victims, and clan members together. The goal is one of respect for all, and acknowledgement that each person manifests from the “Holy People.” According to The Honorable Robert Yazzie, Chief Justice Emeritus of the Navajo Nation Supreme Court (<http://www.realjustice.org/library/natjust1.html>),

The first order of business the relatives would do in the peacemaking process is to get to the bottom of a problem...In court, I would sue you for battery and the state would say we have to prove all the elements of a crime and use the rules or the law to prove that you are guilty. The Holy

People say that’s beside the point. What matters here is: why did this act happen in the first place? There’s a reason why the harm has occurred. Let’s deal with that. Maybe we have a history of problems between the two of us. If we can get to the bottom of a problem, all the other stuff will fall into place. The damage can be acknowledged by you, and I can go away happy from the process, knowing that you say that you’re not going to do it again. The peacemaking process is related to the concept of k’e, or respect...K’e means to restore my dignity, to restore my worthiness...Through the peacemaking process, an offender can come to feel better, especially when the person can say, ‘I’m responsible, I’m accountable.’ That does a lot to the spirit, the mind and the body of those who participate in the process...Not only are the victim and the offender involved in the process, like in Western law, but the relatives would also feel relief, and those who are also interested in the process would feel the same way. So in the end, there’s healing at different levels.

If we take the time to examine our own hearts, thoughts and behaviors, we might find that each of us has contributed to a problem—each in our own way. The Navaho use the phrase *hozhooji naat’aanii* to denote a way of communicating that re-forms relationships and likewise has a positive effect upon the universe. *Hozhooji* translates as “rightness” and *naat’aanii* refers to communication. In short, the Navaho process is the opposite of the Western idea of punishment. Instead, *hozhooji naat’aanii* allows for heartfelt self-examination, restoration and healing.

South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation committee added a piece that is not emphasized in Rosenberg’s compassionate communication process. This South African committee was established by the Archbishop Desmond Tutu and many others following the end of Apartheid. The Truth and Reconciliation movement recognizes that the past does have meaning, and it needs to be resolved in order to truly move ahead. This means that if a wrong has occurred, the truth often may need to be spoken and heard. This process requires a group to hold the space while a person tells his or her story. It states,

Truth is the longing for acknowledgement of wrong and the validation of painful loss and experiences, but it is coupled with Mercy which articulates the need for acceptance, letting go, and a new beginning. Justice represents the search for individual and group rights, for social restructuring and restitution, but it is linked with Peace which underscores the need for interdependence, well-being and security¹

These models can be used to assure that we bring our ideals into cellular levels. Friction and discord are inevitable at this stage of our human development. Let us focus on the mutual goal of relating with love, harmony, and beauty, especially when discord arises in our relationships. Together we can create pathways of peace in our human interactions and in the Dance. The world is greatly in need of healing, and each small act adds to the ripple affecting our humanity.

About the Author

Shafiya Majid is a member of the MTG. She holds Shodan (blackbelt) rank in Aikido. Her next book, *The Root of All Evil: An Exposition of Prejudice, Fundamentalism and Gender Imbalance*, is co-authored with Aliaa Rafea, an Egyptian Muslim woman; Rachel Falik, an Israeli Jewish woman; and Jenny Eda Schipper, an American Jewish woman. It is due out January 2007.

Notes

¹ Andries Odendaal. (December 1997). For All its Flaws. *Track Two*, Vol. 6, Nos. 3 & 4. p 4.