



DEALING POSITIVELY WITH WORLD CRISES: OUR CONTRIBUTION TO WORLD PEACE

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Dostoyevsky said that life is like a paradise to which we have lost the key. -"The Brothers Karamazov", Book VI, Ch. 1 This talk will show us a way to find this lost key.

On 11 September 2001 a world order that we had taken for granted was completely and unexpectedly turned upside down.

This article will not discuss the facts of this event or the political reasons underlying it. Instead it will try to shed light on its psychological and psychotherapeutic aspects.

"If you want to put the country in order, first put the province in order.

If you want to put the province in order, you have to bring first order to the cities.

To bring order to the cities, you must bring order to the family.

If you want to bring order to the family, you must first bring order to your own family.

If you want to bring order to your own family, you must bring order to yourself." (Oriental Stories)

This ancient oriental wisdom traces the interrelationships in which we live. We must assume that even small changes in one area of life have an impact on the entire system. According to Confucius, each person is responsible for the rise and fall of humanity.

“One can only recognize the value of persons and diamonds when they are taken out of their settings.”
-Word of Wisdom

From a therapist's report:

" ... In addition to these fears of war, images came from the television which showed hundreds of unsuspecting people burning up in a ball of fire within seconds or being torn into a thousand pieces. Thoughts of death, which we are usually so good at repressing in our society, were omnipresent during those days. The fact that it all could be over in seconds was always on the table."

We will limit ourselves to a few factors here:

To ask about the meaning of human life also means that we must ask about its origin and about its goal. Further questions arise in this context as to what is the nature of man? Is he good or evil? Is he free to make his own decisions? Is there fulfillment for his longing for happiness? Does he have any influence on the fate of humanity? Does everything end with his death?

An important motivation for the approach known as positive psychotherapy may well be that I find myself in a transcultural situation. I am Persian (Iranian) but have been living in Europe since 1954. From this vantage point I have become aware that many behaviors, habits and attitudes are valued differently between these two cultures. This is an experience which I had already had during my childhood in Tehran. It concerned prejudices about religion, which I was able to observe quite closely.

As Bahàis, we always found ourselves caught in the tension between our Islamic, Christian and Jewish classmates and teachers.

This stimulated me to think about the relationships

between the religions and about the relationships between people. I had experience with the families of my classmates and came to understand their behavior as coming from their world views and family concepts. Later I was witness to similar confrontations during my specialization when I experienced how tense the relationship between psychiatrists, neurologists, internists and psychotherapists was and the vehemence with which these positions clashed.



Only the Seed

In a dream a young man entered a shop where an older man stood behind the counter. The young man asked him: "What do you sell, dear sir?"

The wise man answered: "Everything you want."

The young man began to list them: "Then I would like world unity and world peace, the abolition of prejudice, the elimination of poverty, more unity and love between the religions, equal rights for man and women and ..."

Then the wise man interrupted him: "Excuse me, young man, you have misunderstood me. We don't sell fruit, we only sell the seeds."

- after N. Peseschkian

These experiences and my reflections led me to understand people not only as isolated individuals (even in psychotherapy); rather, to consider their relationships between one another and, because of my own development, their transcultural situations, which makes a person what he or she is.

Commonality and differences in different cultures (the transcultural approach)

We must consider the transcultural approach, which offers not only material for understanding individual conflicts, but also carries an extraordinary social significance as we face Problems of guest workers and of development aid, difficulties that arise in dealing with members of other cultural systems, problems of transcultural marriages, prejudices and overcoming them, and alternative models that come from another cultural framework. In this context political themes can also be discussed which arise out of a transcultural situation.

For interpersonal relationships, this means bringing prejudices into question by relativizing one's own values, loosening fixations and removing communication blocks.

This is linked to a further process, namely the dismantling of emotional barriers and prejudices that exist towards foreign ways of thinking and feeling. These cause whatever is foreign to be perceived as something aggressive and threatening where understanding would be initially appropriate.

Perplexity and hope

- The fact is, that we can perceive a worldwide crisis in our communication today which is assuming the proportions of an epidemic. In marital communication, partners are experiencing the pain of mutual misunderstanding and disregard. Families suffer from an almost total lack of communication between parents and children or from communication that is merely superficial. Similarly, communication between governments and their peoples exhibit a state of mutual distrust, abuse, deceit and hostility. Finally, there has been an unprecedented crisis of communication between the superpowers - a state which could easily have ended with the destruction of all life on this planet. According to a 1997 UN report, we had wars in 59 places throughout the world. These facts make it clear that our efforts to analyze the reasons for inadequate communication are no more sufficient than our efforts to develop new methods of problem solving or fact-finding.
 - In the whole world there are a great number of people - I would say it is the majority - who are in favor of world peace and view it as the only way of resolving questions about the meaning of our human existence. However, many people maintain an unmistakable skepticism toward the realization of this idea, a mistrust and even an inner resistance against it.
- At the outset I would like to share some experiences which have been particularly important for me. The following four areas are of special interest to me:
- **The contribution of the politician to world peace** (the transcultural encounter)
 - **The contribution of the religious leader to world peace** (concepts of religion or world view)
 - **The contribution of the scientist to world peace**
 - **The contribution of the individual to world peace**

Three examples:

| Behavior/Concept | West | East |
|------------------|--|--|
| Illness | When someone is sick, he/she wants to get some rest. He/she is visited by only a few people. These visits are also seen as a social control. | Here, if someone is ill, the bed is placed in the living room, as with a broken leg. The sick person is the focus of attention and is visited by numerous family members, relatives and friends. A lack of visitors would be considered an insult and a deprivation. |
| Death | We ask people to refrain from condolence visits. I must come to grips with my fate alone. I must bear such great suffering alone. | Relatives, friends, acquaintances and other sympathetic people visit the bereaved for 8-40 days and give them a feeling of security. A shared sorrow is half a sorrow. |
| Depression | Central Europeans and North Americans develop depression because they lack contact, are isolated and lack emotional warmth. | In the Orient people develop depression because they feel overwhelmed by the narrowness of their social obligations and relationships from which they cannot escape. |

1. The contribution of the politician

The actions of the politician are determined by the time and culture in which he/she grew up, the degree of emotional warmth and the examples their families gave them, the relationships they have been able to develop with their fellow human beings and the significance which other people have for them. Furthermore, the ideas of meaning that they receive from their religions and world views and which instruments of science and technology are available to them are also decisive. The considerations paired with the example of the politicians, are not limited to them. Because man, as a social being, can only shape his life together with other people, each of us has a political mandate. We can delegate our tasks but not our responsibilities:

Transfer to language:

It is important for all of us to maintain our mother tongues but we should also be able to speak a language which will help us communicate with others. Such a "language" is what transcultural psychotherapy attempts to provide - a metacommunication - communication beyond conflicts.

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“ *Many little people in many little places who do many little things will change the face of the earth.*
- African Proverb

2. Contribution of religious leaders

Though there is a tendency to ignore religion, there is no argument that religion, in a moral context and also in the context of providing an active creed, influences

the life of the individual even into its most private and intimate areas. Without going into a deeper content analysis of the religions, we can say that their basic principles are the same despite the differences between them. The functional theory of sociology and psychology teaches that the institutional structures built in the contexts of the religions fulfill a function. The institution must fulfill a practical need of its society and its individuals. If it has no meaning and no function, it ceases to exist, or as is unfortunately so often the case, it attempts to save itself over time through fixation and dogmatism. Here also, the dimension of time can be seen as a basic principle of its development.

Religion is like a remedy that is measured according to the nature of the human being. It can only be meaningful when it is appropriate to the requirements, needs and demands of the human being and when it takes into account the concepts of development (the principle of time), relativity and unity. When a falsely-understood religion leads to disturbance, fixations, limitations to development, rigidity of intellectual defenses, then it becomes meaningless. Thus Feuerbach typed it as pathology rather than theology, Marx and Engels called it the opium of the people and Freud caricatured it as an insurance company.

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“ *Learn to tell the difference between a religious belief and an institution*

3. The contribution of the scientist

The task of religion is to give the human being values, goals and meaning (giving meaning), whereas

science seeks for explanations and presents descriptive laws (finding meaning). There are a great number of sciences and they approach reality from different perspectives. Here, too, we find competition between individual sciences with their claims of the absoluteness of their particular systems and their rivalry with other systems.

These connections show us that a science's preliminary decisions, the subjects it investigates, the questions it presents and its methods depend on historical, societal, ideological and religious preconditions. It is not only through geographical connections that humanity has achieved functional unity. This is much more due to the interdependence of the elements of the structure of its civilization. Thus, fields such as politics, business, education, science, philosophy, psychology and religion are interlinked by a whole network of connections. The practical facts of the case are then that the economy is no longer the business of economists and education is no longer in the hands of parents alone. All the fields of endeavor have come to be interrelated in some way ("globalization").

Our current situation, with its non-human technological independence, necessitates working together.



Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.

- Immanuel Kant

4. The contribution of the individual

When we ask where a person got his/her idiosyncrasies, views and value judgments, we most likely come back to the environment in which he or she grew up, namely, his/her family. The continuity of society is maintained by the rules of the game that a person has acquired in the family and by the common values which, as group goals, hold the society together. The individual stands in the midst of these contending, culturally specific, ideological-religious and scientific concepts, which are all trying to offer meaning. The individual will be ground down between these competing millstones if none of them seems to be something he or she could identify with.

The result is that the human being him/herself is integrated into this unity and must accede to certain orders, laws of nature and unavoidable regulations. At

the same time the individual possesses the capacity of differentiation and the responsibility that goes with it. Thus he or she is not passively subordinated to nature but actively determines his or her own destiny within the range of the available possibilities.

Practical Approach

In this sense, the relationship of a politician, a religious leader, a scientist or an individual can be seen as disturbed if his/her emotionality is made desolate. One therefore asks the person about the relationships within the following five categories:

How is my relationship as a politician/scientist to my own self?

Do I take time for my own needs such as sleep, food, free time and further education?

How is my relationship with my partner?

Is there good contact with my wife/husband, and with the children? Do I take time for them, trust them? Do I only demand obedience and politeness from them or do I place value on an open exchange of opinions with them? Do I take the family into consideration?

How is my relationship with my social environment?

How is my relationship with relatives, friends, colleagues, compatriots or any other person at all? Am I ready for such relationships, sociable, or do I have prejudices, fears or aggressiveness toward specific individuals or groups?

How is my relationship with my profession?

Did I choose this profession voluntarily or was I forced into it? Was there no other work that I could have done? Does the work that I do interest me? Do I only work for the money or to afford the things I want? Or has my work become meaningful to me, an inner need? Do I have conflicts in my job? Am I overtaxed or under-challenged? Do I find the work fulfilling but not get along with my colleagues? How can I make a contribution to social development?



No future can make up for what is neglected in the present.

-Attributed to Albert Schweitzer

How is my relationship to the future?

Am I satisfied or unsatisfied with the present? Do I see possibilities for development or just being stuck? Can I expect my needs to be appropriately satisfied in the future? What are my goals and what are the principles underlying my system of orientation? Did I work out my system of orientation for myself or did I just get it from others? What does life really mean for me? How do I work through difficulties which appear in various situations? Am I willing to experiment? Am I willing to state my opinion openly and be judged on it, even risking the danger of losing the good opinion of others?

Consequences

Humanity's search for a new and effective orientation will bring with it a changing relationship between cause and effect. Individuals disillusioned by culture, society, politics and religion, who seek refuge and help in their private worlds, will in turn multiply the collective problems because of these shifting relations.

This shows us once again that none of these cultural systems is good in itself. Their qualities only reveal themselves in the ways in which they are effective for the people who live within them and to the extent to which the rules of their games allow for constructive encounters with other sociocultural systems and their members. So, there is much that the members of various cultural systems could learn from each other - even if they only learn to understand one another.