

What unites us is stronger than our differences

By Freya Reynolds, November 2007

Ronald Reagan often called religion the world's mightiest force for good, "*the bedrock of moral order.*" This view is held by millions. But more and more we are hearing 'religion' slandered for causing more problems than good. The record of human experience has shown that where religion is strong, it has the ability to cause immense cruelty. Intense beliefs produce intense hostility. The troubles in Northern Ireland were partly rooted in Catholic-Protestant differences. The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina was born from the animosity between Muslim, Roman Catholic and Serbian Orthodox. Failure to restore order in Iraq has led to civil unrest between Sunni and Shiite Muslims -- religion at war with itself. Even various conflicts that arise in India between the Animists, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs heat up periodically -- and to what avail? They produce little more than loss of life.

Due to religious beliefs, such clashes may never be resolved, but what many seem to overlook are the common themes that each religion share. More often than not these similarities are overshadowed by the discrepancies of past and current conflicts. As **John F. Kennedy** said, "*If we cannot end our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity.*" A truism that holds fast to this day and may be accomplished through the acknowledgement of commonalities within all our world's religions.

The Shadow Lifted

In examining three aspects - the oneness of humanity, poverty and the environment - similarities can be found that unite all religions/spiritual groups and, hopefully, debunk the 'evil of difference.'

The oneness of humanity does not suggest that everyone is, nor should be, the same; it simply attempts to bring forth acceptance of all cultures, faiths and class. As testimony in the Baha'i faith, **Bahá'u'lláh** wrote, "*Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch . . . So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth.*" Further emphasized through the Hindu faith, as the **Atharva Veda** depicts "...man can live individually, but can only survive collectively."

Through 'unity' we are able to achieve 'peace' -- a fundamental teaching amongst all faiths and spiritual groups. Peace, ultimately, is what we, as a world, appear to strive to attain. Many wars of today, as contradictory as it may seem, are fought with the vision of a peaceful and harmonious end. If humanity is united as one, a binding force, then there is no one to fight against us. As a united front we need to accept our differences, embrace individuality and share our knowledge. "*Like the bee gathering honey from the different flowers, the wise person accepts the essence of the different scriptures and sees only the good in all religions.*" **Mahatma Gandhi.**

Poverty persists throughout all continents and is an unrelenting issue in today's society. It is a commonality amongst all faiths to help those in need; such acts of kindness are exemplified through the Sikh religion and their practice of 'Langar' -- a community kitchen meant for providing food, at no cost, to all devotees, pilgrims and visitors, including the poor. Scriptures within Christianity also focus on those in need: **Proverbs 21:13** "*He who shuts his ears to the cries of the poor will be ignored in his own time of need.*"

Within many faiths and spiritual networks, care for the earth is of utmost importance. For theistic religions, it is considered a duty to take care of what has been provided for them. **Midrash Ecclesiastes Rabbah (7:13)** "...do not corrupt the world; for if you corrupt it, there will be no one to set it right after you." For those non-theistic religions, there is generally huge respect for the environment as she is considered to be a life giving source. As **Buddha** once said "*We are the same as plants, as trees... we consist of that which is around us; we are the same as everything.*"

Working Together -- Current Efforts

Religious leaders are forging alliances to bridge differences and solve common problems:

- From December 3rd -- 9th, 2009 the 'Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions' (CPWR) will meet in Melbourne with an expected gathering of 8,000 -- 12,000 people, from diverse religious and spiritual communities. The CPWR is the world's largest, interreligious gathering with previous modern

Parliaments held in Chicago (1993), Cape Town (1999) and Barcelona (2004). The event will surround the topics of social cohesion, poverty, the environment, indigenous peoples, and terrorism, amongst others.

- A five-year undertaking, called the *Sacred Land Project*, will "restore sites of spiritual significance, from standing stones to medieval abbeys" in the UK. On April 23, 1999, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. George Carey, led a group of 8 religious leaders to launch the project. They represented groups from the Baha'i Faith, Jainism, Neopaganism, and others. The group blessed an ancient healing spring at St. Mary's church in London.

- 'UMCOR' (a Christian committee of relief) and 'Muslim Aid' have collaborated to form a landmark global aid partnership. "We are proof that it is possible for Muslims and Christians to come together for a common good. Alone, we are only so strong, but together we can save more lives and provide relief and dignity to millions more," says **Rev. R. Randy Day**, general secretary of Global Ministries. Both groups acknowledge that religious barriers do exist, which, in the past, may have hindered relief efforts in communities that practiced a different faith from either organization. Now, with Muslims and Christians working in unison, that roadblock is steadily being overcome.

Creating the Change

In order for change to occur it must be learnt that everyone has the right and complete freedom to their own belief. In the words of **Voltaire**, "I may disagree with what you have to say but I shall defend to the death your right to say it."

Unifying diverse peoples and faiths may appear to be hopeless in today's polarized world. Yet, when two individuals of opposing faiths come together and acknowledge their differing views with respect and regard for the other, foundations start to form. Opposites can result in "agreeing to disagree" about religious beliefs -- and still work on common challenges like peace, poverty and the environment. This is precisely how we as a world can unite.

Working together, religions can be the force for good that marginalizes those who profess malevolence. Many examples exist. Faith-based aid groups are working together to assist in the refugee crisis in Darfur. The evangelical Christian community has taken a stand on climate change to protect our planet's environment. Diverse religions are joining together in an attempt to show that differences don't necessarily mean division but rather can lead to strength in peace building. As stated by **Mother Teresa**, "If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other." It is through love and understanding that humanity will unite.

Author **Freya Reynolds** conducted her research while at the Global Energy Network Institute in San Diego, CA. GENI focuses on the interconnection of electric power networks between nations and continents, with an emphasis on tapping abundant renewable energy resources. This strategy is the highest priority of the World Game simulation developed by **Dr. Buckminster Fuller** three decades ago. Linking renewables between nations will mollify conflicts, reduce pollution, grow economies and increase the quality of life and health for all.

The GENI Initiative is a physical demonstration of the spiritual principles: the oneness of mankind, being our brother's keeper and good stewards of our planet. The project has received endorsements from many global statesmen, including The **Dalai Lama** and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate **Archbishop Desmond Tutu** who stated, "The GENI proposal encouraging the interdependence of nations through the sharing of energy resources is most exciting. One of the obscenities of Southern Africa is to see electric power lines strung across a rural landscape overshadowing communities where women spend most of their days walking kilometers to find firewood just to survive. I would support an initiative that promotes the distribution of energy to those that are condemned to a cycle of servitude. The opportunities for co-operation and increased international understanding through the establishment of an international power grid would be substantial"

For further information contact: info@geni.org www.geni.org