

PEACE AS A PARADIGM SHIFT

Question: You've written an article called "Peace as a Paradigm Shift." What did you mean by that?

Michael: I take it that we kind of agree what we mean by peace for the time being. So, the question is about what we mean by a paradigm shift. And it's a very important one, because if people think that nonviolence is just a kind of way a of behaving that might attract less harm, they don't understand that nonviolence really implies a total change in our way of seeing the world, of thinking of ourselves, and what our relationship is to one another.

And it's a deep change that will affect every aspect of life. And it will, when it's completed, it will run through the whole of civilizations. It won't just be, oh, I see things differently. You're willing to see—you can see things your way. Right now, we're operating under a paradigm or frame of reference that has several fundamental characteristics which turn out to be quite destructive. They turn out to be harmful.

One element of this harmful paradigm is that the fundamental reality of the universe is matter. Everything comes out of matter. From matter derives energy. From energy derives the appearance of consciousness. Another aspect of it is because it's material, everything is separate. It could be perfectly possible that I could be fulfilled in a way that would impede your fulfillment.

And thirdly, and finally, it's a worldview which leads to deep alienation. It leads to incredible dissatisfaction. It leads to destruction of the planet because we're constantly trying to exploit its resources to make ourselves happy. And we've long since passed the point of material objects have the capacity to make us happy.

So, to bring about a nonviolent future, to live in a world of peace and justice, it's not going to happen if we just change this one injustice over here or change that injustice over there. Ultimately, we have to find a way to change people's whole vision of the world. To give you one little example that I refer to in my book *Search for a Nonviolent Future*, there was a nurse in an emergency room in a Los Angeles hospital. A woman burst into that room with a handgun. She had just tried to shoot another nurse.

And this nurse that we're talking about, Joan Black, went over to that woman, put her hand on her arm that had the gun, started talking to her and very skillfully calmed her down to the point where she was willing to give up the weapon, broke down and cried. And then they tried to help her. So, later on, journalists asked her,

“Whoa. You know, how did you do that?” And she said, “I did not see a distraught person. I did not see a threatening figure. I saw a patient. I saw a sick person, a hurting person coming through that door. And I’m a nurse, I know how to deal with hurting people. That’s what I’m trained to do.”

So, when we talk about a paradigm shift, we’re going to talk about a world where everyone sees one another in that helpful nurturing, unified way. Not as a potential threat. Not as a potential competitor. And ultimately, this paradigm shift is going to right across the board from what we believe the fundamental constituents of the outside world are, to what we believe the fundamental constituents of the inside world are. And in fact, even the belief that there is an inside world is kind of a paradigm shift, because another component of the prevailing paradigm is that everything is external.

Of course, if you look at the world, you see a lot of difference. But are we to do with that difference? Right now, most of the difference that we see is understood under a label of separateness. You know, because you look a little different from myself, you and I are separate. Because you live in another country, or you belong to another race, you and I are separate.

But what we want in the great paradigm shift that’s trying to happen, we’re still going to see all of that difference, but it won’t be separateness. It’ll be diversity. It will be the outward manifestation of an inner unity. So, every place you look, things are going to be construed differently.

There’s a really fun example of this that originated in the same Himalayan state of Bhutan. They decided instead of registering their Gross National Product and registering that with the economic entities in the UN, they’re going to forget about the Gross National Product. Heck, we’re not material objects here. We’re subjective human beings with a desire for happiness and service and so forth. So instead, we’re going to look at the Gross National Happiness. And that little change is part of a big paradigm shift. And I’m happy to say that that little change is spreading.

We are going to look for lots of other little changes, but I think it’s important that we keep in mind the big picture, the overview that these little changes fit into. So, welcome aboard this the great turning, and this is the progress from a paradigm of separateness, exteriority, and materialism, to a paradigm of unity, interiority, and connectedness.

The fundamental shift, therefore, that we really need to bring about, and which will be very rewarding to bring about, is a change in the human image. How do we think our—what do we think we are and what do we think others are, and how is the relationship between and among us to be realized? And this is why we constantly stress nonviolence because conflict will arise. Those conflicts are all conflicts in perception. There is no real unavoidable underlying conflict between or among any of us. My wellbeing is a part of your wellbeing and vice versa.

As Martin Luther King once brilliantly said, “I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be.” That was a beautiful succinct definition of how we’re going to look to one another in the new paradigm. Not as competitors, not as people whose wellbeing may have to be sacrificed for our own or vice versa.

Not as people whose wellbeing has to be achieved independently, totally independently, but rather entities whose wellbeing is interconnected with one another. So, this is a tremendous shift and it’s very exciting to be living at this time in evolutionary history, when we can actually play a part in bringing this about. I think many of us have begun to realize that until and unless we bring this about, nothing will save us from competition and violence.

So, again, welcome aboard the Great Turning.