

“There is no way to peace. Peace is the way.”

Mahatma Gandhi



CINEMA FOR PEACE

LOS ANGELES 2003

“WE LOST ART IN OUR CIVILIZATION”

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I am privileged to help inaugurate CINEMA FOR PEACE. A few moments ago, the thought occurred to me – Is it naive of us to be here, in this little gathering of private people, to be talking about peace when if you go into another room here and switch on the television set, you’ll be seeing the devastation of a city that has its origins many thousand years ago, part of ancient Babylon, the birth place of civilization? Is it very childish of us to presume that since human beings are by nature violent and vicious, at least on the basis of all historical evidence available to us, that we can hope with even an iota of a rationality or sanity, that it is possible to create a peace consciousness in the world?

I read sometime ago a remark by Arthur Miller and I am going to paraphrase it as I don’t know the exact words that he used, but what he said amounted to the following. He said: that as human beings we have such a deep longing for meaning and purpose that it is almost unthinkable for us, it is intolerable for us to think that society and its leaders and world governments have lost their minds – so we deny the evidence!

But if you look historically – just to put this in a little perspective – at our origins even though we were spawned in the cauldrons of interstellar gases and primordial seas, billions of years ago and even though the Universe is 15 billion years old and planet earth is only about three-and-a-half billion years old, human beings have been around for only 100,000 years.

So we are a very young species, we are not even in our infancy. And, if you look at the record of human behavior throughout history there is a lot of violence. People have romantic ideas about ancient Greece and its great civilization; when we think of Greece we think about Aristotle and Socrates and Plato and Pythagoras. But the majority of Greeks were barbarians. They believed in slavery. They threw handicapped children to the lions. They were sexist. We think of India as a great civilization and as a great spiritual country because we think of Mahatma Gandhi and sages of the Upanishads. But the history of India is very violent. Indians are violent like anyone else – the only difference is, they are vegetarians!

So if you look at that, you will see that throughout history human beings have been racist, they have been bigoted and they have been ethno-centric and tribal. They have committed murder in the name of God. We are the only species that has devastated the ecological balance of this planet. We are depleting the mineral and timber resources of our planet; we are rapaciously consuming fossil fuels. We have created the greenhouse effect, which is causing hurricanes and tidal waves in third world countries. We have



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created weapons of mass destruction. The most powerful countries have used depleted uranium to create shell buster missiles; depleted uranium can cause leukemia in children. Plutonium a by-product of our nuclear industries is seeping into the soil and will soon enter the food chain. We have other dangerous chemicals in the food chain.

How can we be naive enough to sit here and say: “We are going to create a peace consciousness.” And yet, I would venture to say to you that the idea for CINEMA FOR PEACE actually might be a revolutionary idea.

We have lost art in our civilization. When society loses art, and it loses poetry, and it loses literature, then it gets away from reality and what we have instead is reality TV – that’s what we have right now. If you go across this room and watch CNN news or any other of the news networks, what you are watching is reality TV competing for ratings.

That’s what we are watching and were it not for the fact that hundreds of thousands of people are going to be affected by this and that children are going to die, we could as well all get some popcorn and sit in bed and watch this stuff and be entertained! This is what our culture has become.

The ancient wisdom tradition of India states that the reason why human beings really suffer is that they are not in touch with reality – they are in touch with a version of reality. If you could really, really this moment, be in touch with reality in its stark nakedness... if you could be in touch with reality as it is in its utter and total nakedness... then you would feel pain and anguish. You would feel the suffering of the world. But we don’t feel that.

We have created a culture and – I have to say that the media and the entertainment industry is responsible for this – we have created a culture of such utter consumerism that our notion of happiness is a brand name deodorant or a new automobile – and we think that is going to bring us closer to fulfillment... so we are not able to feel our pain.

One of the definitions of “apathy” – the origin of the word “apathy,” comes from the Greek word apatheia. In Greek it means; the refusal to feel pain; the refusal or the inability to feel pain because we have so isolated ourselves in our self indulgence and in our self constricted awareness that greed and arrogance and insolence and aggression and belligerence and unhappiness have become the norm. We don’t know what it means to be sharing. We don’t know what it means to be tender or soft. We don’t know what it means to be humble. We don’t know what it means to not have your way all the time. We don’t know what it means to make a request instead of a demand.

And, as long as our policies of governments across the world, are based on self-interest alone and on greed, there is no hope! The nations at war and their leaders might appear to be explicit enemies but they are implicit allies.

They are implicit allies in the destruction and devastation and the misery and the suffering of humanity. They are implicit allies because they are contributing to the anguish of the world. In this situation, no amount of angry activism against war is going to help because angry activism against war is anger nevertheless, and it contributes to the turbulence of the world.

If we understand that consciousness is a field, which is the new understanding that science is giving us today; then there may be some reason for hope. More than two thousand years ago, Buddha said: We are inter-beings that inter-arise in the interisness and there is only the interisness.

Today scientists are telling us that our bodies are recycled dust; our body fluids are recycled waters and rivers; our breath recycled air; our emotions are recycled energies; our thoughts are recycled information; our very personalities are recycled relationships; and even our souls are reflections of every other soul.

If you cannot see your inter-beingness and only think in terms of me and mine – my economic interests, my security – then no amount of military power can give you security. It is a false premise that military strength can give us security. In fact, the more military strength there is, the more insecurity it breeds, because it has its genesis in fear.

True security comes from an expanded sense of self where greed is replaced by sharing; arrogance by humility; aggression by nurturing; demand by conciliation. It will happen, if and when, our leaders emphasize service and not profit making; cooperation and not competition; open hearts and not open markets. And when violence and fear will be replaced by compassion, humility, peace, and social justice, and then we will identify with the human family instead of focusing on nationalism and tribalism.

Art can play a role in our collective healing and it must assume responsibility. Art is a raid on the inarticulate because art allows us to get in touch with what real reality is. And real reality is, to look at things as they are – not to camouflage them – not to have reality TV where we do not see the bloodshed... we do not see the gore... we do not see the anguish of mothers... we do not see innocent children dying. What do we see? We see a Nintendo game being played out as reality TV. And, of course, advertisers are rushing to see which one is doing a better job so that they can see the ratings and make money out of it.

And, as long as we think like that, there is no solution.

I think the reality is that if we join forces together, then maybe it is not so naive to hope that we can change things...

If the news networks, if the media, if the entertainment industry, if the educational institutions start to put attention on peace consciousness that will make military power irrelevant... that will make the merchants of death and destruction in this world the pariahs of society so that it will be considered obscene to associate with them. That is the power that we have in the media, in the entertainment industry, through the news networks and through the educational institutions of our time to create a critical mass of peace consciousness.

And peace conscious, once again, – is not angry activism against war. It is the ability to nurture human beings; nurture the chain of being; nurture the web of life; nurture the ecology, the extended environment which is our physical body – those trees are our lungs – these rivers and waters are our circulation and our blood – and the earth is our very body. If we cannot feel this at a deep level – if we cannot feel the pain that the world is having right now – then there is no possibility for compassion. Compassion cannot be legislated. Morality cannot be legislated. It has to be felt from a deep level of soul where our identity is our inter-beingness, our inseparability.

Perhaps we can create an environment where nationalism itself becomes an out-motivated idea. The philosopher Krishnamurti said 50-years ago, "Nationalism is tribalism. Einstein said, "Nationalism is an infantile disease; it is the measles of humanity." Eric Fromm said, "Nationalism is our form of incest – it is our idolatry and patriotism is its cult." These are dangerous things to say in today's environment, but the fact is, I am quoting people that have been held in high-esteem by society and civilization.

Perhaps we can create a consciousness where to tell the truth is to be a true humanitarian; where we can go beyond nationalistic identity and see ourselves as members of the human race and children of this planet; where we don't see all these different nationalities and tribes but an inseparable eco-system, a web of life, a chain of being where everything is interdependently co-arising and inseparably woven into everything else. Then perhaps we will know that the way we treat others is the way we treat ourselves.

So let us create CINEMA FOR PEACE... Art for Peace... Music for Peace... Lyrics for Peace... I think it is now time for the artists, for the philosophers, and the poets, and the filmmakers to take some responsibility and share their anguish and their pain, because if they share their anguish and their pain, there is a possibility that we will all feel compassion. Compassion is nothing but the sharing of pain and suffering, and when there is compassion then there is a possibility for love. And when there is love there is a possibility for healing.

Let us do what has never been done in history – Mahatma Gandhi didn't have the internet – Jesus Christ didn't have all the communication networks that we have today.

Let the artists, poets, and philosophers of today, collaborate to create that critical mass of peace consciousness and change world consciousness so that the very idea of a violent solution to problems becomes abhorrent... becomes obscene... becomes disgusting... becomes shameful... becomes disgraceful!

As human beings we have intuition, creativity, vision and a sense of connection to the sacred powers of this planet. This is the next phase of our evolution and if we don't take a quantum leap of creativity together we could face extinction!

I was talking to an anthropologist friend of mine and he said that if insects and ants disappeared from this planet, all life on this planet would cease in five years – but if human beings disappeared from this planet, life would flourish on this planet in five years.

So Mother Nature might be saying, "You know, this human being, it was an interesting experiment, but it didn't work. Lets move on."

Maybe that is our fate or maybe not. The world waits, with bated breath, for the artists and lovers to lead us out from this nightmare.

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