

CHAPTER 44

The Way to Unification

If we look at the world around us, we see that it is full of conflict, intolerance and alienation. Why? Why don't people and nations live in peace? How do wars break out? Why does crime exist? What is the origin of violence in families? Why is unification still an unattainable ideal?

The problems that humanity faces seem so great and various that it is almost senseless to look for something in common between them. But as soon as we reflect on a deeper level, it turns out that all problems have one and the same source: People cannot find unity or harmony within themselves. The inner conflict that

begins in the individual is reflected in relationships with other people, especially in families. People who do not have inner harmony and loving unity in their families cannot fully realize themselves nor the loving and creative potential within their relationships. Families are composed of individuals, and therefore the disunity within each member of a family creates disunity within the whole unit. The disunity at the family level leads to a contentious and dysfunctional society.

Many people and organizations have tried to bring peace to the world. Still, we all understand that we are far from this goal. Often politicians who are responsible for the fate of their countries work with the conviction that everybody's well-being can be achieved by issuing better laws regulating relationships within society, or by organizing the economics and politics of the state in a more elaborate way. Lasting harmony has never been achieved this way and remains elusive to the human family.

In all of our efforts to solve problems among people, could it be that we fail to understand that the source of the problems lies somewhere deeper? Maybe we can compare problem-solving to the efforts of a gardener tending his garden. Imagine that every week he cuts all the new weeds but then is surprised when the weeds grow



back thicker and thicker. The weeds must be pulled out by the roots. Likewise, the problems of the world can be solved only by reaching their root, the disharmony in the hearts of individuals.

Before speaking of harmony and unity on the world level, it is necessary to overcome the conflict in one's own soul. For the world consists of us — separate human beings living together.

The search for inner harmony

Our way to unification — that is, peace on a worldwide level — starts with achieving unity in ourselves. As we become people of internal integrity and our actions follow the direction of an educated conscience, we become people with dignity, worthy of self-respect and the respect of others. Our century has seen many bloody revolutions, bringing great pain and death, but the only thing that can really bring about positive change is a change of heart. Racism, intolerance, wars, poverty, and all forms of social evil begin within the human heart. That is why we first must find the way to replace hate with love in our own souls. Then and only then can our world become a better place.

How can one achieve such unity? It is one thing to understand intellectually that the only real change in the situation of the world can be made through the growth of goodness within each individual, but it is another to actually reach into one's life and begin to reconstruct oneself as a true person. This task takes wisdom and determination.

Inner peace begins with the unity between a person's mind and body. What does this mean? The mind and body can be said to be united when the body is controlled by the higher mind of the individual. The higher mind is otherwise known as the conscience — that little voice that lives within you and guides you toward goodness. Following this voice sometimes can be easy and sometimes can be exceedingly difficult. Sometimes it is the simple things that are the origin of disunity between mind and body.

Imagine all of the human happiness that goes unfulfilled because of simple mind-body disunity. How many people ever realize their potential? How many people go beyond the drives of everyday life to become what they dream of? And how can a person's dreams become reality?

The foundation of realizing all dreams is harmony between the mind and body. Once an individual achieves this, he can become a leader of his community. Many such people will make up a solid society — people whose conscience is the director of their actions.

In discussing human nature, we have stated that every human being has two purposes. The first is directed at supporting personal life, the development of personality and individual character. The second purpose is connected with relationships: serving and caring for other people. The way to unification starts with



help other people, living for the sake of family, country, and all humanity, at the same time we will be able to express ourselves and bring to life the unique inner potential we possess. The only path leading toward this harmony is through moral and spiritual cultivation. Virtues such as honesty, conscientiousness, goodness, and love will naturally develop and enhance our inner world, ultimately defining us.

Unity of mind and body can be based only on the absolute standard of goodness — true love. True love is directed only toward the benefit of others. To determine if love is true, one may ask if it is eternal, unchangeable, and unconditional. In order for unification to materialize, love is necessary. No law or correct political plan will cause the world to change into a place of peace. Only love blossoming within the individual will bring peace on a worldwide level.

Gradually realizing the miracle of true love, making it part of our life and the basis of our relationships, we can arrive at genuine harmony in our soul. We will get to know the feelings of joy and satisfaction, the realization of the value and importance of our life, and the ability to solve complicated life situations with greater wisdom, integrity and responsibility. Ultimately we can be role models for others to follow in the development of world peace.

The family is the basis for unity in the world

No one can exist in absolute solitude; we need communication with other people. As children we start to understand the world that surrounds us through our families — first through our parents, then through our brothers and sisters. All our adult relationships reflect our experiences within our family. That is why the role of the family in the world is so important. It is in the family that each of us learns love or hatred, respect or intolerance, honesty or lies.

In order for the family to become the center of love and unity, those who marry should be mature, having achieved the foundation of inner harmony that we have spoken about. A family reflects each spouse's character strengths and weaknesses. If one partner is egocentric and focuses on the satisfaction of his or her own needs,

conflicts will be unavoidable and children will inherit that way of life.

If a husband and wife both have achieved inner unity and live for the sake of others, their family will live according to a principle that is different from those of most families. If husband, wife and children live unselfishly, seeking the welfare not only of their own family and relatives but also of other families, then the ideal of unity will be realized in their family. For what is unity in relationships? It is the ability to find a harmonious balance between one's own needs and the needs of others; it is caring for one



another, supporting and helping. Learning these traditions from their parents, children can grow their heart to love and respect all people. Thus the family will become the center of harmony, the center of unification for other people and for society.

It is no secret that many people marry only as a convenient way to satisfy their needs. Such egocentric families will not improve society. But families based on the

principle of eternal love will not be locked into the little world of their own problems; they will be open to other people, sharing their pain, worries and difficulties.

This is the way to achieve peace among people. Unity of mind and body within the individual will create families bringing love to the world. If the families making up society are focused on helping their neighbors and take responsible actions to solve the problems in their neighborhood or region, then problems in society will be reduced. In a harmonious, loving family, children naturally learn to respect their elders, to accept wise authority and to take responsibility for their own actions. Such people will help bring order to society based not on force or fear but on the natural understanding of basic principles of human social life. The inner regulating force of such a society will be love, not fear.

When relating to other countries, a nation formed of such families will also be guided by principles of mutual respect and the welfare of the whole. A mature person cannot put his own egoistic interests above everything taking place in the world, and a harmonious family will not build its prosperity at the cost of other families and the state. In the same way, to achieve real unity in the world, governments must seek not only their nation's welfare but also the welfare of other nations.

Thus we can conclude that the way to the unification of the whole world starts with the inner harmony of a person, and is reflected in succession on the levels of family, society and nation. The realization of this eternal dream of humanity is possible only on the basis of service, in which human action is always directed toward the benefit of others and not centered solely on the needs and benefits of one individual, family, society or nation. When nations pursue an other-centered perspective, a peaceful planet and human family will ultimately emerge.

People who have discovered a relationship with the higher power known by various faiths as God, Allah, or Yahweh will say that the source of love is the eternal Creator of our world. Most religious traditions teach that it is in relationship with Him that a person is able to develop his own higher self and prosper through difficulties, that He is the root of all goodness and the original source of love.

Unity and uniformity

Unification may be understood in different ways. Some people think that unity comes about by everyone believing the same creed or obeying the same authority, or belonging to the same organization, like cogs in a vast machine directed toward a common purpose. Yet if we think about it a bit more deeply and reflect on our own experiences, we can discover what the basis of unity has to be.

Sometimes people associate the idea of unity with uniformity or the loss of individuality. Wouldn't the world be boring if everyone believed the same thing and there were no longer national differences? There indeed should be unity in diversity. In fact, there has to be diversity. Unity can be achieved only by the harmony of different elements. Unification doesn't mean making everything the same. Unity is possible only on the basis of respect for the uniqueness of each individual. For instance, unity in a family does not mean that the spouses should resemble each other in everything, or that children should be copies of their parents. On the contrary, the more different the personalities of the children are, the richer the family is.

What can hold together people who are very different? The answer is simple: It is only love that allows people to maintain their uniqueness. Love first of all means respecting people's individuality and valuing it. It is senseless (and moreover, immoral) to try to destroy this unique beauty. A happy family is enriched by all the different personalities within it. In a similar way a peaceful world does not require a uniform culture but simply respects each nation's culture and allows each to make its

unique contribution to the rich tapestry of humanity. Individual characteristics can form a beautiful and integrated mosaic, the real meaning of which can be understood only when it is finished.

Let us now address the issue that causes the most doubt and contradictions. We have discussed different religious teachings, trying first of all to show what they have in common and the virtues that they all teach. Each religion also has unique insights, and it is impossible to reconcile different religions on the basis of logic. Each makes its own contribution to human understanding and culture, and the world would be a less interesting place without these differences. Unity among religions and nations cannot come about on the basis of trying to impose a uniform belief system, a uniform political system, uniform customs and laws, or uniform traditions and artistic forms. Only love, based on mutual respect, is able to transcend the differences and bring about unity of heart. Just as children in a family are united by the love of their parents, so too can parental love bring peace to the nations. The ideal resembles the Russian concept of *sobornost*, according to which everybody retains his own freedom and uniqueness. It is not that all people should be alike, but that they should learn to see the beauty of other traditions, while respecting and keeping their own.

The various religions and nations can be compared to different petals of a flower or the different fingers of a hand. Is there any sense in discussing which finger is better, the second or the fifth? Each of them is important and has its role, which cannot be performed by another. It would be absurd to try to make all fingers the same. How would you eat or write if you had a hand of thumbs? Such strange ideas don't occur to people when it concerns the parts of the body, for unity exists there already. However, people living in different countries or having different views (religious, political, or cultural) sometimes try to oppose this obvious principle. Thus wars and conflicts start with the desire to prove that one country, religion, race or party is more important and true than others, and that all the others should submit and change.

But even if this kind of unity is achieved, it doesn't last too long and needs to be supported by force. After some time has passed, such an unstable unity tends to deteriorate. It is impossible to make another person become exactly like yourself, impossible to turn a whole nation into robots that will look and act alike. Real unity is found not in uniformity, but in respectful relationships that support the harmonious complement of different traditions, teachings and national features.

Tolstoy is not addressing the type of unity that may be seen as profitable by some and costly by others. For example, Adolf Hitler attempted to unite Europe by imposing the same political system on all the nations and eliminating minorities that would not conform. Of course, this cannot be seen as an example of real unity.

There is the light of truth, and there are people who approach it from different sides which are as many as there are radii in a circle; that is, the ways are really countless. Let us try to reach the light of truth, uniting everybody, and it is not for us to decide, how close to it and united we are.

— Leo Tolstoy
Way of Life

Patriotism and unification of nations

In speaking of the unity of different nations, we come inevitably to the issue of patriotism. What does patriotism mean?

A true patriot loves his country, respects the people who live in it, has a familiarity and affection for its customs and national traditions, and is dedicated to its service. Authentic patriotism means putting the needs of one's country before one's own. This doesn't mean that we need to defend everything about our country, such as a government policy that is immoral or outdated. Patriotism is directed toward

goodness and the well-being of the country, and that cannot be achieved by immoral means. Andrei Sakharov cannot be accused of lacking patriotism, since it was love for his country that pushed him to criticize its violation of human rights and to speak in defense of its political prisoners. It is partly due to his efforts that democratic changes started in Russia.

In this connection we can't avoid another issue: How can love for humanity, and the search for peace for all people and countries, be justified when one's own country is in chaos, when people are losing respect and love for their own history and culture? In such a situation, is it too early to speak of love for humanity? Must patriotic feelings be revived first, so that everyone begins by feeling himself a citizen of his own country?

These two ideas are connected. True love for one's people, one's own country, is impossible without love and respect for other nations. Respecting, understanding, and taking responsibility for the fate of our country helps us to see the value of other nations. This is the essence of patriotism — remaining connected and at peace with other nations. Patriotism does not mean isolationism, fulfilling one country's needs at the expense of others. Our world is too small, and all countries are too closely connected to each other, for us to afford to love only our own nation and forget about the fate of humanity. In this connection, one cannot but remember the words of the Russian philosopher Vladimir Soloviev from his book *On Christian Unity*:

The idea of nation is not what it thinks of itself in time, but what God thinks of it in eternity. ... We must consider humanity as a whole, as a great compound being or social organism, the living members of which are represented by different nations. From this point of view it is obvious that no nation can live in itself and for itself, but the life of each nation presents only a certain part of the common life of humanity. The organic function of this or that nation in this world life is its real national idea, stated eternally in the plan of God.

We must know and love our own nation. But if we want to live in a world without wars and religious and racial intolerance, loving our own country is not enough. We must learn to value, respect and love other nations too.

This is the true way to unification. Each person must begin with cultivating unity within himself. This inner harmony becomes the source of unity in society, and societies based on love will bring the light of unity into relationships among all nations. Only then will our world, retaining the variety of colors and all the richness of cultural, historic and religious traditions, become a world of unity and love.

