

Affection for Peace - Create it and do it – El Hanan
by **Iman Nouri Mourad**

I am a Lebanese mother of 2 daughters, 12 and 18 years of age. I reside in Tripoli and work in Beirut. All the wars and violence throughout the years have touched my life, like thousands of others.

The negative effects are shown harshly and expressed abusively, everyday, all over the world on TV screens and front pages of the newspaper...

The anticipated progress of the millennium is questionable, at best.

What we have achieved in recent years has brought forth no lasting results in making people happy. On the contrary, it has brought the perpetual wretchedness and ruin that result from successive wars. The strong still exploit the weak, races still hate one another. This indicates the eminent failure of a possible dialogue. Is it because we seem to lack refined and sublime values?

We have learned that a modern civilization rests on science but often, so it seems, without regard to values. On the other hand, without human knowledge heeding our internal emotions, we would be without words when faced by forces science has made possible.

While we search for morals and ethics we know that reason is linked to long term survival concepts but which of these result in minimal destruction? Peaceful existence seems most precarious especially when there is no common ethical ground for all to stand on. What then can make possible human development in all domains?

It seems that some confusion prevails between morals and ethics, norms and law. We can search for definitions in dictionaries while we experience that some take values and morals as if the highest laws, even if only unwritten moral codes. That then may explain also the confusion about what gives shape to culture and what determines our behavior.

Out of my experiences in Lebanon when it comes to survival, we can distinguish positive survival from a behavior based on anti-survival codes. This is the case when individuals of the group or the group itself have become unethical. They seem to revolt against any moral code there to protect individuals and groups in their normal lives.

What may be a further cause of confusion is that the ultimate reason they give to their behavior is linked to the ultimate in survival, but not necessarily to the ultimate in ethics. By trying to go beyond reason or rational thought, they may end up doing things which go against human values even though they believe to be doing it so for ultimate reasons.

But how to face social decay with global challenges like climate change becoming a fact? What moral codes affect people negatively in their behavior even though they act in accordance with the society of their day? These are huge questions difficult to answer.

Moreover how many times, as you read the pages of the newspaper or listened to the latest news broadcast, have you questioned the violence, crime and lack of values

permeating this society? Can we continue living and pretend as if this has nothing to do with our own future? Way of life? Behavior towards others? The information we pass on?

Cultural decay is rampant and no city or town in the world is immune to the myriad of social problems that arise in the wake of widespread violence, crime, abuse, illiteracy and immorality. If allowed to continue, the killing becomes the continuation of violence.

We can no longer afford the view that our social problems will lessen or go away if only we throw enough money and resources at them.

There is something more fundamental that is wrong. We are missing a true and common denominator. The very absence of that causes such problems to exist and to persist. War is the most outstanding of all these problems which seem to keep recurring maybe because of seeking an ultimate or final resolution when life is really an ongoing learning process.

Are we facing, therefore, an ethical crisis in our world, from the highest levels of government and business to the media and through virtually every echelon of society?

One possible answer given is that at the root of violence, crime and an unsafe environment, there is a lack of basic moral and ethical values. The argument goes that if the youth are not taught what is right and what is wrong (in a way that makes sense and is understandable), then society becomes a dangerous place to live, work or play in...for All.

But there is something I have learned from some outstanding individuals, but also through practical experiences when entering a collaborative learning process as made possible, for example, by Kids' Guernica, and that is how to gain trust and positive energies by realizing some small but extra efforts can make all the difference in reaching a common understanding. The difficulties before seem afterwards surmountable. That is specially the case when people speak again to each other where before more than silence stood as a wall between them.

Many special people who came before us and left striking positive examples through their disciplines and practice knew the secrets of the power of goodness brought about by sharing these human experiences.

In such a sense good education which includes such practical experiences can become a force that unites people, nations and cultures for peace and a sustainable future.

To achieve this goal, believing and exemplifying the values it promotes are crucial. The real life experience of my eldest daughter Maysa who spent the last 2 years of her high school at United World College in New Mexico is a good example. The school gathers a minimum of 80 different nationalities from different races and backgrounds for 2 years together under the same roof, so that the students can attain international and intercultural understanding of difference while caring about integrity and personal responsibility. It goes hand in hand with respect for the environment.

Another example is what I learned when we did in Tripoli the peace mural “Enough! Let us live!” for the Kids’ Guernica exhibition both in Chios and here in Athens. It brought about a global friendship and a connection to the Kid’s Guernica family members. It made my 11 year-old daughter Miriam feel stronger and safer when Gabrielle from US wrote to her during the outbreak of fighting in a Palestinian refuge camp near our home: “Miriam your languages and your words are your weapons and not the little hunting knife you may want to put in your pocket to feel secure and to defend yourself.”

Indeed, in times of acute crisis, when everything seems going bad, it is most precious to know that there are friendly people out in the world acknowledging our different realities and who try to do and act out of moral solidarity with oneself. That is most amazing when it happens. It gives courage to face the facts without succumbing to negativity.

Peace is not something you wish for, it’s something you make, something you do, something you are, and something you give away!

If we all believe in it we will reach peace together.

Dreams are more powerful than facts.
Hope always triumphs over experience.

Let’s ACT together and NEVER stop being citizens of the world. We are that when aware of our differences but also what is our common denominator: being human.

IF we could together promote the knowledge, recognition and mutual respect between the cultures, traditions and values, my mission for this trip to Athens would be successfully accomplished.

To promote tolerance and basic morals based on a closer cultural understanding of one another, it would help us already to avoid stereotypes, xenophobia and racism.

To identify the best methods to promote peace and affection in this shaky world, to encourage a simple initiative which aim at promoting dialogue between religions, by cooperating with others to achieve a sacred awareness of those basic principles and spread them in the world community, all that would be a good beginning of peaceful actions.

My wishes are best expressed through this special poem ‘El Hanan’.