

GHA AND THE CONCEPT OF HARMONY

By John Scales Avery

The Danish Peace Academy, March 21, 2016.

The Global Harmony Association advocates the concept of harmony as a road to global peace. This choice of harmony as a guiding principle is in keeping with many centuries-old philosophical traditions.

<http://peacefromharmony.org/docs/global-peace-science-2016.pdf>

In the ancient world, the concept of harmony was developed to a high level by the Pythagoreans. The Pythagoreans used the idea of harmony to understand medicine, music, mathematics and ethics.

In China, Taoist and Confucian teachings each emphasized a particular aspect of harmony. Taoism emphasized harmony with nature, while Confucianism taught harmonious relationships between humans. Thus in China, harmony became an ideal advocated by both traditions. The Chinese respect for harmony as an ideal can be seen, for example, in the beautiful Temple of Divine Harmony in Beijing.

Both Hindu and Buddhist traditions of India emphasize the unity of all life on earth. (The Hindu and Buddhist picture of the relatedness of all life on earth has been confirmed by modern biological science. We now know that all living organisms have the same fundamental biochemistry, based on DNA, RNA, proteins and polysaccharides, and we know that our own human genomes are more similar to than different from the genomes of our close relations in the animal world.)

The original peoples of North America had a tradition of harmony with nature. The Lakota (Western Sioux) chief, Standing Bear (ca. 1834-ca. 1908) expressed this in the following words: "The Lakota could despise no creature, for all were one blood, made by the same hand, and filled with the essence of the Great Mystery. A similar attitude towards nature can be found in traditional Inuit cultures."

The peoples of the industrialized nations urgently need to acquire a non-anthropocentric element in their ethics, similar to reverence for all life found in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, as well as in the teachings of Saint Francis of Assisi and Albert Schweitzer. We need to learn to value other species for their own sakes, and not because we expect to use them for our own economic goals.

Saint Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) and Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) also showed respect for the unity of all life. There are similarities between the doctrines of these two great ethical teachers. Both came from wealthy families, but during the course of their lives they acquired strong sympathy with the poor and rejected excessive attachment to worldly goods. Both dressed in the simplest possible rough homespun clothes. (Gandhi said, "Live simply that others may simply live.") Both taught peace between humans and kindness to all life. St. Francis is said to have preached sermons to the birds; Gandhi personally took care of sick animals in his ashram.

Respect for nature can also be found in African cultures: In some parts of Africa, a man who plans to cut down a tree offers a prayer of apology, telling the tree why necessity has forced him to harm it. This pre-industrial attitude is something from which the industrialized North could learn. In industrial societies, land "belongs" to some one, and the owner has the "right" to ruin the land or to kill the

communities of creatures living on it if this happens to give some economic advantage, in much the same way that a Roman slave-owner was thought to have the “right” to kill his slaves. Pre-industrial societies have a much less rapacious and much more custodial attitude towards the land and towards its non-human inhabitants.

The pre-industrial societies and ethical teachers mentioned above have much to tell us about how to achieve harmony with ourselves, harmony with nature, and harmony with other members of our own species. Of course it is necessary to learn from the best aspects of each culture and not the worst. Also we must remember that the population of the world is now so large that a complete return to a pre-industrial way of life would not be possible. However, some of the values and attitudes of pre-industrial cultures can help us to an awareness of what it will take to achieve a truly sustainable global society.

The advertising-driven orgies of consumerism that characterize modern market economies cannot be extended into the distant future because of limitations that will be imposed by exhaustion of non-renewable resources and by the limited carrying capacity of the global environment. Therefore we need to stop using material goods as a measure of merit. Gandhi deliberately reduced his possessions to a minimum in order to demonstrate that merit and goods are not synonymous. St. Francis did the same. We can learn from them, and from the values of pre-industrial societies, to stop worshiping the false ideals, power, dominance, growth, and profit. Instead we must learn to live in harmony.

The Global Harmony Association is completely correct in advocating harmony as the guiding ideal for our efforts to achieve world peace.