

WILLIAM P. SHAW, PhD
PRESIDENT
CROSSCURRENTS INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE
SIDNEY, OHIO USA

“LAST NIGHT I HAD THE STRANGEST DREAM”

It is a dream shared by millions of people around the world---people from all countries and cultures and religions. It is the dream that one day we will all come together to PUT AN END TO WAR.

The 1970's folk song, “Last Night I Had the Strangest Dream” was made popular by American folk singers, Simon and Garfunkel. The lyrics continue to hold meaning and hope, especially in times of wars and violence that dominate our world today:

“Last night I had the strangest dream
I ever dreamed before
I dreamed the world had all agreed
To put an end to war.

This is our collective mission---to put an end to war! Let us not be shy to this cause. If someone asks the mission of your peace museum, your organization, your classroom or your personal values---give a simple and straightforward answer---to put an end to war.

The focus of this paper is on peace, the cessation of war and the resolution of conflicts. The definition of peace is broad and ranges from state-centered peace, to societal peace, to individual peace. As Johan Galtung, the Founder of Peace Studies, states, “peace is the resolution of conflicts at any level from individual to global conflicts.”

It is time to move forward, when humankind will decide that war is outdated, unacceptable, barbaric, and immoral as a tool for conflict resolution. It is a paradox that both soldiers and peace makers share a common goal ---both seek peace! The core difference lies in how to reach

peace---by killing or by talking. The former has never worked but continues to be used. It's time to focus on better systems---diplomacy, listening, learning, respecting, building bridges, examining values and the process of change on all sides.

Wars have continued through the centuries. Nations have built their identities through stories of wars and military conquests. These stories, often written to enhance the nation, are the root of nationalism in our world today. Teachers use textbooks that are often outdated, teaching history through stories of wars, not through stories of peace.

Our world simultaneously deals with 2 opposing realities: wars, violence, fear, stress AND the desire for kindness, social support, safety, peace. The former makes most headlines while the latter is seldom reported.

We are in a new time when people have broad access to internet and information. People can cross boundaries of nations and cultures and religions, as never before in history. Can humankind find common ground for the elimination of war? Wars have been part of human history forever. Can this change?

I believe there are positive signs around the world, questioning the "tradition" of war as a tool for solving conflicts. These signs include new technologies, new levels of awareness of the realities of wars, new organizations that focus on international cooperation, new opportunities for people-to-people connections. These signs give hope that "one day we will all come together to put an end to war".

Lester B. Pearson, former Canadian prime minister, who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957, said, "Of all the dreams today there is none more important, or so hard to realize, than that of peace in the world." Are we closer to his dream in the world today than in 1957?

There is reason for hope, even in the midst of tragic wars and violence around the world. War is simply immoral and unacceptable. This message is becoming more evident to people around the world. It is the key to our future on this planet.

"Our heads are round so our thoughts can change direction!" Quote by Francis Picabia, French painter, writer, poet.

Where is the evidence?

“One child, one teacher, one book,
and one pen can change the world.
Education is the only solution.”

Malala Yousafzai, Nobel Peace Prize, 2014

How does Education help to put an end to wars?

FIRST:

Education, both formal and informal---offers hope for change, for “putting an end to war”. Raising awareness, seeking factual information, crossing boundaries, reaching out to “others”, addressing social injustices, learning and listening. These are the elements of quality education in all countries. It is important that young people learn and think about the tragedies of war and the future of our planet. The field of Peace Studies encompasses reliable sources of information covering broad range of topics.

SECOND:

Study the facts---learn from reliable sources like UN, UNESCO, WHO. The data is clear. The world is getting better, not falling apart. Social indicators like less extreme poverty, women’s right to vote, child mortality rates, clean water supplies, lower crime, access to better healthcare, and many other indicators, all tell a positive story about quality of life. Most people on the planet now live in middle income countries, not extreme poverty. This is good news for the planet and for peace. Yes, there are serious wars and global challenges and we need an improved balance between reporting about the good and bad. But, we must not overlook the data that clearly indicates “things have changed’ for the good over recent decades. The quality of life on the planet is getting better, not worse.

(See recent book, “FactFulness” by Hans Rosling, Gapminder Foundation, Stockholm, Sweden).

THIRD:

Social Media---connects people around the world, as never before in history. People come together to talk, share concerns and ideas. Even children in India and Kenya carry smartphones in their pockets! Those born in the 21st century have never lived without the internet. People can connect to the world, learn, update their knowledge and awareness. This is part of the education process, thanks in part to social media.

On the near horizon will be AI (Artificial Intelligence) that will create even greater social and cultural shifts on our planet, both positive and negative. AI may offer new technologies to put an end to wars (this will be topic of another paper).

FOURTH:

Citizen Diplomats---people move around the world for study and travel. They make friends, sometimes even marry people from distant cultures and backgrounds. They are not tourists; they are seekers. They learn, listen, think and question their own beliefs. They listen to music that they have never heard. They eat “strange” foods. They may learn a second (or third) language. They respect cultures and people and they discover that people around the world share many common values. They talk with strangers and begin to feel part of the world community. They honor and respect the histories of different countries and cultures and religions. They change their own thinking and the collective global thinking about such issues as war and peace. People talk, whether around a kitchen table or around the “global” tables at the UN. Nothing happens until people talk.

FIFTH:

Non-governmental organizations (NGO’S)---since the end of WWII, thousands and thousands of NGO’s around the world have been created. These organizations seek, in different ways, to make our planet safer and better for all life---people, animals, plants. Most of these organizations are small with limited budgets and staff. They focus on service for their communities, nations and the world.

Intergovernmental Organizations (IGO’S)---link governments across international boundaries, like the United Nations. These organizations have

multinational staff, who work collaboratively with colleagues around the world. They have large budgets and generally large bureaucracies. They provide a forum for connecting leaders, crossing boundaries, sharing information, building a better world, free from wars.

What are the roadblocks for ending wars?

The challenges seem overwhelming: national education systems, politics, economics, foreign policies, prejudices, greed. These are present in all countries and block the dream of “putting an end to war”.

FIRST:

National education systems offer both support for peace and non-violence and roadblocks for peace and non-violence. Teachers and books are often outdated, offering few opportunities for reaching beyond national boundaries. Teachers focus on the nation. They are not prepared to help their students, at all levels to gain a global perspective. Opinions are formed in the minds of students that shape their future thinking. Information is often presented in binary fashion---either this-or-that. For example, texts, teachers and media may lump together people living in “Developed” or “Undeveloped” countries, as though all people in those countries fit a certain profile. This style of teaching permeates education and media around the world. It is a roadblock to global awareness and understanding.

SECOND:

Who makes money from wars? Wars underpin salaries of thousands of people around the world. Some corporations make money building weapons, others rebuilding cities, others moving people and equipment, others cleaning up the environment after wars. If wars were to end, many people will lose jobs and some companies will close their doors. Changing labor markets is nothing new in all societies. Horses were replaced by tractors and farmers moved to cities to seek work. Stopping wars will mean changing the labor markets. Change is threatening.

THIRD:

Roadblocks from government---thousands of people, in all countries, contribute in some way to foreign policy decisions. Lower level “officials”

make recommendations to higher level “officials” who, in turn, set policy and financial recommendations. A similar chain of command happens in the military where thousands contribute to decisions and policies to support the military-industrial complex. Top leaders take decisions based on recommendations for national policies. Decisions are made through a complex web that no one fully understands or controls. Money flows. National “heads of state” may actually have little to say about foreign policies. They are the “mouthpiece” for the country and they hope to be re-elected.

FOURTH:

Social issues related to patriotism, nationalism and pride resist change. There is fear of “different” countries, political systems, religions and cultures. There is prejudice and racism. Language differences create misunderstanding. Social barriers underlie roadblocks to peace. There is always resistance to change.

Putting an end to war is about change:

Do you believe that human nature can change or that our species has remained much the same from age to age? There is ample evidence that our species has changed and is constantly changing, evolving socially to a higher order of consciousness. We are not static robots. These changes do not happen overnight but they do happen---and are happening now.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the 20th century French theologian, writer, anthropologist, spoke about human social evolution. Teilhard believed that human nature evolves, just like physical nature evolves, from the simple to the complex, in an evolutionary process to a higher order of consciousness. Human consciousness is “evolving” and changing.

I believe that Teilhard is absolutely correct. People are coming together in thousands of different ways, as never before in history. There is a global paradigm shift in human thinking. This quiet revolution—or evolution---is part of our human DNA. This is the evolutionary process to higher consciousness that Teilhard envisioned. Change is happening.

Will this paradigm shift lead to changes in how humans react to violence and war? Is this paradigm shift the precursor to “putting an end to war”?

What will hasten this paradigm shift to put an end to war?

The transformation of perceptions is core---changing thinking. It is very difficult to change attitudes and beliefs that have been part of our lives, from childhood. This is the challenge that we all face, regardless of where we live. What concrete steps can we follow to be “Peacemakers”, to move our human consciousness to a higher level and realize the dream of “Putting an End to War”?

I can envision 4 different levels of “Peacemakers”.

First Level Peacemaker:

Everyone can help move our human consciousness to a higher level.

- Think of no one as “Them”
- Talk to strangers
- Listen to music you do not understand
- Learn a 2nd (or 3rd) language
- Watch movies with subtitles
- Enjoy “new” foods from other cultures
- Visit people and place and cultures, not just tourist attractions
- Learn and honor people’s history
- Respect people’s values and religions
- Know physical and political geography
- Play games from other cultures
- Honor everyone’s holidays
- Look at the moon, imagine someone else, somewhere, doing the same

These are small positive steps along the journey, available to everyone, no limitations. Your lives as “Peacemakers” will impact others. You can begin today!

Second Level “Peacemaker”

---Share your stories.

Everyone has stories to share, maybe about peace, maybe about being a soldier, maybe about trauma from violence and war, maybe about an experience of living in a different culture. What are your stories that connect you to peace and war?

Send your stories to Crosscurrents International Institute and your story may be included on our “Blogs for Peace”.

Third level “Peacemaker”

Education---at all levels and in different settings, both formal and informal. You may be a teacher or business leader or medical professional or member of Clubs or faith communities. Use your voice for “education” about peace and wars. Become a 3rd level “Peacemaker”.

Teach your children about peace and war. A quote from Gandhi comes to mind:

“If we are to teach real peace in this world,
and if we are to carry on a real war against war,
we shall have to begin with children.”

Students seldom learn about peace issues, history of peace heroes, peace movements, tragedies of wars and violence. Offer small group discussions related to “Peace Studies” at your community centers or places of worship.

Become a “teacher of teachers”. Help teachers to travel, network teachers with teachers in other countries, help develop curricula together for peace, build friendships, share results after they return to their classrooms. These are the building blocks for teachers to impact students for the future.

Fourth level “Peacemaker”

Become a “Leader” for Peace, a voice for peace that others know and respect. Connect with leadership in government and non-governmental institutions. Build your network of peacemakers. Publish articles, give interviews, attend conferences—tell your stories to a wider audience. Become a 4th level Peacemaker and impact the world!

Conclusions

Wars may stop violence and this is good but the “good” is only temporary until the wars break out again. Peacemaking may not end violence as quickly as wars, but when peace arrives, it is not “temporary” but lasting. Peacemaking may take decades to resolve complex issues, especially when addressing national pride, traditions, history, religions, cultures. Nothing happens until people talk.

War is simply immoral and unacceptable and outdated. Thousands of people are killed on all sides, people carry the trauma of war for generations, forced human migration, properties are destroyed, environment degraded, climate change impacted. It is not “rocket science” to conclude that wars are tragic and unacceptable. The future of war is the central question about the future of life on Earth.

There are reasons for hope that humankind will make a paradigm shift from “using” wars and violence to settle conflicts to using dialogue and respect for resolving conflicts. People around the world are frustrated with wars and are asking questions: Why? Who is gaining? Who is making money from wars? Are there better ways to settle conflicts? Where are the “new” Leaders who disdain war and violence? These questions are growing and masses of people are searching for answers.

Will we experience a paradigm shift after centuries of wars? Can we invent new ways to resolve conflicts?

Arthur Clarke, well known British and Sri Lankan writer and scientist, once quipped that all “revolutionary” ideas pass through 3 stages: 1) “It’ll never work, it’s pure fantasy” 2) “It might work but it’s not worth doing” 3) “I said it was a good idea all along”! Let us hope that we are at Stage 3 and that Clarke’s message also relates to “Putting an end to war”.

Let us all join hands, move forward to new levels of consciousness AND “Put an End to War.”

Last Night I Had the Strangest Dream