

The eminent Hindu-Christian theologian Panikkarji was a frequent contributor to the Canadian journal INTERculture from which this deeply important essay is extracted, Vol. XXIV No. 1, Issue 110, 1991. Find back issues at the Intercultural Institute of Montreal archive, in both English and French: <https://iimarchives.org/>

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## NINE SUTRAS ON PEACE

BY

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I would like to introduce them by a general remark. The *sûtras* are threads of a single necklace. The one leads into the other and they depend on each other. Only together they constitute this jewel which we call Peace.

### I. Peace is participation in the Harmony of the Rhythm of Being.

Peace does not mean absence of force or of polarities. Peace does not do violence to the Rhythm of Reality. But non-violence is not a merely passive attitude of permissiveness. Non-violence means the non-violation of personhood, the reverence for the inner dignity of every being, and not the absence of resistance or the lack of force or even power. Peace does not entail the homogenization of everything. It means the participation in and the contribution to the constitutive Rhythm of Reality. We are also responsible for the harmony of the universe. We enhance and transform it by cooperating with it. This cooperation, this synergy is active and passive all in one.

Participation entails an active and a passive taking part in the adventure of Being. This adventure is neither a linear progress towards an omega point nor a regression to an original and indiscriminate alpha point. Peace is neither eschatological, nor a state of a mind which has "dis-covered" the vanity of all "transient" things. The meaning of our lives is neither to be found only at the

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end, and the justification of our actions in our final success, nor can we be satisfied with momentary satisfactions. The adventure of Being is neither such an evolution towards the Future, nor a pure involution towards the past. Peace like Being is neither static nor dynamic. Being is not even dialectically moving between those two states in more or less disguised schizophrenic fits. Being is rhythmical, it is Rhythm. And Rhythm is the non-dualistic integration of movement and quiet, of striving towards the goal and enjoying it already while pilgrims on the way. Rhythm is the deepest nature of Reality, the very Becoming of Being, which is Be-ing precisely because it Comes to Be.

From such a *Philosophia pacis* stems, I submit, a deep and constructive critique to our modern predicament visible now in ecological, economic, psychological and political symptoms.

My conviction is that our technocratic culture which, through the cultivation of acceleration has transgressed the natural rhythms of matter and the mind, is an unpeaceful society which makes both urgent and difficult the realization of Peace in our times. Peace does not mean maintaining the *status quo* when this latter has proved to be unjust. My hypothesis here is not warfare against the *status quo*, but emancipation from it by several means, and transformation of it into a *fluxus quo* towards an ever new cosmic harmony. All too often discourses about peace tend to become idyllic dreams of an ideal paradise, forgetting that the essence of Eden consists in having been lost, and the destiny of Man lies in overcoming — not denying — the temporal strictures into which we have the danger to be drowned.

**II. It is difficult to live without external Peace; it is impossible to live without internal Peace. The relationship is non-dualistic (advaitic).**

It is excruciating and dangerous to live in situations of conflict or warfare of all types. The world is full of institutionalized and non institutionalized injustices which destroy Peace. Over 1000 victims of war fall mortally every day since the last World War — this very year in over twenty major armed conflicts. The refugees in the world are by the millions, so are the street children and the starving people. And we should not minimize this human degradation of our race. But if there is internal peace there are still chances of survival. Not so if there is no internal peace. Without the latter the person desintegrates. Crime, drugs and many other individual and social plagues come from the lack of internal peace.

But the relationship is non-dualistic. Peace is more than just absence of an armed conflict. If there is no internal peace there cannot be external peace. Lack of internal peace breeds cold wars of all types. Lack of internal peace

originates competitions ending in defeats which trigger declared or undeclared revenges of all sorts. On the other hand, it is not possible to enjoy truly internal peace if our human and ecological environment suffers violence and injustice. Without external peace a mere inner peace is a make-belief or an exclusively psychological state of artificial isolation from the rest of Reality. The bodhisattva renounces *nirvāna* in order to liberate all sentient beings; the Christ suffers Gethsemani for the sake of the world; the saint is not insensitive to the suffering of the universe. No authentic spirituality defends escapism from the real world and no true sage encapsulates itself in its own selfishness or self-sufficiency.

This non-dualistic relationship (there is not the one without the other, we should distinguish, but not separate them) exerts, at the same time, a reciprocal and *sui generis* causality. Inner peace produces outer peace, outer peace fosters inner peace. And similarly, internal disorder breeds external strife, and external strife engenders internal degradation. And yet the relationship is *sui generis*. Have we not sometimes seen a mysterious and intriguing serenity in catastrophic and unjust situations? Have we not also witnessed inexplicable depressions in the midst of externally optimal conditions? The entire universe is embarked in the same venture. The philosophy of life understood as the "Wisdom of Love" proper to Life helps us to overcome the dichotomy between the inner and the outer, and allows us to enjoy inner peace in the middle of external sufferings and to consecrate ourselves to alleviate unjust situations without losing our internal joy. This was the message of the Buddha, the example of Christ, the torment of Luther ("simul justus et peccator"), the conundrum of Vedānta (the *pratisthā* of *māyā* is *brahman*), ... the revelation of the irreducibility of Reality to an intellectual principle.

### **III. Peace is neither conquered for oneself nor imposed on others. It is both received, discovered and created. It is a gift (of the Spirit).**

Neither masochistic spiritualities nor sadistic pedagogies, on whatever level, bring true Peace. You do not fight for Peace. You fight for your rights, or eventually for Justice — not for Peace. It is a contradiction. The regimes we impose are not Peace for the receiver, be it a child, an alien, a pagan, a poor, a family or a nation. We lack a more feminine attitude of receiving and, by receiving, of transforming what we accept. Christ wanted us to receive his peace, not to impose it on others, or even to force it upon us. The nature of peace is grace. It is a gift.

We dis-cover Peace, we un-veil it. Peace is a discovery, not a conquest. It is the fruit of a re-velation; we may experience it as the revelation of Love, God, the Beauty of Reality, the existence of Providence, a hidden

Meaning, the Harmony of Being or the goodness of creation, Hope, Justice. When in this context I said femininity I mean neither sex nor women. I mean the complementary attitude to what a certain exclusively male mentality has associated with positive values. We accept a gift. But we do something with it. The gift of Peace is not a toy. It is an urge, *nixus*, *spanda*, *élan*, an aspiration. Peace is not a ready-made situation, a merely objective datum. Peace needs to be constantly nurtured, and even created. There is no blue-print for Peace; no full-fledged programme is possible. When we say gift we mean also grace. This is why Peace is also a creation. Peace is not reached by going back to a primitive state, once the innocence is broken. Peace is recreated each time anew. It is *Gabe* and *Aufgabe*, gift and responsibility.

#### IV. Victory never leads to Peace.

This is a theoretical affirmation as well as an empirical statement. Witness thereof are the some eight thousand peace treatises we know of and possess along the millennia of human history. None of those victories has ever brought a true peace. It cannot be retorted that this is so for such is human nature, because most of the wars have started, and found their "justification", as counter measures against the previous peace treatises. The archetypes of the defeated, when not their immediate children, will sooner or later emerge and demand what was denied to them. Not even the repression of evil will bring lasting results.

One is tempted to recall that apparently so simplistic and empirically so unbeatable statement of a young Rabbi of Nazareth about letting grow together the wheat and the tares...

Peace is a fugitive from the field of the victors I would say, paraphrasing Simone Weil. We know that justice is not "just us". But Peace is more than mere justice. And Peace is richer than *pax*, a mere pact, a sort of balance, often of terror. Peace is not the re-establishment of a broken order. It is a new order.

Victory leads to victory, not to peace. And we also know of the deleterious side effects of prolonged "victories".

But there is also a more theoretical foundation for this *sūtra*. In spite of all our distinctions, victory is always over people, and people are never absolutely evil. So we cannot say that victory is only over the forces of evil or the errors or aberrations on a theoretical level. We may like to kill only evil but we eliminate also the evildoer; we may want to punish the crime, but we imprison the criminal. "Do not resist evil" (or the evil-one) says also challengingly and irritatingly that selfsame Son of Mary!

But besides the sane caution of not absolutizing anything because, to begin with, we ourselves are not absolute, there is still another underlying assumption for this *sûtra*: the nature of Reality is not dialectical; neither reducible to logical dynamisms nor proceeding by synthesis of opposites. Peace is not the opposite of war, to begin with. Elimination of war does not bring automatically Peace. This is why the way to true Peace is not the victory on anything real. The defeated do not enjoy the peace of the victors. Peace is not the result of a dialectical process.

## V. Military disarmament requires cultural disarmament

We have to disarm our own respective cultures alongside with and sometimes previously to a mere elimination of arms. Our cultures are oftentimes belligerent, treat the others as an enemy, as a barbarian, *gol*, *mleccha*, *khafir*, pagan, unbeliever, and the like. Furthermore, in many a culture, reason itself is used as a weapon: in order to win and convince.

Cultural disarmament is not a mere catchy phrase. It is a requisite for Peace and certainly for any lasting disarmament in our present state of affairs. First of all, it is not by sheer chance that Western civilization has developed such an arsenal of weapons both in quality and quantity. There is something inherent in this culture which has led to such a situation: competitiveness, setting our minds for "better" solutions without considering the possibility of challenging the causes and dissolving the problem, sensitivity for the quantitative and the mechanical, creativity in the field of objectifiable entities over against arts, crafts, subjectivity, neglect of the world of feelings, sense of superiority, universality, etc. An example of this spirit is the very fact of political and even intellectual talks concentrating exclusively on reduction of armaments without considering those more basic questions.

Perhaps what has become manifest in the modern technocratic culture was already potentially present in the cultural project of historical Man. We should learn the lessons of History and having come to the "End of History", begin to contemplate the plausibility of transhistorical Man — as I have tried to explain elsewhere. Our time is ripe for such an anthropological mutation. It is after all a question of survival.

But cultural disarmament is as risky and difficult as military disarmament. We become vulnerable. It is a matter of common knowledge that reduction of armaments is an economic as well as a political problem. But economics is a fundamentally cultural problem. The passage from agriculture as a way of living, to agribusiness as means of financial gains could serve as an epitome of what we want to say.

Cultural disarmament does not mean to revert into primitivism. It entails a critique of culture not only in the light of what might have gone wrong in Western culture, but also under the perspective of a genuine crosscultural approach.

**VI. No culture, religion or tradition in isolation can solve the problems of the world.**

No religion today is self-sufficient, nor can it provide universal answers (let alone because the questions are not the same). Crosscultural approaches to the problems of the world are imperative. We suffer still from the remnants of colonialism. The essence of the latter is the belief in the monomorphism of culture. We need each other and are interdependent on all levels.

Significantly enough, when most traditional religions today are prone to lay down the mantle of imperialism, colonialism and universalism, the so-called "scientific" vision of the world seems to be the cultural heir of such attitudes. Modern astronomy, physics, mathematics, etc., seem often only implicitly to assume that they are supra-cultural, universal and definite achievements of the human spirit: "Finally, we know that Andromeda lies at such a distance; the atoms are no long *atomoi*; gravitation works in such a way that the quarks, biomolecules, chromosomes and what not up to a big bang, represent the real thing, open of course to refinements and corrections with possible new parameters." I have chastised enough the technocentric attitude to linger now any longer on the subject. Let me only recall that I am speaking about Peace on Earth and in the Heavens — and not whether under a very limited context a certain "physical law" is valid or not.

The word to be mentioned here concerning cultures, religions, and traditions is *pluralism*, about which I have also said enough elsewhere.

**VII. Peace belongs mainly to the order of the mythos, not of the logos.**

There is not a single concept of Peace. Suffice to know the resonances and connotations of the different words (*pax, eirênê, salam, Friede, shanti,...*). Peace is polysemic, it has many meanings. It is also pluralistic, it has many and doctrinally incompatible interpretations. My notion of peace may not be peaceful to somebody else. Peace is not an ideology. Peace is not synonymous with pacifism. A myth is something we believe in because we take it for granted. A myth is not ununderstandable, irrational. It is that which makes the understanding understandable, the reason reasonable. It is what

grants intelligibility in any given situation. Peace is not a mere concept. It is the emerging myth of our times.

"God" was once upon a time a fairly universal myth. Wars were fought in his name and each contender wanted the god at its own side: "Gott mit uns". Peace was also signed in God's name. Peace now seems to be the emerging unifying myth of our times; and wars are also being fought in its name!

But a myth defies a further foundation. It is beyond any possible definition, because the myth is the horizon which makes the definition possible. The *mythos* cannot be separated from the *logos*, but they should not be identified. This is the explanation why to impose our *concept* of peace does not bring Peace. And this is again a topic so near to me that I may be allowed to cut it short here.

### VIII. Religion is a way to Peace.

A more traditional notion of religion was that of considering it as a way to salvation. And people fought for their salvation. It is a fact that most wars in the world have been religious wars. We are witnessing today a transformation of the very notion of religion and it may be expressed saying that religions are the different ways of approaching and acquiring that Peace which is today probably one of the few most universal symbols. *Summa nostrae religionis pax est et unanimitas* (the acme of our religion is peace and concord) wrote Erasmus in a letter of 1522.

Connecting this *sūtra* with the previous one there is no danger of falling into a superficial eclecticism which could chop off all religious diversity and reduce religions to an almost pointless common denominator. All religions are not the same, first of all, because they do not say it. They say and affirm different things, and speak diverse languages. Secondly, because that *same* (thing, meaning, ...) for most of the traditions does not exist disconnected from their saying (it). The Word is paramount in most religions.

Yet most religions would agree that their concern is to bring Peace to man and eventually to the entire cosmos. Each religion understands Peace as a symbol polysemic and pluralistic enough so as to allow the use of it.

But this is no minor step forward because it shifts the emphasis of the religious encounters (in all senses of the word) from the doctrinal issues to a more existential attitude, and thus makes possible a fruitful cooperation of religions in our present human situation. In the past religions have often been

factors of inner peace for their followers and external wars for the others. The incongruency is today so manifest that the very self-understanding of religion begins to change in the sense we are indicating.

A difficult word should be mentioned here in this connection between Peace and religion. The word is Revolution. The way to Peace is not an easy way; it is revolutionary, upsetting, challenging, demanding the removal of injustice, selfishness, greed. History proves that once religions cease to be revolutionary, first they degenerate and do not fulfil their role; and second, the revolution is also degraded to a mere change of the guard. The problems today are formidable.

**IX. Only forgiveness, reconciliation, ongoing dialogue, leads to Peace, breaks the law of karma.**

This is a historical constatation as well as an anthropological and theologico-philosophical truth. Punishment, repayment, restitution, reparation and the like do not lead to Peace. To believe that a mere reestablishment of a broken order will put things straight is a crude mechanistic and immature way of thinking. The lost innocence demands redemption, and not the dream of a recovered paradise. No amount of compensation will undo what has been done. Peace is not restauration. Human history is dynamic. The very cosmos moves rhythmically, but does not repeat itself. The *status ante* is an impossibility.

The only way to Peace is first of all a way "forward" and not "backward". Now, forgiveness is something which transcends the main dogma of Modernity: the will. To have the will to forgive is not the same as to forgive. In order to forgive, one needs a strength beyond the mechanical order of action and reaction, one needs the Holy Spirit. *Karunā*, *charis*, love are not just good sentiments of some individuals. They are the pillars of the universe.

It is instructive to remark that each time that the Risen Christ appears to his disciples he bestows Peace on them and that, each occasion when he confers on them the power of forgiveness, he gives them the power of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes the law of *karma* is broken just by putting to shame the holders of justice: "Woman, where are (gone) those who accused you?..."

The consequences are so far-reaching that it may be improper for me now to spell them out.



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1. Intercultural: undertaken in light of the diverse cultural traditions of contemporary Man, and not solely in the terms of modern culture;
2. Inter and trans-disciplinary: calling on many 'scientific' disciplines, but also on other traditions of knowledge and wisdom (ethno-sciences) as well as on vernacular and popular knowledge;
3. Dia-logical: based on the non-duality between mythos and logos, theoria and praxis, science and wisdom, wisdom and love. "Wisdom emerges when the love of knowledge and the knowledge of love coalesce" (R. Panikkar)

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