



PEACE CULTURE THROUGH POETRY

By Prof. Ada Aharoni

Presented at the “Sociology Through Popular Culture Panel”
(July 8, 2004, Beijing, China.)

Introduction

My name is Ada Aharoni, I am a writer, poet and sociologist. I research and teach CR: Conflict Resolution at the Technion: Israel Institute of Technology, and am the Founder and President of IFLAC: The International Forum for the Literature and Culture of Peace.

- **What is Poetry? How Can it help in the resolution of conflicts between people, and even between nations?**

Topics of Discussion

The main ideas I'll be talking about are:

1. The need of a revolution in Global Popular Culture Today, from a Culture of Violence to a Culture of harmony, peace and creativity.
2. Poetry can indeed help in this needed process.
3. The use of Poetry for Conflict Resolution, Reconciliation and Coexistence

I would like to start my talk with the presentation of one of my poems, to illustrate some of the points which will be made:

The Bridge of Peace

“They shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid” (The Bible, Micah 4. 4)

"He who walks in peace, walk with him." (The Koran, Sura 48)

***My Muslim sister, daughter of Ishmael,
Let us build a sturdy bridge
From your olive world to mine,
From my orange world to yours,
Above the boiling pain
Of acid rain prejudice -
And hold human hands high
Full of free stars
Of twinkling peace***

***I do not want to be your oppressor
You do not want to be my oppressor,
Or your jailer, or my jailer,
We do not want to make each other afraid
Under our vines, and under our fig trees
Blossoming on a silvered horizon
Above the bruising and the bleeding
Of poisoned gases and scuds.***

***So, my Muslim sister,
Let us build a sturdy bridge of
Jasmine understanding
Where each shall sit with her baby
Under her vine and under her fig tree -
And none shall make them afraid
AND NONE SHALL MAKE THEM AFRAID.***

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HUMAN BEINGS

The profound difference between human beings is their ethnic culture - mainly, their cultural heritage, language, literature, poetry, and values. In the case of people in long conflicts as the Israelis and Palestinians - feelings of fear, mistrust and lack of understanding have been piling up in their hearts and minds over the years, on both sides. This paper shows that through poetry, people from both sides of conflicts come to understand each other better, and this understanding can lead to the promotion of peace. Only a suitable vehicle that can reach and profoundly penetrate through those layers of mistrust, suspicion and fear, can overcome those separating boundaries and build bridges of trust and respect for each other's humanity. The best vehicle for this delicate operation is the magical healing of the Poem, with its words of comprehension, feelings, care and tenderness.

THE POWER OF THE POEM

Poems have the ability to build confidence measures and to create bridges of understanding that can dissipate mistrust. Examples from various poems and their contexts will be shown and analyzed. Peace poetry has also the capacity to impart the important and crucial message that we all belong to one family, that of humanity, and that violence and terror only lead to chaos, destruction, and sorrow and deep misery on all sides. In every conflict there are two stories. The Poem of Peace, because of its ability to present each of the two sides in all its reality, pain, hope and yearning for peace - can lead to mutual recognition and reconciliation, and to the ensuing building of confidence, openness and respect.

- 1. To address cultural and ethical root-causes of violence, conflicts, terror and war.**
- 2. To build harmonious bridges of culture, understanding, and respect among people and nations.**
- 3. To spread a culture of peace climate nationally and globally, and to make "peace news" and "peace culture" developments newsworthy.**

Elie Wiesel, the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, was certainly right when he stated: "We are the stories that we heard and the stories we tell." It is the same with Poetry.

A powerful and influential new peace culture system, with harmonious poems, and the aid of a responsible media, could diffuse required harmonious values, ideas and ethics, through arts, literature, education and entertainment, which would reach the various sectors of society and the masses. What people watch, hear, and read, and the kind of culture, films, literature, and art they are exposed to and absorb, influence their thoughts, feelings and ethics. It is therefore of crucial importance, that those poems, communications and stories we hear and watch on television and in films, and which we listen to on the radio, should be forwarded by programs that create and build and do not destroy.

THE POWER OF THE POEM

Poetry is indeed a powerful constituent and vehicle at the core of possible transformations, given that it mediates and transfers ideas, values and intellectual refinement, between generations and between civilizations. It is both a preserving and a reproductive force, by transmitting the cultural patterns of the past and the present, to the future, and an important innovative influence, by its power to inculcate new feelings, emotions, attitudes, thoughts, values and norms.

THE NEED FOR A PEACE CULTURE

A reformed peace culture, literature, communications and educational system, can make it possible for the creative voices of poets of the many lands around the globe yearning for peace, to be heard and to be listened to. The poets, writers, film – makers and dramatists , encouraged by a culture of peace, would give voice to the craving of the preponderant majority of the global community to build a world beyond war, terror, and violence. There is therefore, a crucial need for reform at an international scale, concerning culture, literature and the arts, that can undermine and replace the culture of violence terror and crime.

SUICIDE BOMBERS

The solution to the phenomenon of suicide bombers probably lies in getting to the minds of the suicidal volunteers, with powerful and influential contents of a culture of peace, before their minds are poisoned. Poetry and research can help in exploring ways how to reach the roots of their identity, to profoundly understand what their grievances are, and examining and suggesting directions how these grievances can be addressed. The differences in cultures should also be examined, as well as what all national cultures have in common. The results should be presented in powerful and convincing ways that could influence volunteers for suicide bombings to change their decisions and behavior.

THE RECONSTRUCTION of Poetry and Literature

The feelings of distrust and hatred by certain nations and ethnic groups of different cultures toward each other, leading to terror and suicide bombers, cannot be overcome by guns or bombs, but only by a basic and resourceful peace culture system, that thoroughly penetrates the deep roots of the conflict, uses effective conflict resolution methods, and builds confidence, understanding and respect of each nation's identity, ethnicity and culture. This new peace culture system should be initiated, organized and applied both nationally and globally, by various international institutions.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

The suggested innovative peace culture system, to counteract violence, war and terrorism would replace the culture of violence rampant in many places around the world, and would shed new lights and point out new directions. It is suggested that it would consist of, among other various factors and elements:

- 1. The foundation and organization of a wide, powerful and resourceful "Peace Media and Telecommunications Network," that would function regionally and globally, to support the global culture of peace system. A Peace Satellite, Television and Radio, in the Middle East, and other conflicted areas, such as Cyprus, for example, could help to counteract the fear, hatred and misunderstanding rampant in the region.**

CONCLUSION

The major underlying ideas exposed in this essay, as we have seen are:

- 1) That culture is a key factor in avoiding and resolving conflicts.
- 2) It is also a main factor in promoting genuine peace.

If a peace culture system instills recognition of the "other", respect for his or her identity and culture, as well as a commitment to solving conflicts and differences by peaceful means, then the chances for peace will be greatly enhanced. By contrast, if the cultural and educational system instill self-centeredness, rejection and hatred of the "other's" identity or culture, and calls for and justifies the resort to violence to solve conflict - then life sustainability in our fragile world may be endangered.

NOTES

A. Aharoni A. ed. et al (1993). *A Song to Life and to World Peace: Selected essays and poems presented at the XIII World Congress of Poets of the World Academy of Arts and Culture*, Jerusalem: Posner and Sons., Jerusalem (Jerusalem Books: ISBN965-219-013-6.

amazon.com

Aharoni A. (1995) *Peace Flower: A Space Adventure*, A Quest for World Peace for young and old, 119 pp. Haifa: M. Lachman (Iflac: POB 9934, Haifa 34341, Israel), ISBN: 965-9013930. amazon.com

Aharoni A. ed. (1997). *Galim 8: Waves of Peace, In Memory of Yitzhak Rabin.*, Shfaram Galilee: Hatichon (Jerusalem Books: Tel. 972-2-6426576), ISBN 965-222-774-9. (In Hebrew, English and Arabic). amazon.com