

WHEATLEY INSTITUTION

Inequality, Peace, and Us

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Growing inequality within countries and between regions deepens [human conflict]. It is our task to create a future and hope for regions and countries in crisis where young people suffer from unemployment and have little prospects of improving their lives. Unless we can meet this challenge, new conflicts will flare up and we will lose another generation to war.[1]

I begin with the above quotation by Martti Ahtisaari, 2008 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and tenth President of Finland (1994–2000), to make three points. First, inequality and peace are fundamentally incompatible. Second, a great many youth in our world are being crushed in the vise of inequality: between inequality of opportunity and inequality of condition. Third, progression toward peace by battling inequality is not an abstract challenge; but rather it is an ethical-leadership imperative for each of us.

Inequality and Peace are Incompatible

Incompatibility has been defined as a condition where two things are so different in nature as to be incapable of coexisting. One major reason that inequality and peace are incompatible is that they differ at their core: inequality primarily being based on reference to factors that are external to oneself; but peace being found most often to be internally referenced. The incompatibility

arises because we seek to enact a mismatch: we expect peace to be external (we should all get along) and equality to be internal (I should get as much as anyone else).

Inequality external

At the core of the experience of inequality is comparison, which juxtaposes factors external to the self—as Ahtisaari suggests: “within countries and between regions”, and “with respect to prospects of improving lives.”¹ Also, inequality characteristically is enacted through the use of social forces external to the self. For example, classical sociologist, Max Weber, argued that “group[s] of competitors take some externally identifiable characteristic of another group of (actual or potential) competitors—race, language, religion, local or social origin, descent, residence, etc. as a pretext for attempting their exclusion.”^[2] Thus one way to view the experience of inequality at its core is to interpret it as one of exclusion—e.g., of the self from others around them.

Peace internal

Of peace, Gandhi said, “Each one has to find his peace from within. And peace to be real must be unaffected by outside circumstances.” This is an expectation grounded in the core idea that peace springs from within us: we experience peace by becoming impervious to outside circumstances.

Mismatch

So, while the experience of peace occurs internally within ourselves, it appears to be unrealistic to expect it to occur externally in our relationships with each other because its fundamental core is internal. Inequality and peace are therefore incompatible because practically speaking, they are mutually exclusive: peace is internally driven; inequality is externally driven.

For example, while some individuals may, through mighty effort over a lifetime of gaining maturity, become capable of achieving internal peace despite the existence of an unequal and exclusionary world; it does not seem practical (given human nature and maturation processes) to expect such compatibility to exist among the youth who are only beginning to grapple with comparison and inequality. It is therefore crucial to address the other point of reference as suggested in the words, again, of Ahtisaari in his Nobel Lecture, “to create a future and hope for regions and countries in crisis where young people suffer from unemployment and have little prospects of improving their lives.”¹ However, to do so we must both confront the vise of inequality that is crushing many youth in our world, and then look for ways to solve this mismatch.

A Vise of Inequality

Inequality comes in two intertwined forms that create the jaws of the vise of inequality: inequality of opportunity, and inequality of condition. Inequality of opportunity suggests the compromise of a person's chances to "get ahead" in such life attainments as an education, a good job, access to financial resources; whereas inequality of condition suggests the disparate distribution of material goods, living conditions, and rights such as citizenship or even employment prospects.[3] Inequality of opportunity and of condition intertwine, and become a vise, in the sense that access to opportunity can lead to improvement in condition; and reciprocally, a favorable condition can influence access to opportunity—but unfortunately, also vice versa. This reverse interrelationship creates a "vise of inequality" that is crushing many youth in our world: those with less opportunity, experience inequality of condition. Those with inequality of condition experience less opportunity.

For example without the opportunity for jobs, the youth in many areas of the world (e.g. the Middle-East and North Africa at approximately 60% unemployment of youth under age 30) exist in poverty or at subsistence economic levels. [4] And without the resources and institutions[5] that enable capital formation and job creation, for example, the jobs are not available to the youth. Almost two years ago the UN Secretary General's Envoy on Youth, Ahmad Alhendawi of Jordan, published a report that confirms this relationship between employment and inequality and calls for greater attention to the opportunities and condition of at-risk youth in the world. ⁴

How then, as encouraged by Ahtisaari in his Nobel Lecture, can we loosen the vise of inequality that is crushing many of the world's youth, to undertake the task of "creating a future and hope for regions and countries in crisis where young people suffer from unemployment and have little prospects of improving their lives, to fashion a world where inequality-charged conflict is reduced, prospects for peace are improved, and thereby we do not lose another generation to war?" ¹ To solve this problem I believe we must confront the clash between inequality and peace that occurs as these two notions of inequality and peace vie for preeminence.

Our Ethical-leadership Imperative

Now, to cite Nobel Laureate Ahtisaari further in the context of the inequality/peace nexus: "Neither wars and conflicts nor inequality are inevitable. Both are caused by human beings. There are always interests that are furthered by war and by inequality. Therefore those who have power and influence can also stop them." ¹ Where is it that we have such power? I suggest that much of this power can come from our ethics, and specifically from our engagement in ethical leadership.

Ethical leadership is morality in action.[6] What actions can transform the energy of youth in the direction of peace: from the vicious-cycle that drives the "vise of inequality" into a virtuous cycle that propels the "potential for peace"?

Ahtisaari further has argued:

“Peace is a question of will. All conflicts can be settled, and there are no excuses for allowing them to become eternal...Conflict settlement requires the injection of optimism and hope born from employment and economic opportunities. Otherwise, fragile peace agreements can rarely be sustained.”¹

It is in this sense that personal and societal ethics, and ethical leadership, matter.

To closely paraphrase Gandhi:

[Our] beliefs become [Our] thoughts,
[Our] thoughts become [Our] words,
[Our] words become [Our] actions,
[Our] actions become [Our] habits,
[Our] habits become [Our] values,
[Our] values become [Our] destiny.
The future depends on what [we] do today.

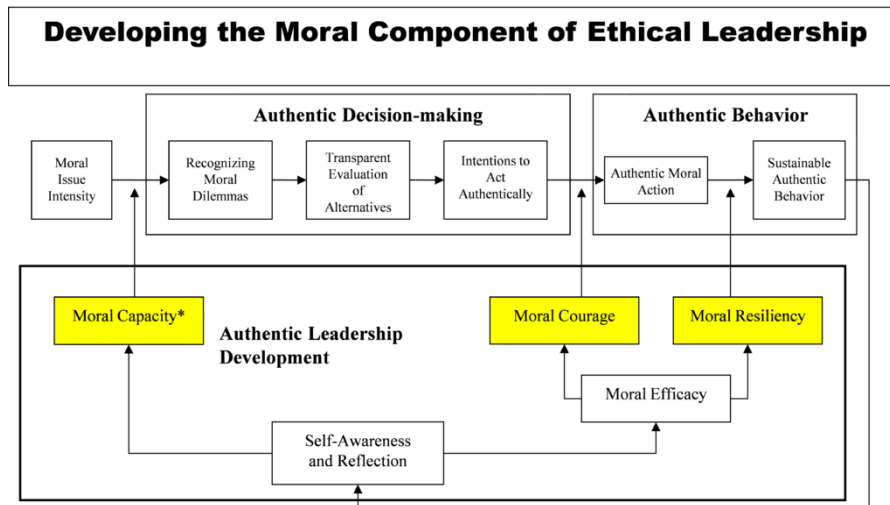
Translating Gandhi’s truisms into action is a personal challenge. It applies to adults and youth alike. While preparing this Note I was searching the web to see if I could find posted there some sentiments of youth in the world concerning peace and inequality. I found the following statement from an essay contest participant, Anjana Sathiyaseelan:

“When people solicit ‘what is peace and harmony?’ I would always say that it is the immense joy in having the equality feeling in our hearts towards all the different people in this world based on religion, wealth status, etc. and treating them with respect and pure love. I believe that peace can be maintained in a country only when the government treats everyone equally and respectfully. Only then will the people of the nation [exhibit] brotherhood towards all. We should invest thoughts and benefits of peace and harmony in the hearts of children who are going to lead the entire world towards the righteous path tomorrow.”^[7]

What “morality” should we expect to see in action? I suggest that the ethics of reducing inequality to foster peace would include our developing the internal qualities of equality-of-feeling and treatment-with respect as Anjana has outlined. But this means being ethically proactive by developing the moral component of ethical leadership, to reconcile both internal (peace) and external (equality) expectations.

About 15 years ago, professor Doug May, Director of the Bob Billings Center for Positive Ethics in Business at the University of Kansas (and colleagues) outlined the idea that the moral component of ethical leadership draws from an individual reservoir of authentic leadership development. As highlighted below in the illustration from their paper, this reservoir must be filled by each of

us as we develop moral capacity, moral courage, and moral resiliency—the kind of authenticity that enables us to exercise ethical leadership.[8]



This kind of ethical and leadership authenticity necessitates individual internal development. How is this to be done? Wheatley Fellows Brad Agle, and Bill O’Rourke who—with co-author Aaron Miller—recently published the “Business Ethics Field Guide,” suggest that being ethically proactive means clarifying what matters most to us, thereby identifying our values; and then committing to living our values and to building social structures that facilitate ethical behavior.[9] Becoming ethically proactive then also means taking upon ourselves the responsibilities of ethical leadership: becoming both moral people and moral managers in our various life roles.[10]

Again paraphrasing Ahtisaari, “reconciling ethics, equality and peace are therefore a question of will.”¹

Will we?

[1] Ahtisaari, M. Nobel Lecture, Oslo (10 December 2008). Ahtisaari served as a United Nations special envoy for Kosovo, charged with organizing the Kosovo status process negotiations, aimed at resolving a long-running dispute in Kosovo, which later declared its independence from Serbia in 2008. In October 2008, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize “for his important efforts, on several continents and over more than three decades, to resolve international conflicts.” The Nobel statement said that Ahtisaari has played a prominent role in resolving serious and long-lasting conflicts, including ones in Namibia, Aceh (Indonesia), Kosovo, and Iraq.

[2] Weber, M. (1922/1978). *Economy and society*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, p. 342.

[3] Breen, R., & Jonsson, J. O. (2005). Inequality of opportunity in comparative perspective: Recent research on educational attainment and social mobility. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 31: 223–243.

[4] UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2016/08/global-youth-unemployment-rise/>

[5] Ferguson N. 2012. *The Great Degeneration: How Institutions Decay and Economies Die*. New York: Penguin.

[6] Agle, B. R., O'Rourke, W., Miler, A. (2016). The business ethics field guide. Provo, UT: The Ethics Field Guide LLC.

[7] Published by Anjana Sathiyaseelan on 11/17/2016 <https://www.mystudycorner.net/peace-and-harmony-essay-speech-article-paragraph/> downloaded, June 5, 2018.

[8] May, D. R., Chan, A., Hodges, T., & Avolio, B. J. Developing the moral component of authentic leadership. *Organizational Dynamics*, 32, 247-260.

[9] Agle et al. (2016).

[10] Trevino, L. K., Hartman, L. P., and Brown, M. (2000). Moral person and moral manager: How executives develop a reputation for ethical leadership. *California Management Review*, 42 (4): 128-142.