

Observations & Views:

Conceits Of War

The celebrated CBS correspondent, Andy Rooney, on the eve of Memorial Day, May 24, 2009, reflected on the various aspects of war. Among other things, Mr. Rooney said, "There's only so much time any of us can spend remembering those we loved who have died, but the men, boys really, who died in our wars deserve at least a few moments of reflection during which we consider what they did for us. ... We use the phrase 'gave their lives,' but they didn't give their lives. Their lives were taken from them."

Some conceits of war include 'patriotism', 'defending freedom', 'remembering those who sacrificed their lives' and so on and so forth. Commenting on such conceits of war, Andy Rooney said, "Remembering doesn't do the remembered any good, of course. It's for ourselves, the living. I wish we could dedicate Memorial Day, not to the memory of those who have died at war, but to the idea of saving the lives of the young people who are going to die in the future if we don't find some new way - some new religion maybe - that takes war out of our lives."

We should bear in mind that violence leads to further violence. Lasting peace cannot be attained through war. Remember, World War I was branded as 'the war to end all wars'. There will be less violence, bloodshed and misery for the common people if individuals and nations avoid conflicts resulting from selfishness, greed and ego. Talking about the greed involved in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan on the PBS Program, Bill Moyers' Journal of June 5, 2009, Jeremy Scahill, the twice winner of the George Polk Award for special achievement in journalism and author of the best selling book, *Blackwater: The Rise Of The World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army*, said, "The fact is that I think most Americans are not aware that their dollars being spent in Afghanistan are, in fact, going to for-profit corporations in both Iraq and Afghanistan. These are companies that are simultaneously working for profit and for the U.S. government. That is the intricate linking of corporate profits to an escalation of war that President Eisenhower warned against in his farewell address. We live in amidst the most radical privatization agenda in the history of our country. And it cuts across every aspect of our society."

Avoiding war is a genuine sacrifice on the part of individuals and nations. Such moves will be beneficial to humanity at large. Further, war involves considerable waste of natural resources. Avoiding wars will also be good for our environment. But most importantly, avoiding acts of war will mean less bloodshed, less grief, less pain and less bereavement.*

* In this context, please see 'Ashok – Emperor Or Monk', published in this issue.

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What Is Religion?

Some individuals consider religion as a set of do's and don'ts handed down by some supreme authority. Indian religions, being based on highly sophisticated philosophies, are much more than that. They constitute the science of living. An individual, like a scientist, observes and experiences reality. Then he/she determines what is the best way of living his/her life. The eminent Indian philosopher of modern times, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan held similar views. The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy

(<http://www.iep.utm.edu/r/radhakri.htm#SH2d>) states:

"Religion," Radhakrishnan holds, is "a kind of life or experience." It is an insight into the nature of reality (DARSHAN), or experience of reality (ANUBHAV). It is "a specific attitude of the self, itself and not other".¹ In a short, but revealing passage, Radhakrishnan characterizes religion in terms of "personal experience." It is "an independent functioning of the human mind, something unique, possessing an autonomous character. It is something inward and personal which unifies all values and organizes all experiences. It is the reaction to the whole of man to the whole of reality. [It] may be called spiritual life, as distinct from a merely intellectual or moral or aesthetic activity or a combination of them".²

True religion, argues Radhakrishnan, remains open to experience and encourages an experimental attitude with regard to its experiential data. Hinduism more than any other religion exemplifies this scientific attitude. "The Hindu philosophy of religion starts from and returns to an experimental basis".³ Unlike other religions, which set limits on the types of spiritual experience, the "Hindu thinker readily admits of other points

¹ The Hindu View of Life by S. Radhakrishnan, page 15.

² An Idealist View of Life by S. Radhakrishnan, pages 88-89.

³ The Hindu View of Life by S. Radhakrishnan, page 19.

of view than his own and considers them to be just as worthy of attention".⁴ What sets Hinduism apart from other religions is its unlimited appeal to and appreciation for all forms of experience. Experience and experimentation are the origin and end of Hinduism, as Radhakrishnan understands it.

Evidently, the Jain religion, with its concepts of relativism and multiplicity of viewpoints, falls into this distinguished category.

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The first step to any religion is to be a good human being. How can anyone be a good Muslim, Christian, Jew, Sikh, Hindu or atheist, when they are having a problem being a good human...

- Raza on Bill Moyers' blog

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Culture Of Consumerism: Gifts And Presents

(Based on the article 'Toys make way for spirit of charity, simplicity' by Beth Teitell, published in the Boston Globe of March 27, 2008)

All of us, especially the youngsters, are happy and excited to give and receive gifts and presents. However, some individuals are questioning such practices. Beth Teitell writes: When Carrie Alyea's daughter, Piper, turned 7 this month, guests invited to her jungle-themed party were asked not to bring presents for the birthday girl. Instead, they could donate \$5 to the parents' organization at Piper's school.

"She already has so much stuff she doesn't play with," said the South End mother. "I saw it as a good way not to have parents spend money on toys that will be thrown in the corner."

The writer continues, "Fueled by environmental concerns, charitable impulses, and stepped-up campaigns to control household clutter, a growing number of middle-class parents are drawing the line at birthday presents."

The problem is not limited to birthday presents. Madeline Levine, a psychologist in Marin County, Calif., and author of "The Price of Privilege," calls the present-free trend a "childish solution" to the problem of parents who reward their kids simply for behaving themselves. "Kids now

⁴ Ibid, page 19,

get gifts for everything," she said. " 'You got an A: Let me get you something. You woke up this morning: You want something, you can have it.' " After that, taking a public "no-gift" stand on a child's birthday strikes Levine as "almost self-righteous."

These days the focus has shifted from spiritualism, purity of heart and simplicity to money and material. "One thing we know is that very large numbers of people feel we've become too materialistic," said a Boston College sociologist, Juliet B. Schor, author of "Born to Buy." "It's a touchy subject right now, how we're living."

The culture of consumerism that is fueled by the practice of gift-giving is detrimental to the environment as well. We should buy only what we need and not what we want. This is good for the environment. Remember, desires know no limit and natural resources are limited. So contentment is the key to happiness. In view of these facts, it is advisable to give cash instead of presents. The recipient is then free to use his/her discretion and buy what he/she needs. This will also promote the Jain teaching of non-possessiveness (APARIGRAH).

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From President Eisenhower's Farewell Address

(January 17, 1961)

We pray that peoples of all faiths, all races, all nations, may have their great human needs satisfied; that those now denied opportunity shall come to enjoy it to the full; that all who yearn for freedom may experience its spiritual blessings; that those who have freedom will understand, also, its heavy responsibilities; that all who are insensitive to the needs of others will learn charity; that the scourges of poverty, disease and ignorance will be made to disappear from the earth, and that, in the goodness of time, all peoples will come to live together in a peace guaranteed by the binding force of mutual respect and love.