

DIALOGUE

The art of having a meaningful conversation



KEN O'DONNELL

between two human beings?', elicited a similar reply from scientists in Greece, saleswomen in Argentina, indigenous villagers in Bolivia, workers in India and monks in Korea. They all replied that respect, trust, honesty, empathy and so on were the key factors.

The art of meaningful conversation is based on being able to establish a common ground with the person I talk to, irrespective of age, culture, social or educational background. This is especially important when the outcome is crucial or the topic difficult.

I have had the great fortune to visit almost 100 countries and interact with people from many cultures and traditions. We all had much more in common than may be imagined. The answer to a question that was posed to the most diverse of audiences, 'What is important in a good relationship

Mothers love, and suffer, with their children everywhere. Taxi drivers in Sydney, Istanbul or Madrid get angry in the same way for probably the same reasons. Both, the chief executive and the receptionist of the same company, want to be happy if they can, to love and be loved if possible, and seek to understand and be understood. Underneath the skin colour, the creed, the language and the way of life, we value and aspire to the same things. After all, we are all human beings before the roles we play.

If I want a meaningful conversation and one that avoids all the pos-



sible misunderstandings and conflict of viewpoints, then I have to stand back and see the common ground, where I can meet others as they are and without any prejudice.

I especially have to understand that the image I carry in my mind of them is probably not

them at all. If I talk to the image I have of them and they talk to the image they have of me then neither of us really speaks to the self behind the image.

The one I am talking to may have a mind that is different from mine, and intellect that works on a different level and a

set of personality traits that has little to do with mine, so how can my vision see beyond that and see what is behind that?

By seeing the soul within. I connect as I, the soul, the eternal spiritual being, and I talk to the soul within the one who I am addressing,

and that is when real common ground, common understanding, can be enjoyed. This is the challenge; but what rewards await if I am able to meet this challenge!

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DISCOURSE

KNOW THE INNER ENEMY TO PROTECT YOURSELF



DADI JANKI

If I do not know the enemy, I will be poorly equipped to protect myself. Anger, greed, ego, lust, attachment are the enemies in myself and in others. If I cannot protect myself, who will?

Not to know the value of thoughts, or to move through life without an aim, is ignorance. This is another kind of enemy. To say: 'Things are okay as they are' means that I have not yet recognised my ignorance nor my need for protection.

The non-violent battle I have set out to win, is of overcoming the vices. Spirituality playing itself out as virtue and wisdom in my life is my sword and my protection.

It is possible to become happy, free and deeply peaceful and bring into your life the literal, tangible companionship of God.

These are extraordinary times for reaching towards your highest ideals.

HUMANITARIAN SERVICE

SERVING WITH THE POWER OF PEACE



B.K. GEETA

One thing everyone desires in life is peace. Without peace we do not feel content, secure, and at ease. But no matter how much we try, we cannot attain true and lasting peace through money or material means. There is abundant wealth in the world, and all sorts of facilities to make us feel happy, yet people long for peace that is constant.

There are, however, some individuals whose mere presence makes others feel peaceful, free from any desire or agitation, even if for a short while. Such souls carry an aura of peace around them created by the vibrations emanating from their tranquil mind. In other

words, they are embodiments of peace. Sadly, such people are few in number. It need not be so.

Most people lack peace of mind because they are looking for peace in the wrong place. They have forgotten that they are spiritual beings, or souls. The body is the medium through which the soul expresses itself. It is the soul that thinks, speaks and acts. Consciousness resides in the soul. God, the Father of all souls, is the ocean of peace, and just as the offspring of any species have the characteristics of their parents, we souls have God's qualities in us.

Peace is the soul's natural state of being. When we recognise this fact and remind ourselves of it again and again, we discover the reservoir of peace within us. Those who immerse themselves in this reservoir, by contemplation and meditation, become imbued with peace, which then radiates from their person.

Not just thoughts and feel-



ings, but even the dreams of such people are peaceful as their entire consciousness is permeated with peace. The vibrations, speech, look and conduct of such individuals give others a glimpse of that inner peace.

The world today is in great need of this kind of humani-

tarian service — reminding others of who they really are and showing them how to tap into the peace they carry within themselves.

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SELF-IMPROVEMENT

PURITY IS THE FOUNDATION OF GREATNESS



B.K. DR SAVITA

The basis of self-improvement is purity — in thoughts, words, actions, and relationships.

When we falter or fail, the root cause is some impurity in the mind — any defect that causes me, the soul, to lose control of my thoughts, emotions, and actions. It can come in many forms, such as anger, jealousy, greed, or attachment.

But the flaw that does the greatest damage is lust. It begins subtly, with getting impressed by someone because of their nature, personality or virtues. This is a slippery road to ruin. Everyone has one or more good qualities, and these are gifts from God. To be

impressed by someone is to be deceived, because we forget where their virtues are coming from, and the ultimate result is sorrow.

Impurity is like a mirage; it often appears in relationships. When someone attracts us, we think it is goodness that is pulling our mind. That is why we think: "This one is a nice person", "I like this one's nature", "and this one is so

loving and helpful". It feels very pleasant for some time, and we are tricked. We forget the spiritual truth that we are all souls, children of God, and all of us have received an inheritance from Him in the form

of virtues. We can learn from others' good qualities, keeping in mind that they are coming from the Father. The Father is the seed of the tree of humanity, and souls are like leaves drawing sustenance from Him.

If the base — purity — is weak, the edifice of greatness cannot stand on it for long. Being impressed with someone and having desires means there is a trace of lust

in the soul. One cannot be impressed unless there is a desire. Desires and attractions repeatedly distract the soul, consuming its time and energy. Consequently, one has no lasting peace or spiritual progress. One may

know all the right things — what needs to be done and what will be achieved — but one will be unable to put it into practice. Identifying and overcoming such attractions calls for attention on one's thoughts and feelings, the honesty to acknowledge mistakes or weaknesses, and the willingness, backed by sustained effort, to remove them. The peace, stabil-

ity, contentment and joy achieved by this work make life truly valuable and satisfying.

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WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

THE SPIRITUAL SYMBOLISM OF SOLAR ENERGY



JOANNA KITTO

In the Western Celtic tradition, the springtime is called the return of the solar energy when the sun starts to gather warmth and stimulates new creation within the soil, a process which begins to unfold in January. The solar energy or the fire element needs to combine with Mother Earth for the creation to be triggered. Solar energy is often

seen as a pure masculine energy, and in some religions and traditions, the sun is considered to be symbolic of the supreme cosmic energy or God and is often portrayed as a father figure or male deity. Thus, it is a balance of both the masculine and the feminine energies that is needed for the new growth to take place.

When we look at society today it is difficult to find a synergistic balance of these two energies. Instead, it is a particular form of the masculine energy that tends to dominate. This is the world of achievement and power through striving, busyness, and of information gathering rather than the acquisition of wisdom.

These are the values that tend to be promoted in our materialistic society. They are often seen as the mark of success and the means to happiness, albeit often short-lived. But what is missing is the balance of this dominant masculine energy with the feminine: the spirituality, the 'beingness', the connection with the inner being, with God and with one another.

On the whole, nature is perceived as feminine and those who speak gendered languages will know this. In French, nature is la nature, for example. What can we learn by observing nature? From the natural world, we can certainly learn the art of stillness, endur-



ance, perseverance and growth. Nature teaches us how to just 'be'. William Wordsworth said, "Come forth into the light of things, let nature be your teacher".

Nature is indeed a great teacher. The persistent dominance of the impure masculine energy is perhaps why the feminine is consistently abused. This happens in relation to women in societies all

over the world but also in relation to nature, which has, as we know, been plundered and abused consistently for decades in the name of progress. Within the teachings of the Brahma Kumaris, it is understood that the original nature of the soul is a perfect balance between the masculine and feminine qualities. However, in a world which is so conditioned and polarised by

gender, we easily lose that inner balance. The founder of the Brahma Kumaris, Prajapita Brahma, was ahead of his time when, in the late 1930s, he put the administration of the community into the hands of a group of young women. Recognising the dominance of the masculine in society, he felt that it was especially the feminine energy of nurturing and caring that was needed to restore the balance. Henceforth, the organisation has been led by women.

But restoring balance to the world and creating a harmonious relationship with nature once again, starts not just within organisations but within the self. The prime tool

of spiritual development taught by the Brahma Kumaris is meditation, and this is seen as a means of connecting to the Divine. The Divine or God is considered to be a being of light, like the sun, but we are encouraged to relate to this being as both the Mother and the Father. This enables each soul to develop the full range of virtues and powers needed to deal with the challenges of today's world and also to create a better, more balanced world in the future.

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A THOUGHT FOR TODAY

Doctors will not make me healthy. Nutritionists will not make me slim. Teachers will not make me smart. Gurus will not make me calm. Mentors will not make me rich. Trainers will not make me fit. Ultimately, I am responsible for the actions required to achieve any of these things. Today let me choose what I want and follow through with the small repeated actions required to make it happen.