The Globalization of Science, Spirituality, and Peace

by Joseph R. Giove

Major technological and humanistic developments are converging as a result of globalization. This holistic blending of the East and the West is making the scientific exploration of certain spiritual practices, which are aimed at creating peace, a viable pursuit. With a rigorous Western approach to practical application of Eastern wisdom, world peace may well be within our reach.

This article first discusses the current state of societal disharmony from an unusual perspective, one that considers the underlying subjective issues of conflict. Next it addresses how the science of consciousness is transforming our worldview. Then it presents how an East-West convergence of science, technology and spiritually gives humanity an unprecedented opportunity to bring sustainable peace to our communities and to the world.

A Different Model of Societal Disharmony

The peace-through-strength approach, both in our communities and on the world scene, continually demonstrates its limitations. Every "victory" contains the seeds of fear, mistrust and hostility. Societal tension underlies attempts at reconciliation, rendering them temporary at best. A more fundamental and sustainable approach to societal harmony is apparently needed.

One approach is to examine the underlying subjective issues of conflict, a common one being tension or stress. As R.K White argues in *Fearful Warriors*:

"Traditional approaches to peace…cannot be effective in the absence of concurrent measures to drastically reduce tension. High levels of tension or stress directly motivate violence aimed at removing perceived injustices, threats or blocks to progress….they may also indirectly breed misperceptions, fear, and dysfunctional cognitive and decision-making processes."

Consider this on a personal level. Recall a circumstance between you and a spouse, coworker or business partner. Your stress may have distorted your perception of the situation and ability to make thoughtful, creative, harmonious decisions. Now multiply this stressful influence times a hundred or thousands, as is the case in many communities around the world.

If a sustainable approach to peace is possible, it must alleviate this tension in a way that feels personal to each individual, yet is not externally imposed. When this is accomplished, cognitive and decision-making processes naturally tend toward more harmonious outcomes.

Examining human consciousness as it relates to peaceful relations seems as relevant as any externally motivated means of resolving conflicts. In fact, as consciousness researcher, David Orme-Johnson points out, "The scientific exploration of consciousness is critical to our understanding of the natural world and for solving the recalcitrant problems of humankind, which are all ultimately problems of mind."

Once we give consciousness and its practical application equal footing with machines, progress and commerce, we have a chance at uniting three major developments that have resulted from advancing technology and globalization. They are: 1) collective mind over matter, 2) a human-based peace technology, and 3) massive global collaboration.

As Mass Mind Moves, So Does Matter

Imagine going to Las Vegas and playing craps. Instead of everyone at the table hoping for a different roll of the dice, you all agree what number you want to see. Believe it or not, this might have a subtle influence on the probability of those intended numbers occurring. This ability to influence random events has been studied for over 75 years, according to Dean Radin, PhD, author of *Entangled Minds* and *The Conscious Universe*.

Now imagine having dozens of computers spread around the world whose job it is to roll electronic dice continuously, creating a steady stream of random events. Do you think that a group of people around the world could meditate on becoming more coherent as a group, calming themselves very deeply without falling asleep, and that human coherence could make those random dice-rolls not so random?

What would you say if it doesn't even require that much intention; that all it takes is an event that captures the collective attention, like the death of Princess Diana, a tsunami disaster broadcast on every TV station, or the tragedy of September 11, 2001? Dr. Roger Nelson, retired Princeton University professor, heads the Global Consciousness Project. [noosphere.princeton.edu]. Since 1998 this project has been running a network of random event generators distributed around the world. When actual events of world interest occur a change of the random numbers to non-random occurs in a manner that cannot be explained. Over 200 events have been evaluated, from natural disasters to the death of celebrities to global meditations, and have shown that as humans become more coherent, it appears that matter does too, with odds against this phenomenon occurring by chance at over 1,000,000 to 1.

A Human-Based Peace Technology

One of the most remarkable imports from the East isn't curry spice; it's a phenomenon referred to as "a fourth state of consciousness."

The first three you are familiar with: 1) wakefulness, 2) dreaming while you sleep; and 3) deep sleep.

The fourth state, according to Robert M. Oates in *Permanent Peace*, seems to be a combination of two seemingly opposed human states: minimum physical-mental arousal and maximum awareness. The former is akin to deep sleep, where the body and nervous system are minimally aroused, with no sensory or mental activity. The latter is a rarified, gentle type of awareness that transcends normal wakefulness – a pure, self-referral type of awareness – awareness circling back to become aware of itself…awareness of awareness, so to speak.

While this fourth state of consciousness is uncommon, it is a natural human state. It has been studied extensively for its remarkably positive effects on human health and well-being. In this state, oxygen consumption drops significantly; blood levels of cortisol, a stress hormone, drop sharply; metabolic activity of red blood cells decrease; brain wave coherence – increasing orderliness and harmony amongst different brain waves – increases; blood flow to the brain increases; and arginine vasopressin increases (AVP regulates blood pressure and improves learning ability and memory).

The method used to experience this fourth state of consciousness is an inner practice called transcendental meditation (TM). The full complex of effects as described above does not seem to be achieved with most other forms of skilled relaxation or meditation. Although TM comes from the eastern Vedic tradition, it is not a religion, does not involve contemplation about religious or secular ideas, nor does it involve concentration, which is characteristic of some meditation and religious practices. It is a simple, inner practice that allows the active mind to settle to its silent self-referral state.
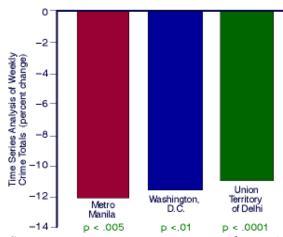
The reason TM is being highlighted here is because it is has been the subject of most social studies. These studies tested the hypothesis that societal stress underlies violence, aggression and conflict, which can be reduced by inducing into the community a fundamental calming and harmonizing influence.

Remember the Global Consciousness Project where groups of people appear to influence a change of random numbers to non-random Considering this, it's not too far fetched that humans can affect other humans to behave in a more coherent, harmonious way as well…by becoming more coherent and harmonious within themselves.

Since the late 1970s, studies of large peace-creating groups of TM practitioners have consistently shown a reduction of violent crime and terrorism. They come to a city, gather in large groups for a period of weeks or months, and a significant drop in crime is subsequently observed below pre-existing levels. These groups, numbering in the hundreds to thousands, seem to create a calming and harmonizing effect in the surrounding communities. Think of what could be accomplished if citizens in these communities would form similar peace-creating groups and thus provide this effect on a continuous basis. The future of neighborhood crime prevention programs should include similar peace-creating group activities. These activities may include TM but studies currently underway may show other types of activities can be effective.

The table below summarizes three studies that demonstrated significantly reduced crime in the capital regions of the Philippines, the United States and India. A time series analysis showed that this drop was not expected based on prior causative factors, and could not be accounted for by weather, seasonal cycles or change in police coverage. Because two of the three groups were composed of Westerners visiting Asian cities, these studies also demonstrated that peace-creating groups apparently operate on a fundamental level that transcends political, cultural or ethnic differences.

Decreased Crime in the Capital Regions of the Philippines, the United States, and India

Source: www.permanentpeace.org with permission.

The remarkable effects demonstrated by the 50+ well-controlled TM social studies is not outside the realm of your own personal experience, you may have just never considered it this way. Imagine going to a gathering of friends who respect you, desire your company, and are calm and enjoying themselves. This gathering would feel welcoming and you'd be more likely to have a relaxed, enjoyable time. You'd feel confident, creative and resourceful. You'd feel a harmony with your friends that would transcend inevitable differences. Contrast this with attending a court hearing with obvious interpersonal polarities, skilled adversaries and ill intentions. In the presence of this field of tension and conflict, you may feel uneasy, strained, mentally agitated, uncreative, perhaps even cognitively impaired, and not in the best decision-making mode. Both scenarios involve a localized consciousnesses field that you influence and that influences you…a very common human experience.

Mainstream science is just now recognizing this consciousness field. It's been there all along, though, harboring our hopes, frustrations, fears, joys, sorrows…and intentions. While a handful of very powerful people may be able to influence a nation for its betterment or detriment through political, economic or violent means, the mass of people connected through technology can now bring something much more rewarding to life. This brings up the final development.

Massive Global Collaboration

Massive collaboration in today's highly connected world is something dramatically different than we're used to. It is about deep changes in the structure of our society and economy that are touching virtually every aspect of human affairs.

As Dan Tapscott says in *Wikinomics, How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything*, "Billions of connected people can now actively participate in innovation, wealth creation and social development in ways we once only dreamed of. And when these masses of people collaborate they collectively advance the arts, culture, science education, government and the economy in surprising ways…discovering the true dividends of collective capability and genius. These changes are ushering us toward a world where knowledge, power and productive capability will be more dispersed than at any time in our history—a world where value creation will be fast, fluid and persistently disruptive."

The power to add immense value to humanity and disrupt the cycle of conflict, violence and societal disharmony has been demonstrated repeatedly by the two previously mentioned developments. Now,

combined with the proliferation of massive collaboration technologies – made evident by the large scale successes of MySpace, YouTube, Second Life and Wikipedia – these two social endeavors can be scientifically explored to discover their ability to impact social harmony.

Imagine a massive global collaborative of peace-creating groups whose purpose is social harmony, comprised of members from every religion, meditation practice and indigenous group. They would come together locally and globally, learn how to apply the findings of prior social studies, and develop an open-source technology that validated the social harmonizing effects of their combined efforts.

One of the products of their collaboration would be a "social harmony index" reflective of the value in social capital gained by their efforts. They would regularly monitor indicators of social harmony and coherence, like the level and severity of emergency calls, crime statistics, socially responsible investing, and other real-time data sources. They would then feed that composite index back to participating groups over mobile phones, podcasts, television, radio and the Internet.

This index would serve as a social coherence feedback signal to educate and empower ever-larger numbers of people to participate in the most disruptive technology ever developed. One that puts the power of peace in the hands of those who benefit most: the individual.This would be an excellent project for the Millennium Project of the United Nations University to be incorporated with their annual *State of the Future* publication.

When this is done, peace may well be within our reach, and science can help us get there.

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POINTS FOR THE CLASSROOM *(send comments to forum@futuretakes.org):*

- o *In 2015, will win-win approaches to conflict resolution – between nations, political factions, socioeconomic groups, ethnic groups, etc. – be more prevalent than the "zero-sum" approach that is so pervasive today?*

- o *There are several sources of dissatisfaction in the world, and various forecasts indicate that some will get worse. Some discontents result in interest-based conflict – for example, competition for resources (food, water, energy, etc.) and living space. Other stressors, especially in this era of rapid change, include deculturation, loss of one's way of life, and loss of one's sense of stability and identity. This, in turn, typically leads to over-identification with one's "tribe" or ethnic group in a binary "us-them" sense that sows the seeds of value-based conflict – sometimes reinforced by a sense of past injustices and a perceived need for redress. Superimposed on this backdrop is the tendency of those who feel marginalized to find a sense of identity in street gangs, terrorist groups, etc. What promise does the human-based peace technology presented in this article hold for mitigating both interest-based and identity-based conflict?*

- o *Expanding on the previous question – many parts of the world teach competition beginning in elementary school, both in the classroom and in student sports. For adults, there are professional sports, beauty pageants, and the like. This value system results in "losers" as well as winners. For example, students in the public schools who cannot find "that winning feeling" in academics, athletics, organizations, or social life sometimes*

seek acceptance and identity in gangs. As an extreme example, some people seek their acceptance and identity in terrorist or other criminal groups. Other societies have tried egalitarianism, which generally resulted in misery (or at least lives of maintenance as opposed to lives of fulfillment) for even greater numbers of people than in the competitive societies. Can human-based peace technology lead to a viable third alternative? Furthermore, will real peace be possible only when there are constructive opportunities for self-actualization for everyone?

o   *Does peace need to begin at the individual level? Why or why not?*

o   *Some present-day societies and cultures value constant stimulation, diversion, and a fast pace of life – all now facilitated by IT as the world becomes more wired and people feel increasing pressures to stay "plugged in." Taken to excess, this lifestyle is the very antithesis of "down time" and the regular practice of meditation and contemplation. At the same time, there is increasing dissatisfaction with the fast pace of life or so-called "rat race." Considering all of these factors, will the human-based peace technology discussed in this article (or something similar) become more commonplace in Western cultures in 2015 – or will the fast pace of life prevail?*