

# **THE VIOLENCE-FREE FAMILY:**

## **Building Block of a Peaceful Civilization**

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### **FOREWORD**

Humanity, now in the last stages of the turbulent age of its collective adolescence, finds itself overwhelmed by a devastating and ominous destructive process. Wars are ranging; hunger and disease are exacting their toll; millions of refugees live in conditions of abject misery; families breaking apart; children are neglected, abused and abandoned; the powers of science and technology are misused for creating instruments of destruction; political leaders find themselves increasingly incapable of effectively and constructively administering human affairs; and many religious leaders and their followers are mesmerized by the differences among various religions and are bereft of discernment to see their fundamental unity.

Among such current challenges faced by humanity, the most ubiquitous challenge with the most far-reaching consequence concerns the institution of the family and its present plight. This is so because the family is the workshop of civilization and includes all members of the human race. No one is without a family. Everyone has a family of one kind or another. It is most praiseworthy that the United Nations has focused the attention of the world on this fundamental institution-the family-which is now under attack from all sides.

So much work needs to be done and so many innocent victims of the present deterioration of the existing order have to be rescued that all of us as individuals, communities, or nations have a direct and inescapable responsibility to act. And act we must.

Otherwise the tide of events will, without a doubt, engulf us all in a storm of violence and destruction the like of which humanity has not witnessed throughout its long and arduous history.

This small volume is, therefore addressed to all of us-as individuals, marriage partners, parents, teachers, workers, administrations, spiritual mentors scientists, philosophers, media personalities, artists, local, national, and international leaders-whoever we are, whatever we do, wherever we live, and wherever our loyalties lie. It is an expression of unshakeable belief in the nobility of the human spirit, the fundamental unity of the human race, and the ultimate victory of the forces of love and justice (animated by the forces of care, tenderness, love, and spiritual enlightenment) over those of hate and tyranny.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The United Nations Year of the Family (1994) finds the institutions of the family facing major crises. The view of the family as an essential for the welfare of the individual and society is no longer universally and unhesitatingly accepted. Many valid concerns are raised about the past and present role of the family. In some quarters the very validity and usefulness of the family are being questioned.

One main concern about the family centers on the place of females in the family and the manner in which they are often unjustly and unequally treated by male family members. A related concern is that these abusive practices have frequently been and continue to be justified in the context of cultural norms, religious beliefs, and unfounded scientific theories and assumptions.

Another serious concern about the family relates to its vital role in parenting and rearing the next generation of children. Many question the desirability of having children

reared by their parents and alternative child-rearing institutions have been proposed and put into practice with distributing results.

Yet another area of concern is the frequent justification of violence and prejudice against non-family members in the name of family solidarity and “blood” relationships. Such concerns raise legitimate questions about the family and its role in contemporary society.

This essay specifically addresses three questions:

- Should the family as it now exists be abolished?
- Can we live without the traditional family?
- Is there a viable alternative to the traditional family?

In the course of answering these questions, the essay then puts forward the main characteristics of the unity-based family as the most practical approach to creating violence-free family. Finally, three specific recommendations are proposed for consideration by both the political leadership of the world and by the United Nations and its affiliated agencies.

## **SHOULD THE FAMILY AS IT NOW EXISTS BE ABOLISHED?**

When we answer the question of whether to abolish the family affirmatively and identify at least three reasons why the family, as we have known as experienced it thus far, should be abolished:

- The institution of the family in the past has been and largely continues to be a source of control, dominance, abuse, and violence against its weaker members, namely, women and girls, the physically or psychologically disadvantaged, and, not infrequently, the elderly;
- The family has sanctioned, defended, and promoted the conditions of inequality between men and women, giving men a greater degree of freedom and privilege;

- The family has encouraged and promoted child-rearing practices that have resulted in fundamental deficiencies in the character development of both boys and girls.

## **POWER AND THE FAMILY**

The arguments for abolishing the family as the basic nucleus of society are primarily based on the central issue of power and its role in family relationships and activities. Historically, the great majority of families in all societies and cultures have been bastions of male dominance and power. “Male power” has been, and still is, exercised in respect to all aspects of the female family members’ lives—controlling their educational rights and privileges, their sexual wishes and preferences, their social opportunities and status, their economic well-being and independence, their personal freedoms and responsibilities, and their spiritual standing and aspirations. Abuse of power by the family has also contributed to deep-seated prejudices and hostilities by one family or clan against another.

To understand the dynamics of power-based marriages and families better, we need to comprehend more fully the challenge of equality between women and men. This understanding is of singular importance because some of the main crises in contemporary marriages and families are related to the issue of equality—the inability or unwillingness of the majority of men (and even some women) to relate to women on an equal basis. The topic of marriage is introduced here, because, in most cases, the institutions of marriage and family are interrelated.

## **CHARACTERISTIC OF EQUALITY**

Equality is a sign of maturity, and maturity of an ever-increasing ability to increasingly ability to integrate and unite rather than to separate and individualize. On the other hand, individualism is the hallmark of the adolescence phase of growth, which is

characterized by self-absorption and self-worship. It is a mode of behaviour that does not consider others except for one's own benefit. Equality, on the other hand, is the state of unity and integration. An equal relationship is characterized by the willingness and ability to be cooperative, generous, and other-directed. In the contemporary world, as humanity traverses its most problematic phase of adolescence, the quest for establishing equality between men and women has deteriorated into a virulent and destructive power struggle. Power, the very instrument that men have always used to achieve their self-centered interests, is now being sought by women to correct past and present injustices-hence, the potentially destructive power struggle found in most marriages. This situation is not surprising. It is the inevitable outcome of a mindset that gives power the most importance in human relationships. It is the mindset of humanity in its collective phases of childhood and adolescence. Here, it will be instructive to review briefly the role of power in shaping the characteristics of marriage as an arena of intimate human relationships and a precursor to the family.

### **THE MAIN CHARACTERISTIC OF MARRIAGE**

Marriage is a living social entity that comes into being as a result of a conscious deliberate union of a woman and man. As such, marriage is not only a legal, religious, and social entity but also a living, growing institution subject to the laws and requirements of all living organisms. In other words, marriage has its own dynamics and powers that transcend those of the two individuals who create it.

The biological equivalent to marriage is the union of the sperm and ovum. The fertilized ovum has powers and potentialities that are quite distinct from and superior to those of either sperm and ovum alone. Likewise, the union of a man and a woman in the conscious act of marriage creates a social organism that is distinct from either the husband or the wife alone. Under the healthy conditions, the powers of the marriage are the outcome of the

amalgamation, coordination, and integration of the powers of the husband and wife. This kind of power is creative and cooperative in nature. An analogy may help to elucidate this very important yet poorly understood phenomenon.

If we liken marriage to a bird with its own particular powers and capacities, the husband and wife are the wings that make it possible for the bird to fly. However, the flight of the bird depends on the equality and harmony between powers of both its wings. Likewise, without such equality and unity, the institution of marriage will be unable to reach its potential.

Throughout history and across all cultures, lack of equality between women and men has been the most important contributor to the miseries of married life. In the same manner that male dominance of women in the past has brought violence and sadness to the lives of the countless millions, the current prevalence of power struggle in marriage will result in new forms of misery in marriage and family life. Marriages characterized by power domination or power struggle make life miserable not only for husbands and wives but also for their children. Consequently, the entire family suffers.

To summarize, the answer is yes to the question should the family as it now exist be abolished? The power-based, violence-probe marriages and families of the past are no longer acceptable or viable, as humanity inevitably enters its long-awaited phase of collective adulthood and begins its era of mature relationships. However, if we abolish the family as we have known and experienced it, another question arises.

## **CAN WE LIVE WITHOUT THE TRADITIONAL FAMILY?**

To answer the question of what can replace the family, we need to identify the family's main function and to see if we can entrust that responsibility to another institution. The family has always been and continues to be the most suitable milieu in which the next

generation of children grow and form their views about themselves, the world, and the purpose and meaning of life. The family is the workshop of civilization. To put it differently, “A family is a nation in miniature.”

## **CHILDREN AND PARENTING?**

Children automatically create a family because their very presence places the adults and others in the household in the role of a family. However, a family not solidly based will be unable to parent adequately. Children by nature need protection, nurturing, care, guidance, and encouragement. These are the main properties of parental love. As well, children need models to emulate in order to learn about the qualities of both adulthood and parenthood. To the degree that these fundamental needs are met, children grow up to be nurturing, caring, enlightened, and encouraging adults and in turn capable, healthy parents. In other words, children reared in healthy, loving families grow up to be healthy, loving parents. The converse is also true. To the degree that a family fails to meet the fundamental needs of children, to that same degree will society be burdened with the consequences of neglect and abuse as well as suffer greatly from the resulting conditions of apathy and violence. The parenting qualities discussed above are aspects of love – that universal force which unites and creates. properly parented children, in turn, as adults are able to create marriages and families characterized by unity, equality, and creativity – some of the essential characteristics of the violence-free family.

As we contemplate the current condition of the children of the world, one fact becomes clear: Our children are not being adequately and properly parented. In war-ravaged regions of the world, children are the most tragic victims. In poverty-stricken areas, children suffer the most. In affluent societies, children are relegated to the tertiary level of priority, after parental economic and personal interests and pursuits are met. Wherever people face

racism and prejudice, children are the most innocent and tragic victims. Is there any place in the world where one could say with confidence that the majority of children are being reared under healthy, loving conditions? Even when some children are lucky enough to have the benefit of caring parents and to live in comfortable, safe circumstances, they are not infrequently deprived of loving attention to some or all their needs – physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual. This deprivation occurs because the institution of the family has become feeble and unable to meet the requirements and demands of change in the contemporary world. Power-oriented and authoritarian families are not suitable to meet the needs of this new phase in the evolution of humanity. A new type of family and new approach to the all-important task of rearing our children are needed.

To summarize, the answer is both yes and no to the question Can we live without the traditional family? The family, as the workshop of civilization, is an indispensable part of civilized life. As such, we cannot be without the family. However, the *type* of family the world now needs is not the kind of family we have had in the past. A dramatically different type of family is needed. This brings us to the third question of an alternative.

### **IS THERE A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO THE TRADITIONAL FAMILY?**

The question of a viable alternative to the traditional family needs to be broadened to cover two main issues: alternatives to the family and alternative type of families. While the former calls for the abolition of the family or some of its most important functions, the latter searches for new prototypes of the family. Both approaches have been tried. The objective here is not to catalogue those approaches and their merits or demerits; rather, I will briefly review the outcome of attempts to find alternative modes of child rearing, which has always been the main function of the family. I will then put forward a new model of the family –

one based on the concept of unity as the next inevitable step in the evolution of the institution of the family and as the only way to create violence-free families.

## **ALTERNATIVE MODES OF CHILD REARING**

This century alone has seen in different parts of the world many notable experiments in relegating a major portion of the task of child rearing to agencies and individuals other than parents. State-administered childcare agencies in the former USSR, Israel, and Eastern European countries, the phenomenal rise of public and private child-care facilities in North America and Western Europe, and some smaller but significant experiments in other parts of the world are among noteworthy examples of attempts to find alternatives to the family for many parenting tasks formerly assumed by parents and other relatives. An objective review of these experiments compels us to conclude that no agency – whether governmental, religious, professional, or other – is capable of adequately replacing the family in respect to the all-important task of parenting. Regardless of how well trained and well intentioned these surrogate parents may be, they will never be able to replace that primal state of unity and affinity which naturally exists between parents and their children.

It is within the context of the family that biological, psychological, cultural, and spiritual bonds find their fullest expression. During their infancy and early childhood, children who spend a significant portion of their waking, active hours away from their parents, in daycares, state-run nurseries, or private child-care arrangements face certain unique challenges. These children experience, to varying degrees, a significant sense of loss, abandonment, and rejection, which these alternative parenting agencies, despite all their resources and well-conceived programs, are ultimately unable to remedy. Nor are these agencies able to ameliorate the fear, anger, and anxiety that these inadequately parented children feel. In fact, there is increasing evidence that these alternative modes of bringing up

children create in them feelings of rejection and a sense of being unloved. I believe the anger, fury, and rejection that many children display towards their parents and society have their roots in the children's feelings of being rejected and considered of secondary importance.

Children reared in nurseries, daycare centers, and other similar settings for a significant portion of their waking hours are in danger of developing what I call "tribal mentality." These children, by virtue of having little one-to-one meaningful and loving interaction with their parents and other adults, can grow up to be very attached to their peers and highly suspicious of adults. They tend to function in groups and gangs, are highly prone to manipulation by charismatic personalities, are easily seduced to imitate and act as they are told to do, are extremely self-centered and self-doubting, and in their efforts at survival and gratification do not hesitate to commit irrational or destructive acts. These children have little respect for authority. In fact, they tend to view all authority with the same suspicious and hostility that they direct towards their parents, whom they perceive to be rejecting and untrustworthy. This perception occurs because most parents, though they love their children dearly, do not express their love through parenting attitudes and activities. There is a basic discrepancy between what these parents say and what they do.

## **TOWARDS A NEW TYPE OF FAMILY**

By now, the futility of looking for alternatives to the basic institution of the family is clear. These alternatives have proven to be ineffective and even destructive. Rather, we should be interested in creating new types of unity-based families. While the families of the past were primarily power based, the families of the present are generally either power based or indulgence based, and, not infrequently, both. The main characteristics of these three

types of family (power-, indulgence-, and unity-based) are manifested within the framework of the three main human capacities of knowledge, love, and will.

## **THE MAIN HUMAN CAPACITIES**

The three main human capacities of knowledge, love, and will are at the very core of being human. They occur universally and transcend gender, race, and cultural boundaries to form the framework in which families function and family members interact. As such, the description and analysis presented here apply to all families. However, this constancy in the fundamentals of the institution of the family does not imply that all families of the future will be identical and indistinguishable. In fact, the opposite is true. Among the most outstanding human qualities are the capacity for creativity and the interest in introducing diversity into all aspects of our personal and collective endeavours. It is this creativity and diversity that bring richness and beauty to our lives, allowing us to be distinct yet one, separate yet united, independent yet interdependent. Also, it is on the basis of this creativity and diversity that we can establish true unity and avoid the dangers of conformity. In the following discussion of the characteristics of power-, indulgence-, and unity-based families, the role of the main human capacities of knowledge, love, and will becomes clearer.

## **POWER-BASED FAMILIES**

In the power-based family, access to knowledge is unequal. Historically, men in most cultures have had easier access to sources of knowledge and information, while women have been systematically denied such access. In power-based families, the education of males takes precedence over education of females, who are assigned roles and responsibilities that seemingly do not call for the education and refinement of one's mind. Actually, however, the traditional responsibilities of women, particularly those with respect to child rearing, do call

for much education and proper training. A well-trained mind is essential for the healthy development of both the individual and the society, and denial of such training to anyone, particularly women, is a manifest injustice and an indication of our short-sightedness and basic ignorance of the prerequisites for creating a peaceful and happy world.

Another expression of the human capacity to know in the power-based family concerns truthfulness and trust. The ultimate fruit of the human capacity to know is truth with respect to ideas, on the one hand, and truthfulness and trustworthiness in the context of human relationships, on the other. By its very nature, the power-based family suffers from varying disorders of knowledge. It is therefore not surprising that these families are suffused with a lack of truthfulness and trust in their interpersonal relationships.

Power-based families also suffer from disorder of love. The prevalence of powering these families makes the expression of love conditional upon one's willingness to conform. These more powerful person(s) in the family demand(s) obedience and submission from the other members of the family and, in return, give(s) some measure of care and compassion to them. Usually in such families, it is the father who expects conformity from the wife and children. However, both parents not infrequently use their positions of power to demand obedience and conformity from their children.

## **THE PRICE OF CONFORMITY**

Conformity is fundamentally different from legitimate parental expectations that their children be well behaved, well mannered, polite, truthful, and considerate. To wish for such behaviour from our children and to make the necessary efforts to rear them to be “good citizens” are signs of our love for our children. In fact, if we do not do our best to rear our children in this manner, then we have failed in truly expressing our love towards them. Love, by its very nature and in its healthy expression, is a fundamental force for growth, inner

discipline, universality, and enlightenment. It is the antithesis of indulgence, promiscuity, self-centredness, and bigotry. These latter conditions are aspects of authoritarian (power-based) parenting, an important dimension of which is conformity.

Parents who demand conformity from their children are interested in controlling; they wish to mold their children in their own image. Consequently, they discourage curiosity, originality, and creativity. They fear that which is different and unique. Within the dichotomous framework of the authoritarian approach to life, seeds of prejudice, suspicion, and exclusivity are sown in the minds and hearts of children. These children are made to feel safe within the rigid boundaries of conformity, and, in the process, they become fearful of all that is different and unique. Diversity becomes a threat, and uniformity takes precedence. Such children see the world in the context of separation and divisions, and they do not hesitate to be violent towards those who are different. However, not all children reared in the confines of conformity become conformists themselves. In fact, a significant number of children reared in authoritarian families rebel against all authority as soon as they can. Many such children later become agents of anarchy and disorder. They act out their anger and frustration against every thing and every one that represents or calls for discipline and order.

Another unhealthy expression of love in power-based families occurs when one parent is demanding and authoritarian, while the other compensates by becoming indulgent and overprotective. The outcome of this combination of power and indulgence is the creation of a state of self-centredness, which by definition is the opposite of being able to love. Thus, love in power-based families tends to be conditional, ambivalent, disuniting, and conducive to creating undue dependency and self-preoccupation.

In addition to the unhealthy development of the human capacities to know and to love, members of power-based families also have difficulties with respect to the development and expression of the capacity of will. All human behaviour is an expression of our capacity

to choose and make decisions. Thus, it is essential that parents and educators pay special attention to the healthy development of will in children. When the human capacity to will is developed in a healthy manner, the qualities of justice and service become its natural expressions. Poorly parented children, however, by virtue of their primal sense of aloneness and their considerable fears, anxieties, and resentments, feel very vulnerable and concentrate all their energy on survival and feeling safe. Consequently, these children are very prone to destructive and violent behaviour.

Power-based families are not equipped to help their children develop their power of will in a healthy manner. This is especially true in our world today. In the past, human societies were much more homogeneous, and the geographical distance between the different societies was considerable. People's place in society, their expected life pattern, and their roles were largely predetermined. There was a rigid structure and an expectation of conformity that made life much simpler, albeit less fulfilling. Personal freedom was exchanged for social security. However, in our world today, the opposite has occurred: The price of unfettered personal freedom has become the ruin of social order. These two extremes are expressions of our limited understanding and unwise use of the human will in our collective stages of childhood and adolescence respectively.

## **THE CHALLENGE OF FREEDOM**

True freedom is not the liberty to do whatever we want, whenever we want, however we want, and wherever we want, as long as we commit no harm to others. True freedom comes from the capacity to choose not to do what we have the urge, the capacity, and the opportunity to do. In other words, we are truly free when we have developed such a degree of inner discipline and transcendence that we use our capacities to know, love, and will in the service of others and for the purpose of creating conditions of equity, justice, and unity.

These qualities are not valued in the worldview of power-based families and societies, and are usually dismissed as being unrealistic and utopian in nature. However, the world can no longer continue on the path of progress and true civilization if we insist on functioning within the framework of power, control, and authoritarianism.

## **INDULGENCE-BASED FAMILIES**

Since the end of the Second World War, a new type of family has developed in the West and increasingly elsewhere. These are pleasure- or indulgence-based families that give primacy to gratification of personal needs and desires over all other issues. In such families pursuit of knowledge and truth do not have relevance except for personal gain. Love in indulgence-based families is viewed as identical to gratification; the powers of human will are expressed in promiscuous and anarchic ways. Children in these families grow up to be immensely self-centred, intolerant, and undisciplined. They demand instant gratification of their desires from their parents and society, and when their demands are not met, they often resort to violence and crime. These individuals are highly prone to develop addictions and to relate to others as though they have automatic and unlimited privileges.

Indulgence-based families emerged not only as a reaction to the discredited authoritarian practices of the past but also because of at least three other major interrelated developments: the enormous rise of individualism, a tremendous increase in the material wealth of peoples and societies, and a dramatic change in the moral and ethical standards of individuals and societies alike. From a psychological point of view, these developments are closely related to the collective phase of development of human societies at the present time – the last phase of adolescence.

An interesting and potentially alarming related development in recent decades is the simultaneous presence of both power and indulgence in many families. This unfortunate

amalgamation has resulted in further confusion in family relationships and parenting practices. Not infrequently, we observe families that are extremely permissive and undisciplined in their child-rearing practices while the children are still young and relatively manageable. However, the same families become very rejecting and authoritarian towards their children as they grow older and begin to behave in ways that are unacceptable or uncomfortable for their parents. These families then reject their children and call upon society to care for and control them. The children in such families, feeling rejected, angry, and confused, then turn their wrath against society and all that it represents, including adults, other children, and the physical environment. These conditions are conducive to the seemingly random, illogical, purposeless, and vicious acts of violence.

Having reviewed the main characteristics and dynamics of both power-based and indulgence-based families, let us now focus on the characteristics of unity-based families and consider ways in which we can promote them in our societies.

## **TOWARDS UNITY-BASED FAMILIES**

Humanity is now in the final stages of its collective adolescence. As we mature, we leave behind the mindsets based on power and pleasure because evolution and transition from one stage of development to another is an inevitable aspect of life. The most important dimension of this transition is the development of a new mindset. The nature of this new mindset is directly related to the oneness of humanity, which attains its highest expression in the all-important state of unity. It will be impossible for humanity to advance on its path of growth unless humankind establishes a life of unity – inner, interpersonal, and international unity.

As we enter the next stage in our collective evolution, we will gradually move away from the mindsets of childhood and adolescence based on control, power struggle, and

indulgence, and we will begin to see the world from the perspective of unity. We will also begin to move away from power-based and indulgence-based families to unity-based families. To help us understand the characteristics of unity-based families better, the analysis will use the same framework incorporating the parameters of the human capacities of knowledge, love, and will.

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF UNITY-BASED FAMILIES**

In unity-based families, acquisition of knowledge is not only a right but also a responsibility of all members of the family. However, because of the inequality that now exists between men and women with respect to education, girls and women must be given priority until an equitable condition is attained. For far too long, humanity has been deprived of women's unique contributions to the development of civilization. When women and men are involved on an equal basis in the administration of all human affairs (including political, academic, religious, and economic areas) and are able to make their unique contributions to family life under just and enlightened conditions, the very quality and character of our world will fundamentally change. That is why the education of women must top the agendas of all nations, governments, and social, academic, and religious institutions of the world.

By creating conditions of equality and mutuality, the unity-based family removes the unpardonable prevalent lack of truthfulness and trust now plaguing many families and male-female relationships. This equality will also result in the development of more profound conditions of intimacy and sharing, which have thus far eluded most people in their marital and familial interactions.

The expression of love in unity-based families, unlike that found in power- and indulgence-based families, is unconditional, other-directed, growth-inducing, unifying, and marked with tenderness and openness. In such families the pain of growth, which is an

unavoidable aspect of true love, will not be dulled by the use of short-term, basically injurious portions of instant gratification and indulgence. Also, in the context of unity-based families the qualities of universality, creativity, curiosity, and search for truth are actively encouraged. In these families, love is unifying and all-encompassing, and children are helped to love themselves, others, and life without experiencing the “love ambivalence” so frequently found in power- and indulgence-based families and societies. In such unhealthy conditions individuals are made to feel that they cannot simultaneously love both themselves and others, their families and all other families, their countries and the whole of humanity, their coreligionists and all other people regardless of their belief systems. The list is endless.

In its pure and mature form, love has no limits, knows no bounds, makes no exclusions, and does not allow violence and destruction. Above all, a mature and healthy love creates unity. Thus, in the unity-based family a creative cycle exists: unity creates love and love creates unity, which in turn results in more love and unity.

Finally, the development of the human will and its expression are quite different in unity-based families. In these families, the power- and indulgence-based practices of control, competition, and excessive individualism and independence give way to those of equality, cooperation, universality, and interdependence. This transformation is due to the two fundamental expressions of a mature and healthy human will –service at the individual level and justice at the societal level.

When people become aware of their essential unity with all other people and attain the courage to be truthful and truth seeking, they then realize that the highest level of human freedom is obtained when one engages in acts of service to others. While, at the individual level, service refers to the mature use of human will, at the societal level, the noblest expression of the human free-will is to create conditions of justice. Service and justice, therefore, go hand in hand. In a unity-based family or society, the individuals endeavour to

their utmost to serve one another, while at the same time the family and society make certain that justice will be the *modus operandi* of the group. Thus, individuals need not engage in disunifying acts of seeking personal justice that often deteriorate into revenge and violence. Likewise, society, by virtue of its reliance on justice, will allow neither conditions of segregation, prejudice, injustice, anarchy, and disorder to develop nor a culture of mistrust, disunity, and violence to be created.

This comparison of the characteristics and dynamics of power- and indulgence-based families with those of unity-based families clearly demonstrates the existing wide gap. Indeed, the differences among the three types of family are so immense that the immediate response of many family specialists and policy makers is to consider such a transformation as being an unrealistic and utopian goal. Consequently, they propose that we focus instead on more “realistic” and “practical” solutions, such as battling poverty, segregation, and addictions, as well as responding to the rapid disintegration of the fabric of our societies and the alarming rise of violence by infusing the system with more money to combat these conditions, introducing greater measures of law enforcement, and imposing stiffer penalties.

These responses may be well intentioned. However, we now have enough experience to know that these measures alone are insufficient. A good examples of the inadequacy of such approaches is the limited success of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. We cannot find a nobler cause, espoused by a finer group of individuals, and supported by a stronger and wealthier government than this movement that gained considerable momentum in the 1960s and 70s. Three decades later, we should have tangible evidence of progress in relationships among the members of different races, improvement of the conditions of families and their children in inner cities, a decrease in prejudicial and racist attitudes among the populace in general, and the emergence of new generations of young people of various racial backgrounds interrelating with true love, understanding, unity, and exhibiting

unconstrained interpersonal involvement and integration. However, none of these changes has occurred to a meaningful or appreciable degree despite the much higher degree of awareness created by this movement; the strong body of legislative and administrative reform enacted; the number of sincere, seemingly sound projects widely implemented; and the noteworthy, educated, and influential African-American middle class that emerged.

One can also put forward some isolated examples of community progress along the parameters described above. However, the overall outcome of all these efforts has been most disappointing. The main reason, I propose, lies in our not yet fully identifying the prerequisites for individual and social transformation.

## **FROM TRANSITION TO TRANSFORMATION**

Since the Industrial Revolution, the pace of change has dramatically accelerated, especially with respect to the living conditions of people in many parts of the world. Along with this external change, we have also experienced significant changes with respect to our interpersonal relationships within families, communities, and among different nations. To understand the nature and processes of individual and social change better, we have developed such areas of study and specialization as economics, political science, archaeology, anthropology, sociology, and psychology. In recent years, even a distinct scientific discipline devoted to the study of change has developed. These diverse disciplines now form the basis on which we study the nature and causes of change in the past, evaluate our conditions at present, and try to predict and direct the process of future change. Such related areas of knowledge have greatly enhanced our self-understanding, but they still do not give us the ability to identify all causes and dynamics of change, particularly with respect to human attitude and behaviour. This deficiency is not surprising.

Human behaviour is not merely a reflection of the individual's economic conditions, as Marx insisted; or social circumstances, as sociologists elaborates; or psychological processes, as Freud and others postulate; or instinctual imperatives, as ethologists propose; or evolutionary imperatives, as Darwin suggested. Such explanations as to the nature, needs, and behaviour of humans are all to some degree accurate. However, none singly, or even all collectively, is sufficient to explain the causes of human behaviour and the dynamics of change and transformation in individuals and societies. The main reason for this failure is the exclusion of the uniquely human powers of creativity and spirituality from the perspectives that form the conceptual basis for most governmental policies and programs.

We have already reviewed some of the major issues about the human powers of creativity in the above analysis of the main human capacities of knowledge, love, and will as well as their role in creating power-, indulgence-, and unity-based families and societies. Clearly, there is much more to be said in this respect; however, such elaboration is beyond the scope of this essay. Here, it will be useful to focus, however briefly, on the role of spirituality in effecting creative and lasting change in human behaviour and in facilitating a transition from a power and indulgence orientation to one of unity.

## **THE ENIGMA OF SPIRITUALITY**

Spirituality is arguably the most misunderstood and rejected aspect of human nature. Some equate spirituality with religiosity or emotionality. Some consider spirituality to be the equivalent of being superstitious and biological, while others consider spirituality to be found in artistic expressions alone. Still others consider anything beyond their comprehension to be spiritual. There are, of course, other perspectives as well. Spirituality does have some of the qualities found in these various definitions; yet spirituality is a far more complex and comprehensive reality. In fact, spirituality is the core reality of being human. It refers to the

human power of consciousness and our ever-present search for meaning and purpose. Spirituality connects the past, the present, and the future. It places our sense of mortality and immortality into a comprehensive framework and allows us to face death from the perspective of existence rather than annihilation. Spirituality connects us with the Source of all creation and, in the process, enables us to become creators ourselves. Spirituality makes it possible for us to be both unique and united, thus removing, once and for all, the dichotomous mindset that has brought and continues to bring so much destruction and sorrow to the life of humanity. Spirituality is the force of transcendence and the source of transformation.

This elusive, mysterious, yet essential reality is increasingly absent from the discourse of our times. Spirituality is not the object of research and application to conditions of life in a scientifically sound and disciplined manner. Consequently, the life-giving and enlightening properties of a spiritual lifestyle are increasingly absent from our midst. Our lives have become hardened by materialism, burdened with immorality or amorality, and impoverished by the absence of opportunities for deep reflection, prayerful meditation, and momentous inspirations. Above all, humanity has lost its connection with God. As we have excluded God from our lives, so too have we lost all the God-like qualities we all potentially possess.

No individual or society will be able to make the crucial transformation from a power- or indulgence-orientation without first integrating scientific and spiritual principles and then applying them to all aspects of life – individual, family, and community. Without such integration we will experience the kind of change and transition that is an indication of deterioration and destruction rather than of growth and transformation. The challenge before us has never been of the magnitude that it is now. We require the courage to free ourselves from the strong grip of history and current destructive patterns. The future cannot be built on the foundations of what has already been tried and proven wanting. The civilization we are

aspiring to create requires a new consciousness—not a simple transition but a fundamental transformation. However, good ideas are valuable only to the degree that they are practical. Therefore, we need to examine seriously the practicality of such a monumental change both in our individual and collective lives.

## **IS THE UNITY-BASED FAMILY ATTAINABLE?**

The answer to the question of whether the unity-based family is attainable is affirmative, provided that we tread the path of new ideas with practical plans and programs. We must first ask ourselves what is meant by “practical”? Do we mean a set of instructions like those found in “how-to” and self-help packages abundantly available in the marketplace of ideas? Does “practical” refer to techniques that could be applied by anyone who learns the steps required for their implementation without understanding the nature of the task before them? Or does “practical” involve acquisition of necessary insights and experiences, in conditions of earnest search for truth and profound personal transformation, which will, in turn, allow us to look at ourselves and our world from totally new perspectives, free from prejudices and preconceived notions, and open to novel ideas and approaches? It is this latter definition of “practical” to which I refer in this essay. Within this framework, I suggest that the proposed transition to unity-based families and societies is practical, indeed inevitable. There are several reasons for this assertion:

1. ***Developmental Imperatives:*** The transition from power and indulgence to unity is not simply an idea merging out of nowhere. The establishment of unity is the unavoidable outcome of humanity’s transition from its collective age of adolescence to that of adulthood. In other words, whether we like it or not, we are driven towards unity. Consider the environmental, economic, and political conditions of our world. Do they not all demand that we deal with these issues from the perspective of unity?

Can any nation or group of nations isolate itself from the rest of the world and prevent the intrusion of ozone depletion, the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), or the effects of international trade into its territories? Is it still possible to keep the masses of humanity in one part of the world uninformed about the realities of the rest of the world, even in the face of the stiffest regulations? Can we afford to remain indifferent and silent about the worldwide abuse of human rights without jeopardizing our own rights? The answer to these and other similar questions is a resounding no, because of the fundamental truth that “the earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.” Our task now is not to oppose this reality but rather to promote it through our efforts at creating higher levels of unity while simultaneously preserving our diversity.

2. ***Scientific and Technological Advances:*** The rapid advancement of the means of transmission of ideas and information, combined with the increasing ease of movement of peoples to all parts of the world, have de facto created an international and transnational community. These developments are not accidental by-products of science and technology. Rather, they are direct results of the human innate striving to know and to be united. The forces behind scientific discoveries and technological innovations are the powers of the human soul—to know, to love, and to will. Everything created by humans is achieved through these powers, which all people inherently possess. These powers are at the base of our fundamental oneness, and these scientific discoveries and advances are the tools we create to bring us together so as to come to know each other, to love and serve one another.
3. ***Political Experiences and Lessons:*** In this century alone we have gathered a considerable wealth of political experience and insights that could help us facilitate the inevitable transition to the next phase of our collective development. We now have clear, indisputable proof that we cannot create unity through force and

imposition. The costly failed experiments in the former USSR and Eastern European countries are sufficient evidence of the truth of this statement. Likewise, we are now gradually beginning to realize that capitalism, like communism, will not be able to usher in the era of international unity and cooperation. This is so because capitalism, with its emphasis on competition and individualism, is a very potent expression of the adolescent stage of development. Furthermore, capitalism in practice has demonstrated that it is incapable of creating conditions of equity and justice. Instead, extremes of wealth and poverty reach such a dangerous state that the system begins to self-destruct. The signs of this destructive process are already discernible in many capitalistic societies. In the face of these realities, the leaders of the world are increasingly attracted to the principles of international cooperation and mutual assistance. There is no longer any doubt in the minds of thoughtful individuals that people are interdependent. However, this realization alone is not sufficient to create the state of unity in diversity, which is the characteristic of the next phase in our evolution. Clearly, we need new perspectives on ways in which to organize our world. In this respect it should be said that ultimately the most important agents of social change will be today's children, if they were to be reared and educated within the mindset of unity. A new generation of leaders who see the earth as one country and humankind as its citizens will transform the world in a dramatic and positive manner. It is here that unity-based families assume their great significance and play their crucial role in the improvement of our world.

4. ***Spiritual Receptivity:*** Finally, there is another development that makes the transformation described above practical. Here, I refer to the remarkable spiritual awakening taking place in our world today. After more than a century of open and rebellious rejection of spirituality in favour of scientific research, political reform,

humanistic pursuits, issue-oriented movements, and fundamentalist revivals, the peoples of the world are once again turning towards spirituality. This long period of deprivation has resulted in a deeply felt hunger for spirituality and in a frenzied search for anything that resembles, however remotely, that long-lost and yearned for spiritual state which humanity has experienced from time to time in its history. Thus, many people have begun to look to the past in their search for spirituality. However, this backward-looking search will prove to be futile. The spiritual needs of humanity at this time of its coming of age are considerably different from those that were needed during the long periods of our collective childhood and adolescence.

What makes our age different from bygone ages is that scientifically oriented humanity cannot and should not accept those concepts which are illogical, archaic, or out of touch with the realities and needs of humanity at this time.

However, the confusing state surrounding the issues of spirituality, morality, and values should not deter us from searching for a coherent and universal articulation of spiritual principles and from applying these principles to our lives at the individual, familial, and societal levels.

Of all the practical steps we need to take to bring about this transformation from power and indulgence to unity, the search for spirituality is the most important and challenging. Because it is through spiritual principles that we define our humanness, our life purpose, and our individual and collective destinies. There are deep-rooted attachments to the perspectives of the past, and their reappraisal and change require either a very high degree of self-confidence and trust or a very desperate state of hopelessness and misery. One hopes the former will be the motivating catalyst in our search for spirituality.

## CREATING VIOLENCE-FREE FAMILIES

We are finally in a position to focus on how we can create violence-free families. From the foregoing description, it should be clear that the violence-free family and unity-based family are the same, but with differing emphases. In the violence-free family, the emphasis is on violence and how we can eradicate it from the family. In the unity-based family, the main issue is that of unity and how it can be created. In one case, we need to eradicate; in the other, to create. The first approach is problem-oriented; the second, solution-oriented. Their objectives, however, are the same.

We have to focus simultaneously on dealing with family violence whenever and however it occurs and with equal, if not greater, attention on *preventing* violence. Unfortunately, most policies adopted by various governments and agencies focus on the problem of violence rather than its prevention. When we adopt the goal of creating unity-based families, we effectively correct this imbalance and remove the disabling dichotomous thinking that tends to dominate our approach to almost all issues. When we compare power-, indulgence-, and unity-based families, we should make certain that the dichotomous mode of thinking will not trap us into looking at these issues from an all-or-nothing perspective. In other words, we should be careful not to fall in the mode of thinking that if we opt for a unity-based family model, it means we have to forego any of the positive qualities found in the other two types of families. In fact, because these three types of family simply demonstrate different levels of individual and collective development, it follows that by moving upwards to the next level, we automatically maintain and incorporate what is good and positive from the previous levels while adding new dimensions characteristic of the new phase and the new mindset. Under healthy conditions, as we move from our childhood to adolescence to adulthood and maturity, we maintain at each level some of the positive qualities we have previously developed, and we add new ones as we evolve. The same

principles apply to the development of the institution of the family. The tragedy of human life is not that we have to face the pain and uncertainty of growth, but rather the opposite—that we do not welcome change and growth, thus experiencing the more severe pains of stagnation, deterioration, and eventual destruction.

### **THREE RECOMMENDATIONS**

At a minimum, the following actions and conditions are recommendations to effect change and to create violence-free families.

#### **1) PROMOTE UNITY**

The reality of the oneness of humanity and its inevitable outcome – unity in diversity – must constitute the core element of current international and interpersonal dialogue. Its facts and principles need to be included in the educational curricula, the study of history, the agendas of all governments, the teachings of all religions, the scientific research on human origins and nature, the reporting of world events by the media, the development of new technologies, and, above all, the education of children, parents, and teachers.

In this respect, nothing short of convening a global summit of world leaders would be sufficient. Acceptance of the oneness of humanity and the decision to establish international political peace based on the principles of unity in diversity demand a fundamental change in our mindset. This change is of a deep psychological, social, and spiritual nature. It calls for willingness on the part of world leaders to put aside their attachment to and reliance on power and force and instead to learn to harvest the fruits of unity. Power and force are primarily sought by leaders because they feel insecure in today's competitive and violent world. These leaders understandably fear that without power they would become targets of more powerful and/or power-seeking individuals and groups. Thus, they fear not only the loss of their own

positions but also the possible unfortunate consequences their subjects would suffer. Ample historical and contemporary evidence validates these fears.

However, possession of power itself no longer guarantees the safety of either the national leaders themselves or their people. The recent collapse of one of the two major superpowers, the fall of the Shah of Iran, the dissolution of the form Yugoslavia, and the fall of leaders in many other countries are all examples and reminders to leaders that power and force no longer guarantee safety and security. Likewise, a country possessing military power is not automatically a safe country. In fact the opposite is more likely true. Witness the death and destruction suffered by masses of humanity as a result of power struggles between various groups, all using the instruments of war and “self-defense.” Witness the thousands even millions killed, injured, displaced, and traumatized globally. If military or economic powers were effective tools for bringing security and stability to governments and nations, reliance on power, however costly and burdensome, would be at least partially defensible. However, history amply demonstrates that “the harvest of force is turmoil and the ruin of the social order.”

It is clear that the world needs to make a transition from power to unity. It is also evident that this transition can take place peacefully only by the joint resolve and firm decision of world leaders to usher in an era of political unity as a first and fundamental step toward creating a peaceful world.

No doubt such a decision requires a high degree of courage, humility, selflessness, psychological maturity, and spiritual enlightenment. However, there is no question that an increasing number of world leaders are prepared to consider alternatives to the present highly destructive power-based practices in the arena of national and international diplomacy. The time is right for the United Nations to take the first step toward this momentous objective and

to begin consultation for convening a world summit on unity and peace in the year 2000 to inaugurate a new era in the fortunes of humanity.

## **2) GIVE PRIORITY TO THE FAMILY**

As preparation for the advent of political unity and peace, it is essential that the reality of the oneness of humanity be universally taught and demonstrated in action. The family is the best and most effective institution to teach the concept of the oneness of humanity and to rear our children to live a life of unity and to become unifiers in all dimensions of their lives. There are several reasons for this assertion, among them the reality that the family is the basic foundation of all societies in the world; that the families of the world comprise the entire population of the planet; and also that children develop their worldviews fundamentally on the basis of what they learn and experience in their families. These are among the reasons why both governmental and non-governmental agencies of the world need to give priority to the development of the family by helping to educate its members on how to create unity-based and violence-free families. In particular, parents and their children need to learn how to resolve conflicts and make decisions without resorting to the destructive practices of power and force on the one hand, or indulgence and permissiveness on the other. This is a very fine line to tread, and most parents do not know how to approach these issues in a healthy manner. With the development of new methods and modalities of education and training at our disposal, there is no legitimate reason for not reaching parents and their children through television, radio, and other means to provide them with insights and techniques on how to create unity-based, violence-free families.

### **3) GIVE PRIORITY TO THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN**

There is a tendency to view culture and religion as constant realities to which all else must conform. This view is clearly both unrealistic and unscientific. All creation and life are subject to the immutable laws of change, decay, and renewal. Cultures and religions are not exempt from these universal laws. In fact, at the core of many contemporary crises lies the reality that while change has overtaken all aspects of our lives, our attitudes and values (which are derived from our cultures and religions) have either not changed or have evolved into pure pragmatism without overriding universal principles. In this respect, science is far ahead of religion and culture. Unfortunately, many cultures and religions deny women their rightful and equal opportunities. Among these rights is the opportunity for equal education.

When females receive better education and an equal position in all aspects of the life of the society, healthier marriages, more unified families, better educated and trained children, more cohesive and integrated communities, stronger economics, and more peaceful, less violent societies will result. To restate, the family is the workshop of civilization, and women, equally with men, are needed to create a balanced, peaceful civilization.

There are three broad requisites for creating unity-based, violence-free families: creating unity, putting the family first, and giving priority to the education of women and girls. Further more, focusing on these fundamental issues is far more effective and practical than trying to deal with each specific problem singly. We must remember that most of the world's problems are in fact symptoms of the underlying disorders of disunity, inequality, injustice, and materialism which have so dangerously affected the world of humanity. Therefore, we must deal with the essentials and trust that the creative powers of people will find many novel ways to achieve the one fundamental objective: unity. The following quotation aptly describes our history and current tasks:

*The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the scales are already shifting – force is losing its weight and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence, the new age will be an age less masculine and more permeated with the feminine ideals – or, to speak more exactly, will be an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more properly balanced.*