



A New Perspective on Justice

World Religion Day will be celebrated at UVic this year on the theme “*Justice and Compassion: Where is the Balance?*” It seems a logical question to ask, given the larger ethical questions the world grapples with: First Nations rights; homelessness; Afghanistan; the drawing down of natural resources; factory farming; mass killings – just to name a few. We live in interesting times, with a massive need for justice as much as compassion.

A spiritual perspective on the underlying causes and solutions to such problems may not be the left-brained fare normally expected at an institution of higher learning. The theme, “*Where is the Balance?*”, reflects the common perception of justice as the polar opposite of compassion. Yet it’s only when we speak the language of domination that “justice” is reduced to legalistic wrangling and cold enforcement. True justice is a heart thing and, at least to some degree, intuitive. It’s wisdom and fairness. It’s the means through which good will, compassionate relationships and healthy communities are built. Its mother tongue is equality, not domination.

It seems that this “new” perception of justice is an old one to First Nations peoples, and its influence is slowly spreading through the Restorative Justice movement. Justice as Fairness may in fact be an old concept in all our societies and religions, below the silt of centuries of dogma, among the wisdom of lost beliefs. Not lost to all, though. There are some inspiring people out there, from all traditions, quite passionate about those beliefs.

There’s a saying in Islam that’s repeated in the Bahá’í Writings: “*Knowledge is a single point, but the ignorant have multiplied it*”. Related writings say that reality is one, truth is one, humanity is one. Our endless arguments and vain imaginings have given birth to more difficulties than we’d dare to count.

To redefine the concept of justice as a society and re-infuse it with compassion could set us on a whole new path, leading to a complete redesign of the old organizing principles – legally, economically, and socially. It’s a course correction that’s sorely needed.

One of the roles of religion has always been to inspire dedication to a life-affirming vision. Even my foggy vision can see that any coherent plan out of this mess has to involve losing the conflict-ridden paradigm of fighting dualities for a more holistic view of complementarity and essential unity.

Hence the refreshing hopefulness of the interfaith movement, where common ground is consciously sought and the light of spiritual teachings shone on murky issues. [The World Religion Day event](#) (Sunday, Jan. 20th, David Lam auditorium) will include panel discussions with four women and four men of various traditions – Aboriginal Spirituality, Bahá’í, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh. If you’d like more information, check the above link or the website of the Victoria Bahá’í Community.

Hope, inspiration and general joyfulness – it’s a great way to start the year!

Sheila Flood is a member of the Bahá’í Community, resident of Victoria since 2003, retired, and happily pursuing a million interests.