A Long-term Solution to Terrorism

In a world with so many entrenched conflicts and deepening crises, attitudes can either help or hinder in finding solutions. The latest of these conflicts is military action against ISIS, but surely no one believes that this will solve the problem? We will constantly be putting out these fires until the underlying conditions change, when we finally lose the intense heat of anger and our tinder dry mistrust.

Our greatest challenge globally is to arrive at concepts and values we hold in common that permit a positive attitude towards each other. Once there, solving any problem becomes possible. Without that, we have the same sort of deadlock that characterizes prolonged conflict, at any level.

One of the world's most entrenched conflicts is framed in the language of religion. It may be the work of terrorists and may have little to do with religion at all, but its effects on how we think of religion and spirituality have been far-reaching. Our attitudes towards other cultures range from superiority to estrangement to confusion, with violence over the years creating even greater polarization.

The increasing negativity towards religion, however, isn't going to heal the world or bring about peace. No matter how personally spiritual we become, we need new concepts and attitudes to accomplish that. We need to find patterns and commonalities, allowing our overarching ideas to evolve into worldviews that will serve us.

An explanation for our religious and cultural differences is offered in the Bahá'í teachings, and is worth examination in this context. It says simply that all religions come from the same Source but have two aspects. One consists of the spiritual teachings which are eternal, renewed by the Messengers of all faiths over the ages. The other aspect of religion is composed of their social teachings, equally necessary to a civilization's progress at the time they're revealed, but subject to change as religion renews itself. An example of the latter would be dietary and other practical laws relating to daily life.

This conceptual framework avoids any sense of superiority of race or religion, and allows agreement on moral principles and essential values. There are quite a few books that outline these common principles, such as *Oneness: Great Principles Shared by All Religions* by Jeffrey Moses. A particularly useful read, *Hope for a Global Ethic* by Brian D. Lepard, takes the process a step further by exploring the applicability of these shared moral principles to civic peace and human rights.

It's important to note that these teachings and concepts are not just an eclectic mix, but consist of universal spiritual principles. They share the same DNA, no matter what part of the world they're from. They nourish the need for meaning and purpose, which is central to any spiritual quest, and allow us to overlook our differences and learn from each other.

There is no inherent conflict between religions, or between spirituality and religion. The way out of the current impasse hinges on our acknowledgement of their essential oneness, and the oneness of humanity itself. This is the basis on which any just and peaceful society needs to be built, where terrorism will have no traction.

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