

EDITORIAL

Religions always stood for and preached peace, but the mystery of all times is the astounding number of battles that men have fought in the past in the name of religions. The question of interrelation or intimate connection between religions and violence is a very intriguing and at the same time fascinating topic and so the *Journal of Dharma* has taken up this theme for its present number.

Apart from the question whether it is a myth or a truth, mankind ever believed that the moral issues can be or have to be settled in the battlefield (*dharamkshetre, kurukshetre, The Gita* 1:1). Religions always claim to offer life that is full. "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies. (John 11:25). "The thief comes only in order to steal, kill and destroy. I have come in order that you might have life, life in all its fullness." (John 10:10). The contrast between the true shepherd and the thief is that of what religion and violence offer, namely, the fullness of life and its destruction. Are they irreconcilably opposed or can one sometimes promote the cause of the other? In other words can violence in any form (resistance and conflict) help us to attain peace and establish harmony by destroying the forces against the fuller expression of life? History of religions shows that conflict and violence was always an essential part of it.

The epic *Mahabharata* seems to symbolize a major spiritual struggle found in human society from time immemorial. It is the conflict between moral integrity and the need for survival as well as economic prosperity. While Kauravas (representing the evil forces in man) did not care for what is ordinarily known as moral integrity, the Pandavas represented the virtue of moral integrity, although they themselves, as the story unfolded, often violated the code of morality they sought to reestablish by force. Though Duryodhana, Karna and Krishna were presented as characters who did not experience any moral dilemmas and consequently no regrets or remorse for their evil actions, most of the moral agents in the *Mahabharata*, like Arjuna, faced moral dilemmas. Arjuna had gone to the battlefield with every intention of fighting a deadly war in order to regain the kingdom of which he and his brothers are the rightful heirs. The principle of natural justice obliged Arjuna to regain the kingdom by force. But when the stage is set for battle, Arjuna is suddenly struck by grief at the thought of having to kill his own kinsmen, respected elders, revered *gurus* and affectionate friends. Earlier he had his own reasons for fighting, namely that in an ideal society the principle of justice must be upheld at all costs.

He has seen the opponents as unjust and criminals. Yet a doubt has crept into his mind as to the legitimacy of his own right to use force and kill them. Krishna's response to Arjuna's moral dilemma consisted in convincing Arjuna that the struggle he was called upon to carry on was not merely a family fight, but a righteous or just war (*dharmayudha*) which is the gateway to heaven, the goal of all religions.

Holy war (*jihad*, an effort or a striving), an armed fight against those who are unbelievers in the mission of Muhammad, was regarded as the "sixth pillar" of Islam. Although the five pillars (namely, *shahādah* - belief in Allah and his messenger Muhammad, *salah*, the five daily prayers, *Zakah*, the giving of alms, *sawm*, the fasting of the month of Ramadan and *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca) are the fundamental tenets of Islam, *jihad* also became a fundamental aspect of Islam in the course of time. It is a religious duty established in the *Qur'ān* and in the Tradition as a divine institution for the purpose of advancing Islam and of repelling evil from Muslims. It is remarkable that all the verses which laid down *jihad* as a religious duty occur in the al-Madinah Surahs which were given after Muhammad had established himself as a paramount ruler, and was in a position to dictate terms to his enemies. In Surah ix, 5, 6 we read: "And when the sacred months are passed, kill those who join other gods with God wherever ye shall find them; and seize them, besiege them, and lay wait for them with every kind of ambush, but if they shall convert, and observe prayer, and pay the obligatory alms, then let them go their way, for God is Gracious and Merciful." Again in Surah ix, 29 we find: "Make war upon such of those to whom the Scriptures have been given as believe not in God, or in the last day, and who forbid not that which God and His apostles have forbidden, and who profess not the profession of the truth, until they pay tribute out of hand, and they be humbled."

In the name of righteousness and justice religions have initiated and encouraged war or violence. The articles in the present number have highlighted some of the aspects of this conflict. They have touched upon only a very limited aspect of the issue. Yet I hope the present number will highlight the perennial contradiction involved in the religions which encourage men to take up arms to establish peace and harmony among men of differing persuasions.

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