

Global Peace Services USA

...an idea whose time has come

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Greetings from John Eriksson, President, GPS USA

The first article in this edition of the Newsletter is a thought-provoking article by GPS Board Member Dr. Sovan Tun on "Buddhism and the Environment." Sovan is President of the Cambodian Buddhist Society, Inc. The second article is by GPS member, Ibrahim Hussein of Washington, D.C., who provides personal insights into the initial optimism born of non-violent action and subsequent pessimism over socio-economic deterioration and instability in his native Egypt, "Egypt Two Years After the Revolution." The third article is by Board Member Anna Amato. Anna represented GPS USA at a conference in Portland, Oregon September 15-16, 2012, on the subject of training for nonviolence. The themes emerging from this meeting have inspired a GPS workshop to be held in Washington, DC the afternoon of May 4, 2013, "Nonviolent Action: Concept and Practice." Anna provides a preview of our workshop.

GPS has been active in several other areas related to education for the prevention and transformation of violent conflict. A paper by Board Member Robert Muscat, "Peace and Conflict: Engineering Responsibilities and Opportunities," will be published in the May 2013 edition of the new online International Journal of Engineering, Peace and Social Justice. We are also exploring the presentation and dissemination of Dr. Muscat's seminal paper at the meetings of engineering and scientific professional societies. We have been working with a member of the faculty at the Institute for Teacher Education at the University of Hawaii at Manoa to incorporate in her teacher training GPS materials related to the role of identity in the instigation and amelioration of conflict. These and other topics will be explored in more depth in future editions of the Newsletter. We welcome a new GPS Board Member, Dr. Ronald Ridker. A brief biographical sketch at the end of this edition outlines Ron's rich and relevant background.

✿ In Memoriam ✿

This edition of the GPS Newsletter is dedicated to the memory of GPS Board Member, Rev. Dr. Harry E. Yeide, Jr., who passed away February 6, 2013. We extend our profound condolences to Harry's wife Betty and his children, grandchildren and great grandchild. In addition to his family, Harry is missed by many people, including current and former GPS Board Members, going back almost 15 years. After a PhD in Theology from Harvard University, Harry had a distinguished academic career of 48 years at George Washington University (GWU), which included serving as Professor of Religion and Department Chairman, head of the GWU Peace Studies Committee and Chairman of the Bioethics Committee of GWU Hospital. He was particularly loved by his Peace Studies students at GWU, a number of whose career and life directions were influenced by Professor Yeide.

Harry made many valuable contributions to GPS during his tenure as a GPS Board Member, including active involvement in co-designing and leading a week-long module of the pioneering GPS "Peace Power 2000" Program during the month of June 2000, as well as designing and implementing with a Board colleague a widely disseminated evaluation of the Program. Harry was a thoughtful and articulate contributor to this Newsletter. In particular, he wrote several articles on the role of nurses and other health professionals in addressing and resolving conflict among themselves and among those they served. He excelled in bringing historical perspective to these questions, for example, drawing on the experiences of the path-breaking 19th Century nurse, Florence Nightingale. First and foremost, Harry would ask us probing questions about the relevance of the subject or proposal being discussed to the vision and mission of GPS. He will be missed for these qualities and for the warmth of his congeniality. Our best tribute to Harry Yeide would be to reflect on his varied contributions to GPS and to endeavor to continue them.

Buddhism and the Environment

Siddharta Gautama knew very well the importance of nature. He was born in a palace, left his palace and lived in the forest among wild animals. After he meditated and purified his mind, Gautama attained enlightenment under a Bodhi tree, and the title of Buddha was bestowed upon him. At the age of 80, the Buddha passed away between two Sal trees near a river bank. His aim was to learn about life, and he understood life without any teachers; thus, he is called the Supreme Teacher. His teaching is called *Dhamma* which means the path of living, consisting of codes of moral conduct for people to abide by to live happily and to eradicate human suffering. The Buddha knew first-hand how to live in the forest among animals and plants. He understood that human beings, animals, and plants have to co-exist for each other's survival. It is important to note that there were no specific discourses by the Buddha on the environment, but by gathering certain aspects of his Teaching and his laid-out Discipline for Buddhist Monks, one can determine the Buddhist attitude toward the natural environment.

Man and Nature

According to Buddhism, human beings are but small particles in an enormous and complex system called the cosmos. They are one type of sentient beings among other beings, such as other animals and celestial beings.

In Buddhism, the human being is the principal actor of his/her own life. Compared to other animals, men and women have greater ability to think, plan, and act. However, this ability can be used in a positive way or a negative way. With ingenuity, humans can build amazing structures or enhance their own status in society in search of pleasure. Since resources are limited, without morality, humans in search of pleasure exploit natural resources without restraint; thus, they are not consuming to satisfy their needs but to satisfy their greed. Buddhism commends frugality as a virtue.

In seeking power and winning over competition, human beings build stronger and stronger weapons

which may destroy the world. The Buddha knew that the true cause of suffering is greed or craving. He set forth a code of moral conduct that includes five precepts (*Panca Sila*): to abstain from killing, to abstain from stealing, to abstain from sexual misconduct, to abstain from lying, and to abstain from taking intoxicants. The first precept is to abstain from killing or injuring human beings, other animals, and plants. Regarding nature, unwise, inappropriate, and uncontrolled development of natural resources is considered stealing from the present and future generations of all life. Public and private sectors often poorly or incompletely analyze the environmental effects of the projects they finance, or even worse, do not tell the truth about their economic development schemes or their conservation efforts. The most important Buddhist precept is to abstain from taking intoxicants which include alcohol, drugs, or any substances that warp the mind. Once having taken intoxicants, humans lack a clear mind to think, plan, and act positively. They can be inclined to lie and even steal or kill to prosecute their destructive exploitation of the natural environment.

As seen above, there is a close relationship between human morality and the natural environment. There are interactions between five sets of natural laws (*Panca Niyamadhamma*), namely physical laws, biological laws, psychological laws, moral laws, and causal laws. The physical environment influences the growth and development of its biological component which in turn influences the thought patterns of people. People's ways of thinking determine their moral standards. Interactions are also possible in the opposite direction. Human beings' moral standards not only influence their psychological makeup, but also the biological and physical environment of the area.

The Buddha taught us how to be better human beings who are friendly to all beings in society regardless of their ethnicity, caste, creed, or color. There are four sublime virtues that should be practiced by everybody: *Metta* or loving kindness,

Karuna or compassion, *Mudita* or joy for other's happiness, and *Upekka* or equanimity.

Animal and Plant Life

The Buddha also taught us how to be friendly to all animals and plants. The first precept taken by followers of the Buddha is to abstain from killing or injuring all living beings. Buddhists should also abstain from participating in the trading of meat as their livelihood. There are even more strict codes of conduct for Buddhist monks than laymen, such as to abstain from unintentional injury to all life.

Understanding of the rebirth concept of *Kamma* (action with volition) prepares Buddhists to adopt a sympathetic attitude towards animals. It is possible for human beings to be reborn in a sub-human state among animals. Some animals could have been human beings in their past lives, and they could have been anyone's relatives. This is called *Samsara*, the way of life in this long cycle of birth and death.

This understanding also helps Buddhists to be compassionate towards plant life. They should maintain a gentle and non-violent attitude towards vegetation. One should not cut down a tree or even break the branch of a tree that has given shelter, flowers, fruits, or other useful products to other living beings. Plants are so important in providing humanity with necessary conditions for life, such as food, shelter, clothing, and medicine. In *Vinaya*, Buddhist monks have to abide by even stricter codes of ethics than laymen. They have to abstain from injuring plant life.

Pollution

The problem of environmental pollution was recognized during the time of the Buddha. Several *Vinaya* (discipline) rules prohibited Buddhist monks from polluting green grass and water with saliva, urine, and feces. Grass is food for most animals and it is the human being's duty to refrain from polluting it by his activities. The Buddha was concerned about keeping water clean in rivers, wells, or ponds for public uses and individual uses. He recognized the importance of water for drinking, bathing, washing,

and growing agricultural products. He intervened in a battle for water between the country of his father and the country of his mother.

Noise is another serious personal and environmental pollutant recognized by the Buddha. The Pali Canon (*Tripitaka*) indicates that He was critical of noise. He raised his disapproval of noisy situations as indicated in his *Anguttara Nikaya* discourse. He emphasized the importance of meditating in solitude and silence in a peaceful environment to achieve mental and spiritual progress. The Buddha even ordered a group of monks to leave the monastery for noisy behavior, as indicated in the text of the *Majjhima Nikaya*. Stricter rules (*Vinaya*) were set up for Buddhist monks; namely: do not speak, do not laugh aloud, do not tell jokes, and do not tickle. That is the reason why, even at the present time, one cannot hear loud noise coming from gatherings of hundreds or even thousands of Buddhist monks.

In Conclusion

Buddhism considers a clean and unpolluted environment to be very important for achieving mental and spiritual growth. The Buddha taught us a simple lifestyle to avoid greed or craving in search of pleasure, without moral or ethical restraints, which may lead to the exploitation of natural resources. The lifestyle taught by the Buddha creates in human beings a non-exploitative, non-aggressive, gentle attitude towards nature. Human beings are only small particles in the cosmos. They should use their ingenuity in a positive way by preventing pollution and by conserving natural resources for future generations.

Sovan Tun

Note from the editor: From time to time, the GPS Newsletter will include articles, while they relate in general to the vision and mission of GPS, also take a particular position on current events. The following article, which does not necessarily reflect the views of GPS Board Members, was of sufficient currency and relevance that it was deemed worthy of publication. We welcome any comments on the article.

Egypt Two Years After the Revolution

I am an Egyptian-American living in Washington, D.C. and came to the U.S. in 1963 to study. The Six Day War of 1967 was more than a military defeat – it uncovered many political, social, and economic ills caused in part by the military regime. I decided to stay in the U.S., but have continued to be active in Egyptian issues.

When I returned to Egypt 10 years after my decision to stay in the U.S., I noticed that the Egyptian people appeared to me to be more accepting and tolerant of the government's authoritarian practices. This attitude grew every time I have revisited. My attempts to talk about democracy or freedom were mostly perceived as foreign concepts that didn't apply to Egypt.

Last year, my wife and I went to Egypt to celebrate the first anniversary of the revolution and to visit my family. During our three-week stay, I talked with dozens of people from taxi drivers and family members of all ages to college professors, journalists, and shop keepers. There had been a remarkable shift. Instead of avoiding conversation about democracy and freedom, these issues now dominated every conversation. The connection between these ideals and their daily lives – food, housing, education, etc. – was understood and debated, no longer foreign abstract ideas.

There was a healthy debate in Egypt about the speed of transition. Some, especially the young, were getting impatient that a year after the revolution, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, or SCAF, continues to run the country. Others, for the sake of stability, were willing to give the process more time, citing the experiences of other countries.

Another important development I observed was the rise of Islamic organizations and groups. The Muslim Brotherhood gained 40 % of the seats in the People's Assembly, and the Salafis, whom I had never heard of in Egypt, secured 20% of the seats. I was told by family members and friends that this disproportionate representation by the Islamic groups was due to several factors: good organization by the Muslim Brotherhood, Saudi Arabian money supporting the Salafis, rumors of heavy financial penalties if you don't vote or going to hell if you vote against the Muslims. This may also explain the high voter turn-out and the most recent incidents against the Christians in Egypt. The tradition of religious tolerance in Egypt is fading.

Two huge challenges face Egypt: one immediate and one long term. The immediate challenge is the sad state of the economy, with high unemployment, declining reserves, increasing cost of living and tourism that has almost come to a halt. The long-term challenge is education. High illiteracy rates, curricula based on memorization of facts and study to pass life-determining examinations, private tutoring instead of classroom education, and lack of resources, all present obstacles to democratic transition. An uneducated electorate is very susceptible to rumor and religious-based provocations.

With all the above challenges, I was still optimistic. Egypt has plenty of underutilized natural and human resources. And the "genie is out of the bottle." The people of Egypt are demanding their rights and they know where "Tahrir Square" is. SCAF and other authorities know this. Egypt will never return to Mubarak's era.

Since I took that trip just one year ago I have seen that my conclusions, i.e. my optimism about Egypt's future, were rather naive and premature. Conditions have changed dramatically:

- Three months ago Egypt's Supreme Constitutional Court abolished, on a technicality, the elected People's Assembly and was about to abolish the Constitution drafting Committee.
- President Morsi reacted by issuing a decree that puts him above the law with unlimited powers. He also managed to send the military generals back to their barracks. The people of Egypt protested and hit the streets.
- This has resulted in a deep division and confrontations between those who support Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood and those who oppose them. Violence erupted in several Egyptian cities with casualties among protesters and the police.
- In the meantime, the economy continues to deteriorate and tourism, a main source of income and employment, has come to a halt.

Regrettably, I am no longer as optimistic about Egypt's future as I was even a few weeks ago. Unlike Thomas Friedman of the New York Times, who said that even God cannot help Egypt, however, I still have faith in God and the Egyptian People.

As an Egyptian American with loyalty to both great countries, I often wonder: what can the United States do? A strong democratic Egypt is good for both nations. The Obama administration has stayed on the sidelines and given good speeches. Indeed it is an Egyptian problem and is up to the Egyptian People to resolve. But the U.S. can do more than speeches.

Recently the new Secretary of State visited Egypt and met with members of both disputing parties, calling for unity and looking for common interest. He also pledged \$250 million in economic aid. This was a good start. But I think this aid, along with continuation of military aid, should be conditioned on a certification by the State Department that there has been an improvement in

Egyptian governance and a demonstration by President Morsi that he is the President of *all* Egyptians, that is, that they will all be treated equitably.

I cannot put all the blame on President Morsi, but he *is* the President and must show leadership and his readiness to compromise and take the necessary first steps to get Egypt out of its current sad condition. Egypt's economic and political conditions are deteriorating fast and they need leadership and action.

I left Egypt in the early sixties, but Egypt never left my heart.

Ibrahim (Abe) Hussein

GPS Workshop on Nonviolence May 4

Global Peace Services will be holding a four-hour workshop entitled "Nonviolent Action: Theory and Practice" on Saturday, May 4, 2013. The workshop will explore the role and power of nonviolent approaches in dealing with conflict ranging from personal to community and international settings. Workshop leaders and presenters, including GPS members, with backgrounds and experience in nonviolent conflict resolution will make brief presentations and lead discussions about the principles of nonviolent conflict prevention and resolution, accompanied by examples of these principles in practice.

The workshop will feature two speakers focusing on their personal experience of nonviolence. Rev. Edgardo Palacios, originally from El Salvador, is an Associate Minister at the Calvary Baptist Church in Washington, DC. Rev. Palacios has been involved in reconciliation work in El Salvador and in Washington, was a co-founder of the National Council of Churches in El Salvador and served as its Executive Director for three years. Rev. Palacios was also the general coordinator for peace during the years of fratricidal bloodshed in El Salvador. Dr. Sovan Tun has been a GPS board member for five years. After receiving his PhD in Economics from the University of Tennessee, he moved to the Washington, DC area where he became a labor economist at the Equal Employment Opportunity

Commission. He is a leader in interfaith and intercultural affairs in the DC area and is President of the Cambodian Buddhist Society located at the Cambodian Buddhist Temple in Silver Spring, MD. As a young man, Dr. Tun emigrated from Cambodia to the southern United States when it was in the throes of the Civil Rights Movement and experienced its impact first hand. Following each of the presentations there will be time for reflection and discussion on the issues raised.

We will also have short sessions on women and peace and methods of nonviolence on different levels – personal and within groups. In addition, participants will come away with resources for further study on nonviolence and how to incorporate nonviolence into their lives.

We will meet at a location convenient to the Takoma Park Metro Station in northwest Washington, DC (detailed directions will be provided to those who RSVP). Light refreshments will be served. Please RSVP at GPSUSA2013@gmail.com or at 202-216-9886 no later than Wednesday, May 1st. If you will be bringing guests with you, please indicate their names. We hope to see you for what will be a relevant and enlightening afternoon!

Anna Amato

Welcome to New GPS Board Member, Dr. Ronald G. Ridker

We welcome Dr. Ronald Ridker to the Board of GPS USA. He has a rich and varied experience that ably suits him for our Board.

Ron was an Assistant Professor of Economics at Washington University, St. Louis and Associate Professor at Syracuse University's Maxwell School, as well as a Visiting Research Professor at the Brookings Institution. He served for a decade as Director of the Population, Resources and Environment Program at Resources for the Future, and as Senior Economist in several departments over a fifteen year at the World Bank, from which he retired in 1995. Ron has been a consultant to such organizations as the African Development Bank, World Bank, Ford Foundation, UNESCO, the International Task Force on Public Goods, and the U.S. Agency for International Development. He served for more than a decade as Chairman of the Board of the Meridian Public Charter School in Washington, DC.

Ron earned his B.A. from the University of California, Berkeley in economics and sociology, an M.A. from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, and a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin, focusing on economics and political science. Ron lives with his wife, Tamora, in Washington, DC.

Global Peace Services USA

The newsletter of Global Peace Services USA is published quarterly. GPS USA is incorporated in the District of Columbia and is tax-exempt. Current board members are: Anna Amato, John Eriksson, Robert Muscat, Mindy Reiser, Ronald Ridker and Sovan Tun. We welcome contributions and comments. To contact us:

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