

Harmony through dialogue

In today's fraught world, it is of paramount importance that harmony be achieved and maintained between nations and this places a responsibility on individuals everywhere to **accept and respect all neighbours regardless of ethnic background.**

This is an admirable goal that can sometimes present difficulties. For example; how do we react to neighbours with a different complexion to ours, or perhaps they speak a different language or have a different set of family values that superficially appear wholly different to what we so dearly cherish.

It is important that we rejoice in our differences and society as a whole is enriched when hearts and minds readily accept others' culture and language. This does not mean that we must absorb every facet of alien cultures into our daily lives. It does mean, however, that there should be a willingness to tolerate and accept that the inclusion of features from each culture enhances the fabric of society as a whole.

One of the most important tools at the disposal of the individual towards breaking down the barriers that undoubtedly exist between certain segments of society is **dialogue or communication.**

The dictionary defines dialogue as either a conversation between two individuals or communication and discussions between groups or representatives of two nations.

Dialogue or communication is not only verbal. Body language plays a part as does facial expressions. For example, it is pretty universal for a smile to be taken as a positive signal and maintaining eye contact is very important to most cultures. However, there are societies where that can present problems and a way forward is for us to make the effort to learn the social mores of all segments of society.

These aspects of dialogue are extremely important however this article concentrates on **verbal communications.** As mentioned earlier, it is not easy to overcome built in prejudices. However, we must acknowledge the importance of achieving harmony between all and communication has a very significant part to play in helping us reach that extremely worthwhile goal.

The beneficial effects of positive communication cannot be over emphasized. But let us make sure that it is the right type of communication; otherwise, it's value is limited and in certain circumstances may do harm.

Let's review the various types of communication.

- **Playground communication** is consistently good. It is, to normal families, the first time their children will interact with kids from other ethnic backgrounds. Life time friendships can be formed at this time and differences in family background are normally of little significance.

- **Neighbourly communication** is very valuable and in some circumstances it intermingles with playground communication. Unfortunately the positivity is restricted to the immediate social circle in the neighbourhood and thus normally has little influence in the wider community.

- **Work-place communications** take place in environments where actions may be covered by legislation. Normal pleasantries in communications are normally maintained - however from time to time things can become difficult and the situation may reach a point where "*constructive communication*" may surface. I use this phrase to cover a situation where participants simply trot out preconceived jaundiced ideas that may not have any relevance to the discussion.

These situations may occur when one party or another feels the discussion is taking a personal turn and their core beliefs are being attacked through a careless ill judged remark. These moments can quickly escalate and become dangerous.

- **Social communications** is a phrase used to describe interaction between the various communities during the evening and weekend hours. These convivial situations in a relaxed environment are ideal for enhancing harmony between different ethnic groupings. Unfortunately, the benefits and goodwill gained through these occasions can sometimes be wholly erased through the effects of too much alcohol. Once the "bonhomie" period has been gone through, the **constructive communication** period may raise its head again. When this happens it is indeed a sad outcome.

- **Academic communications** are a vitally important component towards harmony and at this higher level, are research bodies within universities and independently funded organisations who are constantly investigating issues that trouble society.

- **Inter - Governmental communication** is beyond the reach of mere mortals such as us and is not something that we have to concern ourselves with in this article.

In summary, dialogue is an extremely important component in the road towards harmony, but as you will gather from these remarks, the method of communication is all important. We must all be willing participants in positive dialogue and have a desire, *no a duty*, to reach out and interact with their fellow man regardless of colour, creed or religion.

No one can hide from this responsibility