

# Closing Remarks

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**by Farzam Arbab**

It is not customary in meetings dedicated to objective and scientific matters to talk about one's emotions and feelings. But ours has been an extraordinary meeting, and I would like to begin this morning by expressing some of my heartfelt sentiments. During these past days we have often talked about a new beginning for Albania and have shared the joy of being able to contribute to this beginning. At the same time, our deliberations on the process of moral education in a new society have been carried out with acute awareness of the great suffering that now affects so many people in this country. The sufferings of each person, and indeed of each individual, may be unique but the condition of suffering is not unique, and to share the sorrow that is engendered by suffering brings people closer together. There is an old saying that joy and sorrow embrace each other. I think I can speak confidently on behalf of my colleagues when I express gratitude in having been allowed to share with you some of your moments of joy and sorrow. The experience of these few days has made all of us richer, and for that we thank you.

A premise we have worked from in this conference is that Albania's rapid development in the next few years will not occur in isolation. As you restructure your own society, you will also be participating in the process of building a world civilization. What has to be remembered is that your interactions with other peoples will not be conducted from a position of inferiority; you have as much to give to others as you need to receive. But in order to enter rapidly and effectively into this interaction, we all have agreed, you need to develop more faith and confidence in yourselves. It is true that a system has failed in Albania, but it is not true that the Albanian people have failed. Indeed, what you have expressed in this conference, your ideals and aspirations, your mode of behaviour, and the wisdom with which you are analyzing new paths—all of this in spite of so many years of oppression—are, in themselves, proofs of the principle of the nobility of man, a principle that we have emphasized repeatedly in our presentations. Now, self-confidence, faith and courage, trust, and determination to create a just and therefore prosperous society are moral matters par excellence, and developing them constitutes one of the most urgent challenges of a new process of moral education.

A subject that has come up repeatedly in our deliberations is that of the economic needs of the Albanian society. A few have even questioned the relevance of moral education at a time when the nation is facing enormous economic problems. How can we talk about spiritual matters when there is hunger in our country? Should we not focus our attention on economic solutions before we speak of the ideals that are being discussed here? It has been a source of great joy that the vast majority of you are not moved by the apparently obvious, but highly simplistic, statements about how to organize society that are implicit in these objections. After all, the system that caused the current crisis was based on the firm conviction that economic processes constitute the most fundamental aspect of human existence, and that, ultimately, even human beings are determined by their interactions with nature and society in the activities of production and the reproduction of means.

No one here, of course, denies the urgent necessity of economic growth for Albania. We all know how much the country needs sound economic policies, appropriate technology, training, injection of capital, reorganization of economic institutions, in sum, all those elements that would quickly lead to economic development. But what we are refusing to do is to put economic activity at the heart of human existence and assume that, once material prosperity is achieved, everything else will follow. In fact, no one can deny that, in the final analysis, economic choices are moral choices. When the values underlying economic decisions are not made explicit, people become easy prey to manipulation and oppression, and labour their lives away in pursuit of false goals as slaves of one economic system or another.

In our search for a framework for moral education we have dedicated some time to exploring certain

fundamental questions, especially related to human nature and the nature of society. The one point I think we have all agreed upon is that we should avoid the extreme statements that have caused us so much confusion and suffering in the past: Man is entirely good....Man is evil....We should be free to do everything we want....We should give up everything individual for the sake of society....Moral standards have to be imposed....No, it is up to each one of us to work out moral standards for ourselves. What we have said here is that it is best to analyze human nature in terms of great potentials that every human being has been endowed with. One of the speakers presented us with the apt metaphor that we should consider man as a mine rich in gems of great value, and that education is the means to discover these riches and bring them to light.

Now, to have great potentials, to be inherently noble, to have the capacity to be just, generous and loving, does not mean that human beings automatically achieve their high destiny. A seed has the potential to become a strong and fruitful tree, but if the seed is not sown in fertile soil and the resultant plant does not receive rain, sunshine, and the care of a gardener, its potential will never be fulfilled. Indeed, human potential is realized only through and appropriate educational process.

Essential to this conception of the nobility of man is another idea that has been presented here and that was, at first, surprising to some, namely the non-existence of evil. Now, when we say that evil is the lack of good and does not have its own existence, we are not being naive and pretending that everything in the world is good and wonderful. The best analogy we can bring forth to demonstrate our point is the relation between light and darkness. Darkness, of course, exists, and we all know what it is to be in darkness. But what has real existence in the physical world is photons of light. There is no such thing as particles of darkness. Darkness disappears when rays of light come to shine upon a given region of space.

In this context, an interesting question was asked: How can we explain the struggle between good and evil that we experience in our lives and in society if only good has real existence? In order to answer this we have to consider the properties and characteristics of two aspects of our own nature. One aspect is the material one, which we share with the animal world and that comes to us from millions of years of evolution. Now, the question of good and evil does not enter into the world of animals. In that world, the strong kill and consume the weak and no one considers this to be a matter of injustice or oppression. The question of good and evil arises only when we see ourselves from the perspective of our higher nature. Struggle is necessary, then, as we aspire to a higher existence and try to control and direct the forces of our animal nature.

The problem with this conception of human nature, many believe, is that history disproves its validity. There is too much cruelty, too much oppression, they claim, to allow us to believe in the inherent nobility of the human race. The answer we have given to such pessimistic claims is that the history we know is nothing but the history of humanity's childhood. We have described an outlook that interprets today's events in terms of the passage of the human race from childhood to maturity, and have concluded that our search for appropriate moral education must take into account both the integrative and destructive processes that characterize this transition. The signs of this transition are everywhere, if we free ourselves from outworn systems and theories and allow ourselves to see the reality of the transformation that is occurring in human society.

This manner of interpreting history has also helped us when we have tried to analyze and understand the spiritual qualities and virtues that people are to develop through moral education. The list of virtues we are enumerating comprises the same qualities that humanity has identified as virtues in almost every culture and tradition. We are still speaking of truthfulness, honesty, justice, forgiveness, generosity, diligence, courtesy, and all the other qualities that have always been the characteristics of a moral individual. But maturity makes far greater demands on human virtue than did childhood and adolescence. In a primitive village, for example, honesty may have required simply that a fisherman not hide his day's catch from his fellows. Today, in a complex society, dishonesty can be hidden behind such elaborate political and economic arrangements that being honest requires a much higher capacity for moral reasoning. This is one of the reasons why we have placed great emphasis on the twofold nature of moral purpose. Modern man, beyond being vigilant in his personal moral practices, must be capable of creating structures in society that are morally sound. In this regard, may I suggest to you that in the present move

towards modernization and free markets, the Albanian people will be facing some of the toughest moral choices of their history, especially with respect to the choices of technologies. Everyone will be here to sell you their technologies, which they will present as the latest and most essential element of modern civilization. Great will be the demands on the moral structures of the decision-makers as they analyze their choices in terms of the effects that specific technologies may have on such aspects of life as the environment, family bonds, the upbringing of children and youth, the way that joy and happiness are pursued, and, in general, on whether Albania will be in charge of its own progress or whether it will be manipulated by greedy groups who hide their real intent behind clever promises of prosperity.

Now, in examining moral behaviour, we have said that moral reasoning and cognition are not sufficient in themselves. High ideals have to translate themselves into action. Therefore, we have suggested that, as we search for educational activities and patterns of action that would foster in people the appropriate qualities, attitudes, skills and abilities, we should concern ourselves with moral capabilities, that is, on what people must actually be capable of doing in order to achieve the twofold purpose of social and personal transformation. Some example of moral capabilities that we have mentioned here include the capability of building unity, that of contributing to the development of a united and loving family, that of acting with initiative, that of conducting one's affairs according to high standards of rectitude, that of assessing opportunities and finding means of exploiting them that are free from ego and self-interest, that of offering solace to the estranged and the suffering, that of bringing joy to the sorrowful and the bereaved, that of working diligently and effectively as individuals and in collective pursuits, and that of taking part effectively in group consultation.

In analyzing moral capabilities, we have looked especially at ourselves as educators and we have emphasized the fact that teachers must exert moral leadership in society. However, we constantly need to remind ourselves that our concept of leadership is not based on power. Moral leadership is engendered through genuine service to others. What defines true leadership is the influence of knowledge, and not economic or political power. True leadership brings unity, consensus and interconnectedness, and not the imposition of an individual's will on a group of followers.

Our deliberations in these past few days have not only been concerned with questions of morality per se, for we have also talked a great deal about educational approaches and classroom methods. I will not try to summarize all the contributions that have been made to this aspect of our exploration, but two important points should be mentioned. First, we have emphasized excellence, intellectual and spiritual excellence. But again, we have seen that the way a society defines excellence depends on the nature of its moral structures. Second, we have refused to accept the notion that excellence can only be achieved through competition. We are extremely happy to see in the world the beginnings of an educational movement that emphasizes cooperation rather than competition, a movement which, even in its early stages, is already providing us with some practical steps for achieving excellence through cooperation. A number of these steps have been discussed here.

Another important question that we have grappled with is how to go about applying all those ideas in the development of an actual educational system and its methods, contents and instruments. I think I can summarize our deliberations on this subject by saying that we propose an integral process, which includes thorough study of existing theories, without blind acceptance of them; systematic research and experimentation; educational practice; the gathering and systematization of experience; and conceptualization—all of this carried out time and again, gradually leading to the creation of elements of curriculum. In this process, research is not to be isolated from educational practice, and deductive and inductive methods are to complement one another. Ideas that were presented in the very interesting talk on consultation have a great bearing on this aspect of our work, as do ideas brought out in the talk on classroom practices. I would suggest to you that comments made here about the qualities of those who take part in consultation merit deep reflection.

Finally, let me recall our discussions about another fundamental problem: from what source will we gather our conception of a moral person? Will our standards of morality derive somehow from our efforts to solve

the problems of survival? Does humanity naturally become more moral as, one by one, the problems of material existence are overcome? Will our standards of morality come from science and our constant exploration into the operations of the physical universe? Our answers to these questions have been negative. Man is not alone in the universe, and life is not restricted to the material plane. From the source of our creation and our being, we do receive guidance. Periodically, as humanity evolves, spiritual teachers appear and they define the bases for moral action. In dealing with these teachings, however, we should remember our decision to put aside extreme positions. One of the most harmful of these positions is that which sees religion and science as contradictory. The profound disagreement that has existed between religion and science is really a disagreement between corrupt religion and arrogant science. Science is the system of knowledge that assists us to understand man's spiritual nature. It would be absurd to claim that there is any inherent disagreement between the two. So, somehow in our search for a framework for a process of moral education that will help us create a world civilization, we have to leave behind fragmentary systems of thought, and walk in the ways of unity. Not only will our science have to advance at an even more accelerated pace than it has done in the past century, but many of the questions that science has studied will have to be reexamined. For example, we need a science of psychology that considers not merely the animal in man, but actually conceives of man as a mine rich in gems that must be discovered and polished. We need a science of economics that is not the study of human greed and competition, but an enquiry into the matter of bringing material prosperity to the peoples of the world as a means for attaining ever higher levels of intellectual and spiritual achievement. We need a political science that is not the study of brute force but an exploration into how society can be organized to facilitate the flow of humanity's collective energies and the blossoming of individual talents. Even the study of nature has to undergo profound change. This is already beginning to happen at the frontiers of physics and biology, where efforts are being made to avoid projecting humanity's fragmented mind onto nature and to free science from the limitations of Newtonian and Cartesian thought processes, and where real insights are being gained into the interconnectedness of the universe.

And, as we change our attitudes towards science, we will also have to reexamine religion. Here again, we will have to be careful. If religion divides people, it is better that it not exist. A religion that agrees with science has to be entirely free from the limitations of fundamentalism. We need to study religion in a scientific way in order to gain insights into the spiritual aspects of our own existence. I understand that, at a time in your history when you were suffering from religious division and conflict, you adopted the saying, "our religion is the cause of Albania." I hope that now, as you go about advancing the cause of Albania, your religion will actually become the cause of humanity, the cause of the unification of the human race. Thank you for having allowed us to make a contribution, however small, to your endeavours.