

**INTERVIEW ON LIFE AND DIGNITY WITH BJØRN PETTERSEN, HEAD OF THE MT. TRON UNIVERSITY OF PEACE PROJECT, NORWAY.
BY PREETI PRITHYANI, OSLO.**

What are, in your opinion, some of the most important questions humanity and the world face today?

Humankind continually faces challenges, it is part of our evolution. However, at the present time there are some questions that we should ask ourselves as humans and individuals rather than as a nation or a group of people.

There are so many crises in the world today of a huge variety of natures, like humanitarian crisis, ecological crisis, climatic, political and economical crisis, and so on and so forth, which most of us apparently can do very little about. But at the bottom of all these crises there is a single great crisis which is the source of all the other crises of man and that is the *crisis of human identity*. We have to ask ourselves questions pertaining to this fundamental crisis in order actually to deal with any of the other crises. In other words we shall have to explore ourselves physically, mentally and spiritually as whole and complete human beings to be able to come up with the knowledge which can make a change for the better in our own lives and at the same time make a proper impact on society and our environment.

What exactly do you mean by crisis of identity for humans?

We do not know ourselves as universal beings or simply as humans. We know something about our physical body but hardly anything about our mind, and our spiritual sphere of life is completely in the dark. Who can make a detailed record of what has happened to him- or herself during the six or eight hours of sleep every night? One third of our lives is spent in utter darkness and in the gloom of forgetfulness, and it is also an intriguing question how awake we really are in our waking stage during the 16 or 18 other hours of the day. There is so much we do not know about ourselves but still we behave sometimes as if we were more than God!

We do not know what it really means to be human in the context of this world or this universe. We have no idea who we really are, from where we have come or unto where we are going, or at all why we are here. We are living on the very surface of life only and do not care to try to live it deeply or fully. In this view our education is merely learned ignorance – otherwise, why are we always afraid of death!? No one knows what will happen to him or her in the next moment, yet Time always makes something happen regardless of whether we remain active or passive. Why are all those very nearest things which should really be known to us, always an unfathomable mystery? Like Self, God, death, sleep or life itself? We need to come to terms with ourselves – our very life and simple being.

But what can each and every one of us do about these deep existential questions of human life?

First we have to halt a little to catch our breath in this inhumane race for which purpose we really do not know, and then we should feel how it is to just *be* without doing anything. In

this setting it might occur to us that the basis for all energy, motion and dynamism we experience on the surface of life through our frail physical senses actually have a static base without which they cannot function or operate at all. It is this static side of us that every one experiences unconsciously every night in deep, dreamless sleep and which we simply cannot live without. This holds good for all forms of life and even life itself. So why should we not do our best to try to know something about this side of ourselves, too? This everyone can do for themselves and really should do. To know our Self and thereby solving the riddles of life is our very birthright. We have human rights in relation to each other on the social and collective level, but who thinks about our birthrights as human beings in relation to life and God on the individual level?

This is on the individual level, but what can we do on the collective level?

Yes, this pertains to the individual sphere of life but it is important to understand that nothing ever happens on the collective level without the individual initiative. Inspiration and great ideas never come to a nation or to a group of people but always to the individual first. The collective field is always the sum of its individuals, so therefore the real work must happen on the individual level first.

But as humans are highly social beings we need to understand how to relate to each other, too. And here a good start is to think about *dignity*. Dignity is really a key word in human relationships. If we look at its verb form '*to dignify*' it contains the action of *exalting*, i.e. with respect and regard, which again holds an element of equality. This is actually part of an art of life in which you want to give your very best for the fulfilment of life. When you are giving dignity to someone you are giving true reverence and sacrifice to that person which can only be positive to him or her. With this kind of understanding and attitude one can really make a difference in the world. And that is why I welcome every sincere initiative with this as its aim.

How does the understanding of dignity come about?

As I just said the living concept of dignity is an understanding and attitude of the individual. It is really natural and easy, and everybody can feel it. The psychological process behind it is universal and its principle holds good for how we relate to almost anything in life. For instance I think that everyone can do something about his or her awareness and attitude towards whatever they find challenging in their lives. We can stop and think and listen to our conscience and ask ourselves what we will prefer, in any given situation, that others should do to us. We usually take great care about our nearest family, but that care should also extend to our society and environment as well. What we usually feel for ourselves we should also be able to feel for others. One of the great truths of life and living is that it is not the condition or situation we are in at any time that define us as persons, but how we are dealing with it, i.e. our attitude towards that condition or situation.

So awareness and attitude are key factors in our quest for a better world. How we mould and shape our attitude about anything is entirely our own choice and therefore it is completely changeable – there is always the possibility of changing a negative attitude into a more positive one. It is fully our own choice and responsibility. In this simple way, by awareness and attitude only, every single person can do lots for changing his or her own life for the

better, and consequently also for society as a whole. This mental mechanism and simple human experience lies at the very core of the blossomed idea of dignity.

Is dignity among people really a necessity for living in this world?

We definitely need dignity – we need that inherent art of life for the raising and fulfilment of life – not only among humans in the human society, but for all life. Every form of manifested life from atoms to galaxies and interstellar space needs dignity, and it is only we humans who are able to give it – starting with ourselves and our fellow human beings, and then our near brothers and sisters of the animal kingdom.

Is it really possible for us to give dignity to all life like that?

Yes, of course! It is really part of our nature as humans and as such it comes very naturally and easy. It is really one of those qualities which define us as humans apart from animals, and by which we shall be able to establish a true civilization in the proper sense of the word and not only continue the line of dynasties and so-called super powers. We only seem to have forgotten it in our daily race for competition and domination in life. Therefore we shall have to halt a little and contemplate this wonderful human quality of dignity.

The human being has such great and still undiscovered potential with so many possibilities, and we really need to explore them for the betterment of humankind and living in this world. But really, my friends, it all comes down to *humanity* – to pure and simple humanity – which all want and all need and all are able to give!