

15 DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD

¹Some of the speeches that Dag Hammarskjöld, Secretary General of the United Nations, made were collected and published in a book after his death. The following loose quotations are taken from that book. We meet in those speeches a life view that is in full agreement with the noblest principles of esoterics, of humanism.

²No existence is more satisfying than the one dedicated to unselfish service of mankind. It requires the sacrifice of all personal interests but demands also the courage to act on your convictions without flinching.

³The faith in the value of the individual, in human reason, and human basic dignity is an ideal of life without which one does not pursue a path of patient negotiation, unceasing effort to reconcile, to mediate, to settle antagonisms, to appeal to people's reason in order to build mutual understanding. This ideal of service useful to society and this faith in the final triumph of good will is a living reality.

⁴We realize that we live in an age of change and rapid development, but are unwilling to adapt our habits to these changes.

⁵The United Nations must serve and strengthen order as a guarantee of peace, affording the possibility for everyone to lead a fully dignified life in freedom. The Organization must be animated by the faith in the dignity and value of individual human beings, and defend that faith.

⁶Never before have the difficulties of the world so quickly reached into every home. But seldom in a manner that makes it possible for everyone to decide what his appropriate reaction to world affairs is in the light of his own basic ideals.

⁷Our times are characterized by the striving to achieve social and economic equality within individual nations and equal rights and opportunities for all nations. Both tendencies constitute a striving after a world of greater justice, necessary to a lasting peace. If, however, these constructive forces develop outside a system of judicial order animated by the will to peace, they imply a threat of destruction.

⁸The contribution that the United Nations can make as to the underlying ideological tensions is limited to encouraging, with patience and persistence, the will to impartiality and respect for justice. It cannot influence, however, those basic attitudes which are decisive in the struggle for people's hearts.

⁹Our relation to our fellow human beings does not determine our attitude to ideals, but it is determined by our ideals. We embrace ideals and interests for their own sake, not because they are our environment. Who demonstrates true loyalty to this environment? Anyone who, following his conscience, knows that something is wrong and expresses his criticism, or anyone who, to protect himself, keeps his silence to himself? The concept of loyalty is distorted when taken as blind acceptance. It is given its right interpretation when seen as implying honest criticism.

¹⁰There is much talk of freedom and the blessings of freedom. There is less talk of the duties of freedom and of the ideals by which freedom must be guided. An individualism that does not accept limitations, whether those imposed by the community or by fellow human beings, and not a mature ideal either, would lead to anarchy.

¹¹Every human being is an aim in himself, of infinite value as an individual. Invoking this view in one's own favour is easy. But it becomes a reality only when we apply it ourselves in our relations to others.

¹²When nationalism stands for self-sufficient isolationism, and internationalism belittles the importance of national life, then words become contradictory and the corresponding attitudes, irreconcilable. With one part of his being the individual belongs to his native country, and with another part he is a citizen of a world that does not admit of national isolation any more.

The question is not either the nation or the world but how to serve the world by serving one's people or how to serve one's nation by serving the world

¹³Technological changes have created a new kind of interdependence between nations and have brought all nations closer to each other. All mankind must today be seen as a unity in important economic, technological, and political respects.

¹⁴Faith in national self-determination is both an asset and a liability: Asset as a resolution to shape a national destiny and assume the responsibility for it, as a brake on immature experiments in international integration; but a liability when it makes us blind to the necessity of international organization, necessary to the life of the nation.

¹⁵Despite all the evidence of history to the opposite during two thousand years, the hope of a world in peace and order, animated by respect for the human being, has never ceased to occupy the human mind. We have reached such a phase of our technological development that our faith has new possibilities of shaping history.

¹⁶Two of our most common weaknesses seem to be our disdain of things that take a long time and our tendency to shift responsibility onto our institutions. Often it is our habit to decry the goal and, as we define it, assume that we shall automatically attain it. This makes us confuse aims and means, characterize as failures what is historic progress, perceive great things as small.

¹⁷Without recognition of human rights we shall never have lasting peace, and it is only within the framework of peace that human rights can be developed to the full. Everybody's right to security and freedom from fear is one of the most elementary of human rights.

¹⁸Setbacks in trying to realize an ideal do not prove that the ideal is at fault. It is not useless to preach the law because its observance cannot be enforced. The law is the unavoidable law of the future, and it would amount to betraying the future if we failed to preach the law merely because of the difficulties of the present. The law cannot become a living reality if those who are responsible for its development surrendered when faced with difficulties.

¹⁹In a mass culture where commercial advertising in the service of sales promotion dings into people's heads that the latest things must be the best, the book is degraded into a rapidly ageing article of consumption. This is accompanied by an industrialization of culture that prefers the bestseller lists of the public taste to the interest in essential and therefore vital things. We are always threatened by the illusion saying that old things are passed away because all things are become new. A form of expression demanding less self-activity is preferred to the advanced literature requiring power of reflection and meditation.

²⁰Besides, many people are so fully absorbed by the physical resources of entertainment afforded by modern technology that they increasingly lose interest in matters of life view. The need of a life view seems to be satisfied by a cult of spontaneity in the arts that denies form and by a philosophy of life that enthrones absurdity. Our age "forgets wisdom for knowledge and knowledge for news". A literature is being produced where realism is transformed into stories aimed at filling the spiritual emptiness of increasing leisure without disquieting the reader or calling for his effort.

²¹There is nothing automatic in progress, nothing we get for nothing in our advances. Our times witness a change from the "mechanical" optimism of previous generations to the militant optimism of the present generation. We have learnt a hard lesson and we must truly learn it again and again.

²²The conflict between different attitudes to human freedom and spiritual freedom or between different views on human dignity and individual freedom goes on without cease. Finally the battle is between humaneness and subhumaneness. We are on dangerous ground if we think that some particular individual, some nation, or some ideology have a monopoly of justice, freedom, and human dignity.

²³Distrust between people has become a part of our view of life which is increasingly strengthened We can all contribute to breaking down the walls of distrust through simple faithfulness to the independence of the spirit and the right of the free human being to think freely and to speak his mind.

²⁴It devolves upon society to shoulder its responsibility in the struggle against poverty, disease, misanthropy, and lack of freedom, using the means that science and technology have put into its hands. It is likewise the duty of society to assume responsibility for the development of methods that will enable human beings to live in this shrunk world and to create out of the dynamics of change a stable peace.

The above text constitutes the essay *Dag Hammarskjöld* by Henry T. Laurency.

The essay is part of the book *Knowledge of Life Five* by Henry T. Laurency, published in Swedish in 1995. Translation by Lars Adelskog.

Copyright © 2015 by the Henry T. Laurency Publishing Foundation.