

# MARC GOPIN, SCHOLAR AND PEACE PRACTITIONER: A FRIENDLY INTERVENTION

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Prof. Gopin writes of his life as a pioneering peacebuilder. He charts the itinerary from a religiously conservative Jew with a Kantian deontologist bent to a theorist and practitioner of international peacemaking. It is a rich and rewarding journey of discovery – into himself and his own moral and spiritual development, as well as a discovery of others who are on their own journey of peacemaking.

There are a number of stops on the way. But I would suggest the journey has three key junctures on the arc from being an ethical deontologist focusing on the choices that make for peace to becoming a *virtuous peacemaker* who pioneers improved encounters of care that lead to joyful engagement rather than contagiously acquired burnout. I delineate three junctures on this journey: disintegration, integration, and reintegration.

## **/// Disintegration: Peacemaking and Choice**

The moral framework of deontology, Kantian or otherwise, works best in a community whose plausibility structures remain intact, unexamined, and uninvolved. But once any of those characteristics is shattered or shifted, in the complexity of the world – especially a world damaged by conflict – that ethical world view inevitably shifts, if not shatters. The story Prof. Gopin tells of a separatist religionist (conservative Jew) come of age in a hard-edge “immanent frame” is not unique. What is unique is the degree

to which it puts him on a search for a more adequate frame. In a world of systemic, unresolved conflict, deontological reasoning is insufficient to get one on the solution side of peacebuilding.

### **/// Integration: Exemplars of the Inward Journey**

While doing field work in conflict zones, Prof. Gopin met many remarkable peacemakers. They modelled for him a peculiar kind of inward reflection, resourcefulness, and resilience in the face of shattering violence. Their reflective habits were both inward and outward, leading to renewed strength to engage the damaged world in peace. One example stood out: a Palestinian father who lost his son to a senseless act of violence in the West Bank became a singularly providential teacher. Ibrahim was already known in Israeli society as a peacemaker and bridge-builder across enemy lines. But when his son was run over by an Israeli soldier, his faith was cruelly tested. Through personal reflection and corporate dialogue, Ibrahim forged a four-fold “path out of the hell of cyclical rage to the mysterious region of peacebuilding.” Ibrahim’s witness inspired Prof. Gopin back into his own religious tradition of peaceful contemplation and compassionate reasoning, especially to that of his intellectual mentor, Rabbi Luzzatto. Thus, he arrived at the third juncture of his journey of being a teacher of peace.

### **/// Reintegration: Compassionate Reasoning**

At this stage of his development, as both theorist and practitioner, Prof. Gopin is marrying the cutting-edge neuropsychology of mindfulness with moral reasoning into an integrative theory he calls “compassionate reasoning,” which reintegrates all the previous threads of theory and practice together. But just under the hood of this theory, I detect a different engine driving his peacemaking: he has shifted from the *act of peacemaking* to *becoming a peacemaker*. The shift in theory – though unstated and possibly unrecognised – is from deontology to virtue, from Kant to Aristotle. The goal of becoming a peacemaker was certainly present in his earlier theory or proposal. But now it is front and centre, waiting further development and deployment.

### **/// Conclusion**

If we want to be better peacemakers, we must first become peaceable humans. Indeed, we simply must become better humans. We must learn, as another Jewish teacher of peace once said to the City of Jerusalem, in a moment of nationalistic fever, “you must learn the things that make for peace.” Rabbi Gopin is teaching us the things that make for peace. My hope is that his further theorising will expand his dialogue partners to Aristotle and Pope Francis, along with Prof. Seligman and Kant. This is my one and only intervention or suggestion to his wonderful itinerary.

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