

# Peace Education in a Multicultural and Multiethnic Society

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This Third lecture on Peace Education was given at two programmes on the Notodden Campus and the Porsgrunn campus of Telemark University College in Norway 31 October and 2 November, 2006 by Dr. H. T. D. Rost, a member of the Board of the Bahá'í Academy and staff member of New Era Development Institute, Panchgani. These lectures were attended by professors and students of TUC and were very well received. They were followed by useful comments and questions to panels that included Prorektor Knut Duesund, Dr. (Mrs.) Radha Rost, and others.

My friend Prorektor Knut Duesund and I agreed a few months ago on the topic of this second talk, "Peace Education in a Multicultural and Multiethnic Society." Although I have been involved in peace education for many years, I had no idea of the many new insights into important aspects of peace education this topic provides. Norway is developing into a so-called multicultural, multiethnic, and multireligious society and has to learn to live with it to its best advantage. Harmonious living together in Norwegian society, as well as in every nation, has as its foundation the informal, nonformal, and formal education of all the children and youth living here, and this is the great responsibility of you teachers and school administrators as well as parents, families, and the community. Today I wish to outline to you some concepts based on research, practical experience as a peace educator, and everyday life that can help you as peace educators in a multicultural, multiethnic society.

Both my wife and I have led lives in which this same responsibility for helping to bring unity and harmony in society has been thrust upon us, a task we have both consciously and unconsciously accepted. Because of our shared religious beliefs we not only accept the need for world peace, love for the whole of humankind and creation, and the unity of mankind, but have attempted to put these principles into practice in our lives as parents and educators. We have learned a great amount in this process about multicultural and multiethnic living.

Radha and I represent the East and the West. Both of our ancestries are genetically mixed and our ancestors followed a wide variety of religious beliefs. We were married in Kampala, Uganda, East Africa in 1971 with half our 200 wedding guests being black Africans, half Indians, and a small number of others—a cross-section of the peoples of East Africa. Our marriage provided us with a new and fuller social and spiritual life and wider view of the world that could not have been experienced under ordinary conditions. Our three sons were born and brought up in Uganda and Kenya. We deliberately tried to raise them to become world citizens, being friends with people of all ethnic groups, religions and nations, as free of prejudice as possible. In our home people of all cultures, religions, and countries have always been welcome. I will draw upon a

few of our experiences in this lecture. We won't pretend that we have always done the right thing, but at least we have tried.

Peace education in a so-called multicultural, multiethnic society immediately raises certain basic issues about culture and ethnicity that must be kept in mind by peace educators when developing a curriculum and using it in schools, reaching out at the same time to parents and families as well as cultural, ethnic, and religious groups. The first and foremost principle that we think should guide peace educators in this respect is "unity in diversity." This principle, as applied to the whole human race, is expressed in the words of Baha'u'llah: "Ye are all fruits of one tree and leaves of one branch." To achieve unity in diversity in society, one of many possible starting points in peace education is to overcome misconceptions about culture and dispel cultural ignorance. We can either take a narrow view of what culture is or a wider view. Narrowly, culture includes refinement, taste, sophistication, education, and appreciation of the fine arts. However, not only college and university graduates are cultured; all people, all members of our species *homo sapiens*, are cultured. Culture itself is universal.

As clear as some differences appear to be, cultures have many more similarities, which are basic, than differences. Key institutions such as marriage and the family are present in all societies, and many values and beliefs are unexpectedly similar. All people enjoy adorning themselves, have food taboos, have some form of music, dancing, art, or handicraft. Peace educators must include both the universals as well as differences in their curricula; otherwise, they are not realistic. Play is universal, but we practice it differently. Hospitality is universal, but we practice it differently. So specific customs exist among cultural universals. Again this highlights the principle of unity in diversity.

Cultural forces affect people every day of their lives, especially those that influence children during enculturation. Culture touches almost every aspect of who we are. In this sense culture is the language, beliefs, behaviors and even material objects that are passed on from one generation to the next. The material culture of humanity includes its art, buildings, eating utensils, machines, clothing, and so forth. Peace educators can and do expose children and youth to the rich material culture of the world's peoples, such as their arts, crafts, clothing, and food, but this is only a step toward cultural understanding and appreciation. This useful but incomplete material approach does not get at the deeper issues connected with nonmaterial culture, that is peoples' ways of thinking including their values and beliefs and peoples' ways of doing things including their common patterns of behavior, their language, gestures, and other forms of interaction.

Nonmaterial culture in particular penetrates deep into our spirits. We should also keep in mind that material culture often changes faster than nonmaterial culture. The relatively fast penetration of Western material culture into some elements of urban Indian society is not matched by an equal penetration of nonmaterial culture. Thus, peace educators have the great and more difficult task of educating children and youth deeply about the thinking, language, and actions of the peoples living in their particular society and worldwide. This should be an equal exchange between East and West, not only an imposition of Western material culture, such as "pop" culture, on the East. As peace educators carry out this task, they are contributing to the growing cultural unity of mankind. However, even if peace educators did nothing, improved transportation and communication worldwide and the process of globalization, which has both positive and negative aspects, are breaking down traditional divisions between cultures. So peace

educators should make a positive contribution to globalization. In this process, peace education needs to address various levels of cultures: the subcultural, national, as well as international levels and must recognize that cultures borrow from each other.

Peace educators need to make choices as to what aspects of culture should be stressed in peace education curricula. One question they must address is: What aspects of national and localized culture must be preserved through peace education in a society where social integration will never be complete but a degree of social integration is a must? Perhaps even more important a question is: How can the growing cultural unity of mankind strengthen social integration within a nation? As we all know, there are growing international dimensions of hatred and strife that affect more and more nations internally.

The issue of making choices causes us to return to the deeper dimensions associated with nonmaterial culture, especially the values and morality of the world's peoples. Peace educators must make an effort to become familiar with the traditional values, both universal and particularistic, and morality in the subcultures represented among the students in the schools. Here again the principle of unity in diversity must be kept in mind. The psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg theorized that children's moral development, their sense of right and wrong, proceeds similarly. He did research in a number of countries and noted that, even though societies differ on the specifics of what is thought to be right or wrong, the same basic values are taught in every society. In short morality seems to be a cultural universal. (Virtually all of the approximately 3000 religions of the world contain moral teachings.) Although some foods are forbidden in one society but are eaten in another, such universal human values as concern for others (that is, empathy) and the desire for equality and reciprocity (that is, justice) appear to exist in all societies.

Moving away from Kohlberg's views, some authorities recognize that universal human values exist, with one example being found in the contents of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I take up Article 26, the right to education for everyone, in my new peace education curriculum for 10 year olds. Also, peace is an important part of the traditional system of values of many cultures, although the principle of peace has too often been rejected by conflict and war in recent times. If we are peace loving people, coming into contact with a different culture that encourages conflict and destruction of human lives is a shocking experience, attacking our basic values of life. In sum, the universal human values, including moral values, that are common in all cultures should be stressed in peace education along with recognition of the nature and consequences of particularistic values in certain societies. For example, the particularistic values in India that lead to the common practice of female feticide has led to a total population of over 20,000,000 more males than females with already disastrous results. This issue is also raised in my unpublished peace education curriculum materials for 10 year olds. On the other hand, a value exists among many Indians that, being a very religious society, they must welcome visitors to their homes because they believe that God can come to their homes at any time. I recognize and draw upon India's rich religious tradition, such as the principle of ahimsa (that is, non-violence, non-killing) in my materials. Indian society for a long time has emphasized shanti. or peace, and this is one powerful influence that, in my opinion, somehow holds together a nation that is unbelievably diverse, faces huge social problems, and, to an outsider, seems unmanageable.

Drawing upon religious traditions cannot be ignored in peace education in a multireligious society. If we define religion as "belief and ritual concerned with supernatural beings, powers, and forces," then religion exists in all societies and ties in with culture. Religion can either resist social change or promote social change and can either bring positive or harmful results. In my peace education materials I have incorporated what I call the peaceful values, virtues and good qualities and ways of developing them as drawn from the sacred books of the world's great religions, thus stressing positive aspects of religion. I also prepared a compilation of statements from the world's religions for moral education in schools and suggestions for its use entitled *The Promotion of Unity and Concord*, much of which was incorporated in the 2003 guidelines for value education for the more than 6000 schools of the Central Board for Secondary Education. Also, the positive results of inter-religious dialogue should be taken into account in peace education. An awareness of the various religious and their common teachings is a basic step toward understanding, trust, and love that can overcome hatred and violence in the name of religion.

We all recognize that culture is learned from infancy through a process of conscious and unconscious learning. Sometimes it is taught directly, such as when parents educate their children to greet visitors politely or observation of things that go on around them, including what their culture considers right and wrong. All these learning experiences take place in the home, school, and community. The role of the schools is of particular importance because they are one of the few places where young people of diverse backgrounds may be found daily in large numbers. Our schools, then, have a unique opportunity to provide understanding of the world's cultures and the points of agreement between the religions of the world, recognizing that every person, male and female, is a precious member of the human family. In Kenya, Radha and I deliberately sent our three sons to the government primary school on the Kenyatta University College campus that had all African teachers and, at first, all African children from poor to wealthy families except for our sons rather than private elitist schools in Nairobi that many expatriate children attended. Later our sons attended schools in India associating mostly with Indian students and teachers. Finally, they all completed their college education in the U.S.A. Thus, their learning of cultures was broad and deep in the process of becoming world citizens. To summarize our treatment of cultural similarities and differences, what, in general, can schools do to promote cultural harmony through peace education? First, be guided by the principle of unity in diversity. Recognize that our similarities are more basic than our differences. Second, overcome both misconceptions about culture and dispel cultural ignorance. Third, as the students progress year after year in school, move from emphasis upon understanding and appreciation of material culture only to comprehending and appreciating nonmaterial culture in your nation and the world. Stress should be on respect for various cultures, including your own. Fourth, help students to make choices as to the most beneficial aspects of the cultures of their society including the universal human values and moral values they uphold. Fifth, even if you have what you think is a secular, materialistic society, if cultural groups within it hold strong religious beliefs, you cannot ignore their existence in peace education and must emphasize what religions have in common. Sixth, squarely face the fact that schools are one of the few places where young people of diverse backgrounds come together day after day, so if the schools fail to help to harmonize the society, what will be the consequences?

In addition to these points, your schools should link with more global programs for schools that, among other things, study various cultures such as the Associated Schools Project of UNESCO.

Students should gradually come to realize that regarding cultures as superior or inferior can lead to hurt feelings, frustration, and conflicts. Ethnic and cultural issues should be infused into school subjects such as mathematics, computer classes, art, crafts, drama, home economics, music, languages, and history. For example, when I taught high school English composition to 15 and 16 year olds in the U.S.A., after an introduction to humanity's precious legacy of traditional music, I played recordings of traditional music from throughout the world to the classes and had them write compositions on the feelings and thoughts that came to them as they quietly listened. The students' reactions were very positive. Teachers should use their creative energies and draw upon the inner feelings of students as they are exposed to the fine, beautiful aspects of the cultures of humanity. Cooperative learning with heterogeneous groups helps students to understand viewpoints different from their own and appreciate the cultures of the group members when solving problems. Recognizing students' ethnicity and cultural experiences can help lead toward a more peaceful classroom. In the schools' efforts in reaching out to their communities through community education they need to listen carefully to the people they are trying to educate and understand the cultural traditions of the community so that the peace education program fits in with the people's interests as opposed to forcing an outside agenda on them.

Ethnic identity relates to nationality, race, and culture. It is distinguishable by characteristics that correspond to different ways of valuing, being, and behaving. Identity also includes bodily features, a person's physical size, complexion, and hair. Some ethnic groups are regarded as minorities in societies. This is not based on smaller numbers but on the fact that they do not possess the dominant power. Ethnicity refers to a group's distinctiveness on social and cultural grounds that differ from that of the majority because of their background. As long as the majority of an ethnic group feels bonds of solidarity with others that come from the same background, they are considered to be members of that ethnic group. These people have a culture within them, and as a consequence they remain ethnocentric. Ethnocentrism is a tendency to use our own group's ways of doing things as the standard for judging others. Perhaps all of us are more or less ethnocentric. We learn at home, in the community, and even through the "hidden curriculum" as well as openly in school that the ways of our group are good, right, proper, and even superior to other ways of life. Ethnocentrism can have both positive and negative consequences. The positive aspect is that it creates group loyalties. The negative aspect is that it can lead to harmful discrimination against people whose ways are different from our own. Peace education has to face up to this harmful aspect while at the same time preserving those aspects of our nationality and culture that are seen to promote social harmony. For example, studying and honoring the lives and services of great peacemakers in our nation's and the world's history has an important place in peace education. In India, the life and especially the peaceful views of Mahatma Gandhi are included in the yet-to-be published peace education materials for schools.

People often confuse the terms ethnic group and race. But race is very difficult to define. Race was a concept scientists used in the past to describe biological differences found in the human species. But today, scholars like to do away with this term altogether, since it does not describe a scientific reality. There are no "pure" human groups left anywhere because of the overlapping of genes in neighboring populations. Biologically there are no clear divisions, and human characteristics flow endlessly together. There is no scientific support for the idea that intelligence is based on race.

However, starting with our common ancestor who probably lived in southern Africa around 200,000 years ago, as humans spread throughout the world, their adaptations to varied climates and other living conditions resulted in various complexions, colors, and shapes. So people have assumed that racial classifications represent biological differences between people. Yet experts cannot decide how people can be biologically classified into races. Sociologists stress that what we call races are social classifications, not biological classifications. To them, "race" depends more on the society in which we live than on our biological characteristics. Therefore, the racial characteristics Norwegians think are common in Norway are only one of numerous ways that people around the world classify physical appearances. The same classifications would not hold true in Brazil or India. Although groups throughout the world use different categories, each group assumes that its categories are natural and correct. To further complicate the matter, these categories change over time. Thus, widespread concepts of race as a biological reality are a myth. All such points and other modern scientific knowledge should be carefully investigated and included in peace education. Again we return to the principle of unity in diversity: "Ye are all fruits of one tree and leaves of one branch." Biologically we are one species, one human race.

But we are all aware that people who do not uphold the principle of the oneness of humanity and do not possess a modern scientific view of race can cause millions to suffer racial injustice. If at any time people feel the need to set themselves apart from and above others because of race, ethnicity, religion, culture, economic status or any other reason, the consequence is often disunity, conflict, violence, and even war. Hitler Germany was a disastrous example. Such attitudes must be replaced by modern scientific knowledge rather than ignorance, by mutual understanding, by sincere friendship, and by recognition of and respect for the positive qualities and accomplishments among all the world's people rather than just the qualities and accomplishments of our own group. This, again, is one of the prime tasks of peace education.

However, we must realize that young children do begin to distinguish between physical characteristics of people. Our first son, John, was less than one year old when our family was forced to leave Uganda because of the policies and practices of Idi Amin. While we were in Uganda, most of our friends, colleagues in our work, and visitors to our home were black Africans. Only Radha and I were the exception. When anyone else who was not black was seen by John or came close to him, he cried loudly and fearfully. Infants show a basic fear of strangers. One researcher found that a two year old child already distinguishes between gender and skin color and by age four can clearly be heard making biased statements about racial, gender, and physical differences. But the good news is that this may not yet be deep-seated prejudice.

So how does the peace education teacher of young children, who is the key person, as well as the teacher of older students prevent the development of racist and other biased attitudes? For example, she can invite suitable people from various parts of the world to interact in a positive way with the children. Good first impressions are very important. Evidence exists that children develop more positive interethnic attitudes when it involves close personal interaction between them, such as visits to each other's homes. Again, cooperative learning is a great help in the classroom if the teacher is well trained in it. Teaching materials and learning activities should include positive images of ethnic and racial groups to help students develop more positive racial attitudes. Racial equality is promoted within the school, in and out of the classroom. Incidentally,

our son John, who is now 34 years old, has always related harmoniously with African people, and so have our other two sons, Paul and Collis.

Everything in this talk so far leads us to the worldwide challenge of understanding prejudice; aiming at reducing and even eliminating it; and a further exploration of the many useful ways and means of dealing with it in our schools to achieve that aim. Even though I have repeatedly dealt with prejudice in my materials, when investigating further, I was surprised and pleased by the wealth of knowledge we possess in the social sciences, starting with the pioneering work of Gordon W. Allport and followed by others and the wide range of published activities for schools, some of which I have adapted or used, found in the works of William J. Kreidler and many others. We can only touch on some of the highlights of their valuable work in this talk. But when Norway takes action to develop a peace education curriculum with a strong element of prejudice reduction in an increasingly mixed society, we can find plenty of good sources based on research and practical experience. My sources are from the U.S.A., Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and India, and my experience is from living and teaching in the U.S.A., Uganda, Kenya, and India. Similarly, Norwegians can combine the wealth of material and experience from around the world with their own existing expertise, materials and efforts.

We make invalid generalizations, or stereotypes, about people. For example, we might think or even say, "Poor people are lazy." Stereotypes in turn can give rise to prejudices. Prejudice is an attitude where we arrive at a conclusion or form a judgement about someone or something before finding out the facts. It is an unjustified and unreasonable bias. If we want to be honest with ourselves, we all have prejudices. These are prejudices of ethnicity, race, religion, sect, caste, nationality, gender, politics, social status, profession, and so forth. They are common throughout the world. Self-interest and selfishness prompt us to be prejudiced. Having strong prejudices can do great harm. As long as prejudices and fanaticism prevail, animosity, hatred, and warfare will continue. For thousands of years the world of humanity has been agitated and disturbed by selfish prejudices. If we seek to establish peace, we must overcome this obstacle, so this is another major task of peace education.

Peace educators should first understand how children develop prejudices in order to deal with them. A commonly held view is that children learn prejudices from parents, schools, and their peers. But the results of studies made in the West of how much children may acquire some of their prejudices from parents are contradictory. I think it partly depends on the degree of parental control, especially the influence of the mothers, upon their children. At present in India, such control is often strong and long-lasting, whereas in parts of the West it may often be less. In our personal experience, Radha especially had to deal with the possible development of prejudices in our three boys, especially racial prejudice in Kenya. I think parents do have an important role, but they should help prevent and reduce prejudices. Some authorities have theorized that there is such a thing as a prejudice-prone personality, where the parents are concerned with status, expect perfection from their children, and discipline them harshly, thus developing insecurity and hostility in them. The children develop authoritarian personalities, and prejudice becomes a way of dealing with unconscious conflicts and insecurity. Although the research relating to the theory has been criticized, there is a lot of support for the idea that authoritarian parents tend to have prejudiced children.

As to the possible influence of schools on developing the prejudices of children and youth, let's first look at the worst-case scenario: teachers and administrators who are insensitive to the conditions that lead to prejudice, who do not deal with the harm caused by prejudice and

discrimination, who are subtly or openly prejudiced themselves, who have no peace education curriculum to follow, who use racist and ethnocentric textbooks, and do not reach out in a friendly way to parents and the community can add to and even multiply the problem. Instead, schools should have an important positive effect along these same lines. For example, books in students' readers should have characters from various ethnic groups and teachers should take a long hard look at their own prejudices. Some studies have suggested that peer groups influence the development of various forms of prejudice among youth such as racial prejudice, with one pg 20 study in the West claiming that, as children get older, peers are a greater influence than parents. Again, I think the extent of peer influence would depend on the society. Our three boys could easily have picked up racial prejudice against Africans from a European playmate in Kenya if Radha had not dealt with it. We may conclude that a peace education program in schools to combat prejudice must reach out strongly to parents, families, and peer groups, and the schools must take a long hard look at themselves to root out prejudices internally. We should keep in mind that many or all of a child's peers can be in the same school, so we can confront peer influence to support the development of desired attitudes in the school itself and by reaching out to the parents and families.

We have already dealt briefly with how children and youth learn prejudices in and out of school. The schools must concentrate on helping young people understand the negative effects of prejudice and discrimination and creating an environment that discourages biased acts of any kind. Research by social psychologists on prejudice shows that eliminating it is not easy. But one effective approach is that when people in authority make it clear that biased acts will not be tolerated, others will more likely agree and also condemn such acts. Such persons include school administrators, teachers, and other public leaders.

Another promising approach to combating prejudice and bias involves putting diverse groups of people together in a cooperative situation working toward a common goal. If we just put students together in groups there is no guarantee that they will start liking each other, but if they work or play together with shared goals in a controlled manner, it breaks down negative stereotypes that they have of each other. I have been using cooperative learning and cooperative games, both of which stress that the learning groups strive toward shared goals, in teacher training and schools starting from 1992. I have confirmed the results of over 900 research studies worldwide by personally noting their positive effects on relationships between students as well as improved academic achievement as compared to competitive learning and individual work. Hopefully, cooperative learning and cooperative games will become a vital aspect of peace education in Norway. I have completed a draft of a 120 to 150 hour course on cooperative learning and cooperative games as connected with peace education for the Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University. A short course in cooperative learning requires 30 hours of instruction while a short course for cooperative games is 18 hours. In all cases, the full support of the school's administration and follow up are vital. Teachers must be carefully trained in this approach, and schools must be receptive.

All of the experiences of reducing prejudices in schools, including the strong influence of persons in authority and cooperative activities with shared goals, must take place often and extensively in order to break down stereotypes and prejudices. The motto is: "Persevere. Don't give up even if the going gets tough." And whatever we do most be done over a long period of



time. But more can be learned from research and other studies and personal experience. First, students will appreciate unity in diversity and will work harder to resolve diversity-related conflicts when they are in an environment that values unity in diversity. Second, if students appreciate and respect their own culture, they can appreciate other cultures more. Third, to appreciate other cultures and overcome prejudices, it is not enough for students to learn about those cultures; they need some positive emotional connection with other groups and direct, positive experiences of being equal with each other. Fourth, for students to overcome prejudices and stereotypes, they need to learn and understand the vocabulary needed for talking about prejudice and related issues. Fifth, youngsters must be helped to become aware of their own prejudices and helped to understand that these prejudices are based on misinformation or incomplete information. Sixth, effective peace education programs in a multicultural, multiethnic, and multi-religious society are based on our knowledge of moral development and moral reasoning in children and youth. Very young children tend to operate from an egocentric point of view. They don't consider the interests of others and don't recognize that these may differ from their own. But I have noted that a selection of a good number of activities from materials for two and three year olds from the University of North Carolina aim at developing cooperative attitudes in children. I have also seen that four and five year olds can cooperate with each other effectively, starting in pairs but gradually in triads and teams of four through cooperative learning and can cooperate well with each other in larger groups in cooperative games, developing friendships, caring for others, and helpfulness. We should all be aware of how significant this can be for preventing, reducing or eliminating prejudices, as prejudices can be superficial at this young age and can, as a result, be dealt with more readily. Seventh, as they move into adolescence, teach students critical thinking skills, for instance promoting discussion rather than rote memorization, building confidence in their ability to comprehend complex issues, and enabling them to find innovative solutions to today's problems.

As children grow older, they give more recognition to the needs and views of others, but this still ties in with self-interest: "You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." They are just beginning to internalize the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." This characteristic of partial internalization is noticeable in seven year olds. But the next significant change is when the child around the age of nine can begin to really internalize the Golden Rule: "We should treat others as we ourselves would wish to be treated." Children at this stage tend to value generosity, forgiveness, and helpfulness, especially toward people they know. This stage is characteristic of adolescence.

The strong connection between understanding and practicing the Golden Rule and the reduction of prejudices should be made clear to us all. If you are about to treat another person or group based on your prejudices, how would you like it if the same were done to you? If you make a racist remark about someone, how would you like it if you were that person? This highlights the fact that I have stressed the learning and practice of the Golden Rule starting with the germ of the principle with five and six year olds and developed through nine year olds and older in my published materials. These publications also contain a very large number of activities dealing directly with the issues dealt with in this talk. Most of them cover two class periods each and a few of them more than that. But after this lecture was prepared, the realization came that I must work together with others to do more. So in Norway you can certainly include such activities in your own peace education program as a subject as well as infusion of peace education to reduce prejudices in existing subjects. This is a big task, and Telemark University College can take the lead with your initiative, cooperation, and support. You do not need to reinvent the wheel. There

is plenty of existing material and help at hand. Be sure to actively involve qualified, respected members of various cultural, ethnic, and religious groups in the development of your program. Norway has a great and respected tradition in peace studies and, as a nation, has made admirable efforts to bring peace to other nations. Among the countries of the world, you have a unique potential to develop and spread peace education for the progress of the whole human race. You can certainly understand this challenging statement: "The earth is but is one country, and mankind its citizens."

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