

LIFE-COHERENT DISCERNMENT AND REPAIR

RE-GROUNDING SPIRITUALITY, RELIGION,
PEACE, AND GEOPOLITICAL CONFLICT
IN THE PROTECTION OF LIFE



AN ACADEMIC WHITE PAPER

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BSc (Biology), MBBS, DM (Internal Medicine)



PROTECT
LIFE



REPAIR
WOUNDS



RESTORE
DIGNITY



RECONCILE
DIFFERENCES



CONSERVE
PEACE

CREATING MORE LIGHT THAN HEAT.
BUILDING THE CONDITIONS FOR LIFE TO FLOURISH TOGETHER.

Life-Coherent Discernment and Repair

Re-Grounding Spirituality, Religion, Peace, and Geopolitical Conflict in the Protection of Life

Dr. Bichara Sahely, BSc (Biology), MBBS, DM (Internal Medicine)

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The framework brings together multiple streams of inquiry: Maturana's biology of love and legitimate coexistence; McMurtry's life-value onto-axiology and critique of life-incoherent value systems; Galtung's analysis of direct, structural, and cultural violence; Peil Kauffman's understanding of emotion as embodied moral-spiritual guidance; Wilber's distinctions between waking up, growing up, cleaning up, and showing up; and wider traditions of thought on ultimate concern, idolatry, sacred memory, I-Thou relation, scapegoating, reconciliation, restorative justice, prophetic religion, and peacebuilding.

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The author remains fully responsible for the final conceptual framing, interpretive judgments, manuscript content, scholarly claims, and any remaining errors or omissions.

Abstract

The contemporary world is marked not only by ecological, economic, political, technological, and institutional fragmentation, but by a deeper crisis of ultimate concern. Persons, communities, religions, states, markets, movements, and civilizations continue to organize life around sacred and quasi-sacred commitments — God, land, nation, identity, security, sovereignty, growth, liberation, justice, memory, survival, and future — without always discerning whether these commitments protect life or require its sacrifice. When ultimate concern becomes captured by fear, trauma, revenge, domination, certainty, purity, or institutional self-preservation, violence can appear necessary, sacrifice can appear righteous, and the suffering of others can become invisible, deserved, or expendable.

This white paper proposes a life-coherent framework for discernment and repair. Building on prior life-coherent work in health, healing, human flourishing, and Beyond GDP, it extends the framework into the domains of spirituality, organized religion, peace, and geopolitical conflict. It argues that the spiritual analogue of measurement is discernment. Measurement asks what counts as progress. Discernment asks what is worthy of ultimacy. Both can reveal or conceal life. Both can become instruments of repair or mechanisms of distortion.

The paper integrates several complementary streams of thought: Maturana's biology of love and legitimate coexistence; McMurtry's life-value onto-axiology and critique of life-incoherent value systems; Galtung's distinction between direct, structural, and cultural violence; Peil Kauffman's account of emotion as embodied moral-spiritual guidance; Wilber's distinction between spiritual states, developmental stages, shadow integration, and embodied practice; and wider traditions of thought on ultimate concern, idolatry, sacred/profane distinction, I–Thou relation, scapegoating, prophetic religion, reconciliation, and restorative justice.

The central claim is that many seemingly intractable conflicts persist because their failure modes are misnamed. They are treated as security problems, territorial disputes, religious conflicts, civilizational clashes, diplomatic impasses, or development failures when they are often deeper failures of discernment: failures to distinguish life-protection from domination, liberation from revenge, sacred memory from weaponized memory, faith from certainty, security from permanent insecurity imposed on others, and peace from the mere silencing of violence. Without naming these ultimate distinctions, societies cannot know what must be de-implemented.

The framework introduces the concept of sacred insecurity: a condition in which collective trauma, identity, land, religion, sovereignty, memory, and survival become fused into an ultimate concern that makes compromise appear as betrayal and violence appear as protection. It identifies recurrent failure modes of sacred incoherence, including weaponized victimhood, redemptive violence, enemy absolutization, institutional idolatry, spiritual bypass, selective legality, metric and narrative capture, and peace without life-conditions.

The paper culminates in a life-coherent discernment and repair cycle: recognize the wound; name the ultimate concern; expose the sacred distortion; distinguish life-protection from life-destruction; de-implement harmful patterns; restore the commons of coexistence; repair life-

capacity; and conserve the conditions of peace. It stress-tests the framework against the Middle East, arguing that no people's wound should be denied and no people's wound should be allowed to sanctify the destruction of another.

Its purpose is to support those who carry the burden of healing — religious leaders, peacebuilders, clinicians, trauma workers, educators, diplomats, humanitarian actors, public-health practitioners, civic leaders, and communities living inside inherited wounds — in creating more light than heat.

The guiding question is simple:

Does this sacred story, institution, policy, memory, movement, or practice protect, repair, and expand life-capacity — or does it require the disposability of life?

Keywords

Life-coherence, discernment, spirituality, religion, ultimate concern, sacred insecurity, sacred incoherence, sacred violence, peacebuilding, geopolitical conflict, Middle East, life-capacity, life-value, structural violence, cultural violence, legitimate coexistence, biology of love, civil commons, sacred memory, weaponized memory, prophetic religion, organized religion, trauma, moral injury, reconciliation, restorative justice, de-implementation, repair, human dignity, civilian protection, positive peace, interreligious dialogue, life-ground, shared life-protection.

Executive Summary

This white paper argues that the deepest conflicts of the contemporary world cannot be understood only as failures of policy, diplomacy, security, development, governance, or institutional design. They are also failures of discernment. Human beings and societies live by ultimate concerns: what they treat as sacred, what they protect at all costs, what they are willing to sacrifice, what they fear losing, what they refuse to question, and what they believe gives life meaning. These ultimate concerns may be explicitly religious, but they may also be secular: nation, race, territory, market, growth, sovereignty, security, technological mastery, ideological purity, institutional survival, or historical revenge.

The problem is not that human beings have ultimate concerns. No civilization can live without them. The problem arises when finite things are treated as absolute, when sacred stories are captured by fear or domination, and when institutional vessels become more important than the life they were meant to serve. At that point, spirituality can become ideology, religion can become cultural violence, security can become domination, liberation can become revenge,

memory can become weapon, and peace can become the temporary silence imposed by superior force.

The paper proposes that the spiritual analogue of measurement is discernment.

Measurement asks:

What counts as progress?

Discernment asks:

What is worthy of ultimacy?

Prior life-coherent work on Beyond GDP showed that better indicators are necessary but insufficient. Societies must move from counting what counts to caring for what counts, protecting what sustains life, repairing what has been damaged, and coordinating action around life-capacity. This white paper extends that insight into the domain of spirituality, religion, and conflict. The question is no longer only what societies measure, but what societies worship, defend, sacrifice, and refuse to sacrifice anymore.

The central thesis is that many wicked conflicts persist because the failure mode is misnamed. If the problem is called only terrorism, security, occupation, ancient hatred, religious extremism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, nationalism, colonialism, or geopolitical rivalry, each term may reveal part of the truth while concealing the whole. A life-coherent approach asks what deeper pattern is reproducing life-destruction. It asks what sacred abstraction has become more protected than living beings. It asks whose grief is recognized, whose fear is legitimized, whose life is made disposable, and what must be de-implemented because it keeps reproducing the wound.

The paper introduces the concept of sacred insecurity. Sacred insecurity occurs when collective trauma, identity, land, religion, sovereignty, memory, and survival become fused into an ultimate concern. In such conditions, compromise appears as betrayal, the other appears as existential threat, violence appears defensive, revenge appears just, and the suffering of civilians can be rationalized as tragic necessity. Sacred insecurity turns political conflict into metaphysical struggle. It makes peace difficult because each side experiences its own life-protection as non-negotiable while experiencing the other's life-protection as threat.

The paper therefore develops a set of crucial distinctions for life-coherent discernment:

Spirituality must be distinguished from organized religion.

Ultimate concern must be distinguished from idolatry.

Faith must be distinguished from certainty.

Sacred memory must be distinguished from weaponized memory.

Security must be distinguished from domination.

Liberation must be distinguished from revenge.

Martyrdom must be distinguished from the sacrifice of the vulnerable.

Prophetic religion must be distinguished from captured religion.

Peace must be distinguished from the silencing of violence.

Forgiveness must be distinguished from impunity.

Reconciliation must be distinguished from forced coexistence.

Justice must be distinguished from retaliation.

These distinctions are not merely conceptual. They are instruments of repair. Without them, societies cannot know what must be conserved, what must be transformed, and what must be de-implemented.

The paper draws on several guiding thinkers. Maturana contributes the biology of love: the other must be allowed to appear as legitimate in coexistence. McMurtry contributes the life-value criterion: every value system must be tested by whether it expands or reduces life-capacity. Galtung contributes the peace and violence diagnostic: violence is not only direct harm, but also structural and cultural arrangements that normalize preventable life-damage. Peil Kauffman contributes the embodied emotional compass: grief, fear, shame, rage, compassion, love, and moral pain must be understood as signals that can guide repair or be captured by revenge. Wilber contributes a developmental warning: spiritual experiences may be real, but they can be interpreted through immature stages, unintegrated shadow, tribal identity, and institutional capture.

The framework is then stress-tested against apparently intractable geopolitical conflict, especially in the Middle East. The paper does not offer a partisan peace plan. It offers a discernment architecture. It argues that Palestinian dispossession, occupation, displacement, humiliation, statelessness, blockade, and denied self-determination are life-destroying. It also argues that Israeli fear, Jewish historical trauma, antisemitism, hostage-taking, rocket attacks, and existential insecurity are life-destroying. The life-coherent task is to honor both wounds without allowing either wound to sanctify the destruction of the other.

In this light, the paper identifies what must be de-implemented: hostage-taking, civilian targeting, collective punishment, starvation, permanent occupation, settlement expansion, annihilationist ideology, militarized sacred identity, dehumanizing language, selective legality, revenge politics, proxy warfare, security without justice, and humanitarian relief without political repair. It also identifies what must be restored: civilian protection, mutual recognition, humanitarian restoration, trauma repair, truth-telling, reciprocal security guarantees, rights-based

self-determination, regional de-escalation, sacred protection of children, and institutions answerable to life.

The practical method is the life-coherent discernment and repair cycle:

Recognize the wound → Name the ultimate concern → Expose the sacred distortion → Distinguish life-protection from life-destruction → De-implement harmful patterns → Restore the commons of coexistence → Repair life-capacity → Conserve the conditions of peace.

The paper's purpose is not to replace diplomacy, law, humanitarian action, clinical trauma work, public health, religious leadership, education, media reform, or civic organizing. Its purpose is to provide a deeper architecture that can help these practices become coherent with one another. It is written for those who carry the burden of healing: those who must hold grief without hatred, truth without dehumanization, memory without revenge, faith without domination, and peace without surrendering justice.

The central conclusion is this:

No sacred story, no national project, no religious doctrine, no security claim, no liberation movement, no economic system, and no institution can be considered life-coherent if it requires the disposability of life. The test of ultimate concern is whether it protects, repairs, and expands the conditions through which all peoples can live with dignity, memory, security, justice, belonging, and future.

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Part I — The Crisis of Ultimate Concern

1. Introduction: When Ultimate Concern Becomes a Battlefield

The deepest conflicts of the contemporary world are not only conflicts over territory, power, resources, rights, security, religion, or historical memory. They are conflicts over ultimate concern: what human beings and societies treat as sacred, non-negotiable, worthy of loyalty, worthy of sacrifice, and worthy of protection at any cost.

This is why some conflicts become so difficult to resolve. They are not experienced merely as disputes that can be negotiated by adjusting interests, borders, incentives, guarantees, or institutional arrangements. They are experienced as struggles over survival, dignity, memory, justice, identity, homeland, God, and the meaning of history itself. In such conditions, compromise can appear as betrayal. The suffering of one's own people can become the only suffering that matters. The suffering of the other can become invisible, deserved, exaggerated, or strategically necessary. Violence can appear defensive even when it destroys civilian life. Domination can appear protective even when it manufactures the insecurity of another people. Liberation can become entangled with revenge. Security can become entangled with permanent control. Religion can become entangled with sacred entitlement. Memory can become entangled with vengeance. Peace can become confused with silence.

A life-coherent framework begins by refusing to simplify this field. It does not deny the reality of political interests, legal rights, military power, historical grievances, religious commitments, or geopolitical strategy. These matter. But it asks a deeper question beneath them:

What is being treated as ultimate here, and does that ultimate concern protect life or require life to be sacrificed?

This question is not abstract. It is the question that determines whether a society can recognize the humanity of those it fears. It determines whether grief becomes mourning or revenge. It determines whether religion becomes compassion or domination. It determines whether security becomes protection of life or permanent production of another's insecurity. It determines whether memory becomes warning or weapon. It determines whether peace becomes a pause in violence or the restoration of life-conditions.

The prior life-coherent health framework defined health as life-capacity enabled, healing as life-capacity restored, and flourishing as life-capacity expressed in dignity, relation, meaning, participation, and ecological belonging. It also argued that systems must become answerable to the conditions that allow life to live, heal, participate, repair, and flourish. The Beyond GDP white paper extended this logic from health to progress, arguing that societies must move beyond narrow measures of economic output toward a deeper transformation of the relations through which life is enabled or disabled.

This white paper takes the next step. It asks what happens when the deepest orienting meanings of persons, communities, religions, nations, and civilizations become misaligned with life.

The answer is that fragmentation becomes sacred.

When ultimate concern is captured by fear, domination, revenge, purity, growth, sovereignty, institutional preservation, or exclusive identity, life-destruction can be made to appear necessary, righteous, or unavoidable. A society may then sincerely believe that it is defending life while reproducing the conditions that destroy life. It may speak of security while normalizing insecurity for others. It may speak of faith while denying love. It may speak of justice while perpetuating vengeance. It may speak of peace while enforcing humiliation. It may speak of progress while consuming the future.

The task of life-coherent discernment is to interrupt this confusion.

It asks not only what people profess, but what their systems actually protect. It asks not only what sacred stories say, but what forms of life they make possible. It asks not only who has suffered, but whether suffering is being converted into responsibility or into authorization for further harm. It asks not only whether a people seeks security, liberation, sovereignty, recognition, or justice, but whether the path pursued preserves, restores, or destroys life-capacity across the whole relational field.

This is why discernment must precede repair.

If the failure mode is misnamed, the remedy will reproduce the pathology. If domination is misnamed as security, it will be strengthened. If revenge is misnamed as liberation, it will be sanctified. If silence is misnamed as peace, structural violence will remain intact. If institutional survival is misnamed as faithfulness, religion will protect itself rather than life. If economic growth is misnamed as progress, depletion will continue under the sign of development. If resilience is misnamed as adaptation to preventable harm, the vulnerable will be praised for surviving what should have been transformed.

The central claim of this white paper is therefore simple but demanding:

The world's deepest conflicts cannot be healed unless their ultimate distinctions are named.

Without those distinctions, societies cannot know what must be conserved, what must be transformed, and what must be de-implemented. They cannot know when religion is serving life and when it is blessing domination. They cannot know when security protects life and when it destroys the conditions of coexistence. They cannot know when memory dignifies the dead and when it conscripts the dead into future violence. They cannot know when justice repairs relation and when it becomes revenge wearing moral clothing.

The purpose of this white paper is to develop a framework for making those distinctions.

It is written for those who carry the burden of healing: religious leaders, peacebuilders, clinicians, trauma workers, educators, humanitarian actors, diplomats, public-health practitioners, civic leaders, communities living inside inherited wounds, and all who are asked to

hold grief without hatred, truth without dehumanization, memory without revenge, and peace without surrendering justice.

Its aim is not to abolish sacred stories. Human beings live by meaning. Communities require memory, ritual, mourning, celebration, moral formation, hope, and symbols through which suffering can be held and responsibility renewed. The aim is rather to ask every sacred story to become answerable to life.

No sacred story, no national project, no religious doctrine, no liberation movement, no security claim, no economic system, and no institution can be considered life-coherent if it requires the disposability of life.

That is the threshold.

1.1 The civilizational stakes

The present historical moment is marked by multiple forms of fragmentation at once. Ecological systems are destabilizing. Economic systems generate wealth while displacing burdens onto bodies, communities, ecosystems, and future generations. Political systems are polarized. Digital systems amplify attention capture, outrage, surveillance, and disembodied forms of belonging. Health systems treat disease while struggling to address the life-conditions that generate vulnerability and block healing. Public trust is weakening. Young people inherit both planetary risk and civilizational uncertainty. War, displacement, ethnic hatred, religious nationalism, technological acceleration, and geopolitical rivalry increasingly interact in ways that threaten not only particular regions but the possibility of shared human future.

This fragmentation is often analyzed through separate domains. Economists speak of inequality and productivity. Security analysts speak of deterrence and threat. Public-health scholars speak of trauma and social determinants. Religious scholars speak of fundamentalism, secularization, or pluralism. Political theorists speak of sovereignty, identity, rights, and legitimacy. Ecologists speak of planetary boundaries. Technologists speak of information systems and artificial intelligence. Each language reveals something real.

But the lived world does not fragment itself according to academic departments.

The same child may experience war, hunger, grief, ecological instability, religious fear, digital propaganda, displacement, interrupted schooling, family trauma, and loss of future possibility as one life-world. The same community may experience economic precarity, humiliation, collective memory, theological interpretation, militarized policing, and ecological stress as one field of insecurity. The same society may speak of progress while generating loneliness, distrust, militarization, ecological loss, and moral numbness.

The crisis is therefore not only that systems are failing. It is that the distinctions by which societies understand their failures are themselves inadequate.

A life-coherent framework begins where these divided languages meet. It asks whether the relations being conserved by institutions, narratives, policies, rituals, technologies, and economies enable or disable life-capacity. The health framework already established that health is sustained when exposures remain within restorative capacity, and that disease, distress, dysfunction, and breakdown become more likely when cumulative exposures exceed repair margins. The same pattern applies to civilizations. A civilization becomes unstable when its people, ecosystems, institutions, moral traditions, and peace structures are exposed to more burden than their repair systems can absorb.

War is one of the clearest signs that repair has failed. But war is not only a breakdown of diplomacy. It is often the visible eruption of deeper failures: unhealed trauma, humiliation, unmet life-needs, sacredized identity, unequal power, weaponized memory, cultural violence, institutional betrayal, and the collapse of legitimate coexistence.

The stakes are therefore civilizational because the failure is not confined to one domain. A world that cannot discern what is worthy of ultimate concern will repeatedly sacrifice life to false ultimates. It will sacrifice life to growth, life to security, life to purity, life to revenge, life to sovereignty, life to institutional survival, life to technological mastery, life to sacred entitlement, and life to stories that have forgotten their purpose.

The life-coherent task is to bring ultimate concern back under the discipline of life.

1.2 Why spirituality and religion cannot be left outside peace analysis

Modern policy language often treats spirituality and religion as secondary to “real” drivers of conflict: territory, resources, state power, military capacity, economic interest, legal rights, and geopolitical strategy. This is understandable. These drivers are concrete, negotiable, and institutionally visible. They can be mapped, counted, modeled, and mediated. Spiritual and religious meanings are more difficult. They are interior and collective, symbolic and institutional, intimate and political, ancient and contemporary. They cannot be reduced to variables without distortion.

Yet leaving them outside peace analysis is a mistake.

Human beings do not fight only for material interests. They fight for meaning, memory, identity, belonging, recognition, dignity, sacred places, ancestors, children, promises, wounds, and futures. They fight because they fear disappearance. They fight because they believe the world has humiliated them. They fight because the dead have not been mourned. They fight because sacred stories have been fused with territory, blood, sovereignty, revenge, or divine command. They fight because institutions have failed to protect life and because violence begins to appear as the only language still heard.

Religion can deepen this. It can also heal it.

At its best, religion is a civil commons of meaning. It preserves rituals of mourning, gratitude, repentance, forgiveness, restraint, service, hospitality, and care for the vulnerable. It teaches that

life is not reducible to power, price, utility, or self-interest. It can remind communities that the stranger, widow, orphan, enemy, prisoner, poor, wounded, and future child belong within the moral field. It can interrupt revenge by placing grief before God, truth, or the sacred rather than converting grief immediately into retaliation. It can make humility possible where politics rewards certainty.

But religion can also become captured. It can bless domination, sanctify violence, intensify purity, harden boundaries, weaponize memory, silence victims, protect institutions, and give metaphysical dignity to hatred. It can teach people to love their own dead while ignoring the dead of others. It can turn land into exclusive entitlement, suffering into sacred license, and God into the guarantor of one people's innocence.

This ambiguity is why spirituality and religion must be included in life-coherent discernment.

The question is not whether religion is good or bad. The question is whether a spiritual or religious formation preserves, restores, and expands life-capacity, or whether it legitimizes life-destruction. The question is whether it opens the heart to the other as legitimate in coexistence, or whether it converts the other into obstacle, pollutant, enemy, heretic, invader, or disposable body. The question is whether it teaches reverence for life, or reverence for the institution, tribe, doctrine, nation, leader, or sacred abstraction above life.

A peace process that ignores this level may negotiate arrangements while leaving untouched the symbolic systems that reproduce violence. A humanitarian intervention may save lives temporarily while the sacred narratives that justify future destruction remain intact. A security architecture may reduce attacks while preserving humiliation. A ceasefire may silence weapons while leaving memory weaponized. A legal settlement may draw borders while failing to repair the moral imagination.

Life-coherent peace requires more.

It requires discernment of the ultimate concerns that organize perception, emotion, loyalty, sacrifice, and legitimacy.

1.3 The limits of political, security, and diplomatic framings

Political, security, and diplomatic framings are necessary. They can prevent immediate harm, negotiate ceasefires, define obligations, regulate force, structure guarantees, distribute responsibilities, create institutions, and hold actors accountable. Without them, peace can remain only aspiration.

But these framings become inadequate when they treat the visible conflict as the whole conflict.

A security framing asks: who threatens whom, and how can threat be deterred or neutralized?

A diplomatic framing asks: what can each party accept, and what guarantees can make agreement possible?

A legal framing asks: what rights, duties, violations, and remedies are recognized under law?

A humanitarian framing asks: who is suffering now, and what must be provided to preserve life and dignity?

Each is indispensable. None is sufficient alone.

The security framing can become life-incoherent when it protects one population by normalizing domination of another. The diplomatic framing can become life-incoherent when it seeks agreement without truth. The legal framing can become life-incoherent when law is selectively invoked. The humanitarian framing can become life-incoherent when relief substitutes for political repair. The religious framing can become life-incoherent when sacred identity authorizes harm. The developmental framing can become life-incoherent when reconstruction restores infrastructure without restoring dignity, rights, freedom, and trust.

The problem is not any one frame. The problem is frame capture: the substitution of a partial truth for the whole relational field.

A life-coherent framework does not replace security, diplomacy, law, humanitarian action, religion, or development. It asks each to become answerable to life. Security must protect life without producing permanent insecurity for others. Diplomacy must create conditions for truthful coexistence, not merely manage conflict. Law must apply consistently, especially when inconvenient. Humanitarian action must preserve life while refusing to normalize the structures that repeatedly destroy it. Religion must serve compassion, justice, humility, and repair, not sacred domination. Development must restore life-capacity, not merely rebuild what will be destroyed again.

This is why discernment matters. It asks what each frame reveals and what each frame conceals. It asks when necessary instruments become idols. It asks when the vessel has begun to demand that life serve the vessel.

1.4 From wicked problems to sacred failure modes

Wicked problems persist because they cannot be solved by technical optimization alone. Their problem definitions are contested. Their causes are distributed. Their symptoms are entangled. Their interventions create unintended consequences. Their stakeholders do not agree on what counts as success. Their histories shape their futures. Their metrics may conceal as much as they reveal. Their remedies often reproduce their causes.

But some wicked problems are more than wicked. They are sacredly entangled.

A sacredly entangled problem is one in which practical disputes become fused with ultimate meanings. Land becomes more than territory. Security becomes more than protection. Sovereignty becomes more than governance. Memory becomes more than history. Religion becomes more than doctrine. Victimhood becomes more than suffering. Identity becomes more

than belonging. Survival becomes more than biological continuation. The conflict becomes a vessel for the sacred.

In such conditions, ordinary problem-solving often fails because it does not touch the level at which the conflict is being conserved.

A society may negotiate borders while sacred geography remains exclusive. It may arrange security while humiliation remains untouched. It may provide aid while dispossession continues. It may condemn terrorism while ignoring occupation. It may condemn occupation while excusing attacks on civilians. It may invoke human rights while selectively applying them. It may preach forgiveness while denying accountability. It may invoke God while refusing the humanity of those God is presumed not to favor.

The failure mode is then not merely poor policy. It is sacred incoherence.

Sacred incoherence occurs when a sacred or ultimate concern is severed from life-coherence. It appears whenever what is treated as holy, necessary, non-negotiable, or identity-defining requires the degradation, exclusion, humiliation, or destruction of living beings. It appears whenever a people's survival is made to depend on another people's permanent insecurity. It appears whenever memory of suffering becomes permission to reproduce suffering. It appears whenever religion blesses what love should refuse. It appears whenever the future is sacrificed to the unresolved wound of the past.

The task of this white paper is to name these failure modes so that repair can become precise.

For without naming, de-implementation is impossible.

A society cannot de-implement domination if it calls domination security. It cannot de-implement revenge if it calls revenge justice. It cannot de-implement sacred violence if it calls violence obedience. It cannot de-implement humiliation if it calls humiliation order. It cannot de-implement structural violence if it calls violence peace. It cannot de-implement abandonment if it calls abandonment resilience.

The first act of repair is therefore not action. It is right distinction.

1.5 The guiding question: what is being protected, sacrificed, and worshipped?

The guiding question of this white paper is:

What is being protected, what is being sacrificed, and what is being worshipped?

This question is deliberately uncomfortable. It moves beneath official language. It does not ask only what actors say they value. It asks what their systems actually preserve. It does not ask only what people condemn. It asks what they tolerate when it serves their side. It does not ask only

who has suffered. It asks whose suffering is allowed to matter. It does not ask only what is feared. It asks what fear is being used to authorize. It does not ask only what is sacred. It asks whether the sacred has remained answerable to life.

What is being protected?

A people? A state? A border? A doctrine? A market? A leader? A historical narrative? A military advantage? A sacred site? An institution? A way of life? An economy? A myth of innocence?

What is being sacrificed?

Children? Civilians? Truth? Compassion? Land? Water? dignity? freedom? memory? future generations? the humanity of the enemy? the conscience of the faithful? the possibility of coexistence?

What is being worshipped?

God? nation? security? revenge? growth? purity? sovereignty? identity? victimhood? technological power? institutional survival? the market? the flag? the cause? the wound itself?

These are not accusations. They are diagnostic questions. Every community must ask them of itself before asking them of its enemies. That is the discipline of life-coherent discernment.

The question is not meant to flatten moral differences or erase accountability. On the contrary, it sharpens accountability. It prevents the easy innocence by which each side sees only the other's idolatry. It asks every actor, institution, tradition, and movement to submit its ultimate concern to the test of life.

The life-coherent test is this:

Does this ultimate concern protect, repair, and expand the conditions through which all affected lives can live with dignity, memory, security, justice, belonging, and future?

If it does, it may be life-coherent.

If it requires the disposability of life, it must be renamed, resisted, transformed, or de-implemented.

That is where discernment begins.

2. From Measurement to Discernment

The prior white paper argued that the movement beyond GDP must not stop at better indicators. A wider dashboard can reveal harms that GDP conceals, but measurement alone cannot transform the relations that generate those harms. The life-coherent action cycle therefore moves from recognition and renaming through measurement, exposure, de-implementation, restoration of commons, redesign of affordances, protection of margins, coordination, monitoring, and learning.

The present white paper extends that logic into the domain of spirituality, religion, peace, and conflict.

The analogue of measurement is discernment.

Measurement asks:

What counts as progress?

Discernment asks:

What is worthy of ultimacy?

Measurement determines what becomes visible to governance. Discernment determines what becomes sacred to action. Measurement shapes what societies manage. Discernment shapes what societies protect, defend, sacrifice, and refuse to question. Measurement can reveal or conceal life. Discernment can sanctify or repair life. Measurement can be captured by power. Discernment can be captured by fear. Measurement can reduce reality to indicators. Discernment can reduce the sacred to ideology.

Both require a relational upgrade.

The conventional logic of measurement is:

Measure → compare → rank → manage → report.

The life-coherent relational logic is:

Measure → reflect → converse → re-coordinate → repair → conserve life.

The conventional logic of sacred conflict is:

Wound → identity → fear → enemy → defense → sacrifice → retaliation → sacred confirmation.

The life-coherent relational logic of discernment is:

Wound → recognition → mourning → truth → accountability → de-implementation → repair → coexistence.

This shift is subtle but decisive.

Wound remains, but it is nested in recognition rather than denial. Recognition opens mourning. Mourning slows retaliation. Truth prevents false innocence. Accountability prevents forgiveness from becoming impunity. De-implementation removes the patterns that keep reproducing harm. Repair restores life-capacity. Coexistence becomes possible not because memory disappears, but because memory is no longer organized around the disposability of the other.

In this sense, the goal is not merely better beliefs.

The goal is better forms of communion.

2.1 The relational upgrade beyond GDP

The Beyond GDP inquiry revealed that societies do not merely measure what they value. They also come to value what they measure. A dashboard is not just a mirror. It is a field-shaping instrument. It directs attention, legitimizes priorities, distributes resources, defines success, and renders some harms governable while leaving others outside the frame.

The same is true of ultimate concern.

Societies do not merely profess what they worship. They become shaped by what they repeatedly protect, ritualize, defend, fund, mourn, celebrate, and sacrifice. A society may claim to worship God while organizing itself around market growth. It may claim to value peace while organizing itself around military dominance. It may claim to honor human rights while applying them selectively. It may claim to protect children while sacrificing children to war, poverty, ecological breakdown, digital capture, or ideological purity. It may claim to love truth while rewarding propaganda that protects its identity.

The relational upgrade therefore asks not only:

What do we measure?

It also asks:

What do we revere? What do we repeat? What do we defend? What do we excuse? What do we refuse to see?

The Beyond GDP framework moved from output to well-being, then from well-being to life-capacity. This white paper moves from belief to discernment, then from discernment to repair.

Belief alone is insufficient because beliefs can be true, partial, immature, captured, distorted, or contradicted by practice. A person may believe in love and live from fear. A religion may preach

mercy and protect domination. A nation may speak of freedom while denying it to others. A movement may proclaim justice while targeting civilians. A state may claim security while producing permanent insecurity. A civilization may speak of progress while degrading the life-ground.

Discernment asks what is actually being conserved.

It asks what pattern of living is being brought forth through doctrine, ritual, law, policy, media, economy, education, technology, war, and memory.

The life-coherent approach therefore does for ultimate concern what the Beyond GDP framework did for progress. It widens the field of visibility, then deepens the field of responsibility.

2.2 Measurement asks what counts; discernment asks what is worthy

Measurement and discernment are not enemies. Both are necessary. But they belong to different depths of inquiry.

Measurement asks what is happening and how we know.

Discernment asks what matters and how we should respond.

Measurement can tell us how many have died, how many are displaced, how many lack water, how many homes are destroyed, how many children are traumatized, how many attacks occurred, how many schools are closed, how much land has been annexed, how much aid has entered, how much trust has fallen, and how many people report fear.

These measures are indispensable. Without them, suffering becomes deniable.

But measurement cannot by itself answer the ultimate question:

What is this suffering asking of us?

That is discernment.

Discernment asks whether a security policy has become domination. It asks whether a liberation struggle has become revenge. It asks whether a religious tradition is forming compassion or certainty. It asks whether memory is healing or recruiting. It asks whether law is being applied consistently or selectively. It asks whether humanitarian relief is being used to avoid political repair. It asks whether peace means coexistence in dignity or merely the quiet produced by superior force.

Measurement without discernment can produce dashboards of catastrophe.

Discernment without measurement can become vague moral aspiration.

Life-coherence requires both.

Measurement makes harm visible. Discernment names its meaning. De-implementation stops its reproduction. Repair restores the conditions of life.

2.3 Why better indicators are not enough

Better indicators are necessary because what remains invisible is easily ignored. If civilian casualties are not counted, they can be minimized. If displacement is not documented, it can be normalized. If hunger is not measured, starvation can be denied. If trauma is not recognized, suffering can be privatized. If ecological degradation is not tracked, life-ground loss can be called development. If structural violence is not named, domination can be called order.

But indicators are not enough because the same system that produces harm can learn to report harm without transforming itself.

A state can count civilian deaths and continue military practices that produce them. A government can report poverty and continue policies that deepen it. A religion can acknowledge abuse and preserve the authority structures that concealed it. A peace process can monitor ceasefire violations while ignoring humiliation, dispossession, revenge narratives, and blocked self-determination. A development agency can measure resilience while leaving people to adapt to preventable harm. A nation can report sustainability indicators while exporting ecological burdens elsewhere.

The Beyond GDP paper already made this point in relation to progress: measurement becomes transformative only when it leads to de-implementation of harm, restoration of commons, redesign of affordances, protection of margins, and coordinated repair of the relations through which life is enabled or reduced. The same principle applies to spirituality and conflict.

Discernment becomes transformative only when it leads to the de-implementation of sacred distortions, the restoration of life-serving memory, the redesign of institutions toward coexistence, the protection of vulnerable lives, and coordinated repair of the relations through which peace becomes possible.

Without this movement, discernment remains commentary.

With it, discernment becomes repair.

2.4 Discernment as the spiritual-political analogue of measurement

Discernment is often treated as a private spiritual act: a person seeking guidance, clarity, conscience, or divine direction. That meaning remains important. But in this white paper, discernment is also public, institutional, geopolitical, and civilizational.

Discernment is the practice by which a person or community tests its ultimate concerns against life.

It asks:

What are we treating as sacred?

What are we protecting at all costs?

What are we willing to sacrifice?

Whose lives are included in our moral field?

Whose suffering corrects us?

Whose suffering do we explain away?

What are we afraid to question?

What patterns do we continue to reproduce even after we know they harm life?

What would we have to stop doing if life were truly sacred?

This makes discernment the spiritual-political analogue of measurement. Where measurement makes visible the conditions of the world, discernment makes visible the orientation of the soul, the institution, the nation, the religion, and the civilization.

But discernment must itself be disciplined. It can be captured. Communities often discern in ways that confirm what they already want to believe. Religious authorities can call obedience discernment. States can call threat perception discernment. Movements can call ideological certainty discernment. Markets can call consumer preference discernment. Media systems can call outrage moral clarity. Individuals can call trauma response intuition.

Life-coherent discernment must therefore be tested by life-capacity.

Does the discernment expand or reduce the capacity for thought, feeling, action, relation, repair, dignity, truth, and coexistence?

Does it protect the vulnerable?

Does it tell the truth about one's own side?

Does it recognize the humanity of the feared other?

Does it reduce avoidable life-harm?

Does it open pathways for repair?

Does it protect future generations?

Does it remain humble before complexity?

Does it prevent sacred stories from becoming instruments of domination?

If not, it is not yet life-coherent discernment.

2.5 The danger of misnamed failure modes

The gravest danger in wicked and sacredly entangled conflicts is not only that actors disagree. It is that they misname what is happening.

Misnaming is not a minor linguistic error. It is a form of epistemic capture. It determines what can be seen, felt, funded, punished, forgiven, repaired, or stopped. It shapes the path of intervention before intervention begins.

If poverty is misnamed as laziness, the response becomes discipline rather than provisioning.

If trauma is misnamed as hatred, the response becomes suppression rather than healing.

If humiliation is misnamed as disorder, the response becomes policing rather than dignity restoration.

If occupation is misnamed as security, domination becomes normalized.

If attacks on civilians are misnamed as resistance, life-destruction becomes sanctified.

If revenge is misnamed as justice, repair becomes impossible.

If silence is misnamed as peace, structural violence continues.

If selective legality is misnamed as international order, law loses legitimacy.

If despair is misnamed as extremism, recruitment conditions remain intact.

If sacred insecurity is misnamed as ancient hatred, history becomes fatalistic and responsibility disappears.

Life-coherent discernment begins by renaming.

This is why the prior action cycle begins with recognize and rename before moving to measurement and intervention. In the health framework, renaming was necessary because exhaustion can be misnamed as noncompliance, distress as disorder, poverty as lifestyle, and

ecological destruction as development. In the Beyond GDP framework, renaming was necessary because growth, efficiency, resilience, and capital can all conceal displaced harms.

In the present framework, renaming becomes even more urgent because misnamed ultimate concerns can authorize death.

The work is to say clearly:

This is not security if it requires permanent insecurity for another people.

This is not liberation if it requires the targeting of civilians.

This is not faith if it denies love.

This is not peace if it preserves humiliation.

This is not memory if it forbids mourning the other.

This is not justice if it reproduces the wound.

This is not sovereignty if it destroys the life-ground.

This is not religion if the institution becomes more sacred than life.

Renaming is the first act of moral repair.

2.6 Discernment before de-implementation

The central practical claim follows directly:

We cannot know what to de-implement until we discern the failure mode.

De-implementation is not destruction for its own sake. It is the deliberate withdrawal of legitimacy, resources, repetition, protection, and institutional support from patterns that predictably reduce life-capacity.

In health, this may mean de-implementing harmful clinical practices, burdensome administrative routines, commercially driven exposure patterns, or systems that individualize disease while ignoring conditions of life.

In progress measurement, it may mean de-implementing metric capture, false efficiency, life-incoherent capital, growth as sacred compass, or resilience as adaptation to preventable harm.

In spirituality and conflict, it means de-implementing sacred distortions.

It means stopping the reproduction of narratives, rituals, laws, policies, military practices, educational systems, media frames, and theological interpretations that make life-destruction appear necessary, righteous, inevitable, or invisible.

This includes de-implementing:

enemy absolutization;

dehumanizing language;

weaponized victimhood;

redemptive violence;

collective punishment;

hostage-taking;

civilian targeting;

permanent domination;

sacred entitlement;

selective legality;

revenge politics;

spiritual bypass;

peace without life-conditions;

and institutional loyalty above life.

But de-implementation must be paired with restoration. Otherwise, it becomes merely negation.

To de-implement domination, security must be restored in a life-coherent form.

To de-implement armed revenge, justice and dignity must be restored.

To de-implement weaponized memory, truthful mourning must be restored.

To de-implement captured religion, prophetic compassion must be restored.

To de-implement humiliation, recognition and agency must be restored.

To de-implement structural violence, life goods and civil commons must be restored.

To de-implement sacred insecurity, shared life-protection must be restored.

This is why the framework moves from discernment to repair. The task is not merely to condemn what is life-incoherent. The task is to create conditions in which life-coherent alternatives can become real, safe, repeatable, and institutionally protected.

The sequence is therefore:

Discern → name → de-implement → restore → repair → conserve life.

This is the spiritual-political deepening of the life-coherent method.

It begins by asking what is ultimate.

It ends by protecting what makes life possible.

Part II — Spirituality, Religion, and the Institutional Vessel

3. Spirituality as Life Becoming Conscious of Sacred Interdependence

Spirituality, in a life-coherent framework, is not first a doctrine, identity, institution, ritual system, or private belief. It is the lived awakening of life to its own relational depth. It is life becoming conscious that it does not exist alone, does not sustain itself alone, does not heal alone, and does not find meaning alone.

Every breath depends on atmosphere, forests, oceans, microbes, climate, ancestors, and future generations. Every body depends on food systems, water cycles, caregivers, language, shelter, soil, sunlight, immune memory, social trust, and ecological stability. Every person becomes human through relation: through touch, voice, recognition, protection, learning, mourning, play, work, culture, and love. No life is self-originating. No life is self-sufficient. No life is outside the web of life.

Spirituality is the felt recognition of this truth.

It may be expressed through prayer, meditation, silence, ritual, song, service, contemplation, awe, grief, gratitude, pilgrimage, repentance, ecological reverence, moral courage, or love of neighbor. It may be explicitly religious or not. It may speak the language of God, Spirit, Creator, sacred Earth, ancestors, emptiness, compassion, truth, mystery, or simply life. But in all its life-coherent forms, spirituality opens the self beyond isolation, possession, domination, and indifference.

It teaches that the other is not merely an object, instrument, enemy, resource, statistic, sinner, competitor, foreigner, or threat.

The other is a participant in the same field of life.

This does not mean that all differences disappear. Life-coherent spirituality does not abolish conflict, responsibility, judgment, law, memory, or accountability. It does not deny that persons and communities can harm one another. It does not confuse compassion with permissiveness or peace with the absence of truth. Rather, it deepens responsibility because it recognizes that no person, people, ecosystem, or future generation can be treated as disposable without damaging the larger field of life to which all belong.

Spirituality therefore becomes dangerous when it is reduced to escape. If spirituality is only inward consolation, private serenity, devotional identity, or transcendence from worldly suffering, it can become a bypass around the demands of life. It may soothe the soul while leaving domination intact. It may speak of peace while ignoring injustice. It may celebrate unity while refusing to repair broken relations. It may invoke heaven while abandoning Earth. It may proclaim compassion while protecting institutions that harm the vulnerable.

Life-coherent spirituality cannot stop at inner experience. It must become embodied as perception, relation, practice, institution, and repair.

It must teach us to see differently.

To see the hungry not as failures, but as persons deprived of life goods.

To see the enemy not as pure evil, but as a human being formed inside wounds, fears, loyalties, and histories.

To see the Earth not as resource, but as life-ground.

To see children not as inheritors of our abstractions, but as claimants upon our responsibility.

To see grief not as weakness, but as evidence that relation still matters.

To see anger not only as threat, but as a signal that dignity, truth, or life-capacity has been violated.

To see peace not as silence, but as the restoration of conditions in which life no longer has to defend itself through violence.

This is why spirituality belongs at the center of life-coherent discernment. It names the depth at which human beings orient themselves to reality. It asks what is sacred, what is worthy, what is owed, what must never be violated, and what kind of world our deepest loyalties bring forth.

In this sense, spirituality is not separate from health, politics, economics, ecology, or peace. It is the depth-dimension of all of them.

Where economics asks what is valuable, spirituality asks what is ultimately valuable.

Where politics asks what should be ordered, spirituality asks what order must serve.

Where law asks what is permitted, spirituality asks what must be revered.

Where medicine asks what heals, spirituality asks what makes healing meaningful.

Where peacebuilding asks how violence can stop, spirituality asks what kind of relation can make violence unnecessary and illegitimate.

A life-coherent framework therefore defines spirituality as:

the embodied orientation through which persons and communities recognize, honor, and participate in the sacred interdependence of life.

Its test is not the intensity of experience, the beauty of ritual, the age of tradition, the certainty of belief, or the size of the institution.

Its test is life.

Does it deepen humility?

Does it widen compassion?

Does it strengthen truthfulness?

Does it protect the vulnerable?

Does it restore relation?

Does it reduce avoidable harm?

Does it conserve the life-ground?

Does it expand the capacity for persons and communities to live with dignity, memory, security, justice, belonging, meaning, and future?

Where it does, spirituality becomes life-coherent.

Where it does not, spirituality must be discerned, corrected, or renamed.

3.1 Spirituality beyond private belief

Modern societies often treat spirituality as private belief. This has certain protections. It allows freedom of conscience, protects persons from coercive religious authority, and prevents the state from dictating ultimate meaning. These protections matter deeply.

Yet the privatization of spirituality also conceals something important. Ultimate concerns do not remain private. They shape public worlds.

What people treat as sacred shapes how they vote, fight, forgive, consume, educate, govern, punish, mourn, and imagine the future. A society that claims to be secular may still sacralize growth, national security, technological mastery, market freedom, race, sovereignty, ideological purity, or historical destiny. A society may separate church and state while allowing the market, the nation, or the military to function as unquestioned sacred orders. A person may reject organized religion while remaining governed by an ultimate concern that is never named.

This is why the life-coherent framework does not reduce spirituality to explicit religion.

The decisive question is not whether a person or society uses religious language.

The decisive question is:

What has become ultimate, and what does that ultimacy do to life?

If market growth becomes ultimate, then forests, caregivers, workers, attention, health, and future generations may be sacrificed to output.

If national security becomes ultimate, then civilians, truth, law, dissent, and the humanity of enemies may be sacrificed to threat management.

If religious purity becomes ultimate, then compassion, complexity, women, minorities, dissenters, and vulnerable bodies may be sacrificed to order.

If liberation becomes ultimate without life-coherent discipline, then civilians may be sacrificed to the cause.

If institutional survival becomes ultimate, then victims may be silenced to protect the vessel.

Spirituality beyond private belief therefore means that societies must learn to discern their operating sacreds. They must ask not only what they officially profess, but what they actually protect. Every civilization has liturgies: repeated practices that form desire, loyalty, fear, imagination, and obedience. Some occur in temples, churches, mosques, synagogues, shrines, and sacred groves. Others occur in markets, parliaments, military ceremonies, media cycles, schools, stadiums, screens, courts, and national memorials.

The life-coherent question is whether these liturgies form persons capable of protecting life.

3.2 Sacred interdependence and the life-ground

Sacred interdependence begins with the recognition that the life-ground is not optional. Water, air, soil, climate, biodiversity, bodies, care, language, trust, knowledge, and future generations are not external supports added to life. They are conditions through which life exists at all.

The prior health framework named this through the organism–niche relation: the person is not an isolated body placed in an external environment, but a living being continuously formed, sustained, stressed, and repaired through recurrent relations with the surrounding niche. The Beyond GDP framework extended this insight to progress, arguing that social, economic, technological, institutional, and ecological arrangements must be judged by whether they expand or reduce life-capacity.

Spirituality deepens this by adding reverence.

The life-ground is not merely useful. It is worthy of care. It is not only instrumentally necessary for human well-being. It is the living matrix within which all value arises. To pollute water, destroy soil, degrade air, destabilize climate, humiliate bodies, exploit care, corrupt knowledge, or sacrifice children to violent abstractions is therefore not merely inefficient or imprudent. It is a violation of the sacred interdependence of life.

This does not require every tradition to use the same metaphysical language. Some will speak of creation. Some will speak of divine presence. Some will speak of dependent co-arising. Some will speak of the web of life. Some will speak of ancestral obligation. Some will speak of Earth jurisprudence, planetary health, common good, or human dignity.

The language may differ.

The life-coherent test remains the same:

Does the tradition protect the life-ground, or does it provide symbolic cover for its violation?

A spirituality that does not protect water is incomplete.

A spirituality that does not protect children is false.

A spirituality that does not protect the dignity of the stranger has become tribal.

A spirituality that does not protect the Earth has become disembodied.

A spirituality that does not protect truth has become ideology.

A spirituality that does not protect the vulnerable has forgotten life.

3.3 Awe, grief, gratitude, humility, love, and responsibility

Life-coherent spirituality is carried through core affective orientations.

Awe opens the self beyond control. It interrupts the fantasy that reality exists for possession, prediction, extraction, or domination. Awe teaches that life exceeds our categories. It makes humility possible.

Grief reveals attachment. We grieve what we love, what we needed, what was violated, what should have been protected, what cannot be restored. Grief is therefore not merely private pain. It is a moral signal. It tells us where relation has been broken and where repair is owed.

Gratitude recognizes gift. It interrupts entitlement. It remembers that life is received before it is achieved. Gratitude is not passive acceptance of injustice. It is the recognition that life is sustained by countless visible and invisible contributions, and that such gifts call forth care.

Humility recognizes that no doctrine, institution, metric, ideology, map, or policy exhausts life. Humility does not mean indecision. It means that action remains corrigible before reality, suffering, truth, and the lives of those affected.

Love is the domain in which the other is allowed to matter. It does not abolish judgment, boundaries, or accountability. But it refuses the reduction of the other to disposable object. Love is the core relational condition of life-coherent spirituality.

Responsibility is love made durable. It is the willingness to protect, repair, restrain, and re-coordinate action in light of the life one recognizes.

These orientations matter because fragmentation is not only cognitive. It is affective. People do not only miscalculate the world; they misfeel it. They are trained to fear some bodies, ignore some griefs, resent some claims, envy some lives, despise some identities, and remain numb to some forms of suffering. Public life becomes fragmented when emotional formation is captured by outrage, humiliation, resentment, disgust, contempt, revenge, or despair.

Peil Kauffman's work helps us see emotion not as an irrational residue beneath spirituality, but as a biological and moral guidance system. The life-coherent question is therefore not whether emotion is present. Emotion is always present. The question is whether emotion is being metabolized into truth, compassion, courage, mourning, and repair — or captured into vengeance, domination, denial, and enemy-making.

A life-coherent spirituality must therefore repair the affective field.

It must help grief become mourning rather than revenge.

Fear become protection rather than domination.

Anger become truth-telling rather than cruelty.

Shame become responsibility rather than self-erasure.

Love become courage rather than sentiment.

Hope become disciplined repair rather than fantasy.

3.4 Spirituality as embodied orientation, not escape

Spirituality can become life-incoherent when it floats above embodiment. A person may speak of unity while exploiting workers. A community may sing of peace while excluding neighbors. A religion may preach salvation while tolerating abuse. A nation may invoke divine blessing while bombing civilians. A movement may speak of liberation while reproducing patriarchal, authoritarian, or militarized relations internally.

The life-coherent framework therefore insists that spirituality must be embodied.

Embodiment has several meanings.

First, spirituality must be embodied in the person. It must shape perception, emotion, speech, habits, conscience, relational capacity, and willingness to repair harm.

Second, spirituality must be embodied in institutions. Schools, courts, health systems, religious bodies, economies, media, and governments must become answerable to the life they affect.

Third, spirituality must be embodied in material conditions. Prayer for the hungry cannot substitute for food. Blessings for the displaced cannot substitute for shelter. Compassion for the traumatized cannot substitute for safety. Reverence for creation cannot substitute for ecological restoration.

Fourth, spirituality must be embodied in conflict. It must show itself precisely where fear, rage, humiliation, memory, and threat make dehumanization easiest.

This is why spirituality cannot be evaluated only by interior states. Mystical experience may be profound, but if it does not widen responsibility, it remains incomplete. Devotional intensity may be sincere, but if it sanctifies exclusion, it becomes dangerous. Ritual may be beautiful, but if it protects power from accountability, it becomes captured. Silence may be contemplative, but if it refuses to speak against preventable harm, it becomes complicity.

Life-coherent spirituality returns from silence with responsibility.

It returns from prayer with courage.

It returns from mourning with repair.

It returns from sacred story with protection of life.

3.5 The test of life-capacity

The life-coherent test of spirituality is therefore not whether it is traditional or modern, religious or secular, mystical or ethical, personal or communal. The test is whether it expands or reduces life-capacity.

Does it enable people to think more truthfully?

Does it enable people to feel more fully without being captured by revenge?

Does it enable people to act more responsibly?

Does it widen the circle of legitimate concern?

Does it protect bodies from humiliation and violence?

Does it support mourning, accountability, and repair?

Does it conserve the life-ground?

Does it strengthen civil commons?

Does it protect future generations?

Does it refuse to make any people disposable?

This brings spirituality under the same normative discipline as health and progress. In the health framework, systems were evaluated by whether they enabled bodies, persons, communities, and ecosystems to heal and flourish. In the Beyond GDP framework, progress was evaluated by whether social arrangements expanded life-capacity rather than merely increasing output.

Here, spirituality is evaluated by whether ultimate concern becomes life-serving.

This does not reduce the sacred to utility. It prevents the sacred from being used against life.

The sacred exceeds measurement, but it must not evade discernment.

4. Organized Religion as Vessel and Risk

Organized religion is one of humanity's oldest and most powerful vessels of meaning. It carries memory, ritual, symbol, moral formation, grief, celebration, discipline, authority, belonging, service, hope, and intergenerational continuity. It helps human beings locate their lives within stories larger than individual survival. It teaches communities how to mourn the dead, welcome the newborn, bless unions, mark transitions, confess wrongdoing, give thanks, restrain desire, serve the vulnerable, imagine justice, and endure suffering.

This is why organized religion cannot be dismissed as merely irrational, primitive, oppressive, or obsolete. Such dismissal is itself a failure of discernment. Human beings need vessels capable of holding suffering, mystery, mortality, guilt, longing, gratitude, forgiveness, and hope. Secular institutions often struggle to carry these depths. Markets cannot mourn. Bureaucracies cannot forgive. Metrics cannot bless. Algorithms cannot repent. Technocracies cannot replace sacred memory. A civilization that loses all shared vessels of meaning does not become purely rational. It often becomes vulnerable to substitute religions: nationalism, consumerism, political cults, racial myths, conspiracy worlds, technological salvation, market providence, and militarized identity.

Religion can therefore serve life.

It can function as a civil commons of meaning: a shared inheritance through which communities learn reverence, restraint, compassion, moral courage, service, and hope. It can protect the poor when the market abandons them. It can remind rulers that power is not ultimate. It can preserve memory when empires demand forgetting. It can teach forgiveness when revenge feels natural. It can create sanctuary when the vulnerable are hunted. It can sustain care across generations. It can make visible the sacred dignity of persons whom political and economic systems reduce to burdens, enemies, or surplus lives.

But organized religion is also dangerous because every vessel can become an idol.

When the institution becomes more sacred than the life it exists to serve, religion undergoes the great inversion. The vessel demands sacrifice from the life it was meant to carry. Doctrine becomes more sacred than compassion. Authority becomes more sacred than truth. Ritual becomes more sacred than justice. Purity becomes more sacred than mercy. Identity becomes more sacred than love. The survival of the institution becomes more sacred than the victims it has harmed. God becomes the sacred name by which power protects itself.

This ambiguity is why organized religion must be treated neither with contempt nor romanticism.

It must be discerned.

4.1 Religion as civil commons of meaning

A civil commons is a shared life-serving institution or practice that enables access to life goods. In the health and progress frameworks, civil commons include water, healthcare, education, knowledge, ecological protection, social security, law, public infrastructure, and other shared supports for life-capacity. Religion, at its best, can function as a civil commons of meaning.

It offers forms of shared access to moral memory, ritual language, symbolic repair, intergenerational teaching, practices of care, and ultimate orientation. It gives communities words for grief, guilt, gratitude, awe, sin, forgiveness, mercy, humility, responsibility, and hope. It teaches that human beings are more than consumers, producers, competitors, or strategic actors. It places life inside a horizon of accountability larger than immediate self-interest.

In conflict zones, this can be indispensable.

Religious communities may be the first to shelter the displaced, feed the hungry, bury the dead, comfort the grieving, mediate disputes, sustain schools, and preserve dignity when formal institutions collapse. Religious leaders may have moral authority where political leaders are distrusted. Rituals may help communities mourn without immediately retaliating. Sacred texts may provide language for repentance, restraint, hospitality, and protection of the stranger. Shared reverence may open a path where political agreement is not yet available.

But for religion to function as a civil commons, access to its life-serving goods must not depend on domination, exclusion, coercion, or humiliation. A religious commons becomes corrupted when it protects only insiders, demands submission as the price of care, silences victims to preserve unity, or teaches that the lives of outsiders matter less.

A life-coherent religious commons must widen life-capacity.

It must give people access to meaning without requiring hatred.

Access to belonging without requiring exclusion.

Access to memory without requiring revenge.

Access to discipline without requiring fear.

Access to ritual without requiring denial.

Access to hope without requiring contempt for Earth.

Access to God without requiring the dehumanization of neighbor.

4.2 Ritual, memory, mourning, moral formation, and intergenerational continuity

Religion carries five functions that are especially important for life-coherent repair.

First, ritual. Ritual gives embodied form to meaning. It helps communities repeat what they must not forget. It slows action. It creates spaces where suffering can be held, confessed, blessed, lamented, and transformed. In contexts of conflict, ritual can either escalate sacred identity or

open grief to repair. A funeral can become a recruitment ceremony for revenge, or it can become a solemn vow that no other parent should endure the same loss.

Second, memory. Religion preserves memory across generations. It tells stories of origin, exile, suffering, liberation, covenant, sin, mercy, and hope. Memory is necessary for dignity. Peoples who are denied memory are denied continuity. But memory becomes dangerous when it is weaponized. Sacred memory must remember suffering truthfully without making future violence inevitable.

Third, mourning. Religion teaches people how to grieve. This is perhaps one of its most urgent peace functions. Unmourned grief becomes available for recruitment by hatred. Communities that cannot mourn their dead without demonizing the living children of the other remain trapped in sacred insecurity. Life-coherent religion must create rituals where grief is honored without being converted into authorization for cruelty.

Fourth, moral formation. Religion shapes conscience, emotion, desire, restraint, duty, and imagination. It teaches what is admirable, shameful, forbidden, obligatory, forgivable, and sacred. This formation may cultivate compassion and courage. It may also cultivate fear, purity, obedience, contempt, and submission to authority. The question is always what kind of person and community the formation brings forth.

Fifth, intergenerational continuity. Religion links the living with ancestors and descendants. It can teach responsibility across time. It can remind the present generation that it is not sovereign over the future. Yet this continuity can also trap descendants inside inherited wounds. The task is to pass on memory without passing on hatred.

These functions are too powerful to ignore. They are also too powerful to leave unexamined.

4.3 When the vessel serves life

The religious vessel serves life when it remains porous to correction by life.

It serves life when it protects the vulnerable even when doing so threatens institutional comfort.

It serves life when it tells the truth about harm done by its own community.

It serves life when it refuses divine sanction for civilian suffering.

It serves life when it teaches that the dignity of the enemy does not depend on the enemy's innocence.

It serves life when it holds grief without manufacturing hatred.

It serves life when it recognizes that sacred land cannot be honored by desecrating living bodies.

It serves life when it teaches that chosenness, covenant, vocation, dharma, calling, or revelation increases responsibility rather than entitlement.

It serves life when it forms people capable of repentance.

It serves life when it protects the stranger.

It serves life when it asks power to kneel before truth.

A life-serving religious vessel does not need to abandon its particularity. Traditions can remain distinct, richly symbolic, doctrinally serious, ritually embodied, and historically grounded. Life-coherence does not demand bland universalism. It demands that particular sacred stories become answerable to the life of those beyond the boundary of the tradition.

A tradition becomes mature when it can love its own without dehumanizing the other.

It becomes prophetic when it can criticize its own side in the name of life.

It becomes healing when it helps communities mourn truthfully, act justly, forgive without erasing accountability, and repair what has been broken.

4.4 When the vessel demands that life serve the vessel

The vessel becomes dangerous when it reverses its purpose.

This happens when religion protects itself from the lives that call it to account.

The abuse victim becomes threat to the institution.

The dissenter becomes threat to unity.

The outsider becomes threat to purity.

The enemy becomes threat to God.

The poor become objects of charity but not subjects of justice.

Women become symbols of honor rather than persons of full agency.

Children become bearers of identity rather than lives to be protected.

The dead become instruments of mobilization rather than persons to be mourned.

Sacred land becomes more protected than living bodies.

The institution's reputation becomes more protected than truth.

At that point, religion becomes life-incoherent.

The danger is not only overt extremism. Some of the deepest religious failures are quiet: administrative concealment, ritualized avoidance, sentimental language, selective compassion, inherited prejudice, moral cowardice, fear of scandal, and the refusal to let suffering interrupt doctrine.

Captured religion does not always shout. Sometimes it blesses politely while harm continues.

The life-coherent framework therefore asks every religious institution:

What suffering are you unable to hear?

What truth threatens your self-image?

Who must remain silent for your unity to continue?

Whose life is being sacrificed to preserve your doctrine, authority, property, identity, or political alliance?

What would repentance require materially, not only verbally?

These are not hostile questions. They are questions of fidelity.

For if religion exists to serve life, then life must be allowed to correct religion.

4.5 Prophetic religion versus captured religion

The distinction between prophetic religion and captured religion is central.

Prophetic religion speaks from the life-ground against the powers that violate it. It remembers the poor, the stranger, the prisoner, the widow, the orphan, the wounded, the displaced, the enemy, the child, the land, the water, and the future. It judges institutions by their treatment of those whose lives are most easily ignored. It does not flatter rulers. It does not confuse national triumph with divine will. It does not confuse religious success with faithfulness. It does not confuse order with justice.

Captured religion speaks in the language of the sacred while serving domination. It sacralizes the existing order. It blesses the powerful. It explains away victims. It treats dissent as disloyalty. It converts mystery into certainty. It turns divine transcendence into institutional possession. It uses ritual to stabilize what should be transformed.

The prophetic question is:

What does life require of us now?

The captured question is:

How do we preserve what we already are?

The difference is decisive.

Prophetic religion can become one of the strongest allies of life-coherent peace because it has the courage to name sacred distortions from within the sacred tradition itself. It can say to its own people: our suffering is real, but it does not give us permission to destroy. Our memory is sacred,

but it must not become revenge. Our land matters, but bodies matter too. Our security matters, but not if it requires permanent domination. Our liberation matters, but not if it sacrifices children. Our doctrine matters, but not more than love.

Captured religion cannot say this. It can only defend itself.

A life-coherent civilization therefore does not need less sacred seriousness. It needs more prophetic fidelity to life.

5. The Human Corpus of Crucial Distinctions

The human search for wisdom has produced a rich corpus of distinctions that help clarify the relation between spirituality, religion, violence, and repair. These distinctions do not belong to one tradition alone. They arise across philosophy, theology, sociology, psychology, anthropology, peace studies, moral theory, and lived historical struggle.

The purpose of this section is not to catalogue them exhaustively. It is to gather those that sharpen life-coherent discernment.

Each distinction asks a question.

What is ultimate, and what is idolatrous?
What is sacred, and what is merely protected by power?
Is the other encountered as Thou or reduced to It?
Does religion humanize or dominate?
Does spirituality deepen responsibility or evade it?
Does memory heal or recruit?
Does sacrifice witness to truth or consume the vulnerable?
Does peace answer life-needs or merely silence violence?
Does faith remain humble before mystery or harden into certainty?

Together, these distinctions create the conceptual light by which sacred failure modes can be named.

5.1 Ultimate concern and idolatry

Paul Tillich's idea of ultimate concern is indispensable because it shows that faith is not merely assent to religious propositions. It is the orientation of the whole person or community toward what is treated as ultimately meaningful, binding, and worthy of devotion.

This means that every society has ultimate concerns, even when it claims to be secular.

A nation can be an ultimate concern.
A market can be an ultimate concern.
A revolution can be an ultimate concern.
A wound can be an ultimate concern.
A doctrine can be an ultimate concern.
A security project can be an ultimate concern.
A territory can be an ultimate concern.
A leader can be an ultimate concern.

Idolatry occurs when a finite concern claims ultimacy and demands sacrifice beyond what life can justify. In a life-coherent framework, idolatry is not merely worship of a false god. It is the

absolutization of any partial good, identity, institution, memory, or system such that living beings become expendable before it.

Security becomes idolatrous when it requires permanent insecurity for others.

Liberation becomes idolatrous when it authorizes civilian harm.

Religion becomes idolatrous when doctrine or institution becomes more sacred than life.

Nation becomes idolatrous when it demands moral blindness.

Growth becomes idolatrous when it consumes the life-ground.

Memory becomes idolatrous when the wound becomes more sacred than the living future.

The life-coherent question is:

What finite thing has become absolute, and what lives are being sacrificed to it?

5.2 Sacred and profane

The sacred/profane distinction helps us see that societies organize reality by setting some things apart as inviolable, special, forbidden, or worthy of reverence. This is not confined to formal religion. Secular societies also create sacred objects, texts, spaces, ceremonies, symbols, martyrs, flags, constitutions, markets, borders, memorials, and national myths.

The life-coherent issue is not whether societies sacralize. They always do.

The issue is what they sacralize.

If a society sacralizes life, dignity, truth, care, Earth, children, and future generations, its sacred order may support life-coherence.

If it sacralizes domination, purity, conquest, wealth, superiority, revenge, or institutional preservation, its sacred order becomes dangerous.

The question becomes:

What has been placed beyond violation, and has life itself been included within that protection?

A civilization that protects symbols more fiercely than children has disordered its sacred order.

A religion that protects doctrine more fiercely than compassion has disordered its sacred order.

A state that protects borders more fiercely than bodies has disordered its sacred order.

A market that protects property more fiercely than life-ground has disordered its sacred order.

Life-coherent discernment asks sacred orders to reveal their sacrifices.

5.3 I–Thou and I–It

Martin Buber’s distinction between I–Thou and I–It is one of the most important relational distinctions for this framework.

In I–It relation, the other is objectified. The other becomes usable, measurable, manageable, feared, classified, exploited, or controlled. I–It relation is not always wrong. Human beings must use objects, tools, categories, and systems. But when persons, peoples, ecosystems, or future generations are reduced to It, life is violated.

In I–Thou relation, the other is encountered in presence, dignity, and irreducibility. The other is not exhausted by function, category, identity, utility, or threat. The other appears as a being with interiority, claim, mystery, and relation.

Conflict depends on the collapse of Thou into It.

The enemy becomes target.
The civilian becomes collateral.
The child becomes demographic.
The refugee becomes burden.
The prisoner becomes bargaining chip.
The forest becomes timber.
The river becomes resource.
The patient becomes case.
The worker becomes labor unit.
The citizen becomes vote.
The other people becomes problem.

Life-coherent spirituality restores Thou.

This does not mean naïve trust. It does not deny danger or responsibility. It means that even when boundaries, law, or defense are necessary, the other must not be ontologically degraded into disposable It.

The diagnostic question is:

Where has the living Thou been reduced to an It, and what practices are needed to restore presence?

5.4 Humanistic and authoritarian religion

Erich Fromm's distinction between humanistic and authoritarian religion helps clarify how religion forms the self.

Authoritarian religion centers submission to external power. It often emphasizes obedience, guilt, fear, hierarchy, dependence, and unworthiness. It may produce order, but it can weaken agency, conscience, and mature responsibility. In political contexts, it can align easily with domination.

Humanistic religion centers the unfolding of human capacities for love, reason, freedom, responsibility, and solidarity. It does not mean religion without discipline. It means religion that strengthens persons rather than diminishing them.

In life-coherent terms, authoritarian religion reduces life-capacity when it trains people to surrender conscience to authority, suppress emotional truth, accept humiliation as virtue, or obey institutions even when they harm life.

Humanistic religion expands life-capacity when it strengthens thought, feeling, action, relation, dignity, courage, compassion, and repair.

The diagnostic question is:

Does this religious formation make persons more capable of truth, love, responsibility, and repair — or more dependent, fearful, obedient, and easily mobilized by power?

5.5 Prophetic and priestly capture

Religious traditions often contain both prophetic and priestly dimensions. The priestly dimension preserves ritual, order, continuity, transmission, and sacred form. This is necessary. Without preservation, traditions dissolve. Without ritual, communities lose embodied memory. Without continuity, each generation must begin again.

But the priestly function becomes captured when preservation overrides life.

The prophetic dimension interrupts capture. It calls the tradition back to justice, mercy, truth, humility, and protection of the vulnerable. It reminds communities that sacred form exists to serve life, not to replace it.

A life-coherent framework does not abolish the priestly. It reorders it under the prophetic test of life.

The diagnostic question is:

Is sacred continuity preserving life-serving wisdom, or is it preserving arrangements that life now calls into judgment?

5.6 Mystical union and prophetic responsibility

Mystical spirituality seeks direct communion with the sacred, the divine, reality, emptiness, unity, or the ground of being. It can dissolve egoic isolation and awaken reverence. It can reveal that separateness is not ultimate. It can heal the illusion that the self stands apart from the whole.

But mystical union without prophetic responsibility can become escape.

A person may experience unity and ignore injustice. A community may celebrate transcendence while leaving material suffering untouched. A tradition may speak of the oneness of all things while failing to protect particular bodies from violence.

Prophetic responsibility without mystical depth can also become distorted. It may become moralism, rage, ideology, burnout, or purity politics. Without inner grounding, activism can reproduce the aggression it opposes.

Life-coherent spirituality requires both.

Mystical depth reminds action that the other is not separate from the field of life.

Prophetic responsibility reminds contemplation that unity must become embodied in justice, protection, and repair.

The diagnostic question is:

Does spiritual depth return as responsibility for the world, and does moral action remain rooted in reverence rather than hatred?

5.7 Scapegoating and reconciliation

René Girard's theory of scapegoating helps illuminate why communities under stress often seek unity by identifying a victim, enemy, outsider, heretic, or pollutant who can carry collective tension. Scapegoating creates a false peace by projecting disorder onto another and then expelling or destroying that other.

This mechanism is central to sacred violence.

The scapegoat is made to appear guilty for the community's disorder. Violence against the scapegoat then appears restorative. The community experiences unity, but the unity is purchased through injustice. The pattern repeats because the underlying causes are never repaired.

Life-coherent discernment asks:

Who is being made to carry the unbearable contradictions of the whole?

In geopolitical conflict, entire peoples can become scapegoats. In domestic politics, migrants, minorities, religious groups, dissidents, women, the poor, or ideological opponents can be made to carry national anxiety. In institutions, whistleblowers or victims can be scapegoated to protect the organization. In families, one member may carry the unprocessed trauma of the system.

Reconciliation begins when scapegoating is interrupted.

It requires truth, accountability, mourning, and restoration of relation. It refuses unity through expulsion. It seeks unity through repair.

5.8 Orthodoxy, orthopraxy, and orthopathy

A mature spiritual tradition must attend to three dimensions.

Orthodoxy asks whether belief is rightly ordered.

Orthopraxy asks whether practice is rightly ordered.

Orthopathy asks whether feeling, affection, desire, and emotional formation are rightly ordered.

Many religious conflicts overemphasize orthodoxy. They ask whether doctrine is correct while neglecting whether practice is life-serving or whether emotions are being formed toward compassion, humility, truth, and repair.

But belief alone cannot secure life-coherence.

A community may hold beautiful doctrine and practice exclusion.

It may perform correct rituals while protecting abuse.

It may preach peace while cultivating contempt.

It may defend truth while enjoying cruelty.

It may confess love while emotionally training its members to fear or despise outsiders.

Life-coherent discernment therefore asks all three:

Are our beliefs true enough to remain answerable to life?

Are our practices actually protecting and repairing life?

Are our affections being formed toward love, courage, humility, grief, gratitude, and responsibility?

Where one dimension is severed from the others, spirituality becomes unstable.

5.9 Cataphatic speech and apophatic humility

Cataphatic spirituality speaks of the sacred through names, images, doctrines, stories, symbols, metaphors, and affirmations. It is necessary because human beings need language. Communities cannot transmit meaning without speech. Sacred stories require words.

Apophatic spirituality remembers that the sacred exceeds every word, image, doctrine, and concept. It negates false possession. It protects mystery from capture. It reminds traditions that no human language can exhaust God, truth, life, or ultimate reality.

Life-coherent spirituality requires both speech and humility.

Without cataphatic speech, the sacred may become vague, incommunicable, or socially inert.

Without apophatic humility, sacred speech becomes domination.

The danger in conflict is that communities often absolutize their cataphatic forms. Their names for God, land, people, covenant, destiny, justice, or salvation become closed against correction. The sacred is then possessed, and possession becomes entitlement.

Apophatic humility interrupts this.

It says: our language matters, but it is not total. Our story matters, but it is not the whole. Our wound matters, but it is not the only wound. Our revelation matters, but it does not make the other disposable. Our land matters, but it does not license cruelty. Our certainty must kneel before life.

The diagnostic question is:

Has sacred language remained humble before the life it cannot fully contain?

5.10 Faith and certainty

Faith and certainty are often confused.

Faith, in a life-coherent sense, is trustful orientation. It is fidelity to what gives life, truth, love, God, justice, or the sacred its claim upon us. Faith can act without possessing total knowledge. It can remain committed while still learning. It can be courageous without becoming closed.

Certainty is closure. It refuses correction. It converts mystery into possession. It often becomes anxious when questioned because its security depends on exclusion of ambiguity.

Faith can sustain humility.

Certainty often seeks control.

Faith can mourn.

Certainty often explains away grief that does not fit its story.

Faith can repent.

Certainty protects innocence.

Faith can recognize the humanity of the other.

Certainty needs enemies to stabilize itself.

In sacred conflict, certainty is combustible. It allows communities to act destructively while feeling righteous. It reduces complexity to moral binaries. It makes compromise betrayal, doubt weakness, and compassion for the other treason.

Life-coherent discernment does not ask traditions to abandon conviction. It asks conviction to remain answerable to life, truth, and the suffering of those outside its own boundary.

The diagnostic question is:

Does this faith remain open to correction by life, or has it hardened into certainty that can no longer hear the cry of the other?

Together, these distinctions prepare the framework for its next movement.

They show that the crisis of ultimate concern cannot be addressed by generic calls for tolerance, dialogue, or peace alone. It requires finer instruments. It requires the capacity to discern when spirituality has become escape, when religion has become captured, when memory has become weapon, when security has become domination, when liberation has become revenge, when peace has become silence, when faith has become certainty, and when the sacred has been severed from life.

Only then can repair begin.

Part III — Foundations of Life-Coherent Discernment

6. Maturana: Love, Language, and Legitimate Coexistence

Humberto Maturana gives this framework one of its deepest biological and relational foundations. He helps us see that human beings do not simply live in a pre-given world and then describe it from outside. We bring forth worlds through our distinctions, emotions, language, relations, and recurrent ways of living together.

This does not mean that reality is invented arbitrarily. It means that what becomes visible, meaningful, actionable, and conserved depends on the distinctions we make and the emotional-relational domains in which we make them. A society that lives in fear brings forth a world of threat. A society that lives in domination brings forth a world of control. A society that lives in mistrust brings forth a world of enemies. A society that lives in love brings forth a world in which others can appear as legitimate in coexistence.

This is decisive for spirituality, religion, and peace.

The central problem in sacred conflict is not only that people disagree about facts, rights, history, or theology. It is that they live inside different relational worlds. Each side may inhabit a world in which its own grief is central, its own fear is rational, its own violence is defensive, its own memory is sacred, and the other's suffering is secondary, suspicious, exaggerated, or strategically inconvenient. In such a world, the other does not appear as a legitimate other in coexistence. The other appears as threat, obstacle, invader, pollutant, terrorist, occupier, heretic, enemy, or problem.

Maturana helps us name this as a failure of relational biology.

Human beings are not formed only by ideas. They are formed in emotional domains. Love, fear, shame, humiliation, resentment, trust, grief, contempt, and hope are not decorations placed upon rational life. They are the affective fields through which worlds become possible. The same sentence spoken in love and spoken in contempt does not bring forth the same world. The same policy enacted in humility and enacted in domination does not create the same relation. The same sacred story interpreted through fear and interpreted through love does not produce the same civilization.

A life-coherent framework therefore asks:

What emotional-relational world is being conserved?

This question is deeper than asking what doctrine is professed. A religious community may profess love while conserving fear. A state may profess security while conserving domination. A liberation movement may profess justice while conserving revenge. A peace process may profess coexistence while conserving humiliation. A market may profess freedom while conserving dependency. A civilization may profess progress while conserving life-ground destruction.

Maturana's contribution is to make this visible.

If the world is brought forth through recurrent patterns of distinction, language, emotion, and action, then repair requires more than correct information. It requires new coordinations of living. It requires conversations that do not merely exchange positions but transform the relational domain in which positions arise. It requires the possibility that the other may appear again not as an object to defeat, manage, convert, expel, or contain, but as a living being whose existence belongs within the field of legitimate coexistence.

This is not sentimentality. It is a condition of survival.

No peace can become durable if the other remains ontologically illegitimate.

6.1 The biology of love

For Maturana, love is not merely a private feeling or moral ideal. It is a domain of relational behaviors in which another living being arises as legitimate in coexistence with oneself. Love is therefore biological before it is theological. It is not reducible to romance, sentiment, or affection. It is the relational condition through which human beings become fully human.

This matters because civilization depends on the conservation of relational domains. If children grow in fear, they learn a world of threat. If communities live in humiliation, they learn a world of resentment. If peoples are governed through domination, they learn a world in which force becomes intelligible. If religious traditions form people in contempt for outsiders, they learn a world in which exclusion feels holy. If political systems reward enemy-making, citizens learn a world in which belonging is secured by hatred.

The biology of love interrupts this.

It says that the other must be allowed to appear as legitimate in coexistence. Not innocent. Not always trustworthy. Not free from accountability. But legitimate as a living being whose existence cannot be morally erased.

This distinction is crucial.

Life-coherent love does not deny wrongdoing. It does not abolish justice. It does not prevent self-defense. It does not require passivity before violence. But it refuses to cross the threshold where the other's life no longer counts.

In sacred conflict, that threshold is crossed repeatedly. Civilian deaths become unfortunate but acceptable. Children become demographic burdens. Hostages become bargaining pieces. Prisoners become symbols. Refugees become threats. Sacred sites become more protected than bodies. The dead become political instruments. The future becomes collateral.

The biology of love says no.

It restores the most basic life-coherent boundary:

No conflict can be healed while the life of the other is excluded from the field of concern.

6.2 Emotioning and worlds brought forth

Maturana's language of emotioning helps us understand why rational appeals alone rarely heal sacred conflict. People are not simply persuaded by facts when their identity, grief, security, and sacred memory are at stake. They interpret facts through emotional worlds.

Fear organizes perception differently from trust.

Humiliation organizes memory differently from dignity.

Grief organizes time differently from indifference.

Rage organizes justice differently from mourning.

Contempt organizes the other differently from compassion.

A community living in fear will interpret ambiguity as threat. A community living in humiliation will interpret compromise as further degradation. A community living in sacred injury will interpret the other's security as its own erasure. A community living in domination will interpret resistance as irrational violence rather than as a signal of blocked life-capacity. A community living in revenge will interpret restraint as weakness.

This is why peace requires transformation of the emotional field.

The purpose is not to suppress emotion. Suppressed emotion returns as symptom, hatred, denial, or violence. The task is to metabolize emotion into life-serving forms.

Fear must become wise protection rather than domination.

Grief must become mourning rather than revenge.

Anger must become truth-telling rather than cruelty.

Shame must become responsibility rather than humiliation.

Love must become courage rather than sentiment.

Hope must become disciplined repair rather than fantasy.

A life-coherent peace process must therefore attend to emotion as part of the conflict structure. Trauma, fear, humiliation, rage, grief, and moral injury are not private residues left after politics. They are forces through which politics is perceived, enacted, and reproduced.

6.3 The other as legitimate in coexistence

The phrase “legitimate in coexistence” may be one of the most important phrases for this white paper.

It does not mean that every action is legitimate. It means that the being of the other is legitimate. Their existence belongs within the moral field. Their children matter. Their dead matter. Their fear matters. Their dignity matters. Their future matters. Their suffering has the power to correct us.

This is the opposite of enemy absolutization.

Enemy absolutization occurs when the other is not merely opposed but ontologically degraded. The other becomes evil, animal, pollutant, invader, terrorist, colonizer, infidel, demon, obstacle, or disease. Once this happens, violence becomes easier because the victim has already been removed from the circle of legitimate concern.

The life-coherent framework asks every side in every conflict:

Can the other people appear to you as legitimate in coexistence?

Can their grief correct your story?

Can their children interrupt your strategy?

Can their fear be heard without becoming proof of your innocence?

Can their dead be mourned without betraying your own?

Can their future be included in your vision of peace?

If the answer is no, the conflict has not yet entered the domain where repair is possible.

6.4 The failure of domination

Domination is the systematic denial of legitimate coexistence. It occurs when one person, group, institution, state, market, or tradition organizes the conditions of life so that others must adapt to its power. Domination may be overtly violent, but it may also be administrative, economic, cultural, legal, religious, technological, or epistemic.

Domination always damages the relational field.

It damages the dominated by reducing agency, dignity, security, participation, and life-capacity.

It damages the dominator by narrowing perception, hardening identity, normalizing cruelty, and making truth dangerous.

It damages the future by conserving relations that require force, denial, and moral numbness to continue.

From a life-coherent perspective, domination is not merely unjust. It is biologically and spiritually incoherent. It creates worlds in which fear must be managed, resistance must be suppressed, and the other's life must be continually explained away.

This is why domination cannot produce peace. It can produce order. It can produce silence. It can produce compliance. It can produce despair. It can produce temporary security for some. But it cannot produce life-coherent peace because it does not restore legitimate coexistence.

The same applies to revenge. Revenge reverses domination but does not heal its grammar. It continues the same relational structure by changing who is now made disposable.

Life-coherent repair requires a different move.

It must de-implement domination without sanctifying revenge.

It must restore agency without producing new dehumanization.

It must protect security without manufacturing permanent insecurity.

It must hold accountability without abolishing the humanity of the accountable.

6.5 Spirituality as an expansion of relational legitimacy

Maturana allows us to define spirituality, in relational-biological terms, as an expansion of the domain in which life is allowed to appear as legitimate.

The spiritual path is not merely upward transcendence. It is widening coexistence.

The self opens beyond itself.

The family opens beyond kinship.

The tribe opens beyond blood.

The nation opens beyond border.

The religion opens beyond exclusive possession.

The species opens beyond human exceptionalism.

The present opens beyond itself to future generations.

The Earth is no longer background but life-ground.

This expansion is not abstract universalism. It must become embodied in concrete relations: how food is grown, how children are protected, how enemies are treated, how prisoners are held, how

land is shared, how grief is mourned, how institutions respond, how truth is told, how violence is restrained, how repair is guaranteed.

Spirituality becomes life-coherent when it widens the domain of legitimate coexistence.

It becomes life-incoherent when it narrows that domain in the name of God, nation, purity, doctrine, security, liberation, growth, or sacred destiny.

That is Maturana's gift to the framework.

He teaches that the question of peace is not only what agreement can be signed. It is what world of coexistence can be brought forth and conserved.

7. McMurtry: Life-Value and False Religion

John McMurtry gives the framework its normative spine. If Maturana asks what relational world is being conserved, McMurtry asks whether that world expands or reduces life-capacity.

This is indispensable because not every sacred, cultural, political, or spiritual formation is life-serving. Human beings can organize whole civilizations around value systems that appear rational, sacred, efficient, patriotic, progressive, or inevitable while systematically degrading life. A society may increase wealth while reducing life-capacity. A religion may increase obedience while reducing love. A state may increase control while reducing security. A market may increase output while reducing health, care, and ecological viability. A movement may increase mobilization while reducing conscience.

McMurtry's life-value onto-axiology gives us a clear criterion:

Value is what enables life-capacity. Disvalue is what reduces, disables, or destroys life-capacity.

This criterion allows the framework to test every ultimate concern.

Not by asking whether it is old or new.

Not by asking whether it is religious or secular.

Not by asking whether it is popular or powerful.

Not by asking whether it is sincerely held.

Not by asking whether it produces measurable outputs.

But by asking whether it enables a more coherently inclusive range of life.

This is why McMurtry is central to the present inquiry. The problem of sacred conflict is not only that people have different beliefs. It is that beliefs, institutions, identities, and systems can become life-blind. They can continue operating even when their consequences are visibly destructive. They can protect themselves from correction by life. They can convert suffering into evidence of their own necessity. They can become what this paper calls sacred distortions.

McMurtry helps us name this as false religion in the broadest sense.

False religion is not confined to churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, or explicit theologies.

False religion is any closed ultimate value-system that demands loyalty while disabling life.

Market absolutism can become false religion. Nationalism can become false religion. Security doctrine can become false religion. Revolutionary ideology can become false religion.

Technological salvationism can become false religion. Institutional self-preservation can become false religion. Even humanitarian language can become false religion if it conceals the structures that keep producing suffering.

The life-coherent task is to distinguish life-grounded spirituality from life-incoherent ultimacy.

7.1 Life-value as the criterion of ultimacy

Every ultimate concern must be tested by life-value.

This is the central claim.

If a doctrine, policy, ritual, economic rule, national project, security strategy, peace proposal, educational system, or technological design expands the real capacities of living beings to think, feel, act, relate, participate, heal, learn, create, belong, and flourish within the web of life, it has life-value.

If it narrows, disables, humiliates, excludes, depletes, poisons, traumatizes, silences, or destroys those capacities, it has disvalue.

This criterion is not simplistic. It does not imply that every hard decision can avoid loss. Life often involves tragic choice. Communities may face danger. States may face attack. Institutions may face scarcity. Families may face grief. Human beings are finite, vulnerable, and historically situated.

But life-value asks whether harm is being minimized, repaired, and prevented — or normalized, justified, displaced, and repeated.

It asks whether sacrifice is truly unavoidable or whether some lives have simply been made easier to sacrifice.

It asks whether necessity is real or manufactured by the refusal to transform deeper conditions.

It asks whether the burden falls on those least able to carry it.

It asks whether the future is being protected or consumed.

This makes life-value the criterion of ultimacy. A sacred story may be profound. A nation may be beloved. A tradition may be ancient. A security fear may be real. A liberation claim may be just. But none of these becomes life-coherent unless it remains answerable to life-capacity across the relational field.

The ultimate is not tested by intensity of devotion.

It is tested by what devotion does to life.

7.2 Life-capacity and universal life goods

Life-capacity is not vague well-being. It refers to the real powers and conditions required for human and ecological life to continue, develop, repair, and flourish.

These include bodily integrity, food, water, shelter, healthcare, safety, knowledge, meaningful participation, social belonging, dignity, agency, ecological stability, cultural expression, spiritual or existential meaning, and future possibility. Without these, life may continue biologically but becomes diminished, constrained, humiliated, or broken.

This is why universal life goods are central. They are not luxuries. They are not merely preferences. They are the conditions without which human beings cannot live well.

A religious tradition that does not protect life goods becomes disembodied.

A state that denies life goods loses moral legitimacy.

An economy that commodifies life goods without guaranteeing access becomes life-incoherent.

A peace process that does not restore life goods remains fragile.

A spirituality that speaks of transcendence while ignoring hunger, water, shelter, healthcare, trauma, humiliation, and ecological destruction is not yet life-grounded.

Universal life goods make spirituality concrete. They prevent ultimate concern from floating above the bodies it claims to save.

They also expose false universals. Many systems claim to serve humanity while denying real access to life goods. They proclaim freedom without capacity, equality without repair, peace without protection, sovereignty without dignity, growth without life-ground, rights without conditions, and faith without compassion.

Life-coherent discernment asks whether the goods required for life are actually secured.

7.3 False religion as closure against life

False religion is closure against correction by life.

It occurs when a value-system becomes unable to learn from the suffering it causes.

A false religion may have rituals, scriptures, saints, martyrs, heroes, statistics, economic models, security doctrines, policy frameworks, algorithms, or constitutional myths. Its outward form may be religious or secular. What makes it false is not its content alone, but its closure. It cannot allow the harmed to correct it. It cannot allow disconfirming life-reality to interrupt its certainty.

When the poor suffer, it blames them.

When ecosystems collapse, it calls the damage externality.

When civilians die, it calls the deaths collateral.

When children are traumatized, it calls the trauma regrettable.

When workers are exhausted, it calls exhaustion productivity.

When patients fail to heal, it calls them noncompliant.

When victims speak, it calls them threats to unity.

When the enemy grieves, it calls the grief propaganda.

When the Earth protests, it calls the protest cost.

This is false religion because the system has placed its abstraction above life.

Life-grounded spirituality does the opposite. It allows life to correct belief, institution, policy, and identity. It hears the cry of the harmed as revelation. It treats suffering not as inconvenience but as disclosure. It asks what must change so that life can be restored.

The diagnostic question is:

Can this system be corrected by the lives it damages?

If not, it has become false religion.

7.4 Civil commons and life-grounded spirituality

McMurtry's concept of the civil commons is crucial for moving spirituality from private meaning to public life-support. Civil commons are shared social formations that enable access to life goods. They include institutions, practices, laws, infrastructures, cultural forms, and ecological protections through which people can live, learn, heal, participate, and flourish.

A life-grounded spirituality strengthens civil commons.

It supports public health, education, water, food security, care systems, ecological restoration, legal protection, truthful media, dignified work, social trust, intergenerational responsibility, and peace. It does not retreat into private salvation while public conditions collapse. It understands that love of life must become institutional.

This is especially important in conflict.

Peace is not only agreement between elites. Peace requires civil commons: water systems, schools, hospitals, safe homes, trauma care, food access, legal institutions, public truth, dignified mobility, cultural continuity, and shared spaces where communities can encounter one another without humiliation or fear.

Religions can support these commons. They can mobilize care, protect the vulnerable, preserve moral memory, and resist dehumanization. But they can also enclose commons by distributing care only to insiders, controlling education through exclusion, sacralizing unequal access, or treating public goods as instruments of conversion or domination.

The life-coherent test is whether religious and secular institutions secure universal access to life goods or restrict them according to power, identity, purity, loyalty, or profit.

7.5 The life-value test of sacred claims

The life-value test of sacred claims can be stated simply:

Does this sacred claim expand or reduce life-capacity across all those affected?

This question must be asked of every side.

Does this claim to land protect life or require dispossession?

Does this claim to security protect life or require domination?

Does this claim to liberation restore dignity or authorize revenge?

Does this claim to faith deepen love or intensify exclusion?

Does this claim to memory honor the dead or recruit the living into future violence?

Does this claim to justice repair relation or reproduce the wound?

Does this claim to sovereignty protect a people's life-capacity or erase another's?

Does this claim to peace restore life-conditions or merely silence resistance?

The test is not always easy to apply. It requires historical knowledge, moral seriousness, humility, and attention to asymmetries of power. But without it, sacred claims remain unaccountable.

McMurtry's gift is that he prevents spirituality from evading material life. He brings the sacred back to bodies, needs, capacities, commons, and the web of life.

He helps us say:

No ultimate concern is life-coherent if it destroys the conditions of life.

8. Galtung: Peace, Structural Violence, and Cultural Violence

Johan Galtung gives the framework its peace diagnostic. He teaches that violence is not only the visible act of injury. Violence also exists in structures that prevent people from meeting their life-needs, and in cultures that make such prevention appear normal, deserved, necessary, sacred, or invisible.

This is indispensable for life-coherent discernment because many of the deepest harms in the world do not appear as direct violence. They appear as policy, poverty, exclusion, occupation, blockade, humiliation, pollution, administrative burden, commercial predation, educational deprivation, ecological destruction, digital manipulation, or inherited inequality. No single person may strike the blow. Yet life-capacity is reduced.

Galtung's distinction between direct, structural, and cultural violence allows us to ask a deeper question:

What kinds of avoidable life-harm are being produced, and what narratives make them acceptable?

This question is essential in sacred conflict.

Direct violence may be obvious: bombs, rockets, shootings, massacres, torture, hostage-taking, rape, destruction of homes, killing of civilians.

Structural violence may be less visible: statelessness, restricted movement, deprivation of water, unequal legal status, poverty, militarized borders, housing insecurity, exclusion from healthcare, blocked education, economic dependency, or political disenfranchisement.

Cultural violence may be even deeper: religious narratives, national myths, media frames, school curricula, racial stereotypes, sacred histories, security doctrines, or ideological languages that make direct and structural violence seem justified.

A life-coherent approach requires attention to all three.

If only direct violence is addressed, structural conditions may continue producing future violence.

If structural violence is addressed without cultural transformation, domination may reappear under new language.

If cultural violence is addressed without material repair, reconciliation remains symbolic.

Peace requires transformation across the whole field.

8.1 Negative peace and positive peace

Negative peace is the absence or reduction of direct violence. It is necessary. When bombs stop falling, rockets stop firing, hostages return, prisoners are protected, and civilians can sleep without immediate terror, life is preserved. No serious peace framework can dismiss negative peace.

But negative peace is not enough.

A ceasefire can leave occupation intact.

A border can leave humiliation intact.

A treaty can leave poverty intact.

A security arrangement can leave fear intact.

A legal settlement can leave grief unmourned.

A reconstruction plan can leave domination intact.

A silence can be mistaken for peace while life remains constrained.

Positive peace means the presence of life-enabling conditions. It includes justice, dignity, access to life goods, freedom from structural deprivation, participation, trust, ecological stability, cultural respect, and institutions capable of repair.

In life-coherent terms, peace is not merely the absence of threat. Peace is the presence of conditions in which threat-production becomes unnecessary and illegitimate.

This reframes the peace question.

The conventional question is:

How do we stop the violence?

The life-coherent question is:

What conditions must be restored so that violence is no longer experienced as necessary, righteous, profitable, sacred, or inevitable?

Negative peace stops bleeding.

Positive peace restores circulation.

Life-coherent peace requires both.

8.2 Direct, structural, and cultural violence

Direct violence injures life visibly. It is the violence of weapon, assault, killing, torture, rape, detention, expulsion, and destruction.

Structural violence injures life through arrangements. It is built into the conditions under which some people cannot access the goods required for life. It is visible in preventable illness, poverty, hunger, unsafe housing, ecological exposure, blocked movement, unequal law, lack of care, exclusion from education, and systematic humiliation.

Cultural violence legitimizes both. It tells stories that make harm acceptable. It defines some people as inferior, dangerous, impure, chosen, cursed, backward, expendable, illegal, savage, or outside concern. It makes violence feel like justice, domination feel like order, exclusion feel like purity, and deprivation feel like fate.

Sacred conflict often fuses all three.

Direct violence produces trauma. Structural violence produces humiliation. Cultural violence gives both a sacred or moral explanation. The harmed community then develops counter-narratives that may themselves become culturally violent. Each side's injury becomes proof of the other's evil. Each side's violence becomes narrated as response. Each side's dead become sacred evidence. The loop continues.

Life-coherent discernment must break this loop.

It must refuse direct violence without ignoring structural violence.

It must expose structural violence without excusing direct violence.

It must transform cultural violence without erasing historical truth.

This is hard because each side often wants only the violence done to it recognized. But life-coherent peace requires recognition of the full field of avoidable life-harm.

8.3 Religion as source of peace or legitimation of violence

Galtung's framework allows us to understand religion as both peace resource and violence resource.

Religion can reduce violence by teaching compassion, restraint, forgiveness, hospitality, humility, service, justice, and the sacred dignity of life. It can challenge structures of exploitation. It can delegitimize hatred. It can preserve memory of suffering without converting memory into revenge. It can build cross-boundary solidarity. It can remind political actors that power is not ultimate.

But religion can also legitimate violence. It can sanctify conquest, hierarchy, exclusion, patriarchy, caste, racism, ethnic hatred, martyrdom, forced conversion, sacred entitlement, and divine punishment. It can make structural violence appear ordained. It can make direct violence appear redemptive. It can give cultural violence the authority of God.

The life-coherent question is therefore not whether religion is present in conflict.

The question is what role religion is playing in the violence field.

Is it reducing direct violence?

Is it exposing structural violence?

Is it interrupting cultural violence?

Or is it blessing direct violence, concealing structural violence, and intensifying cultural violence?

A religion becomes life-coherent when it acts as a force of positive peace.

It becomes life-incoherent when it sanctifies avoidable life-harm.

8.4 Cultural violence and sacred authorization

Sacred authorization is one of the most dangerous forms of cultural violence because it gives ultimate permission to harm. When violence is authorized by sacred narrative, ordinary moral brakes weaken. The enemy is no longer merely opposed; the enemy becomes an offense against God, destiny, purity, homeland, covenant, nation, or historical justice.

Sacred authorization can take many forms.

It may say the land belongs exclusively to us by divine will.

It may say the other people is cursed, impure, demonic, or less human.

It may say the suffering of the other is deserved.

It may say our dead demand revenge.

It may say our victory is God's will.

It may say compromise betrays the sacred.

It may say children must be sacrificed for the cause.

It may say cruelty is necessary purification.

Life-coherent discernment must identify these narratives early because they convert conflict into existential struggle. Once sacred authorization takes hold, ordinary political compromise becomes morally suspect. Peacebuilders are called traitors. Moderates are called weak. Humanitarians are called naïve. Critics are called enemies. The conflict becomes self-sealing.

The antidote is not secular contempt for religion. That often strengthens sacred defensiveness. The antidote is prophetic discernment from within and across traditions: sacred language must be brought back under the discipline of life.

No divine claim can authorize the disposability of life.

No sacred land can be honored by desecrating living bodies.

No martyrdom can justify the sacrifice of children.

No covenant can abolish compassion.

No liberation can become holy by killing civilians.

No security can be sacred if it requires another people's permanent humiliation.

8.5 Peace as answered life-need

The deepest contribution Galtung makes to this framework is the idea that peace must answer life-needs.

Peace is not simply the end of fighting. It is the presence of conditions that allow life to become livable.

People need food, water, shelter, healthcare, safety, dignity, education, movement, belonging, meaningful participation, law, mourning, truth, accountability, ecological stability, and future possibility. When these needs remain unmet, violence remains latent. It may be suppressed, delayed, displaced, or ritualized, but the conditions of future violence persist.

Life-coherent peace therefore asks:

Are children safe?

Can families remain in their homes?

Can people access water and healthcare?

Can communities mourn their dead?

Can civilians move without humiliation?

Can religious sites be honored without exclusion?

Can law protect all persons consistently?

Can people participate in shaping their future?

Can memory be preserved without weaponization?

Can security be shared rather than imposed?

Can ecological and economic life support coexistence?

Can future generations inherit something other than trauma?

If not, peace has not yet become life-coherent.

Galtung's gift is that he prevents peace from being reduced to silence. He makes peace answerable to life-capacity.

9. Peil Kauffman: Emotion as Moral-Spiritual Compass

Katherine Peil Kauffman contributes what many frameworks miss: the embodied emotional dimension of discernment. She helps us understand emotion not as irrational noise to be suppressed by reason, doctrine, or policy, but as a living guidance system through which organisms detect value, threat, connection, violation, possibility, and need.

This is essential because spirituality, religion, and conflict are not driven by ideas alone. They are carried through emotion: fear, grief, shame, rage, awe, gratitude, love, guilt, humiliation, compassion, disgust, hope, and despair. These emotions shape perception, identity, memory, loyalty, and action. They can guide repair. They can also be captured by violence.

A life-coherent framework must therefore ask:

What is happening to the emotional field?

This question matters because many forms of sacred incoherence are emotional distortions before they are conceptual errors.

Fear becomes domination.

Grief becomes revenge.

Shame becomes projection.

Rage becomes cruelty.

Love becomes possession.

Awe becomes submission to power.

Belonging becomes exclusion.

Hope becomes fantasy.

Despair becomes nihilism.

Humiliation becomes recruitment.

Compassion becomes selective.

Peil Kauffman helps restore emotion to its proper place: neither master nor enemy, but signal. Emotion tells us that something matters. It indicates that life-capacity is being protected, threatened, violated, restored, or longed for. But emotion must be listened to, interpreted, metabolized, and integrated. Otherwise, it can be exploited by demagogues, extremists, institutions, markets, media, and war systems.

The life-coherent task is emotional discernment.

9.1 Emotion beyond irrationality

Modern systems often split reason from emotion. Policy claims rationality. Economics claims calculation. Law claims neutrality. Medicine claims objectivity. Security claims strategic necessity. Religion sometimes claims obedience over feeling. In each case, emotion may be treated as private, unreliable, feminine, childish, sinful, irrational, or dangerous.

This split is life-incoherent.

Human beings do not perceive value without emotion. We know harm through pain, grief, fear, anger, and moral shock. We know belonging through warmth, trust, joy, and recognition. We know violation through shame, outrage, disgust, and sorrow. We know reverence through awe and gratitude. We know responsibility through love and concern.

Emotion is not opposed to truth. It is one way life discloses significance.

The problem is not emotion. The problem is unexamined, manipulated, or disembodied emotion.

Fear can detect danger, but it can also imagine enemies everywhere.

Anger can detect injustice, but it can also enjoy punishment.

Shame can detect violation of moral relation, but it can also collapse into self-hatred or projection.

Grief can honor love, but it can also harden into vengeance.

Disgust can protect from contamination, but it can also dehumanize persons.

Hope can sustain repair, but it can also deny reality.

Life-coherent discernment does not suppress emotion. It asks emotion to become truthful, proportionate, compassionate, and repair-oriented.

9.2 Grief, fear, rage, shame, compassion, and love as signals

Each major emotion in conflict carries information.

Grief says: something loved has been lost.

Fear says: life feels threatened.

Rage says: a boundary has been violated.

Shame says: dignity, belonging, or moral standing has been wounded.

Compassion says: another's suffering matters.

Love says: this life is not disposable.

These signals are morally important. But they become dangerous when severed from life-coherence.

Grief becomes dangerous when it refuses to mourn anyone outside its own group.

Fear becomes dangerous when it demands absolute security at the expense of another's life.

Rage becomes dangerous when it loses contact with limits.

Shame becomes dangerous when it seeks relief by humiliating others.

Compassion becomes dangerous when it becomes selective and tribal.

Love becomes dangerous when love of one's own authorizes hatred of the other.

This is why emotional repair is central to peace. Communities need ways to grieve without revenge, fear without domination, rage without cruelty, shame without projection, compassion without selectivity, and love without exclusion.

Religious and spiritual traditions can help here. They can provide rituals of lament, confession, repentance, forgiveness, hospitality, mourning, and remembrance. But they can also intensify emotional capture by sacralizing grief, fear, rage, shame, and group love.

The diagnostic question is:

Is this tradition helping emotion become life-serving, or is it converting emotion into fuel for sacred violence?

9.3 Emotional truth and spiritual distortion

Emotional truth must be honored. A community's fear may be real. Its grief may be real. Its humiliation may be real. Its rage may be understandable. Its love of land, children, ancestors, and memory may be profound.

But emotional truth is not the same as moral authorization.

This distinction is crucial.

A wound may explain a response without justifying it.
A fear may be real without making domination legitimate.

A grief may be sacred without authorizing revenge.
A humiliation may require repair without excusing cruelty.
A love of one's own people may be beautiful without making another people disposable.

Sacred conflict often collapses this distinction. Because our pain is real, our violence is justified. Because our fear is real, our control is necessary. Because our grief is sacred, our revenge is righteous. Because our people suffered, our innocence is permanent.

Life-coherent discernment refuses this collapse.

It says: your wound matters. And your wound does not give you the right to wound without limit.

This is one of the hardest spiritual truths.

It allows suffering to be fully recognized without allowing suffering to become sovereign.

9.4 When emotion becomes captured by revenge

Revenge is grief and rage organized around reversal. It seeks relief by making the other suffer. It promises restoration but usually reproduces the wound.

Revenge feels powerful because it gives pain an object. It converts helplessness into action. It gives the grieving a script. It creates temporary unity. It gives the dead a political role. It makes humiliation feel answerable.

But revenge cannot heal because it remains bound to the injury. It carries the wound forward by distributing it. It does not restore life-capacity; it expands the geography of harm.

In sacred conflict, revenge often disguises itself as justice. This is why discernment is necessary.

Justice seeks repair, accountability, truth, protection, and restored relation.

Revenge seeks suffering in return.

Justice is answerable to life.

Revenge is answerable to the wound.

Justice can protect the humanity of the wrongdoer while holding them accountable.

Revenge requires the wrongdoer's degradation.

Justice can create future.

Revenge keeps the past in command.

Emotional capture by revenge must therefore be de-implemented. Not by denying rage, but by creating pathways where rage becomes truthful accountability and protective courage rather than cruelty.

9.5 Repairing the affective field

Affective repair is the work of restoring emotional conditions in which life-coherent perception and action become possible.

This includes mourning the dead without recruiting them into revenge.

Creating spaces where fear can be spoken without being exploited.

Acknowledging humiliation without turning humiliation into domination.

Teaching children memory without inherited hatred.

Developing rituals where grief crosses boundaries.

Supporting trauma healing as a public peace practice, not merely private therapy.

Training religious and civic leaders to recognize emotional capture.

Creating media practices that do not monetize outrage.

Building institutions that respond to suffering before it radicalizes.

Protecting language from dehumanization.

Repairing the affective field is slow work. It cannot be reduced to slogans. But without it, agreements remain fragile because the emotional structure of violence remains intact.

Peil Kauffman's gift is to show that life-coherent discernment must include the body's moral signals. Peace is not built only in treaties. It is built in nervous systems, families, rituals, classrooms, prayers, memorials, media ecosystems, and the emotional habits through which people learn who matters.

10. Wilber: Waking Up, Growing Up, Cleaning Up, Showing Up

Ken Wilber contributes a developmental and integrative warning. Spiritual experience alone does not guarantee spiritual maturity. A person or community may have profound experiences of unity, devotion, transcendence, revelation, or sacred presence, yet interpret those experiences through narrow, tribal, authoritarian, narcissistic, or unintegrated structures of consciousness.

This is one reason religion can contain genuine spiritual depth and still produce exclusion, domination, or violence.

Wilber's distinction between waking up, growing up, cleaning up, and showing up is useful because it prevents spirituality from being reduced to any single dimension.

Waking up refers to spiritual realization: states of prayer, contemplation, mystical union, nondual awareness, surrender, awe, or sacred presence.

Growing up refers to developmental maturation: the widening of identity, moral scope, cognitive complexity, and capacity to hold multiple perspectives.

Cleaning up refers to shadow work: the integration of trauma, projection, repression, narcissism, unacknowledged fear, shame, and aggression.

Showing up refers to embodiment: bringing spirituality into behavior, relationships, institutions, culture, systems, ecology, and public life.

A life-coherent spirituality requires all four.

Without waking up, religion may become ritual without realization.

Without growing up, spiritual experience may be interpreted through tribal identity, literalism, ethnocentrism, or authoritarian certainty.

Without cleaning up, spirituality may become projection, abuse, bypassing, charismatic domination, or moral hypocrisy.

Without showing up, spirituality may remain private consolation without public repair.

Wilber's contribution is therefore diagnostic. He helps explain why spiritual intensity does not automatically produce peace. A person can pray deeply and still dehumanize the enemy. A community can worship sincerely and still protect abuse. A nation can invoke God and still practice domination. A movement can speak of liberation and still reproduce hierarchy. A contemplative can experience unity and still ignore structural violence.

Spirituality must develop, integrate, and embody.

10.1 Spiritual states and developmental stages

Wilber's distinction between states and stages is especially important. Spiritual states can be temporarily accessed by persons at many developmental levels. A person may experience awe, unity, devotion, surrender, or transcendence. But the interpretation of that experience depends on the developmental structure through which it is understood.

A tribal consciousness may interpret spiritual experience as proof of exclusive group chosenness.

An authoritarian consciousness may interpret it as obedience to hierarchy.

A rational consciousness may interpret it ethically, philosophically, or symbolically.

A pluralistic consciousness may interpret it as inclusion, healing, and diversity.

An integral consciousness may interpret it as a multi-level call to embody love, justice, systems repair, ecological responsibility, and developmental humility.

This helps explain a painful paradox: genuine spiritual experience can coexist with life-incoherent interpretation.

A mystical opening may be real, yet interpreted as superiority. A revelation may be meaningful, yet converted into certainty. A sacred memory may be profound, yet used to exclude. A religious identity may be deeply nourishing, yet used to deny another's legitimacy.

The life-coherent framework therefore asks:

At what level of identity, moral scope, and relational maturity is this spiritual experience being interpreted?

This question does not rank persons for superiority. It protects spirituality from immaturity.

10.2 The danger of awakened states interpreted through immature structures

Awakened states interpreted through immature structures can be dangerous because they combine intensity with narrowness.

The person or community feels touched by the sacred, but the sacred is interpreted through fear, superiority, literalism, purity, or group identity. This gives narrowness spiritual force. It allows exclusion to feel holy, aggression to feel righteous, certainty to feel faithful, and domination to feel divinely authorized.

This is one root of sacred violence.

The problem is not spiritual experience itself. The problem is insufficient development, insufficient shadow integration, and insufficient life-value discernment.

A community may have real devotion but little capacity to take the perspective of outsiders.

A leader may have charismatic spiritual presence but unintegrated narcissism.

A movement may have authentic longing for liberation but insufficient ethical discipline around civilian life.

A nation may have real historical trauma but insufficient capacity to recognize another people's trauma.

A tradition may have profound sacred texts but immature interpretive structures.

Life-coherent discernment must therefore test spiritual experience by its fruits in life.

Does it widen love?

Does it deepen humility?

Does it increase truthfulness about one's own side?

Does it protect vulnerable bodies?

Does it reduce direct, structural, and cultural violence?

Does it increase capacity for repair?

If not, awakening has not yet matured into life-coherence.

10.3 Shadow, projection, and spiritual bypass

Cleaning up is indispensable because unintegrated shadow often appears in spiritual clothing.

Shadow refers to what individuals or communities cannot acknowledge in themselves: fear, aggression, envy, shame, desire for power, guilt, dependency, trauma, hatred, or vulnerability. What cannot be owned internally is often projected externally. The enemy then carries what the self or group cannot bear.

A nation that cannot face its own violence sees only the violence of others.

A religion that cannot face its own cruelty sees cruelty only in unbelievers.

A liberation movement that cannot face its own authoritarian tendencies sees all critique as betrayal.

A state that cannot face domination sees all resistance as irrational hatred.

A community that cannot mourn its grief turns grief into accusation.

Projection is central to conflict because it makes the other carry disowned truth. The other becomes the container of evil. Violence against the other then feels like purification.

Spiritual bypass occurs when spiritual language is used to avoid psychological, moral, material, or political work. It says forgive without truth. Transcend without justice. Be peaceful without accountability. Accept suffering without transforming its causes. Pray without repairing. Unite without naming harm. Trust God while leaving structures of domination untouched.

Life-coherent spirituality refuses bypass.

It insists that forgiveness requires truth.

Peace requires life-conditions.

Unity requires justice.

Prayer requires responsibility.

Repentance requires material repair.

Love requires protection of the vulnerable.

Cleaning up therefore becomes public as well as personal. Communities, religions, nations, and institutions have shadows. They must name what they have denied, projected, hidden, justified, and repeated.

10.4 Integral spirituality and institutional embodiment

Showing up means that spirituality must become embodied across the whole field of life. It must appear not only in prayer halls, meditation cushions, sacred texts, and personal virtue, but also in budgets, borders, hospitals, schools, prisons, food systems, climate policy, media, diplomacy, law, and war.

This is where Wilber's integrative impulse converges with the life-coherent framework.

A spirituality that does not show up institutionally leaves the world to life-incoherent systems.

A religion that does not show up in justice becomes ritualized withdrawal.

A peace ethic that does not show up in security architecture becomes aspiration.

A theology of creation that does not show up in ecological protection becomes poetry without responsibility.

A doctrine of human dignity that does not show up in law and material access becomes abstraction.

A compassion practice that does not show up in the treatment of enemies remains incomplete.

Life-coherent spirituality must therefore be institutional without becoming idolatrous. It must build vessels while remembering that vessels exist to serve life. It must shape systems while remaining corrigible before suffering. It must enter policy without becoming technocratic. It must enter law without becoming punitive. It must enter religion without becoming authoritarian. It must enter peacebuilding without becoming naïve.

The task is not to privatize spirituality.

The task is to embody it without capturing it.

10.5 Life-coherent correction of integral hierarchy

Wilber's framework is powerful, but it also requires correction. Developmental language can become hierarchical, self-congratulatory, or dismissive. People may begin to rank themselves as more evolved, more integral, more enlightened, or more complex. This can reproduce spiritual elitism.

A life-coherent framework therefore submits integral spirituality to the life-value test.

Does the developmental map increase humility?

Does it deepen compassion for those at different stages?

Does it help institutions repair harm?

Does it protect the vulnerable?

Does it reduce violence?

Does it avoid contempt?

Does it remain accountable to embodied life?

If not, it has become another abstraction.

The purpose of developmental discernment is not to classify people from above. It is to understand why spiritual experience, moral identity, trauma, culture, and institutions mature unevenly, and how repair can be supported without humiliation.

Life-coherent development is not ascent away from life.

It is deepening participation in life.

It is the widening of concern, the integration of shadow, the strengthening of responsibility, the protection of bodies, the repair of relations, and the conservation of the life-ground.

Wilber's gift, corrected by life-coherence, is to remind us that spirituality must wake up, grow up, clean up, and show up — but always in service of life, never in service of spiritual ranking.

Together, these five foundations give the framework its discernment architecture.

Maturana asks:

What relational world is being conserved, and can the other appear as legitimate in coexistence?

McMurtry asks:

Does this ultimate concern expand or reduce life-capacity?

Galtung asks:

What direct, structural, or cultural violence is being produced or legitimized?

Peil Kauffman asks:

What emotional truth is being heard, suppressed, or captured by revenge?

Wilber asks:

Is spiritual experience being interpreted through mature development, integrated shadow, and embodied practice?

Together, they allow life-coherent discernment to move beyond slogans. They give it the power to diagnose sacred failure modes, distinguish life-protection from life-destruction, and guide repair.

Part IV — The Life-Coherent Discernment Framework

11. The Core Architecture

The purpose of life-coherent discernment is to make visible what ordinary political, religious, economic, and institutional language often conceals: the ultimate concern silently organizing perception, emotion, loyalty, sacrifice, and action.

Every conflict, institution, movement, religion, state, economy, and culture protects something. Every one of them sacrifices something. Every one of them brings forth a world in which some forms of life are recognized, supported, and grieved, while others are ignored, burdened, humiliated, or made disposable.

Discernment begins by asking what is being protected, what is being sacrificed, and what is being treated as sacred.

This is not an abstract spiritual exercise. It is a method of public diagnosis. It asks whether a system is genuinely protecting life or merely protecting an abstraction that has been made more important than life. It asks whether security protects persons or demands domination. It asks whether liberation restores dignity or authorizes revenge. It asks whether religion serves compassion or institutional power. It asks whether memory dignifies the dead or recruits the living into future violence. It asks whether peace restores life-conditions or merely imposes silence.

The framework is built around one central distinction:

Life-protection must be distinguished from life-destruction carried out in the name of protection.

This distinction is difficult because most life-destroying systems do not describe themselves as life-destroying. They describe themselves as necessary, defensive, sacred, efficient, legal, progressive, patriotic, faithful, liberating, stabilizing, or unavoidable. They speak in the language of good while reproducing conditions of harm.

A life-coherent framework therefore does not begin by accepting the system's self-description. It begins by tracing effects on life-capacity.

Does this arrangement allow persons and communities to live, heal, participate, belong, learn, mourn, repair, and imagine a future?

Does it protect children, civilians, the vulnerable, the life-ground, and future generations?

Does it reduce avoidable harm?

Does it restore dignity where humiliation has been organized?

Does it make truth speakable?

Does it allow the suffering of the other to correct the story of the self?

Does it build conditions in which coexistence becomes safer than domination or revenge?

Where the answer is yes, the pattern may be life-coherent.

Where the answer is no, the pattern must be renamed, interrupted, transformed, or de-implemented.

11.1 Discernment as life-answerable perception

Discernment is life-answerable perception.

It is perception disciplined by the question of life-capacity. It sees not only what is visible to power, but what is borne by bodies. It sees not only the official narrative, but the hidden burden. It sees not only the stated intention, but the recurrent effect. It sees not only the sacred claim, but the lives sacrificed beneath it.

This matters because perception is never neutral. What a society sees depends on the distinctions it has learned to make. If it distinguishes citizens from foreigners but not persons from disposable bodies, it will protect some lives and abandon others. If it distinguishes legal from illegal but not life-enabling from life-destroying, law may become a mask for harm. If it distinguishes believer from unbeliever but not compassion from domination, religion may become culturally violent. If it distinguishes security from threat but not protection from permanent control, war may become endless.

Wrong distinction produces wrong perception.

Wrong perception produces wrong regulation.

Wrong regulation reproduces the wound.

Life-coherent discernment therefore begins before action. It asks whether the categories through which a system understands reality are themselves life-serving.

This is why the framework does not merely ask: what should be done?

It first asks:

What must be seen differently before action can become coherent?

11.2 The life-coherent discernment cycle

The practical architecture can be stated as a cycle:

Recognize the wound → Name the ultimate concern → Expose the sacred distortion → Distinguish life-protection from life-destruction → De-implement harmful patterns → Restore the commons of coexistence → Repair life-capacity → Conserve the conditions of peace.

This cycle is not a rigid sequence. In real situations, these steps overlap, recur, and deepen. Recognition may reveal new wounds. Naming may expose hidden distortions. De-implementation may require new forms of restoration. Repair may uncover further harms. Peace must be conserved through ongoing vigilance.

But the order matters as a discipline.

Recognition prevents denial.
Naming prevents confusion.
Exposure prevents sacred concealment.
Distinction prevents moral collapse.
De-implementation stops reproduction of harm.
Restoration provides life-serving alternatives.
Repair rebuilds capacity.
Conservation protects gains from reversal.

The cycle moves from perception to transformation.

It prevents two common failures. The first is denunciation without repair: naming harm but not building alternatives. The second is reconciliation without truth: calling for peace while leaving life-destroying patterns intact.

Life-coherent discernment requires both courage and construction.

It must name what destroys life.

It must also build what allows life to continue.

11.3 Recognize the wound

The first step is recognition.

A wound that is not recognized cannot be mourned. A wound that cannot be mourned is easily converted into hatred, denial, numbness, or repetition. Recognition is therefore not a sentimental gesture. It is the beginning of repair.

Recognition asks:

Who has been harmed?
What has been lost?
Whose grief has been denied?
Whose fear has been dismissed?
Whose dignity has been violated?
Whose memory has been erased?
Whose life-capacity has been reduced?
Whose future has been narrowed?

In conflict, each side usually demands recognition of its own wound while minimizing the wound of the other. This is understandable, but it is also dangerous. A wound recognized only on one side becomes a weapon. A wound denied on the other side becomes a seed of future violence.

Life-coherent recognition does not require equalizing all harms. It does not erase asymmetry, responsibility, power, or history. It means that no people's suffering is placed outside the field of moral concern.

Recognition must be truthful. It must distinguish kinds of harm. It must name perpetrators, structures, policies, ideologies, and histories. But it must not require dehumanization as the price of solidarity.

The deepest discipline is this:

Recognize the wound without allowing the wound to become sovereign over life.

11.4 Name the ultimate concern

After the wound is recognized, the framework asks what ultimate concern has been activated.

Is the concern survival?

Security?

Liberation?

Land?

Dignity?

Memory?

God?

Sovereignty?

Justice?

Purity?

Revenge?

Institutional preservation?

Civilizational identity?

Economic growth?

National destiny?

Naming the ultimate concern matters because people do not sacrifice for minor preferences. They sacrifice for what has become ultimate. When conflicts become intractable, practical issues have often fused with sacred meaning. Land is no longer only land. Security is no longer only safety. Sovereignty is no longer only governance. Religion is no longer only faith. Memory is no longer only history. The conflict becomes a vessel of ultimacy.

This is why compromise becomes difficult. A compromise over interests may be possible. A compromise over perceived sacred survival feels like betrayal.

Naming the ultimate concern does not solve the problem. But it reveals why the problem cannot be solved by technical bargaining alone.

It also allows discernment to ask:

Is this ultimate concern life-serving?

Has it become distorted?

Does it protect life, or does it now demand sacrifice of life?

Can it be honored in a way that does not make others disposable?

Many ultimate concerns contain a legitimate life-truth. Security is a life-good. Liberation is a life-good. Memory is necessary for dignity. Land can be part of identity and belonging. Religion can carry wisdom. Sovereignty can protect self-determination. Justice is necessary for repair.

The problem begins when a life-good becomes absolutized against the life of others.

That is sacred distortion.

11.5 Expose the sacred distortion

A sacred distortion occurs when a legitimate concern is severed from life-coherence and made absolute.

Security becomes domination.

Liberation becomes revenge.

Memory becomes weapon.

Faith becomes certainty.

Land becomes entitlement.

Sovereignty becomes impunity.

Justice becomes retaliation.

Peace becomes silence.

Resilience becomes adaptation to preventable harm.

Institutional loyalty becomes concealment.

Growth becomes sacrifice of the life-ground.

The task is to expose the distortion without denying the legitimate concern beneath it.

This is crucial. If the legitimate concern is denied, the community will experience the critique as erasure. If the distortion is ignored, harm will continue.

A life-coherent approach says:

Your need for security is real. Domination is the distortion.

Your need for liberation is real. Civilian harm is the distortion.

Your memory is sacred. Revenge is the distortion.

Your faith is precious. Dehumanization is the distortion.

Your land matters. Dispossession is the distortion.
Your grief matters. Weaponized grief is the distortion.
Your identity matters. Supremacy is the distortion.
Your institution matters. Protecting it above victims is the distortion.

This is how the framework creates light rather than heat.

It does not attack the life-truth. It separates the life-truth from the life-destroying pattern that has captured it.

11.6 Distinguish life-protection from life-destruction

The next step is the decisive moral distinction: what protects life, and what destroys life while claiming to protect it?

This distinction must be applied rigorously to every actor.

Life-protection includes shielding civilians, protecting children, preserving water, food, housing, healthcare, and ecological conditions, maintaining truth, defending dignity, preventing humiliation, honoring grief, restraining violence, and creating credible pathways for justice, safety, and future.

Life-destruction includes civilian targeting, hostage-taking, collective punishment, forced displacement, starvation, torture, dehumanizing language, ecological destruction, humiliation, structural deprivation, permanent domination, and narratives that make any people disposable.

The difficulty is that life-destruction often claims protective purpose.

A state may destroy civilian infrastructure in the name of security.

A movement may target civilians in the name of liberation.

A religion may exclude in the name of purity.

An economy may deplete life-ground in the name of prosperity.

A school may humiliate children in the name of excellence.

A health system may burden patients in the name of efficiency.

A peace process may ignore victims in the name of stability.

The life-coherent test asks not only what is intended, but what is produced.

It asks:

Who becomes safer?

Who becomes more insecure?

Who gains agency?

Who loses dignity?

Who is protected?

Who is sacrificed?

Who is heard?
Who is silenced?
Who receives repair?
Who is told to adapt?

No claim of protection is life-coherent if its method predictably destroys the life-capacity of others.

11.7 De-implement harmful patterns

Once the harmful pattern is named, de-implementation becomes possible.

De-implementation means withdrawing legitimacy, resources, repetition, institutional protection, cultural authorization, and spiritual sanction from patterns that reduce life-capacity.

In the domain of sacred conflict, de-implementation requires more than policy reform. It requires the interruption of the symbolic, emotional, institutional, and material systems that reproduce harm.

This may include de-implementing:

dehumanizing language;

enemy absolutization;

rituals that glorify revenge;

school curricula that erase the other's humanity;

media frames that monetize outrage;

religious interpretations that sanctify domination;

security doctrines that normalize collective punishment;

liberation narratives that excuse civilian harm;

laws that institutionalize unequal dignity;

aid systems that relieve suffering without addressing its generator;

diplomatic habits that trade life-conditions for temporary quiet;

and institutional cultures that protect reputation above truth.

De-implementation is difficult because harmful patterns often serve a function. They provide identity, coherence, power, certainty, belonging, and emotional relief. They may also protect real goods in distorted ways. A domination system may claim to provide security. A revenge movement may claim to restore dignity. A captured religion may claim to preserve tradition. A growth economy may claim to reduce poverty.

Therefore, de-implementation must be paired with restoration.

A harmful pattern cannot simply be removed if the life-need beneath it remains unmet.

Security must be restored without domination.

Dignity must be restored without revenge.

Memory must be restored without hatred.

Belonging must be restored without exclusion.

Meaning must be restored without certainty.

Order must be restored without oppression.

Prosperity must be restored without life-ground depletion.

This is why life-coherent transformation is not merely negative. It is reparative.

11.8 Restore the commons of coexistence

The commons of coexistence are the shared conditions that allow different persons and communities to live without needing to dominate, exclude, or destroy one another.

They include material commons: water, food, shelter, healthcare, schools, safe mobility, ecological stability, public infrastructure, and economic livelihood.

They include civic commons: law, rights, participation, accountable institutions, truthful media, public reason, and shared spaces.

They include relational commons: trust, mourning, dialogue, rituals of repair, hospitality, neighborliness, and intercommunal protection.

They include spiritual commons: sacred restraint, reverence for life, moral memory, repentance, forgiveness, humility, and protection of the vulnerable.

Conflict destroys these commons. It damages the material conditions of life, fragments trust, weaponizes memory, corrupts language, exhausts care, and teaches children fear.

Repair therefore requires restoration of commons, not only negotiation of interests.

A ceasefire without water, schools, hospitals, housing, trauma care, rights, truthful memory, and credible security is not yet life-coherent peace. It is only a pause in direct violence.

Restoring the commons of coexistence means building the conditions in which coexistence becomes livable, not merely declared.

11.9 Repair life-capacity

Repair is the restoration of life-capacity after harm.

In the health framework, healing was distinguished from intervention: treatment may be offered from outside, but healing must be completed by the living system. The same applies to communities and societies. External agreements, aid packages, institutional reforms, and legal settlements may support repair, but they are not identical with repair.

Repair requires that life can move again.

Bodies must be safe enough to sleep.

Children must be safe enough to learn.

Families must be safe enough to grieve.

Communities must be safe enough to remember truthfully.

Institutions must be trustworthy enough to mediate conflict.

Religions must be humble enough to repent.

Economies must be just enough to sustain dignity.

Ecologies must be healthy enough to support future.

Former enemies must be human enough to be encountered.

Life-capacity repair includes physical reconstruction, but it is not reducible to rebuilding structures. A house rebuilt without rights remains insecure. A school reopened without hope remains fragile. A hospital supplied without safe access remains insufficient. A border opened without dignity remains unstable. A sacred site protected while bodies remain unprotected remains incoherent.

Repair must occur across levels: biological, psychological, relational, institutional, ecological, cultural, spiritual, and geopolitical.

This is why the framework is demanding. It does not allow peace to be reduced to one instrument.

Peace is not only ceasefire.

Peace is repaired life-capacity.

11.10 Conserve the conditions of peace

The final step is conservation.

Life-coherent peace must be conserved because conflict systems tend to regenerate themselves. Trauma seeks confirmation. Institutions protect their habits. Armed actors protect their relevance. Political leaders exploit fear. Media systems monetize outrage. Sacred narratives re-harden. External powers manipulate insecurity. Economic interests profit from reconstruction and militarization. Humiliation returns if not structurally removed.

Therefore, repair must be protected.

Conserving peace requires ongoing practices:

monitoring life-capacity, not only violence;

protecting civil commons;

tracking dehumanizing language;

maintaining trauma and grief work;

ensuring equal dignity under law;

teaching history without hatred;

holding institutions accountable;

protecting children from inherited enemy images;

ritualizing shared commitments to civilian life;

restraining arms flows and escalation incentives;

and keeping sacred stories open to correction by life.

Peace is not an event. It is a conserved pattern of life-serving relation.

The question is not only how peace begins.

The question is what keeps peace from being recaptured by fear, revenge, domination, and false ultimacy.

12. The Crucial Ultimate Distinctions

The life-coherent discernment framework depends on distinctions. Without distinctions, moral perception becomes blurred. With false distinctions, action becomes destructive. With life-serving distinctions, repair becomes possible.

This section gathers the crucial ultimate distinctions that allow sacred failure modes to be named.

These distinctions are not theoretical decorations. They are instruments of de-implementation.

A society cannot de-implement domination if it cannot distinguish domination from security.

It cannot de-implement revenge if it cannot distinguish revenge from justice.

It cannot de-implement spiritual bypass if it cannot distinguish forgiveness from impunity.

It cannot de-implement sacred violence if it cannot distinguish faith from certainty.

It cannot de-implement forced silence if it cannot distinguish peace from life-coherent coexistence.

Each distinction opens a path of repair.

12.1 Spirituality versus organized religion

Spirituality is the embodied orientation through which persons and communities recognize, honor, and participate in the sacred interdependence of life.

Organized religion is an institutional vessel that carries symbols, rituals, doctrines, moral formation, authority, memory, belonging, and practices of ultimate concern.

Spirituality can exist within organized religion, beyond organized religion, or against captured religion. Organized religion can protect spirituality by giving it communal form, memory, discipline, and continuity. But organized religion can also betray spirituality when the vessel demands that life serve the institution.

The distinction matters because religion must not be dismissed simply because institutions have failed. Nor should religion be romanticized simply because it speaks sacred language.

The life-coherent question is:

Does this religious vessel serve the sacred interdependence of life, or has it become an idol requiring life to serve it?

12.2 Ultimate concern versus idolatry

Ultimate concern is what a person or society treats as finally binding, worthy of loyalty, and deserving of sacrifice.

Idolatry is the absolutization of a finite concern in a way that consumes or disables life.

Security can be an ultimate concern in a life-serving sense because life requires protection. But security becomes idolatry when it justifies permanent domination.

Liberation can be an ultimate concern because dignity requires freedom. But liberation becomes idolatry when it excuses civilian harm.

Religion can orient life toward the sacred. But religion becomes idolatry when doctrine, authority, or institution becomes more protected than living beings.

The life-coherent question is:

What has become ultimate, and what lives does it require us to sacrifice?

12.3 Faith versus certainty

Faith is trustful fidelity to what is ultimately worthy. It can remain open to correction by life, truth, suffering, and mystery.

Certainty is closure. It protects itself against correction. It often turns complexity into binary, humility into weakness, doubt into betrayal, and compassion for the other into disloyalty.

Faith can be courageous.

Certainty often becomes brittle.

Faith can repent.

Certainty protects innocence.

Faith can mourn the suffering of the other.

Certainty explains it away.

In sacred conflict, certainty is dangerous because it allows people to act destructively while feeling righteous.

The life-coherent question is:

Does this conviction remain humble before life, or has it hardened into certainty that can no longer hear the cry of the other?

12.4 Sacred memory versus weaponized memory

Sacred memory dignifies suffering, preserves truth, honors the dead, warns against recurrence, and transmits responsibility.

Weaponized memory uses the suffering of the past to authorize dehumanization, revenge, domination, or permanent innocence in the present.

A people without memory is vulnerable to erasure.

A people trapped in weaponized memory is vulnerable to endless war.

The distinction is therefore not between remembering and forgetting. Forgetting can be violence. The distinction is between memory that serves life and memory that recruits the living into repetition of the wound.

The life-coherent question is:

Does this memory help prevent future suffering, or does it prepare the next generation to reproduce it?

12.5 Security versus domination

Security is the protection of life from threat. It is a real life-good. People cannot flourish without safety.

Domination is the organization of another's insecurity in the name of one's own protection.

The distinction is crucial because domination often speaks the language of security. It claims necessity, deterrence, order, and survival. But when one people's safety depends on another people's humiliation, statelessness, dispossession, deprivation, or permanent fear, security has become life-incoherent.

The life-coherent question is:

Can this security arrangement protect one people without disabling the life-capacity of another?

If not, it is domination.

12.6 Liberation versus revenge

Liberation restores life-capacity, dignity, agency, rights, and participation where they have been denied.

Revenge seeks to make the other suffer in return.

Liberation is future-oriented.

Revenge is wound-bound.

Liberation may require resistance to domination, but life-coherent liberation remains accountable to civilian life, truth, and the future of coexistence.

Revenge erodes these limits.

The life-coherent question is:

Does this struggle restore conditions for life, or does it reproduce the wound through reversed violence?

12.7 Martyrdom versus sacrifice of the vulnerable

Martyrdom, in its noblest sense, is witness: the willingness to suffer rather than betray truth, justice, faith, or love.

The sacrifice of the vulnerable is something different. It occurs when children, civilians, hostages, prisoners, the poor, or future generations are made to bear the cost of a cause they did not freely choose.

Sacred conflict often confuses the two. The suffering of the vulnerable is made meaningful by being folded into a story of honor, destiny, resistance, purification, or national survival.

Life-coherent discernment refuses this confusion.

No cause is made holy by placing the vulnerable in the path of preventable harm.

The life-coherent question is:

Who is choosing the sacrifice, and who is being made to bear it?

12.8 Prophetic religion versus captured religion

Prophetic religion speaks from the life-ground against domination, hypocrisy, cruelty, idolatry, and the abandonment of the vulnerable.

Captured religion uses sacred language to protect power, institution, tribe, nation, purity, or violence.

Prophetic religion can criticize its own side in the name of life.

Captured religion can only defend its own side in the name of loyalty.

Prophetic religion asks what life requires.

Captured religion asks how existing identity can be preserved.

The life-coherent question is:

Does this religious voice protect the vulnerable and tell the truth to power, including its own power?

12.9 Peace as silence versus peace as life-condition

Peace as silence means the absence of visible violence. It may be produced by exhaustion, fear, domination, surveillance, separation, or despair.

Peace as life-condition means the presence of justice, dignity, safety, participation, repair, access to life goods, ecological viability, and legitimate coexistence.

Silence may be necessary as a first step when weapons must stop. But silence is not enough.

A life-coherent peace must answer life-needs.

The life-coherent question is:

Can people live, move, mourn, learn, heal, belong, participate, and imagine a future under this peace?

If not, peace has not yet arrived.

12.10 Forgiveness versus impunity

Forgiveness is the release of endless revenge in a context where truth, accountability, mourning, and repair are possible.

Impunity is the avoidance of accountability.

Forgiveness cannot be commanded by perpetrators. It cannot be demanded by institutions seeking closure. It cannot substitute for justice. It cannot erase memory. It cannot be used to silence victims.

Life-coherent forgiveness is future-opening. It frees persons and communities from being governed entirely by injury. But it does not deny the injury.

The life-coherent question is:

Does this call for forgiveness deepen truth and repair, or does it protect wrongdoers from accountability?

12.11 Reconciliation versus forced coexistence

Reconciliation is the transformation of relationship after truth, accountability, repair, and renewed recognition of dignity.

Forced coexistence is proximity without justice. It may involve shared space, legal arrangements, or political settlements, but the underlying relation remains marked by fear, humiliation, resentment, or domination.

Reconciliation cannot be rushed. It cannot be imposed by external actors for the sake of stability. It cannot be declared while wounds remain denied.

The life-coherent question is:

Has the relation changed, or have people merely been required to live beside unresolved harm?

12.12 Justice versus retaliation

Justice seeks truthful accountability, protection of the vulnerable, restoration of dignity, repair of harm, and prevention of recurrence.

Retaliation seeks to answer injury with injury.

Justice is bounded by life.

Retaliation is governed by the wound.

Justice asks what must be restored.

Retaliation asks who must pay.

The distinction matters because retaliation often wears the clothing of justice. It speaks in moral language, but its satisfaction comes from suffering in return.

The life-coherent question is:

Does this response repair the conditions of life, or does it merely redistribute pain?

13. Failure Modes of Sacred Incoherence

A failure mode is a recurrent pattern by which a system breaks down or produces harm. Sacred incoherence occurs when ultimate concern is severed from life-coherence. The result is not merely error. It is organized life-destruction protected by sacred, moral, political, or institutional meaning.

These failure modes matter because they tell us what must be de-implemented.

Without naming them, action remains vague. With them, discernment becomes precise.

13.1 Sacred insecurity

Sacred insecurity is the central failure mode of this framework.

It occurs when collective trauma, land, identity, religion, sovereignty, memory, and survival fuse into an ultimate concern. In this state, the group does not merely feel unsafe. It feels that its existence, dignity, history, God, homeland, and future are under threat at once.

Sacred insecurity makes compromise feel like betrayal.

It makes the other's security feel like one's own erasure.

It makes violence feel defensive.

It makes domination feel necessary.

It makes revenge feel like restoration.

It makes civilian suffering easier to rationalize.

It makes peace appear dangerous because peace requires relaxing the identity formed around threat.

Sacred insecurity cannot be healed by reassurance alone. It requires material security, recognition, trauma repair, rights, truth, dignity, and credible guarantees that life will not again be made vulnerable to annihilation, domination, or humiliation.

13.2 Weaponized victimhood

Weaponized victimhood occurs when real suffering becomes a license to deny the suffering of others.

This is one of the most difficult failure modes because the wound is often genuine. The suffering may be historical, profound, intergenerational, and inadequately recognized. But once

victimhood becomes weaponized, it creates moral asymmetry: our pain explains everything; their pain counts only when it confirms our innocence.

Weaponized victimhood says:

Because we have suffered, we cannot be perpetrators.

Because we are threatened, our violence is defensive.

Because our dead are sacred, their dead are collateral.

Because our wound is unique, their wound is secondary.

Life-coherent discernment honors victimhood without absolutizing it.

The question is:

Has suffering become a source of compassion and responsibility, or a shield against accountability?

13.3 Redemptive violence

Redemptive violence is the belief that violence can purify, save, avenge, cleanse, liberate, or restore the world.

It appears in religious, nationalist, revolutionary, imperial, and security contexts. It tells communities that violence is not merely regrettable but meaningful. It gives harm a sacred aura.

Redemptive violence is especially dangerous because it converts moral brakes into moral fuel. Restraint becomes weakness. Mercy becomes betrayal. Civilian suffering becomes sacrifice. Death becomes testimony.

Life-coherent discernment rejects redemptive violence.

Violence may sometimes be constrainedly necessary to protect life from immediate harm. But violence is never redemptive in itself. It always damages the field of life. It may prevent worse harm under strict limits, but it cannot become sacred.

The question is:

Is violence being treated as tragic constraint, or as sacred solution?

13.4 Enemy absolutization

Enemy absolutization occurs when the opponent becomes the embodiment of evil rather than a person, people, institution, state, movement, or actor capable of both harm and humanity.

Once the enemy is absolutized, listening becomes betrayal. Compassion becomes weakness. Civilian distinction collapses. Negotiation becomes contamination. The conflict becomes metaphysical.

Enemy absolutization prevents repair because it destroys the very category of legitimate coexistence.

The life-coherent question is:

Can the other still appear as human, even while being held accountable?

If not, the conflict has entered a dangerous field.

13.5 Institutional idolatry

Institutional idolatry occurs when the survival, reputation, authority, or continuity of an institution becomes more protected than the lives it exists to serve.

This can occur in religious institutions, states, militaries, corporations, universities, humanitarian organizations, political parties, health systems, and international bodies.

Signs include concealment of harm, punishment of whistleblowers, denial of victims, protection of leaders, manipulation of law, symbolic apologies without material repair, and appeals to unity that silence truth.

The life-coherent question is:

What lives must be minimized for this institution to preserve its innocence?

13.6 Spiritual bypass

Spiritual bypass uses spiritual language to avoid material, moral, psychological, or political repair.

It calls for forgiveness without accountability.

It calls for peace without justice.

It calls for unity without truth.

It calls for acceptance without transformation of preventable harm.

It calls for transcendence without protection of bodies.

It calls for prayer without responsibility.

Spiritual bypass is dangerous because it appears gentle while preserving violence.

The life-coherent question is:

Is spiritual language opening the path to repair, or protecting the system from repair?

13.7 Selective legality

Selective legality occurs when law is invoked against enemies and suspended for allies or oneself.

It destroys trust in international order, domestic governance, and moral discourse. It teaches communities that law is not a shared restraint but an instrument of power.

In sacred conflict, selective legality intensifies sacred insecurity because each side concludes that only power, not law, can protect it.

The life-coherent question is:

Does law bind all parties, especially when inconvenient?

If not, legality has become a weapon rather than a commons.

13.8 Metric and narrative capture

Metric capture occurs when numbers replace reality.

Narrative capture occurs when stories preselect what suffering means.

Together, they can conceal life-damage. Casualty counts may exclude slow deaths from deprivation. Security metrics may ignore humiliation. Economic indicators may ignore ecological loss. Peace indicators may ignore trauma. Media narratives may turn one group's deaths into tragedy and another's into statistics.

The life-coherent question is:

What is being made visible, what is being made invisible, and who benefits from the frame?

13.9 Peace without life-conditions

Peace without life-conditions is the declaration of peace while the conditions that generate violence remain intact.

It may include ceasefire without freedom, reconstruction without rights, aid without dignity, borders without justice, security without equality, coexistence without trust, or development without memory.

This failure mode is common because it satisfies external actors. It produces a reportable outcome. It lowers visible violence. It allows diplomatic success to be declared.

But it does not repair the field.

The life-coherent question is:

What life-conditions remain absent beneath the peace?

13.10 Memory without mercy

Memory without mercy preserves suffering but not compassion.

It remembers the dead but cannot mourn the dead of others. It teaches history as grievance without responsibility. It transmits identity through injury. It protects the wound from healing because healing might weaken group cohesion.

Mercy does not mean forgetting. It means refusing to let memory become a machine for producing future victims.

The life-coherent question is:

Does memory make us more responsible for life, or more prepared to harm?

13.11 Security without justice

Security without justice produces temporary protection for some by generating insecurity for others.

It may reduce immediate threat while deepening resentment, humiliation, deprivation, and future violence. It is therefore self-defeating. It conserves the conditions of threat even as it claims to manage them.

The life-coherent question is:

Does this security arrangement reduce threat-production across the whole field, or only suppress threat for one side?

13.12 Liberation without civilian protection

Liberation without civilian protection loses life-coherence.

A liberation movement may arise from real oppression, occupation, exclusion, or humiliation. Its cause may contain truth. But if it targets civilians, uses hostages, sacrifices children, or treats noncombatant life as expendable, it reproduces the grammar of domination.

The life-coherent question is:

Does this liberation struggle protect the life-capacity of the vulnerable, including those outside its own group?

If not, it has been captured by the wound.

These failure modes prepare the framework for its most difficult application.

Part V — Sacred Insecurity and Geopolitical Conflict

14. Sacred Insecurity: Trauma, Identity, Land, and Survival

Some conflicts endure not because the issues are unclear, but because the issues have become fused with ultimate concern. Land is not only land. It is homeland, ancestry, promise, identity, burial ground, divine trust, refuge, humiliation, dispossession, and future. Security is not only safety. It is the memory of past vulnerability, the fear of annihilation, the right to live without terror, and the refusal to be made helpless again. Liberation is not only political self-determination. It is the restoration of dignity after domination, the recovery of agency after humiliation, and the demand that a people's life no longer depend on another's permission. Religion is not only belief. It is sacred geography, divine command, covenant, obligation, memory, mourning, law, ritual, and cosmic meaning.

When these dimensions fuse, conflict becomes sacredly charged.

The people involved are not merely negotiating interests. They are defending the conditions under which they believe life remains meaningful, dignified, protected, and continuous. In such conditions, ordinary compromise can feel existentially dangerous. To give ground may feel like betraying the dead. To share land may feel like surrendering sacred inheritance. To recognize the other may feel like weakening one's own claim to exist. To mourn the other's children may feel like disloyalty to one's own. To restrain violence may feel like abandoning survival. To admit harm done by one's own side may feel like handing victory to the enemy.

This is the domain of **sacred insecurity**.

Sacred insecurity occurs when collective trauma, identity, land, religion, sovereignty, memory, and survival become fused into an ultimate concern. It is not ordinary fear. It is fear intensified by history, sanctified by memory, embodied in institutions, transmitted across generations, and organized into political and religious imagination. It tells a people that the world is not safe, that the other cannot be trusted, that power is the only guarantee, that compromise is betrayal, and that violence may be necessary to prevent disappearance.

Sacred insecurity is dangerous because it often contains real life-truths. Peoples have been annihilated. Lands have been taken. Sacred sites have been desecrated. Communities have been displaced. Civilians have been massacred. Minorities have been persecuted. Promises have been broken. International law has been applied selectively. Humanitarian language has been used to conceal domination. Security assurances have failed. Liberation promises have been betrayed.

The wound is often real.

But the wound becomes life-incoherent when it is converted into permission to make another people insecure without limit.

This is the central tragedy of sacred insecurity: each side may experience its own fear as life-protective while experiencing the other's fear as manipulation, ideology, or threat. Each side may see its own violence as defensive and the other's violence as proof of evil. Each side may see its own dead as sacred and the other's dead as tragic but secondary. Each side may insist that peace requires the other to change first.

Sacred insecurity therefore locks conflict into a self-confirming loop:

Wound → fear → enemy image → defensive action → harm to the other → confirmation of the other's fear → retaliation → deeper wound.

The loop can continue for generations unless the underlying structure is discerned and interrupted.

14.1 Why some conflicts become existential

A conflict becomes existential when parties come to believe that defeat, compromise, recognition, or vulnerability threatens not merely their interests, but their continued existence as a people, faith, nation, identity, or moral community.

In ordinary political conflict, parties may disagree over resources, borders, laws, representation, rights, or power. These can be difficult, but they remain negotiable if the parties believe their basic existence is secure. In existential conflict, negotiation itself becomes dangerous because any concession appears to expose the group to erasure.

This changes the moral psychology of the conflict.

Risk tolerance rises.
Cruelty becomes easier to justify.
Civilian suffering is rationalized.
Leaders who promise maximal security gain authority.
Moderates are accused of betrayal.
Grief becomes militarized.
Religious language hardens.
The future narrows into survival.

In this condition, peace proposals often fail because they address arrangements without addressing existential fear. They may offer borders without dignity, autonomy without security, security without justice, recognition without repair, or humanitarian relief without transformation of the conditions that produce threat.

A life-coherent framework asks:

What would make each people's existence feel secure enough that domination or revenge no longer appears necessary?

This is not the same as accepting all security claims. Some claims are distorted. Some are manipulative. Some are used by leaders to preserve power. Some security doctrines manufacture insecurity for others. But even distorted claims often draw power from unhealed fear. The fear must be discerned, not merely dismissed.

A life-coherent peace process therefore requires both firmness and depth.

Firmness says: no fear authorizes civilian targeting, hostage-taking, collective punishment, dehumanization, or permanent domination.

Depth says: if existential fear is not addressed, the conflict will regenerate.

14.2 Trauma as historical memory and political force

Trauma is not only an individual psychological condition. It can become historical memory, cultural atmosphere, political identity, and institutional design. A people may carry trauma through stories, commemorations, silences, rituals, schoolbooks, sacred texts, family histories, refugee status, military service, memorial days, songs, maps, and inherited bodily fear.

Trauma changes time. The past does not remain past. It becomes present as expectation. A present threat is interpreted through past catastrophe. A present humiliation is felt as repetition. A present attack confirms ancestral warning. A present concession feels like the first step toward old disaster.

This is why conflicts rooted in trauma cannot be healed by telling people to move on.

But trauma also cannot be allowed to govern the future unexamined.

Life-coherent discernment makes a crucial distinction:

Trauma must be honored as truth of injury, but it must not become sovereign over moral judgment.

A traumatized people may have real reasons to fear. Yet fear cannot be permitted to erase the humanity of others. A humiliated people may have real reasons to rage. Yet rage cannot be permitted to target civilians. A displaced people may have real reasons to demand restoration. Yet restoration cannot be built through new dispossession. A persecuted people may have real reasons to seek refuge and power. Yet refuge cannot become a system of domination.

Trauma requires mourning, truth, protection, recognition, and repair. If these are absent, trauma seeks substitute forms of regulation: militarization, revenge, separation, denial, sacred certainty, or enemy absolutization.

The life-coherent task is to create conditions where trauma can become memory in service of life rather than memory in service of future violence.

14.3 Land as sacred geography

Land is never only physical territory. It may be home, livelihood, identity, kinship, burial ground, divine promise, ancestral memory, ecological relation, and future. In sacred conflicts, land becomes a living symbol. It carries wounds and hopes that cannot be captured by maps alone.

This is why purely technical territorial solutions often fail. Lines drawn on maps do not automatically heal belonging, fear, humiliation, sovereignty, access, sacred sites, mobility, ecological continuity, or historical grievance.

A life-coherent framework does not dismiss sacred attachment to land. It recognizes that human beings are place-forming and place-formed. People do not live in abstract space. They live in named places, remembered places, loved places, promised places, lost places, occupied places, ruined places, and longed-for places.

But sacred geography becomes life-incoherent when attachment to land overrides the life of those who also belong to it.

Land cannot be honored by desecrating bodies.
Sacred sites cannot be protected by humiliating worshippers.
Homeland cannot be secured by making others homeless.
Ancestral memory cannot justify future dispossession.
Divine promise cannot become permission to erase living communities.

The life-coherent question is:

How can sacred attachment to land be honored without making another people's life, dignity, access, memory, or future disposable?

This question does not remove political difficulty. But it changes the moral frame. It asks land claims to become answerable to life.

14.4 Sovereignty as life-protection and life-threat

Sovereignty is ambiguous. At its best, sovereignty protects collective agency. It allows a people to govern its life, protect its culture, secure its institutions, defend its rights, and participate in shaping its future. For peoples who have experienced domination, occupation, colonialism, persecution, or statelessness, sovereignty can be a life-good.

But sovereignty can also become life-threatening when it becomes impunity. A state may invoke sovereignty to avoid accountability for harming minorities, suppressing dissent, occupying others, destroying ecosystems, or violating international law. A people may seek sovereignty as protection but then organize sovereignty as domination. A security state may treat any limit on its power as threat.

Life-coherent discernment distinguishes sovereignty as collective life-protection from sovereignty as unchecked power.

The question is:

Does this sovereignty protect life-capacity within and beyond its borders, or does it create a protected zone for domination?

No sovereignty is life-coherent if it requires the abandonment of universal life-claims. Statehood, autonomy, self-determination, and national survival matter because they are meant to protect life. When they become instruments for disabling life, they must be corrected by the very life-value that gives them legitimacy.

14.5 Religion, nation, and the fusion of ultimacies

Sacred insecurity intensifies when religion and nation fuse. Religion gives national identity cosmic depth. Nation gives religion institutional power. Together they can create powerful forms of belonging, moral courage, sacrifice, and continuity. They can also create sacred nationalism: the belief that a people, land, state, army, leader, or historical mission carries divine or ultimate significance beyond moral correction.

Sacred nationalism is not confined to one tradition. It can appear wherever a collective identity is lifted beyond accountability to life. It appears when critique of the state is treated as betrayal of God, when military action is treated as sacred duty, when territory is treated as divinely exclusive, when outsiders are treated as pollutants, or when the suffering of others is minimized because the sacred story of the nation must remain innocent.

The fusion of religion and nation becomes especially dangerous when it closes the tradition against prophetic critique. Every religious tradition contains resources for humility, compassion, repentance, and protection of the vulnerable. But when religion becomes captured by nation, these resources may be subordinated to loyalty.

The life-coherent question is:

Has religion widened the nation's responsibility to life, or has the nation captured religion to sanctify its own power?

A life-coherent spirituality may love a people, honor a land, preserve memory, and sustain national dignity. But it must never allow nation to become God.

14.6 Why compromise becomes betrayal

Compromise becomes betrayal when practical concessions are interpreted as violations of ultimate concern.

If land is sacred destiny, sharing it may feel like desecration.

If security is the only guarantee against annihilation, reducing control may feel suicidal.

If armed resistance is the only remaining symbol of dignity, disarmament may feel like surrender to humiliation.

If memory is organized around unhealed injury, acknowledging the other's wound may feel like weakening one's own.

If religion has sacralized exclusive entitlement, coexistence may feel like disobedience.

This is why peace processes must work at the level of meaning, not only arrangements.

A successful compromise must be narratable inside each people's sacred and historical world. It must not require one side to experience itself as erased, humiliated, or morally defeated. This does not mean each side gets everything it wants. It means the transition must be framed as protection of life, restoration of dignity, and fidelity to a deeper moral obligation rather than abandonment of identity.

The life-coherent task is to make compromise intelligible as faithfulness to life.

Security concessions must be paired with credible protection.

Liberation concessions must be paired with real dignity and rights.

Territorial compromises must be paired with access, memory, and recognition.

Religious compromises must be paired with sacred protection for all.

Legal compromises must be paired with truth and accountability.

Humanitarian compromises must be paired with political repair.

Compromise fails when it asks people to surrender ultimate meaning without offering a deeper life-coherent meaning in its place.

14.7 Why violence becomes self-confirming

Violence in sacred insecurity becomes self-confirming because every act of harm appears to prove the story that justified the prior act of harm.

An attack confirms the need for security.

A crackdown confirms the need for resistance.

A massacre confirms the enemy's evil.

A blockade confirms the enemy's hostility.

A rocket confirms the need for force.

A bombing confirms the need for revenge.

A hostage confirms fear.

A prison confirms humiliation.

A settlement confirms dispossession.
An assassination confirms existential threat.

The cycle is not sustained only by hatred. It is sustained by confirmation. Each side's action confirms the other side's deepest fear. This is why violence is so difficult to interrupt: it functions as evidence within the other's sacred insecurity system.

Life-coherent discernment asks:

What action would interrupt the other's worst story about us without abandoning protection of life?

This is a profound strategic and spiritual question.

It does not ask for weakness. It asks for actions that reduce threat-production rather than intensify it. It asks for forms of protection that do not confirm the other's narrative of annihilation, domination, humiliation, or disposability. It asks for courage strong enough not to feed the loop.

15. The Middle East as Stress Test

The Middle East, and especially the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, is a decisive stress test for this framework because it concentrates many of the world's deepest sacred and geopolitical fault lines: land, trauma, displacement, occupation, antisemitism, Islamophobia, colonial memory, refugeehood, sacred geography, statehood, statelessness, security, resistance, terrorism, military power, regional rivalry, international law, great-power involvement, religious identity, and intergenerational grief.

If a life-coherent framework cannot bring clarity here, it remains incomplete.

The aim is not to offer a partisan peace plan, nor to stand above the conflict with false neutrality. The aim is to test whether life-coherent discernment can hold multiple truths without collapsing into propaganda, moral equivalence, despair, or abstraction.

The framework begins with a refusal:

Do not deny either people's wound. Do not sanctify either people's violence.

This refusal is the doorway to discernment.

Palestinian life-truths must be named: dispossession, occupation, displacement, blockade, statelessness, humiliation, unequal rights, restricted movement, settlement expansion, civilian suffering, interrupted development, and denied self-determination are life-destroying.

Israeli and Jewish life-truths must also be named: antisemitism, pogroms, the Holocaust, regional hostility, terrorism, hostage-taking, rocket fire, existential insecurity, and the fear of annihilation are life-destroying.

To name one truth does not erase the other. To name one wound does not authorize the weaponization of that wound. To recognize one people's fear does not justify making another people permanently insecure. To recognize one people's dispossession does not justify attacks on civilians. To recognize historical trauma does not sanctify domination. To recognize oppression does not sanctify revenge.

The life-coherent task is to hold these truths in a frame where life remains the criterion.

15.1 Why this conflict tests the framework

This conflict tests the framework because ordinary categories repeatedly fail.

If it is framed only as terrorism, occupation disappears.

If it is framed only as occupation, Jewish historical trauma and security fear disappear.

If it is framed only as religious conflict, political dispossession and state power disappear.

If it is framed only as colonial conflict, Jewish vulnerability and historical persecution disappear.

If it is framed only as security, Palestinian dignity and self-determination disappear.

If it is framed only as resistance, civilian protection disappears.

If it is framed only as ancient hatred, responsibility disappears.

If it is framed only as diplomacy, sacred memory and trauma disappear.

Every partial frame can become a form of blindness.

The life-coherent framework does not ask us to abandon these frames. It asks us to see their partiality and submit each to the test of life-capacity.

The question becomes:

What does each frame reveal, what does it conceal, and what life-destroying pattern does it risk protecting?

Only then can discernment create more light than heat.

15.2 Honoring wounds without sanctifying violence

Honoring a wound means recognizing its reality, dignity, depth, and claim upon repair.

Sanctifying violence means allowing the wound to authorize harm without moral limit.

The distinction is decisive.

Jewish historical trauma must be honored. Antisemitism is not imaginary. The Holocaust is not abstract history. The fear of annihilation is not irrational in a world where Jewish life has repeatedly been targeted.

But honoring Jewish trauma cannot mean sanctifying policies or military actions that make Palestinian life disposable.

Palestinian trauma must be honored. Dispossession, occupation, displacement, and humiliation are not rhetorical devices. They are lived conditions that disable life-capacity across generations.

But honoring Palestinian trauma cannot mean sanctifying attacks on civilians, hostage-taking, or ideologies that make Jewish life disposable.

The life-coherent position is therefore demanding because it refuses the comfort of one-sided innocence.

It says:

Your wound matters.

Your wound does not make you incapable of harming.

Your wound gives you a claim to protection and repair.

Your wound does not give you unlimited moral permission.

This is the difference between solidarity and sacred capture.

15.3 Palestinian life-truths and life-destroying patterns

The Palestinian life-truth is that no people can flourish under conditions of dispossession, occupation, statelessness, blockade, restricted movement, repeated displacement, humiliation, and denial of meaningful self-determination. These conditions reduce life-capacity. They burden bodies, families, education, healthcare, livelihoods, culture, dignity, and future possibility. They produce trauma not as private pathology but as a recurrent organism–niche injury.

A life-coherent framework must name this without evasion.

Palestinian life-capacity requires freedom from domination, access to land and livelihood, political agency, movement, safety, education, healthcare, cultural continuity, ecological viability, rights, dignity, and a credible future. Humanitarian relief cannot substitute for these. Aid cannot replace agency. Reconstruction cannot replace freedom. Managing suffering cannot replace ending the structures that reproduce suffering.

At the same time, the Palestinian cause can be captured by life-destroying patterns. Armed groups may target civilians, take hostages, use civilian suffering strategically, cultivate martyrdom without protecting the vulnerable, suppress internal dissent, instrumentalize grief, or teach that Jewish life is illegitimate. These patterns are not life-coherent resistance. They reproduce the grammar of disposability.

The life-coherent distinction is:

Palestinian liberation is a life-good. The targeting or instrumentalization of civilians is a life-destroying distortion.

Both statements must be held together.

If the first is denied, domination is concealed.

If the second is denied, revenge is sanctified.

15.4 Israeli life-truths and life-destroying patterns

The Israeli and Jewish life-truth is that no people can flourish under conditions of existential fear, antisemitic hatred, terrorism, hostage-taking, rocket fire, regional hostility, or the memory of repeated persecution and attempted annihilation. Jewish security is not an abstraction. It is a life-good. The protection of Jewish life is a non-negotiable life-coherent obligation.

A life-coherent framework must name this without evasion.

Israeli life-capacity requires safety from attack, recognition of Jewish historical trauma, protection of civilians, freedom from antisemitism, secure communal life, accountable institutions, and a credible future in which Jewish life is not again dependent on the goodwill of hostile powers.

At the same time, Israeli security can be captured by life-destroying patterns. Military occupation, settlement expansion, collective punishment, dehumanizing language, unequal rights, forced displacement, indefinite blockade, destruction of civilian infrastructure, impunity for settler violence, and political theologies of exclusive entitlement are not life-coherent security. They reproduce Palestinian insecurity and therefore reproduce threat.

The life-coherent distinction is:

Jewish and Israeli security is a life-good. Permanent domination of Palestinian life is a life-destroying distortion.

Both statements must be held together.

If the first is denied, Jewish fear is erased.

If the second is denied, domination is sanctified.

15.5 The regionalization of sacred insecurity

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict does not exist in isolation. It is embedded in a wider regional field involving neighboring states, non-state armed groups, sectarian dynamics, great-power alliances, arms flows, energy politics, maritime routes, proxy warfare, ideological rivalries, and religious symbolism. The suffering of Palestinians and Israelis is repeatedly drawn into broader geopolitical projects.

This regionalization intensifies sacred insecurity.

Local wounds become symbols in regional struggles. Regional actors invoke Palestine, Jerusalem, Israel, resistance, Islam, Judaism, Western power, colonial memory, or anti-terrorism

to advance wider aims. External powers claim stability while supplying weapons. Armed groups claim solidarity while using civilian populations as strategic terrain. States claim sovereignty while intervening through proxies. The conflict becomes more than itself.

A life-coherent framework asks:

Who benefits from keeping the wound open?

This question is not cynical. It is diagnostic. Some actors gain legitimacy, leverage, funding, ideological coherence, military relevance, or domestic distraction from unresolved conflict. Peace may threaten those whose power depends on sacred insecurity.

Regional repair therefore requires more than bilateral agreement. It requires de-escalation architecture, restraints on proxy warfare, arms-flow accountability, non-aggression commitments, economic reconstruction tied to rights, shared protection of sacred sites, and regional narratives that stop using the suffering of peoples as symbolic fuel.

15.6 International complicity and selective legality

International actors often speak the language of law, rights, peace, security, democracy, sovereignty, and humanitarian concern. Yet these principles are frequently applied selectively. Allies receive protection. Enemies receive condemnation. Some civilian deaths are mourned publicly. Others are explained strategically. Some violations trigger sanctions. Others trigger diplomatic language. Some occupations are named. Others are managed. Some attacks are terrorism. Others are collateral damage.

Selective legality is one of the great engines of sacred insecurity.

When law appears selective, communities lose faith that justice can protect them. They conclude that only power matters. This strengthens militarization, cynicism, radicalization, and revenge. It also corrodes the moral authority of international institutions.

A life-coherent framework insists that law must function as a civil commons. It must bind all parties, especially when inconvenient. International humanitarian law, human rights law, refugee protections, prohibitions on collective punishment, protections for civilians, duties toward prisoners and hostages, and rules against annexation or aggression cannot be applied as instruments of alliance.

The life-coherent question is:

Does the international order protect life consistently, or does it protect power selectively?

Where legality is selective, peace is weakened.

15.7 The failure of false binaries

The conflict repeatedly recruits observers into false binaries:

Pro-Israeli or pro-Palestinian.

Security or justice.

Condemn terrorism or condemn occupation.

Recognize Jewish trauma or recognize Palestinian trauma.

Support Israel's right to exist or support Palestinian self-determination.

Oppose antisemitism or oppose Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism.

Mourn Israeli victims or mourn Palestinian victims.

These binaries are life-incoherent when they force recognition of one life-truth at the expense of another.

A life-coherent framework refuses them.

It is pro-life, which means it must be pro-civilian, pro-child, pro-dignity, pro-security, pro-freedom, pro-accountability, pro-truth, pro-rights, pro-memory, pro-future, and anti-disposability.

This does not mean neutrality between all actions. It means fidelity to the criterion by which actions are judged.

Civilian targeting must be condemned whoever does it.

Collective punishment must be condemned whoever does it.

Hostage-taking must be condemned whoever does it.

Dispossession must be condemned whoever does it.

Dehumanization must be condemned whoever does it.

Antisemitism must be condemned.

Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism must be condemned.

Occupation and domination must be condemned.

Annihilationist ideology must be condemned.

The point is not balance for its own sake. The point is coherence.

Life does not become less sacred when it belongs to the other side.

15.8 The life-coherent question: what must never again be sacrificed?

Every conflict has explicit demands. But the deepest peace question is:

What must never again be sacrificed?

For Israelis and Jews, the answer includes Jewish life, safety, dignity, memory, and freedom from annihilationist threat.

For Palestinians, the answer includes Palestinian life, dignity, homeland, agency, rights, and freedom from domination and displacement.

For both, the answer must include children, civilians, truth, mourning, water, homes, hospitals, schools, worship, law, memory, and future generations.

A life-coherent peace must establish sacred minimums:

No child is disposable.

No civilian is merely collateral.

No hostage is a symbol.

No prisoner is outside dignity.

No people exists only by permission of another.

No security can require permanent domination.

No liberation can require civilian terror.

No sacred story can require the erasure of another people's future.

No memory can be honored by producing new victims.

These minimums do not solve every political question. But without them, no political solution can become life-coherent.

16. What Must Be De-Implemented

A life-coherent framework becomes practical when it can name what must stop being reproduced. De-implementation is not an afterthought. It is central to repair. If life-destroying patterns remain intact, new policies become decorations on the old wound.

In sacred conflict, de-implementation must occur at multiple levels: military, political, legal, institutional, educational, religious, narrative, emotional, and regional. It must address direct violence, structural violence, and cultural violence together. It must stop immediate harm while also interrupting the systems that make future harm likely.

De-implementation asks:

- What practices must lose legitimacy?
- What narratives must stop forming children?
- What policies must stop producing humiliation?
- What religious interpretations must stop sanctifying violence?
- What security doctrines must stop manufacturing insecurity?
- What liberation strategies must stop sacrificing civilians?
- What international double standards must stop corroding law?
- What institutional incentives must stop rewarding escalation?

The purpose is not punishment alone. It is removal of the generators of future violence.

16.1 Hostage-taking and civilian targeting

Hostage-taking and deliberate attacks on civilians must be de-implemented without qualification.

They are life-incoherent because they convert vulnerable persons into instruments of strategy. They destroy the distinction between combatant and noncombatant. They turn fear into leverage. They damage not only the immediate victims, but the entire moral field in which coexistence might later be rebuilt.

No liberation struggle becomes more just by taking hostages.

No resistance becomes life-coherent by targeting civilians.

No sacred cause is honored by making unarmed persons bear its burden.

Life-coherent de-implementation requires clear religious, political, educational, and cultural delegitimation of these practices. It also requires pathways for prisoner justice, accountability, and political agency so that hostage-taking does not continue to be framed as the only available leverage.

The moral boundary must be absolute:

Civilians are not instruments.

16.2 Collective punishment and starvation

Collective punishment must be de-implemented because it treats populations as extensions of armed actors or regimes. It destroys the moral distinction between persons and the powers that claim to represent them. It produces life-damage across children, the elderly, the sick, the disabled, pregnant women, families, and communities that may have no control over military decisions.

Starvation, deprivation of water, destruction of health infrastructure, obstruction of humanitarian access, and policies that make civilian survival precarious are not acceptable instruments of security.

They are life-destroying.

A life-coherent framework insists that civilian life-support systems are sacred minimums. Food, water, medicine, sanitation, shelter, electricity for hospitals, safe passage, and care are not bargaining chips. They are conditions of life.

The de-implementation question is:

What military, political, and administrative practices must end so that civilians are never again made to suffer as a population for the actions of some?

16.3 Permanent occupation and settlement expansion

Permanent occupation must be de-implemented because it suspends the life-capacity of a people under another's control. It organizes movement, land, law, economy, security, planning, and future through unequal power. Even when justified as temporary security, occupation becomes life-incoherent when it hardens into a permanent structure.

Settlement expansion intensifies this because it changes facts on the ground in ways that fragment territory, deepen humiliation, displace communities, and make political self-determination less viable. It converts security into territorial entrenchment.

A life-coherent approach distinguishes legitimate security concerns from domination. It asks:

What would protect Israeli civilians without permanently disabling Palestinian life-capacity?

Occupation and settlement expansion cannot be treated as neutral background conditions. They are active generators of sacred insecurity.

16.4 Annihilationist ideology and dehumanizing theology

Annihilationist ideology must be de-implemented wherever it appears. Any ideology that denies a people's right to exist, portrays civilians as legitimate targets, or imagines peace through erasure is life-incoherent.

Dehumanizing theology must also be de-implemented. Sacred language that portrays the other as cursed, demonic, subhuman, pollutant, invader by essence, or outside divine concern prepares the moral field for violence.

The de-implementation of such language requires religious courage. It must come not only from outside critics but from within traditions. Clergy, scholars, teachers, parents, and community leaders must refuse interpretations that make God the author of disposability.

The life-coherent question is:

Does this theology protect the dignity of the other, or does it prepare the faithful to harm without remorse?

16.5 Militarized sacred identity

Militarized sacred identity occurs when belonging to a religious, national, or liberation community becomes inseparable from readiness to fight, kill, dominate, die, or sacrifice others. It forms children and citizens into guardians of sacred injury rather than protectors of shared life.

This must be de-implemented because it narrows imagination. It teaches that dignity comes through force, that memory requires militancy, that masculinity requires domination, that faithfulness requires enmity, and that peace is weakness.

De-implementation requires alternative rites of courage.

Communities need ways to honor bravery without glorifying violence. They need rituals for protecting civilians, rescuing enemies, telling truth, refusing unlawful orders, feeding the hungry, rebuilding homes, caring for trauma, and crossing boundaries. Sacred identity must be re-formed around life-protection rather than enemy destruction.

16.6 Proxy warfare and regional escalation

Proxy warfare must be de-implemented because it uses local populations as instruments of wider geopolitical rivalry. It allows external actors to pursue strategic goals while others bear the devastation. It turns territories into battlefields, civilians into leverage, and unresolved wounds into regional fuel.

Regional escalation also traps local actors inside larger calculations. Even when communities desire relief, external alignments may reward continued conflict. Arms flows, ideological patronage, media mobilization, and regional competition make repair harder.

Life-coherent de-implementation requires regional non-aggression commitments, arms restraint, accountability for external support to civilian-harming actors, and diplomatic architectures that reduce the strategic value of keeping conflicts unresolved.

The question is:

Who is using this wound, and what incentives keep the wound open?

16.7 Revenge politics

Revenge politics must be de-implemented because it keeps the wound in command. It organizes public life around retaliation, humiliation of the other, symbolic payback, and refusal of future.

Revenge politics can appear democratic when it mobilizes public anger. It can appear moral when it speaks in the language of justice. It can appear religious when it invokes sacred memory. But its center is not repair. Its center is returned suffering.

De-implementing revenge politics requires institutions capable of truth and accountability. Where justice is absent, revenge becomes emotionally plausible. Where grief is unheld, revenge becomes socially available. Where humiliation is continuous, revenge becomes identity.

Thus revenge cannot be de-implemented by moral condemnation alone. It must be displaced by credible justice, mourning, recognition, and restoration of agency.

16.8 Selective legality

Selective legality must be de-implemented because it destroys the shared normative field required for peace. If law is only applied to enemies, it becomes another weapon. If allies are exempt, legality becomes domination by other means.

Life-coherent legality requires consistency:

civilian protection applies to all civilians;

hostage-taking is always prohibited;

torture is always prohibited;

collective punishment is always prohibited;

occupation and annexation must be judged by law, not alliance;

war crimes must be investigated regardless of perpetrator;

humanitarian access cannot be politicized;

rights cannot depend on identity.

The international order cannot become life-coherent unless law becomes a commons rather than an instrument of selective power.

16.9 Security without justice

Security without justice must be de-implemented because it is unstable and morally incoherent. It suppresses symptoms while generating causes. It may reduce immediate attacks but deepens resentment, humiliation, and future threat. It protects one group by producing life-disabling conditions for another.

Security must be redefined as shared threat reduction across the whole field.

This does not mean identical risks or symmetrical responsibilities. It means that no security arrangement is durable if it depends on making another people's life unlivable.

Life-coherent security asks:

Are civilians protected on all sides?

Are rights secured?

Are grievances addressable without violence?

Are armed actors constrained?

Are humiliating controls reduced?

Are communities able to build futures?

Are children formed for coexistence rather than fear?

Security becomes life-coherent only when it reduces the production of future threat.

16.10 Humanitarian relief without political repair

Humanitarian relief is indispensable. Food, water, medicine, shelter, sanitation, trauma care, and protection save lives. But humanitarian relief becomes life-incoherent when it substitutes for political repair.

If aid repeatedly treats wounds while the machinery producing wounds remains intact, humanitarianism risks becoming a management system for preventable suffering. This does not mean aid should stop. It means aid must be joined to transformation of the conditions that make aid repeatedly necessary.

The life-coherent question is:

What political, legal, economic, and security arrangements must change so that humanitarian relief becomes less necessary over time?

Relief preserves life now.

Repair changes the conditions that keep destroying it.

Both are required.

17. What Must Be Restored and Guaranteed

De-implementation removes life-destroying patterns. But removal is not enough. Harmful systems often persist because they meet distorted versions of real needs. Domination may claim to meet the need for security. Armed resistance may claim to meet the need for dignity. Sacred certainty may claim to meet the need for meaning. Revenge may claim to meet the need for justice. Institutional secrecy may claim to meet the need for unity.

If the real need is not restored in life-coherent form, the harmful pattern returns.

Restoration is therefore the positive side of de-implementation. It asks what must be rebuilt, protected, guaranteed, and conserved so that life no longer depends on violence, domination, humiliation, or denial.

17.1 Civilian protection as sacred minimum

Civilian protection is the sacred minimum of life-coherent conflict ethics.

No political objective, religious claim, security doctrine, liberation movement, or military strategy can override the basic protection of civilians. This includes children, the elderly, the sick, disabled persons, pregnant women, medical workers, journalists, humanitarian workers, prisoners, hostages, displaced persons, and all noncombatants.

Civilian protection must be restored not only as a legal norm, but as a sacred moral boundary.

Communities must be formed to feel civilian harm as intolerable even when the civilians belong to the other side. Religious leaders must teach it. Schools must teach it. Media must reinforce it. Law must enforce it. Military systems must internalize it. Families must transmit it.

The question is:

Can the child of the other interrupt our strategy?

If not, the sacred has been severed from life.

17.2 Humanitarian restoration as peace infrastructure

Humanitarian restoration is not merely emergency relief. It is peace infrastructure.

Water systems, sanitation, hospitals, rehabilitation, mental health care, housing, food systems, schools, electricity, safe transport, and communication networks are not secondary to peace. They are conditions through which peace becomes livable.

A population deprived of life-support cannot be expected to enter reconciliation. A traumatized child cannot be asked to become a citizen of peace while hungry, homeless, bereaved, and afraid.

A family cannot trust political promises while lacking water, medicine, and shelter. A community cannot de-escalate while its wounded are untreated and its dead unmourned.

Humanitarian restoration must therefore be protected from military exploitation and political delay. It must be rapid, accountable, equitable, and linked to longer-term rights and dignity.

The life-coherent principle is:

Repair the conditions of life as the first language of peace.

17.3 Rights-based self-determination

Self-determination must be restored as a life-good. Peoples require meaningful agency over the conditions of their collective life. Without it, dignity is damaged and political frustration becomes chronic.

But self-determination must be rights-based. It cannot be built on the erasure, domination, or disposability of another people. A people's freedom must not require another people's annihilation or permanent subordination.

Life-coherent self-determination asks:

Can each people participate meaningfully in shaping its future?

Can political agency be exercised without domination?

Can sovereignty, autonomy, confederation, shared governance, or other arrangements protect life-capacity for all affected?

Can rights travel with persons rather than disappear at borders, checkpoints, identity categories, or administrative lines?

The specific political form must be negotiated historically. The life-coherent criterion is that it must restore agency, dignity, security, and future without creating new structures of disposability.

17.4 Mutual recognition without humiliation

Mutual recognition is not merely diplomatic acknowledgment. It is the recognition that the other people's existence, dignity, memory, fear, and future are legitimate.

Recognition without dignity is insufficient. A people may be recognized formally while humiliated materially. A state may be recognized while its citizens live in fear. A people may receive symbolic acknowledgment while lacking rights, movement, land, security, or agency.

Mutual recognition must therefore be embodied.

It must appear in maps, schools, media, law, mobility, worship access, public language, political agreements, memorial practices, and everyday treatment. It must allow each people to tell its story without erasing the other's.

The life-coherent question is:

Can recognition occur without requiring either people to narrate itself as the other's negation?

17.5 Reciprocal security guarantees

Security must be restored through credible reciprocal guarantees. Not symmetrical slogans, but concrete arrangements that protect civilians and reduce threat-production for all parties.

For Israelis, this means protection from attacks, hostage-taking, rockets, militias, and annihilationist threats.

For Palestinians, this means protection from occupation, settler violence, collective punishment, displacement, arbitrary detention, blockade, and military domination.

For the region, this means de-escalation of proxy warfare, arms restraints, non-aggression commitments, and international guarantees that do not become tools of domination.

Reciprocal security must be monitored, enforceable, and tied to rights. Security cannot be deferred until final peace. Nor can rights be deferred until perfect security. The two must be built together.

The life-coherent principle is:

Every reduction in domination must be matched by credible reduction in threat; every reduction in armed threat must be matched by credible restoration of rights and dignity.

This is how de-implementation becomes safe enough to begin.

17.6 Trauma repair and moral injury work

Trauma repair must be restored as a public peace necessity.

Conflict wounds nervous systems, families, communities, moral imagination, and intergenerational memory. Trauma shapes perception of threat. Moral injury shapes guilt, shame, rage, and despair. Humiliation shapes identity. Bereavement shapes politics. Children inherit what adults cannot metabolize.

A life-coherent peace process must therefore include trauma healing, grief work, psychosocial care, moral injury support, community mourning, family reconstruction, and culturally grounded rituals of repair.

This is not soft work. It is security work at the deepest level.

Unhealed trauma becomes future threat perception.

Unmourned grief becomes revenge.

Unaddressed humiliation becomes recruitment.

Unacknowledged guilt becomes denial.

Unhealed moral injury becomes numbness or extremism.

Peace requires nervous systems that no longer expect annihilation at every encounter.

17.7 Truth, mourning, and accountability

Truth must be restored because lies conserve violence.

Mourning must be restored because ungrieved loss becomes weaponized.

Accountability must be restored because impunity teaches repetition.

These three belong together. Truth without mourning may become accusation. Mourning without truth may become sentimental. Accountability without mourning may become legalism. Mourning without accountability may become resignation. Truth without accountability may become documentation without transformation.

Life-coherent repair asks communities to tell the truth about harm done to them and harm done by them. This is among the hardest requirements of peace. Every side prefers its own innocence. But innocence defended by denial becomes future violence.

The question is:

Can each community allow the suffering of the other to enter its moral memory without erasing its own?

This is the beginning of shared future.

17.8 Sacred protection of children

Children are the clearest test of life-coherence.

Any framework, religion, state, movement, economy, or war that cannot protect children has failed at the root. Children carry the future in their bodies. They also carry the unresolved wounds of adults. When children are killed, maimed, orphaned, displaced, starved, terrorized, indoctrinated into hatred, or denied education, the future itself is attacked.

Sacred protection of children must therefore become a non-negotiable principle across all sides.

Children must not be targets.

Children must not be shields.

Children must not be symbols for revenge.

Children must not be trained to inherit hatred.

Children must not be deprived of water, food, shelter, medicine, education, play, family, or future.

A peace process that does not begin with children is morally disordered.

The life-coherent question is:

What would change if every policy, operation, sermon, schoolbook, border, and negotiation were judged first by what it does to children?

17.9 Regional non-aggression architecture

The conflict cannot be fully repaired without regional architecture. Local peace will remain vulnerable if surrounding systems continue to reward escalation.

A life-coherent regional architecture would include non-aggression commitments, limits on proxy warfare, arms-flow accountability, protection of maritime and energy routes without militarized domination, mechanisms for crisis communication, shared economic and ecological projects, protection of religious sites, refugee rights, and multilateral guarantees tied to international law.

The goal is not utopian harmony. The goal is to reduce the incentives and pathways through which sacred insecurity becomes regional war.

Regional actors must be asked:

Are you protecting life, or using another people's wound to advance power?

This question must apply to all.

17.10 Institutions answerable to life

Finally, institutions must be restored as life-answerable vessels.

States, religious bodies, international organizations, courts, schools, media, militaries, humanitarian agencies, and civil society organizations all shape the field of conflict. They can either conserve sacred insecurity or support repair.

An institution is life-answerable when it can be corrected by the lives it affects.

It listens to victims.

It protects dissent.

It applies law consistently.

It measures life-capacity, not only performance.

It refuses dehumanizing language.

It repairs harm materially.

It protects the vulnerable.

It tells the truth about its own failures.

It remains humble before suffering.

Institutional repair is essential because peace cannot depend only on goodwill. It must be embodied in durable forms that make life-coherent action easier, safer, and repeatable.

The final question is:

What institutions can conserve peace when fear returns?

Because fear will return. Grief will return. Provocations will occur. Extremists will attempt to reopen the wound. Political leaders may exploit insecurity. Sacred narratives may harden again.

Peace becomes durable only when institutions, rituals, laws, education, and material conditions are strong enough to prevent fear from becoming destiny.

Part V shows the framework under maximum pressure.

The Middle East cannot be healed by denying sacred stories, nor by allowing sacred stories to command life-destruction. It cannot be healed by security without justice, liberation without civilian protection, humanitarian relief without political repair, memory without mercy, or peace without life-conditions.

The life-coherent path is harder.

It asks each people to preserve its life-truth while de-implementing its life-destroying distortions. It asks each tradition to honor its sacred memory without weaponizing it. It asks each institution to protect its people without making another people disposable. It asks the world to apply law consistently. It asks peace to become not the victory of one sacred story over another, but the shared protection of life beneath all sacred stories.

Part VI — Applications for Those Who Carry the Burden of Healing

18. Religious and Spiritual Leadership

Religious and spiritual leaders occupy one of the most difficult positions in sacredly charged conflict. They inherit stories, texts, rituals, wounds, loyalties, symbols, and communities formed across generations. They are asked to comfort the grieving, protect identity, preserve tradition, speak moral truth, and guide people through fear. In times of war, their words can either widen the field of compassion or narrow it. They can either slow the movement from grief to revenge or intensify it. They can either return sacred memory to life, or allow sacred memory to be weaponized.

A life-coherent framework does not ask religious leaders to abandon their traditions, dilute their faith, or pretend that all sacred stories are the same. It asks something more demanding: that every sacred story be brought under the discipline of life.

The religious leader's first responsibility is to protect the sacred from capture by violence. This means refusing to let God, scripture, covenant, chosenness, martyrdom, land, sacrifice, destiny, or religious identity become instruments for making others disposable. It means teaching communities that the suffering of their own people matters profoundly, but does not erase the suffering of others. It means creating liturgies of mourning that do not become rehearsals for revenge. It means helping people grieve without hatred, remember without dehumanization, and hope without domination.

Religious leadership becomes life-coherent when it is prophetic rather than captured. Prophetic religion does not flatter the tribe. It tells the truth to its own community because it loves life more than it loves innocence. It can say: our wound is real, but our wound must not become permission to wound without limit. Our sacred land matters, but no land can be honored by desecrating bodies. Our children must be protected, but so must the children of the other. Our memory must be preserved, but not converted into a machine for producing future victims.

This is the vocation of spiritual leadership in a fragmented world: to return ultimate concern to the protection of life.

18.1 De-weaponizing sacred texts

Sacred texts are never read in isolation from communities, wounds, institutions, and power. The same text may be read as a call to compassion or a warrant for exclusion. The same memory may deepen humility or strengthen entitlement. The same story of suffering may generate solidarity with the oppressed or justify domination in the name of never being vulnerable again.

De-weaponizing sacred texts does not mean removing their difficulty, power, particularity, or historical force. It means refusing interpretations that convert sacred authority into permission for cruelty. It means reading every text through the life-coherent question:

Does this interpretation protect, repair, and expand life-capacity, or does it authorize disposability?

Religious leaders must therefore name interpretive capture. They must say when scripture is being used to bless revenge, when prophecy is being used to sanctify nationalism, when martyrdom is being used to sacrifice the vulnerable, when chosenness is being interpreted as superiority, when promise is being interpreted as entitlement, and when divine justice is being confused with human retaliation.

The sacred text must be allowed to judge the community, not merely arm it.

18.2 Rituals of shared mourning

One of the deepest failures in sacred conflict is the inability to mourn across boundaries. Communities mourn their own dead and explain away the dead of others. Their funerals become proofs of innocence. Their martyrs become identity. Their grief becomes recruitment. The other's grief becomes propaganda.

Life-coherent religious leadership must interrupt this pattern.

It must create rituals that honor particular grief without making compassion treasonous. This does not require collapsing all histories into sameness. It requires creating moral space where the pain of the other can be acknowledged without erasing one's own.

Shared mourning may begin modestly. It may not begin with joint ceremonies where trust is absent. It may begin with prayers that name all children. It may begin with silence for civilians on all sides. It may begin with sermons that forbid rejoicing in enemy suffering. It may begin with liturgical language that distinguishes accountability from hatred. It may begin with sacred days that include lament for harm done by one's own community.

The purpose is not sentimental unity. The purpose is to prevent grief from becoming fuel for future violence.

18.3 Refusing divine sanction for civilian harm

The most urgent religious responsibility in war is to refuse divine sanction for civilian harm.

No sacred claim can make a civilian target legitimate. No sacred cause can make a child disposable. No religious identity can erase the dignity of a prisoner, hostage, displaced person, wounded person, or enemy civilian. No claim of chosenness, martyrdom, liberation, covenant, defense, or destiny can override the sacred minimum of civilian protection.

Religious leaders must say this clearly, repeatedly, and before their own communities.

It is not enough to condemn the other side's violence. The harder test is whether religious leaders can condemn life-destroying actions committed in the name of their own group's fear, grief, security, or liberation.

A religion that cannot protect the civilian life of the enemy has lost contact with the sacred interdependence of life.

18.4 Teaching humility before mystery

Sacred conflict often hardens around certainty. Communities become certain that God is on their side, history vindicates them, the land belongs only to them, their suffering is uniquely important, and the other's fear is manipulative or illegitimate. Certainty gives emotional relief. It simplifies unbearable complexity. It turns moral ambiguity into usable identity.

But certainty is spiritually dangerous.

Life-coherent religious leadership must teach humility before mystery. Humility does not mean moral paralysis. It does not prevent judgment, accountability, or action. It means that no community possesses God, no tradition exhausts truth, no wound grants total innocence, and no sacred story can be used to silence the cry of life.

Humility makes repentance possible. It allows a community to say: we have suffered, and we have also caused suffering. We remember our dead, and we must not create new victims. We love our people, and we must not dehumanize another. We seek justice, and we must not become servants of revenge.

Without humility, religion becomes certainty with sacred clothing.

With humility, religion can become a vessel of repair.

18.5 Protecting the dignity of the other

The dignity of the other is the test of life-coherent spirituality.

It is easy for a tradition to protect the dignity of its own. The deeper test is whether it protects the dignity of those it fears, opposes, resents, or has been taught to distrust.

Religious leaders must therefore guard language. They must refuse animalizing, demonizing, contaminating, and annihilationist speech. They must teach that accountability does not require dehumanization. They must distinguish between opposing harmful actions and degrading the being of a people. They must remind their communities that the enemy's child is not the enemy, that the prisoner remains human, that the stranger carries a claim, and that the dead of the other must not be mocked.

The dignity of the other does not abolish justice. It makes justice possible.

For justice without dignity becomes punishment.

Security without dignity becomes domination.

Liberation without dignity becomes revenge.

Religion without dignity becomes cultural violence.

18.6 Returning religion to life-service

The deepest task of religious leadership is to return religion to life-service.

This means asking every doctrine, ritual, institution, sermon, school, charity, alliance, and public statement:

Does this serve life?

Does this protect the vulnerable?

Does this widen compassion?

Does this strengthen truth?

Does this reduce violence?

Does this restore dignity?

Does this repair the world?

Where religion does this, it becomes a civil commons of meaning.

Where religion fails to do this, it must undergo repentance, reform, and de-implementation of its life-destroying patterns.

19. Diplomacy, Policy, and International Law

Diplomacy and policy are often forced to operate under conditions of urgency, mistrust, violence, propaganda, political pressure, and incomplete information. They must negotiate what is possible, not only what is ideal. They must prevent immediate harm while building pathways to longer-term repair. They must work with imperfect actors, asymmetries of power, competing legal claims, and publics shaped by grief and fear.

A life-coherent framework does not dismiss this difficulty. It deepens it.

It says that diplomacy cannot be judged only by whether it produces an agreement. Policy cannot be judged only by whether it stabilizes a situation. Law cannot be judged only by whether it is invoked. All three must be judged by whether they reduce avoidable life-harm, restore life-capacity, and de-implement the patterns that reproduce conflict.

The conventional diplomatic question is:

What can the parties accept?

The life-coherent question is:

What must be transformed so that the parties no longer require violence, domination, humiliation, or disposability to secure their future?

This does not make diplomacy easier. It makes it more honest.

19.1 Security and justice as inseparable

Security and justice are often treated as sequential: first security, then justice; or first justice, then security. In sacred insecurity, this sequencing often fails.

Those who feel existentially threatened demand security before justice.

Those who live under domination demand justice before security.

Each side experiences the other's priority as dangerous.

A life-coherent approach insists that security and justice must be co-constructed. Security without justice becomes domination. Justice without security may feel like exposure. A peace process that asks one side to surrender threat without restoring dignity will fail. A process that asks another side to surrender control without credible protection will also fail.

The guiding principle is:

Every step toward security must reduce domination. Every step toward justice must reduce threat.

This is the only way to move from sacred insecurity toward shared life-protection.

19.2 Why ceasefire is necessary but insufficient

A ceasefire is necessary because life must first be protected from immediate destruction. Bombs, rockets, raids, attacks, hostage-taking, and direct violence must stop. Without cessation of violence, humanitarian restoration, mourning, truth-telling, and political repair remain nearly impossible.

But ceasefire is insufficient because silence is not peace.

A ceasefire that leaves civilians hungry, displaced, humiliated, occupied, detained without due process, or fearful of renewed attack is only a pause. A ceasefire that leaves hostages unresolved, prisoners abused, homes destroyed, schools closed, hospitals broken, and political futures blocked cannot carry durable peace.

Life-coherent policy treats ceasefire as a threshold, not an endpoint.

The question after ceasefire is:

What life-conditions must be restored immediately so that the pause in violence becomes a pathway to repair rather than an interval before recurrence?

19.3 Humanitarian law as minimum life-coherence

International humanitarian law is not the fullness of life-coherent peace. It is the minimum boundary below which civilization falls into barbarism. Its core function is to protect life amid conflict: civilians, prisoners, wounded persons, medical workers, humanitarian access, and proportional restraint.

A life-coherent framework treats humanitarian law as a civil commons. It is a shared restraint on sacred insecurity. It says that even when parties believe their cause is just, their methods remain bound. Even when they suffer, they may not do anything. Even when they fear annihilation, they may not make civilians disposable.

The problem is not only violation of law. It is selective reverence for law. When law is applied only to the enemy, it loses its function as a commons. It becomes a weapon of narrative war.

Diplomats and policymakers must therefore defend law consistently, especially when doing so is politically inconvenient. Life-coherent legality must bind allies, clients, enemies, and oneself.

19.4 De-escalation with reciprocal guarantees

De-escalation must be reciprocal enough to be credible, but not so conditional that all action waits for perfect trust. Sacred insecurity makes unilateral gestures difficult because each side fears exploitation. Yet if all repair waits for trust, nothing begins.

This is why guarantees matter.

Guarantees may be legal, military, political, economic, humanitarian, regional, international, or community-based. They must create enough safety for harmful patterns to be de-implemented without one side feeling abandoned to the other's power.

For example:

reductions in armed threat must be matched by reductions in domination;

release of hostages must be matched by lawful detainee processes and protection from abuse;

humanitarian access must be protected from military exploitation;

demilitarization must be tied to rights, mobility, reconstruction, and credible self-determination;

security guarantees must be tied to the end of collective punishment and permanent control;

regional restraint must be tied to protections against proxy escalation.

The life-coherent principle is not “trust first.”

It is:

Build verifiable conditions in which trust can become less irrational.

19.5 Political repair and life-conditions

Political repair is not merely institutional design. It is the restoration of life-conditions through accountable arrangements.

A political agreement that does not change lived reality will not heal sacred insecurity. People must experience change in movement, safety, dignity, water, housing, schools, healthcare, law, work, worship, mourning, family life, and future possibility.

This is why political repair must be life-indexed.

Policy should ask:

Can children return to school?

Can civilians move without humiliation?

Can families access healthcare?

Can homes be rebuilt without fear of demolition?

Can communities worship safely?

Can people participate in governance?

Can prisoners and detainees be protected by due process?

Can refugees and displaced persons have truthful pathways to justice?

Can the economy support dignity rather than dependency?

Can ecological systems sustain life?

Political repair becomes credible when life changes on the ground.

19.6 International legitimacy and consistency

International legitimacy depends on consistency. When powerful states apply principles selectively, they do not merely undermine particular cases. They weaken the very possibility of law-governed peace.

Life-coherent diplomacy therefore requires consistency in the protection of civilians, condemnation of atrocities, accountability for war crimes, opposition to occupation and annexation, rejection of hostage-taking, protection of refugees, and defense of humanitarian access.

Consistency does not require identical policy in every context. Context matters. But it does require that the life-value criterion remain the same.

The question is:

Are we protecting life, or protecting allies, interests, narratives, and power?

Where international actors cannot answer this honestly, they become part of the conflict's sacred incoherence.

20. Clinical, Trauma, and Public Health Applications

Conflict is not only a geopolitical event. It is embodied. It enters nervous systems, immune systems, sleep, metabolism, reproduction, child development, family structure, memory, emotion, and moral imagination. It creates injuries that do not end when weapons pause. It changes what people expect from the world.

A life-coherent framework therefore treats clinicians, trauma workers, public-health practitioners, and caregivers as peace workers in a profound sense. They repair the biological and emotional conditions through which persons and communities can remain capable of relation, learning, trust, and future.

This does not mean medicalizing political conflict. It means recognizing that violence and domination become embodied, and that repair must also become embodied.

20.1 Grief as political reality

Grief is often treated as private sorrow. In sacred conflict, grief is also political reality.

Unmourned grief becomes available for mobilization. It can be converted into hatred, revenge, despair, numbness, or identity. Communities that cannot grieve safely may seek meaning through retaliation. Families who cannot bury their dead with dignity may carry unresolved anguish across generations. Children who grow up surrounded by unprocessed grief may inherit a world organized around loss.

Clinical and public-health work must therefore honor grief as a life signal.

Grief says: a bond has been broken.

Life-coherent care helps grief become mourning rather than revenge. It creates spaces where loss can be spoken, bodies can be honored, memories can be held, and pain can be witnessed without being exploited.

20.2 Moral injury and collective trauma

Moral injury occurs when persons participate in, witness, fail to prevent, or are betrayed by actions that violate their moral world. In conflict, moral injury affects soldiers, civilians, clinicians, humanitarian workers, journalists, religious leaders, parents, and children. It can appear as guilt, shame, rage, numbness, despair, self-condemnation, loss of faith, or inability to return to ordinary life.

Collective trauma occurs when injury becomes woven into a community's memory, institutions, and identity.

Life-coherent repair must address both. It must not treat trauma only as symptoms inside individuals. Trauma is also carried by destroyed homes, lost land, broken schools, absent family members, militarized streets, humiliating checkpoints, unsafe hospitals, unmarked graves, and inherited silence.

Healing requires safety, truth, dignity, community, ritual, justice, and restored life-conditions.

20.3 Humiliation as a driver of violence

Humiliation is one of the most underestimated drivers of conflict. It is the lived experience of being diminished, degraded, controlled, exposed, mocked, excluded, or treated as less than fully human.

Humiliation injures dignity. When repeated across institutions, borders, laws, media, schools, policing, employment, and everyday encounters, it becomes structural. It teaches people that ordinary pathways to dignity are blocked. Violence then becomes more imaginable as a way to recover agency.

Life-coherent public health must therefore treat humiliation as a preventable exposure.

Policies should ask:

Where are people made to wait, beg, prove, submit, or endure arbitrary power?

Where are bodies searched, delayed, displaced, or contained without dignity?

Where does law communicate inferiority?

Where do aid systems reproduce dependency?

Where do institutions make people feel unseen?

Reducing humiliation is not cosmetic. It is violence prevention.

20.4 Intergenerational transmission of sacred insecurity

Children inherit more than stories. They inherit emotional atmospheres, family silences, threat expectations, body memories, rituals, maps, images, fears, and loyalties. They learn who is dangerous before they can evaluate why. They learn whose grief counts. They learn which deaths are mourned and which are justified. They learn whether peace is honorable or naïve.

Sacred insecurity becomes intergenerational when children are formed inside unresolved wounds.

A life-coherent approach must therefore protect childhood from enemy inheritance. Education, family support, trauma care, religious formation, media, and public ritual must help children remember truth without inheriting hatred.

This does not mean hiding history. It means teaching history in ways that preserve dignity and responsibility rather than forming children for future violence.

20.5 Healing spaces under conditions of conflict

Healing spaces are not only clinics. They may be homes, schools, places of worship, community centers, refugee shelters, mourning circles, art spaces, youth groups, women's networks, elder councils, or mobile health units.

Under conditions of conflict, healing spaces must provide safety, recognition, continuity, and agency. They must allow people to speak without being recruited into propaganda. They must hold grief without forcing premature reconciliation. They must recognize anger without feeding revenge. They must support meaning without spiritual bypass.

Clinicians and caregivers must also be protected. Those who carry trauma for others can become overwhelmed, morally injured, or targeted. A life-coherent framework includes restorative margins for healers themselves.

No healing system can serve life if its healers are sacrificed.

20.6 Rebuilding margins for persons and communities

The prior health framework emphasized margins: reserves of time, energy, safety, trust, money, care, ecological stability, and institutional support that allow systems to absorb disturbance without collapse. In conflict, margins are destroyed. People lose sleep, housing, income, mobility, social trust, healthcare, schooling, and future certainty.

Rebuilding margins is therefore central to peace.

This includes safe shelter, predictable food, access to care, family reunification, legal identity, education, livelihood, public safety, psychosocial support, ecological restoration, and trustworthy institutions.

Without margins, communities remain reactive. Any new shock can reignite fear. With margins, people gain capacity to pause, reflect, mourn, deliberate, and choose something other than retaliation.

Margins are not luxuries.

They are the buffer through which peace becomes possible.

21. Education, Media, and Public Conversation

Education and media shape the moral imagination of societies. They teach people what to notice, whom to fear, whose suffering matters, what history means, what violence is called, and what futures are possible. They can either reproduce sacred insecurity or help de-implement it.

A life-coherent framework treats public conversation as field regulation. Words are not merely expressions. They bring forth worlds. Repeated language can humanize or dehumanize, clarify or conceal, mourn or mobilize, repair or inflame.

The task is to create more light than heat.

This requires discipline.

21.1 Teaching sacred memory without enemy absolutization

Education must preserve memory truthfully. Erasure is violence. Peoples need to know their history, including suffering, displacement, persecution, resistance, survival, and moral courage.

But memory must be taught without enemy absolutization.

Students must learn that their people's suffering is real without learning that another people is essentially evil. They must learn that history includes perpetrators, structures, choices, and responsibilities without collapsing all members of another group into guilt. They must learn that grief can widen compassion rather than narrow it.

Life-coherent education asks:

Does this curriculum prepare children to inherit truth or inherit hatred?

Does it allow multiple wounds to be known?

Does it teach accountability without dehumanization?

Does it help students imagine repair?

A society's future depends on how it teaches its wounded past.

21.2 Narrative repair

Narrative repair is the work of transforming the stories through which communities understand themselves and others.

In conflict, narratives often become rigid:

We are innocent.

They are evil.

We only defend.

They only attack.

Our dead are sacred.

Their dead are unfortunate.

Our violence is forced.

Their violence is chosen.

Narrative repair does not create false symmetry. It does not erase responsibility. It widens the story until life can re-enter.

A repaired narrative can say:

We have suffered, and we have caused suffering.

We need security, and our security must not require domination.

We seek liberation, and liberation must protect civilians.

We remember our dead, and memory must prevent new deaths.

We love our people, and love must not become hatred.

Narrative repair is one of the deepest forms of peace work because people act from the stories they inhabit.

21.3 Refusing dehumanizing frames

Media systems can accelerate sacred insecurity by repeating dehumanizing frames. These frames may be visual, linguistic, statistical, or selective. One side's victims are shown with names and families; the other's are shown as numbers. One side's fear is contextualized; the other's is pathologized. One side's violence is active; the other's is passive. One side's grief is human; the other's is strategic.

Life-coherent media must resist these asymmetries.

It must name civilians as civilians.

Children as children.

Hostages as hostages.

Prisoners as persons with rights.

The displaced as families.

The dead as lives, not only counts.

It must provide context without excusing violence. It must expose structures without erasing agency. It must avoid both propaganda and sterile neutrality.

The question for media is:

Does this frame help the public perceive life more truthfully, or does it recruit perception into the conflict's own grammar?

21.4 Public discourse as field regulation

Public discourse regulates the emotional field. When leaders, journalists, influencers, clergy, academics, and citizens speak, they either increase or reduce the likelihood that violence will be accepted.

A phrase can make harm easier.

“Human animals.”

“Collateral damage.”

“Necessary sacrifice.”

“They only understand force.”

“There are no civilians.”

“They all support terror.”

“They are invaders.”

“They must be erased.”

Such language prepares the field for atrocity.

Life-coherent discourse must therefore practice restraint, precision, and humanization. It must distinguish actors from peoples, governments from civilians, accountability from dehumanization, explanation from justification, and grief from revenge.

The discipline is simple and demanding:

Do not speak in ways that make it easier to kill children.

21.5 From propaganda to life-coherent truth-telling

Propaganda simplifies reality for mobilization. It selects facts, inflames emotions, hides contradictions, protects one's own side, and reduces the other to a usable image. It may contain truths, but it organizes them toward domination, revenge, recruitment, or denial.

Life-coherent truth-telling is different.

It tells truths that are inconvenient to one's own side. It names harm wherever life is harmed. It includes history without fatalism. It recognizes asymmetry without erasing mutual humanity. It distinguishes explanation from excuse. It gives the public enough context to understand why harm recurs and enough moral clarity to know what must stop.

Truth-telling is a form of repair because lies conserve violence.

21.6 The discipline of creating more light than heat

To create more light than heat is not to avoid moral intensity. It is to discipline intensity so that it reveals rather than burns.

Heat escalates identity.

Light clarifies distinctions.

Heat asks who is loyal.

Light asks what protects life.

Heat repeats accusations.

Light names failure modes.

Heat seeks victory.

Light seeks repair.

Heat makes the other smaller.

Light makes the whole field visible.

Public conversation becomes life-coherent when it helps people see more truth, feel more responsibility, and act with greater fidelity to life.

22. Civic and Community Practice

Peace is not built only by leaders. It is built in neighborhoods, schools, clinics, congregations, families, workplaces, refugee communities, youth groups, women's networks, cultural spaces, and local institutions. These are the places where fear becomes habit or is interrupted, where children inherit hatred or learn dignity, where grief becomes revenge or mourning, where the other remains abstraction or becomes human.

Civic practice matters because political agreements cannot carry peace alone. A treaty may be signed, but if communities remain organized by sacred insecurity, the agreement will be fragile. Conversely, community practices of protection, mourning, hospitality, truth, and repair can prepare the ground before formal peace is possible.

22.1 Local rituals of protection and mourning

Local communities need rituals that protect life and hold grief. These may be religious or secular, formal or informal. Their purpose is to make life sacred in practice.

A community may gather to mourn all children killed.

A school may create memory practices that refuse hatred.

A clinic may honor the dignity of every wounded person.

A congregation may pray for civilians on all sides.

A youth group may visit sites of shared suffering.

A women's network may support families across boundaries.

A neighborhood may establish commitments to protect vulnerable persons during unrest.

Rituals matter because they form emotion. They teach bodies what to do with grief. They can slow the movement toward retaliation.

22.2 Intercommunal repair before full agreement

Communities often wait for political agreement before engaging in repair. But some forms of repair must begin before agreement is complete, otherwise agreement never becomes socially possible.

Intercommunal repair may begin with shared humanitarian work, trauma support, environmental restoration, medical cooperation, protection of sacred sites, dialogue among bereaved families, youth exchanges, professional networks, women-led peace initiatives, or joint commitments against civilian harm.

These practices do not solve all political questions. But they restore fragments of legitimate coexistence. They help people encounter the other not as symbol, but as human.

The aim is not premature reconciliation.

The aim is to protect the possibility of future reconciliation.

22.3 Shared life goods as peace commons

Shared life goods can become peace commons. Water, health, education, ecological restoration, emergency response, trauma care, food systems, and child protection can create practical fields of cooperation even when political trust remains low.

Such commons must be designed carefully. They cannot become substitutes for justice or instruments of normalization under domination. But when grounded in dignity and rights, shared life goods can reduce threat, build habits of coordination, and show that coexistence can produce concrete benefits.

The life-coherent question is:

What life good can be protected together before full agreement is possible?

This question can open pathways where ideological dialogue fails.

22.4 Youth, elders, women, families, and future generations

Conflict is often narrated by armed actors, political leaders, and ideological voices. But the burden of conflict is carried deeply by youth, elders, women, families, caregivers, and future generations.

Youth inherit the consequences of decisions they did not make. They need education, dignity, agency, and future beyond revenge.

Elders carry memory. They can transmit hatred or wisdom.

Women often carry family survival, mourning, community repair, and peace work while being excluded from formal decision-making.

Families carry grief, fear, and moral formation.

Future generations carry the costs of unresolved sacred insecurity.

Life-coherent civic practice must therefore widen whose voice counts. Those who sustain life must help shape peace.

22.5 Repairing trust where trust is not yet available

Trust cannot be demanded. In sacred insecurity, mistrust is often rational. Promises have been broken. Agreements have failed. Violence has recurred. Humiliation has continued. Leaders have exploited hope.

Life-coherent practice therefore does not begin by demanding trust. It begins by building trustworthy patterns.

A trustworthy pattern is repeated, observable, accountable, and life-serving.

Aid arrives when promised.

Civilians are protected.

Language changes.

Violations are acknowledged.

Harm is repaired.

Children are safeguarded.

Agreements are monitored.

Dignity is preserved in small interactions.

Trust grows when life repeatedly experiences that it is not being deceived.

22.6 Coexistence as protected practice

Coexistence is not merely an attitude. It is a practice that must be protected.

People need spaces where coexistence is safe enough to be attempted: schools, clinics, markets, religious sites, shared ecological projects, professional associations, cultural events, mourning spaces, and local councils. These spaces must be protected from extremists, political exploitation, humiliation, and symbolic violence.

Coexistence also requires boundaries. It cannot mean asking the oppressed to accept domination politely. It cannot mean asking the traumatized to reconcile prematurely. It cannot mean suppressing truth to preserve comfort.

Life-coherent coexistence means practicing shared life under conditions that protect dignity, truth, safety, and repair.

The final civic question is:

What practices make it easier for ordinary people to live without being recruited into hatred?

That question belongs at the heart of peacebuilding.

Part VI translates the framework into the work of those who carry the burden of healing. Religious leaders, diplomats, clinicians, educators, media workers, and communities are not peripheral to peace. They regulate the fields of meaning, emotion, law, memory, care, and daily life through which conflict either reproduces itself or begins to heal.

Part VII — Research and Practice Agenda

23. A Research Agenda for Life-Coherent Discernment and Repair

A life-coherent framework must be more than a moral vocabulary. It must become a disciplined field of inquiry, practice, evaluation, and repair. If the framework is to help those who carry the burden of healing, it must generate questions that can be studied, patterns that can be recognized, failure modes that can be named, and practices that can be refined over time.

The prior life-coherent papers established that measurement becomes transformative only when it is nested in reflection, conversation, de-implementation, restoration of commons, redesign of affordances, protection of margins, coordination, and learning. The present framework extends this into the domain of ultimate concern. It asks not only what can be measured, but what must be discerned before measurement can serve life.

This is crucial because sacred domains resist ordinary quantification. Grief, humiliation, dehumanization, moral injury, sacred memory, spiritual bypass, enemy absolutization, and the loss of legitimate coexistence cannot be reduced to simple indicators without distortion. Yet they also cannot be left entirely unnamed, unobserved, or unexamined. If they remain invisible, they continue to regulate conflict beneath the surface.

The research task is therefore delicate:

**to make sacred insecurity visible without reducing the sacred to a dashboard;
to identify failure modes without hardening them into labels;
to evaluate repair without pretending that peace can be fully captured by metrics;
and to support action without allowing measurement to replace discernment.**

Research must remain answerable to life.

23.1 Indicators of sacred insecurity

Sacred insecurity is not directly measurable in the way mortality, displacement, or infrastructure damage may be measured. It is a pattern of meaning, emotion, memory, identity, threat, and ultimate concern. Yet its expressions can be studied.

Possible indicators include:

the frequency of existential threat language;

the fusion of religious, national, territorial, and survival claims;

public narratives that portray compromise as betrayal;

increased support for maximalist positions after violent events;

rituals that convert grief into revenge;
school curricula that present the other as permanent threat;
political speeches that equate criticism with disloyalty;
religious language that sacralizes exclusive entitlement;
media frames that humanize one side's suffering while abstracting the other's;
and public tolerance for civilian harm when framed as necessary protection.

These indicators should not be used to stigmatize a community. Sacred insecurity often arises from real wounds. The aim is not blame. The aim is to identify when fear has become fused with ultimacy in ways that make repair harder.

The guiding research question is:

When does legitimate fear become sacred insecurity, and what forms of recognition, protection, and repair can prevent that transition?

23.2 Measuring dehumanization and re-humanization

Dehumanization is one of the strongest predictors of life-destruction. It prepares the moral field for civilian harm, collective punishment, torture, expulsion, humiliation, and indifference.

Research should track the language, images, metaphors, jokes, slogans, policies, and institutional practices through which persons are reduced to animals, disease, insects, demographic threats, terrorists by essence, invaders by nature, pollutants, obstacles, or expendable numbers.

But the framework should also study re-humanization.

What practices restore the face of the other?

What forms of storytelling allow people to hear the grief of those they fear?

What rituals make mourning across boundaries possible?

What educational encounters reduce enemy absolutization without erasing historical truth?

What media practices preserve moral clarity while refusing dehumanization?

What religious teachings help communities distinguish accountability from hatred?

The research question is:

What conditions allow the other to reappear as a living Thou rather than remain a disposable It?

23.3 Mapping exposure, repair, and margins in conflict zones

The life-coherent health framework emphasized exposure, repair, and margins as core dynamics of health and breakdown. This same structure applies to conflict-affected societies.

Conflict exposure includes violence, displacement, food insecurity, water deprivation, family separation, grief, fear, humiliation, restricted movement, destruction of homes, school interruption, ecological degradation, detention, torture, propaganda, and loss of future confidence.

Repair includes safety, healthcare, sleep, nutrition, mourning, family reunion, trauma support, education, legal protection, community rebuilding, religious care, ecological restoration, truthful memory, and meaningful political agency.

Margins include reserves of trust, time, money, care, safety, institutional responsiveness, ecological stability, and social support.

Research should ask:

Where are exposures concentrated?

Where are repair pathways blocked?

Whose margins have collapsed?

Who is being praised for resilience while being left inside preventable harm?

What institutions increase repair capacity?

What policies reduce exposure without creating new burdens?

This allows peacebuilding to become embodied and concrete. It shifts attention from ceasefire alone to the conditions through which life can actually recover.

23.4 Tracking cultural violence and peace language

Cultural violence is often the atmosphere in which direct and structural violence become acceptable. Research must therefore examine language, symbols, theology, education, media, art, memorials, ceremonies, and political narratives.

Key questions include:

What narratives make some lives less grievable?

What stories portray violence as purification, revenge, destiny, defense, obedience, or historical necessity?

What religious symbols are used to bless domination or resistance without moral limits?

What jokes, slogans, songs, or images normalize humiliation?

What silences conceal harm done by one's own side?

At the same time, peace language must be studied carefully. Not all language of peace is life-coherent. Some peace language silences justice. Some calls for reconciliation protect impunity. Some invocations of unity erase victims. Some humanitarian language manages suffering without transforming its causes.

The research question is:

When does language reduce violence, and when does it conceal or reproduce it?

23.5 Evaluating rituals of mourning and reconciliation

Rituals are powerful because they shape emotion, memory, belonging, and moral imagination. They can escalate sacred identity or open pathways of repair.

Research should evaluate rituals of mourning, lament, confession, apology, memorialization, pilgrimage, interfaith prayer, shared silence, truth-telling, and symbolic restitution.

But evaluation must be humble. The deepest effects of ritual may unfold over years and generations. Metrics can help, but they cannot exhaust meaning.

Possible questions include:

Do rituals reduce enemy absolutization?

Do they allow grief to be expressed without revenge?

Do they include truth about harm done by one's own community?

Do they protect victims from being used symbolically?

Do they enable children to remember without inheriting hatred?

Do they open space for accountability?

Do they strengthen willingness to protect civilians?

A life-coherent ritual is not judged by emotional intensity alone. It is judged by whether it helps grief return to life.

23.6 Monitoring de-implementation of harmful patterns

De-implementation must be monitored because harmful patterns often return under new names.

A ceasefire may de-implement direct violence temporarily while leaving dehumanizing education intact.

A political agreement may de-implement some controls while preserving humiliation through administrative systems.

A religious reform may de-implement overt hate speech while preserving subtle superiority.

A security reform may de-implement one form of force while replacing it with surveillance or economic strangulation.

Research should track whether the named harmful patterns are actually losing legitimacy, funding, institutional support, repetition, and cultural approval.

Examples include monitoring:

civilian-targeting rhetoric;

collective punishment policies;

settlement expansion or forced displacement;

hostage-taking justification;

dehumanizing sermons or curricula;

media incitement;

selective law enforcement;

militarized youth formation;

institutional concealment of abuse;

and revenge narratives after new incidents.

The guiding question is:

Has the harmful generator stopped reproducing itself, or has it merely changed form?

23.7 Life-capacity metrics for post-conflict repair

Post-conflict evaluation often focuses on reconstruction, economic recovery, institutional reform, and security incidents. These are necessary, but not sufficient.

A life-coherent approach evaluates whether people can live again.

Indicators should include:

child safety and development;

school continuity;

access to water, food, housing, sanitation, and healthcare;

freedom of movement with dignity;

family reunification;

mental health and trauma care;

livelihood and meaningful work;

trust in institutions;

legal protection;

reduction in humiliation;

participation in decision-making;

ecological restoration;

intercommunal contact under safe conditions;

and future confidence among youth.

The question is not merely whether violence has stopped.

The question is:

Has life-capacity been restored enough for people to imagine a future beyond fear?

23.8 Ethical cautions in measuring sacred domains

Measurement in sacred domains carries risks.

It can become extractive.

It can turn grief into data without repair.

It can expose vulnerable communities to surveillance.

It can pathologize traumatized groups.

It can be used by states or armed actors to manipulate narratives.

It can flatten sacred meaning into variables.

It can create false confidence where humility is required.

Therefore, research must be guided by ethical principles: consent, dignity, community participation, protection from harm, cultural humility, transparency, accountability, and return of benefit to affected communities.

The deepest safeguard is this:

No research on sacred insecurity should increase the insecurity of those being studied.

24. Discussion: The Promise and Danger of the Framework

The promise of a life-coherent framework for discernment and repair is that it can help name what ordinary language conceals. It can distinguish security from domination, liberation from revenge, faith from certainty, memory from weaponized memory, forgiveness from impunity, peace from silence, and spirituality from captured religion.

Its danger is that it too can be captured.

Any framework that names ultimate distinctions risks becoming another instrument of judgment, ranking, moral superiority, or ideological control. Life-coherence itself could be misused as a label by which one side declares itself mature and the other primitive, one tradition life-serving and another life-destroying, one people enlightened and another captured. That would betray the framework.

Life-coherent discernment must therefore remain humble, reflexive, and self-applying.

Every user of the framework must ask:

Where might my own side be captured?

What suffering am I tempted not to see?

What violence am I tempted to excuse?

What sacred story protects my innocence?

What would I have to de-implement in myself, my community, my institution, my religion, my nation, or my civilization?

Only then can the framework create more light than heat.

24.1 Avoiding false neutrality

False neutrality treats all claims as equivalent and all harms as symmetrical. It avoids moral judgment in order to appear balanced. This is not life-coherent.

Some actions are more destructive than others. Some actors hold more power than others. Some structures impose more burden than others. Some harms are deliberate, some systemic, some reactive, some historical, and some ongoing. A framework that cannot name asymmetry cannot serve justice.

Life-coherent discernment is not neutral between life-protection and life-destruction.

It condemns civilian targeting, hostage-taking, collective punishment, torture, starvation, dispossession, occupation, annihilationist ideology, dehumanization, and selective legality wherever they occur.

It does not flatten differences.

It applies the same life-value criterion to all.

24.2 Avoiding moral equivalence

Moral equivalence occurs when the recognition of multiple wounds is mistaken for equal responsibility. The framework must avoid this.

To recognize that both Palestinians and Israelis carry life-truths does not mean all actions, powers, histories, or responsibilities are equal. To condemn both civilian targeting and collective punishment does not mean they are identical phenomena. To honor both Jewish trauma and Palestinian trauma does not erase asymmetries of power, law, territory, and institutional control.

Life-coherent discernment requires moral differentiation.

It asks:

What happened?

Who did it?

Under what conditions?

With what power?

With what intention?

With what effect?

What structures made it possible?

What repair is owed?

Recognition of shared humanity must never become evasion of accountability.

24.3 Avoiding spiritual naïveté

Spiritual language can become naïve when it invokes love, unity, forgiveness, or peace without confronting domination, trauma, law, security, material conditions, and accountability.

Love without justice becomes sentiment.

Forgiveness without truth becomes silencing.

Unity without repair becomes coercion.

Peace without life-conditions becomes management of suffering.

Hope without structure becomes fantasy.

Life-coherent spirituality must therefore be embodied. It must enter institutions, budgets, borders, schools, courts, clinics, rituals, laws, and security arrangements. It must know how power works. It must protect bodies, not only inspire souls.

24.4 Avoiding technocratic capture

The opposite danger is technocratic capture. This occurs when discernment is reduced to tools, indicators, templates, dashboards, and procedural checklists. These may help, but they cannot substitute for moral courage, wisdom, grief, humility, and relationship.

Sacred insecurity cannot be repaired by technical management alone.

A template cannot mourn.

A dashboard cannot repent.

A metric cannot forgive.

A policy cannot love.

A legal instrument cannot by itself restore the face of the other.

The framework must therefore use tools without becoming tool-driven. Measurement must remain nested in reflection, conversation, re-coordination, repair, and conservation of life.

24.5 Avoiding hierarchy of suffering

Communities often compete over suffering because recognition is scarce. If one wound is recognized, another fears erasure. If one atrocity is named, another asks why its dead are silent. If one people's trauma receives global attention, another feels abandoned.

This competition creates a hierarchy of suffering.

Life-coherent discernment refuses hierarchy while preserving specificity. Every wound must be allowed its truth. Not every wound is the same. Not every history has the same structure. Not every responsibility is equal. But no people's grief should require the denial of another's grief.

The framework asks:

Can memory become capacious enough to hold more than one wound without collapsing truth?

That is a central task of civilizational healing.

24.6 The humility required for ultimate inquiry

Ultimate inquiry is dangerous because it touches what people most deeply love, fear, and protect. It must therefore be undertaken with humility.

Humility means recognizing that every framework is partial.

It means listening to those who suffer before explaining their suffering.

It means allowing affected communities to correct our abstractions.

It means refusing to use the framework to stand above the conflict as if untouched by history.

It means admitting that some harms cannot be neatly reconciled.

It means knowing that repair may be slow, incomplete, and repeatedly interrupted.

Humility does not weaken the framework. It protects it from becoming another sacred certainty.

24.7 When discernment fails

Discernment fails when communities cannot hear the cry of the other.

It fails when leaders profit from fear.

It fails when religious authorities bless domination.

It fails when trauma becomes identity.

It fails when law is selective.

It fails when grief becomes revenge.

It fails when metrics conceal life.

It fails when peace is declared without repair.

It fails when people no longer believe alternatives are possible.

When discernment fails, violence becomes more likely because life-destroying patterns remain misnamed. The task is then to begin again at the most basic level: protect civilians, restore humanitarian access, reduce humiliation, create spaces for mourning, interrupt dehumanizing language, and rebuild the minimum conditions for truthful perception.

24.8 When repair begins

Repair begins when the other's life becomes visible again.

It begins when a community can say: our suffering is real, and so is theirs.

It begins when a leader refuses to exploit grief.

It begins when a religious teacher refuses to bless revenge.

It begins when a child is protected before a symbol.

It begins when law binds allies as well as enemies.

It begins when humanitarian relief becomes tied to political transformation.

It begins when the dead are mourned without recruiting them into future violence.

It begins when a people can seek security without domination and liberation without civilian harm.

Repair begins before full trust. It begins with practices that make trust less impossible.

25. Conclusion: No Sacred Story May Require the Disposability of Life

The central claim of this white paper is simple:

No sacred story, no national project, no religious doctrine, no security claim, no liberation movement, no economic system, and no institution can be considered life-coherent if it requires the disposability of life.

This is the final life-coherent test.

The world does not suffer from lack of ultimate concern. It suffers from ultimate concern severed from life. Human beings and civilizations continue to worship, defend, sacrifice, ritualize, measure, mourn, and organize around what they treat as sacred. The question is whether those sacred orders protect life or consume it.

Spirituality, in its life-coherent form, is life becoming conscious of sacred interdependence. Organized religion, in its life-coherent form, is a vessel that helps communities remember, mourn, repent, forgive, serve, protect, and repair. Peace, in its life-coherent form, is not the silence of weapons alone, but the presence of conditions through which persons, peoples, ecosystems, and future generations can live with dignity, security, justice, belonging, memory, and future.

The opposite is sacred incoherence.

Sacred incoherence occurs when ultimate concern demands life-destruction: when security becomes domination, liberation becomes revenge, memory becomes weapon, faith becomes certainty, religion becomes institutional idolatry, sovereignty becomes impunity, peace becomes silence, and grief becomes permission to harm.

The task of discernment is to name these inversions.

The task of repair is to de-implement them.

25.1 The final life-coherent test

The final test can be stated as a sequence of questions:

What is being treated as sacred?

What is being protected?

What is being sacrificed?

Whose life is made visible?

Whose life is made disposable?

What wound is being honored?

What wound is being denied?

What pattern is being repeated?

What must be de-implemented?

What must be restored?

What conditions would allow life to continue with dignity?

These questions do not solve conflicts automatically. They do something more fundamental. They prevent the mind from being recruited into the conflict's own grammar.

They keep life at the center.

25.2 From sacred insecurity to shared life-protection

Sacred insecurity cannot be overcome by asking peoples to forget their wounds. Wounds must be recognized. Memory must be honored. Security must be real. Liberation must be meaningful. Land, faith, dignity, and self-determination matter.

But each must be restored in life-coherent form.

Security must become shared life-protection.

Liberation must become restored dignity without civilian harm.

Memory must become warning and responsibility, not revenge.

Religion must become prophetic compassion, not sacred domination.

Sovereignty must become life-protecting agency, not impunity.

Peace must become answered life-need, not forced silence.

The transition from sacred insecurity to shared life-protection is the central civilizational task.

25.3 From memory without mercy to memory in service of life

Memory is necessary. Without memory, injustice is erased. Without memory, the dead are abandoned. Without memory, communities lose continuity.

But memory without mercy becomes dangerous. It can trap generations inside inherited injury. It can make future violence feel like fidelity to the past. It can turn children into carriers of unresolved grief.

Life-coherent memory does not forget.

It remembers in order to prevent repetition.

It mourns in order to restore relation.

It tells truth in order to repair the future.

It honors the dead by refusing to create new victims in their name.

25.4 From peace as silence to peace as life-condition

The world often calls silence peace because silence is easier to count. If weapons stop, reports improve. If borders quiet, diplomacy declares progress. If markets reopen, recovery is announced. But silence can conceal fear, humiliation, trauma, hunger, domination, and despair.

Life-coherent peace requires more.

It requires children who can sleep, learn, play, and imagine a future.

It requires families with homes, water, food, healthcare, and safety.

It requires communities that can mourn and worship without fear.

It requires institutions that protect dignity and apply law consistently.

It requires economies that support life rather than exploit desperation.

It requires religious traditions that refuse dehumanization.

It requires political arrangements that make coexistence livable.

Peace is not merely the absence of violence.

Peace is the presence of life-conditions.

25.5 The burden and vocation of healing

Those who carry the burden of healing are asked to do nearly impossible work.

They must hold grief without hatred.

They must tell truth without dehumanization.

They must seek justice without revenge.

They must protect memory without weaponizing it.

They must build security without domination.

They must pursue liberation without sacrificing civilians.

They must practice faith without certainty.

They must create peace without silencing wounds.

They must keep life visible where the world has learned to abstract it.

This work is difficult because it does not offer the emotional simplicity of taking one side's innocence as total. It asks for something harder: fidelity to life across the whole field.

That fidelity is not weakness.

It is the deepest courage.

25.6 The world we must refuse to sacrifice

The ultimate question is not which sacred story will prevail over all others.

The ultimate question is what sacred obligation all stories must serve.

That obligation is the protection, repair, and flourishing of life.

A life-coherent civilization must therefore refuse to sacrifice children to war, civilians to strategy, truth to loyalty, Earth to growth, dignity to security, justice to order, memory to revenge, religion to power, and future generations to the unresolved wounds of the present.

The world we must refuse to sacrifice is not an abstraction.

It is the child under rubble.

The hostage in fear.

The prisoner without dignity.

The mother searching for water.

The elder remembering exile.

The family crossing a checkpoint.

The patient without medicine.

The farmer losing land.

The worshipper afraid at a sacred site.

The young person inheriting hatred.

The ecosystem carrying our violence.

The future waiting to see whether we will repeat the wound or repair it.

Life-coherent discernment begins when we see them.

Life-coherent repair begins when we refuse to make any of them disposable.

Back Matter

Appendix A. Glossary of Ultimate Distinctions

Discernment

The life-answerable practice of perceiving what is being treated as ultimate, what is being protected, what is being sacrificed, and whether the resulting pattern preserves, restores, or destroys life-capacity.

Ultimate concern

That to which persons, communities, institutions, or civilizations give final loyalty. It may be named religiously as God, covenant, salvation, or sacred duty, or secularly as nation, security, growth, sovereignty, identity, market, progress, or survival.

Idolatry

The absolutization of a finite concern in a way that demands the sacrifice of life. In this framework, idolatry is not confined to formal religion. Growth, security, nation, technology, ideology, institutional survival, or historical revenge can all become idolatrous when they become more protected than living beings.

Life-capacity

The real capacity of persons, communities, ecosystems, and future generations to live, heal, develop, relate, participate, repair, create meaning, belong, and flourish within the web of life.

Life-coherence

The alignment of perception, value, institution, practice, and action with the protection, repair, and expansion of life-capacity.

Sacred interdependence

The recognition that life exists only through relations of dependence, gift, vulnerability, reciprocity, care, ecology, memory, and future. Spirituality, in this framework, is life becoming conscious of this sacred interdependence.

Sacred insecurity

A condition in which collective trauma, identity, land, religion, memory, sovereignty, and survival become fused into an ultimate concern. Under sacred insecurity, compromise appears as betrayal, violence appears protective, and the other's security appears threatening.

Sacred incoherence

The severing of ultimate concern from life-coherence. It occurs when what is treated as sacred, necessary, or non-negotiable requires the degradation, humiliation, exclusion, or destruction of life.

Life-ground

The shared conditions without which life cannot continue: water, air, soil, climate, biodiversity,

bodies, care, food, shelter, health, knowledge, dignity, social trust, ecological stability, and future generations.

Civil commons

Shared life-serving institutions, practices, infrastructures, and protections that enable access to life goods. In this paper, religion at its best is understood as a civil commons of meaning.

Organized religion

An institutional vessel that carries sacred texts, rituals, doctrines, memory, moral formation, authority, belonging, and practices of ultimate concern. It can serve life or become captured by power.

Prophetic religion

Religion that speaks from the life-ground against domination, cruelty, hypocrisy, idolatry, and abandonment of the vulnerable. It can criticize its own community in the name of life.

Captured religion

Religion that uses sacred language to protect power, nation, tribe, institution, purity, domination, or violence.

Spiritual bypass

The use of spiritual language to avoid truth, accountability, grief, material repair, political transformation, or protection of vulnerable bodies.

Weaponized memory

The use of real historical suffering to authorize revenge, domination, dehumanization, or permanent innocence.

Sacred memory

Memory that honors the dead, preserves truth, transmits responsibility, and prevents recurrence without recruiting future generations into hatred.

Security

The protection of life from threat. Security is a life-good when it protects life without disabling the life-capacity of others.

Domination

The organization of another's insecurity, humiliation, dependency, exclusion, or restricted life-capacity in the name of one's own safety, order, sovereignty, or power.

Liberation

The restoration of dignity, agency, rights, participation, and life-capacity where they have been denied.

Revenge

The attempt to answer injury by producing suffering in return. Revenge remains governed by the wound rather than by repair.

Justice

Truthful accountability, protection of the vulnerable, restoration of dignity, repair of harm, and prevention of recurrence.

Retaliation

The answering of harm with harm. Retaliation may speak the language of justice, but its satisfaction lies in returned suffering rather than repaired life.

Forgiveness

The release of endless revenge in a context where truth, accountability, mourning, and repair remain possible.

Impunity

The avoidance of accountability. Calls for forgiveness become life-incoherent when they function as impunity.

Reconciliation

The transformation of relationship after truth, accountability, mourning, repair, and renewed recognition of dignity.

Forced coexistence

Proximity without repair. It occurs when people are required to live beside unresolved domination, humiliation, fear, or injustice.

Peace as silence

The absence of visible violence without the restoration of life-conditions.

Peace as life-condition

The presence of safety, justice, dignity, access to life goods, ecological viability, truthful memory, legitimate coexistence, and future possibility.

Appendix B. The Life-Coherent Discernment Test

The Life-Coherent Discernment Test is a practical method for evaluating sacred stories, institutions, policies, religious teachings, security claims, liberation movements, peace proposals, and public narratives.

It asks whether a given pattern protects, repairs, and expands life-capacity — or whether it requires the disposability of life.

1. What is being treated as sacred?

What is placed beyond ordinary questioning?

Is it God, life, land, nation, security, liberation, sovereignty, growth, identity, doctrine, memory, market, institution, revenge, or survival?

Has this sacred concern remained answerable to life?

2. What is being protected?

Who or what receives priority protection?

Are children, civilians, the vulnerable, truth, water, land, dignity, memory, and future generations protected?

Or are symbols, borders, doctrines, reputations, military advantage, institutional survival, or political narratives protected more fiercely than life?

3. What is being sacrificed?

Who bears the cost?

Are civilians, children, prisoners, hostages, refugees, the poor, ecosystems, dissenters, future generations, or the enemy's humanity being sacrificed?

Is the sacrifice truly unavoidable, or has some life been made easier to sacrifice?

4. Whose grief is recognized?

Whose dead are named?

Whose suffering is given context?

Whose suffering is minimized, doubted, mocked, abstracted, or justified?

Can the grief of the other enter moral memory without erasing one's own grief?

5. Whose fear is legitimized?

Whose insecurity is treated as rational?

Whose insecurity is dismissed as propaganda, weakness, manipulation, or pathology?

Does one people's security require another people's permanent insecurity?

6. What distinction is being blurred?

Is security being confused with domination?

Is liberation being confused with revenge?

Is peace being confused with silence?

Is forgiveness being confused with impunity?

Is faith being confused with certainty?

Is sacred memory being confused with weaponized memory?

Is humanitarian relief being confused with political repair?

7. What life-destroying pattern is being reproduced?

Is the system reproducing dehumanization, humiliation, dispossession, civilian targeting, collective punishment, selective legality, sacred entitlement, spiritual bypass, institutional idolatry, or revenge politics?

What keeps this pattern alive?

8. What must be de-implemented?

What practice, policy, narrative, ritual, doctrine, incentive, military strategy, educational pattern, or media frame must stop being reproduced because it predictably damages life?

9. What must be restored?

What real life-good is beneath the distortion?

Security? Dignity? Recognition? Agency? Justice? Memory? Belonging? Truth? Land?
Worship? Future?

How can that life-good be restored without making others disposable?

10. What would repair life-capacity?

What must be rebuilt materially, relationally, institutionally, emotionally, spiritually, and ecologically?

What would allow people to live, sleep, mourn, learn, heal, worship, participate, move, belong, and imagine a future?

11. What would conserve peace?

What institutions, rituals, laws, educational practices, media norms, security guarantees, trauma supports, and civil commons are needed to prevent fear, grief, and revenge from recapturing the field?

The final question

Does this sacred story, policy, institution, movement, or practice protect, repair, and expand life-capacity — or does it require the disposability of life?

If it protects life, it may be conserved.

If it distorts life, it must be renamed.

If it destroys life, it must be de-implemented.

If it has been captured, its life-serving truth must be restored.

Appendix C. Failure Modes of Sacred Incoherence

Failure mode	Core distortion	Diagnostic question	Life-coherent response
Sacred insecurity	Trauma, identity, land, religion, sovereignty, and survival fuse into existential fear	Has fear become sacred in a way that makes compromise betrayal?	Restore shared life-protection, trauma repair, rights, dignity, and credible guarantees
Weaponized victimhood	Real suffering becomes license to deny the suffering of others	Has suffering become a shield against accountability?	Honor the wound while refusing unlimited moral permission
Redemptive violence	Violence is imagined as purifying, saving, cleansing, or restoring	Is violence treated as tragic constraint or sacred solution?	Reframe violence as failure or last-resort restraint, never as redemption
Enemy absolutization	The opponent becomes evil itself	Can the other still appear as human while being held accountable?	Restore the distinction between accountability and dehumanization
Institutional idolatry	The vessel becomes more sacred than the life it serves	Who must remain silent for the institution to preserve innocence?	Make institutions corrigible by the lives they affect
Spiritual bypass	Spiritual language avoids truth, justice, accountability, or material repair	Is spirituality opening repair or protecting the system from repair?	Join prayer, forgiveness, unity, and peace to truth and repair
Selective legality	Law binds enemies but not allies or oneself	Does law protect life consistently?	Restore law as a civil commons, not an instrument of power
Metric capture	Numbers replace lived reality	What suffering is invisible to the indicator?	Nest measurement in discernment, testimony, and repair
Narrative capture	Stories preselect who is innocent, guilty, grievable, or disposable	Who benefits from this frame?	Tell truths that include one's own side's harms
Peace without life-conditions	Direct violence pauses while structural harm remains	What life-conditions remain absent beneath the peace?	Restore water, homes, rights, dignity, safety, movement, law, and future
Memory without mercy	Memory preserves injury but not compassion	Does memory prevent recurrence or prepare revenge?	Honor the dead by refusing new victims in their name

Failure mode	Core distortion	Diagnostic question	Life-coherent response
Security without justice	Protection of one group produces permanent insecurity for another	Does security reduce threat-production across the whole field?	Build shared security with rights, dignity, and accountability
Liberation without civilian protection	A just cause sacrifices the vulnerable	Who is being made to bear the cost of liberation?	Bind liberation to civilian protection and future coexistence
Sacred entitlement	Land, identity, or chosenness overrides the lives of others	Has belonging become permission to exclude or dispossess?	Re-ground sacred belonging in responsibility to life
Humiliation governance	Order is maintained through degradation	Where are people made to submit without dignity?	De-implement humiliating controls and restore agency
Revenge politics	Public life is organized around returned suffering	Is the response repairing life or redistributing pain?	Replace revenge with truth, accountability, and restoration
Humanitarian substitution	Aid manages suffering without transforming its causes	Is relief replacing political repair?	Link humanitarian restoration to rights, dignity, and structural change
Developmental abstraction	Reconstruction restores infrastructure without restoring life	Can people actually live, heal, move, learn, and belong?	Use life-capacity as the criterion of recovery
Sacred certainty	Faith hardens into closure against correction	Can this conviction hear the cry of the other?	Restore humility before mystery and life
Disposability	Some lives become acceptable losses	Who is being treated as expendable?	Reassert the sacred minimum: no life is disposable

Appendix D. De-Implementation and Repair Template

This template can be used by religious leaders, civic actors, peacebuilders, policymakers, educators, humanitarian workers, clinicians, and researchers.

1. Name the situation

What conflict, institution, policy, teaching, practice, or narrative is being examined?

Who is affected?

What is the immediate harm?

What is the deeper pattern?

2. Recognize the wound

What injuries, losses, humiliations, fears, and memories are active?

Whose wounds are publicly recognized?

Whose wounds are denied or minimized?

What grief remains unmourned?

3. Name the ultimate concern

What is being treated as non-negotiable?

Security? Liberation? Land? Identity? Religion? Sovereignty? Memory? Justice? Growth?
Institutional survival?

What legitimate life-good lies beneath this concern?

4. Expose the sacred distortion

How has the legitimate concern become distorted?

Security into domination?

Liberation into revenge?

Faith into certainty?

Memory into weapon?

Institution into idol?

Peace into silence?

Justice into retaliation?

5. Identify the harmed life-capacities

Which capacities are being reduced?

Safety?

Health?

Dignity?

Agency?

Mobility?

Belonging?

Learning?

Mourning?

Worship?

Participation?

Ecological viability?

Future possibility?

6. Identify the generator

What keeps the harmful pattern reproducing?

Law?

Military practice?

Religious teaching?

Media narrative?

Economic incentive?

School curriculum?

Trauma?

Humiliation?

External funding?

Regional rivalry?

Institutional fear?

7. Name what must be de-implemented

What must stop?

A practice?

A phrase?

A policy?

A doctrine?

A ritual?

A metric?

A military rule?

A settlement pattern?

A form of aid dependency?

A media frame?

An educational narrative?

A diplomatic double standard?

8. Restore the life-good beneath the distortion

If domination claimed to provide security, how can real security be restored without domination?

If revenge claimed to restore dignity, how can dignity be restored without revenge?

If certainty claimed to provide meaning, how can meaning be restored with humility?

If institutional secrecy claimed to preserve unity, how can truthful unity be restored?

9. Build repair pathways

What material, relational, psychological, institutional, ecological, and spiritual repair is required?

Who must participate?

Who must be protected?

Who must be heard?

What resources are needed?

What sequence is safe?

10. Protect margins

What reserves of time, trust, safety, care, income, ecological stability, and institutional support are required to prevent collapse under the next disturbance?

Who has no margin left?

How will margins be restored?

11. Coordinate across levels

What must happen at the individual, family, community, religious, institutional, national, regional, and international levels?

Who must coordinate?

What agreements, rituals, laws, services, or safeguards are required?

12. Monitor for recapture

How might the old pattern return?

Under what names?

Through which actors?

What early-warning signs should be watched?

Who will be authorized to call attention to recapture?

13. Conserve life-coherent gains

What practices will help make repair durable?

Education?

Ritual?

Law?

Media norms?

Institutional accountability?

Public health systems?

Shared life goods?

Trauma support?

Intercommunal spaces?

Final template question

What must stop being reproduced, what must be restored in its place, and how will the restored pattern remain answerable to life?

Appendix E. Middle East Application Matrix

This matrix is not a peace plan. It is a discernment tool. Its purpose is to distinguish life-truths from life-destroying distortions and to clarify what must be de-implemented and restored.

Domain	Life-truth	Life-destroying distortion	What must be de-implemented	What must be restored
Palestinian liberation	Palestinians require dignity, freedom, self-determination, rights, land access, mobility, safety, and future	Revenge, civilian targeting, hostage-taking, martyrdom that sacrifices the vulnerable, denial of Jewish life	Attacks on civilians, hostage-taking, annihilationist ideology, use of civilian suffering as strategy	Rights-based self-determination, dignity, agency, civil protection, reconstruction, political voice
Israeli/Jewish security	Jewish life must be protected from antisemitism, terrorism, hostage-taking, rockets, and annihilationist threat	Permanent domination, occupation, collective punishment, settlement expansion, dehumanization of Palestinians	Collective punishment, occupation as permanence, settlement expansion, impunity, dehumanizing language	Shared security, civilian protection, lawful accountability, recognition, credible guarantees
Sacred land	Land carries memory, identity, belonging, worship, ancestors, and future	Exclusive entitlement that makes others homeless or humiliated	Dispossession, sacred geography used for exclusion, denial of access to worship	Shared protection of sacred sites, dignity of access, land arrangements answerable to life
Memory	Historical suffering must be remembered truthfully	Weaponized memory, permanent innocence, inherited hatred	Education and ritual that erase the other's wound	Memory in service of prevention, mourning, responsibility, and repair
Religion	Traditions can preserve compassion, restraint, mourning, justice, and humility	Sacred authorization of violence, domination, revenge, or disposability	Dehumanizing theology, divine sanction for civilian harm	Prophetic religion, shared mourning, sacred protection of children and civilians

Domain	Life-truth	Life-destroying distortion	What must be de-implemented	What must be restored
Security	People require safety from attack and terror	Security as domination, surveillance, blockade, humiliation, or impunity	Security practices that manufacture future threat	Reciprocal security guarantees tied to rights and dignity
Resistance	Oppression and domination may require organized resistance	Resistance that targets civilians or sacrifices the vulnerable	Civilian targeting, hostage-taking, militarized martyrdom	Non-disposable resistance, political agency, lawful protection of civilians
Law	Law can restrain violence and protect dignity	Selective legality and impunity for allies	Double standards, politicized accountability	Law as civil commons applied consistently
Humanitarian relief	Immediate life must be saved	Relief used to avoid structural repair	Aid dependency that manages preventable suffering	Humanitarian restoration tied to political transformation
Regional politics	Regional actors have legitimate security interests	Proxy warfare, arms flows, symbolic exploitation of the wound	Use of local populations as instruments of regional rivalry	Regional non-aggression, arms restraint, crisis communication
Children	Children carry the future and must be protected	Children as symbols, shields, collateral, or inheritors of hatred	Indoctrination, deprivation, exposure to preventable harm	Sacred protection of children, education, trauma care, future confidence
Peace	Direct violence must stop	Peace as silence under unresolved domination or fear	Ceasefire without life-conditions	Peace as life-condition: safety, justice, dignity, rights, repair, future

Central application question

How can Palestinian life-truths and Israeli/Jewish life-truths both be honored while de-implementing the life-destroying distortions carried in their names?

Appendix F. Life-Coherent Questions for Religious, Civic, and Policy Leaders

For religious and spiritual leaders

What sacred texts, rituals, or teachings are being used to widen compassion?

Which are being used to harden hostility?

Have we condemned civilian harm by our own community as clearly as we condemn harm by others?

Can we mourn the children of the other without feeling disloyal to our own?

Where has our tradition been captured by nation, tribe, institution, power, purity, or revenge?

What would repentance require materially?

How can we teach memory without hatred?

How can we protect sacred particularity without dehumanizing outsiders?

What rituals could help grief become mourning rather than revenge?

For diplomats and policymakers

Does this policy reduce threat-production across the whole field, or merely suppress threat for one side?

Does it join security to justice?

Does it protect civilians unconditionally?

Does it reduce humiliation?

Does it restore agency and dignity?

Does it apply law consistently?

Does it create pathways from humanitarian relief to political repair?

What harmful pattern does this policy de-implement?

What life-good does it restore?

How will it be monitored for recapture?

For clinicians, trauma workers, and public-health practitioners

What exposures are people carrying?

What repair pathways are blocked?

Whose margins have collapsed?

How are grief, fear, rage, shame, and humiliation being metabolized?

Where is trauma becoming political identity?

How can care protect dignity and agency?

How are healers themselves being protected from moral injury?

What would it mean to treat trauma repair as peace infrastructure?

For educators

Does the curriculum teach truth without enemy absolutization?

Are students learning the suffering of their own people only, or also the humanity of others?

Does memory become responsibility or resentment?

Are children being prepared for coexistence or inherited war?

What language in textbooks, classrooms, or rituals makes the other disposable?

How can education protect sacred memory while widening moral imagination?

For media and public intellectuals

Whose suffering is humanized?

Whose suffering is abstracted?

Does this frame clarify or inflame?

Does it distinguish civilians from armed actors?

Does it distinguish explanation from justification?

Does it expose structural violence without excusing direct violence?

Does it create more light than heat?

Would this language make it easier or harder to harm children?

For civic and community leaders

What shared life-good can be protected before full political agreement is possible?

Where can people encounter the other safely?

What local rituals of mourning, protection, and dignity are possible?

How can trust be built through repeated trustworthy patterns rather than demanded prematurely?

What practices make it easier for ordinary people to live without being recruited into hatred?

How can youth, elders, women, caregivers, and families shape repair?

For international actors

Are principles being applied consistently?

Are allies being held to the same life-protecting standards as adversaries?

Are arms, funding, diplomacy, or vetoes sustaining sacred insecurity?

Is humanitarian relief being joined to structural repair?

Are regional actors rewarded for de-escalation or for leverage through conflict?

Does the international order function as a civil commons of law, or as selective power?

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Author Bio

Dr. Bichara Sahely, BSc (Biology), MBBS, DM (Internal Medicine), is a physician, systems thinker, and independent scholar based in St. Kitts and Nevis. His work integrates clinical medicine, public health, life-value onto-axiology, autopoiesis, peace theory, planetary health, civil commons, and life-coherent governance into frameworks for health, healing, human flourishing, progress, and civilizational repair.

He received a BSc in Biology from Dalhousie University and medical training at the University of the West Indies, where he completed the MBBS and DM in Internal Medicine.

His current writing develops a life-coherent framework across multiple domains, asking how health systems, economies, institutions, religions, technologies, and civilizations can become answerable to the conditions that allow life to live, heal, participate, repair, and flourish.

Analytical and Editorial Support

This white paper was developed through an iterative process of reflection, synthesis, drafting, critique, and revision led by Dr. Bichara Sahely. The framework builds on prior life-coherent white papers on health, healing, human flourishing, and Beyond GDP, and extends their core logic into spirituality, religion, ultimate concern, peace, sacred insecurity, and geopolitical conflict.

The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of ChatGPT as an AI-supported drafting, analytical, editorial, and synthesis companion during the development of the manuscript. ChatGPT was used to help organize the argument, refine language, develop section structure, generate explanatory prose, identify conceptual gaps, support integration across traditions, and assist with editorial polishing.

The author remains fully responsible for the final conceptual framing, interpretive judgments, manuscript content, scholarly claims, and any remaining errors or omissions.

Back Cover Synopsis

The contemporary world is not only politically, economically, and ecologically fragmented. It is spiritually disordered. Peoples and institutions continue to organize life around what they treat as sacred — security, land, religion, nation, growth, sovereignty, identity, memory, justice, and survival — without always discerning whether these ultimate concerns protect life or require its sacrifice.

Life-Coherent Discernment and Repair extends the life-coherent framework into the domains of spirituality, organized religion, peace, and geopolitical conflict. It argues that the spiritual analogue of measurement is discernment. Measurement asks what counts as progress. Discernment asks what is worthy of ultimacy.

Drawing on Maturana, McMurtry, Galtung, Peil Kauffman, Wilber, and wider traditions of thought on sacred memory, idolatry, violence, reconciliation, and repair, the paper develops a framework for identifying sacred failure modes: sacred insecurity, weaponized victimhood, redemptive violence, enemy absolutization, spiritual bypass, selective legality, institutional idolatry, and peace without life-conditions.

The paper stress-tests the framework against the Middle East, arguing that no people's wound should be denied and no people's wound should be allowed to sanctify the destruction of another. Its central test is simple:

No sacred story, national project, religious doctrine, security claim, liberation movement, or institution can be considered life-coherent if it requires the disposability of life.

Written for religious leaders, peacebuilders, clinicians, educators, policymakers, civic actors, and all who carry the burden of healing, this white paper offers a disciplined architecture for creating more light than heat in a world where ultimate concern has too often become a battlefield.