

What does it mean to be a people of *Peace*?

To Dwell Together in Peace



It was in a therapist's office in my mid-twenties where I realized I was carrying a good deal of unresolved anger. I was surprised because I thought of myself as a kind, loving, easy-going person. I didn't have conflict in my life, I was happy, so it surprised me that I would have anger dwelling just below the surface of my consciousness.

It may seem strange to begin a reflection on peace by talking about anger. But I am not sure we can really cultivate peace in our lives or our world without dealing more intentionally and forthrightly with anger. It does not serve us well to see peace as only passive tranquility, somehow removed from the realities and challenges we face in our lives. After all, if we define peace as an absence of anger, or an absence of conflict, we make it impossible, because conflict, frustration, and anger are a part of the human experience. Peace requires that we understand these more fully and develop healthy ways to respond to anger and to resolve conflict that don't lead to violence and destruction.

Anger is a powerful emotion. It is something every single person experiences. Rarely are we given tools to know how to constructively express and use our anger. Yet just denying that we have anger, or simply trying to quiet it down and push it aside doesn't actually lead us to peace. If you are like me, you may have learned to try not to feel anger, just let it go, let others off the hook, try to smile! Alternatively, there are situations when we are legitimately unable to name our anger, for example, when violations happen in a situation where power is not equal and so we have no recourse. For whatever reason, when we don't allow ourselves to name our feelings, we are more likely to misdirect our anger, or have it explode on others.

Part of the covenant of our congregation, the promises we make to each other for how we will live together in community, is the promise to "dwell together in peace." I find this one of the most meaningful lines in our covenant. However, we must be careful not to read it as, "we will never disagree," or "we promise to never share directly our upset in order that we might all dwell in peace." The idea that a community – especially one like ours that has chosen a path toward greater theological diversity and radical inclusion – will never have conflict, disagreement or difference is absurd. The beauty of our covenant to "dwell together in peace" is its invitation to find ways to disagree, even to have conflict, without letting it be destructive.

In my mid-twenties, I had to unpack anger that resulted from my efforts to always "keep the peace," sometimes in ways that denied my truth and my experience. Through that process, I learned to be more assertive, mindful of my own experience and creative in dealing with difference and conflict. This actually unlocked more flexibility and joy in my life as well.

It's important to remember that the absence of conflict is not the same as peace. And the presence of conflict, when approached with a desire to learn and understand can nurture peace. After all, isn't this what we would hope to see in our world? Not the absence of difference, but a reality where difference didn't result in violence, in power struggles, in winners and losers. The promises of our covenant call us to try to practice that here in community, that we might understand how to live it in the larger world.

Rev. Susan

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Living the Theme: Peace

Choose one of the exercises below to engage the theme. Come to the meeting prepared to share how you tried to experience the theme and what you learned from the practice.

A Working with Conflict

From Rev. Susan's Horizons article:

Conflict can be creative, it can be educational, it can actually deepen the relationships of trust between people or within community. Here are a few important principles to keep in mind:

1. Name how you feel, directly and humbly, with "I" statements rather than blame.
2. Listen to the perspectives of others with the intention to gain more understanding.
3. Recognize and affirm the humanity of others, especially in times of conflict.
4. Recognize the goal is not winning, but gaining understanding which leads to an improvement in communication and relationship.
5. Take responsibility for yourself and your actions and words.

Is there a person who you are experiencing conflict with now? Try using the above principles to engage with that conflict. If you're not ready for direct communication with that person, or it isn't possible, try doing some writing or journaling. Write out your own feelings, and then write some questions that could help gain understanding.

B Living More Simply for Peace

The Jain tradition is built upon strong teachings of compassion and non-violence. One way they live these teachings is through an awareness of their diet. Vegetarianism is seen as a spiritual discipline – an extension of the no-harm philosophy.

Examine your lifestyle looking for activities you engage in or products you consume, and pick something you can give up for a week, a month, or a lifetime, that would lower your impact on the world. Share this experience with friends or family. Some things to consider avoiding are plastics, meat, disposable items, products from certain corporations, new clothes or shoes...

C Family Activity: *Jackal & Giraffe*

In non-violent communication (NVC), jackal language is violent and consists of blame and criticism, while giraffe language is compassionate and speaks in the language of feelings and needs. Brainstorm with your children words and phrases that represent jackal language and giraffe language. Try to notice when the jackal language gets used, and then take a moment to come up with new ways of saying the same thing in giraffe language. Then discuss how the two languages make each of you feel and why.

Resource: Respectful Parents, Respectful Kids by Sue Hart & Victoria Hodson.

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Additional Reflection

What is Non-Violent Resistance?

In discussing nonviolent resistance in [Stride Toward Freedom](#), Dr. King identified five basic characteristics.

1. Nonviolent resistance means neither cowardice nor passivity. Nonviolent resisters are not cowards but strong individuals; it takes strength to resist the use of violence. If, however, resisters are nonviolent because of fear or because they do not have the means of violence, they are not practicing true nonviolence. Also, nonviolent resistance ...is only passive in that the resister commits no physical aggression against the opponent. “The method is passive physically, but strongly active spiritually. ...”
2. The goal of nonviolent resistance is not to defeat anyone, but to create friendship and understanding. Instead of destroying the opponent, the nonviolent resister tries “to awaken a sense of moral shame... The end is redemption and reconciliation. The aftermath of non-violence is the creation of the beloved community....”
3. Nonviolent resistance attacks evil rather than the evildoer. There is a distinction between evil and the person committing the evil. Thus, in fighting racial injustice, the struggle is not between races, but rather between “justice and injustice, between the forces of light and the forces of darkness.” ...
4. Nonviolent resistance involves turning the other cheek, not responding to violence with violence. The nonviolent resister is willing “to accept blows from the opponent without striking back, ...to accept violence if necessary, but never to inflict it.” ...
5. Love is central to nonviolent resistance. The nonviolent resister avoids not only physical violence but also spiritual violence, refusing to hate the opponent. To act otherwise would only increase the hatred in the universe.

Source: http://www.njstatelib.org/research_library/new_jersey_resources/digital_collection/nonviolent_resistance_mlk/

<http://tinyurl.com/mlk-nonviolence>

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Questions to Live With

Simply look over these questions and find one that “hooks” you. Live with it for a while. Allow it to regularly break into – and break open – your ordinary thoughts. Then come to your group prepared to share the journey.

1. When you were growing up, what were the messages you received about the importance/value of peace?
2. Are there ways you have taught or modeled peace to children or others in your life?
3. How do different spiritual traditions (Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Pagan/Wiccan) inform your understanding of peace?
4. What ways have you been impacted by violence in the media? Video games? Movies?
5. Do you have a story or example of a time when conflict led to a productive outcome?
6. Do you have an experience where you feel like violence was justified or necessary?
7. How do you nurture peace in your own life? What tools do you find helpful?
8. As you think about growing up, how were the seeds of violence planted in you and those around you? The seeds of non-violence?
9. In our inter-connected world, what ways do you see your own actions locally creating either peace or violence globally?
10. How do you recognize anger in yourself? What are the ways that you are impacted by anger?
11. What emotions and values reinforce the use of violence? What emotions and values reinforce a commitment to non-violence?
12. Have you been a part of a movement, a protest, or other organizing efforts for peace? What have you learned from that experience?
13. How can we cultivate non-violence in ourselves and in others?

Deep peace of the running wave to you,
deep peace of the quiet earth to you.

~ Gaelic Runes

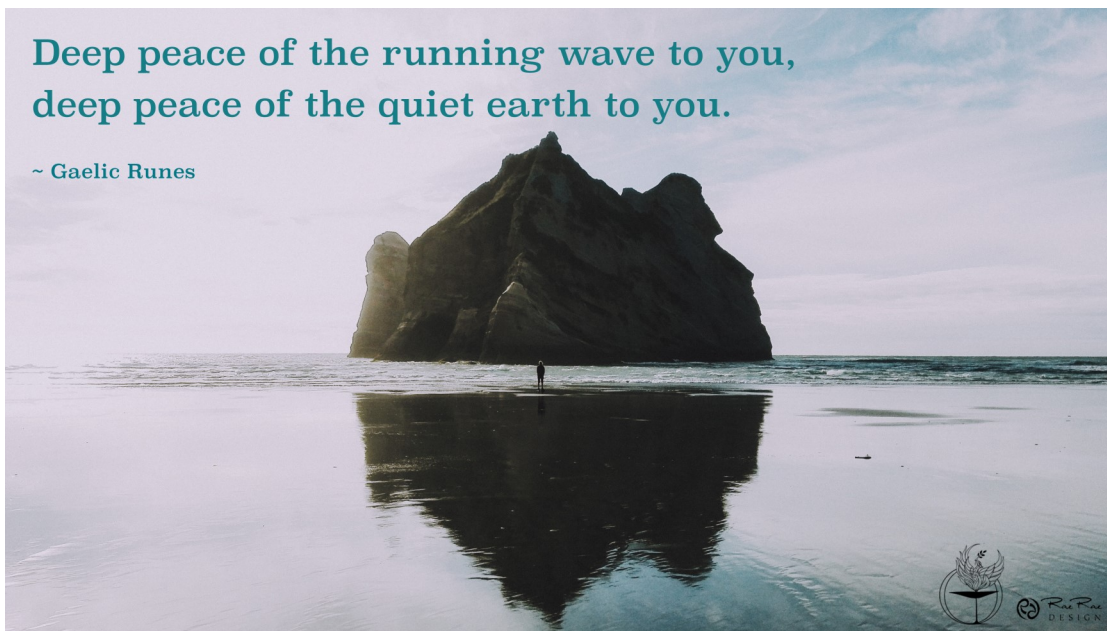


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Wise Words

Peace: In the individual, a spiritual state of tranquility, serenity and harmony. In the state, freedom from violence or war.

Whatever may be the tensions and the stresses of a particular day, there is always lurking close at hand the trailing beauty of forgotten joy or unremembered peace.

Howard Thurman, Meditations of the Heart

Keep inviolate an area of light and peace within you.
Corazon Aquino

Go in peace. Live simply, gently, at home in yourselves.

Act justly.

Speak justly.

Remember the depth of your own compassion.

Forget not your power in the days of your powerlessness.

Do not desire to be wealthier than your peers

And stint not your hand of charity.

Practice forbearance.

Speak the truth, or speak not.

Take care of yourselves as bodies,

For you are a good gift.

Crave peace for all people in the world,

An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind.
Mahatma Gandhi

[By using torture]...We are reacting out of fear instead of thinking our way through the difficult process of conflict resolution. In the end, our use of violence and repression can only sow seeds of hatred and trauma, which in the end will produce only greater violence against us...We must accept the fact that we are indeed our brothers' and sisters' collective keepers. If we are indifferent to the basic human needs of others, then peace will always elude us. Suffering, when too long ignored, inevitably leads to conflagration.

Jennifer Harbury, Truth, Torture and the American Way

Beginning with yourselves

And go as you go with the dream

Of that peace alive in your heart.

Mark Belletini

Those who are free of resentful thoughts surely find peace.

The Buddha

Our task as religious people committed to compassion and peace is to show a better way.

Peter Morales, UUA President

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Wise Words

This theme [of peace] has been the toughest one to reflect on so far. Inner Peace, People of Peace, World Peace. In looking at quotes and "wise words", it struck me that religious and philosophical leaders had much good to say about inner peace, whereas most of the wise quotes on "world peace" came from the presidents and world leaders most responsible for trying to achieve it. Realistically, not everyone in the world will let go of anger and resentment and violence. Therefore the world will not ever be totally at peace, so the question becomes how to deal with violence, both personal and global, when it does occur. The short-term answer would be non-violent de-escalation of whatever is going on whenever possible. The long-term solution? More social justice, improved mental health care, universal education in anger management, impulse control and conflict resolution. Practical measures like more non-lethal weapons for the police, and serious gun control measures would help. And finally, a global initiative to spread the word that there ARE alternatives to violence, and better ways to deal with conflict peaceably.

Small Group Facilitator

We plant seeds that will flower as results in our lives, so best to remove the weeds of anger, avarice, envy and doubt, that peace and abundance may manifest for all.

Dorothy Day

Peace is a daily, a weekly, a monthly process, gradually changing opinions, slowly eroding old barriers, quietly building new structures.

John F. Kennedy

"Walk Slowly"

It only takes a reminder to breathe,
a moment to be still and just like that,
something in me settles, softens,
makes space for imperfection. The harsh
voice of judgment drops to a whisper
and I remember again that life isn't a relay race;
that we will all cross the finish line;
that waking up to life is what we were born for.
As many times as I forget, catch myself charging forward
without even knowing where I am going,
that many times I can make the choice
to stop, to breathe, to be and walk
slowly into the mystery.

Danna Faulds

You cannot shake hands with a clenched fist.

Golda Meir

It isn't enough to talk about peace, one must believe in it. And it isn't enough to believe in it, one must work at it.

Eleanor Roosevelt

Peace, – it is not stagnation,
Nor simple, aimless rest:
'Tis tireless movement onward,
Impelled by some high quest.

Minot Judson Savage, Unitarian

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Wise Words

Peace cannot be kept by force, it can only be kept by understanding.

Albert Einstein

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow peace.

St. Francis of Assisi

Let there be peace in the sky and in the atmosphere, peace in the plant world and in the forests; Let the cosmic powers be peaceful; let Brahma be peaceful; Let there be undiluted and fulfilling peace everywhere.

Atharva Veda

Grant us the ability to find joy and strength

Not in the strident call to arms,

But in stretching out our arms

To grasp our fellow creatures

In the striving for justice and truth.

Jewish Prayer

My inner peace

Does not select anybody.

Does not reject anybody. My inner peace

Always self-givingly projects itself.

Sri Chinmoy

I like to believe that people in the long run are going to do more to promote peace than our governments.

Indeed, I think that people want peace so much that

one of these days governments had better get out of the way and let them have it.

Dwight D. Eisenhower

To meet everything and everyone through stillness instead of mental noise is the greatest gift you can offer

to the universe.

Eckhart Tolle

If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.

Mother Teresa

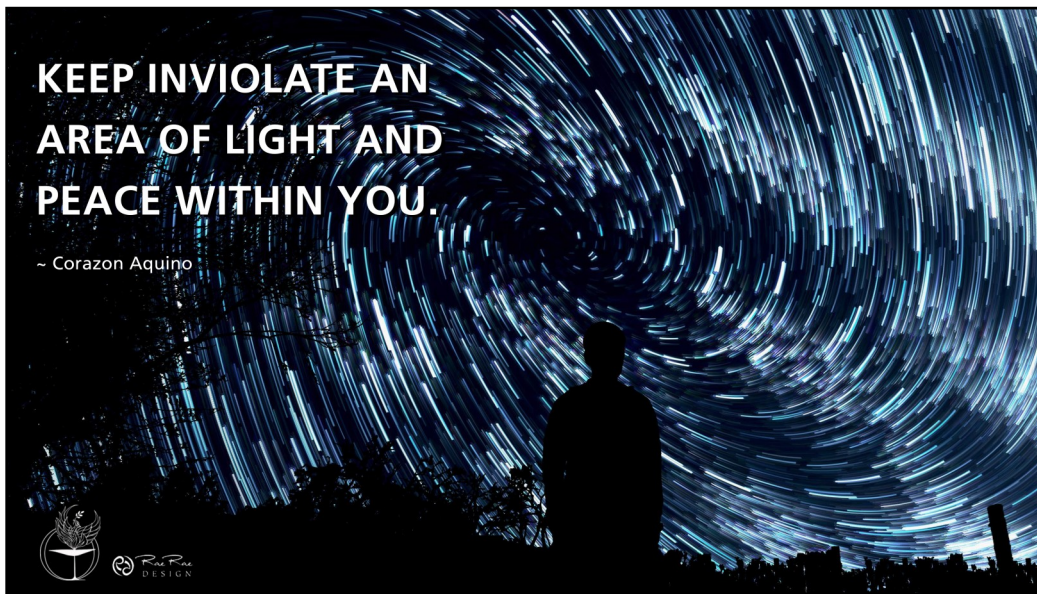


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Wise Words

If someone with courage and vision can rise to lead in non-violent action, the winter of despair can, in the twinkling of an eye, be turned into the summer of hope.

IT IS POSSIBLE TO LIVE IN PEACE.

Non-violence is not a garment to put on and off at will. Its seat is in the heart, and it must be an inseparable part of our being.

IT IS POSSIBLE TO LIVE IN PEACE.

Non-violence, which is a quality of the heart, cannot come by an appeal to the brain. It is a plant of slow growth, growing imperceptibly, but surely.

IT IS POSSIBLE TO LIVE IN PEACE.

If a single person achieves the highest kind of love it will be sufficient to neutralize the hate of millions.

IT IS POSSIBLE TO LIVE IN PEACE.

If we are to reach real peace in this world, and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with the children.

IT IS POSSIBLE TO LIVE IN PEACE.

The future depends on what we do in the present.

IT IS POSSIBLE TO LIVE IN PEACE. *Gandhi*

I do not want the peace which passeth understanding; I want the understanding which bringeth peace.
Helen Keller

Every time we drop our bombs in North Vietnam, President Johnson talks eloquently about peace....But one day we must come to see that peace is not merely a distant goal we seek, but that it is a means by which we arrive at that goal....In the final analysis, means and ends must cohere because the end is preexistent in the means, and, ultimately, destructive means cannot bring about constructive ends.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

The situation in the world is still like this. People completely identify with one side, one ideology.... Reconciliation is to understand both sides, to go to one side and describe the suffering being endured by the other side and then to go to the other side and describe the suffering being endured by the first side. Doing only that will be a great help for peace.

Thich Nhat Hanh

And then there crept a little noiseless noise among the leaves,
Born of the very sigh that silence heaves.

John Keats

Peace does not mean an end to tension, the good tensions, or of struggle. It means, I think, less waste. It means being centered.

May Sarton, The House by the Sea

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Wise Words

“Visitors”

I have had asthma for a
Long Time. It seems to improve
Here in this house by the river.
It is quiet too. No crowds
Bother me. I am brighter
And more rested. I am happy here.
When someone calls at my thatched hut
My son brings me my straw hat
And I go out and gather
A handful of vegetables.
It isn't much to offer.
But it is given in friendship.

Tu Fu, translated from the Chinese by Kenneth Rexroth

Give me the money that has been spent in war and I
will clothe every man, woman, and child in an attire
of which kings and queens will be proud. I will build
a schoolhouse in every valley over the whole earth. I
will crown every hillside with a place of worship con-
secrated to peace.

Charles Sumner, Unitarian

There is no life to be found in violence. Every act of
violence brings us closer to death. Whether it's the
mundane violence we do to our bodies by overeating
toxic food or drink or the extreme violence of child
abuse, domestic warfare, life-threatening poverty, ad-
diction, or state terrorism.

bell hooks

Peace is not an absence of war, it is a virtue, a state
of mind, a disposition for benevolence, confidence,
justice.

Baruch Spinoza, philosopher

This conjunction of an immense military establish-
ment and a large arms industry is new in the Ameri-
can experience. The total influence -- economic, po-
litical, even spiritual -- is felt in every city, every
State house, every office of the Federal government.
We recognize the imperative need for this develop-
ment. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave
implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are
all involved; so is the very structure of our society.

In the councils of government, we must guard
against the acquisition of unwarranted influence,
whether sought or unsought, by the military-
industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous
rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.

Dwight D. Eisenhower

Build a House for men and birds.
Sit with them and play music.
For a day, for just one day,
talk about that which disturbs no one
and bring some peace,
my friend,
into your beautiful eyes.

Hafiz

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Recommended Resources

Books:

Be the Change: Poems, Prayers and Meditations for Peacemakers and Justice Seekers, by Stephen M Shick
<http://tinyurl.com/be-the-change-book>

Peace is Every Step, by Thich Nhat Hanh
<http://tinyurl.com/peace-is-every-step>

Articles and Websites:

Be the Presence of Compassion and Peace, by Deepak Chopra, M.D.
<http://www.chopra.com/ccl/be-the-presence-of-compassion-and-peace>

The First Memorial Day was Black by James DeWolf Perry
<http://sfbayview.com/2014/05/the-first-memorial-day-was-black/>

Living Non-Violence
<http://www.livingnonviolence.com/>

Videos and Music:

“Imagine” by John Lennon
<http://tinyurl.com/lennon-imagine-video>

“Dona Nobis Pachem” sung by Carrie Newcomer
<http://tinyurl.com/dona-nobis-pachem>



ALL THAT BREAKS THE HEART
AND OPPRESSES THE SOUL WILL
ONE DAY GIVE PLACE TO PEACE
AND UNDERSTANDING AND
EVERYONE WILL BE FREE.

~ Paul Robeson



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