

WISDOM CIRCLE DECEMBER 2012

What Does It Mean To Be An Instrument of Peace?

The Transformation Theme of December, just in time for Christmas, is Peace. When we think about the Christmas story, of course, the heavenly host of angels comes to mind who sang to the shepherds on that first Christmas, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to all people." Peace on earth has been a theme of Christmas ever since. When we think of peace on earth, we think of war between nations and organized groups. Sometimes we think of the violence in our cities and society. But peace is more than that. There are levels and layers, all inter-twined.

The Hebrew word for peace is *shalom*. But the full meaning of the Hebrew word is far more complete than is rendered by the simple English word "peace." *Shalom* means the peace of God and included in its meaning are such concepts as wholeness, completeness, well-being, health, and being un-divided as individuals, in relationships and in the whole world. *Shalom* is also used as a greeting and a parting word in Hebrew. It is interesting to me that the Hawaiian word *aloha* is used in very analogous ways. In English, we also use the word "peace" to describe many realities. Webster says it can refer to tranquility, serenity, freedom from civil disturbance and freedom from oppressive thoughts and emotions.

It was the Chinese sage Lao-Tse who perhaps best expressed the full requirement for peace:

"If there is to be peace in the world, there must be peace in the nations.

If there is to be peace in the nations, there must be peace in the cities,

If there is to be peace in the cities, there must be peace between neighbors.

If there is to be peace between neighbors, there must be peace in the home.

If there is to be peace in the home, there must be peace in the heart."

As individual peace makers there are many levels at which we can contribute to peace, to *shalom*. Through individual spiritual practice we can cultivate peace by taming our addictions and afflictive emotions and cultivating serenity and loving-kindness. We can see our family relationships as an opportunity to cultivate love, kindness and compassion and to find ways of dealing with conflict with respect and tolerance. At the level of our cities, neighborhoods and nation, we can work for justice and reconciliation. The opportunities here are endless!

SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

In one of his Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings, Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh recommends the following:

“We are determined to learn to listen deeply without judging or reacting and refrain from uttering words that can create discord or cause the community to break. Whenever difficulties arise, we will remain in our [community] and practice looking deeply into ourselves and others to recognize all the causes and conditions, including our own habit energies that have brought about the difficulties. We will take responsibility for the ways we may have contributed to the conflict and keep communication open. We will not behave as a victim but be active in finding ways to reconcile and resolve all conflicts however small.”

Your spiritual exercise for this month is to do your best to do one act of peacemaking or reconciliation. There are many possibilities. You can make an apology that you owe to someone and, if appropriate, make an amends. Remember here that you have no control over whether your apology is accepted or not. Your responsibility is only to make it.

You can pray for or send loving-kindness to a person with whom you are in conflict. You would be surprised how much this can lighten your heart and even improve the relationship.

You can do your best to be helpful in any conflicts within your family, place of employment or any other community that you are a part of. So, you listen deeply, don't take sides and if you already have, examine yourself to discover any part you may have played in the conflict. Then speak words of compassion, forgiveness and reconciliation.

QUESTIONS TO WRESTLE WITH

These are for you to think about all month. We will discuss them together in our groups, but don't wait until your groups to think about them. As always, the gift of Wisdom Circles is that it asks us to think about things that rarely get attention in the rest of our lives. So pull these questions out early. Let them break into --and break open-- your ordinary thoughts

1. Have you been in combat, either as a combatant or as a civilian caught in hostile action? If so, how has that experienced shaped your sense of peace and peace-making?
2. Describe a time in your life when you were filled with inner peace for a sustained period of time. As you reflect on this experience, what were the circumstances? Was this the result of a deliberate effort or did the peace just appear? What can you learn from this experience so that you can have more peace in your life?

3. Think back to a time when you were able to have a positive influence in a process of peacemaking or reconciliation. What was that experience like? Reflecting back, what did you learn from it?

WISE WORDS

Where there is hate, let me bring Love—

Where there is offense, let me bring Pardon—

Where there is discord, let me bring Union—

Where there is error, let me bring Truth—

Where there is doubt, let me bring Faith—

Where there is darkness, let me bring Light—

Where there is sadness, let me bring Joy—

Because it is in giving oneself that one receives;

It is in forgetting oneself that one is found...

Attributed to St. Francis of Assisi

A political victory, a rise in rents, the recovery of your sick, or return of your absent friend, or some other quite external event, raises your spirits, and you think good days are preparing for you. Do not believe it. Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

For peace of mind, resign as general manager of the Universe.

Larry Eisenberg

Peace] is the highest and most strenuous act of the soul, but an entirely harmonious act, in which all our powers and affections are blending in a beautiful proportion, and sustain and perfect one another. It is more than the silence after storms. It is as the concord of all melodious sounds ... an alliance of love with all beings, a sympathy with all that is pure and happy, a surrender of every separate will and interest, a participation of the spirit and life of the universe.... This is peace, and the true happiness of [humanity].

William Ellery Channing

I have come into this world to see this: the sword drop from men's hands even at the height of their arc of rage because we have finally realized there is just one flesh we can wound.

Hafiz of Persia

I do not want the peace that passeth understanding. I want the understanding which bringeth peace.

Helen Keller

The greatest degree of inner tranquility comes from the development of love and compassion. The more we care for the happiness of others, the greater is our own sense of well-being.

Tenzin Gyatso, 14th Dalai Lama

Almost all of us long for peace and freedom; but very few of us have much enthusiasm for the thoughts, feelings, and actions that make for peace and freedom.

Aldous Huxley

We tend to think the problem is human beings have this natural tendency to kill, and yet in the middle of a hot war, WWII, a 'good war,' as it were, the US army was astonished to learn that at least three out of every four riflemen who were trained to kill and commanded to kill, could not bring themselves to pull the trigger when they could see the person they were ordered to kill. And that inner resistance to violence is a well kept secret.

William Ury

Signs & Symptoms of Inner Peace

A tendency to think and act spontaneously rather than on fears based on past experiences

An unmistakable ability to enjoy each moment

A loss of interest in judging other people

A loss of interest in judging self

A loss of interest in interpreting the actions of others

A loss of interest in conflict

A loss of ability to worry

Frequent, overwhelming episodes of appreciation

Contented feelings of connectedness with others & nature

Frequent attacks of smiling

An increasing tendency to let things happen rather than make them happen

An increased susceptibility to love extended by others and the uncontrollable urge to extend it

WARNING

If you have some or all of the above symptoms, be advised that your condition of inner peace may be too far advanced to be curable. If you are exposed to anyone exhibiting any of these symptoms, remain exposed only at your own risk. © 1984

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