

NOW IS THE TIME TO PRACTICE PEACE

Some reflections on war and the conflict in Ukraine



War is the ultimate expression of accumulated individual and collective ‘negative’ emotions such as anger, fear, bitterness, resentment, regret, anxiety and insecurity. Such emotions trigger the well-known ‘fight or flight’ reaction, which we are currently witnessing on our screens at this historic moment in time.

In this state, reason often goes out the window and we say and do things which, in a calmer state of mind, we would never dream of. The primitive survival mechanism from the past rules our head and heart and all the accumulated wisdom and lessons learned by different civilisations go out the window.

No one in their right mind would willingly want to kill innocent children, women and men, destroy homes and communities, bomb hospitals and schools, blow up electricity and water supplies and create a tidal wave of refugees.

This is, of course, not a new story. In the last century alone, over 200 million deaths were caused by war and oppression.¹ However, the stakes are so much higher today due to nuclear proliferation and

¹ See article by Roberto Muchlenkamp on the internet

other weapons of mass destruction and the ever-greater interdependence of us all living in a global economy.

As we stand on the precipice of another major war, it feels like we have entered the last chance saloon. Fate, or the drama of life, is giving us an opportunity to stop, reflect and find other ways of resolving conflict before it is too late. We cannot afford to carry on behaving in the ways that we have always done. Meeting violence with violence just increases the intensity of the flames of anger and the desire for revenge. So what do we do and where do we go?

It is time to retreat from the well-trodden path of death and destruction and choose another path.

In life, we cannot always control what is happening but we can choose our response because there is always more than one way of handling any situation. So, following this premise, if one country is threatened, or attacked by another, conflict and war are not inevitable. There are other choices we can make.

Being aware of this possibility opens up the path to empowerment and peace, collectively and personally.

The word 'peace' can create a feeling of ennui because it has been talked about for millennia but rarely practiced. It can be seen as an impossible ideal for the religiously inclined, or a naïve, Pollyanna option for old hippies and new age types.

It is time to dust down peace and look at it again with fresh eyes and a renewed interest as an urgent and practical alternative to war.

Peace is one of the innate qualities of the human spirit. It is a powerful and positive energy. It makes us feel good; it calms down the mind and body; it enables us to think clearly and take a step back to see the bigger picture and, therefore, make better decisions. It does not seek to judge, blame, criticize or take sides in any dispute. It accepts things as they are, that is neither good nor bad, but looks for win-win outcomes, which take account of the needs of all. Based on respect and compassion, it wins the hearts and minds of people and creates lasting solutions which all can own.

Peace is not a soft option. It has nothing to do with giving in, or giving up, or being a doormat for others to walk over. It requires courage, patience, optimism and a deep faith in the goodness of humanity. It does not suppress or coerce. Rather it empowers and encourages the natural love of peace that lies within us all.

Peace is more than a theory or an ideal. It is a personal and collective practice - the practice of non-violence. It has a long and respectable history both in the East, where it is a key principle in both the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, and in the West, notably amongst the Quakers.

Two well-known, powerful examples of non-violence, among many, are Gandhi, who brought about the defeat and withdrawal of the British from India and Nelson Mandela who chose the path of peace in South Africa that helped put an end to the apartheid regime. Both men were great leaders. They had a dream and walked their talk with great self-discipline and courage. They have a lot to teach us, if we are willing to learn.

So, how do we bring about peace in the world *now*, not only in Ukraine but also the other troubled areas of the world?

The foundation of peace rests in the consciousness of each individual member of the human race. When we become the change we want to see, the collective consciousness will change automatically and together we will be able to put an end to war.

Here are some suggestions, which we can practice, individually and collectively, if we choose.

Individually we can:

1. Regularly connect with our own inner peace through mindfulness, meditation, reflection, contemplation, prayer, or whatever practice makes us feel good. In this way, we raise the energy of our vibrations, which not only calms us down but also has an impact on our behaviour and the atmosphere we create around us
2. Monitor the quality of our thoughts and words. Words are an expression of our thoughts; they are very powerful. As the

saying goes 'the pen is mightier than the sword'. Words carry an energy, which can either uplift and inspire, or incite hatred and violence. So, at this time, do we revert to traditional jingoistic and patriotic language that hardens hearts and closes minds, or do we create a quiet healing space, which allows more productive solutions to emerge?

3. Send powerful, peaceful, loving thoughts and good wishes to *everyone* involved in the conflict. This suggestion may seem fanciful, or even outrageous to some, but there is research, which shows that collective meditation by a large group of people can, at least temporarily, reduce crime and murder rates and other forms of societal dysfunction through its impact on the energy field of others²
4. Heal our heart by releasing any emotions associated with past trauma and pain. Free of such feelings, no one will be able to manipulate and use our suffering for their own purposes
5. Respect and love ourselves. The resultant inner confidence and self esteem will enable us to stop 'people-pleasing' and refuse to do the bidding of others unless we are happy with their requests (rather than demands). Being able to say 'no' in an assertive way, rather than an aggressive or defiant way, is an important aspect of non-violence
6. Learn the language of non-violent communication;³ listen to ourselves and others with compassion; know and express clearly our feelings, needs, wants, desires, ideas and opinions; set down boundaries and, at the same time, be prepared to compromise (not capitulate) for the greater good.

Such practices, along with many others, give us the inner strength and resilience to face adversity and make a positive difference in the world. If we all became peaceful and peace-loving overnight, it would not be possible to lead a nation to war - there would be no life-denying energy for warmongers to tap into and everyone would refuse to cooperate.

² See the work of Lynne MacTaggart on the power of intention and the Field

³ See the work of Marshall Rosenberg

Collectively, if we choose, we can do our best to create peace *now*, in any country affected by war, by actively supporting any initiatives that de-escalate the situation and offer support and hope to all the parties involved, such as intense diplomacy, mediation, rallies, sanctions, arms embargoes and mass passive resistance.

In the longer term we can, if we choose,

1. Create a global culture of peace and non-violence in which everyone is encouraged to focus on making a better world for not only human beings but also animals and nature; a world based on peace and love, compassion and cooperation where there is no desire to fight and kill each other and, therefore, no need for the armed forces that consume and misuse so many of the Earth's resources.
2. Organise a world-wide movement *for* peace (not *against* war), encouraging everyone regardless of country, religion or race to regularly come together on the streets of every nation to hold hands, sing, dance, celebrate and enjoy the power of peace.

At the end of the day, as responsible human beings, we need to make a choice between:

- Peace or war
- Love or fear
- Happiness or sorrow
- Cooperation or competition
- Caring and sharing or indifference and greed

Which do you choose? Which do you practice?

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5th March 2022