

PEACE: A HOPELESS HOPE OF TODAY'S WORLD

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Abstract

Peace is something everyone wants in the world, yet few seem to find. The English word peace is also a translation of the Hebrew word shalom which means to 'restore'. Religious beliefs often seek to identify and address the basic problems of human life, including the conflicts between, among, and within persons and societies. Even though all religions propagate peace, harmony and universal brotherhood, history testifies many combats and crusades which have taken place in the name of religion. Peace is directly related to the actions and attitudes of individuals; but it is ultimately a gift from God As valuable as peace is, it is not surprising to find that it is sometimes counterfeited. Empty promises of peace can be used to manipulate others. Deceitful men speak words of peace while secretly planning evil. The present paper is an effort (humble) to explore the source of peace as described in different religions and therapeutics.

Key words: world, peace, religion, Hebrew, Bible, God

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Literature is one of the powerful instruments for forming character which is braced by knowledge, clothed with steadfastness and courage and inspired by that public spirit and public virtue of which it has been well said that they are the brightest ornaments of the mind of man. Literature is the representation and reflection of social life. Peace is one of the biggest virtues which a nation can have. The word peace originates from the French 'pais' which means "peace, reconciliation, silence, agreement." The English word came as a translation the Hebrew word shalom which means 'to restore.' Peace has multiple meanings like salaam in Arabic, and also justice, good health, safety, well-being, prosperity, security, good fortune and friendliness.

The question whether peace can be attained by the world is being considered by adherents of every type of religion, every type of belief or unbelief, and every type of political persuasion. It is not limited to any color or culture. The whole world is seeking peace. Nothing is more universal in the world today than the longing for peace.

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Science and technological advancement, though capable of creating immeasurable material comfort, cannot replace the age-old spiritual and humanitarian values helpful in shaping

world civilization. Human beings should try to strike a balance between material developments on the one hand and the development of spiritual, human values on the other. The human race is facing many problems today, some are natural calamities, others, are conflict of ideologies, political or religious. People fight with each other for trivial matters, losing sight of the basic humanity that binds them all together as a single human family. It must be remembered that the different religions, ideologies, and political systems of the world are meant for human beings to achieve happiness. One of the greatest single danger facing humankind - is the threat of nuclear destruction. The great leaders of the world conduct conferences having World Peace as their prime agenda. It is all but a futile effort. It is like beating about the bush, for on going back they plan to make weapons more powerful than the other countries.

Peoples' minds are blinded towards their fellow brethren. The practice of compassion and wisdom is useful to all, especially to those responsible for running national affairs, in whose hands lie the power and opportunity to create the structure of world peace. Major religions of the world like Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism, Buddhism - have similar ideals of love, the same goal of benefiting humanity through spiritual practice. I would like to make a note of what is believed and practiced by some of the major religions of the world.

Hindus believe their position in this present life was determined by their actions in a previous life. Hinduism therefore provides a possible explanation for suffering and evil in this life. If a person's behavior before was evil, they might justifiably experience tremendous hardships in this life. Pain, disease, poverty or a disaster like a flood is deserved by that person because of his own evil actions, usually from a previous lifetime. A Hindu's goal is to become free from the law of karma...to be free from continuous reincarnations. Only the soul matters which will one day be free of the cycle of rebirths and be at rest. Hinduism gives a person freedom to choose how to work toward spiritual perfection.

Another recent and popular faith is known as the New Age belief which promotes the development of the person's own power or divinity. When referring to God, a follower of New Age is not talking about a transcendent, personal God who created the universe, but is referring to a higher consciousness within themselves. A person in New Age would see himself as God,

the cosmos, the universe. In fact, everything that the person sees, hears, feels or imagines is to be considered divine. New Age teaches a wide array of eastern mysticism and spiritual, metaphysical and psychic techniques, such as breathing exercises, chanting, drumming, meditating...to develop an altered consciousness and one's own divinity.

Buddhists do not worship any gods or God. People outside of Buddhism often think that Buddhists worship the Buddha. However, Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama) never claimed to be divine, but rather he is viewed by Buddhists as having attained what they are also striving to attain, which is spiritual enlightenment and, with it, freedom from the continuous cycle of life and death. A Buddhist seeks to end these rebirths. Buddhists believe it is a person's cravings, aversion and delusion that cause these rebirths. Therefore, the goal of a Buddhist is to purify one's heart and to let go of all yearnings toward sensual desires and the attachment to oneself. Buddhists follow a list of religious principles and very dedicated meditation. When a Buddhist meditates it is not the same as praying or focusing on a god, it is more of self-discipline.

Muslims believe there is the one almighty God, named Allah, who is infinitely superior to and transcendent from humankind. Though a Muslim honors several prophets, Muhammad is considered the last. To be a Muslim, one has to follow five religious duties: 1. Repeat a creed about Allah and Muhammad; 2. Recite certain prayers in Arabic five times a day; 3. Give to the needy; 4. One month each year, fast from food, drink, sex and smoking from sunrise to sunset; 5. Pilgrimage once in one's lifetime to worship at a shrine in Mecca. At death -- based on one's faithfulness to these duties -- a Muslim hopes to enter Paradise. If not, they will be eternally punished in hell.

Christians believe in a loving God who has revealed himself and can be known in a personal way, in this life. With Jesus Christ, the person's focus is not on religious rituals or performing good works, but on enjoying a relationship with God and growing to know him better. Faith in Jesus Christ himself, not just in his teachings, is how the Christian experiences joy and a meaningful life. In his life on Earth, Jesus did not identify himself as a prophet pointing to God or as a teacher of enlightenment. Rather, Jesus claimed to be God in human form. He performed miracles, forgave people of their sin and said that anyone who believed in him would have eternal life. Christians regard the Bible as God's written message to humankind. Jesus

claimed that He was the salt and light of this world. Jesus Christ said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

On looking at these major belief systems and their views of God, it can be seen that every religion teaches love, kindness, compassion and service towards human beings. All focus at attaining and maintaining peace. The teachings of all religions are moral precepts for perfecting the functions of mind, body, and speech. All teach us not to lie or steal or take others' lives, and so on. The great teachers wanted to lead their followers away from the paths of negative deeds caused by ignorance and to introduce them to paths of goodness. All religions agree upon the necessity to control the undisciplined mind that harbors selfishness and other causes of trouble, and each teaches a path leading to a spiritual state that is peaceful, disciplined, ethical, and wise. There may be differences of dogma according to differences of time and circumstance as well as cultural influences. However, it is much more beneficial to implement in daily life the shared precepts for goodness taught by all religions rather than to argue about minor differences in approach. Dalai Lama in his message on world peace, has said,

"There are two primary tasks facing religious practitioners who are concerned with world peace. First, we must promote better interfaith understanding so as to create a workable degree of unity among all religions. This may be achieved in part by respecting each other's beliefs and by emphasizing our common concern for human well-being. Second, we must bring about a viable consensus on basic spiritual values that touch every human heart and enhance general human happiness. This means we must emphasize the common denominator of all world religions - humanitarian ideals. These two steps will enable us to act both individually and together to create the necessary spiritual conditions for world peace."

Whether we will be able to achieve world peace or not, we have no choice but to work towards that goal. If our minds are dominated by anger, we will lose the best part of human intelligence - wisdom, the ability to decide between right and wrong. Suzy Kaseem says,

"To become a true global citizen, one must abandon all notions of 'otherness' and instead embrace 'togetherness'."

Various efforts are being made to bring peace in the world. One of the greatest contributions is made by the United Nations which has a range of activities like peace keeping, peace building, conflict prevention and mediation and peace enforcement. Conflict prevention involves diplomatic measures to keep intra-state or inter-state tensions and disputes from escalating into violent conflict.

It includes early warning, information gathering and a careful analysis of the factors driving the conflict. Conflict prevention activities may include the use of the Secretary-General's "good offices," preventive deployment of UN missions or conflict mediation led by the Department of Political Affairs. Peacemaking generally includes measures to address conflicts in progress and usually involves diplomatic action to bring hostile parties to a negotiated agreement.

The UN Secretary-General may exercise his or her "good offices" to facilitate the resolution of the conflict. Peacemakers are envoys, governments, groups of states, regional organizations or the United Nations. Peacemaking efforts are also undertaken by unofficial and non-governmental groups, or by a prominent personality working independently. Peace enforcement involves the application of a range of coercive measures, including the use of military force. It requires the explicit authorization of the Security Council.

It is used to restore international peace and security in situations where the Security Council has decided to act in the face of a threat to the peace, breach of the peace or act of aggression. The Council may utilize, where appropriate, regional organizations and agencies for enforcement action under its authority and in accordance with the UN Charter.

Peace building aims to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundation for sustainable peace and development. It is a complex, long-term process of creating the necessary conditions for sustainable peace. Peace building measures address core issues that effect the functioning of society and the State, and seek to enhance the capacity of the State to effectively and legitimately carry out its core functions.

The boundaries between conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping, peace building and peace enforcement have become increasingly blurred. Peace operations are rarely limited to

one type of activity. Today's multidimensional peacekeeping operations facilitate the political process, protect civilians, assist in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants; support the organization of elections, protect and promote human rights and assist in restoring the rule of law.

UN peacekeeping operations may use force to defend themselves, their mandate, and civilians, particularly in situations where the State is unable to provide security and maintain public order.

Apart from various measures taken by different organizations and religions to bring peace into the world it seems that world is moving towards a greater threat and danger. In spite of all despair and desperateness, we still have a hope against hope that one day God who has created everything will bring peace into this world. People do not know what the Bible teaches on this subject. Many passages in the Bible speak of a coming time when the nations of the world will be at peace with one another.

In Psalms 72 verse 3 it is revealed, "The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness." It is recorded in verse 7 of this Psalm that "In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth." It is clear that the Bible definitely predicts a time of peace.

In Isaiah, chapter 2, there is another promise of peace in relation to the time when the Lord will come to Zion. In Isaiah 2:4 it is written: "He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." This definite promise of world-wide peace is connected with the coming of the Lord. Another important reference is found in Isaiah 9:7 concerning the Son to be given to Israel, "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end." This is another sure promise of peace on the earth. These passages could be multiplied as they are not isolated references. There are many predictions in the Old Testament of the time of peace, a time when nations will give up their instruments of war and turn them into instruments of peace. The promise of God is given to mankind with a condition

“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”

This promise was given to Israel under the Old Testament order of things. God said in effect: “If you want peace, come, confess your sins, yield your heart to me, obey my law, and I will heal your land.” In the Old Testament Israel was given specific promises. God told them: “If you obey me; I will give you peace; I will prosper you; I will cause your crops to prosper; I will give you rest among your enemies; I will keep you from pestilence and from disaster.” If they did not obey, God said that He would pour judgment after judgment upon them. Deut. 28-30. In spite of the plain warning of the Word of God, Israel turned its back on God. The result is recorded in historical sections of the Old Testament.

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