

Amber A. Hesleph

## **Internally Preventing an External War**

When you examine world leaders like Gandhi, the Dalai Lama and Martin Luther King Jr., is their confidence and over whelming sense of assurance not clearly evident? Are these characteristics perhaps essential to creating peace within the world? I believe so. In order to create harmony in our world, we must first find harmony in ourselves. We often find that jealousy and hatred are the sources of many crimes committed, as well as the epicenter of disgruntled relationships. On a larger scale, countries even go to war because they seek what they do not have. Martin Luther King, Jr. put it best when he said

*Nonviolence means avoiding not only external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit. You not only refuse to shoot a man, but you refuse to hate him.*

King's statement suggests how if internally you are upset with someone or something, eventually if not stopped it will manifest itself into a physical act of violence.

One of the most infamous leaders in history, had a childhood that possibly sparked a war within himself. After getting smallpox as a child Joseph Stalin's face and arms were left with embarrassing scars; children in the town treated him maliciously. Some articles on Stalin even propose that these incidences caused him to develop a cruel streak for those that treated him with disrespect. Because Joseph Stalin was unhappy with who he was, the likelihood that he would turn to physical violence later on in his life was increased. Could his inner feelings of inferiority have actually sparked the start of his reign as a violent communist leader? I'll let you decide. The

lesson to learn from Joseph Stalin's story is that we need to be at peace with ourselves first regardless of any incoming negative hatred, if we want to assure peaceful relations with others.

On the opposite spectrum of Joseph Stalin's passion for vengeance we have a world hero, in a sense, who had mastered peace within, self-content, and love. Mahatma Gandhi "the great souled one" was celebrated for his practice of nonviolent philosophy and passive resistance. An Indian immigrant living in South Africa, Gandhi was frequently discriminated against and similarly to Stalin, physically abused by those who felt he did not belong. Gandhi however, turned to a life of "truth and firmness" known as Satyagraha which he developed as an outline of truth and love. His method included non-violence; and absolutely no use of hatred. It is through 'the determination to teach truth through nonviolent means' that Gandhi had reached what psychologist Abraham Maslow would call the 'self-actualization' stage. According to Maslow, people who reached this stage exhibited characteristics like: acceptance and realism, sense of personal responsibility, spontaneity and peak experiences. Gandhi chose to use such characteristics and take a negative, being discriminated against, and turn it into a positive, new way of peaceful living. Gandhi could have chosen to take the same route that Stalin did, physical violence and widespread corruption, but he took a more diplomatic route because Gandhi was internally at peace with himself.

So what was the difference between these two prominent leaders? Both of them had lives filled with trials and tribulations, and at times both were treated with disrespect and disdain. The difference is Gandhi chose to cultivate values that reflected peace. He knew how to have confidence and happiness within himself despite the negative opinions of others. Stalin was not able to develop such skills and chose to spread war and hatred.

In order to reduce the level of violent content in the world, we should first start by replicating some of the methods Gandhi used. First, we ought to increase the amount of meditation in our everyday lives. Second, as a society we need to learn how to forgive. Lastly, and perhaps the most important, is the will to practice compassion. A significant decrease in violent crime will be the natural result of people learning to practice these habits.

It has been proven that meditation decreases the amount of violence in the world. In a "Terrorism, Retaliation and Victory: Awaken the Soul of America to Defeat Terrorism Without Casualties" U.S. Army Col. Brian Rees, proposes that group practice of the Transcendental Meditation(TM) and the TM-Sidhi program by seven thousand people reduces terrorism and international conflicts worldwide. Meditation has impacted the lives of many of the leaders we look up to. People like Oprah Winfrey, Bill Ford and Rupert Murdoch, all successful business people that have also found time to give back to the community are famous for meditating. Meditation is a form of healing, it has been practiced by Buddhists for centuries, and for good reason. They believe that meditation helps control the mind so that it becomes peaceful and more focused, and the meditator becomes more aware. Doesn't that sound like a recipe for reducing the level of worldly conflicts? The Tibetan Dalai Lama states:

*If a person's basic state of mind is serene and calm, then it is possible for this inner peace to overwhelm a painful physical experience.*

Isn't that what we as citizens want? To be able to maintain an inner harmony that is so strong our adverse surroundings never impact us in a negative light?

The second attribute we need incorporate in our lives is forgiveness. As citizens we are challenged everyday by each other, in good ways and in bad. A majority of the time it's just little

things that upset us: getting cut-off in traffic, bumping shoulders with someone on the street or a small misunderstanding. Most of the time people are pretty good at controlling their emotions and forgiving people for these small mishaps. However people like eighteen year old Karl Halverson Pierson who opened fire in a Colorado school because he wanted 'revenge,' sometimes forget the importance of forgiveness. If we chose to stop, take a deep breath and forgive people prior to acting out, the level of violent crime would decrease tremendously. I believe that as a society we should put a larger emphasis on how important it is to stop being angry and resentful towards one another. To accomplish this, we need to take time out of our hectic lives and truly contemplate the thought of whether or not our indignation is actually necessary or not. We have become so enveloped in what we do, that we rarely take a second to just stop and pardon petty confrontations, and we tend to dwell on insignificant events too often. When we can incorporate forgiveness into our everyday lives and learn to focus on the positive, then we will become happier beings and thus a more peaceful world.

The last ingredient in our recipe for a decrease in violent conflicts is compassion. A contributing factor of genocide, murder, and civil war is a lack of compassion. Stemming from the Latin 'compati' meaning 'to suffer with' compassion is defined as "sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it." If Adolf Hitler or other famous killers would have shown more compassion like Oskar Schindler did during the holocaust, millions of lives could have been saved. In order for compassion to be a daily habit, we should more frequently imagine ourselves in the shoes of others, and picture what we would want if we were them and then act on it. Whether this is on a large scale like providing food and clothing to a third world country, or on a smaller scale like baking cookies for someone who has just lost a loved one. Regardless of the act of compassion, the person on the receiving end is

more likely to be happier and pass the act along; than to act out in a cruel manner. Consequently, we can all benefit from showing more compassion for one another.

Being an African-American female, I have been confronted with the choice of hate or peace on multiple occasions and have decided to continually cultivate peace. Regardless of any negative experiences that may have tempted me to believe otherwise, I am aware of how important it is to find tranquility within yourself so as to prevent violence from revealing itself. I have developed confidence in myself like Martin Luther King Jr, Gandhi and the Dalai Lama did and have become more assured in who I am; making it easier to cultivate peace within myself. Through meditation, forgiveness and acts of compassion I have personally reduced the level of cruel violence in my life, and believe that cultivating these practices as citizens will decrease the level of cruel violence in the world as well.

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