

Peace through the Practice of Peaceful Action

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No amount of violence in the world will generate peace. Peace is not something concrete and external; it is a way of life that must come from within us all. Michael Franti's lyrics, "We can bomb the world to pieces, but we can't bomb it into peace," ring with clear truth, especially in today's world of global competition, industrialization, and war.

What counts as peace? Fighting with weapons does not support peace, whether the fighting serves as revenge, an "offensive defense," or any other purpose. However, peace must not be misconstrued as passivity in the face of injustice. Peace is active resistance of injustices that occur. If someone attacks me, and I am an advocate of peace, I do not physically fight back. I take the pain, not happily, but I resist the injustice by courageously facing the adversity in hopes that my attacker will see my pain and suffering and that seeing it will change the attacker's heart, arousing peace. In Sanskrit, peace can be equated with the word "ahimsa," meaning non-violence, and more specifically, doing no harm. I practice ahimsa, but ahimsa is not the violence avoided because I am weaker than others and I would lose in a fight. I actively choose not to cause harm to others, though I am strong, because peace bubbles forth from within me and I actively choose to be a channel of peace.

Despite these definitions of peace, peace remains abstract and difficult to hear when it calls to us. Yet we have guides in our world today: the people who followed peace persistently before us. Mahatma Gandhi, a Hindu, presents an apparent example. He never used violence in fighting unjust laws; however, he did not sit by and allow discrimination to happen, either. Gandhi gathered the Indian people together to stand up to the injustice of the imposing British, and they sought fair laws and equal treatment. Never touching a sword, Gandhi changed the world with his words and peaceful actions, catching the attention and respect of the British, who did in fact change their laws. We, too, can forget our bombs and nuclear weapons; they are totally unnecessary. Gandhi proved that peace can work! With peace as a constant option, violence proves to be a shabby alternative.

When "we bomb the world to pieces" in an attempt to reach peace, we are trying to fight fire with fire, simply creating more fire and chaos. Surely, it is difficult to fight the fire, the injustice, with water, peace, but acting out of peace and ahimsa will bring us closer to world peace than committing more violence will; we must fight the cycle. It is easier to try to "bomb [the world] into peace," but the longer, more demanding path of peace and nonviolence promises a happier, more harmonious world for humankind.