

FINDING PEACE AMIDST STRIFE AND CONFLICT

MA. BETTY SALCEDO
School of Allied Medicine
Universidad de Zamboanga
Zamboanga City, Philippines

Never before in the history of the world, has the human race been in such great need for freedom from conflict, ill-feeling, selfishness, deceit and strife. We are in dire need of peace not only in our homes, offices and in our personal lives, but also at global level. The tension, anxiety and fear arising from conflicts are not only disruptive but constitute a constant drain on our being, mentally and physically. Human beings have become the most violent beings in this world.

Today, the threat of global nuclear destruction is a real possibility. Should there be a global nuclear war, there can be no sanctuary anywhere under the sun for man to escape to. What a mess the human race has landed itself in! Scientific advancement which has made possible the tapping of the tremendous energy within the atom has also endangered the human species. As long as man is dominated by ignorance, selfishness, injustice, vengeance and other kindred evil destructive forces, no one will be safe from him.

The basic problem we face today is moral degradation and misplaced intelligence. In spite of all the advances made by science and technology, the world is far from being safe and peaceful. Science and technology have indeed made human life more insecure than ever before. If there is no corresponding spiritual improvement in our approach to human problems then human life itself will be in danger.

In the search for peace and harmony, world leaders have attempted to formulate international treaties and agreements to prevent or settle disputes among nations. The United Nations as a world body was in fact established after the Second World War to maintain international order and stability. It might not be the best vehicle to achieve that purpose but at least it provides a workable system whereby disputing nations can meet in a civilized manner to settle their problems. The hostility, fear and suspicion among different races, nations and religious denominations, however, do not make peaceful co-existence an easily accomplished goal. Despite the endless hours of negotiations and rhetorics at the United Nations, countries are still fighting one another and ceasefire agreements are broken with impunity and predictable regularity. Where do people find peace and happiness under such circumstances? Happiness never arises when there is fear.

A happy and contented life cannot be achieved if we waste our time and energy in conflict and strife. To have peace, we must renounce conflict of every description. The heart, once freed, from such strife, will then be free to become the instrument of welfare that it should be, instead of being a hindrance to society. The invisible and powerful mind can be diverted to the aid of mankind, instead of its woe.

A boil cannot be cured by merely cutting it off with a blade. The contaminated blood will only produce more and more boils. The root cause must be investigated first and eliminated to effect a radical cure. Similarly, for there to be peace, the heart and mind, which form the basis of human action, should also be at rest. This can be brought about through a sincere spiritual awakening. What is of importance is not mere faith but for people to lead a life of love, sincerity and justice based on the moral principles taught by religious teachers.

Religious teachers always maintain that human happiness does not depend upon the satisfaction of physical appetites and passions, or upon the acquisition of material wealth. This fact is also clear from empirical human experience. Even if we have all the worldly pleasures, we cannot still be happy and peaceful if our minds are constantly obsessed with anxiety and hatred, arising from ignorance with regard to the true nature of existence.

Genuine happiness cannot be defined in terms of wealth, power, children, fame or recognitions. These are no doubt conducive to some temporary physical comfort but not to happiness in the ultimate sense. This is particularly so when possessions are unjustly obtained or misappropriated. They become a source of pain, guilt and sorrow rather than happiness to the possessors.

Fascinating sights, enchanting music, fragrant scents, delicious tastes and enticing body contacts mislead and deceive us, only to make us slaves of worldly pleasures. While no one will deny that there is momentary happiness in the anticipation of as well as during the gratification of the senses, such pleasures are fleeting. When viewed in retrospect, a person can understand the fleeting and unsatisfactory nature of such pleasure, paving the way to a better understanding of this reality.

Wealth cannot quench the burning thirst of craving. We can never be happy if we merely seek to satisfy our gross animal desires, to satisfy our need for the pleasures of earthly possessions. If it were so, then with the tremendous progress achieved in every field, the world could well be on the road to complete happiness and peace. But this is obviously not the case. Worldly desires can never be entirely satisfied because the moment we obtain something we want, we soon become dissatisfied with it and crave for something else. When the changes and decay occur in the many things we cling to, we experience unhappiness. The enjoyment of sensual pleasures is not real happiness. True happiness can only arise from the full freedom of the mind. The source of happiness is not physical; it must be found in a mind free from mental disturbance.

Worldly treasures are impermanent but transcendental treasures like confidence, morality, generosity, honesty and wisdom are imperishable. Emotional attachment, hatred and jealousy debase a person; but goodwill, sympathetic joy and an unbiased attitude will make him noble, even divine in this life itself.

Man can develop and maintain his inner peace only by turning his thoughts inwards instead of outwards. Be aware of the dangers and pitfalls of the destructive forces of greed, hatred and delusion. Learn to cultivate and sustain the benevolent forces of kindness, love and harmony. The battleground is within us, and it is within us that the greatest battle has to be fought and won. The battle is not fought with weapons, but with mental awareness of all the negative and positive forces within our minds. This awareness is the key to unlock the door from which conflict and strife as well as wholesome thoughts emerge.

The mind is the ultimate source of all happiness and misery. For there to be genuine happiness and peace in the world, the mind of the individual must first be at peace and happy. Individual happiness is conducive to the happiness of society, while the happiness of society means happiness to the nation. It is on the happiness of nations that the happiness of the world is built.

From the lessons of life, it is clear that the real victory is never gained by strife. Success is never achieved by conflict. Happiness is never experienced through ill-feeling. Peace is never achieved by accumulating more wealth or gaining worldly power. Peace is gained by letting go of our selfishness and helping the world with acts of love. Peace in the heart conquers all opposing forces. It also helps us maintain a healthy mind and live a rich and fulfilling life of happiness and contentment.

And it all starts with **ONESELF**.