

Peace Within

Peace Between

Peace Among

*by Jim Bitter*

### Peace Within: A Review

All of us are in a more or less constant movement from normal feelings of being less than we believe is possible to becoming more of what we want to be; that is, our life is a movement from perceived minus-positions to desired plus-positions. In the end, we hope to become complete, whole, self-actualized, or even perfect. Most of us know we will never get there, but it is in the striving that we form the basis for our living. It is in the striving that we declare who we are, what we are worth, and how we want to be remembered.

Each of us is unique, and it is impossible, therefore, to say that there is a right way for everyone to live. There are, however, some general guidelines for living a meaningful life and for achieving a sense of *peace within*. Coming to a place of internal peace is the starting point for achieving peace between individuals and among the multitude of others.

The Guidelines:

- We are social being and interdependent. We cannot do everything alone, nor can we leave others to fend for themselves: *The meaning of our lives is the contributions we make to others.*

- We are all *unique* and *different* from each other and yet we are more or less the same. The human genome for every person is 99.9% the same, and all of our differences are accounted for in the .1% that is left. *Interest in* and *appreciation for* differences in others is essential for peace: These are the capacities that replace fear and prejudice.
- We have the capacity for intimacy and intimacy flows from other capacities for *friendliness*, *trustworthiness* and *sharing*.
- We have the capacity to think, and *thinking rationally* is generally better than being in a state of triggered emotional reactivity.
- We have the capacity to feel, and having access to *a full range of emotions* is generally better than not feeling at all or turning off our feelings.
- We are bound to this earth, this planet, and it provides so much of what sustains us in very real ways: Those who live more peaceful lives find ways to *spend at least a half an hour quietly in nature almost every day*. Appreciating nature also means living in harmony with the planet so that it may sustain us and future generations.
- If we must compare ourselves to others, *we ought to compare ourselves to those who are less fortunate* and be *thankful* for the gifts we have been given.
- In general, when we seek goals, we will be happier if the goals we choose are *realistic* and *reachable* rather than perfect and flawless.
- Happiness is supported by our *courage to be imperfect*. We are human beings. We make mistakes. It takes no courage to be perfect. It does, however, take courage to accept ourselves as merely human. Our goal in life ought to be to embrace our humanness, to *become more fully human*, not to burden ourselves with goals of perfection. Being more fully human is reflected in our willingness not to take ourselves too seriously and to have and express a *sense of humor*.

- Mistakes require of us only that we *correct* what we can, *apologize* when appropriate, and *forgive* self and others for real and perceived transgressions.
- Peace within is intimately connected to being *fully present*. It encompasses *awareness* of self and others; *contact* characterized by caring, connectedness, cooperation, confidence, capability, compassion, and courage (the 7 C's); and *experiencing* that enriches us and opens us to further experiences rather than constricts. Being fully present means trying to *love as much as we can from whatever position we are currently in*. Peace within avoids self-absorption.

## Peace Between: The Process of Conflict Resolution

Conflict flows from the recognition that we are different; we speak of having differences with each other. In and of itself, *conflict is neither good nor bad*, but we can make it one or the other. Successful conflict resolution starts with internal peace and extends that peacefulness through *mutual respect* to others. Love is very helpful, but it does not prevent fighting or conflicts that diminish the individuals involved in the conflict. Mutual respect does prevent these things: It is expressed in a valuing of self and others.

Some signs that mutual respect is missing:

- Blaming & Criticism: Sacrificing others to preserve self
- Placating: Sacrificing self to preserve others
- Super Reasonableness: Sacrificing self and others to preserve what is right
- Irrelevance: Sacrificing self, others, and principles to distract, distort, and avoid
- Contempt: Diminishing others to elevate self
- Defensiveness: Protecting self at all costs
- Stonewalling: Passive resistance—Taking the stance that no one can make you do anything
- Withdrawal: Avoiding conflict by refusing to face it
- Seeking power rather than agreement

Some signs that mutual respect is present:

- **Interest in the point of view of others**
- **Caring about the well-being of self and others**
- **Confidence in being able to speak for self**
- **The courage to listen to others with appreciation**
- **A desire to be heard rather than to win**
- **A willingness to consider alternatives to personal desires**
- **Trusting in the good will of others**
- **Replacing judgment with understanding**

- **Seeking agreement rather than power**

## Four Basic Steps to Solving Conflict:

### 1. **Approach conflict resolution from a position of mutual respect**

- Don't try to problem-solve when you are angry: To fight with someone is to empower their oppositional stance
- From a calm state, try to understand the other person's point of view and still express your own clearly: The goal of any discussion is to be firm, but kind.
- Be willing to listen and ask for a respectful hearing yourself: Neither fight nor give in.
- No one can be humiliated if they do not feel humiliated: You cannot always choose what will happen to you, but *you can choose how you will respond*.
- Effective problem-solving starts from a position of well-being and high self-esteem (peace within); it includes the conviction that we are valuable and valued human beings who can stand up for ourselves without resorting to power over others
- When possible, validate the other person's position without losing your own: "If I saw the world/life/problem the way you do, I can certainly understand why you would hold the position you do."

### 2. **Pinpoint the real issue**

- In what way, am I *feeling less than*? In what way is the other person feeling the same way? In what way do both of us feel like we may lose before we even start?
- What *goal* or *desire* or *agenda* do I have in this conflict? What goal or desire might the other person be trying to express?
- What is the *private logic* that underlies the other person's position? What is my own private logic about?

- How can each person make the other person feel *understood*?

### 3. Seek mutual agreement

- There is *no such thing as a lack of communication or a lack of cooperation*: Everything happens in relationship, even conflict and fighting. I cannot have a fight with you unless I communicate my interest in fighting with you, and you agree to join the fight and cooperate in maintaining it.
- Start with the conviction that *the only person you can change is yourself*: It is the first lesson we all need to learn and the generally the last one we enact.
- Think outside of the box: The answer does not have to be *either* your answer *or* the other person's answer: What is a third, fourth, or fifth possibility? *Brainstorming* can include even bad ideas at least initially.
- The goal is to answer the question: *How could we both satisfy our needs*? How can all parties come out ahead?

### 4. Seek mutual responsibility in decision-making

- Unless all parties to a conflict participate in the decision-making, there is no agreement, and the conflict will continue
- What ideas can each person offer as a solution?
- What is each person willing to do to solve the problem?
- You know what a person is really willing to do *not by what she or he says but by what is actually done*.
- The conflict is over when each person feels *understood* and *valued*.

#### A conflict-resolution conversational format:

- “ I have something serious I would like to discuss with you. Is this a good time for you, or is there another time that would be better?”

- “Here is a problem I am having: (state it using I-statements as much as possible).”
- “Do you understand what I am saying? Does it make sense to you?”
- “Thank you for understanding what I have said.” Or “Let me clarify what I said or meant so I will be clearer about what is important to me.”
- “I would like to know what you are thinking and feeling about all of this.”
- “Let me see if I am understanding you: Do you mean . . . ?”
- “If I am understanding you, the important issue for you is \_\_\_\_\_.”
- “Do you have some sense of what the important issue for me might be?”
- “If I am understand myself well enough, I think the important issue for me might be \_\_\_\_\_.”
- For problem-solving:
  - “How could we both get what we need/want in this situation? What are your ideas—all of them?”
  - “I favor trying this idea. Which one do you favor?”
  - “Thank you for taking the time to work on this with me.”

- For requesting behavior change:
  - “I have a request to make of you: Would you be willing to hear it?”
  - “I would like to ask you if it would be possible for you to \_\_\_\_\_.”
  - “Is there any part of this request that you could do or do you have another solution that might work?”
  - “Thank you for hearing my request and being willing to talk about this with me.”

## Peace Among

The world in which we live is increasingly developing according to the democratic principles inherent in *social equality*. Social equality does not mean that we are all the same. We are not. We do, however, have an *equal right to be valued and respected*. This is true in all relationships: the ones between men and womyn, between adults and children, between labor and management, between races and cultures, between those who are heterosexual and those who are gay/lesbian/bi-sexual/transgendered, between political parties, between religions, and between nations. When we come to understand all problems as being social in nature, then the kind of relationships we generate can be the only focus of true conflict resolution.

No conflict can be resolved without understanding the other side better than or at least as well as our own. No conflict can be resolved by a resort to power rather than agreement. No conflict can be resolved with one side winning and one losing. For a conflict to keep going, all parties must agree that it should keep going. For a conflict to end, it takes only one party to withdraw or refuse to fight.

Fear is the great enemy of peace. Human connectedness, caring, compassion, understanding, interest in others, and courage mark the end of fear. I wish you peace within, peace between, and peace among.