

**Jesus Buddha Peace**  
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**Meditation**

In the midst of our full lives, may we pause...  
Seeking the peace that always rests within...  
However busy, however hard our days...  
that peace always rests within.

So may we pause... and find that peace... that deep peace...  
that renewing peace....

Pause, and know the peace of our hearts...  
The peace of this place and this gathering...  
The peace of the falling snow...  
Peace...

**Readings**

from the words of the Buddha and of Jesus

**The words of Jesus:**

Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, "Friend, let me take the speck out of your eye," when you yourself do not see the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.

*Luke 6.41-42*

**The words of the Buddha:**

The faults of others are easier to see than one's own; the faults of others are easily seen, for they are sifted like chaff, but one's own faults are hard to see. This is like the cheat who hides his dice and shows the dice of his opponent, calling attention to the other's shortcomings, continually thinking of accusing him.

*Udanavarga 27.1*

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**The words of Jesus:**

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. From anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.

*Luke 6.27-30*

**The words of the Buddha:**

Hatreds do not ever cease in this world by hating, but by love; this is an eternal truth...  
Overcome anger by love, overcome evil by good. Overcome the miser by giving,  
overcome the liar by truth. *Dhammapada 1.5 & 17.3*

from Living Buddha, Living Christ, by Thich Nhat Hanh:

When Gandhi said that love is the force that can liberate, he meant we have to love our enemy. Even if our enemy is cruel, even if he is crushing us, sowing terror and injustice, we have to love him. This is the message of Jesus. But how can we love our enemy? There is only one way – to understand him. We have to understand why he is that way, how he has come to be like that, why he does not see things the way we do. Understanding a person brings us the power to love and accept him. And the moment we love and accept him, he ceases to be our enemy. To “love our enemy” is impossible, because the moment we love him, he is no longer our enemy.

To love him, we must practice deep looking in order to understand him. If we do, we accept him, we love him, and we also accept and love ourselves.

**Sermon**

When it comes to peace and peacemaking, there are some people who just won't give up, or in their lifetimes never gave up.

There are the iconic figures we all know – in the century just past Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gandhi are often the first that come to mind.

Yet there are uncounted others, well-known and less well known, women and men who stand in vigil, who protest war, who are conscientious objectors, who serve on reconciliation commissions, who put themselves in harm's way as part of UN peacekeeping missions or working with gang members on the streets of Boston.

But haven't they all noticed? There are still wars. There is still violence in the streets. There is still hate. Jesus preached peace two thousand years ago. The Buddha preached peace twenty-five hundred years ago. And there are still wars; still violence.

Haven't we noticed that peace is simply an unrealistic goal?

Well... almost forty years ago the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh sat down for extended conversations with the peace activist, Jesuit priest Daniel Berrigan. Their conversations were transcribed and published as a little book titled *The Raft is Not the Shore: Conversations Toward A Buddhist – Christian Awareness*. All this said, I want to share just two sentences from Thich Nhat Hanh, as he and Dan Berrigan contemplated not only the war in Vietnam, raging at the time, but also the seemingly intractable continuing conflict in the Middle East (that part of the dialogue could have taken place yesterday). Thich Nhat Hanh said this:

There are things that the Buddha or Jesus said thousands of years ago; they may begin only now to have an effect. You cannot hastily say whether something is effective or not.

Well, there is perspective and patience for you. Not that we should just sit around waiting and waiting for the words and teachings finally to take root; but that however engaged we are in peace-making, in following ancient paths of wisdom, who are we to say how long it should take for deeper change to take root? And who are we to judge on the basis of our limited experience that the ancient wisdom is ineffective or wrong?

So... just what were the Buddha and Jesus preaching about peace? What were their messages? Are their messages at all realistic?

Jesus said “love your enemy” and “turn the other cheek.” And the first precept of Buddhism is to refrain from harming.

But these come across as pretty abstract prescriptions, pretty idealistic and maybe detached from reality. So here are two stories to illustrate the teachings a bit, one from the Buddha’s life, one from Jesus’ life:

The story from the life of the Buddha concerns a man who came to be known as Angulila, which means necklace of fingers. Contemporary writer and peace worker Satish Kumar, who was born and raised in India and now lives in England, composed a retelling of the story of Angulila that he titled *The Buddha and the Terrorist*.

His telling is over a hundred pages, and the various traditional versions are fairly long too. But here is the heart of it.

It is said that during the lifetime of the Buddha a robber and murderer who came to be known as Angulila terrorized the region of India in which he lived, in particular the town of Savatthi. He was strong and apparently fearless, and after killing each of his victims he cut off their fingers, out of which he fashioned a necklace which he wore, thus making his appearance all the more fearsome. People were afraid to travel on the road alone, or even to leave their homes.

At a certain moment in time the Buddha came to Savatthi to visit one of his disciples, Lady Nandini. Asking her why the streets were deserted and the shops empty, she told of Angulila and his reign of terror. When the Buddha resolved even so to walk the road to meet his followers at the Jeta Grove, Nandini urged him not to go, for his route would take him right past the spot where Angulila often hid and attacked unwary travelers.

But the Buddha would not be ruled by fear.

He did walk the road, and indeed Angulila saw him coming and resolved to kill him. But the Buddha’s serene demeanor as fearsome Angulila approached stopped him in his tracks. The Buddha kept walking, yet said, “I have stopped, but why have you not stopped?” This confused Angulila, who thought it was the other way around – “What do you mean?” he asked the Buddha. The Buddha replied, “I have stopped the grasping for power and control over others, I have stopped the desire to harm others; but you have not.”

Well, Angulila was transformed by the presence and words of the Buddha, transformed from a terrorist to a monk.

Yet no one in Savatthi believed the transformation was genuine. So when Angulila first returned to Savatthi with saffron robe and shaved head, he was severely beaten. Not surprisingly. For those who had lost loved ones who were infinitely dear to them wanted punishment, death for the terrorist and murderer. Yet finally, during a council held by the local king, one anguished woman said that killing Angulila would not bring back the one she loved.

Instead, she said, we should learn from his example that a person *can* change. This turned the tide.

So Angulila lived the rest of his life in service to others, bringing healing and compassion to those who suffered.

Well, a beautiful story, one might say... but entirely impractical in the real world, certainly in today's world of suicide bombers and weapons of mass destruction.

To which my initial reply is, "As if the so-called practical responses to violence and terror, namely revenge and retaliation, violence for violence, have been working very well?!"

The other story, from the life of Jesus, is briefer, and may be familiar to most of you.

It took place during the final days of Jesus' life. He was spending the night in the garden of Gethsemane, having that day confronted the temple authorities in Jerusalem. His weary disciples were unable to stay awake with him. Jesus knew his life was in danger; he prayed and wept. Then suddenly an angry crowd emerged from the darkness; soldiers seized Jesus. At this, one of the disciples drew his sword and cut off the ear of a slave of the high priest.

But Jesus stopped him, saying, "Put your sword back in its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword."

Well, in this case, unlike the story of the Buddha and Angulila, though the immediate violence was halted, the violence of the crucifixion was still to come, was not prevented. And one can imagine that perhaps *that* violence could have been prevented had the disciples and Jesus put up a fight and escaped.

But that would have been a very different Jesus, not the Jesus who was a teacher and exemplar of peace. And it would have led to a different Christianity, a Christianity bereft of its radical pacifist stream:

"Put up your sword." "Turn the other cheek." "Love your enemies."

And though mainstream Christian theology has developed elaborate philosophies of "just war," it is hard to escape the nagging radical idea that Jesus would have had none of it, that he was proposing quite another way of being, not only in interpersonal relations, but for society and relations among nations.

Put up your sword. Put away your guns and bombs. We must find another way.

*Is this unrealistic in today's world...? Easy enough to believe that it is.*

But I illustrated the teachings of the Buddha and Jesus with stories in order to emphasize that neither the Buddha's or Jesus' teachings were bare statements of idealism detached from reality. They each strived to *live* lives of peace and compassion.

Further, they suggested practical tools for the rest of us.

Example: Jesus' admonition to "turn the other cheek" – which never fails to engender challenging conversation! – may not have been a suggestion to meekly accept whatever punishment and harm your aggressor was trying to dish out. Rather, some historians believe he was in fact suggesting a highly sophisticated form of non-violent resistance. For if someone from a lower class was to turn the other cheek when given a back-handed slap by someone of higher rank, he was offering that so-called superior two unattractive alternatives – to strike next with the left hand, the unclean hand, which simply would not be done, or to strike open-handed with the right hand, which would signal a challenge and a statement of equality between the two. In other words, he would be standing up for his own dignity as a child of God, equal in Jesus'

“kingdom of heaven” if not in the kingdom of Ceasar. To “turn the other cheek” would have been a peaceful, yet revolutionary spiritual and political statement.

And at the very least, in our daily lives this admonition also suggests the simple value of pausing rather than thoughtlessly responding, tit for tat, in the midst of conflict.

As for Buddhism, the teachings of the Buddha are filled with practical methods for developing a more peaceful heart, and therefore a more peaceful way of being in the world. Quite simply, for example, part of Buddhist practice when it comes to the common human feeling of anger is to notice your anger, to analyze the sources of your anger, all before acting perhaps violently on your anger; and at the same time, as Thich Nhat Hanh suggested in the reading, to look deeply into the life of the person with whom you are in conflict, to discover your compassion for that person’s suffering, all in order to open the possibility of deeper mutual understanding and peace... less suffering... rather than escalating conflict.

These *are* practical teachings of peace and peacemaking.

Additionally, we might add that we have selfish motives for seeking non-violent, peaceful resolution to the conflicts in our lives. To put it simply: Isn’t it better for our souls, healthier for our spirits to seek peace? What, after all, would be a happier, more content way of life: Always to allow our anger to escalate, always to take up the sword, if only figuratively, of interpersonal conflict? Or to shape our lives toward compassion and mutual understanding, to do the hard but good work of peace-making which leads to richer community?

And of course this is not just about our personal lives. It better not be. For example, isn’t the peace-making path the only path that will eventually lead to a greater measure of peace in the Middle East?

It is so easy, always so easy, to justify violence – on either side. The Buddhist text, the *Dhammapada*, puts it directly:

“He berated me! He hurt me!  
He beat me! He deprived me!”  
For those who hold such grudges,  
hostility is not appeased.

“He berated me! He hurt me!  
He beat me! He deprived me!”  
For those who forego such grudges,  
hostility ceases.

And *someone* must be the one to take the first step to “forego such grudges.” If both sides wait for the other, the round of violence and suffering will never end.

The path of peace is *not* an easy path. It may be harder in some ways than unleashing your anger or dropping bombs and firing rockets. But, as the Dalai Lama affirms (in his book *Ethics for the New Millenium*), “The only certainty is that where there is violence, there is always and inevitably suffering.”

Finally, though the stories and teachings of the Buddha and Jesus do not offer policy prescriptions, they do challenge us and our leaders to consider paths other than the conventional, other than our so-called natural human response to aggression, to anger, to hate. They challenge us to consider that there might, just might be a way of living that is based on deeper understanding and compassion, based on a realization that we *are* all in one boat, one species, one “kingdom of heaven” as Jesus put it, rather than on grasping for control and power and the need to be right.

To put it another way, these counter-intuitive, challenging, we might almost say impossible teachings encourage us at the least to *cultivate* peace, to *lean* more often in the direction of peace...

And though this leaning in the direction of peace must not end with us, it does indeed – as very old wisdom has it – begin with each of us. So, leaving Jesus and Buddha behind, I’ll end with a paraphrase of an equally ancient Chinese wisdom text:

May we cultivate peace in our hearts, that we might find more peace in our lives;  
may we cultivate peace in our lives, that we might find more peace among our family and friends;

may we cultivate peace among our family and friends, that we might find more peace in our communities;

may we cultivate peace in our communities and our nation, that we might find more peace in the world.

And so – may we be among those who don’t give up, who instead give life each day, whether in ways small or large, to the ancient quest for peace.

Eternal peace? Probably not.

More peace? Why not?

So may it be.