



What Does It Mean To Be a People of Peace?



May 2019

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When I breathe in I breath in peace, when I breathe out, I breathe out love. As we sing these words from our beloved hymnal we slow down, giving ourselves a chance to feel alive, present and grounded. Seventeenth-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza regarded peace not simply as an absence of war, but as “a virtue, a state of mind, a disposition for benevolence, confidence, justice.” It is a stance towards the world that connects and centers. It also requires attention and effort, even risk.

The Rev. Lindasusan Ulrich reminds us that true peace isn't the superficial comfort of bland relationships, nor an insistence on keeping the boat from rocking. Those would more properly come under the heading of stasis or appeasement. For peace to rest on solid ground, it must be engaged with the world. “No justice, no peace!” goes one commonly heard protest chant. It is set up as a linear if-then statement: if people are not being treated fairly, then a holy unrest will motivate them to make change. In other words, peace requires the presence of justice. However, some people might argue for reversing the order: if we can't tap into an inner calm, if we can't act from a place of centeredness, then we won't have the internal resources it takes to build a truly just world. Both directions have merit: justice is concrete and visible, while inner peace depends only our decision to cultivate it.

To adapt a phrase from Toni Morrison, the only peace we can have is the peace we can imagine; if we cannot see it, we will not have it. At the same time, peace need not take place on a grand scale to create real change. It can break through in small moments of engagement and offer a thread of light against a grim background.

Our task is to keep cultivating those moments and to join with others engaged in peacemaking until our threads illuminate the entire sky.

In Faith,
Rev. Andrea Johnson
Chalice Circle Coordinator

Our Spiritual Exercises

Living Peace Exercises

In these tense times at home and abroad, we all need to practice peace in as many ways and places as possible. Sometimes, we need a prompter, someone to remind us when we forget our lines what it is we can do internally, locally, and globally. John Dear, a Jesuit priest who was for many years the Executive Director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, provides just the prompts we may need. Dear calls us to become peacemakers "within our own broken hearts and broken families, in our bloody city streets and corrupt government offices, in the war zones and refugee camps." Review the following practices and **choose one or two to work with this month.**

1. Breathe in the Spirit of Peace and Breath out Love

Try meditating (sing or say the words aloud or silently to yourself) daily to these words from our hymnal: When I breathe in I breathe in peace, when I breathe out I breathe out love. Breathe In, Breathe Out. Repeat the chant 4-5 times and then sit quietly for a period of time that feels right for you. Perhaps imagine sitting beside God, the holy, the mystery, nature, the universe – however you name the sacred – and listening for a word of peace, that invitation to share in a life of love. In that intimate, sacred peace, what happens? Do you rediscover a part of yourself? Do you feel a sense of belonging to God or the universe?

2. Make Peace with Yourself

Peace begins within each of us. It is a process of repeatedly showing mercy to ourselves, forgiving ourselves, befriending ourselves, accepting ourselves, and loving ourselves. As we learn to appreciate ourselves, we begin to radiate peace and love to others. Try engaging in *metta*, loving kindness meditation.

<https://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/tree/loving-kindness>

Take a very comfortable posture. One of the aims in this meditation is to feel good, so make your posture relaxed and comfortable. Begin to focus around the solar plexus, your chest area, your "heart center". Breathe in and out from that area, as if you are breathing from the heart center and as if all experience is happening from there. Anchor your mindfulness only on the sensations at your heart center.

Breathing in and out from the heart center, begin by generating this kind feeling toward yourself. Feel any areas of mental blockage or numbness, self-judgment, self-hatred. Then drop beneath that to the place where we care for ourselves, where we want strength and health and safety for ourselves. Continuing to breathe in and out, use either these traditional phrases or ones you choose yourself. Say or think them several times.

May I be free from inner and outer harm and danger. May I be safe and protected.

May I be free of mental suffering or distress.

May I be happy.

May I be free of physical pain and suffering.

May I be healthy and strong.

May I be able to live in this world happily, peacefully, joyfully, with ease.

3. Be Energized by Other Peacemakers

There are so many historical and present-day peace and justice makers in the world to be inspired by: Mahatma Gandhi, Malala, Dorothy Day, Ida B. Wells and Thich Nhat Hanh to name just a few. Our recommended resources are full of wisdom about what it means to be a people of and a person of peace. Engage these resources and find the one that especially speaks to you. Then set aside some regular time throughout a week to meditate on them until you find the one that most expands or deepens your understanding of peace. After you've found it, consider printing it out and carrying it with you or pinning it up so you can continue to reflect on it throughout the weeks leading up to your group meeting.

4. Standing Up Publicly for Peace

For peace to rest on solid ground, there must be justice. This month take the opportunity to reflect on the work you have done or are doing to create peace and justice in the world around you. What are you noticing about the familiar protest chant?: "No justice, no peace!" How and when do you decide to disrupt the peace and comfort of yourself and others in the pursuit of justice? How do you stay spiritually grounded and centered while you pursue justice and peace? Are there justice efforts here at Unity church or elsewhere that are calling you to stand up publicly? Reflect on this journey for you and come prepared to share it with your group.

Your Question

As always, don't treat these questions like "homework" or try to answer every single one. Instead, make time to meditate and reflect on the list and then pick the one question that speaks to you most. The goal is to figure out which question is "yours." Which question captures the call of your inner voice? Which one contains "your work"? What is it trying to get you to notice? Where is it trying to lead you?

1. When despair grows in you – where (what space or place) do you find peace? How often do you spend time there?
2. Is peace the absence of strong or negative emotion (e.g., fear, anger, sadness, anxiety etc.) or the act of living in the present?
3. Do you need to make peace with your past?
4. Do you need to forgive someone or yourself to find peace?
5. What "congruence" is calling to you? What "alignment" is your deepest self-longing for?
6. What happens when you sit quietly in a room? Do the voices you hear center and balance you? Or leave you off-balance and pulled off-center?
7. Are you trying too hard to make something work? Might peace for you be a matter of accepting defeat or finally letting it go?
8. Parker Palmer says that the ultimate reward of walking through our fears and into the unknown is that we come to feel more at home (and at peace) in our own skin and on the face of the earth. Has this been true for you?
9. We struggle between our desire to save the world and savor the world. But what if it's really a matter of listening better to both of them? How is what you savor calling you to save or protect something? How are your efforts to save world asking you to get better at finding moments of personal peace and joy?
10. Is there a justice issue in the world that is calling you to disturb the peace and the status quo?

What's your question? Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to hear it.

Companion Pieces

Recommended Resources for Personal Exploration & Reflection

The following resources are not required reading. We will not analyze these pieces in our group. Instead they are here to companion you on your journey this month, get your thinking started and open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be part of a people of Peace.

Word Roots

Peace: freedom from disturbance; a stress-free state of tranquility, quiet, calmness and security. Everything coexisting in perfect harmony and freedom. A period in which there is no war or a war has ended.

Wise Words

The impatient idealist says: ‘Give me a place to stand and I shall move the earth.’ But such a place does not exist. We all have to stand on the earth itself and go with her at her pace.

~ *Chinua Achebe*

You can’t separate peace from freedom because no one can be peace unless he has his freedom.

~ *Malcom X*

Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is in an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob, and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe.” - Frederick Douglass

~ *Frederick Douglass*

We can never obtain peace in the world if we neglect the inner world and don't make peace with ourselves. World peace must develop out of inner peace.

~ *Dalai Lama*

True peace comes with the discovery that we can respect the seasons of life with a spacious and undefended heart. In it we learn to trust, to rest in the truth of the way things are, to willingly accept the measure of joy and sorrow we are given.

~ *Jack Kornfield*

Often our bodies are not at peace. We can learn how to bring peace into our body right in the here and the now. Our body suffers, especially during times of war. We feel tension, stress, and pressure. We have worked our body too hard and it is full of conflicts. To bring peace into our bodies, we allow them to rest and have a chance to renew and heal themselves. We can do it today. Even after one or two hours, we will feel much better. We are not just *talking* about peace in our body, we are actually *bringing* peace into it.

~ *Thich Nhat Hanh*

If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other. What can we do to promote world peace? Go home and love your family.

~ *Mother Theresa*

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing there is a field. I'll meet you there.

~ *Jala Ad-Din Rumi*

When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace.

~ *Jimi Hendrix*

If you are depressed you are living in the past. If you are anxious you are living in the future. If you are at peace you are living in the present.

~ *Lao Tzu*

Whatever may be the tensions and stresses of a particular day, there is always lurking close at hand the trailing beauty of forgotten joy or unremembered peace.

~ *Howard Thurman*

Poetry

The Rock Cries Out To Us Today

Maya Angelou

<https://www.thoughtco.com/poems-about-peace-4156702>

Each of you a bordered country,
Delicate and strangely made proud,
Yet thrusting perpetually under siege.
Your armed struggles for profit
Have left collars of waste upon
My shore, currents of debris upon my
breast.
Yet, today I call you to my riverside,
If you will study war no more.
Come, clad in peace and I will sing the
songs
The Creator gave to me when I
And the tree and stone were one.

The Peace of Wild Things

Wendell Berry

<https://www.poemhunter.com/poems/peace/page-1/29617/>

When despair grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's
lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the
great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with
forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still

water.

And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting for their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am
free.

Peace, My Heart

Rabindrinath Tagore

<https://www.thoughtco.com/poems-about-peace-4156702>

Peace, my heart, let the time for
the parting be sweet.
Let it not be a death but completeness.
Let love melt into memory and pain
into songs.
Let the flight through the sky end
in the folding of the wings over the
nest.
Let the last touch of your hands be
gentle like the flower of the night.
Stand still, O Beautiful End, for a
moment, and say your last words in
silence.
I bow to you and hold up my lamp
to light you on your way.

To the Indifferent Women

Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Full poem:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46059/to-the-indifferent-women>

You who are happy in a thousand homes,
Or overworked therein, to a dumb peace;
Whose souls are wholly centered in the
life Of that small group you personally
love; Who told you that you need not
know or care About the sin and sorrow of
the world?

Do you believe the sorrow of the world
Does not concern you in your little
homes? —

That you are licensed to avoid the care
And toil for human progress, human
peace, And the enlargement of our power
of love
Until it covers every field of life?

The one first duty of all human life
Is to promote the progress of the world
In righteousness, in wisdom, truth and
love;
And you ignore it, hidden in your homes,
Content to keep them in uncertain peace,
Content to leave all else without your
care.

Articles, Podcasts and Videos

Being Peace

Richard Rohr

<https://cac.org/being-peace-2018-08-23/>

Buddhists are much more concerned about waking up to our innate wisdom and compassion (our Buddha-nature) than they are about working for justice. If Christians insist that “if you want peace, work for justice,” the Buddhists would counter-insist, “if you want peace, be peace.” That’s the point Thich Nhat Hanh gently drives home in the little book . . . Being Peace. His message is as simple and straightforward as it is sharp and upsetting: the only way we are going to be able to create peace in the world is if we first create (or better, find) peace in our hearts.

To Be On A Spiritual Path

Jan Phillips

<http://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=988>

To be on a spiritual path means to use the rearview mirror to be sure that the path behind is clear of debris and that we do not obstruct another's journey with clutter of our own. It means making peace with our past, knowing our future contains it, and summoning the courage it takes to acknowledge, forgive, and release whatever we have clung to that impedes our movement.

Living While Black – A new normal or history repeating itself?

Nicol Turner Lee

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2018/05/17/livingwhileblack-a-new-normal-or-history-repeating-itself/>

Last month, the [National Memorial for Peace and Justice](#) opened in Montgomery, Alabama, paying tribute to the more than 4,000 blacks who were lynched during the period of 1877 to 1950. The project, a collaboration between community members and the [Equal Justice Initiative](#)—led by social justice activist and lawyer [Bryan Stevenson](#)—also acknowledges African Americans who have been killed at the hands of the police.

Attachment is Habitual Thinking

Miao Tsan

Uncontrollable reactions – especially anger, sadness or sensual indulgences – often become stubborn, nearly unstoppable attachments. It is as if we are an old phonograph record that keeps skipping at the same spot. Attachment is habitual thinking or an idea that occupies and disrupts our inner peace. When the mind becomes dependent on certain people and situations and repeats the same thoughts, it is attachment. When certain people, objects and situations continually bring out the same reactions and emotions in us, this is attachment. When we feel the urge to seek approval from a certain individual or take possession of certain objects, this too is attachment.

Stopping the War

Jack Kornfield

<http://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=2269>

Compassion and a greatness of heart arise whenever we stop the war. The deepest desire we have for our human heart is to

discover how to do this. We all share a longing to go beyond the confines of our own fear or anger or addiction, to connect with something greater than "I," "me," and "mine," greater than our small story and our small self. It is possible to stop the war and come into the timeless present-to touch a great ground of being that contains all things. This is the purpose of a spiritual discipline and of choosing a path with heart -- to discover peace and connectedness in ourselves and to stop the war in us and around us.

To be at peace with our essential loneliness

Parker Palmer

<https://onbeing.org/blog/parker-palmer-to-be-at-peace-with-our-essential-loneliness/>

The ultimate reward of walking through our fears and into the unknown is something everyone longs for: We come to feel more at home in our own skin and on the face of the earth.

Ted Talk: I am the son of a terrorist. Here's how I chose peace.

https://www.ted.com/talks/zak_brahim_i_am_the_son_of_a_terrorist_here_s_how_i_chose_peace?referrer=playlist-the_road_to_peace

If you're raised on dogma and hate, can you choose a different path? Zak Ebrahim was just seven years old when his father helped plan the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. His story is shocking, powerful and, ultimately, inspiring.

Ted Talk: Teaching with the World Peace Game

https://www.ted.com/talks/john_hunter_on_the_world_peace_game?referrer=playlist-the_road_to_peace

John Hunter puts all the problems of the world on a 4'x5' plywood board -- and lets his 4th-graders solve them. At TED2011, he explains how his World Peace Game engages schoolkids, and why the complex

lessons it teaches -- spontaneous, and always surprising -- go further than classroom lectures can.

Melvin Giles (St. Paul Peacemaker)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qWdGdhVn5c0>

Served with Catholic Charities for 15-years; the last 7-years as the Director of Catholic Charities Frogtown Center. He is a veteran peace, diversity, and dismantling racism educator.

Podcast: Being Peace in a World of Trauma

<https://onbeing.org/programs/thich-nhat-hanh-cheri-maples-larry-ward-being-peace-in-a-world-of-trauma/>

We visited Thich Nhat Hanh at a retreat attended by police officers and other members of the criminal justice system; they offer stark gentle wisdom for finding buoyancy and "being peace" in a world of conflict, anger, and violence.

Minnesota Peace seeking organizations:

The Circle of Peace Movement (here at Unity Church)

<https://tcopm.org/>

TCOPM grows from an effort by Russel and Sarah Balenger in the Rondo neighborhood of St. Paul, Minnesota, in February 2010.

Working to organize a community response to increasing violence, the Balengers gathered affected families to sit, share a meal, and talk with one another.

Center for Restorative Justice and Peacemaking

<http://rjp.umn.edu/>

The Center initiated a Community Peacemaking Project to promote sustained dialogue among diverse communities in response to hate crimes, intolerance, and political violence.

Minnesota Alliance for Peacemakers

<http://www.mapm.org/mission.htm>

Founded in 1995, MAP is a coalition now comprising over seventy organizations with a collective membership of many thousands of concerned citizens. Nearly half of its institutional members are faith-based. Since its inception, MAP organizations have focused on issues relating to peace, justice and the environment.

Minnesota Veterans for Peace

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5vXYFDBTnVE>

Movies

The Lost Boys of Sudan

<https://www.rottentomatoes.com/search/?search=lost%20boys%20of%20sudan>

This award-winning documentary examines what happens when a pair of Sudanese boys, orphaned due to a civil war in their home country, are allowed to live for a year in the United States. Santito and Peter must contend with extreme examples of culture shock, while also figuring out how to negotiate a world that is physically safe but emotionally and intellectually foreign to them.

The Hurt Locker (Iraq)

<https://www.rottentomatoes.com/search/?search=hurt%20locker>

During the Iraq War, a Sergeant recently assigned to an army bomb squad is put at odds with his squad mates due to his maverick way of handling his work.

Dead Man Walking

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0112818/>

A nun, while comforting a convicted killer on death row, empathizes with both the killer and his victim's families.

Norma Rae

https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0079638/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

A young single mother and textile worker agrees to help unionize her mill despite the problems and dangers involved.

How to Train Your Dragon

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/how_to_train_your_dragon

The son of a Viking chief must capture a dragon in order to mark his passage into manhood and prove his worthiness to the tribe.

Books

Perfect Peace (a novel)

Daniel Black

https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/6969591-perfect-peace?from_search=true

The heartbreaking portrait of a large, rural southern family's attempt to grapple with their mother's desperate decision to make her newborn son into the daughter she will never have

Peace Like a River (a novel)

Leif Enger

https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/227571.Peace_Like_a_River?from_search=true

Affecting and dynamic, *Peace Like a River* is at once a tragedy, a romance, and an unflagging exploration into the spirituality and magic possible in the everyday world, and in that of the world awaiting us on the other side of life. In Enger's superb debut effort, we witness a wondrous celebration of family, faith, and spirit, the likes of which we haven't seen in a long, long time—and the birth of a classic work of literature.

Living Peace

John Dear

<https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/reviews/view/2754>

A prophetic work calling us to all become peacemakers and outlining concrete steps to take toward this goal.

Being Peace

Thich Nhat Hanh

https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/331344.Being_Peace?from_search=true

Thich Nhat Hanh shows how our state of mind and body can make the world a peaceful place. We learn to transform the very situations that pressure and antagonize us into opportunities for practicing mindfulness.

Songs

<http://stargayzing.com/16-songs-about-peace-love-understanding/>

Over the Rainbow

We are the World Lionel Ritchie

One Love Bob Marley

Heal the World Michael Jackson

Peace Train Cat Stevens

Sunday Bloody Sunday – U2

What's Going On Marvin Gaye

Message Tadro Brothers

Imagine – John Lennon

Wind of Change by Scorpion

Redemption Song by Bob Marley

Dear Mr. President – Pink

Border Song (Holy Moses) Aretha Franklin

If I had a heart by Joni Mitchell

This packet has been created by Andrea Johnson using the Soul Matters Model of Small Groups. For use at Unity Unitarian Church only.



<https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com/>