

Practice Peace

Written by Shelley Lowther

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If you are unhappy with the state of world events, or even with your personal relationships, remember the famous words of Mahatma Gandhi – “You must be the change you wish to see in the world.”

The world seems to be in a constant state of upheaval, yet amongst the chaos and heart-breaking violence and turmoil, great people are achieving great things. Our innate goodness and humanness will always outshine the evil that people do if we look for the good.

But if we want peace, we must practice peace. Yogis are always talking about taking our yoga off the mat, of living a life that sets an example. We make mistakes, we fall into old patterns of behavior, and we behave badly. But even with all of our mistakes, if we practice peace, we will find peace. First, however, we must find peace within ourselves.

In yoga, *ahimsa* is the first of the yamas (part of the Yogic Ten Commandments), and translates as “non-violence.” Some yogis take ahimsa to mean non-violence towards all living things, and practice strict vegan diets, while others see it as a more subtle suggestion. Regardless, it means much more than refraining from punching your annoying neighbor. It is a directive to practice non-violence in thought, speech and action, and indicates that we should treat all we encounter with compassion, patience and worthiness. This includes treating ourselves with understanding and self-love.

Ahimsa must start within. If we do not treat ourselves with forgiveness and kindness, we will

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never truly be able to open our hearts and practice peace and love to others.

Through the practice of forgiving ourselves for our mistakes or perceived shortcomings, we begin to practice peace. As we forgive ourselves, it becomes easier to forgive others. As we start to see how things are clouded by our points-of-view, it becomes easier to forgive. Forgiveness begets ease, and ease begets peace.

My teacher Baron Baptiste recently said, "If you are at war with one person, there is war on the earth." We may not be able to achieve world peace with one simple act of kindness, but we can choose to believe that our intrinsic goodness, our shine, can make a difference. If we practice peace, we will at the very least make the world a better place for everyone we meet.

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