

Becoming Peace

by [Dr. Marianne Rolland](#)

Several months ago my 23-year-old daughter handed me “Being Peace” by Thich Nhat Hanh. I found the teachings presented by this Vietnamese author and Zen Master to resonate closely with my own philosophy and belief system. Although I never really considered myself to be a Buddhist, I never considered that I was not a Buddhist either.

Carly also shared with me a paper she had written. Included was a vivid description of how I had raised her under a philosophy that parallels Buddhist thinking: “I have unknowingly been practicing Buddhist philosophy my whole life. As a child, my mother taught me many things that are consistent with Buddhism: compassion, understanding, letting go, not clinging or craving or grasping—even meditating.”

Two months later my 15-year-old son said, “Mom, I’ve been exploring my beliefs about God and I hope you aren’t mad but I have decided that I am a Christian.” I was stunned. “How could you consider that I might be mad at you? Haven’t I always encouraged you to explore your spirituality?” Kayin responded, “Yeah, Mom, but I don’t believe the same way you do, because you aren’t a Christian; you are a Buddhist.” An interesting comment, I thought, coming from a child who has been participating in the Native American Sweat Lodge ceremony since age 3.

I knew it was time for me to enter silent contemplation. Why was it that my children viewed me as a Buddhist and not as a Christian? Don’t I resonate inwardly with the core teachings of both belief systems and yet outwardly avoid labeling myself? Won’t the teachings of either philosophy guide us towards inner peace and in doing so contribute to a peaceful world?

As my children challenged my thinking and helped expand my awareness, so did Hanh in “Being Peace.” His words permeated my being yet I repeatedly found myself saying, “But how can we be peace without going through the process of becoming peace?” Perhaps Hanh is saying we already are peace and simply need to wake up to this truth. Perhaps we need to look deeper into each others eyes and allow ourselves to resonate with the peace and sense of tranquility that lives inside each one of us.

How do we do this? Buddhist and other philosophies teach that we must be conscious of the reciprocal relationship that exists in the universe and not separate ourselves from others or “all that is.” Hanh reminds us that “if you are happy then everyone profits from it.” This is no different from the Native American teachings that tell us “the good of one is the good of all,” or the essence behind the Christian commandment “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” The majority of our world’s religions holds universal truths and messages that can guide us to states of inner and outer peace if we pay close attention and practice the simple teachings offered.

My life experiences tell me that to become peace I must consciously engage in an inward journey. At times this can feel anything but peaceful as I allow others to trigger places within where disharmony hides. Learning to become an observer of my own process, to not judge or blame, to forgive myself and others opens me to a sense of calm. Simultaneously I have adopted a pledge of “no-conflict” in all aspects of my life and globally participate in activities that promote world peace. I have come to understand that if I connect with my own inner peace, I can give peace to the world and the world will give peace back to me. There is a reciprocal relationship between inward and outward growth.

“A civilization can only be destroyed outwardly when it has already destroyed itself inwardly” is the essence of the quote that flashes on the screen of Mel Gibson’s new movie Apocolypto. If this is the case then it is equally true that no civilization will outwardly live in peace until every citizen has inwardly established his or her own sense of peace. Outward growth is dependent upon inward growth. Yet is it not also true that outward growth promotes inward evolution? I know that if I am feeling really bad about myself and someone gives me a compliment, that compliment ignites a soothing, healing energy that will grow if I elect to nurture it.

Becoming peace requires that we make a commitment to having peace in our lives; that we are willing to acknowledge that others are our mirrors and continually reflect back to us our own state of peace or disharmony. Becoming peace requires that we take action outwardly to support those systems and programs that promote peace in our world and dismiss those that do not.

To achieve peace we start by setting our intent, which will affect all levels, phases and spheres of our vast universe. Efforts made on the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social, environmental and global spheres serve as catalysts for growth on every other level of being and existence. As we awake to the need for internal growth or change we are taking the necessary first step to becoming peace.

As we recycle products to protect and keep the environment clean, we concurrently cleanse our body, mind and spirit. As a civilization we are at a critical time; either we choose a path of healing and peace or we choose a path of self-destruction. The Earth is our Mother, and we must take care of her. As we do, she will take care of us.

Speaking truth to others keeps my being clean and clear. Expressing feelings as they arise prevents toxicity from manifesting in my body. While words and thoughts are powerful creators, condensed repressed emotions have an energy charge that is magnified. This is a critical piece we cannot miss in our effort to heal and discover inner peace.

Simultaneously we can begin to shift old destructive patterns of thought and belief. As we examine each of our beliefs it is useful to ask the question, “Is this belief soul nurturing or is it soul damaging?” Soul-nurturing beliefs we want to keep, while soul-damaging beliefs we need to eliminate and replace. Soul-nurturing beliefs promote a peaceful sense inside of us. When we create this inner sense of peace, we are contributing to world peace. From a place of inner peace we can take action in the world, and our reciprocal relationship with the universe will unfold as inward and outward growth will manifest.

With our thoughts we must examine areas of negative and destructive thinking. Research tells us that negative self-talk messages occur between 30 and 60 thousand times a day. Negative, critical, judgmental, and punishing thinking hurts all of us. To find peace we must catch ourselves in these destructive self-talk traps and consciously shift our thinking. When we become observers of our thoughts and our life in an impartial way, we promote growth and peace.

Becoming peace requires letting go of all that does not serve us individually and collectively. Becoming peace means trusting the universal law of nature—that what I give out will be returned. Becoming peace means loving myself passionately and completely, so that everyone and everything in nature can love me back. Becoming peace is acknowledging the reciprocal relationship between inward and outward growth.

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Marianne Rolland, MSW, PhD is the founder of White Raven Center Inc. of Anchorage, which specializes in the treatment of PTSD and provides outreach training and treatment to village Alaska.

Contact: 333-4478 or w.raven@att.net.