A Meaning in Darkness

G-d created the world in six days. At the end of each day’s accomplishments, the Bible in Genesis informs us that “G-d saw that it was good.” At the end of each day that is, except for Day Two. Commentators have explained that this is because the number two connotes conflict. Oneness by definition intimates the absence of any form of division. It is only when an “other” enters the picture, that the self experiences friction. Accordingly, on the second day of creation, G-d divided the higher waters from the lower waters. Interestingly, on the third day of creation, the Bible records that G-d saw that it was “good” twice. The explanation given is that this duplication serves to make up for the absence of the phrase on the second day. Because in essence, you see, the second day was “good” as well. It just needed the third day to reveal its inherent goodness.

The Hebrew word for peace is Shalom. It is made up of the four letters shin, lamed, vav and mem. Jewish mystics liken the letter shin (the first letter of the word Shalom) to fire. Dynamic and unsettled, passionate and ethereal, the heat of fire signifies the spiritual realms. The flame of a candle incessantly flickers upwards, bound to the physical world only by means of a wick. It knows that it does not belong here. The mem of Shalom (the word’s last letter) signifies water, the polar opposite in many ways, of fire. The natural tendency of water is to flow downward. In the absence of wind or any other external stimuli, water remains still. Water is often given as a metaphor for pleasure. Unlike passion, pleasure is passive. Cold and complacent, water signifies this physical world. In its calmness it becomes forgetful of its source above, quickly merging with and drawing into it that which surrounds it. The word Shalom embodies the unification of these two opposites, achieved by going through the levels of the lamed and the vav.

Within the word Shalom is condensed the purpose of the entire universe and everything within it. The spiritual worlds are constantly aware of their inherent dependence on G-d in order for them to exist. Our world is not. The coarseness of the physical masks the underlying G-dly reality to which all of the other worlds are attuned. Nonetheless, it is not G-d’s will that we escape to the woods and meditate ourselves into oblivion. G-d put us here for a reason. Judaism teaches that the reason why we are all here is because: “G-d desired to have a dwelling place for Himself in the Lower Realms.”

Indivisible oneness, while perhaps appealing in its homogeneity, lacks purpose and indeed true completion. The “other” serves to bring that which exists only in potential within the “self” into actuality, and vice versa. This is why the statement “G-d saw that it was good” was doubled on Day 3. It is precisely from within division that true harmony is achieved. All darkness is in essence light. It is our job to reveal the inherent light within everything by drawing down and revealing the spiritual within the physical. Through doing, Heaven and Earth converge into one leading up to a world where all darkness will be transformed into light, and all past sufferings will be revealed as the blessings they truly are. This will be a time when true peace will reign, in a world united within the paradox of independent existence and total dependence on G-d.

—Sarede Switzer

Searching for Peace

Mind, Body, World Peace

“Peace is every step
It turns the endless path to joy.”
~Thich Nhat Hanh

Are you wondering how to get to nirvana? I have no idea. Seriously, would you believe it if someone opened a mini-course entitled "Endless joy in four lessons"? (No, it's not offered at McGill). Many people, instinctively, turn to spirituality for answers. In bookstores, both self-help and religious bookshelves flourish alongside each other. What they have in common cannot be found in the text they contain, but in the hearts of those who wrote and read them; not in what they know, but in the common quest that pushes them on the steps to peace.

Whichever path you choose, peace probably appears as a distant blur at first, a vague idea derived from short glimpses of times when you were by yourself in nature, or surrounded by a group in which a comfortable ambiance reigned. That feeling of peacefulness isn’t just absence of anger, absence of violence, or absence of war; it is harmony that resonates along three levels: mind, body, and environment. ...

Transcendence: The Path to Healing

In light of the deplorable loss of life at the hands of a band of cruel, misguided souls on September 11th, we have all been faced with one big question: what do we do now? For the first time in half a century, the United States has felt destruction coming from a force outside its own geographic borders, on its own soil. As a consequence, the feelings of anger, frustration and fear that arise are quite expected. It is how we deal with these afflictive emotions that will determine whether or not we are able to “look outside the box” and transcend our own experience.

After the shootings of adolescents by adolescents in Columbine, Ohio a few years back, there was one man who particularly struck me in his ability to transcend the situation he found himself in. The man was a priest who had lost his young son in the shootings. ...

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I could not agree more, but the anonymous author left no more suggestions than does our culture on how to go about increasing peace. Thank goodness Jesus is not so vague. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid” (Luke 14:27). Now there is a message that I can understand! How comforting! Jesus, as a result of His suffering and death on the cross, gives us Peace. He is the only perfect peace. What a gift!

With this amazing gift however, comes a responsibility for each one of us to be an instrument of Christ on Earth. How can I, as one university student, help to change a society that has become so fraught with violence? I ask myself this daily, but usually only after I have done something violent. I do not mean that I used racial slurs or punched a girl in my history class. The ways to tear down peace are much smaller than that. I walked by a homeless woman as if I did not see her. I snapped at my roommate. Such small violations of the way Jesus wants me to treat my neighbours add more conflict to a world already wearied by hostility. Who can say what impact kind words make on the hearts of those around us? After all, Mark Twain once remarked “I can live a long time on one good compliment.” Jesus’ words to the Samaritan woman at the well gave her troubled heart peace, and with her newfound serenity she brought peace to many other Samaritans (John 4). In the smallest ways we follow Christ, we can reap the biggest rewards on behalf of the Prince of Peace.

I can—through the merits of Christ’s Passion—give the world Peace. True, I am only one, fallen human being. But when Jesus says, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you,” He is promising to comfort those who are frightened by the violent world in which we live through those who have accepted Him. We do not need to search for peace—it has already been given. And life has already triumphed over death through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. By accepting Jesus we allow Peace to increase Itself.

—Emily Bessette

Comments? Questions? Suggestions?
One of our goals at the Radix is to promote understanding and awareness and provide a place to ask questions. We want to hear from you!

Write to us at radix@yours.com

MAKING THE CONNECTION

Searching for peace...this is not the first time, I am sure, that you or I have heard this phrase. We are all searching for peace: inner peace, world peace, peace with our past and, especially, peace with the things that we cannot change and have to accept. The main purpose of religion and faith is to give oneself that inner peace, that feeling of serenity and completeness that many of us are looking for. I personally feel that in order to be a spiritual person, one does not necessarily need to be religious. That is to say, that there is no one way to be spiritual and practise one’s religion. I have always found that in times of turmoil, I have turned towards scriptures and hymns. They give me a sense of calm that, to this day, I have not been able to find elsewhere.

On this topic, a particular incident does come to mind. In my second year here at McGill, I remember going home one weekend and spending time with some of my high school friends. I noticed that night, as I had noticed many times over the past couple of years, that one particular friend was missing. I didn’t ask anyone or make a comment about it; it was just an observation. Later that same weekend, I ran into that particular friend’s little sister. During the conversation, I asked her what her sister had been up to over the previous couple of years and why didn’t I see her out on the usual scene. She told me that my friend, in her first year at university, had taken up an interest in her own religion and had decided to learn more about it. She found that as she learned more and delved further into the scriptures and the prayers, she felt something that she had never felt before: an intense feeling of peace. During that time, she decided that she didn’t need the frivolous, superficial things that made her happy before. She had now truly found something that she could find nowhere else.

I am not saying that we all have to be like my friend, or like anyone else for that matter. I am saying that we should all search for that spiritual connection that gives us what we are looking for, no matter what that may be.

—Reena Kaur Baweja
When I was little I was an idealist, and my dream was of world peace. Then I entered adolescence and became convinced, to my great dismay, that things had already gone so wrong in the world that my dream could never be anything more than simply a dream, and that in fact, our world was destined for ruin. I see things differently now, and my idea of the world has been informed by my experience of it; I’m no longer as much of an idealist, nor am I a pessimist. A large part of the difference has been a change in perspective—peace is no longer something that happens exclusively in the world around me. Now I feel that peace is something that starts from the inside out.

A year ago I found myself taking aikido classes at McGill for the first time. Aikido was not my martial art of choice at that point, but now I’m hooked. There’s not a lot that’s martial about aikido. The word aikido literally translates as “the Way of harmony with ki” (ki may be loosely described as “life force”) and the techniques are designed not to overpower or dominate an opponent by force, but to create harmony in action. What aikido has become for me is a search for peace. Each class I enter, not knowing whether my movements will be smooth, precise and harmonious, or frustratingly clumsy. Sometimes I walk in feeling confident, sure of my ability and thinking that my mind is calm and receptive. Other days my ego is clearly dominating. On either day I could be headed for embarrassment, but it is the latter days most of all, when I am sure to come away bruised—in body, in ego, or both. My performance in class depends much less on how much I have practised recently, and much more on my state of mind. If I am able to let go of my thoughts of grandeur and success, and instead lead with my centre and surrender to the movement of my body, then I can experience peace, even amidst the conflict. But aikido doesn’t stop when I leave the mat. This is the same peace I search for in each choice I make. It is the peace I search for whether I’m chanting mantra, interacting with friends or strangers, writing an M.P., cleaning the bathroom or recycling. I have a vision of a world that I want to live in, a world of choices made in support of peace and beauty. I try to make these choices myself, to contribute to creating this world. On my walk to school I’ve made a practice of picking up at least one piece of garbage along the way. Because each piece of garbage I remove makes the walk that much more beautiful.

—Erica Crawford

Call for Submissions:

The Radix is looking for submissions for future issues.

Upcoming themes include:

Transcendence—Print date: November 30

Body—Print date: January 25

Art

Symbols

Spiritual Teachers
(dates subject to change)

If you have an idea for an article, book review, poem or artwork, contact the Radix editor at radix@yours.com or call 398-4104

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