

Peace: A Gandhian perspective

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The meaning of the word 'peace' is understood as 'mental calm', 'quiet', 'tranquility', 'freedom from or the cessation of war' etc. The moment any of these are uttered with respect to whatever an individual or a group, we immediately make it an object of attention. That is, we like it and so attach some value to it and our judgment about it is based on the thought of some qualities. When we make judgements like 'a calm or a quiet person, a 'tranquil mind' etc. we find that each one of these suggest some kind of an emotion of appreciation of that which belongs to the individual. We like him or regard him as likeable. Peace, in this sense, then, is a 'quality', which is regarded, as valuable by everyone. It is the 'existential', which has a 'verbal' meaning. Peace, then, is a 'state of being', which is 'objectively' valued.

Gandhi says, *"Attainment of real world peace is impossible except for greater scientific precision, greater travail of the soul greater patience and greater resources than required for the invention and consolidation of the means of mutual slaughter. It cannot be attained by a mere muster roll signed by millions of mankind desiring peace. But it can, if there is a science of peace. As I hold there is, by a few devoting themselves to the discovery of the means."* (Vol. 66 pg 72)

Peace is no mere finding of what it is. It is in fact 'a striving after it' within. It is an attitude one has 'to grow' into. Peace is to be acquired by following virtues which are regarded as valuable in themselves. Honesty, truthfulness, non-violence and the like lead to peace, is known or is an experience for those who have lived a life of the kind. Generally, all moral virtues lead to mental satisfaction. They are instrumental in bringing mental peace. For instance, Truth as a vow, is by no means a mere single act, it is rather a commitment to be followed in all walks of life. That is telling lies is to be avoided in all circumstances. We have to eschew situations of wrong doing because it is these that compel us to cover up the wrong. Without truth it is impossible to observe any principles or rules in life. This can best be understood by Gandhi's following utterance:

"Peace cannot be established with the help of money. So long as there

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is no peace in the heart there can be no peace outside, only when peace issues from within the heart and is expressed through the eyes, words and actions of men can we say that peace has been established.”
“..peace is not dependent on external conditions”. (Vol.90 pg 350)

We all agree to the fact that it may happen that in holding on to a virtue in a difficult situation may cause mental discomfort. Yet, one has to have faith in the fact that peace is valuable in itself. Initially peace has to be taken up as a vow. One has to consciously attempt to take it up as a commitment, one has to make a conscious attempt to practise it as a vow or to try to cultivate peace .

However, one has to guard against hypocrisy. One may dislike certain bad habits of his or her partner yet pretend to be peaceful. Peace also does not mean a submission to the will of the evildoer. It may happen that confronted with difficult situations one may

- either become impulsive and may react accordingly and move away from the attitude of peace .But one should not forget that as Gandhi says, “Those who take the sword will perish by the sword”(Vol 83 pg 367)

– or on the other hand , a man may defy all impulses, stay peaceful within and outwardly express his positive attitude to bring about peace. That is, he may stay peaceful in thought, speech and action. Indeed it requires an effort of the highest kind. The agent has to keep away from all evil thoughts. He has to stay vigilant and self critical at every moment to fill his mind with good thoughts. His action then will accord with or express peace as a vow. This may be supported by Gandhi’s following utterance:

“You are under the vow to remain absolutely peaceful...”
(Vol. 52 pg 252)

Peace is not a thing to grasp . It is to grow into an attitude which comes from within. It is a positive state of love, state of compassion. Love activates the opponents hidden ability to see and become good. Just as harsh words provoke anger so also ‘love begets love.’ Its impact lasts longer.

In practicing peace, we cannot be absolutely steadfast unless we care for what our conscience says. To listen to one’s conscience , is to have self confidence. For Gandhi, self confidence is but another name for faith. It is one’s grounding in God. A man who has faith in God can never stay inactive. He shall ever devote his life for the goodness of humanity. He shall fearlessly adhere to truth as against untruth; not get annoyed and shall try to pacify his act peacefully. His belief that God is immanent will lead him to arouse goodness in the other through loving persuasion. This is non-violence in practice.

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Gandhi wrote:

“The fascination of the doctrine as an epitome of non violence is daily growing on me, and I doubt not that if an individual or a nation adopts it as a plan of life, it will promote their happiness and peace and it would be the highest contribution to the attainment of the world peace after which we are all hankering.”(vol 62 pg 174)

“Peace should not be imposed by arms, (such) peace is not the peace of the heart” (Vol.90 pg 349)

If non-violence is love for others, then it requires one to be free from conceit. That is, the agent should become humble. Humility is the essential basis and condition of love. It is, as Gandhi says, a state of ‘utter egolessness.’ For Gandhi, no vow can be properly observed without humility. Positively speaking, humility is the most strenuous and constant endeavor entirely directed to the service of humanity. Service is the best worship a man can offer especially to those who are in distress.

“Path of peace is paved with silent service”(Gandhi)(Vol. 80 pg 85)
Gandhi believed that no man with truth and nonviolence, can stay inactive. The agent is bound to act in the direction leading to goodness for humanity.

“Utterance with the lips is no doubt necessary, but in order to perceive the efficacy of prayer it has to find its place in the heart. The only way to test the question whether it has permeated the heart is by finding whether there is real peace of mind”(Vol.65 pg. 409)In most difficult situations however, he pray silently.communicate inwardly to whatever faith he may be into, and do as what comes to him asa command. Gandhi was a live example of this conduct.

For Gandhi, nothing but a sacred alliance between God and man whereby he attains his deliverance from the clutches of darkness. A heartfelt prayer is a longing from within, a quiet growth in goodness and certainly a step onwards towards inner peace.

The most important question as to how we should move a step onward to peace also has an answer in Gandhi.

In Gandhi we find emphasis on three issues:

A) Education for children; in his own words:

“...if we are to reach real peace in this world and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with children and if they will grow up in their natural innocence, we won't have to struggle, we won't have to pass fruitless idle resolutions, but we shall go from love to love and peace to peace until at last all the corners are covered with that peace and love for which, consciously or unconsciously, the whole world is hungering.”(Vol 48 pg 240)

B) Formation of Peace Brigade:

In 1938, Gandhi had suggested the formulation of a Peace Brigade ‘whose members would risk their lives in dealing with riots, especially communal’ which would ‘substitute the police and even the military.’ Gandhi suggested the following qualifications for the ‘peace messengers’(as he calls them) who become a part of the Peace Brigade.

In 1938, Gandhi had suggested the formulation of a Peace Brigade ‘whose members would risk their lives in dealing with riots, especially communal’ which would ‘substitute the police and even the military.’ Gandhi suggested the following qualifications for the ‘peace messengers’(as he calls them) who become a part of the Peace Brigade.

- 1)Have living faith in non violence which he says is impossible without a living faith in God.
- 2)Have ‘equal respect for all religions of the earth’. The votary must possess ‘a knowledge of different faiths of the country’.
- 3)Local men must take up the work of peace in their localities. Men in single or in groups can take up the task.
- 4)These agents must ‘cultivate through personal service contacts with the people’ so that at the time of need they should appear as strangers.
- 5)‘Peace bringer must have a character beyond reproach’. He should be known for his ‘strict impartiality’.
- 6) The Peace Brigade should handle the situation in anticipation. in their circle’.
- 8) The volunteers should ‘cultivate friendly relations with the people living recognized without difficulty at times of need.
- 9) ‘A distinctive dress’ is to be worn by all peace messengers to be

The qualifications cited above as essential clearly show that the most important pre requisite is that the agent should be

he should be ethical and spiritual in character. Also, it is noticed that Gandhi did not use the words 'peace messenger', 'peace bringer' in a casual way. The peace messenger should have a high moral conduct.

C) Spinning:

Spinning is an outward act. What is spun is visible as a creative piece of work. Inwardly, one is withdrawn from the external world. It requires a high level of concentration. In the process of spinning, the agent acquires self-confidence and an organizing ability.

The following lines of Gandhi are of utmost importance:

"The spinning wheel is the external of internal symbol of internal reform, and its universal re adoption..."

"Understand the inner meaning of the message of the spinning wheel and you will probably find solution to the world peace." (Vol.23 pg 362)

"Spinning wheel is a symbol of peace" (Vol. 27 p.244)

Finally, what needs to be pointed out is that a peaceful mind alone can bring out one's capabilities in its fullest form. A peaceful mind can address the major social and political issues in a better way. His influence is positive. In a world of strife, peace is a valued goal.

References:

Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi

"The whole world is good if we ourselves are good" **Vol.80, Pg 85.**

"We should learn the method of peace by observing silence" ...

Peace is a great strength", **Vol.83, Pg409**

"Outward peace is useless without inner peace, **Vol. 83, Pg 409**

"There is no remedy like peace of mind", **Vol.63 Pg 401**

Question to Gandhi-What do you consider as your most satisfactory achievement?

Answer "It is a difficult question. I do not know what to say. I can simply say this: I do not know whether you will call it an achievement or not, but I may say that, in the midst of humiliation and so called defeat and a temptuous life, I am able to retain my peace, because of my undying faith in God, translated as Truth. I have myself adopted the simple formula-'Truth is God" **Vol.63, Pg 401**

"Not to believe in the possibility of permanent peace is to disbelieve the godliness of human nature ...Peace is unattainable by part performances of conditions, even as a chemical combination is

impossible without complete fulfillment of the conditions of attainment thereof. If even one great nation were unconditionally to perform the supreme act of renunciation, many of us would see in our life time visible peace established on earth.”, **Vol 62.Pg 175**

“The moment we have restored real living equality between man and man, we shall be able to establish equality between man and the whole creation. When that day comes we shall have peace on earth and goodwill to men” **Vol.62, Pg285.**

“.....to perceive efficacy of prayer it has to find its place in the heart. The only way to test the question whether it has permeated the heart is by finding whether there is real peace of mind. For, answer to prayer does not mean that you should get what you want but means that you become free from all anxiety and become indifferent as to whether you get the thing prayed for or not.” **Vol.65,Pg409.**

“Lasting peace can be attained only by sat sang” **Vol.55, Pg58**

(2 kinds of sat sang ----good company ----good books and conducting one self on the pattern enjoined therein)

“one is overwhelmed when God helps one to fulfill a vow”

Vol.55, Pg 248

Mira behn Gandhi’s close associate wrote-‘cessation of mental imagination of what might come to pass, either good or bad, is an essential condition to inner peace.’

‘...(Gandhiji’s) teaching’s sank deep into my being and by now it has become a habit with me immediately to check my mind the moment it begins speculating and pasteurizing.’ (**Vol. 52 Pg301 fn**)

“...It is quite true that friends around me ...my peace of mind ...is an object of envy. It comes from absolute faith and his goodness. That faith enables me humbly to do the task allotted to me without being anxious for the result.” **Vol. 46, pg292**

“ one way to promote world peace is to help India her own through truth and nonviolence.”**Vol.46, Pg215**

“There is no calm without a storm, there is no peace without strife. Strife is inherent in peace. We should not know it without strife. Life is a perpetual struggle against strife whether within or without. Hence the necessity of realizing peace in the midst of strife”.**Vol.49, Pg 469.**

“ Training in ‘takli’ is progressing well. It will be very good if all the ashram inmates learn it.”

The silence period was lengthened from one minute to five minutes in order to give people greater peace...Concentration will be greatly helped if all observe silence with a willing heart.” **Vol.49,Pg493.**

“The illustration that I can give from my life is that whenever I have been assailed in difficult situations, by anxiety or doubts they been dispelled by prayer, and peace has taken the place of depression.”

Vol. 65 p.410

.Peace may arise out of strife, for all strife is not antipacific. To stand with folded hands is not to achieve reform.”

“I have baffled many of my friends when they have noticed in me peace that they have envied, and they have asked me the cause of that priceless possession. I have not been able to explain the cause by saying that, if my friends found that peace in me, it was due to my attempt to obey this, the greatest law of our being (law of love) **Vol.48 pg.369**

“I hate privilege and monopoly. Whatever cannot be shared with the masses is taboo to me” **Vol 48. Pg 167.**

“My duty is to die in peace if it is necessary to die” **Vol.94 p.387**

“A man of peace can live happily even in a mud house hut and has no thought of the morrow, for it is only God who knows what will happen on the morrow.” **Vol.90 pg.350**