

# The Nature of Peace and Its Implications for Peace Education<sup>1</sup>

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*“Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and misguided men.”*

– Martin Luther King, Jr.

*“The abolition of war requires the development of effective nonviolent alternatives to military struggle.”*

– Gene Sharp

*“But war will only end after a great labour has been performed in altering men’s moral ideals, directing them to the good of all mankind and not only of the separate nations into which men happen to have been born.”*

– Bertrand Russell

*“Peace is not merely the absence of war but the presence of justice, of law, of order – in short, of government.”*

– Albert Einstein

## Peace: Avoiding the Way of Negation

“Peace” is a word that is uttered almost as frequently as “truth,” “beauty,” and “love.” It may be just as elusive to define as these other virtues. Common synonyms for peace include “amity,” “friendship,” “harmony,” “concord,” “tranquility,” “repose,” “quiescence,” “truce,” “pacification,” and “neutrality.” Likewise, the peacemaker is the pacifier, mediator, intermediary, and intercessor. While some of these descriptions are appropriate, they are still quite limited in describing both the nature of peace and the role of the peacemaker. Any attempt to articulate the nature of peace and peacemaking, therefore, must address those conditions that are favorable to their emergence. Freedom, human rights, and justice are among such prerequisites. Also included are proactive strategies such as conflict resolution, nonviolent action, community building, and democratization of authority.

The peace process additionally must acknowledge and contend with its alternative – war – because of the high value status of violence. For example, while war has brought out the worst kind of behavior in humans, it has also brought out some of the best. Aside

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<sup>1</sup> Several years ago Leo Sandy entered into dialogue with fellow veterans to explore the nature of peace and, based on their own experiences of war, to provide a satisfactory account that could serve as a guide for all peacemakers who seek a world without war. This paper draws, in part, on that dialogue, and references to participants and ideas are duly noted.

from relieving boredom and monotony, war has been shown to spawn self-sacrifice, loyalty, honor, heroism, and courage. It is well known that suicide rates decline during war. Also, war has helped to bring about significant social changes such as racial and sexual integration, freedom, democracy, and a sense of national pride. Because of its apparent utilitarian value and its ability to enervate, violence has been solidly embedded in the national psyche of many countries. As a result, its elimination will be no easy feat. Nevertheless, Reardon (1988) insists that “peace is the absence of violence in all its forms – physical, social, psychological, and structural” (p. 16). But this, as a definition, is unduly negative in that it fails to provide any affirmative picture of peace or its ingredients (Copi and Cohen, p. 195). Perhaps that picture must come, as O’Kane (1992) suggests, from a close examination of the “nature of causes, reasons, goals of war in order that we might...find ways of reaching human goals without resorting to force. That process should help us “uncover” the possible conditions of Peace.”

In its most myopic and limited definition, peace is the mere absence of war. O’Kane (1992) sees this definition as a “vacuous, passive, simplistic, and unresponsive escape mechanism too often resorted to in the past – without success.” This definition also commits a serious oversight: it ignores the residual feelings of mistrust and suspicion that the winners and losers of a war harbor toward each other.

The subsequent suppression of mutual hostile feelings is not taken into account by those who define peace so simply. Their stance is that as long as people are not actively engaged in overt, mutual, violent, physical, and destructive activity, then peace exists. This, of course, is just another way of defining cold war. In other words, this simplistic definition is too broad because it allows us to attribute the term “peace” to states of affairs that are not truly peaceful (Copi and Cohen, p. 194). Unfortunately, this definition of peace appears to be the prevailing one in the world. It is the kind of peace maintained by a “peace through strength” posture that has led to the arms race, stockpiles of nuclear weapons, and the ultimate threat of mutually assured destruction. This version of peace was defended by the “peacekeeper” – a name that actually adorns some U.S. nuclear weapons deployed since 1986.<sup>2</sup> Also, versions of this name appear on entrances to some military bases. Keeping “peace” in this manner evokes the theme in Peggy Lee’s old song, “Is That All There is?” What this really comes down to is the idea of massive and indiscriminate killing for peace, which represents a morally dubious notion if not a fault of logic. The point here is that a “peace” that depends upon the threat and intention to kill vast numbers of human beings is hardly a stable or justifiable peace worthy of the name. Those in charge of waging war know that killing is a questionable activity. Otherwise, they would not use such euphemisms as “collateral damage” and “smart bombs” to obfuscate it.

## Some Different Types of Peace

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<sup>2</sup> The Peacekeeper was the name given by the Reagan administration to the MX missile, a weapon with first strike capability, to disguise its dangerous character and make its deployment more acceptable to the American electorate.

One way of clearing up the confusion over terms is to define types of peace and war. Thus, there can be hot war, cold war, cold peace, and hot peace. In hot war, commonly called war, there is a condition of mutual hostility and active physical engagement through such forms as artillery, missiles, bombs, small arms fire, mortars, flamethrowers, land and sea mines, hand-to-hand combat, and the like. The aim is the destruction of the enemy or his surrender by intimidation. The object is to have a winner and loser. Nationalism reaches its zenith here.

In cold war, there is mutual hostility without actual engagement. Intimidation is the sole means of preventing hot war. This condition is characterized by propaganda, war preparations, and arms races – always at the expense of human needs. During a cold war, nationalism prevails, and the object is to have a stalemate where neither side will initiate aggression – nuclear or conventional – because of the overwhelming destructive capability of the retaliatory response.

In cold peace, there is almost a neutral view of a previous enemy. There is little mutual hostility, but there is also a lack of mutually beneficial interactions aimed at developing trust, interdependence, and collaboration. There may be a longing for an enemy because nothing has replaced it as an object of national concern. In this situation, isolationism and nationalism occur simultaneously. There is no clear objective because there is no well-defined enemy. Perhaps the current U.S. military preoccupation with Iraq's Saddam Hussein and the debilitating decade of sanctions against the Iraqi people are helping to relieve this enemy deficit. The notion that "there are still dangerous people in the world" is often used to advance the cause of military preparedness and at least some momentum toward a restoration of cold war thinking and behavior. The term "peace dividend" that expressed post-cold war optimism is hardly verbalized anymore. Now we are (again) advancing ballistic missile defense – a variation of the Reagan Administration's Star Wars debacle and an instigator of nuclear proliferation.

By contrast, hot peace involves active collaborative efforts designed to "build bridges" between and among past and present adversaries. This involves searching for common ground and the development of new non-human enemies – threats to the health and well-being of humankind and the planet. These new enemies could include human rights abuses, air and water pollution, dwindling energy resources, the destruction of the ozone layer, famine, poverty, and ignorance. Hot peace promotes – and, indeed, is defined by – global interdependence, human rights, democratization, an effective United Nations, and a diminution of national sovereignty. The object is the proliferation of cooperative relations and mutually beneficial outcomes. Hot peace thinking imagines peace and the abolition of war.

Another way of thinking about peace is to have it defined in negative and positive terms. Peace as the mere absence of war is what Woolman (1985) refers to a "negative peace." This definition is based on Johan Galtung's ideas of peace. For Galtung,

negative peace is defined as a state requiring a set of social structures that provide security and protection from acts of direct physical violence committed by individuals, groups or nations. The emphasis is...on control of violence. The main strategy is dissociation, whereby conflicting parties are separated...In general, policies based on the idea of negative peace do not deal with the causes of violence, only its manifestations. Therefore, these policies are thought to be insufficient to assure lasting conditions of peace. Indeed, by suppressing the release of tensions resulting from social conflict, negative peace efforts may actually lead to future violence of greater magnitude (Woolman, 1985, p.8).

The recent wars in the former Yugoslavia are testimony to this. The massive military machine previously provided by the U.S.S.R. put a lid on ethnic hostilities yet did nothing to resolve them, thus allowing them to fester and erupt later.

### Accentuating the Positive

Positive peace, in contrast, is:

...a pattern of cooperation and integration between major human groups...[It] is about people interacting in cooperative ways; it is about social organizations of diverse peoples who willingly choose to cooperate for the benefit of all humankind; it calls for a system in which there are no winners and losers – all are winners; it is a state so highly valued that institutions are built around it to protect and promote it (O’Kane, 1991-92).

It also “involves the search for positive conditions which can resolve the underlying causes of conflict that produce violence” (Woolman, 1985, p.8). The strategies used for this purpose are called “associative,” and they are characterized by “a high level of social interaction [that] enables more rapid resolution of conflict by providing maximum contacts through which solutions may arise” (Woolman, 1985, p.8).

Woolman also describes the sort of social reorganization that would provide the best opportunity for real peace. Essentially, he espouses Galtung’s idea of smallness and decentralization of power and authority. Thus, “small scale social organization offers a better environment for encouragement of local autonomy, participation, and high levels of inter-group interaction. Big countries, corporations, and institutions are generally regarded as negative structures because they are prone to depersonalization, excessive centralization of decision-making, and patterns of center-periphery exploitation.” Gene Sharp (1980) in his *Social Power and Political Freedom* adroitly elaborates these points. The condition of smallness does much to reduce feelings of anonymity and powerlessness. It also facilitates the development of relationships that can restore and preserve community values and spiritual needs that “should take precedence over the materialism that is so central to Western culture.” (Woolman, 1985, p.12).

Consistent with these approaches, Reardon (1988) places global justice as the central concept of positive peace and asserts that “justice, in the sense of the full enjoyment of the entire range of human rights by all people, is what constitutes positive peace” (p.26).

In a similar vein, Trostle’s (1992) comprehensive definition of peace clearly places it within a positive context:

[Peace is] a state of well-being that is characterized by trust, compassion, and justice. In this state, we can be encouraged to explore as well as celebrate our diversity, and search for the good in each other without the concern for personal pain and sacrifice...It provides us a chance to look at ourselves and others as part of the human family, part of one world.

The role of the individual peacemaker from this perspective would involve people who:

...work toward promoting a world in which nonviolent interaction and social equality are the norm...Individuals of conscience should work to create a “trickle up” theory...by starting at the grassroots level to encourage corporate leaders, political figures, and government officials to establish policies promoting peace and justice. This includes not only participating in government by voting, etc., but also standing against a government that does not operate in the best interest of global harmony (Trostle, 1992).

A peacemaking government would require “a system of non-military national service (to)...include the Peace Corps and exchange student or “exchange citizen” programs...as well as the duty of largely developed nations to share technology and surpluses of any kind with those countries in need and less developed” (Trostle, 1992).

Offering another broad positive view of peace is MacLeod (1992) who defines it as, an awareness that all humans should have the right to a full and satisfying life. For an individual this means developing his own and his loved ones’ potential growth, and for reaching out to his neighbors to help assure that they have the same chance. For communities, this means developing fair regulations for living together, and encouraging programs that will enhance fellowship among its many diverse elements. For nations, this means encouraging its citizens to strive for enhancement of a benign attitude toward all elements of their own society and toward all other nations.

## Toward an Adequate Definition

It is difficult not to see in these “positive” approaches to the definition of “peace” radical implications for a reorganization of our society and, indeed, our entire world.

There is no denying that a positive conception of peace along the lines suggested by Galtung, Sharp, Reardon, and others would involve fundamental changes on the level of the individual psyche and the nation-state as well. At both levels genuine peace requires the advent of a new selflessness, a willingness to see our fellow humans as our brothers and sisters and – as the traditional religions have always counseled – to love them as we love ourselves.

But besides this subjective component of each individual's altruistic love, there must be justice that depends on the right sort of social organization. This is Reardon's point. It is also implied by Trostle's "state of well-being...of global harmony...part of one world." The suggestion here is that, at the very least, a state of (genuine) peace is something beyond what can be achieved by the traditional system of sovereign nation-states. The problem, of course, is that this system lacks a system of workable law, each state being the ultimate arbiter of whether it will wield force in its pursuit of national interest or not. Without workable world law it is hard to see how there can be justice, and so, peace, in its true sense. The world federalists have expressed this point succinctly but powerfully: "There can be no world peace without international justice; no international justice without world law; and no effective world law without institutions to make, interpret and enforce it." And the world federalists may be right when they make this requirement of enforceable world law a *sine qua non* for the abolition of the age-old institution of war itself. Certainly Albert Einstein thought so when he declared "Peace is not merely the absence of war but the presence of justice, of law, of order – in short, of government" (Einstein, 1968).

In conclusion, we believe that a proper definition of "peace" must include positive characteristics over and above the mere absence of belligerence. Rather, it must include those positive factors that foster cooperation among human groups with ostensibly different cultural patterns so that social justice can be done and human potential can freely develop within democratic political structures. And this – promoting social justice/freedom by democratic means – will almost certainly require more "selfless" concern at all levels: at the personal level, more brotherly love; and at the international level, less narrow national self-interest – a goal which we believe will require a diminution of the current system of nation-states and the gradual emergence of a world community self-governed by world law. In this way, a truly peaceful world will be a world where war has been made impossible – or, at least much less likely – by a new community where people not only see themselves in their hearts as part of one human "family," but where, in (political-legal-moral) reality, they really are part of such a "family."

## Lessons for Peace Education

Finally, what do these insights about the definition of "peace" mean for peacemakers, and peace educators generally, in the 21st Century? We think they mean

first that peacemakers must stress that the long-range goal of peace education should be the elimination of war as a method of resolving disputes. Reardon (1988) anticipated this when she said, “peace education must confront the need to abolish the institution of war” (p.24). To date, there has not been a widespread perceived need to do so. Establishing the need is a challenge that lies ahead. But, secondly, and at least equally important, our reflections about the nature of peace also suggest that the abolition of war will require more than the mere cessation of hostilities among peoples – not that that would be bad if we could get it. The problem is, as we saw earlier, that we probably cannot get it without a radical reconstruction of interpersonal and international relations along the lines suggested by our earlier examination. Paramount among these relations are the ideas of social justice and world law. The importance of these ideas in successfully pursuing the quest of abolishing war is, we think, an equally important implication for the future of peace education. Of course, the quest for peace and the abolition of war will be long and will require us to dig deeper into the very depths of the human and institutional psyches that lead “civilized” peoples to resort to force and, hopefully, to find and build the elusive “peace.” This quest requires that we teach for peace and not just about peace.

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\*The people cited as “personal correspondence” are all veterans of military service between World War II and the Vietnam War. They are all members of Veterans for Peace, Inc., and they relayed their thoughts to Leo Sandy in written correspondence.

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