

Peace for the New Millennium

by Kathylyne Maki-Banmen

Virginia Satir was a visionary. She claims that, as a very young child, she was puzzled by her parents' inconsistencies and became a "detective" of human behaviour to try to figure them out. She began her professional career at the age of eighteen teaching in a one-room school house, but soon moved on to study social work and become a therapist. She truly believed that all human beings have an innate drive to grow and evolve, a positive energy that moves us towards becoming, as she put it, more fully human. Her whole approach towards people was always positive. Not for her the focus on pathology, on problems, on what was wrong. She always helped people find the positive intention or the deep wisdom in whatever they experienced. Her work with individuals, couples and families took her to the far corners of the earth. She found that the human process of growth is similar, no matter what the cultural context in which it happens. In the last years of her life, she dedicated more and more of her time to promoting and working towards world peace. One of her last major contributions was to send petitions signed by thousands to Presidents Regan and Gorbachev requesting that they get together and work to make the world a more peaceful, healthy place.

Virginia Satir coined the phrase, "Peace within, peace between, peace among". What did she mean by peace?

The way our media reports the events that take place in our world, it may seem that peace is as far away as it may have been at the dawn of the last millennium. We only need to look to Africa to see that famine takes millions of people each year in a world of plenty. Witness Bosnia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda to see that war and horrible atrocities still exist in our modern world. The resurgence of the white supremacy movements and the rise of radical Muslim fundamentalist groups illustrate the present existence of prejudice and oppression. Gangs and organized crime groups threaten the safety of our communities. Domestic violence occurs on a regular basis. And individuals try drugs, depression and empty materialism as ways to cope - and when that no longer works, may resort to suicide as a final answer. It paints a pretty bleak picture and begs us to ask the question, "Does peace exist in our world?"

I guess we first need to ask ourselves what peace means. To some it means a cessation of fighting. The Middle East Peace Accord has this as its mandate. But is this peace? To the black people of the Southern United States it wasn't enough. One hundred years after the end of the American Civil War, the Civil Rights movement was still striving to begin the healing process leading closer to peace.

To some people, peace means being happy together. But again, is this enough? For many who live seemingly happy lives with material comfort, loving family members and

satisfying jobs there is still a restlessness - a yearning for some deeper meaning, some deeper connection, some kind of inner peace.

So let's look at peace in a deeper way.

To me, peace begins with an internal journey. In our externally focused society, we sometimes forget about our internal worlds, and when we do remember, we sometimes let our fears lead us to ignore or avoid what we experience inside. In this place of fear, we find differences between ourselves and others to be places for conflict to develop, leading to misunderstandings, arguments, hurts and anger.

So the journey towards peace might begin with courage - the courage to see what is, to accept what is, to find new possibilities and choices, and to be willing to grow - to be willing to find our own inner treasure and to live a life of responsible wholeness.

Dr. Joan Borysenko has written in her book *Fire in the Soul* (1993) about three types of courage: willful courage, psychological courage and spiritual courage. I'd like to put these in Satir terms.

Willful courage is when we are afraid, but will ourselves to move forward anyway - "feel the fear and do it anyway". There is a certain satisfaction that comes with doing that, but it's not really peaceful. We still carry the fear, and the cost of dealing with the inner conflict of carrying the fear. When we confront differences with others from this level of courage, we look at acceptance or compromise. We agree to disagree, but we know inside that we're still right.

The second type of courage, psychological courage, is the courage to face our own pain and to heal, to dismantle our defenses and our images and transform ourselves to become more fully human. As we move through this kind of change, we find ourselves more deeply in touch with our inner core, our essence, our Spiritual Center, which some call the soul. We find ourselves experiencing love, gratitude, awe, joy, security, compassion, even rapture. We are in a sacred place which is uniquely our own - "my own Inner Self". This is an experience of peace. Our only problem is that it is hard to remember to stay there. We find ourselves busy with the outside world, facing problems, becoming triggered by old unfinished business and again, needing to find the courage to go inside and transform yet another part of our coping mechanism. The good thing is that, once we have had some success in transforming ourselves and growing, it becomes easier to find the courage to continue the process. When we meet differences with others from this level of courage, we use it as an avenue for personal growth and a way of making new possibilities and new connections.

The third type of courage, spiritual courage, is the courage it takes to choose to live in that inner core, to choose to live in love rather than fear, to choose to surrender, in the very deep place of wisdom which we all possess, to the knowledge that I am truly that

Sacred Being and that I am connected to everyone and everything else through the Universal Life Energy which Satir talked about so much. This is more than just believing. It is knowing in the deepest part of me. When I have the courage to live in my Inner Self, I truly find peace, and from this place differences from others become cause for celebration and the uniqueness and the connection exist simultaneously.

How do we make this shift from fear to love? >From fear-focused to peace? Let's first look at the purpose of fear. Satir taught us that everything that exists can have both positive and negative energies. When fear becomes an energy which stops us from growing, we tap into its negative energy. But what about its positive purpose? We have events or relationships in our lives which challenge us and give us choices. We can ignore them, we can run from them, we can lie down before them and give up. Or we can use them in our human growth and spiritual evolution as the means to develop courage. For how can courage exist if not for fear? Our fears become our means for growth and evolution towards peace.

After courage, another ingredient to creating peace is hope. Again, we can experience willful hope; that is hope that is attached to a specific outcome. When we experience hope in this way, with a stake in the outcome, we turn our hope into an expectation. We find ways to manipulate, control, and fret over what has not yet happened. How many of us have done that with our children or our partners? And gotten ourselves tied up in knots inside in the process?

We can also experience psychological hope, where we still have an outcome in mind, but we have given up the expectation that it has to happen and can remain open to the possibility that it may happen. This is a freeing experience, but can still create sadness that the hoped for thing has not yet happened.

Or we can experience spiritual hope. By this I mean letting go of our will and being open to trust that the right thing will happen, even if it isn't what we would have chosen for ourselves. How many of you have ever had a "blessing in disguise" when the right thing seemed very much like the wrong thing until after the fact? I would like to read to you a quote from Brother David Steindl-Rast, a Benedictine monk:

"Hope looks at all things the way a mother looks at her child, with a passion for the possible. But that way of looking is creative. It creates a space in which perfection can unfold. More than that, the eyes of hope look through all imperfections to the heart of all things and find it perfect." [Gratefulness, the Heart of Prayer (1984), p. 142]

The heart of all things - your own inner core, your own Inner Self, and those of all around you.

Erich Fromm also has a beautiful way of looking at hope:

“Hope ... is neither passive waiting nor is it unrealistic forcing of circumstances that cannot occur. It is like a crouched tiger, which will jump only when the moment for jumping has come . . . To hope means to be ready at every moment for that which is not yet born, and yet not become desperate if there is no birth in our lifetime.” [The Revolution of Hope (1968), p. 9]

A third element of peace is forgiveness. Some people who hold onto their fear, hurt and anger see forgiveness as a way of condoning the evil or wrong doing of others. But true forgiveness is not an external process. It is an internal process of accepting what is, of owning my own feelings and experiences, of connecting with and loving my own inner core and letting go of the hurt, the anger, the pain associated with the event. It is allowing my own Life Energy to empower me to have peace, even if the outside world does not or cannot change. It is knowing and accepting that we all come from the same Source, we all have the same Life Energy.

When we have experienced a trauma, especially one at the hands of another human being, the healing process is one of reclaiming one’s soul, one’s Inner Self. It is a process of letting go of the dualities in which we see the world: good / bad, right / wrong. Let me illustrate by reading an excerpt from a very moving book called Shivitti: A Vision (1987) by an author who calls himself Ka-Tzetnik 135633, which refers to Auschwitz and his tattoo number while he was an inmate. His trauma in the concentration camp was so great that he was unable to testify against his tormentors at their war crimes trial and actually spent several years in a mental hospital as a result of being asked to do so. Thirty years after his liberation from Auschwitz, he sought the help of a therapist and recorded his healing journey in a journal. He wrote about getting in touch with and re-experiencing the memory of being loaded into the truck which was to take a group of prisoners to the ovens. He looked at the S.S. officer who was loading the truck and saw a tired, chillingly ordinary man who was wishing he was home in bed instead of standing in the cold, dark morning herding a group of skeletons into a vehicle to take them to their deaths. He recorded these thoughts:

“Do I hate him? I don’t even know his name, just as I don’t know the names of the rest of us now being delivered to the crematorium. All at once an additional horror seizes me, one I’ve not yet known: if this is so, then he could have been standing here in my place, a naked skeleton in this truck, while I, I could have been standing there instead of him, on just such a cold morning, doing my job delivering him and millions like him to the crematorium.” (p. 10)

“Oh, Lord, merciful and compassionate Lord, am I the one, the one who’s created Auschwitz? It’s much worse than that he - the German facing me with the death’s skull insignia on his cap, his hands deep in his pockets of his black S.S. coat - could have been in my place. It’s that I - and this is the paralyzing horror - I could have been there in his place!

Oh, Lord, Lord of Auschwitz heavens, illumine my ignorance of your handiwork, so that I might know who is the being within me now delivered to the crematorium - and why? And who is the being within him delivering me to the crematorium - and why? For you know that at this moment the two of us, dispatcher and dispatched, are equal sons of man, both created by you, in your image.” (p. 11)

After this, he re-experienced how he hid in a coal bin in the truck and escaped his death. And how the darkness of the coal bin had become the metaphor for the darkness he had been existing in ever since. As his perception of the event and his captor transformed, so did his experience of himself. He continues:

“A perfect peace wafts down on me from on high as I repay my obligations, one and all. I throw off the yokes that bear down on my neck. I surrender my body to the earth and my breath to my Creator, while an ineffable light fills me. . . . I see my soul turn its face toward the source of the light. And all my obligations are repaid, every one.” (p. 85)

In these remarkable words, we see the power of forgiveness as an avenue to freedom, to growth, to peace.

And the final ingredient to peace is, of course, love. Allowing loving energy to open and flow, not just to others but also to ourselves. Not just to the parts about ourselves which we appreciate and like, but the parts which we judge, which we discount, which we find vulnerable. Not only to the moral and upstanding people of the world, but to the wounded, the ignorant, the unkind, the hurtful. Not only to the good things in the world, but to the parts we'd like to see changed.

Mother Theresa, who many consider to be a saint who lived in our time, was a good model for someone who lived in a state of peace. Yet it wasn't something she strived for - she found it through her own courage, her hope, her forgiveness and her love. When asked to comment on the huge impact she made on the people in the slums of Calcutta, she said:

“I never look at the masses as my responsibility. I look at the individual. I can love only one person at a time. I can feed only one person at a time. Just one, one, one. . . So you begin . . . I begin. I pick up one person - maybe if I didn't pick that one person I wouldn't have picked up 42,000. The whole work is only a drop in the ocean, But if I didn't put the drop in, the ocean would be one drop less. Same thing for you, same thing in your family, same thing in the church where you go. Just begin . . . one, one, one.” [Words to Love By (1983) p. 79]

So we begin. With ourselves, with each other, in our families, in our communities, in our world. One, one, one. Peace within, peace between, peace among.

Kathlyne Maki-Banmen, MA, RCC, has trained therapists in several countries in Asia, North America and Europe. This publication is the transcript of a keynote address for the conference entitled "Peace Within, Peace Between, Peace Among", a celebration of Satir Model therapy hosted and sponsored by the Satir Institute of the Pacific in Vancouver, BC, Canada on November 20, 2000. Kathlyne is presently working with individuals, couples and families in private practice in Delta, BC, Canada. She can be reached by e-mail or by telephone at (604) 591-9269