

Peace First

You might find my perspective a little different. I'm not associated with big institutions. When I travel, I talk to people—human beings. And sometimes that's what we forget—who we really are. We get so caught up in our causes and definitions that we forget to see that each one of us has fundamentally the same ambition: to be happy, to be in peace.

When people talk about peace, sometimes I ask, "What does peace mean to you?" For many, it is an absence of something. They get away from the traffic, go somewhere overlooking a beautiful lake, and say, "It's so peaceful." Some people think that if you *do* something—climb Mt. Everest or accomplish something in life—then you will have peace.

What is peace? What was it like for Socrates or Plato to contemplate the idea of peace? They didn't know about this war-torn world, the tanks, this and that, but they were trying to cope with problems not so different from ours. And their quest was to bring peace to every single individual.

So is peace something innate that resides in the heart of every single human being? Or is it a state that can be manipulated and brought about? When I talk about peace, I mean the desire for peace that has resided within human beings from time immemorial. And it continues. A voice for peace surfaces again and again, however many times it has been ignored by governments and world leaders.



Even in the face of that, the voice for peace continues to call. This is what we have to acknowledge, to listen to. This voice does not belong to a group of people or a country. This is within every human being trying to find that peace in their own way. That's how powerful it is.

I say: Do not squelch that voice. Hear that voice, because that is the voice that sees no difference between the rich and poor, between types of governments, between an educated and a non-educated person. That peace is an innate need—just like water, air, food, shelter. People all around the world cry out for peace. I know. I meet with people who are extremely poor and extremely rich. And when they express their needs, it is obvious that what each one of them wants is exactly the same.

People look at the reasons and justifications for wars. It is time that we start looking for the reasons for peace. Because that has not been given a chance. And it is no accident that we find ourselves again and again at those unwanted thresholds. Nobody wants war. War inflicts the most pain on the innocent people who did no wrong. Their ambition is simply to have food, shelter, a better life for their family, a future for their children. That's all they want. Going to the moon is optional; they don't think that far.

Not long ago, I was talking to a taxi driver, and he said, "What's going to happen to our children?" All he talked about was the opportunity to have peace.

This is the fundamental need that we have. Is it so impossible to look within for the solution? In times of trouble, when we have personal problems, we need strength, and that strength comes from within. Other people may be catalysts, but that strength comes from within us. Peace is no different. The quest for peace comes from within, and peace resides within the heart of every single human being. We forget our fundamental nature. And when we cannot see who we are, how will we respond to the needs of those around us? We are each a precious gift on this magnificent Earth. There's nothing like it for billions of miles.

The other night, I looked up at the beautiful stars. I had seen a documentary on outer space and how violent it is: dark holes, planets, stars—violent explosions. Yet that night, it was incredibly serene. How could it be? Is it all a mistake? Or is there more to it?

There *is* more to it. In every human being, there is a want for peace. And as long as there are people on Earth, the need for peace shall exist. If we acknowledge that need, we will begin to seek peace first, then happiness will follow. That's just my take on it from my personal experience, traveling and talking to people and trying to make it possible for them to find that happiness in their lives.



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