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## Spirituality and Peace

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### Abstract

Spirituality and peace are tightly interlinked; the broader the definition of peace, the more intertwined it is with the concept of spirituality. This essay distinguishes between three stages, or levels, of peace: weak peace, strong peace, and holistic peace; and between inner and outer dimensions of spirituality in the non-materialistic realm. A discussion of the connection points brings the following insights: weak peace, defined as the absence of war or any kind of violence, represents the simplest form of peace and, thus, a nonspiritual starting point of the discussion, albeit the absence of violent thoughts being worthwhile spiritual goal. Strong peace is the presence of positive values or ideals; correspondingly, spiritual practices can lead to individual, interpersonal, and institutional virtue. Finally, holistic peace implies a transrational desire to follow a higher purpose, culminating in true passion, bliss, unconditional love, and a strong feeling of interconnectedness.

**Keywords:** Peace; Spirituality; Transrationality; Morality

### Introduction

This essay discusses the connection between spirituality and peace in the context of spirituality being defined as a nonmaterialistic lifestyle: the tendency to realize that life is more than what is perceived by the five senses. Spirituality is a deeper attempt to recognize phenomena that may not be immediately recognizable. Spiritual practice is an attempt to turn inward – toward the essence of being human, or, in certain spiritual traditions, toward the divine – from the ordinary, outer world. Accordingly, spirituality is directly relevant to scholars and practitioners of Peace Studies because peace is much more than the mere absence of war or violence.

The concept of peace is also relevant to spirituality scholars and practitioners. The academic field of Peace Studies, also called Irenology, is defined as “an academic field that identifies and analyzes violent and nonviolent behaviors as well as structural mechanisms attending social conflict with a view towards understanding how these processes might lead *to a more desirable human condition*” (Dugan and Carey, 2013:79, emphasis added). Hence, the premise of this essay is that any spiritual work for the betterment of human conditions has a mandate to foster peace. The concept of peace has a range of definitions, from narrow to broad, from the absence of war to the presence of virtue, harmony, justice, security, truth, and wellbeing – and ultimately to holistic transcendence (Bauer, 2015). Essentially, the broader the definition of peace, the stronger its link to spirituality. The next section begins with the narrowest definition, which serves as the epiphany, or epitome, of nonspiritual peace. The definition is gradually expanded, ultimately reaching a philosophy where spirituality and peace are superimposable and intertwined. The goal is to present a conceptualization of the interlinkages of spirituality and peace.

## Weak, strong, and holistic spheres of peace

Peace, in its most limited form, is the absence of negative notions such as violence, war, disturbance, or disharmony. The “father” of Peace Studies, Johan Galtung, coined the term “negative” peace, defined as the absence of physical violence (Galtung, 1967, 1969). This idea can be traced back to philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) who discussed the concept of peace in his *Leviathan* (Hobbes, 1651). Hobbes argues that human nature is essentially bad and that, if not prevented, humans would resort to war. According to sociologist Brian E. Fogarty, Hobbes deems “the civilizing veneer of society [to be] all that saves us from chaos and self-destruction” (Fogarty, 2000:1). In other words, weak peace – as opposed to strong peace discussed below<sup>1</sup> – is the absence of war or violence, as represented by Greek goddess *Eirene*. Here, violence refers to any organized physical, structural, or cultural violence (Galtung, 1969 1990), as well as to violent thoughts such as hate, agitation, or hostility.

For weak peace to prevail, some authority needs to “[keep] chaos at bay, which is in the end the very social peace Hobbes argued for” (Adolf, 2009:5). Hobbes’ worldview does not allow for higher, spiritual levels of the mind to exist; rather, human nature can be reduced to physical, animalist desires. Hobbes’ school of thought eventually contributed to the enactment of international law to punish and minimize (but not eliminate) war.

Absence cannot add to a conceptual definition, so, what is the substance of peace? Peace coalesces those ideals that world thinkers deem necessary, right, and beneficial for the advancement of human potential. Strong peace is, therefore, defined as the presence of any positive, virtuous ideals or values (Bauer, 2015). This pertains to Johan Galtung’s “positive” peace: the absence of structural violence or the presence of social justice (Galtung, 1967, 1969). Galtung’s work enables scientific exploration of deeper facets of peace that foster “all other good things in the world community, particularly cooperation and integration between human groups” (Galtung, 1967:12). Galtung notes that positive peace empirically correlates with negative peace, as “conditions that facilitate the presence of positive relations” (ibid.:14) also foster negative peace; such positive values include the presence of cooperation, freedom from fear, freedom from want, economic growth and development, the absence of exploitation, equality, justice, freedom of action, pluralism (diversity), and dynamism (ibid.). Galtung’s understanding of “freedom from fear” includes the absence of existential threats caused by natural catastrophes. “Freedom from want” relates to the ability to satisfy basic human needs (cf. Galtung, 1980; Maslow, 1954, 1964).

Through a positive definition, peace becomes the ultimate substance of collective ethical visions. For example, Galtung’s freedom is a spiritual maxim (cf. Steiner, 1894; Dalai Lama, 1994). Strong peace serves as a fundamental goal of human activity and as an inspiration for the better – offering a “red thread” through the jungle of imperatives towards societal betterment and, ultimately, enlightenment. The essence of strong peace can be traced to the philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677). Spinoza formulated his theory as a reaction to Hobbes (Steinberg, 2009): “For peace is not mere absence of war, but is a virtue that springs from force of character” (Spinoza, 1670:314). Spinoza’s approach not only includes concepts of justice and security, but also connects peace with inner harmony (cf. Steinberg, 2009), thereby offering a quintessential ingredient for a conceptualization of spirituality and peace. If spirituality was irrelevant for Hobbes, Spinoza brought it to the core of the peace concept.

A renowned peace scholar of our age is Adam Curle, whose approach is characterized by his adoption of the distinction between negative and positive peace, emphasizing the latter’s reliance on peaceful relationships among individuals within society. A central point is to

understand the parties' underlying attitudes and values in a conflict. Through Curle's background in anthropology, psychology and development education, peace was linked to "human development" and the "liberation of human potential." As per humanistic psychology, the human spirit and psyche was for Curle a source for peace to be tapped into; he was influenced by the Quakers, the works of Peter D. Ouspensky, George I. Gurdjieff, and Buddhist teachers (Woodhouse, 2010). Particularly, meditation was conceived as a means and prerequisite to fathoming and achieving peace – and to realizing human potential. Conversely, a lack of peace is, according to Curle, "our failure fully to grasp, and so to develop, the amazing potential of our natural endowment" (Curle, 1986:5). Interestingly, Curle brings a spiritual dimension to attempts of reaching negative peace. Curle writes: "solutions [of negative peace] reached through negotiation may be simply expedient and not imply any change of heart. And this is the crux of peace. There must be a change of heart. Without this no settlement can be considered secure" (Curle, 1995:132). This "change of heart" refers to "the development of the local peacemakers' inner resources of wisdom, courage and compassionate non-violence" (Curle, 1994:104).

Another fundamental conceptualization of peace is the distinction between "inner" and "outer" peace. Peace scholar Charles P. Webel (2007:10) defines inner peace as "psychological harmony and well-being, [...] characterized by low degrees of 'inner conflict' and malignant aggression." Inner peace is in constant dynamic interaction with outer peace: peace within, among, and between groups, societies, or nation-states. The inner/outer conceptualization of peace is also discussed by philosopher Michael Allen Fox who argues that inner and outer peace support and reinforce each other (Fox, 2014). Fox describes inner peace as a subjective, and outer peace as an objective "viewpoint on peace" (ibid.:184–187). The subjective acknowledges that peace depends on one's way of being, behaving, acting, and thinking; while the objective considers external factors that inhibit or foster peace. Peace researchers and futurists Linda Groff and Paul Smoker (1996) explain that "only true inner peace within the hearts of people can bring about true outer peace in the world, because if individuals are plagued by inner conflicts, doubts, fears, and insecurities, they will tend to project them outwardly onto others, blaming others for their problems."

Spirituality and peace scholar Mark S. Umbreit (2000) applies an interpersonal dimension to the concept of inner peace. Umbreit recognizes that spiritual calmness, as experienced in inward meditation to transform inner conflicts, can also be experienced in outward transformations of interpersonal conflicts. Umbreit identifies "key principles of resolving interpersonal conflict" (Umbreit, 2000:1) that rest on humanistic mediation, i.e. interpersonal dialog based on spiritual practice. Umbreit's (2000) spiritual dimension rests on an intuitive process that combines both left and right brain functions, i.e. the logical, emotional and spiritual aspects of human nature. The prerequisite to achieve peace, according to Umbreit, is being centered and connected to a spiritual source of wisdom leading to compassion, humility, congruence, and creativity, with meditation as the facilitator for the peace process.

Manifesting weak, strong, inner, and outer peace forms holistic peace, which is the extension of inner peace to outer peace while taking a holistic approach to life, and to peace in the universe (cf. Groff and Smoker, 1996; Fox, 2014). It suggests the interconnectedness of all beings; oneness celebrated through life. According to His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, inner peace and outer peace are not only related, but inner peace is also a prerequisite for world peace (see, for example, Dalai Lama, 2002, 2009a, 2009b). The connection between peace and spiritual thinking is embracing love, compassion, and respect in thinking and doing (cf. Kraft, 1992). Moreover, Buddhist monk and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh emphasizes the "need to

find an inner peace which makes it possible for us to become one with those who suffer, and to do something to help our brothers and sisters, which is to say, ourselves [...]" (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1988:127). Peace is relational, and violence against others (whether physical, non-physical, direct, or indirect) is, in fact, violence against oneself.

Extending unconditional loving kindness to oneself, a close person, a person of great admiration, a neutral person, or an enemy is a spiritual practice that Mohandas Karamchand (Mahatma) Gandhi proclaimed. As Peace Education scholar Edward J. Brantmeier said, "[i]n a Gandhian theory of peace and nonviolence, loving kindness is the soul-force that motivates and guides action towards positive social change" (Brantmeier, 2007:136). Meditation as a spiritual practice fosters inner peace and can, eventually, lead to the elimination of suffering, enlightened living, and world peace (cf. Tanabe, 2016). Peace can be fostered through – and is an important theme in – spiritual practice of any major tradition.

The idea of peace through spiritual practice resonates with African conceptions<sup>2</sup> of peace where, according to Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the sense of "community" and "togetherness" is an important aspect that emphasizes sharing, belonging, and participation in efforts to improve society (cited in Fox, 2014:190). Thus, "peace [...] builds outward to become, among other things, a state of harmony with the universe as a whole. [...] Inner and outer are inseparable correlates" (ibid.:191). The African phrase, or ideology, *Ubuntu* literally means "I am because we are" (Cortright, 2008:13) and embodies "the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity" (Dartey-Baah and Amponsah-Tawiah, 2011:132). Peace scholar Ho-Won Jeong points out that harmony with the universe also includes living in harmony with nature (Jeong, 2000). Hence, peace requires us to understand that currently "the earth, too, is the object of violence" (ibid.:8) and that an unsustainable, or unspiritual, way of life threatens our own survival.

The above references to Buddhist, Hindu, and African traditions serve as exemplary notions, while other traditions offer valuable insights, as well. For example, *Tao Te Ching*, *Bhagavat Gita*, the *Upanishads*, and other classics of earliest World literature offer timeless wisdom on how to achieve inner and outer peace (cf. Richards, 2006). Perhaps the most radical is the teaching of love of Jesus Christ. According to theologian Mark Bredin (2004), Jesus was the quintessential forerunner of nonviolence, the same philosophy that Gandhi, an educated Hindu, followed.

Fundamental to understanding the magnitude of holistic peace is the work of Wolfgang Dietrich (2008/2012). His "transrational" interpretation of peace transcends the limits of reason by combining the energetic understanding of life (as suppressed by the modern view) with reason, or rational thinking – without forgetting lessons from modernity and postmodernity. Spirituality is, therefore, a part of the human experience, as postulated by humanistic and transpersonal psychology, without denying rationality. "Peace through harmony" is complementary to reasonable thinking, i.e. to "peaces" through justice, security, and truth. Moreover, transrational interpretations go beyond the individual and expand consciousness to include collective systems. Transrational peaces require a perceiving subject and the analysis of the perceiving self. Thus, there is no one absolute truth, but rather relational aspects of subjects and objects. According to Dietrich, transrational peace is the lifelong quest for a dynamic balance: harmony is a function of security, security of justice, justice of truth, and truth only exists in harmony. It entails harmonizing ethical conduct with the aesthetic of life. The notions of spirituality, love, and harmony are again part of the academic vocabulary.

Dietrich's seminal work on transrational peace explains that conflict is energetic dissonance. Therefore, "Elicitive Conflict Transformation" (Dietrich, 2008/2012; Lederach, 1995; and, more practically, Dietrich, 2011/2013), which is the logical result of transrational peace, is essentially spiritual (or holistic) peace work. Such "elicitive" work can take the form of breath-oriented, voice-oriented, or move-oriented approaches (Dietrich, 2011/2013). The idea is to transform the energetic dissonance through mindful presence and practice (cf. Lederach, 2005; Dietrich, 2015).

Finally, "peace can be identified [...] as not only good in itself, but also as good by virtue of its healing power and contribution to the common weal" (Fox, 2014:192). Therefore, peace has a "prescriptive/visionary" aspect, a normative goal for humanity through "ethical or moral directives [that] should be understood and acted upon accordingly. [...] Peace is [...] a serious duty" (ibid.:192). This imperative is summarized by Peace Education scholar H.B. Danesh (2011:65), who concludes that "peace is a psychosocial and political as well as moral and spiritual condition requiring a conscious approach, a universal outlook, and an integrated, unifying strategy." Jeong (2000:30) states, "A holistic conception of peace links the ideal of the human spirit to the harmony between different components of the earth system and even universe."

Accordingly, the highest spheres of the peace concept entail a normative quest for a higher purpose of human existence. Therefore, holistic peace is defined as the transrational vision for humanity, an ultimate higher purpose of human endeavor, and effective amalgamation of all aspects of peace (Bauer, 2015).

### **Practical Aspects of Spirituality and Peace**

Are higher levels of peace possible without spirituality? Perhaps, as it is possible to be non-spiritual while doing all good deeds. However, higher levels require a spiritual understanding of issues that cannot be perceived with the five senses. After all, if we have the ultimate spiritual aim of achieving inner, outer, and world peace, then the examples of such peace visionaries as Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, and Al Gore are leading the way to a spiritualized understanding of contributing to the common good – an explicit or implicit desire to base all actions on a higher purpose transcending rationality. In other words, a deep, *de facto* spiritual, set of values can serve as inspiration for doing the right thing together (cf. Saade, 2014). For example, business magnate Elon Musk (2013), exploring the underlying motivations of his work, talks about his desire to solve the greatest challenges that humanity faces throughout the course of the present century. While Musk has been criticized on various fronts, such thinking is exemplary for the type of practical spirituality that has the potential to connect deeper meaning to moral excellence and peace leadership (cf. Dalai Lama and Muijenberg, 2008; Chaudhry, 2011; Fairholm, 1998).

The relevance of the spirituality-peace nexus is manifold. Acting in accordance with a strong desire to contribute for the common good, for holistic peace, maximizes one's potential. Meditation/prayer is, without doubt, the best way to connect to inner wisdom and to foster inner peace as a basis for identifying one's higher purpose. A related, similarly profound concept is commitment to nonviolence. Like peace, nonviolence too has narrow and broad definitions. From a narrow, pragmatic, even strategic scope of not using violence to achieve one's goals, as advocated by professor of political science Gene Sharp, nonviolence also has holistic aspects that go beyond mere actions by including one's thoughts. In the most comprehensive, spiritual definition, nonviolence as a lifestyle includes not hating one's enemies but loving all beings

(cf. the teachings of Jesus) with pure intentions. In addition to Gandhi, exponents of a holistic approach to nonviolence are renowned author Leo Tolstoy and Civil Rights activist Martin Luther King Jr. Holistic nonviolence is based on profound spiritual practice of meditation, or prayer, to align all thoughts and actions with the basic principles of peace, love, respect, and compassion. Groff and Smoker (1996) give an example about Gandhi: “Gandhi never took action in the world until he had first meditated and asked for inner guidance on what to do. When Gandhi's movement also became violent, he called off further action until people could be adequately trained in nonviolence.”

The connection between spirituality and peace is starkly relevant also for regular day-to-day life. In his seminal work *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey (1989) offers valued advice (or “perennial” truths, cf. Huxley, 1945) based on wisdom literature regarding personal effectivity, which is defined as achieving the ultimate purpose of a human being (cf. Covey, Merrill, and Merrill, 1994). Here, effectivity lies in, and relies on, the success of oneself together with others through keywords like a win-win attitude and creating synergy. Peace is a worthwhile goal for individuals and organizations.

Practitioners, whether peace workers or regular workers, benefit from realizing the omnipotent relevance of peace for one’s personal and working life. Knowing one’s higher purpose, being centered in peaceful and holistic values, but also knowing one’s limits, helps to integrate a spiritual dimension into daily life, whether at home or at work.

## **Conclusion**

Peace has a multitude of definitions: weaker spheres that address the absence of war or violence (whether physical, structural, cultural, inner, or outer); stronger spheres that proclaim the presence of positive values and ideals in society (such as justice, wellbeing, and freedom); and holistic spheres that transcend rigid structures of reason to a higher purpose by amalgamating all aspects of peace (Bauer, 2015). Here, the ultimate frame is the peaceful coexistence of all human beings in a society where the true potential for humanity is realized. The trajectory of these levels of peace – and the culmination in the holistic approach – manifests in “the idea that the collective external world of outer peace is in some way a representation or image of the collective inner world of spiritual peace, [and] may be of particular importance in the creation of a holistic, inner and outer global culture of peace,” as eloquently stated by Groff and Smoker (1996). Holistic peace as an aim puts us back in sustainable balance with ourselves, with nature, and with universal wisdom – proclaiming the extension, or transcendence, of inner peace to outer peace.

To summarize, and to pinpoint the links between spirituality and peace, we can develop a matrix of weak, strong, and holistic peace on one dimension to be juxtaposed with spirituality and its inner and the outer dimensions on the other. The inner dimension refers to an individual’s experiences, while, the outer dimension focuses on spirituality in the contexts of more than one individual, in interpersonal or institutional contexts. Table 1 attempts to present examples of how the crossing points could be understood. The underlying insight is that, as we progress from weaker to stronger, and finally to holistic spheres of peace, we figuratively climb up a ladder of virtue. This may, depending on the context, present itself as a ladder of morality, as a ladder of spiritual development, or some other form or scale for the ultimate purpose of fostering peace in our lives, in society, and in the world.

Table 1: Conceptualization of Spirituality and Peace

	Inner Dimension of Spirituality	Outer Dimension of Spirituality	
		Interpersonal	Institutional
<b>Weak peace</b> Absence of any systematic (physical, structural, or cultural) violence	Calmness, no stress	Tolerance, courtesy, civility	No negative impact on stakeholders
<b>Strong peace</b> Presence of positive, virtuous values or ideals (e.g. justice, health, wellbeing, and freedom)	Happiness, joy, excitement, virtue	Synergy, win-win, cooperation	Positive impact on stakeholders
<b>Holistic peace</b> The transrational vision for humanity, an ultimate higher purpose of human endeavor, and the effective amalgamation of all aspects of peace	True passion, wisdom, bliss, enlightenment	Unconditional love	Interconnectedness, higher purpose, moral excellence

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The “weak” / “strong” terminology is adapted from Charles P. Webel whose “Spectral Theory of Peace” (Webel 2007:11) offers a continuum from “Strong, or Durable, Peace” (~positive peace) to “Weak, or Fragile, Peace” (~negative peace).

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of the geographic and cultural richness of understandings of peace in the world, see, for example, Dietrich et al. (2014).

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