

Finding Peace

“Peace on Earth” this Christmas of 2005?

Don't think so. So many Christmas cards I've mailed, promising “Peace on Earth.” Hasn't happened in my lifetime. I have seen Christmas cards in family scrapbooks from the 1940s, including 1943, the year I was born. They promised “Peace on Earth,” in the middle of World War II, with the first tactical atomic explosion at Hiroshima still two years away. I haven't and wouldn't be able to document it, but I'll bet Earth has not had a moment of peace since then.

Maybe if we narrowed it down. “Peace in the Christian World.” Nope. “Peace in America.” Daily murders, violence and crime, in streets, in movies and on TV. “Peace in California.” Road rage capital of the world. “Peace in San Diego.” Har de har har. Corruption City. “Peace in La Mesa.” La Mesa is where I live, and we do have our quiet moments, but why would I offer that as your Christmas wish? “Peace at my house.” Now we're getting close, as long as we don't watch the news, but peace at my house doesn't do you much good, and your good is my wish.

No, once again this Christmas, peace anywhere on Earth has to be portable, and that peace is achievable. Insurance follows the car, and peace follows the person. “Peace in your mind” is totally possible this Christmas Day, or if not this Christmas (it takes a little work), then by Christmas 2006. If peace follows all the people who come to sit down at your Christmas dinner, then you will have “Peace at the Christmas dinner table.”

At many Christmas dinner tables, though, including many in my past, you might as well ask for “Peace on Earth.”

So many people go through life wired with buttons to be pushed. Such buttons can be pushed from a range of a thousand miles. All it takes is the right word traveling through the air. Get a dozen button-wired people at a Christmas dinner table, and watch out.

The buttons can be unwired. All you have to do is take back the power you have given to some other person to push it. These can be very important and powerful people: mothers, fathers, etc. But it isn't their power they use to push your buttons. It is yours. You gave it to them years ago, probably starting in childhood. With that power, they can push your buttons at any time and make you feel small, cheap, insignificant, selfish, ungrateful, undesirable, inferior, a lifelong waster of every opportunity you ever had at achieving the greatness that you were born for, if you had only listened to the person leaning with all his or her weight against the thumb pressing your button.

You gave that person that power and weight, and you can take it back. All it takes is forgiveness. Appropriate, at the Christmas season, and the figure it celebrates, that the route to peace involves forgiveness. But it works. I don't know exactly how it works, and it takes some work and willingness to get there, but when you forgive, you take power back, and peace is there waiting. Forgiveness, power, peace and freedom are all different spellings of the same human condition: happiness.

When you are ready, and it very well could require some professional guidance, you come to a point where you simply say in your mind to a person: "I forgive you." At that instant, the button becomes unwired. The person may say the same things as before, words that for years you felt as sandpaper in your ears or an arrow through your heart. But now the words pass right through you and out into space. Left behind is a feeling of liberation you have known only in your dreams.

You haven't said a word to the person about forgiveness. The person knows something has happened, though, because the button doesn't work anymore. So he or she quits pushing, and it is a relief. It was your power, but it required their energy to keep their thumbs on your buttons all those years, and at some point, inside themselves, they will feel relieved.

But this Christmas story about reachable peace is not about them; it is about you. It is a true story.

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