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Building Positive Peace

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Describe what world peace means to you and discuss your ideas on how society can achieve it?

Steven Richmond

Creating World Peace Through Positive Peace

On June 28th, 1919, the Treaty of Versailles was signed, marking the end of World War One. World leaders everywhere rejoiced and proclaimed that the world was now finally at peace. People thought that WWI would be a war to end all wars, a war to finally bring peace to the world. As we know now, they were wrong. Twenty years later, World War Two started, this war dwarfed the first war and came with more destruction of land, more deaths of both civilians and soldiers, and introduced the deadliest form of weapons the earth had seen. One must ask, how did the leaders of WWI create the conditions that allowed WWII to happen? They ignored the importance of an idea called positive peace. This is the only world peace that will last.

There is a difference between peace, which is just the absence of violence, and positive peace, which is the absence of violence and the presence of justice in culture, economics, political structures and institutions, and freedom for all. Positive peace is complicated, it doesn't address only the violence in society but addresses the root conflicts of the society. For example, one could say that a slaveholding nation could be at peace because they aren't at war. But under positive peace the structural violence in that country is still present, therefore there isn't peace in the country. Positive peace is something that can't be acquired by the winning of a war or by conquest, and it can't be given. It is something that must be pursued constantly and responsibly by all humans.

Under positive peace, there are no victors, because victory would mean peace forced upon the loser, which is exactly happened after WWI. Positive peace will only happen if there is a common participation towards a common benefit by *equals*. This means that positive peace

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involves concession and sacrifice from all sides, to the point where they are treated equally, which is why positive peace can't allow victors. To achieve equality, we must stop thinking in terms of small nations and big nations, between the weak and the powerful, or the rich and the poor, we must stop thinking as us vs them. We must think of common strength, where we work *together* towards our common goals of justice.

There is, without doubt, injustice in our world. In Myanmar not long ago, the Rohingya people were subjected to genocide. In Syria, there are entire cities that were once beautiful paradises demolished to ruins with dead children beneath them. Here in the United States, there are places where an African American is more likely to go to jail than go to a higher education facility. There must be ways to end these injustices. The notion that positive peace would mean these oppressed people would stay oppressed because only violence is the way to rise out of it is false. Positive peace encourages the oppressed to rise up and stop the oppression and injustice. People like Reverend Martin Luther King, Gandhi, and Paulo Freire are leaders that have used positive to end oppression.

When bringing justice to the world there is something that positive peace requires us to live by, we must always try to provide "humanity" to *everyone*. Surprisingly, in a population that actively prevents positive peace, it is not always the oppressors that prevent it but the oppressed who are trying to bring justice. The idea that the oppressed are sometimes to blame for the absence of positive peace is not a popular one, but it is true. Take, for example, the issue of abuse. Often the abusers are people who have been abused, and the person who is committing the abuse has been abused in the very same way. A father will hit his child the same way his father hit him. This is how the oppressed become the oppressors. Too often an oppressed group will rise out of injustice and treat their oppressors the same way their oppressors treated them. This

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only creates a vicious cycle of violence. Positive peace requires the restoration of humanity on both sides because both sides have lost it. The oppressors have lost their humanity because they have stolen the humanity away from the oppressed. Under positive peace, restoring the humanity of the oppressed is just as important as restoring the humanity of the abuser.

How do we do this though? The idea of positive peace is idealistic, it is challenging, complex, and strenuous; but it is not impossible. There are practical ways that we can do it, but they involve sacrifice. The first step is acknowledgment. I must acknowledge that my country exports the most weapons in the world, is participating in violence abroad and at home, and could be considered the largest barrier to positive peace. I would first start here. Imagine what we could achieve if we chose to use generosity over violence. Our country's first instinct is to fight first, ask questions later. When we chose to invade Afghanistan and Iraq, the generals didn't ask what was going to happen to those countries after we left, because they didn't care. Imagine what we could have done if, instead of spending the billions of dollars on war, we chose to spend it on building up those countries' economies or addressing the root causes of injustice there to begin with. I know that doing this would decrease terrorist activity more than any war ever could.

In the end, to achieve peace, we must look at ourselves and acknowledged the prejudices that we have. We must demand humanity for everyone, not just for ourselves, but the very people we fight against. We must accept the necessary sacrifices in the name of peace. Above all, we most promote justice in every culture, every economy, and every society, a justice that ignores race, socioeconomic status, and religion. The last line of our Pledge of Allegiance is "with liberty and justice for *all*," let's take that to heart.

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