

Making Peace Possible.

If we are going to talk about making peace possible, we must take some time to ask, what is peace? I don't think the absence of war is peace. But abolishing war is a great place to start.

There are several other things that we know are not peaceful. People say there will always be racism, sexism, etc. That may well be true, but I do not accept that organized systems of intolerance and discrimination are inevitable. We can work to dismantle and minimize how systems of oppression impacts people lives. So, while one person or another may be prejudice, it does not mean that prejudice must limit people's possibilities and opportunities as they do now.

Of course, there will always be conflict. Conflict is good and an important part of growth and creativity. But we must also have peaceful means and ways to manage conflict.

During the past decade, I have been told on more occasions than I can count that my Veterans For Peace t-shirt or the idea of Veterans For Peace is a great, "but" - the person goes on to explain to me why peace is not possible. I have never met anyone who does not want peace or an end to war, but I have met countless people who do not believe we can achieve it.

So, that has led me to believe that the most entrenched obstacle we face is not the Pentagon, corporations or the military industrial complex. Our greatest challenge is to help enough people believe peace is possible so that we have the political and social will to achieve it.

Thus, we who claim to be peacemakers and justice seekers must believe peace is possible. We must feel this in our hearts and know it in our minds or we will not be the most effective advocates for peace. I do not say this to imply that if you do not believe peace is possible you cannot work for peace. But I do know that most of us see ourselves as truth tellers who do not seek to manipulate people. Rather it is our hope that truth will lead to action and walking a peaceful path. So, I submit to you that if you don't believe or are not sure peace is possible, you cannot be your authentic self as an

advocate for peace. It will be harder for you to see social and political connections you would see if you believed peace is possible.

If you don't believe or are not sure peace is possible, I suggest you work on preparing yourself to be the most impactful and effective peace advocate you can be by gaining the knowledge that will help you understand that peace is possible. Just as I had to train and prepare for war, we must prepare and train to be peacemakers and justice seekers. Just as a soldier must believe in her cause, we must believe in our cause to win. Especially when there are so many voices telling us daily that we are wrong.

We cannot achieve peace without a critical mass of people who also see the possibility of a peaceful world.

Most people simply will not work to achieve something that they believe is not possible. Further, humans tend to create what they believe is possible and acceptable. If people believe peace is possible and war is unacceptable, they will demand real and lasting peace and not expect and accept war. I believe understanding this is extremely important because there are clearly not enough of us who believe peace is possible to bring about the changes we seek, which increasingly are changes we need for humanity to survive.

Why should we believe peace is possible? Especially after election night. If we look at what I'm going to call humanities awareness of itself, as in human and civil rights and social relations between groups, we do see an arc of positive change which tells me progress to end organized hate and intolerance is possible. Yes, we have a setback in the election of Donald Trump, but I also know possible does not mean easy.

I am under no illusion. It seems that humans have a natural propensity to be violent. We are not docile creatures and are driven by emotions. Fear, anger and jealousy are a few of the feelings that can drive us to physical aggression. But instinctive emotions are not enough to push us to war. As Barbara Ehrenreich has written, "There is no plausible instinct, for example, that could impel a man to leave home, cut his hair short, and drill for hours in tight formation."

As veterans who have fought in or trained for war, we know that the training is what molded us into humans capable of killing people who did us no personal harm. Soldiers are trained to kill.

So, if we can train and become more effective at war, we can do the same to wage peace.

We also know that humans are the most adaptable species. We can adapt to most anything by either changing our behavior, changing the environment around us or in combination. We can even place an environment around us. No other animal could possibly go into outer space.

We are also the only animal that can dream it and then make it happen.

Humanity has the unique ability to recognize threats and make complex plans to address them. Disease is perhaps the best example. It took us thousands of years of cumulative knowledge, but we became aware of the nature of threat and have made incredible advances to address disease. And war is a kind of disease.

Just as ancient societies were pre-literate in reading, our society is pre-literate in waging peace. As VFP member and Peace Leadership Director of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation Paul K. Chappell wrote, “As long as we remain pre-literate in peace, we cannot see the true causes of our most serious human problems -- or the practical solutions to these problems. Discussing how to stop ISIL in the context of our flawed modern understanding of conflict is like trying to discuss how to stop European plagues in the context of twelfth-century medieval medicine.”

The following are some resources. WorldBeyondWar.org [2016 A GLOBAL SECURITY SYSTEM: AN ALTERNATIVE TO WAR](#) - Why We Think a Peace System is Possible

Also, listen to a lecture by [Paul Chappell about why peace is possible](#) on YouTube. Just search Paul Chappell and peace is possible in YouTube or Google.

My next point is to explain the strategic imperative to think and talk about peace in the framework of peace at home peace abroad. That phrase is a way VFP talks about our work. You don't have to use those terms, but it is important to use the concept. Why? First, I hope we all understand that if we are going to change U.S. foreign policy we cannot do it alone. There simply are not enough of us. We do not have the money like corporations and the 1% to control legislators. Moral arguments will not persuade change. We must use people power, numbers to create the change we seek. If you understand that, the question is how do we manifest that power.

Peace must be made relevant to people lives. Right now, it is not, or at least in the context the peace movement usually talks about.

Remember when Libertarian Presidential candidate Gary Johnson was asked a question about Aleppo he responded, "What is Aleppo?" People who follow the war in Syria recognize the name Aleppo. The name has been in the news, but for Gary Johnson Aleppo did not carry enough significance to remember. He illustrates the reality of most people in this country. Especially people who are dealing with the challenges of finding a job, making ends meet, concerned with police violence or general violence and safety in their community.

Let me give you some examples. Per USA Today, Fourth of July weekend in Chicago 64 people were shot and 4 killed. What do you think people woke up thinking about in Chicago on Monday after the 4th weekend?

Of course, death is the most extreme example of why people may not pay attention or act on the injustice of U.S. foreign policy, but there are a host of survival issues that will grab people's attention and drain their energy so that they have no choice but to resist what is to them of highest priority.

Right now, after the election of Donald Trump there has been a rise in hate crimes and open racists actions and remarks. Millions of people from a wide variety of communities: the LGBTQ community, Muslims, Black people, Hispanics, increasingly Jews and others feel unsafe. Are they thinking about Aleppo or Afghanistan? Maybe. But the first order of things is to feel safe.

Peace at home peace abroad is the correct framing because there are inextricable links between U.S. foreign and domestic policies. It reflects a positive proactive answer to a reality of war at home, war abroad.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. outlined for us the intertwined relationship between poverty or greed, war and racism or all forms of bigotry. I would add patriarchy and climate change although climate change may be the direct result of patriarchy and greed.

When King addressed the April 15, 1967 Mobilization to end the Vietnam War in NYC saying, “The bombs in Vietnam explode at home, they destroy the hopes and possibilities for a decent America,” he illustrated the waste of resources on war and opportunity cost for our nation and the world.

King was killed after he spoke out against the Vietnam War and attempted to unite poor White and Black people in the Poor People’s campaign. King was confronting our depraved system at its roots and attempting to transform it. That is exactly what we are trying to do.

So how do we do that. We must be build a national culture of peace where people have an expectation that peaceful means of conflict resolution are the norm and violence is the exception if ever used. This can only happen if people see means to achieve peace in their own communities so that peace has meaning in their lives.

White activists in the peace movement must understand with their minds and hearts that my struggle as a Black man seeking justice for my community is their struggle too. Especially since White privilege is a manifestation of White supremacy; it helps hold in place U.S. imperialism and is central to U.S. global aggression and the oppression faced by people of color around the world.

I must understand as a heterosexual Christian that the struggles faced by the Muslim and LGBTQ communities are my struggles.

Perhaps most important is to challenge myself as a man to see and act against patriarchy which I believe is the originator of all forms of oppression.

As we more closely identify with each other, will we more clearly see the connections that are already there in these struggles. Seeing these connections and learning from each other will breakdown structures of dehumanization and the creation of the other. We will increase our understanding of how these struggles are connected which in turn will allow us to be more imaginative and creative as to how to confront oppression and work for peace.

We will more clearly see the difficult path to building peacemaking mechanisms between groups and individuals here at home. That will help us increase solidarity and power so that we can have the full spectrum justice movement we need to create the change we seek.

When we think about where to go from here, I think in part we must look to the past. Today we find ourselves at war and in domestic turmoil. All the issues of the 60's plus a few confront us today. One of the lessons we seem to be learning is that all the challenges before us are intertwined and that we must have a strategy that keeps this understanding in the forefront. The peace movement is in a unique position to provide a narrative that gives a vision of how all these struggles are connected and what a new world of peace and justice will look like.

When I told my son, an Iraq war veteran, about the amount of pushback I was receiving from people within Veterans For Peace about my and VFP's participation in the movement for Black Lives he said to me, "I thought you all are veterans for peace." He got it. People understand that there is a global system perpetuating war, violence and economic exploitation in our communities and around the world. People get it. We must get it and show people we do by supporting their struggles and where we can, bring the anti-war and global peace perspective. We must show up with our minds and bodies. We must make peace relevant.

I close with peace is justice in action. The peace movement needs to help confront injustice and help bring about justice so that we can achieve the change we seek. None of the movements can do it alone. We must do it together. No just no peace!