

Peace

By Jeanne Supin

I'm thinking about peace. I'm in the Memphis airport awaiting a connecting flight, probably not the best place in the world to contemplate a timeless, universal principle. But I'm trying anyway. Forcing myself to think crisply, in fact, to condense eons of notions about civilization's most important vision into 900 succinct words. Which were technically due yesterday, so I'm also trying to think fast.

It's election night and CNN is chattering on the tv suspended above our crowded gate. Most of us are mildly watching – too early for definitive results, but we're killing the same time as the news folks. They speculate the Iraq war is a key voter issue. Peace-related, I note. Nearby, a little girl, maybe seven or eight, with short brown hair and pink platform flip-flops, antsy from waiting, starts singing "Silent Night." *Sleep in heavenly peace. Sleep in heavenly peace ...* she sings, over and over, in her lovely child's soprano. A cherished song about peace. I make more notes ...

Check any dictionary and peace has two definitions: an external state in which large diverse groups co-exist without harm, and an internal state describing an individual's calm serenity. Yet, hang out in some of my circles and there's a debate about which type of peace is better – external action or internal tranquility. Which better improves the world? Ironic disharmony about our most harmonic concept.

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I've done some share of public protesting, and I'm always moved by external acts of peace (and when contemplating the external I favor Martin Luther King Jr.'s assumption that peace blends with justice). Thousands of American colonial women began weaving their own cloth by hand rather than purchase excessively taxed British fabric, one of several nonviolent acts that led John Adams to believe the American Revolution succeeded before actual shots were ever fired. Maids and cooks and nannies quietly refused to ride segregated Montgomery buses, simple acts that helped change the way all Americans view civil rights. Every Thursday for nearly three decades Argentine Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo assembled silently outside the Buenos Aires seat of power, dressed in white, with photographs of the "disappeared". Wordlessly they implored the ruling military junta to reveal the fate of their children. And peacefully they sparked the collapse of dictatorship and oppression. In August 2005 Cindy Sheehan began her vigil outside our President's home in opposition to the Iraq war, and now she advocates across the country for peace, joined by thousands of others. People have stood witness across the globe and across time. Simple, collective acts of visible moral courage that change the world. The power of external action.

I'm also drawn to internal peace, particularly when my single life morphed into a family, the internal stuff more about love and kindness than justice. I learned error & trial that my crying infant would calm down once /calmed down, once I held her without anxiety or guilt or frantic efforts to make her feel better. If I wanted the chaos of kids & dogs & carpools & getting hot food on the table to feel happy I had to center on the inside -- I sure couldn't control all that external rambunctiousness. My kindness, I learned, would best invite and allow the warmth of others.

Internal peace can have other, more collective positive effects. Decades of Transcendental Meditation research show significant decreases in crime, violence, war, and terrorism when meditators practice en mass, even if they're far from ground zero. Masaru Emoto's startling photographs show that our words matter: write "I will kill you" on a water bottle and the crystals distort and disperse; write "love/appreciation" and those same crystals flower into beautiful symmetry. New age physicists say energy attracts what best matches its own resonance; if you're pissed and impatient, you'll lure more fury and frustration. And energy's wholly neutral - angry energy is angry energy,

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whether it's righteous or vindictive. Even justified rage over inhuman cruelty adds fuel to a violent fire. But if you're loving and serene, you'll get it returned in boatloads. And if hundreds of thousands of people are loving and serene – even if they never march down the Capitol mall – the world's energy shifts.

Peace on the inside? Peace on the outside? Is one really more ideal than the other? Who woulda thought I'd find the answer right here in Gate B1 of Memphis International, as succinct and fast as I need it. Big outside peace: CNN reporting on a national issue with international consequences that can engage a huge electorate and capture the world's attention. And little inside peace: one girl's simple effort to keep herself happy and playful through an otherwise mundane moment. Peace that stops wars. Peace that calms a soul. It's all the same thing. External, internal; action, tranquility; change the world, change myself ... It's the same peaceful impulse, for the same peaceful outcome. Each of us just contributes what's most logical and convenient in the moment. That little girl wouldn't analyze exit polls any more than Anderson Cooper would sing "Silent Night" on the news. So they do what they do best instead.

Sometimes I march along the landmark reflecting pool, and sometimes I play goofy charades with my daughter and her friends. Sometimes I write this public column, and sometimes I do heart-opening meditations all by myself. Gods, saints, and prophets from all traditions preached before multitudes, heroically public acts. They guide us to love unconditionally, enemies and friends alike, an act equally heroic but ultimately private. External. Internal. Who cares? Peace doesn't need debate.

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