

## THE ANATOMY OF PEACE: TRANSFORMING CONFLICT INTO CONNECTION

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So, tonight I'm talking about how to have a heart of peace. And it's a topic I've been really, really focused on lately, because I don't know if you've noticed, but there seems to be a lot of division and animosity and conflicts going on right now in the world ... and even within our personal relationships, I think family and friends and neighbors -- there's disagreements and judgments. And we're starting to close off our hearts.

And so, we start to ask ourselves, don't we, when we find ourselves in conflict or when we're observing conflict or disharmony, we might start wondering: How do I find peace in the middle of this? How do I forgive the other person in the midst of conflict? How can I be a peaceful presence in a disharmonious world?

And so, that's what we're going to be exploring tonight. How can we show up as the anatomy of peace -- with a heart of peace -- in every situation and every conversation and in every relationship? How do we show up as the anatomy of peace?

Well, I once saw a post that said, *"The path to inner peace begins with just three words: not my problem."* [Congregants laugh] And I think that's the problem, isn't it? Yeah, we want it to be someone else's fault; someone else's problem to deal with.

And yet real peace -- deep sustaining peace -- doesn't come from avoidance. We have to have the conversation, right? It doesn't come from just staying inside or burying our heads in the ground. It doesn't come from blaming another person or the others; that it's their fault. *"Why can't they not fight with me or have a different opinion than me?"* Or, *"It's their problem there's no peace."* So, the blaming doesn't create peace either.

But, instead, real peace -- real peace -- comes from how we choose to see and relate to one another. How we choose to see and relate to others.

So, I was reminded about a book I read a few years ago called *The Anatomy of Peace* by the Aringer Institute. And it teaches that **going from conflict to connection, or conflict to forgiveness -- it doesn't begin with the resolution or the apology; it actually begins with a heart of peace.** That we must first decide and be aware that we will come to our relationships and our interactions with one another with a heart that's open.

So, instead of approaching our interactions with *"It's me versus you; which one of us is going to win or get our way?"*, instead it's a shift to an open heart: an open heart that welcomes in peace; that makes the goal of the interaction be one of peace, one of connection, one of remembering our oneness. That we are all of the same divine energy; all divine expressions. Can I go back to remembering who I am and who you are; that we're divine beings together?

And, of course, forgiveness is a big part of healing conflict and disharmony in our relationships. And that also takes an open heart to get to forgiveness.

So in the book, they share a really great story that I wanted to share with all of you. It's a true story. It's a story about a man named Lou. He grew up in the '50s and the '60s near the Catskills Mountains. And his family owned only one car. It was a 1942 red truck that rattled and coughed and barely made it up the road. But then when he turned 16, Lou's family purchased a brand new car ... and it was no small feat for

them at the time. It was a pretty big deal that they were able to get this car. And so, Lou, being 16, of course, wanted to show the car off to his friends and take the car into town.

So, sensing his son's excitement, Lou's dad told him he could go take the new car to town to run some errands. So, Lou got in the car, but in his excitement he realized he had forgotten his wallet. So, he ran back into the house and then when he ran back outside, to his horror, there was no car. And suddenly he panicked, and he was afraid that when he had run back he had forgotten to put the brake on the car, and that maybe the car had rolled down the hill towards the Hudson River.

So, he ran down the drive, and where the lane turned, sure enough, there was fresh tire tracks. He headed down the hill. He went towards the river. He sprinted to the edge of the bluff, and he looked 20 feet down, and looking back up at him were the headlights of his father's brand new car. So, he stood there frozen as he watched the water slowly suck up the new car.

So, he walks numbly back up to the house. He walks inside and saw his father in his wingback chair; he was reading the paper and his back was to Lou. And his father says, without turning around, *"Did you forget something?"*

*"No,"* Lou responds. He says, *"Oh ...."* He knows he's got to tell the truth, but he's really struggling. So, finally, his voice breaking, he says, *"Dad, I ... Dad, I ..."* And then finally it all comes out. *"Dad, the car; I think I forgot to set the brake. It's in the river, Dad. The car's in the river. I'm so sorry. I'm so, so sorry."*

And he starts sobbing. And then he's trembling waiting for his dad's response. And his dad says without turning around, *"Well, I guess you'll have to take the truck then."*

No lecture. No visible anger. Just, *"I guess you'll have to take the truck then."* Just presence and acceptance in a very -- I would say very, as a parent -- difficult situation.

And then this is the example that's given in the book about what a heart of peace looks like. That, when we can come to a situation where we really, really, really probably want to rage and get angry, but instead stay calm and heart-centered.

How do I stay connected heart-to-heart to this individual? And so, how do we get there? How do we keep that calm presence? How do we get to the accepting of: It's just this -- what it is before us -- in the midst of someone upsetting us.

So, in the book it says, *"When we see others as people, we open the door to peace. But when we see them as objects, we close it."* Objects in this case -- what they're saying is -- when we see others as an object, it's something that we want to win against. We want to win the argument. We want to get them to agree to our way of seeing things or doing things.

But in the anatomy of peace, the intention -- the goal -- is to have a heart of peace ... meaning keep your heart wide open and remembering your connection as a fellow human; as a fellow expression of God, of divine life.

On the other hand, when we have what they call a heart at war ... A heart at war is when we see others as a problem to fix, an enemy to win against, the obstacle to move. It's when we have that need to be right or control the person or control the situation. With a heart of war, we might be right in our facts, but if our way of being is defensive or aggressive, then we're actually wrong in spirit.

On the other hand, when we have a heart of peace, it means understanding that the other person's concerns and their worries are much like my own. They have fears; I have fears. And so, we can acknowledge there's fear here, maybe for both of us. What are we afraid of losing? Again, another place to come in for connection.

So, here's just a real simple example. You're at home and you really need those dishes washed, and so you ask your kids or your spouse, "Hey!" You're yelling, "Hey! Do those chores!" And you can be completely right about the importance of shared responsibility in the household, but what tone is going to bring cooperation? And what tone is going to bring resistance?

I've got two sons. I know which tones. [Congregants laugh] One's sitting here right now. He's like, "Mmm hmm." Yeah.

And noticing -- and noticing in that moment: Is your heart open or is it closed? Am I inviting help and cooperation or am I nagging and yelling at them? Which one is going to invite peace and heart connection? What would inviting help sound like? What would inviting help look like? What would it take for me to be *that*?

There's a man named Yusuf in the book, and he shares this about his wife, Lena. He says, "*When Lena is upset with me, the least helpful thing I can do is criticize or correct her. I might think she's wrong, but I've never once convinced her by fighting back.*"

Yeah! See, it's all about the way of being. What feeling am I standing in? What energy am I sitting in? What am I being in that moment? Is my heart at war, meaning needing to be right? Meaning not coming from love? Or is my heart centered in love and coming from a place of connection? Of remembering our connection and wanting to connect?

I may have disagreements with family members. We may see things differently; we may have different beliefs. But will I listen to *win*, or will I listen to *learn*? *Will I listen to win or will I listen to learn?* Will I listen with an open heart or a closed one? With a heart at peace or a heart at war?

Eckhart Tolle says, "*If you want peace, you don't get there by fighting. You get there by being peace.*"

And it's the same with cooperation too, right? If you want cooperation, you don't get there by yelling or fighting; you get there by peace. Staying peaceful; staying in connection with the other person.

So, in that story, Lou's father could have yelled up a storm. And the reason we're hearing about this story is because he *didn't* yell up a storm. He did exactly the opposite of probably what most of us would do! But it's all about his being connected to his son; to being present to his son; to having that heart connection. And that made a bigger impression. That made a bigger impression than any yelling would have done. And it kept the relationship.

And here's what I always find interesting: that so often we say, "*I want peace. I want peace in my life. I want peace in the world.*" But a lot of times what we're saying is, "*I want them to change. I want them to change for me to have peace.*" This is what the book calls the *illusion* of controlling conflict.

**But see, true transformation starts within us. Something in us must change first. If we want peace, it's here; us. It starts with us.**

**The peace process, conflict resolution, even forgiveness ... it's about letting go of the resentment in order for us to open up our hearts to the present moment.** Because that present moment is the gift. It's a gift to learn from, to grow from. We can allow it to be our teacher.

I just spoke about that last Sunday. That every moment -- every interaction -- can allow us to open our hearts and let it be a gift and for our greatest growth. That's where our spiritual transformation happens. It's in the uncomfortableness.

I know we want to sit on our yoga mats and just, "*Ohm*" all day. That would be really comfortable and awesome. But the greatest spiritual transformation happens in the discomfort. Because when we're

uncomfortable, and we're sitting in that discomfort ... Now I have to open my heart and keep it open and connected to myself and that other person? That's the challenge: to be vulnerable; to have humility.

**But when we remember our oneness in the midst of all that -- when we remember I'm a divine expression, you're a divine expression -- that's where the transformation happens.**

The book says we become agents of change only to the degree that we begin to live in a way that helps things go right, rather than simply to correct things that are going wrong. That's a juicy one, right?

We become agents of change and we help things go right rather than just correct them. So, instead of correcting -- or expecting, again, that other person to change -- what if we help? What if we listen? What if we learn? What if we consider the impact of: What is the feeling underneath our words, our actions, our thoughts? And then shift into how do I *want* to be right now in this relationship, whatever that relationship is? How do I *want* to be in this situation? How do I *want* to be in the world?

And then allowing the goal to be about building relationship, which builds peace ... one heart at a time. And there's feelings, I know.

And so, when my kids were younger, and they would get angry ... probably I told them to put a jacket on, right? [Congregants laugh] And they'd be screaming and I would think, *"Oh my gosh, the neighbors are probably thinking I'm beating my kids or something, but it's just I'm trying to get them to put their shoes on or something."* So, they'd get really angry, right? And they'd be really upset.

And what I started to do -- I learned it from another mom -- I'd get a big bowl of ice cubes, and they would go out back. I would send them out back, because there was a brick wall between our house and the next property. And I'd have them take the ice cubes and throw it at the brick wall. [Congregants laugh] My friends, this is fantastic for all ages. [Congregants laugh] There is something about throwing an ice cube at a brick wall! Because you hear that snap. And you can pick it up and you can throw it again.

And so, you get your anger, and you get to express it, but then also you get to shift the energy. It becomes fun. There it becomes laughter.

So, we got to acknowledge anger; express anger; shift the feeling. And now we're in a place where we can listen; where we can hear each other; where we can understand, where we can build relationship.

**See, a peaceful heart gives space for expression and then gently redirects toward understanding.** A peaceful heart doesn't mean we're not going to have any angry feelings whatsoever, right? We're putting our heads down in the sand again -- that's what this is; we're not going to have any angry feelings towards each other. No! But we can calmly -- with connected hearts -- communicate: What are our feelings here? Do we need to go throw ice at a wall for a little while and then come back?

A peaceful heart gives space for expression and then redirects to understanding.

And there's a common misconception pushing our agenda with friends and neighbors and "those people": *"But I'm just trying to get them to see the truth. I'm just trying to get them to understand. I'm just trying to get them to do it right."* [Congregants laugh]

And this is when we can become present and aware of our intention ... which, in those cases, are about our own agenda -- our own belief -- instead of remembering **most relationship issues aren't resolved with correction; they're healed with connection.**

Correction: the need to be right -- whether you are or not -- has rarely, if ever, helped an upset child, a brooding spouse, a perturbed co-worker, or really anyone.

**Connection over correction.**

And one of the hardest steps in being a peace maker. It's one I still work with. You ready? Going to let all my secrets out here now. And what if I'm wrong? Maybe I'm the one who's wrong. I mean, it never happens with me. [Congregants laugh] But maybe *I'm* the one that's wrong.

See, because no conflict has ever been solved as long as both parties are convinced that they're right. No conflict has ever solved as long as both parties think they're right.

And so, peace becomes possible when one person is willing to ask, *"And what if I'm mistaken? What if I'm wrong? What if I don't have all the information? What if the information I have has changed?"*

Inviting humility in. *"And even if I am not wrong, am I willing to consider where I might be missing something?"* That's a courageous question and It's a powerful step towards peace and reconciliation. Which means that living with a heart of peace is aided by also being in that present moment.

Again, Eckhart Tolle says, *"Most people treat the present moment as if it were an obstacle they need to overcome. But since the present moment is life itself, this is an insane way to live."*

See, we're so busy, aren't we? We're so busy rushing around, checking things off our list, instead of being present and connecting with one another.

We had a nephew who went to Japan to teach English there for a couple of years, And he came back afterwards to visit us in California. And he and I were having coffee one morning. He was a great guest. He'd make coffee, clean up the kitchen. [Congregants laugh] Fantastic!

And we had these great moments where he would share about his time in Japan. And he said to me, *"There's this word that they have in Japan."* Hopefully I'll get it right. It's **Ichigo Ichie**. It means once in a lifetime encounter. That this moment -- this moment -- is unique and will never come again in the same way. This moment is unique and will never come again in the same way.

We have this breath. We have this moment. We have this relationship before us. How do we want to be in it? Because we have that precious moment. Then *every* moment becomes sacred, does it not?

So, let's just take a moment right now. Take a breath and invite peace in. And as you exhale, feel your heart soften. And again, inviting peace in with the next breath. And exhaling and allowing your heart to soften and expand.

I just got done teaching four weeks of the book, *The I of the Storm*. Some of you are in my class. And I wanted to include what we read in the book, which was the Chinese word for listening. The Chinese word for listening is made up of three characters: two streams flowing together; paying attention; heart and ear. Meaning: listening with our hearts; being present; creating connection so that we can flow together.

As Gary Simmons says in the workbook' he says, *"When we truly listen from the heart, we remain empty of opinions with a willingness to learn and perhaps be changed by what we hear."* And then it's possible that we can listen without trying to promote our own agendas and we can be two streams flowing together.

And from a Unity publication a few years ago, it says, *"By renewing our awareness of our wisdom, we breathe in knowing that the Power and Presence of Source is providing the right answers to every need."*

**So, when we take a moment to pause, to breathe, to reconnect to Source, we begin to act -- not from fear or from ego -- but from wisdom and from love.** And that's how peace feels in the heart and mind. It feels like clarity. It feels like answered prayer.

So when we bring a heart of peace into our relationships, the present moment -- this moment -- becomes more beautiful, more enriching, and again, more sacred.

And so, let's come to our relationships -- our interactions with others -- with the understanding that we're equal divine beings; that we're all expressions, extensions of the Divine. And let's show up not with an aim to fix everything, but with the intention to help things go right.

Let's listen deeply. Let's forgive freely. Let's open our hearts to the present moment and be the expressions of love that we are here to be.

And so, as you go about the week ahead, here's your soul work. Your soul work is all about creating connection to all living beings. And to live from a heart of love and a heart of peace. That's how we are the anatomy of peace, everyone.

Blessings, everyone! Thank you.

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