

Contemplating Peace in Daily Life:

How to Use the Peace Card

Peace is a delicate seed best planted in a quiet place deep inside of us, in soil that will be lovingly tended and nurtured over time. At first, peace may come only sparingly, growing slowly, invisibly, as if winter will never end. But with careful tending our peace plant will become stronger, putting forth more and more leaves and even a flower now and then. If the blooming lasts only for moments here and there – moments that may seem to be borrowed or stolen and all too fleeting - we can't lose hope. We must elongate each of them, taking deeper and deeper breaths of that peace until our lungs are filled with the freshness of its infinite potential.

In creating our Peace Cards, we have chosen to use PEACE as an acronym whose letters represent some of the qualities to which we aspire. We hope that you will resonate with these ideas and personalize them according to your tastes and philosophy.

Nurture a Deep Sense of Place Purpose & Passion

Sustain this in your heart, home, community & world.

P Cultivating a deep sense of **Place, Purpose, and Passion** is a key part of fostering peace in daily life. In the larger context, many of us feel a strong regional identity and a certain amount of community pride. This is why we live where we do. Hopefully we are also actively reaching out and getting to know our neighbors. Supporting neighborhood awareness, solidarity, and goodwill contributes to the safety and well being of all. It also helps us overcome the feelings of isolation and mistrust that so many people seem to feel when they don't even know the neighbors next door. But we need more than a well-developed social network. We need to tend the Spirit of Place in our own heart, home, and nature.

Without a deep heart and hearth connection to our home, we live in an empty shell. If we can create a personal sanctuary that is our refuge from the world, it helps us sustain our sense of balance and peace as we are faced with the rigorous demands of life. When we create a healing home environment and spend time in this place every day rejuvenating ourselves, we become more and more whole. Out of the strength engendered by roots well watered, we then have the vitality and passion to bring forth and gradually fulfill our own unique purpose on this earth. Then we look at the challenges that face our world today, not with anger or despair, but with the firm conviction that we have the power within us to make a real difference. A devotion to place – both inner and outer, and whether it is in our home, a corner of a room, in our garden or favorite outdoor setting – salves the soul and helps to engender the passion essential for discovering and living into our true purpose.

Often, we seem to feel that our purpose is not important enough to mean anything, but there are countless examples through the centuries of humble individuals doing simple yet profound work. Consider St. Francis, Mother Teresa, or even Brother Lawrence, who found enlightenment in the menial tasks of sweeping, cleaning, and cooking. We needn't be a saint, however, to accomplish great good; we just have to pour ourselves into whatever we do, one task at a time. Smiling, being generous, appreciating others – these are as much a part of our purpose here as our so-called profession or career. When you meet someone who does humble work and

yet takes pride and satisfaction in what they do, let this serve as a reminder that passion and purpose have less connection to *what* we do than to how and why we are doing it.

Questions to Contemplate:

- Do you have a special place where you feel most at peace? Would you describe it as your “sanctuary?”
- Do you have a special relationship with a person, animal or natural setting that makes you feel peaceful?
- Do you feeling lacking in your life a deep connection to a special place? In your imagination, what would a special connection to a certain place that can foster peace be like?
- Do you feel your life has meaning and purpose? If not, how does this make you feel?
- Do you think there is any degree of relationship between feeling close to a certain place (home, neighborhood, community, nature, garden, etc.) and having a sense of purpose?
- Do you feel any passion in your life? If so, describe it and what is it about. If not, would you like to have passion about something?

Emulate People Who Inspire You

*Bring more joy, hope & beauty into the world.
Show heartfelt kindness, love, respect & generosity.*

E From childhood, most of us have had people we deeply admire and seek to **Emulate**. We need high-minded role models who inspire us with their noble qualities of kindness, love, respect, generosity, and so forth. Some of our “mentors” may be famous individuals, such as Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, and so on. If we look around, however, at the ordinary people we know, we can often find much that is worth emulating. Among our friends, co-workers, and family, no doubt there is a wealth of inspiration. We are students with many teachers, if we are humble enough to “apprentice” ourselves to their wisdom.

Look for the beauty in people, even if it is hidden. Let it motivate you to be even more generous with the gifts of love and appreciation you give to others. Your recognition and esteem may further stimulate their positive growth, and learning to see the good in them will strengthen it in you. Every heartfelt action is in some way perpetuated.

When we reflect on the profound influences in our life, we realize that we cannot become anything on our own. If we bemoan the fact that we lacked the support and guidance we needed in our youth, nevertheless we can still resolve to be available to mentor and support those around us. We are all interdependent; our lives are immeasurably interwoven for a reason. As we draw inspiration from noble people and become more finely tuned instruments of peace, others will in turn emulate us. The ripple effect never ends.

Questions to Contemplate

- Who are the people (living or dead) you look up to in your life? What people influenced you as a youth? Who inspires you as an adult?
- What are those special qualities in a mentor or admired person that most attracts you?

- Have you attempted to integrate an admired person's qualities into your life? How well have you succeeded?
- Do you have a sense if any person looks up to you? What special qualities of character do you possess that are worthy of admiration?

Apply the Law of Attraction

*Ask for what you really want & need.
Believe you can achieve your worthy dreams.*

A The Law of Attraction is the force that underlies all our thoughts and actions; it holds the entire universe together. In order to draw to ourselves that which we want and truly need, we must have the courage to ask for it and the faith to believe we will achieve our worthy goals. If, as Buddha said, "All that we are is the result of what we have thought," then we have our work cut out for us.

It is easy to become discouraged at times, but in order to rise to our highest potential, we have to look each of our fears in the face and move beyond them. We simply cannot afford to let life drag us down. By positive thinking, kind words, and right action – all repeated daily – we position ourselves to draw the good we are envisioning. It is far easier to attract abundance, grace, and meaningful relationships when we are overflowing with good energy.

Visualize your dreams for a peaceful world/community/home/life coming true in all sorts of small and grand ways, moment-by-moment, day-by-day. Don't let anything dissuade you from holding the vision of peace. Keep reaching for joy, refining your understanding of its true source. Whenever you are happy you are attracting more happiness to you, and uplifting others at the same time.

Questions to Contemplate

- What is it that you really want in your life right now: better or sustained health, financial stability or independence, improved happiness, peace in your family or an intimate relationship, a motivating vocation, etc.? Write it down in no uncertain terms.
- In reflection, can you remember those incidents in your life where the Law of Attraction was clearly at work?
- Do you think you are worthy of receiving what you want and need?
- Where does positive or negative thinking fit into your life? Are you able to maintain a positive outlook and sustained energy toward your desires, or do you generally become doubtful, cynical, critical or lazy?
- Do you even think or believe that there is a Law of Attraction at work in the universe? If you have doubts, what is your basis for disbelieving?

Practice Compassion & Cooperation

*Help those in need. Avoid conflict.
Minimize judgments and criticism. Be honest.*

*Uphold non-violent thinking & actions — patience,
acceptance, understanding, forgiveness & prayer.
Respect and honor the diversity of cultures & nature.*

C A compassionate outlook enables us to behold people and circumstances in the highest light, seeking the good in them and always finding hope. Compassion is inherently non-violent and non-judgmental, asking us to enfold and uplift in the spirit of cooperation rather than to criticize or negate. Of course, we must first act compassionately towards ourselves. Loving ourselves is the precursor for loving anyone else. When we are patient and understanding with our own humanness (and this can be difficult), we can more easily forgive the human foibles of others. When we accept our inevitable imperfections, letting go of rigid beliefs and standards, we can more easily accept others in all their diversity. We cannot enjoy widespread peace in this world until there is first widespread compassion – towards all beings.

One way to practice compassion is to offer heartfelt daily prayers for the well being of humankind, our earth, and its creatures. We may be motivated to pray for our friends and family, but as author and humanitarian Bo Bozhoff states, “Give to those who deserve your love and to those who don’t.” The true measure of our kindness may well be reflected in how we behave towards someone whom we strongly dislike or disagree with or in the way we treat or think about a homeless person standing on the corner. Our mind might want to say, “Get a job!” but our heart says, “Give without judging.”

Questions to Contemplate

- What is your personal interpretation of compassion — how do you uniquely show compassion towards others, animals or nature?
- What role does judgment and criticism play in your life — are you in touch with these qualities and how they manifest themselves in your thoughts, actions?
- In what area of your life could you benefit from having more compassion or by engaging more cooperation?
- What is your unique way to avoid conflict?
- Are you a generally patient, accepting, understanding and forgiving person? How do these qualities manifest themselves in your life? In what specific incidents could you better demonstrate any of these qualities?
- Where do you stand on honoring and respecting others/cultures — the way they look and speak, their faith tradition, their political views and the like? Do personal judgments tend to interfere with your being able to accept others?
- Do you even believe there is a relationship between non-violent thinking and subsequent actions?
- In what ways do you show compassion to yourself?
- Do you believe in the power of forgiveness and/or prayer? In what ways, if any, do you try to integrate forgiveness or prayer in your daily life?

Take It Easy and Enjoy Life

*Smile often, be cheerful. Relax and instill calmness.
Live simply and savor each moment with full gratitude.*

E Ahhh... Isn't life sweeter and more wonderful when we can relax and savor the moment? This doesn't mean we won't have our challenges, but our calmness and cheerfulness will pave the way towards creative solutions to any problem. We should be what one sage calls a "smile millionaire," smiling as much as we can. It is easy to smile once we understand how good it feels. The sincere smiles we bestow on others are like angels of grace uplifting them and giving them hope. Our life may seem difficult, but if we look for the good in it and practice gratitude for what we do have, the good will be amplified. Even a little good is worth smiling about.

We live in a culture that is primarily focused on material desires and consuming. Isn't it true that the more we have the more we seem to want? The well of desires seems to have no bottom. We have forgotten what it is like to live simply, and yet we can begin today to take steps to clarify our priorities. Simplicity and calmness seem elusive to most of us, but they are qualities well worth cultivating. Life is grand experiment anyway, so why not try something different? Take a deep breath. Life is good.

Questions to Contemplate

- What is your general disposition — content, serious, happy, brooding, understanding, critical, calm, agitated, easy going, complex? There are many sides to one's personality, but generally speaking, a person leans towards a few. What do you lean toward?
- Do you have the ability to relax, or are you generally driven by nature?
- What are those special moments that you love to savor?
- Where does smiling and being cheerful play into your life? What really makes you smile? How do you demonstrate cheerfulness?
- How easy is it for you to move on from negative experiences?
- Do you get depressed — how often, under what circumstances and for how long? How do you deal with being down?
- Do you ever simply sit, doing nothing? Do you ever meditate, quietly contemplate or pray?
- When it comes to personal consuming, having new or unmet desires, or having a lot of possessions, do you think there is any connection to happiness?
- Would you say you live a simple life or not? What does simplicity mean to you? Do you think living a simple life has to do with sacrificing wants and needs? How could you live more simply each day or in your overall lifestyle?

Excerpts from forthcoming book: **Islands of Grace: Creating Sanctuary in Daily Life**. By Dr. Christopher Forrest McDowell and Tricia Clark-McDowell

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