

Global justice in the intimacy of contemplation

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Words cannot easily describe the way to global justice. Insight remains silent in the human heart until one day it poignantly emerges: "An injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inextricable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny." From a vast wellspring of spirituality, a great prophet found words to speak for us all.



The language of Dr. King speaks of injustice and violence on a global scale and in our hearts. When bombs fall outside, we are being torn up inside. When violence roils, who can know true peace of mind? Though we might hope to hold hatred at bay, anger wells up in the deepest recesses of our psyches.

Taking us right up to the edge of despair with stark honesty, poets and prophets make us see the brutality and yet, in the same moment, pull us back from the abyss. Awakened to the terror of the night and the agony of broken hearts, we weep and yet are given the good news of human compassion. In empathy with our sisters and brothers the world over who have known firsthand the horrors and indignities of injustice, we give hope and find it ourselves.

Though goodness seems fragile, we are all called to work for a world of greater justice and peace. We must use reason. Global justice requires thoughtful analysis. We can try to listen to diverse voices and move beyond inflexibility. No matter how diligent our social analysis, exploring all sides of issues and gradually identifying the "inextricable network of mutuality" among injustices--biosphere degradation, systemic militarism, gross economic inequality, and ideological fanaticism--we can respond to the call to action. We can act, respecting others, for as Dr. King exemplified in his life, an act of nonviolent justice-making anywhere can be a creative "threat" to injustice everywhere.

A third practice, with analysis and action, goes to the heart of justice and peace: contemplation. A monk survived two wars and long exile. He has always grounded his work in a simple but profound contemplative practice. In "Creating True Peace: Ending Violence in Yourself, Your Family, Your Community, and the World" Thich Nhat Hanh writes: "All of us can practice nonviolence. We begin by recognizing that in the depth of our consciousness, we have both the seeds of compassion and the seeds of violence. We become aware that our mind is like a garden that contains all kinds of seeds: seeds of understanding, seeds of mindfulness, and also seeds of ignorance, fear, and hatred. We realize that, at any given moment, we can behave with either violence or compassion, depending on the strength of these seeds within us."

Found in the intimacy of contemplation, true global justice goes well beyond words.

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