



## THE SEARCH FOR PEACE

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One morning in the fall of 2003, I walked into the kitchen and remarked to my mother, “You know what? I’m not seeking anymore.”

A peace-infused clarity had moved from the background to the foreground of my awareness. Suddenly, feeling peaceful seemed quite normal. Other than my memories of a life lived mostly lost in thought or reacting to things emotionally, it felt as though peace had always been my natural state.

It was as if I had come home to myself.

Only now did I notice how deeply embedded the “seeking” me had been. I had no idea of the extent of my anxiety, and how desperately I had wanted to find peace, until after years of seeking, that morning my distress was finally gone for good.

Everyone wants to feel peaceful, don’t they? People go out of their way to avoid stressful situations, or to bring about their dreams, in the hope of finding peace.

Would it surprise you if I told you that feeling peaceful has nothing to do with your current personal *situation*, but everything to do with *where your attention is*?

To illustrate what I’m talking about, if you are in a room right now, are there more things in this room, or is there more space? You may not have noticed until now, but there’s far more space in most rooms than

there are things. The average room is, in fact, mostly space. Indeed, the world itself is mostly empty space—atmosphere, with shapes on the ground. Isn't this also true of the universe itself?

The apparent solidity of anything material is a perceptual illusion.

Even the atoms that make up matter are almost completely empty space, since the nucleus and electrons constitute an infinitesimal part of the atom. The space between individual atoms is even greater, regardless of the material. We could lift the roof off a house and pour concrete until every inch from bottom to top is filled, but the resulting solid block would still be more than 99.99 % empty space.

Did all of this space just arrive, or was it here long before us? Of course, it's been here a very long time. We just weren't aware of it.

### ***Where should I be looking for peace?***

You may think you've looked *everywhere* for peace. You may feel quite frustrated, perhaps even exasperated, because you believe you've looked everywhere, tried everything, and come up empty. However, I've already shown you there is a reality around you that you likely haven't paid attention to before now. You may not have even noticed this at all.

The fact you've looked in so many places for peace and not found it is actually good news. Even though you believe you've looked everywhere, you have just experienced how easy it is not to notice something that's in fact very, very obvious. Just as you didn't really notice how empty everything is, so too you haven't noticed that the peace you crave is actually *right here already*.

In fact, the peace you have been looking for emanates from the emptiness of the space we've just been talking about, the space in which you exist. Peace has always been here, and indeed everywhere, without us knowing it. Once you learn how to tune into the peace that's already here, you'll have all the peace you could wish for. If you aren't at peace with yourself, you certainly haven't looked right where you are. How do I know this? Because to look here, you have to *be* here.

What do I mean by “be here”?

To be here, you have to be in the present moment, giving it your full attention. Sadly, instead of being here, in most cases our minds are elsewhere.

When we aren't completely here in this moment now, we don't experience reality as it actually is. Instead, we view it through a heavy filter of beliefs, thoughts, and emotions. These are characteristics of the mind, which we might think of as an interpreting and measuring mechanism. If you pay attention to your thoughts, you'll notice they are constantly evaluating everything, commenting on everything, drawing conclusions about everything.

The problem is, the constant interpreting and evaluating that takes place when the mind is active tends to disconnect us from the aliveness of reality. In other words, the thoughts we use to try to understand reality have a way of removing us from the actual experience of reality.

Let's focus on thought for a moment. Are you aware there's an almost constant monologue going on in your head? There is, though many of us aren't aware of it unless we actually stop and pay attention to our thoughts.

This “voice in the head”<sup>1</sup> carries on a conversation with itself during most of our waking hours. It's as if we're talking to ourselves all the time. But this voice isn't our own—isn't the voice of our true self. It's a foreign voice.

Even if, unlike most people, you're aware of this voice in your head, you may never have thought of it as a foreign voice. Because you're so completely identified with it, it just sounds like your own thoughts. Until you step back from them, that is, and suddenly become aware that all of these thoughts and various emotions are arising without you doing anything to cause them. They aren't you at all! They are just something happening inside your head, and you are the one listening to them, noticing them, observing them.

It might help to think of the voice in your head as software that's been programmed into you and is now running on your hardwiring, the neural circuits of your brain. This software goes under various brand

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<sup>1</sup> Tolle, Eckhart. *A New Earth*, Dutton, 2005, p. 30.

names. The one I like to use was coined by Eckhart Tolle in his book *The Power of Now*. He calls this software the “ego.”

***Are you saying that my ego is different from who I really am?***

Ego is a term that’s been around for thousands of years. But over the centuries, it’s meaning has changed. It has been used to refer to everything from our authentic self to a false sense of self, and even to specific aspects of ourselves such as in the way Freud used it. Different people use the term ego to mean different things.

When I speak of ego, I’m referring not to who we *really* are, but to a false sense of ourselves—an idea of ourselves, an image of ourselves, a picture of ourselves we carry around in our head.

You can see what I mean if someone says to you, “I need to improve my self-image.” There’s an observer who sees the image and concludes it needs improving. Or someone might say something like, “I don’t see myself that way.” Their interpretation of how they come across is different from your sense of how they come across.

As mentioned, the software that’s almost constantly running on our neural circuits drops a heavy filter of beliefs, thoughts, and emotions over reality. This conceptual filter goes largely unnoticed. It’s so subtle, it remains superimposed on our perception of reality for most of our lives unless something awakens us to its presence. The result is that the mental processes associated with this software consume most of our attention, leaving little room for seeing the way things *really* are—including who *we* really are.

Most humans suffer from a case of mistaken identity. We believe ourselves to be our thoughts, emotions, and behavior, each of which are products of the mind. We think of ourselves as “me” with a story about our likes, dislikes, what happened to us in the past, and what we want to happen in the future. In fact, we often associate life with “what’s happening to us.”

If you pay close attention, you’ll see that all of our thoughts, emotions, and behavior—along with all the things that are happening

to us—occur on the *surface* of reality. Hidden behind the scenes is a silent, invisible intelligence that observes these things. This invisible intelligence is pure awareness. It has no shape or form, but simply *is*. We might think of it as pure “being,” that which exists before actual things and events come into being. In other words, it’s the *source* of all shapes, forms, and everything that happens. It’s where objects, nature, people, places, events, thoughts, and emotions originate.

This pure being—this intelligence from which everything has arisen—can’t be known through words or concepts. It’s impossible to describe it, or even imagine it. Instead, it has to be *experienced*.

I liken it to a grapefruit. If you had never seen a piece of fruit of any kind, and I began describing a grapefruit to you, no matter how hard I might try, you would have little idea of what a grapefruit is. The only way you could know what I’m talking about would be to see a grapefruit, hold it, peel it, taste it, and swallow it. In other words, it must be experienced to be known. In effect, only when we become one with the grapefruit, so that we absorb its nutrients, do we really grasp what it is.

In our essential being, each of us is pure awareness. So as long as we identify ourselves with the voice in our head, we are living with a case of mistaken identity. To be identified with the content of our mind is to inhabit a virtual world, which in effect means we live in the abstract realm of thought.

To discover who we really are, we must step back from the thinker that pretends to be us, including the images we hold of ourselves. We must look beneath our mental clutter to find its source, which is the spaciousness of pure awareness. Only then can we detect this ever-present awareness as our true nature, which is pure *being*. Let me be clear what I mean when I speak of pure awareness. When we say, “I’m aware of the situation,” we are indicating that we are cognizant of our thoughts *about* a situation. This is the way we typically describe awareness. But behind our mental content, our body, and the universe, there is an eternally awake, present, and formless source of everything that exists. This pure awareness has always been and will forever be. This is who we truly are.

When we refocus our attention to become aware of awareness

itself, we don't identify with any thought, emotion, object, or event. We are not being "this" or "that." As an expression of the awareness that precedes the emergence of all shapes and forms, we are simply *being*. We are one with the source of, and the silent witness to, all that can be perceived and conceived.

***I hear so many people say it's important to "be here now." Why?***

We've all heard expressions such as "be here now," "be in the moment," "stay in the now," "just live in the present moment." So when I talk about pure "being," you're likely saying to yourself, "Haven't we heard all of this before?"

Yes, millions have heard about the need to live in the present moment. Yet here we are, most of us still struggling, hurting, year after year. Obviously it's not enough that we hear about living in the moment, and that everyone from sports figures to movie stars talk about it these days, or people wouldn't be suffering as they are. It has to become an actual experience that we no longer talk about or even try to do. It has to be experienced as our state of *being*.

Sometimes people feel they've had enough of all this talk about the present moment. They believe they know about the present moment, since they've read a lot of books and been to many retreats to deepen their understanding of the subject. After sometimes years trying to be in the present, they're tired of it all.

The actual present moment is never fatiguing or irritating. Quite the opposite, it's the very definition of vibrancy, joy, clarity, and peace. The beautiful mystery of the present fills you with wonder as you experience relief and liberation.

What you have "had enough of" is the *concept* of the present moment, which teases you with its hopeful possibilities but always remains just out of reach. Whenever you feel this way, it's because your mind is forcing itself up against reality, trying to extract an understanding of it through mental interpretation alone. In this way, your mind acts as an invisible barrier between you and reality. Like two

magnets whose like poles are facing each other, whatever you reach out for, whatever you seek to understand, is actually pushed further away by the very act of trying to grasp it mentally.

The wonderful thing is that life is hardwired to bring us experiences that invite us to step into the present moment. In fact, life will keep on bringing us such experiences, repeating the message about living in the moment as it were, until everyone begins to embody what the words point to.

When we make the shift into just being in the present, we experience a deep, vibrant peace that's vast and intelligent—a peace that's nothing to do with how we might attempt to rearrange our lives or alter what's happening to us in the hope of making things more peaceful for ourselves.

We discover peace as our primordial characteristic, which has always been there.

***You seem to be suggesting that people have a misconception of what peace is.***

In his huge hit *Imagine*, John Lennon sings the words, “Imagine all the people living life in peace.” It's a wonderful image.

However, the word “peace” poses an interesting challenge. It's been used in so many different ways that it's lost much of its meaning. Reduced to platitudes in endless speeches and a symbol on t-shirts and bumper stickers, it's little more than an idea in people's heads—an idea that's different for different people.

Consider some of the ways people imagine what it would be like for everyone to live in peace. For a Muslim, Christian, or Jew of a fundamentalist persuasion, it could be that the only way there could ever be peace on earth would be for everyone to adhere to the identical beliefs and same strict practices they themselves embrace. For many of them, strict adherence to Islamic law, a literal interpretation of the Bible, or rigorous practice of Torah are essential for there to be peace. In contrast, for someone who doesn't believe in any kind

of God, for everyone to “do their own thing,” as long as they don’t hurt another person, would be a state of peace. No one would control anyone.

The world is plagued with violence and untold cruelty. For many, peace means simply an absence of violence—an end to cruelty, torture, abuse, and especially war. For them, the world would be at peace if nations and individuals were no longer caught up in conflict with one another.

I suggest our concepts of peace, which inevitably conflict with other people’s, fail to point us in the direction of real peace. In fact, they take us in the opposite direction because they lead us to imagine peace is something that can be found externally—by practicing a strict code, pursuing whatever lifestyle we prefer, or simply not engaging in fighting.

***I can see how none of this brings people a deep sense of calm, contentment, and joy. People don’t feel at peace within themselves.***

A growing number of people are realizing they long for something more than a pseudo peace that’s only surface deep. They want the kind of peace that soothes their nerves, quiets their anxiety, and stills their emotional turmoil. Consequently, many are attracted to the kind of philosophy espoused by influential author and inspirational speaker Dale Carnegie, who stated, “Nothing can bring you peace but yourself.”

Carnegie was of course correct. Only we can experience peace—it isn’t something someone else can bequeath to us. Yet even this concept can take us away from real peace if we imagine peace as something we have to “work at.”

Unfortunately, the more deeply we are enmeshed in the conceptual realm, the more cliché and meaningless the words of people like John Lennon and Dale Carnegie become. Cut off from our true selves, we mistake the reality of peace for some abstract ideal. This is what the mind, the conceptualizer, does to all of reality. It shifts our attention



from the actual experience of something and creates a virtual copy in the head for us to look at and identify with. The longer we remain transfixed by the images and thoughts in our head, the further we move away from the reality we wish to experience.

My sense is that John Lennon and Dale Carnegie ultimately had in mind a deeper truth than how their words are frequently understood. They no doubt caught a glimpse of the peace that's inherent in *being* itself.

A common term for the phenomenon Carnegie referred to is “inner peace.” However, it's important to recognize that “inner” doesn't mean “inside.” Rather, it refers to the inner dimension of formlessness—the primordial substrate from which all the shapes and forms that make up the world emerge.

It's time to liberate peace from the prison of the mind, the abstract realm. The key to this is to realize that the peace we long for is the living, breathing reality of who we truly are. It can never be understood conceptually, since it possesses a depth and permanence far beyond the superficial and temporary calmness that's typically referred to as peace.

This book will show you how to live from your true nature, which is always peaceful. It's your birthright to experience peace as a constant background to everything that happens in your life. In a sense, this is a roadmap home, back to your true self. By going in the direction this book points, you'll enter into your own direct experience of being at home with yourself. You will be the evidence that peace is available right now, no matter what may be happening in your external world. The implications of such a discovery literally constitute an evolutionary leap in consciousness.

### ***Is personal peace in some way related to peace on the planet?***

Yes—and in fact we will never experience planetary peace without going deep into this moment to experience the source of all peace. Most of humanity have been looking for peace in the wrong place for thousands of years.

Throughout history, there has never been a time when humans brought about peace. What was claimed to be peace was just superficial and temporary. A cease-fire between two warring nations is only a declaration of less violence for a limited period—a promise to refrain from behavior the ego finds irresistible. This isn't peace.

Although a temporary calm is certainly preferable to violence and upset, it disappears soon after it arrives because the ego—the image of ourselves we carry around in our head—is by nature dissatisfied, and its compulsive thinking and reactivity makes it prone to new rounds of negativity. Consequently, just as nations haven't been able to bring about peace in the past through wars, negotiations, and treaties, so too all future attempts to create peace are destined to fail.

Peace isn't two leaders shaking hands in front of flashing cameras and to loud applause.

Peace isn't a ceremony in which documents are signed at a table.

Peace isn't a panoramic view of a sleepy town below.

Peace isn't an afternoon in bed reading, a morning in the basement repairing a chair, or an evening watching television.

Peace isn't someone holding two fingers outwards in a V for victory sign.

This list could become quite long if we tried to think of all the scenarios that depict calmness, inactivity, or symbolic behavior. But none of these are what I mean when I speak of peace.

### ***So a quiet town isn't necessarily evidence of a deep or lasting serenity?***

No, because behind each door of a seemingly quiet town live one or more egos, which inevitably create suffering for themselves and often each other. Leisurely behavior or a quiet mood is subject to change at short notice. Neither does it reflect the tension, distraction, and unease that lie below the surface. These are at best temporary states of calm.

While we are busy trying to forge, broker, negotiate, establish, or in some other way create what can't be created, we miss the peace that's already here. Peace is permanent and is present behind the scenes in

each and every situation, waiting to be recognized and experienced. Peace should never be confused with symbols, ceremonies, or other activities. All thoughts, intentions, emotions, objects, and events are impermanent. They are constantly shifting and changing, growing or dissolving, whereas peace has always been here and always will be here.

The good news is that once we cease resisting this reality, the personal and planetary peace we have struggled and longed for will appear. This is because the peace we long for to end our personal distress is the same peace nations seek—a peace that’s now fast becoming essential for the survival of our species. Personal and planetary peace are related because our longing for peace is, at the deepest level, our desire to discover who we truly are. Each step an individual takes toward discovering themselves has them moving closer to peace.

### ***How exactly can personal peace lead to world peace?***

The awakening of one person to their true nature acts as a catalyst for others. It’s as if the peace emanating from that one person begins to resonate with and awaken something deep within another. As we wake up out of our false images of ourselves, we act as mirrors for those around us, so that it becomes harder for them to continue playing their roles when they encounter an authentic being. Awareness of our true self then spreads across the planet and is carried on a wave of peace.

In other words, the unseen peace that pervades the universe only becomes what we call “world peace” when the personal experience of peace becomes *widely* recognized and embodied.

You could say that peace is rather like a single living entity that engulfs and penetrates not only our entire planet, but all the galaxies, indeed the whole universe. It extends from the vastness of space to the infinitely small at the subatomic level. This living entity is the intelligence, the awareness, the essence of who each of us truly is. All we have to do is tune into it.

The search for inner peace has always been a search for who we are in our essential selves, and the quest for world peace has always been a

movement toward a global awakening to our collective oneness as an expression of *being* itself. The destination, so to speak, is the same for the individual and the planet—the recognition that, deeper than all our ideas about ourselves, we are pure awareness, which is a state of vibrant peace.

***Does the peace you speak of ever leave you?***

Back to the kitchen where we began this journey together. When I told my mother I was no longer seeking, I noticed that her eyes focused elsewhere. Of course, she replied approvingly, “Okay, Chris, that’s good.” Although she was genuinely happy for me, she didn’t really understand what “no longer seeking” meant.

I was more than happy. I was serene, content, and quietly amazed by what had happened.

Since that day, this peace has been with me continuously. It’s accompanied by a sense that when I observe the world, I’m observing something sacred. I can feel that people, places, objects, and indeed the whole of nature are grounded in a deep sacredness. Even on the most challenging days, I feel the presence of peace somewhere beneath the tumult. I find myself aligned with something that lies beyond my wants, fears, and the stories I tell myself about life. It’s as if someone turned down the volume of what’s happening not only around me, but also in my own head.

Like a compass that always aligns with true north, my inner being is in permanent alignment with a peace that’s both intelligent and vibrant. Even after that morning when I walked into my mother’s kitchen, my experience of peace continued to grow slowly and gently, as it does to this day.

I realize that what’s been happening to me for some time is something that can happen to anyone. This is encouraging, because like so many other people, I always wanted to make the world a better place. Now I know this begins with the discovery of our peaceful self.