

Force, Understanding and Peace

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Albert Einstein created the quote "Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding" in December, 1940.

Einstein made this statement during the expansion of World War II.

The event that began the war was when German Nazi leader Adolf Hitler invaded Poland. In doing so, Hitler and the Nazi forces killed masses of people, sending the world into chaos. The Germans moved to invade France, Norway and Denmark.

The entire globe was impacted by their actions, as other countries joined in to protect the already invaded countries and other nations in danger.

In a world that, at the time, was a war torn wasteland, Einstein voiced a thought. He noticed the way that force is many times used to keep peace, yet when used it created more conflict.

Using force seems to be the most often used tactic to keep peace between nations. Force is used to impact, and used to silence. Force is frequently framed as the last option, yet it is often one of the first things to be used.

As a society, we preach that our end goal is peace, but the way we go about it almost always seems to end in violence. Our world has had so many wars and conflicts, so much wrongdoing, and so many chances of making peace lost.

The catalyst event that disturbs the peace is often an act of violence and hatred. The response is almost always forced to be more violence. Bombs. War. Death when the goal was supposed to be life.

There is then the cycle of retaliation. The idea of "if they hit me, I can hit them back." This continues, until there is nothing left to hit. Yet again, going forward with the goal of preserving some form of peace, but pulling back to burn it to the ground.

After all the effort put towards keeping peace, it is set back.

What even is peace? Is it a world without war? Without pain? Without even the little arguments, conflicts, bullying, hurt?

Is it a world where there is no need for armies, no need for weapons, simply because all of this does not exist?

There are many different versions of peace, all of them important.

Mother Teresa once said that "peace begins with a smile", demonstrating that something which seems so complex can be started through one kind action.

Another famous quote says “an eye for an eye only ends up making the world blind”. This quote brings to light the endless cycle of people continuing to retaliate against each other, and the pointlessness of it.

Einstein states that peace can be kept through understanding, but understanding is also a complex thing.

Understanding is one of the most difficult things to achieve. We may never truly understand another, or one's actions or motives.

To fully understand someone, you must see through their eyes. See what they see. Think what they think. Feel what they feel. That is why the feeling of being understood can be so rare. It can be explained over and over, and we can say over and over that we understand. We have to really try to think from someone else's perspective.

This may also be the reason that we find peace so elusive.

When attempting to preserve peace, many peacekeeping international organisations use communication to find out motives and possibly compromise. The thing that drives us to war is the refusal to try to understand.

For something that initially seems so easy, it is so difficult to achieve. And even if you can manage to sit another down for a conversation on how to resolve a conflict, there is the possibility that it will not work. To have an understanding of something, first you must listen. There is always a choice.

The choice to listen, or to turn and look the other way. And it seems that when we are attempting to communicate a message of peace to others, those who are in control seem to prefer the latter.

Even if the message trying to be communicated may help everyone for the greater good, there are still people who will simply refuse to listen and therefore refuse to understand.

This is what brings us to resort to further violence. Because when someone is causing harm, we cannot just let them carry on. Yet when someone reaches out, offers to sit down, negotiate and bring understanding, they are met with rejection.

And this is confusing, but also human nature. As people, we are driven to get what we want, and this is often what motivates people to commit these acts that disturb the peace. Some people find themselves so motivated to achieve something, reach a goal or gain something that they will do anything to get it. The end result, to them, justifies and outweighs the means.

This may also be why people are so uninterested in having a conversation and talking through conflicts. In compromising, the end goal may have to be changed, or may not be able to be reached at all.

That, for some people, is not an option in their mind. Because in their eyes, the end will justify the means, and other people cannot stand in their way.

The unwillingness and stubbornness of these people is one of the biggest obstacles in reaching understanding and therefore peace.

When you understand something, you will be able to see things from a different point of view. Having understanding can reveal the pain of another, and the consequences of actions. Some cannot face this, and refuse to.

When a conversation concerning an issue is raised, there is always the option to leave and ignore it.

This will always be the case. We may want to give up hope, surrender to hopelessness and dread.

But we have another option.
We can try.

We can bring up issues that concern us, listen and encourage others to listen, and try to understand, because that is the only way.
With a closed heart and mind, there is no hope.

Because there are many different versions of peace, all of them important.
The first step is to listen.