

World Peace vs Inner Peace – Which comes first?

Ever since the dawn of human civilization, peace has been a common desire. Peace, however, resides in 2 different planes: the inner peace of a person & the world peace of nations & societies. The question of which is first is both practical & philosophical, for the two are inseparable. Can the world ever be peaceful if people are agitated within? Or can people be at peace if the world outside them is ever in turmoil?

On one hand, inner peace looks like the obvious beginning. A person who works on being calm, understanding & self-disciplined sends peace into the world. If all people can learn to contain anger, greed & hatred, wars between families, communities or world would naturally reduce. Great leaders & thinkers – Buddha to Mahatma Gandhi – stressed that inner change comes first. Gandhiji's philosophy of "*be the change you want to see in the world*" emphasizes that world peace has to emerge from within rather than be imposed from the outside. Inner peace is the seed & it should be the source through which world peace grows as the tree.

Yet, one cannot overlook the power that external conditions hold over the mind. An individual dwelling in the shadow of war, violence or social injustice would understandably struggle to find inner peace. Consider children who have been raised in a warzone – their innocence is tainted by fear & inner peace is all but unattainable. Here, a peaceful external world serves as the ground upon which individuals can construct their personal harmony. As fertile soil is required for a seed to grow, world peace provides the room for inner peace to develop.

Inner peace & world peace are non-sequential but rather cyclic, suggesting a balanced approach. They are interdependent: peaceful people minimize the likelihood of war in society & peaceful societies help cultivate calmer people. If we concentrate on just one aspect, the endeavour could stay unfinished. An individual may attain momentary tranquility with meditation, but lose it in an aggressive & unfair surrounding. In the same way, a nation may impose order by law & peace, yet without inner change, such a brotherhood could still break out again.

Thus, instead of inquiring as to which precedes the other, it can be more intelligent to acknowledge their complementarity. Inner peace is necessary for planting the initial seeds of harmony, but world peace is necessary for nourishing & growing those seeds.

In conclusion, neither inner peace nor world peace can exist in segregation. They are two sides of the same coin. But if one has to be given precedence, inner peace can be taken as the starting point – because a peaceful individual mind has the capacity to inspire families, communities & nations towards peace. Simultaneously, this inner peace has to be safeguarded & sustained by outer conditions of justice, equality & cooperation. At long last, peace in the world starts with peace in the heart, & peace in the heart is brought up by peace in the world.