



How We Can Bring Peace on Earth

By Kalpana (Rose) M. Kumar, M.D.

In the aftermath of the shooting in Boston, many of us are left wondering how tragedies like this can be prevented. Why are these occurrences more common today? What can we do to make the world a more peaceful place?

All humans have a shadow. Carl Jung said that the shadow aspects of ourselves are the denied and repressed aspects we do not want others to see. We have an individual shadow as well as a collective shadow. The collective shadow is comprised of shadow aspects of individuals that form a society or a nation. It can also refer to the shadow aspects of all the people who inhabit the Earth.

Hatred, anger, racism, greed, control, domination, abuse, betrayal, jealousy, violence and shame are some aspects of the shadow. War, patriarchy, violence, inequality, racism, glass ceiling, Ponzi schemes, child labor, corruption and greed are some aspects of the collective shadow. Emotions like anger and fear are connected to all aspects of the human shadow.

It takes a lot of courage to face our shadow, but it's one of the most liberating acts of maturation and integrity we can achieve. Admitting wrong-doing, weakness or limitation can free us to be authentic and not harm ourselves or others. When consciousness is brought to aspects of ourselves that we would rather not face or admit to having, we are able to bring our shadow into the light. There it has little to no power. When consciousness is not brought to these aspects of our shadow, we are at risk of harming others, either consciously or unconsciously. When we harm others through unconscious behaviors, this adds to our collective shadow. These concepts are not a part of mainstream thinking. In our quick fix society where we are encouraged to 'get over' our feelings, we are at risk for denying and suppressing them. These suppressed feelings add to our personal and collective shadow. When we normalize the denial of our feelings, we are more at risk of harming ourselves and others. We are also more at risk for becoming physically, mentally or emotionally sick. Carl Jung said, 'what is not brought to consciousness comes to us as fate.' We have all experienced the harm that is caused by suppressing our feelings.

A safe way to do shadow work is with a good therapist. The vocation of therapy is meant to create a safe space for people to examine patterns of thinking and behaving of which they would not otherwise be aware. I am sorry to say that our society has equated seeing a therapist with having a mental illness. Therapy is a modality that can help us become conscious of who we *really* are and to be able to live from that place. It can safely put light into the darkness of our shadow and make us conscious of it. It can help us decrease our probability of behaving from familiar dysfunctional patterns and help us replace them with unfamiliar yet healthy ones. It is important to see a therapist who is committed to their own personal shadow work. If they are not, there is always danger of them working their shadow issues through their clients or not even recognizing shadow issues in their client as they are blinded by their own unprocessed material.

In midlife we are more open to transforming our familiar harmful patterns to healthy behaviors that increase our experience of meaning and fulfillment. Most of us in midlife want to live the second half of our lives with more meaning than harm. We want to live authentically and with a level of truth and clarity that we may not have lived from earlier in our lives. As we bring light to the areas of our youthful dysfunction and shadow, we feel more whole and at peace. I recommend everyone in midlife to entertain the possibility of entering into some form of therapy with an authentic therapist to gain self-awareness. In this way we can model our courage to others and decrease the depth of our individual and collective shadow. This is a sacred contribution we can offer to make our world a better place for all.

We have heard that 'peace begins with each one of us'. Imagine a world where we were all committed to bringing consciousness to our shadow and dismantling our dysfunctional patterns to live more authentically from harmlessness. We must find the courage to make a commitment to this sacred and powerful work. Only then will we be able to transform and lighten our collective shadow. When this happens, our world's tragedies will be rare, war will be counter-intuitive and peace will finally prevail on Earth.

Despite the manner in which our collective shadow expresses itself, I continue to have faith in the goodness of people, in the power of the human Spirit and the tireless work many are doing to make our world a better place.

Mahatma Gandhi's timeless words are, 'All through history the way of truth and love has always won'.

Let us be true to ourselves and to each other. Let us courageously face our shadows and awaken to the beautiful possibility of peace on Earth.

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