

Zones of Peace

By Louise Diamond, CEO, The Peace Company

I always think of the holiday season as a time to deepen my commitment to making 'Peace on Earth' a dream come true. At this time of year, people of many faiths are praying for peace, and this concentration of energy can boost us to the next level of concerted action.

What might that next level be, for those of us who are dedicated to taking personal responsibility for making a more peaceful world? In recent months, my thoughts have turned to the idea of creating Zones of Peace around us. If we follow the local and international news, we can easily become discouraged about the possibility of global peace breaking out any time soon. However, if we can't make peace in the world, we can make peace in *our* world, by selecting discrete places – our home, our workplace, a classroom, our neighborhood, our faith congregation – and declaring them to be Zones of Peace.

The concept of Zones of Peace is not new. For many years, people have tried to proclaim certain historical or cultural sites off limits to combatants, or to put this same safety net around particular populations, like children or aid workers. The central idea has been one of sanctuary, to protect the chosen site/group from the violence swirling around it.

I suggest we take that concept, turn it inside out, and apply it in our own lives. By turning it inside out, I mean to go beyond the notion of sanctuary and actually make our selected Zone a proactive model of living peace. Within the boundaries of our chosen site, we choose to make peace a way of life. We agree that within this context we will practice behaviors and attitudes that promote peace, justice, nonviolence, and the well-being of all. We commit ourselves to making our Zone of Peace a mini-version of what we would like to see in the larger world – a place where a culture of peace does indeed prevail as an everyday set of values, norms, and activities.

To be successful, a Zone of Peace needs to be grounded in certain core principles, just as a house must be built upon a firm foundation. From nearly two decades of working as a peacebuilder in places of violent conflict around the world, I have distilled what I believe are the four most basic pillars upon which to build a viable peace culture. These are:

- 1. Community: We're All in This Together.** This refers to the basic interdependence or interconnectedness of all life. There is only one family of life, taking a multitude of forms but depending on one another for our survival and well-being, and sharing the same essence or life force. Therefore, we are

all relatives, and must build the highest quality of relationship we can, knowing that what harms one harms all, and likewise what helps one helps all.

2. Nonviolence: We Do No Harm to Self or Others. This refers to the presence of love as the glue that keeps us connected in human community. Violence closes and hardens the heart, and arises when we forget our unity and believe we are separate. Realizing our oneness, we strive to keep our hearts open and the river of love flowing. We use apology and forgiveness to heal our wounds; empathy and understanding to build stronger connections across the line of our differences; and the moral power of nonviolence to respect the life force in all and to address injustice and oppression.

3. Cooperation: We Create, Together, the World We Share. This refers to the fact that we construct our own reality through our thoughts, words, and actions. Being all connected in a single web of life, we are shaping our environment collectively whether we are conscious of it or not – at the individual up to the global level. When we become aware of our power to work together for a common goal, and to see our problems as joint opportunities to grow and learn, we can co-create a world that works for the benefit of all.

4. Witness: Peace Begins with Me. Peace is a living potential inside each and every one of us. When we awaken that seed and let it grow within, we begin to change not only ourselves but also the world around us. As Gandhi says, “We must be the change we seek in the world.” Inner peace is the starting point. When we bear witness to the presence of peace through our own behavior, we become inspiring examples for others. Honoring that seed of peace in each other and in every situation is the next step. Because we know, at a deep and personal level, that peace is not only possible but is true to our basic human nature, we stand up for peace and reach out in compassion to those who suffer from its absence.

When we accept these principles as the basis for any Zone of Peace, we can discover and create infinite ways of putting them into practice. I would suggest the following seven steps for establishing your living Zone of Peace:

- 1. Make a conscious choice to establish a Zone of Peace.** We establish a Zone of Peace on purpose, not by accident. We invoke our will, set our intention clearly, and make a commitment to follow through. We know our purpose and our goal.
- 2. Make a Peace Agreement based on the Four Principles of Peace.** The people involved in this Zone of Peace must work together to create their own Peace Agreement. How will we act within this Zone of Peace to make the Four Principles a living culture? How will we treat each other? How

will we structure our time, organize our space, and help each other learn and grow in peace?

3. **Restore your Peace Agreement when it gets broken.** Conflict happens. We have differences. We all have conditioned responses and habits that are difficult to change. Our Peace Agreement is a goal that we will realize over time, as we get more and more skillful at living peace. Along the way, we need loving and non-judgmental ways to help each other remember what we have agreed to, and to practice the life skills of communication, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and community-building necessary to support our culture of peace.
4. **Declare yourself publicly as a Zone of Peace.** It is good to build a Zone of Peace. It is even better to let others know and see what you are doing. In that way you show what is possible, inspire others to do the same, and set an even larger process in motion. By being visible with your Zone of Peace, you become a role model in a world desperate for success stories that help us remember that peace is indeed possible.
5. **Surround yourself with people and things that support your Zone of Peace commitment.** Our environment matters. Our Zone of Peace will flourish more readily if wherever we turn our senses are nourished by that which encourages peace – images, words, sounds, colors, textures, and objects that promote the values, ideals, and behaviors we have agreed to. Likewise, we want people around us who support our experiment, and contribute positively to it.
6. **Study peace and peacemaking to constantly enrich your Zone of Peace.** Peace is a living art. When we read about, learn about, and explore what others have done or are doing to promote peace as a way of life, we inspire and inform our own actions and expand our range of possibilities.
7. **Connect with other Zones of Peace to support each other and grow the revolution.** We know the power of networking. A single Zone of Peace can make an enormous difference to the people involved. When we connect with others engaged in similar experiments, we exponentially grow our collective expertise in creating communities of peace, as well as our capacity to make a difference.

I believe we face a crucial time in human history, where humanity must choose whether to remain on the warpath and risk global destruction, or to step onto the peace path and find a better way to share this one planet we all call home. I know that this choice will not be made by our leaders; it must be made by the people, one heart and mind at a time. Creating Zones of Peace is a concrete way we can take that decision into action; it is one way we can make a practical contribution to

seeing the dream of 'Peace on Earth' come true. This holiday season, let Zones of Peace be the gift we give each other.

*Louise Diamond, CEO of The Peace Company, is a professional peacebuilder who has worked in places of conflict all over the world. She is the author of three books on peace, including **The Peace Book: 108 Ways to Create a More Peaceful World**, which has sold over 70,000 copies. Currently she is focused on inspiring, informing, and engaging people for transforming our culture of violence to a culture of peace. Go to www.thepeacecompany.com to learn more about this work, and to find training, materials, and other resources to support your efforts in peacebuilding and in creating Zones of Peace.*