

Pursuing Peace

In this season of **peace** (Shalom, Salam, Pax, La Paz, La Paix, Pingan) celebrated around the world, we long for a time when nations will no longer be at war-when neighbors will simply love one another.

The wisdom traditions of the world remind us that “world peace” will only be possible when each of us has learned to cultivate peace within ourselves. According to these traditions, there are specific principles, practices, and commitments that most effectively support our individual pursuit of inner peace. [Peace Mantras](#) are among these, such as the world-renowned Peace Mantra from Brihadaranyaka Upanishad:

“Let all be happy, let all be free from disease/illness, let all see goodness, let there be no sorrow and suffering. Peace, Peace, Peace.”

As we discover and develop this capacity for inner peace within ourselves, it begins to flow out from us along lines of influence connecting us to each other, to all of life, and to the earth.

But where do we start? Is the path to inner peace a recipe of ingredients – think this, do that, be still – all arranged in the right order? Some part of us wishes it could be that simple, that procedural. Follow the steps and – done! On to other things.

It is no coincidence that the worldwide season of peace is also a time when friends and families exchange gifts – presents, as we call them. Presents, **presence**: being present, staying centered, getting grounded, showing up and giving yourself to the moment.

The path to inner peace, then, begins in our practice of personal presence. And while we are here, let us acknowledge another path that starts in personal presence: an *outgoing* path into experiences of communal **joy** – a third virtue celebrated in this season.

Joy is, almost by definition, a relational experience, something which is amplified to the degree it is shared between and among individuals.

Joy adds “me” to “you,” mine with yours, until a higher sense of “we, all of us together” emerges. This can only happen to the extent that we are present to one another.

This meditation is on the virtue of inner peace, however, so let us return to that grounded and centered position of personal presence. The path to inner peace is not about adding “me” to “you,” but descending inward to a place within ourselves that lies below our ego.

When we say or think, “*I am anxious*” or “*I am angry*” or “*I am happy*” or “*I am depressed*,” our ego (Latin for “I”) is the owner and agent of these attitudes. It is the part of us that often shrinks the sphere of our personal presence to reduce exposure to what we cannot control and do not understand.

Mantras and meditation practices from around the world are proven ways that can help us release the scripts of insecurity that keep us safe and small. A mantra, like the one from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad quoted above, offers a different script – one that can calm us down and help us simply relax into being.

Another practice often used in tandem with a mantra is mindful breathing. Every attitude or emotional state, such as the “*I am anxious*” example mentioned earlier, is the manifestation of a syndrome of events conspiring in our body.

Heart rate, blood pressure, muscle tension, hormone secretion, glucose release into the bloodstream – these and many more such physiological events conspire to generate how we feel in any given moment. For the most part, these events are autonomic and unconscious, occurring below the threshold of our conscious control.

Breathing is one location in this syndrome of events where we have some control. By taking in a slow and deep breath, holding it for a short count, and then releasing it slowly until our lungs are completely empty and ready to be filled again – perhaps as we recite a mantram or chant – we change the message being sent across the syndrome. All other actions in the syndrome adjust accordingly and before long we are feeling more present, centered, and grounded.

This is the doorway to inner peace. Let us commit ourselves to going there more often.

Additional resources:

[9 Ways to Bring Peace, Grace & Mindfulness to Your Holiday Season \(chopra.com\)](http://chopra.com)

[Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah - In Sanskrit, English with Translation, Meaning and Notes \(shlokam.org\)](http://shlokam.org)

[10 Powerful Mantras to inspire peace – Kati Kaia - UK](#)