

# Foreword

*by George Lakey*

Matthew Legge has given us a considerable gift: guidance for expanding our capacity as peace advocates. Whether this is our first peace-related book or our fiftieth, reflecting on the issues raised here can increase our knowledge, skill, and confidence, even in situations when conventional wisdom insists that violence is the only answer.

In our world, violence is still promoted as a solution on many levels, including individual self-defense, community protection, challenging injustice, and international conflict. That means we can explore peaceful alternatives wherever we're most challenged by violence in our own lives. As we become aware of where we're stuck for answers, and experiment with ways of getting unstuck, we grow our capacity and courage. Because this book operates on multiple levels, it supports us on our way.

While teaching at Swarthmore College I encountered students who were concerned about the threat of terrorism and at the same time wondered if "the war on terrorism" was in fact recruiting more terrorists. I therefore offered a course completely focused on non-violent responses to terrorism. I was deluged with students, who went on to develop nonviolent defense strategies for a variety of countries currently threatened by terrorism.

Back in the 1960s, even though many people were singing "Give peace a chance," the institutional decision-makers remained sure that power = violence, just as the flat-earthers were sure centuries ago that safety depended on being able to sail near the coastlines.

Since then the old violence paradigm has become raggedy—Matthew Legge tells us that wars have almost never been won since the US invaded Grenada in 1983! But most decision-makers still cling to the old belief.

This is a Good News book, one that encourages new thinking and experimentation in more effective ways of relating to conflict. It contains stories that may surprise even people who have already sailed out of sight of the coastline to explore the possibilities of peace. More than that, the author is a coach as concerned to empower us as he is to fire our imaginations. He shows us proven means of communicating the Good News to people who are still hugging that coast, so we can join them in mutual exploration.

The mutuality is encouraged by Matthew's presentation of peace methodology not as dogma but as an unfolding set of practices. He supports this approach with numerous studies from social psychology and political science. Once we've digested the finding that mass movements seeking freedom from dictators have twice as good a chance of winning if they choose nonviolent struggle rather than violence, we're more open to tantalizing experiments from the field of unarmed peacekeeping, which as yet haven't been fully studied.

I remember how important exploration was to me when I joined the first team of Peace Brigades International's Sri Lankan project. It was 1989; no one could be sure that human rights lawyers who were being assassinated by hit squads could be kept safe by non-violent accompaniment. Still, the experiment needed to be done, and as it turned out, we kept everyone safe who we accompanied. An important part of the effort were the peace workers back home, who supported the experiment and backed us up by communicating with the governments involved. As experiments of this kind are tried and found successful, we gain more confidence that we can go beyond the old violent paradigm that is failing us.

The book invites all of us into a collaborative search for peaceful alternatives, a search that is bold enough to make the discoveries we need without pretending in advance we were certain of the outcomes. Then as collaborators Matthew supports us to become ever

more aware of how bias and misperception might get in the way of making our best conclusions—thereby showing us how we can become more accurate in our thinking.

A bonus comes at the end of each chapter, where Matthew not only summarizes the major points but offers activities that empower us even more, in the context of group discussions. I heartily recommend that you read this with others, preferably a group that includes different points of view.

Many of us don't have as much time as we would like to devote to our peace work. An advantage of the approach taken here is that a big focus is on *how* to do the work most effectively. In turn, that supports us to maximize the value of the time that we do have.

I found the book to be diversity friendly. Matthew shows ways that communication failures snarl conflict and make it more likely to become violent, but he doesn't say that "violence is simply about miscommunication." As he leads us through the field, he shows us multiple lenses through which we can view situations and offers multiple options for acting. His stories are especially vivid and likely to stick in the mind at moments when we need them.

His diversity friendliness supports unity because it suggests the variety of roles that can be played in transforming even the most bitter situations. For example, the late Quaker strategist Bill Moyer showed that successful social movements characteristically include four different roles. In confronting an environmental threat, say, the *advocates* focus on dialogue with the authorities while the *helpers* jump in to ameliorate the situation themselves by, for example, building windmills as an alternative source of power. A third role is the *organizers*, who like to build coalitions and pull people together in conferences and rallies. The fourth role is the *rebels*, who engage in nonviolent direct action to make it difficult for decision-makers to continue their injury to the environment and incentivize them to listen to the advocates.

Time and energy often get wasted by people criticizing a role different from their own and trying to get them to join their preferred role, instead of accepting the diversity as the reality and, at best, as

a strength. Movements are more likely to solve the problem when people find ways to unite across lines of difference.

This book, by paying attention both to the individual and group levels of peace work, and even the group and mass levels, supports the big picture we need.

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# About Quakers and the Author

The Religious Society of Friends (members are commonly called “Quakers” or “Friends,” and I’ll use both terms) has a history with peace and pacifism dating back to the 1650s. Friends are seekers after truth—a bold goal if there ever was one! I’m the Peace Program Coordinator of Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC), the peace and social justice agency of Quakers in Canada. When it was created in 1931, Arthur Dorland, among the founders of CFSC, wrote, “We trust that...in our united effort we may make a greater impact for good upon our day and generation.”<sup>1</sup> This is still our hope.

For centuries, Quakers have been exploring the tough question of how to respond effectively to violence. Historian Robert Byrd explains that “Friends’ primary interest has been in the underlying causes and forces at work in international affairs, or, in [early Quaker George] Fox’s phrase, in ‘taking away the occasions for war.’”<sup>2</sup> This book continues that way of looking at the issues.

In 1947 Quaker service agencies were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for non-partisan medical support offered to all sides in war. (This later became a common approach used by groups like the Red Cross/Red Crescent.) In his awards speech, Norwegian leader Gunnar Jahn said, “The Quakers have shown us that it is possible to translate into action what lies deep in the hearts of many: compassion for others and the desire to help them...”<sup>3</sup> Bronnie Ware, a palliative care nurse, wrote that the single biggest regret people told her as they lay dying was not staying true to themselves.<sup>4</sup> I hope that the skills we’ll be building in this book will help us discover

practical ways to stay true to what lies deep in our hearts. We're not seeking in these pages to oppose violence or war. We're exploring to what extent, in any moment, we can stay true to ourselves and act on our peace aspirations.

When this book references Quakers and their practices, it's not out of some tribalism—a claim that Quakers are exceptional or have special access to the truth. In fact, Quakers believe just the opposite. We can all access inner wisdom and we need *each other* to help it flourish. The reason I make reference to Quakers is that those are the examples I know well, and they're examples that most people haven't heard of, so you probably aren't already sick of reading about them. I think Friends have some great stories they don't often tell, so I'm pleased to be sharing them. I hope they hint at the impacts a small group of people can have.



I'd like to express my deep gratitude to everyone I've learned from and bounced ideas back and forth with, and who supported the creation of this book—family, friends, and Friends. Significant contributions were made by Gianne Broughton, Trevor Chandler, Paul Dekar, Meg Gunsar, Barbara Heather, Keira Mann, Maggie Sager, Megan Schmidt, Bertha Small, and Linda Taffs.

Please know that this book was written and edited by white North Americans with their basic needs like food and shelter readily met. It's easy for us, with so many comforts, to talk about peace. But in the coming pages we'll discover the stories of remarkable people from many different walks of life using the ideas in this book. A cast of characters all around you is celebrating life with these skills right now.

# Introduction

What if there were something powerful you could do right now, today, that would impact not only your own life but your whole community? What if others were already using skills and knowledge that you'd never heard much about but that could be genuinely *transformative*?

Slobodan Milošević's rule saw mass unemployment, widespread corruption, ethnic cleansing, a million ethnically Albanian refugees, even the use of concentration camps. A 78-day, 3-billion-dollar military campaign led by the United States failed to impact Milošević much, if anything making him more aggressive. Then, incredible as it may sound, the Milošević dictatorship was toppled *without guns*. This is how Srđa Popović summarized the nonviolent work everyday citizens did to help bring down Milošević: "We won because we loved life more. We decided to love life."<sup>1</sup>

Imagine if you had the courage and skills to love life, whether living under a terrifying dictatorship or in a relatively peaceful and affluent country. Picture how you could use and spread these skills, what an impact they could make if they really caught on...

This is a book about thriving. There will never be a perfect moment for this book, nor a better one than right now. We'll explore the processes at play when hate arises, and learn all kinds of practical ways to counteract them. We'll see how fighting can get entrenched or can move in transformative and healing directions. For now, let's call that latter process "peace."

It has always been true, and certainly is today, that we're in a time of major change: cultural and political power shifts, skyrocketing inequality, climate change... We have increasingly powerful artificial

intelligence, cyber warfare, even debates on new human rights to protect us from technologies like neural implants that monitor our thoughts or hijack our mental processes!<sup>2</sup> The pace of change can be staggering, leaving us feeling vulnerable. This could contribute to division and violent unrest. Or it could produce a specific susceptibility to a very different type of infection.

In 2014 I had the chance to hear Quaker peace activists Dale Dewar and Bill Curry deliver a lecture examining war from a public health lens.<sup>3</sup> A shift in perspective like that can suddenly open fresh ideas, so I began to think that a further envisioning may be in order. I started to see a shimmering sense of what “peace” could be.

I read all sorts of peace books and blogs, and I felt something missing. Much of the work addressed our needs for security and justice. Less frequently authors acknowledged the roles of recognition and meaning in our lives. But a need was being ignored—stimulation! Without meeting it, there’s always a price to pay.<sup>4</sup> Pictures of doves are lovely, but they can get pretty boring. Hearing about peace is alienating if it’s too far removed from what’s relevant and exciting. I don’t want you to see a title like *Are We Done Fighting?* and imagine I’m going to argue that we should all just be friends! If peace is about forcing ourselves to be “good” in bland ways, it’s weak. It can’t just be the “high road” we’re told we *should* take.

Sometimes we want to be contrarians, to cheer for the bad guy, to do what we’re told not to. Peace thinkers often downplay this, overlooking the fact that for many, violence is exciting, even beautiful.<sup>5</sup> It’s possible that many of us “are drawn to carnage, not repelled by it.”<sup>6</sup> With this line of thinking my vision started to become clear—while thinking about violence as a form of infection I began to see that viruses, for example, can be at the same time horrible and yet, from another point of view, elegant. We have to marvel at the ways they’ve evolved to spread and replicate, often with terrifying results. Peace is actually powerful and exciting. It moves between us...like a virus. What incentives do hosts (folks like you and me) need to spread peace, to make it go viral?<sup>7</sup> We don’t often hear about it, but this is exactly what people are doing all around the world. Some-



times it's as dramatic as overcoming the Milošević dictatorship, other times as simple as experiences at home or in the workplace. However it happens, this is an infection to celebrate!

What makes this book unique? Why another book on peace? Much of the study of peace and conflict has been abstract and intellectual. This kind of work isn't always easy to pick up and use. It's often focused on niches and directed at experts. Personally, I think it's a mistake to talk about peacebuilding in Colombia and not the United States. I wholeheartedly agree with the Quaker Council for European Affairs when they say "Peacebuilding is everybody's business"<sup>8</sup>—so this book aims to be practical and useful and to bridge artificial divides.

I think there's an obvious connection that's often lost when universities or the United Nations talk about peace. As valuable as these discussions can be, *they regularly forget the heart*. Simply put, I've witnessed that there's a central element of peacebuilding that too often gets overlooked—peace is built by people, and people aren't that reasonable. We're moved in surprising ways. This book explores the latest research from a range of fields like anthropology, behavioral economics, neuroscience, and social psychology. To my knowledge this is the first time these insights have been combined and related back to spreading peace. They can inform each other in fascinating ways!

My definition of peace will be vast and not technical. Peace happens at different levels, so whether you're looking for tips to understand yourself and your own feelings, improve your relationships with others, or work nonviolently for social change, I know this book will have something for you. It's an easy approach for everyone—from seasoned peace workers to folks with zero interest in violent conflicts. Whether you consider yourself on the political right or left, an optimist or pessimist, a realist or idealist, religious or atheistic, the following pages will be worth your time. This journey promises to be invigorating, empowering, and even infectious. Let's begin.



# Using This Book

This book may be interesting but, most importantly, it's designed for *action*! I've kept most chapters short, and each one has tips at the end for easy reference. There are also lots of examples and activities. Chapters are collected into sections based around key themes.

As with all stories, there's a simple way to tell it, and then there are many details. I've offered the details for those who want to really dig into how the peace virus evolves and transmits, but if that gets to be too much for you, feel free to skim and skip around—you don't have to read this book in order. If you want more reading, there are many references to explore.

Whatever the problem, there are countless ways of looking at it and seeking positive changes. This book will focus mostly on individual approaches, because those are relevant to all of us. That's not to discount the importance of institutions! If we have wise leaders creating peaceful conditions around us, peace can flourish even if many of us lack peace skills. There are great resources out there for folks building peace through influencing governments and corporations, but to make this book useful to all sorts of readers I chose not to make activism a main focus.

I really encourage using this book in a facilitated study and action group. Doing the exercises in a group will create an incredible chance to share the virus. If you're particularly lucky you might find time for a day or weekend-long retreat—a little peace-infection vacation! Many of the activities are deceptively simple. They're all tested and can be *powerful*, but this is the type of learning where you get as much back as you put in.

When doing the activities you might experience insights you would not have expected. Discovering your unacknowledged feelings or needs can't be predicted or controlled, so it could get scary or frustrating. You'll be asked to open to things that can be painful. Be ready to challenge yourself to the point of discomfort if you want to really grow. But it's not usually healthy to push past discomfort into full panic.<sup>1</sup> Listen to yourself, and discern when it may be time to take a break or sit out for an exercise.

Friend and experienced trainer George Lakey explains what can happen when a group really commits to a process like this. Everyone might start off in a friendly place but suddenly descend into conflict as the group "generates a storm when its members want to experience acceptance for the deeper layers of themselves, including differences that, up until then, they've been keeping under wraps." Lakey points out that the higher the stakes of what the group is trying to achieve, the more likely it is that emotional needs will assert themselves, taking group members by surprise. After enough effort, there may be a "breakthrough into community."<sup>2</sup> Be ready! It's also possible that none of this happens in your group, which is fine too.

If you can't do a retreat, I recommend picking a section of the book, reading it alone beforehand, and then meeting to discuss it and do the activities together. This can be enough for a rich hour or two, whatever your group can spare. While the activities are written for groups, most can be done by individuals too.

Make sure to name a facilitator who will lead the activities. Facilitators: don't worry—you don't need any prior experience. There's an appendix full of advice on the basics of facilitation. I encourage those who aren't facilitators not to read the activities beforehand. You'll gain more if you learn them by doing them.

Finally, a word about the findings we'll be looking at. The studies referenced in this book have their limitations. Many were done only on university students—not the most representative of groups! Some studies haven't been replicated enough to see that the findings really hold, and in some cases studies may have been conducted sloppily or even fraudulently.<sup>3</sup> A huge problem with most

of the studies referenced is that they were often done in just one or a few cultures. I find this deeply frustrating, but that's the reality of the evidence I could find. Please keep that in mind. It means that some of what we'll learn won't apply everywhere. Also recall that statistics offer summaries. They tell us about *broad patterns*. Individuals can and do differ from these patterns. The studies discussed *do*, however, hint at useful insights that are expanded on with stories, examples, and thoughts from historical and modern-day peace workers. Each of these stories is, of course, far more complicated and nuanced than I have space for, so I hope that I've done the issues justice.

Political scientist Johan Galtung has explored how he sees the violence of different peoples as being rooted in distinct religious, political, and cultural structures and ideas. He notes, "Most important are the deep structures and cultures because they are unreflected [upon], even unknown."<sup>4</sup> The coming pages will offer chances for reflection, perhaps making the previously invisible come to life for you.

### Activity: Learning Contract or Journaling

1. If you'll be doing group work, this activity will help you create a shared "learning contract." If you're working alone, consider starting a journal to note down your reflections and to answer discussion questions.
2. Select a facilitator for the group. Facilitators: assign someone to take notes, or ask each person to write their response to each question on a single sheet of flipchart paper.
3. Go around in a circle, with each person stating their name and one reason they're here. Facilitators may need to instruct people to be brief as there will be lots of opportunities to talk further in future exercises.
4. Facilitators ask the group to go around again, explaining one thing they need in order to participate fully. For example, "I need to not be mocked for things I say," "I need someone to keep track of time because I have to leave right on time to pick up my

- children,” “I need people to speak loudly and slowly because I’m hard of hearing.”
5. Facilitators ask the group to go around a third time, with each person stating one thing they will commit to bringing to this group learning. For example, “I will approach this with an open mind,” “I will commit to be vulnerable with the group,” “I will commit to talking about what I learn with X person.”
  6. Facilitators may need to suggest additional ground rules if they haven’t come up already. For example, facilitators may cut in to keep the group on time, so there might not be time for every comment to be heard; nothing said may be shared externally without permission; anyone can leave at any time; photos or video may be taken only if everyone agrees.
  7. Inviting everyone to speak in no particular order, facilitators ask, “Is there something you’re sceptical about as we start reflecting on this book?”
  8. Facilitators ask, “Do you have any other pressing needs, hopes, or expectations from this learning process?”
  9. Facilitators check if everyone is OK with the stated needs and commitments. If not, discuss this further—what are the divergent needs, how can a consensus be reached? Once there’s agreement, everyone signs the flipchart sheet or verbally agrees to this learning contract.

### Activity: Your Values and a Special Person

1. Facilitators let the group know that this will be done individually and no one will be asked to share what they wrote. Pass out paper and pens to those who need them.
2. Facilitators instruct the group, “Before we go further, spend a few moments reflecting on your values. Who are you when you’re at your best? What person do you aspire to be? Pick a particular memory if you can think of a time when you behaved like that person. Please write your values down and keep them safe so you can refer to them easily when asked later.” Give at least ten minutes for this, offering a two-minute warning to wrap up.

3. Facilitators now explain, “*Are We Done Fighting?* is a story, and we all know that the stories we remember most are the ones that are meaningful to us. Before we go any further, let’s each think of someone we care about. As we read the book, let’s imagine specific ways that the issues discussed are relevant to, and will have an impact on, the person we’re thinking of. We can make our future discussions of the book more grounded by referring to how the issues it raises relate to challenges we ourselves, or the person we’ve just pictured, face.”

### Activity: Your Strengths

Many of us start seeking change by identifying problems and looking for solutions. It can also be helpful to focus on what our particular strengths may be. Evidence suggests that focusing on and working with our personal strengths can help us achieve our goals.<sup>5</sup>

1. Facilitators divide everyone into small groups and ask them to take 15 minutes to each answer two questions: “What are your particular strengths?” and “How do you use your strengths to build peace?” Give a two-minute warning.
2. Facilitators gather the group together again to share what they were talking about.





# Peace and Power

*We'll start by exploring our sense of what peace is **not**.*

*Toward the end of the book we'll return to the definition and try to decide what peace **is**.*

*In this first section we'll also look at divisiveness and forms of power. We'll clarify many mysterious and bizarre quirks about human attitudes and actions.*

*As we do this, we'll find the gaps where the peace virus can spread. Skills developed in this section will primarily relate to understanding problems and proven tips for transformation.*



## What Peace is Not

*Fundamental to all else is the need that [humans] should grow to understand and practise patience and tolerance, and to substitute for the clumsy, uncertain, cruel tool of violence, the methods of reason and co-operation.<sup>1</sup>*

— EMILY GREENE BALCH

EMILY GREEN BALCH was a Nobel Peace Prize winner with great insights, yet the sentiment expressed here has its flaws. Thankfully, peace doesn't depend on our becoming reasonable! If we rest our hope on reason, we're in impossibly deep waters. Reasonableness and rationality are, it turns out, not at all what we may think. This has huge implications for peace work, so let's see some examples of what I'm talking about.

Nowhere is cold logic more dependable than in the courtroom. We're all supposed to be equal before the law, and a judge's ability to think clearly and make carefully reasoned decisions is honed over years. Yet research suggests that what should be irrelevant factors—like how much sleep a judge got the night before—make a *big* difference to rulings. Researchers suspect that when judges don't get as much sleep, they may be more irritable and have less mental energy to make decisions, resulting in harsher rulings.<sup>2</sup> A different study carefully controlled for many factors and concluded that parole decisions depend on how many cases a judge has seen since taking a snack break. The authors suggest what may be going on is that “decision making is mentally taxing... if forced to keep deciding things,

people get tired and start looking for easy answers. In this case, the easy answer is to maintain the status quo by denying the prisoner's request."<sup>3</sup> Particularly when we're mentally tired, we make more reckless decisions or are more likely to not make a decision at all—doing nothing or accepting the default option presented to us even when we could have benefitted by picking differently!<sup>4</sup>

Let's consider a case where a reasonable choice matters most—a life-and-death decision. You're told you have lung cancer. The doctor says in the exact same concerned tone, "You have a 70 percent chance of living if you have this surgery," or she says, "You have a 30 percent chance of dying if you have this surgery." What choice would you make? This was tested with patients in a hospital (they had a variety of conditions, not lung cancer) and with students and doctors. Every group—even the doctors, with all their years of medical training—were much more likely to choose surgery if it was explained to them in terms of how likely they were to live!<sup>5</sup> The answers we arrive at depend on the framings we start off with.

Another example: Applicants arrive for a job interview. The interviewers are participating in a study. Before the interviews, researchers casually ask the interviewers to help them for a moment by holding their drink. Some of the interviewers get an ice-cold drink to hold, others a warm cup of coffee. The job applicants come in and answer the interview questions. People conduct interviews by rationally analyzing all the facts about each candidate, don't they? Actually, the applicants were secretly actors trained to say exactly the same things in each interview. Interviewers who'd heard the exact same answers liked the applicants a lot more if they'd held a cup of hot coffee instead of a cold drink! Interviewers who held coffee said applicants had warmer personalities, better skills, and were more hireable.<sup>6</sup> Sensations we're feeling get readily confused with decisions we've carefully reasoned out.

If a stranger asked you to volunteer to put a big ugly sign on your lawn, what would you say? A famous study found a way to increase people's likelihood of agreeing by 400%. First, people were asked to put a very small sign on the inside of their window for the same



Credit: Photo by Nigel Downes, first published in *This Light That Pushes Me: Stories of African Peacebuilders*, Quaker Books, 2014

Zawadi Nikuze

cause—safe driving. Having agreed to this, *self-perception* seemed to change. Now people understood themselves to be *the type of person* who cares a lot about safe driving. When asked to put up the big ugly sign, three-quarters of folks who'd agreed to the small sign now complied.<sup>7</sup>

What we're seeing is just a tiny bit of the wealth of evidence that we're actually surprisingly bad at determining why we do what we do. Yet we're very good at being convinced that we *do* know our motivations. Some of us might think that this is all very interesting but that we're too clever to be caught by such tricks, that our intellect will help us behave reasonably while *other people* don't. Research suggests this itself is just another bias. In fact, the smarter we are, the *more* likely we are to be affected by biases like the ones we've just seen.<sup>8</sup> But what does all this have to do with spreading peace?

Congolese peace worker Zawadi Nikuze, who's been in traumatizing conditions for decades but, incredibly, maintains a sense of optimism, advises, "Give what you have. [If you have] a good smile, give it to someone who is stressed who needs it..."<sup>9</sup> This might sound like a nice gesture but ultimately not much of one. How is a smile more than trivial? To be sure, being smiled at will make most

of us feel better for a few moments and may not change our lives. But perhaps those moments are worth more than we'd imagine. It's even possible that what we do in those moments *will* change our lives for years to come.

As we saw with judges, decision making is hard work. To minimize the amount of work we have to do, we look for help from others and follow their lead. That may help explain why, for example, if the first online review for a product is positive, that increases the chances that other reviews will be positive by almost a third, and increases the overall rating by a quarter.<sup>10</sup> We even do this *with ourselves*. We regularly look to our past decisions as if they were made by someone whose lead we should follow. In order to be consistent and to save effort, we tend to do what we've already done, forgetting completely *why* we did it the first time.<sup>11</sup> Once we can look to our past and see that we made a decision to put up a sign about safe driving, we feel that we must care about safe driving and now we need to act consistently with that. We don't recall that right before being asked to put up the sign we were feeling good because someone smiled at us, or warm because we'd just held a cup of coffee. In other words—we don't understand the conditions that lead to our actions, but once we're going in one direction, we can easily get carried forward by following what we did before.

What was your mood last Wednesday at 1 pm? Did you have a warm cup of coffee or a cold drink in your hand? Had someone smiled at you recently? If you're like most people, you won't remember. But what you *will* remember is that on Wednesday you decided to put a sign in your window about safe driving. Since you made that choice, you'll be quite likely to follow your own lead further in that direction.

This means that a well-timed expression of care from Nikuze could actually help start a chain of events that changes our lives. If in the next moment we had to make a choice about a conflict, we might find ourselves pausing instead of escalating. Then the next time we're in a similar conflict, we'd recall that we're not *the type of person* who escalates conflicts, looking to what we did last time with

zero memory of having felt good because of Nikuze's fleeting influence on us. This is just one of the ways that small acts can sometimes unlock significant changes—either for good or ill.

What I hope we're starting to see is that many of us are surprisingly uninformed about ourselves. This makes it tough to make decisions and to act based on our own interests. Here's a simple illustration of the challenge. Rank this list in terms of what will make you happiest:

1. Commuting to work
2. Watching TV
3. Surfing the internet
4. Doing hair, makeup, or other personal grooming
5. Shopping
6. Exercising
7. Preparing food

What did you think? Many of us will rank the list something like this: 2, 3, 5, 4, 7, 1, 6. Watching TV is obviously a fun activity, and preparing food tends to be a chore. Exercising is painful, and we do it for the results. We love spending long hours online chatting and playing games.

The actual findings are very different. Researchers used a phone app to check in with people at random during the day and have them answer a few questions to rate their happiness and say what they were doing. This information was collected from a diverse range of people. So what makes us happiest? Exercising, then preparing food, shopping, watching TV, grooming, commuting to work, and then surfing the internet.<sup>12</sup> What's striking is that most of us do these things, yet we *still* can't remember how happy each one actually makes us while doing it. When asked while *not* doing it, we get the order wrong.

So if we're not nearly as reasonable or informed as we think, and if we want to spread peace, what can we do? Many of us assume we need to spread information. We believe that if people had all the facts, they'd make more peaceful decisions. Some good-quality

information is certainly valuable, but the proof that it's not usually enough is easily offered by author Dan Heath: "Are you doing something in life right now where you have all the information that you need to know it's not a good idea for you, and yet you keep doing it anyway?" From not eating balanced meals to staying up too late or other more dangerous choices, the honest answer for almost everyone is, "Yes!"<sup>13</sup> Having enough information and good intentions regularly fails us, and this insight is far from new. In the Bible we find Paul exclaiming with anguish, "I don't understand my own behavior—I don't do what I want to do; instead, I do the very thing I hate!"<sup>14</sup>

I think these points are crucial to understand, because if we're going to make peace infectious, it won't do to start with impossible premises about how peace spreads. We'll just squander our efforts. Our problem-solving tools need to respond to reality. Informing us that we're not being reasonable or cooperative enough is unlikely to change us. As folks ready to see positive changes, what we *can* do is go first, offering smiles if that's all we have, happily questioning our assumptions, and diving deeper into the constantly evolving understanding we gain. This is a challenge of self-discovery, skill building, and peacebuilding, all at once.

We've just dipped a toe into the river of questions we'll be looking at—how to feel inner peace, build more peaceful relationships (interpersonal peace), and support changes in the world around us (structural peace).<sup>15</sup> You may have noticed that in all this I'm not saying what peace is. That's deliberate. Together we're starting off where we are and testing our ideas as we move forward. Soon we'll do an activity to further outline what peace isn't. Here's one important distinction first—negative versus positive peace. Johan Galtung explains that negative peace comes from "the idea of a predictable social order, even if this order is brought about by means of force and the threat of force."<sup>16</sup> Negative peace is the mere lack of overt war and obvious violence. It is the appearance of stability. Many problems fester unaddressed just below the surface. Negative peace can go on our list of what peace isn't.



## Tips from This Chapter

1. There's a strong tendency to believe that we're more rational than we really are. Becoming aware of what motivates us can help our work for positive changes, making it more realistic and effective. Some tips offered in this book will also help address our biases—for instance, if you can, get a good night's sleep and take a snack break before making too many mentally taxing decisions!
2. Decision making is challenging, and we tend to look for shortcuts. For instance, we look to our past decisions, recalling our actions and forgetting what could have influenced us at the time. This suggests that we need to take great care in establishing any habit or pattern of behavior, no matter how seemingly minor, since it can escalate. (Agreeing to put up a small sign can make us feel inclined to put up a large one.)
3. Checking in with ourselves at random moments, we might see how happy we are. Is what we're doing with our time right now as fun as we imagined? Just because we can't see any obvious problems doesn't mean we're living peacefully. We may be caught up in negative peace.

## Activity: Group Ideas—What Peace is Not

1. Facilitators ask the group "What is *not* peace?" and write a list of the key ideas coming up. Facilitators encourage folks to speak from their own experiences, offering a story or anecdote if it helps clarify what they mean. A follow-up question could draw these responses out: "When you are *not* peaceful, how do you think or act?"
2. Facilitators ask what themes or clusters of ideas people notice emerging in the list.
3. Facilitators ask "Are there any assumptions coming through that you think need to be tested further? Are there any questions being raised that you would like to have answered?" In future activities the group will be reviewing these assumptions and questions, so facilitators need to write these down clearly and keep a copy.

### Example: Experience Changes Beliefs in Kenya

On a hot sunny day in Mtwapa a man is attacked by a mob. He's beaten senseless. The mob is about to set him on fire when police fight their way through and save him. Local religious leaders are there, screaming for ruthless violence against anyone who, like this man, is suspected of being gay.<sup>17</sup>

Imagine you're a gay Kenyan. You're shocked and outraged at what's happening, but how can you stand up to a whole culture? Where would you start? There's such an incredible risk if you speak out. Reeling from a wave of murders, one brave Kenyan civil society group meets to find its strength. Rather than condemn or confront the Christian and Muslim leaders provoking such hatred and violence, they adopt a surprising strategy—they befriend them. The group develops a 12-week program of sensitization, calling it Facing Fears.

Without mentioning homosexuality, the trainers invite religious leaders like Sheikh Ali Hussein to sessions to learn more about HIV/AIDS and patient care. Hussein, along with nearly a dozen other pastors and imams, agrees to join. He later recalls that he felt it was worth attending the sessions to learn how to stop the spread of AIDS in his community. The Facing Fears program opens with discussions of AIDS and the importance of, and right to, health care. After a few weeks, the trainers move to sessions about other rights.

“The first lesson I picked up was that human beings have rights,” says an Anglican pastor, “Thomas,” who attended the program. He asked that his name be withheld out of fear of backlash from his superiors in the church. “What I don't like in a person does not warrant me to break that person's rights, period,” he says.

After three months of sessions involving lively discussion and role-plays to broaden the participants' perspectives, trainers reveal the big secret—they're gay. The trainers then ask the religious leaders pointedly, “Do you still believe I should be beaten?” The leaders,

stunned, say, “No, of course not, not you personally.” The trainers explain that they’re just the same as other gay people.

Hussein describes how before that moment in the training he felt, “We must be aggressive and kill them. [Homosexuals are] not worthy to live anywhere in the world.” But having gotten to know actual gay people, his views changed: “The most important thing we learned is to listen before deciding... And one is supposed to be compassionate.” Hussein still thinks homosexuality is “wrong,” but he reconciles with a gay cousin he hasn’t talked to for 20 years. Participants help recruit other religious leaders for a next round of training sessions.<sup>18</sup>

Similar programs have been used in the United States. First United Methodist Church minister Steve Clunn reports, “I went from ignorance and fear to a place of understanding because people had the courage to talk to me.”<sup>19</sup>

## Us and Others

*As long as you cannot face yourself  
and love even those ugly parts...  
I will be left with the work of trying to love  
what you cannot bear to witness.*

— ROD OWENS, a queer black man, asking that white people  
stop trying to convince him they're not racist  
and start paying honest attention to themselves.<sup>1</sup>

A UNIVERSITY STUDENT more than doubled the amount of money raised on campus by adding a simple phrase to the end of a fundraising pitch: "I'm a student too."<sup>2</sup> We have sympathy for people like us. This helps us cement bonds and cohesion in community. It also has devastating impacts when we see people as not part of "us." That's the process called othering or out-group bias. It's present in racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia... This bleak list could go on.

At an event welcoming Syrian refugees to Vancouver, a man rides up on a bike and pepper sprays the crowd.<sup>3</sup> What makes us act this way? We'll explore this difficult question in this and future chapters. It seems humans are remarkably good at othering. Even preschoolers describe teasing members of another group as more morally acceptable than teasing their own group.<sup>4</sup> The debate rages on about how early in life othering starts. Evidence from Germany and the US suggests that children might not show their parents' prejudices until about age six and aren't born assuming that the

race of other children establishes anything about their character.<sup>5</sup> But by the time we're adults, if we see pictures of someone of a different race, many of us will experience more distress, anxiety, and aggression. In just *one-twentieth of a second* we can process a picture of an "other" differently than a picture of an "us"! This happens much faster than any careful thought or decision about the picture.<sup>6</sup>

When we think of prejudice we usually think of overt beliefs about why our group is superior to "others." Perhaps the pepper sprayer thought this way. But even when we explicitly find such prejudice repulsive, we can still maintain subtle biases that are *implicit*. As much as we might like to be, we're not blind to gender, skin color, or sexual orientation. If biased views are presented to us often enough, we may even learn to implicitly accept them *about ourselves*! Here's Theodore Johnson's description of testing his biases through an activity that flashes pictures together with negative and positive words, to see how long it takes us to respond. The test's purpose is to measure struggles to pair certain concepts (like positive qualities) with certain images (like dark-skinned people).

Before I started the racial-bias assessment, a disclaimer explicitly warned me that those who are not prepared to receive uncomfortable news should not proceed. I was too intrigued to turn back, but it turns out I was unprepared for the outcome.

According to the Implicit Association Test, I have a "strong automatic preference for European Americans compared to African Americans." That's a sterile way of saying that I'm biased against black people. For most people, such a designation would probably be unsettling.... But for me, it caused a mini-existential crisis.

Why? Because I'm black.<sup>7</sup>

The Implicit Association Test has been criticized because, for instance, if the same person takes it at different times their results tend to vary. But the overall reality of implicit bias has been quite thoroughly documented.<sup>8</sup> There *are* people who don't show signs

of implicit bias. However, these individuals may have a bias of their own. One study of racial bias-free individuals found that they all seemed to see neutral objects around them as positive (a chair? That's a good thing!)<sup>9</sup> For the rest of us, here are a few examples of what can happen:

Show subjects slides about some obscure country; afterward, they will have more negative attitudes toward the place if, between slides, pictures of faces with expressions of fear appeared at subliminal speeds. Sitting near smelly garbage makes people more socially conservative about outgroup issues (e.g., attitudes toward gay marriage among heterosexuals). Christians express more negative attitudes toward non-Christians if they've just walked past a church.<sup>10</sup>

Much of this comes down to feeling uncomfortable, even threatened. It's quite possible that the pepper sprayer felt that somehow newly arrived Syrian refugees represented a threat. Threat detection is critically important for survival, but we're easily mistaken. The opposite of seeing neutral things as positive, some of us are extra sensitive to imagining that most changes in the world around us are threats.<sup>11</sup> Evidence suggests that when we're prejudiced, we often experience "others" not just as challenging to understand but as a danger to "us." Like the difference we saw between framing an operation in terms of chances of living or of dying, there's an important difference between perceiving someone as challenging, or as a threat:

Challenges incite a sequence of physiological responses that send more blood to our muscles and brains, enhancing our physical and cognitive performance. Threats, on the other hand, set off a physiological response that restricts our blood flow and releases the hormone cortisol, which breaks down muscle tissue and halts digestive processes so that the body can quickly muster the energy it needs to confront the threat. Over time, these responses wear down muscles, including the heart, and damage the immune system.<sup>12</sup>

This means that our prejudices can literally kill us, increasing our risks of serious health problems associated with chronic stress—from cancer to Type II diabetes!

The example above—that smelling garbage can make heterosexuals feel less supportive of gay marriage—highlights the important and related role that disgust plays. From an evolutionary perspective it makes sense that we'd be motivated to stay away from things that can make us sick, like rotting food. This is highly useful. But somehow, many of us are unwittingly projecting ancient fears of sickness onto people or situations that have no potential to make us sick. This may be why bigoted language is often related to disgust—labeling groups “dirty,” “filthy,” “cockroaches”...

The more squeamish we are, regardless of our income, education levels, and other key factors, the more readily bothered we will be by, for instance, seeing an unflushed toilet. And the more readily we're distressed by the unflushed toilet, the more likely we are to want to keep things the way they are, and to feel threatened by the unfamiliar.<sup>13</sup> We saw how sensations like warmth from holding a cup of coffee influence our decisions, and the same is true of disgust. When we're feeling disgusted, we're more likely to say that lying on our resume is a terrible thing to do, whereas if we're feeling clean after just washing our hands, we're more likely to say it's no big deal.<sup>14</sup>

Those of us with fewer physiological signs of distress (like sweating and rapid blinking) when we see disturbing images are less likely to support wars and are more open to receiving refugees to our countries.<sup>15</sup> How disgusted and threatened we feel by different situations isn't just something we're born with and experience throughout our lives though. For instance, experiencing trauma can make us less accepting of refugees, perhaps because we're newly fearful and attuned to what can go wrong in life.<sup>16</sup> Evidence suggests that feeling frightened makes us temporarily more focused on protecting ourselves (and so less welcoming of Syrian refugees, for instance). The opposite is also true. When people in one study were asked to imagine having a superpower that gave them complete physical safety, they were temporarily more open to accepting refugees.<sup>17</sup>

So the pepper sprayer may have been feeling a sense of threat, fear, and disgust—all unpleasant sensations all of us are familiar with. I think that, without condoning terrible actions in any way, the research findings just discussed can give us cause to understand each other a bit better. Looking at the world around us, it's easy to find reasons to feel safe and cared for or to feel disgusted and under threat. Within limits, both make a lot of sense. When taken to extremes, they can lead to hate crimes like pepper spraying a group of strangers who pose no threat to us whatsoever.

When we're feeling distressed or not doing well in life, for whatever reasons, we often look for simple explanations as to why. Sociologist René Girard says, "Everywhere and always, when human beings either cannot or dare not take their anger out on the thing that has caused it, they unconsciously search for substitutes, and more often than not they find them."<sup>18</sup> Imagining that Syrian refugees are doing well and getting free handouts while causing problems for "us" may feel comforting. Neuroscientist Robert Sapolsky calls this type of thinking "a horrifyingly effective stress-reduction mechanism." He sees it as a displacement of pain, which helps us feel better.<sup>19</sup> (I'd add—in a limited sense and in the immediate term!) And there's another bias that contributes to such scapegoating too.

When a camera is focused on the suspect during a police interrogation, people watching the video are *twice as likely* to rate the suspect as guilty as when, *in the exact same interaction*, the camera is focused on both the suspect and the police interrogator.<sup>20</sup> The information that sticks out to us (like whoever's face is on camera) just naturally feels important and influential. It seems like the *cause* of what we're witnessing. So, if we're feeling angry and unsure about our future, we may look around and disproportionately notice a particular group—Syrian refugees—simply because they stand out to us as different. Then it's an easy step for us to create a story about how Syrians are the *cause* of our bad situation.<sup>21</sup> International trade agreements are remote and tough to comprehend, so they just don't *feel* like they're impacting our career prospects the same way a Syrian family next door is. Our perceived social status and power



play a large role here. When we have power in experiments, we're far more likely to make stereotyped judgments about "others" and less likely to pay attention to them as unique individuals.<sup>22</sup>

As much as we might feel disgust and distress around "others," many of us decide that our own group is particularly likeable and trustworthy.<sup>23</sup> We see ourselves as the farthest thing from disgusting. In one example, Canadians who voted for different political parties were asked to look at yearbook photos of random people and guess which party they vote for. The result? Regardless of our political leanings, we assume that attractive people vote for the same party we do!<sup>24</sup> Evidence from Japan, Hong Kong, and South Korea suggests that over-rating our own group isn't universal. One theory is that collectivist cultures, while still showing prejudices about "others," don't inflate the positive qualities of "us" as much as individualist cultures do.<sup>25</sup>

So, what can we do to reduce our biases against "others" if some are implicit and can play out in the brain in fractions of a second? It's important to point out that experiencing people as "others" can be the result of focusing on any number of characteristics, from their holding different religious or political views to their having particular personal traits. Our brains seem to track relevant information about who we think of as "other," whether they're from another race or another team.<sup>26</sup> So prejudice is *heavily* dependent on the stories we tell ourselves—which makes it vulnerable to a positive infection.

For example, participants in one study were asked to think about "others" as *individuals* by imagining what types of vegetables they like. This shift in thinking seemed to reduce anxiety when seeing pictures of "others." So, if we think of "others" as people, seeking to imagine their perspectives, our biases soften.<sup>27</sup> Similarly we can "try to consciously identify what qualities and goals [we] might have in common."<sup>28</sup> Other evidence suggests that we like people far more when we believe they like us.<sup>29</sup> So one way to reduce our discomfort is to consciously assume that people like us!

Later we'll look in detail at beliefs, but for now it's worth pointing out that it's often possible to identify examples that conform to

stereotypes. (“Look how badly that woman is driving. Women are such bad drivers!”) We can notice that this is happening and then be deliberate in looking for examples that *don’t* conform. (“Oh, that was a stereotyped thought. Let’s see who else is on the road... Actually those other women are driving OK. And that man is driving badly. Some *people* are just bad drivers.”)

In other cases there’s actual evidence to back up stereotypes—for example, that people of color are more likely to be poor. Canadian census data listed poverty rates as 22% among racialized groups compared to 9% for white Canadians.<sup>30</sup> When we find this out we can try to notice our immediate thoughts to get a hint of our biases. Maybe we think, “They must be lazy.” Zooming out to take a bigger view, we might discover many factors that make a stereotype come true, showing us that our initial ideas about laziness were off base.

We read how contact between people was used in a creative way by gay rights activists in Kenya to reduce prejudice. For at least a century Quakers have been among the strong proponents of this approach. Pierre Cérésolle and other Quakers in Europe in 1919 tried to reduce prejudices and hostilities after war by establishing programs where “young people from many countries had an opportunity to know each other through the comradeship of shared constructive, voluntary service.”<sup>31</sup> The idea is that members of groups that have been in conflict work alongside each other on common projects—volunteering to build a community center, for example. What does the evidence say about this work?

An analysis of 515 studies involving people from 38 countries shows that contact can indeed help to reduce prejudice but not always. In a minority of cases contact makes matters worse—so the details are important!<sup>32</sup> Keys to successful contact are “having the support of relevant authorities, sharing common goals, a sense of cooperation, and equal status.”<sup>33</sup> It’s also important that programs be prolonged and not short one-offs. A leading theory says this is largely because continual contact reduces the sense of distress and unfamiliarity when we see an “other,” turning them from *something* we’re unsure about and feel threatened by into *someone* whose pres-

ence is comfortable and predictable.<sup>34</sup> An emotional involvement like a friendship or romance with a member of an out-group can be an even more powerful way to overcome the prejudices we might have learned.<sup>35</sup>

Again, context matters, and there are times when social conditions deeply strain meaningful possibilities for friendship and dialogue. After programs help them make friends, “young Palestinians return to a reality of unchanged occupation. Young Israelis return to their schools, and later complete military service.” This deep divide has led many Palestinians to feel “betrayal, anger, and hurt as Israeli friends that they’d met at camps joined the military and took up positions enforcing Israel’s occupation. Rather than building relationship, trust was broken and people were pushed apart.”<sup>36</sup> When deep structural problems remain, contact could do more harm than good.

Physical contact might not always be necessary in countering prejudices. Simply seeing “others” portrayed in the media seems to help,<sup>37</sup> again perhaps because this makes “others” seem more normal and less threatening. Obviously, this effect depends on the quality of the portrayal—stereotyped portrayals won’t reduce stereotyped and prejudiced ideas.<sup>38</sup>

Some media try to counter prejudice in one-dimensional ways (“Look at this beautiful African village where everyone is good and hard working and always smiling”). While apparently positive, these images, used by nonprofits and even programs designed to address racism, may still be increasing it, “especially if they depict the ‘out’ group as wholly good and undifferentiated,” researcher Emile Bruneau has found. To counteract this, he highlights the importance of not just painting “others” as one homogeneous group, but allowing human uniqueness to shine through<sup>39</sup>—as we’ve seen, effective messages help us imagine “others” in detailed ways—like what vegetables this specific person prefers!

Another technique that works is getting into a better mood! A basic instruction like asking someone to smile has been shown to reduce implicit bias, as has asking participants to listen to a 10-minute guided meditation. What’s particularly interesting about

these findings is that neither the instruction to smile nor the meditation said anything about biases.<sup>40</sup> It appears that when we're feeling good it's just tougher to also feel as threatened and ready to pepper spray people.

This may last only for as long as our good mood does, but other research shows that our brains physically change as we build inner peace (a topic we'll return to later). This is one of many exciting recent findings about neuroplasticity. It used to be commonly taught that at a certain point in early adulthood our brains were fully developed and the best we could do was just maintain them as they slowly declined. Today it's understood that use continually changes the brain. For instance, the insula—brain structures important in tracking our internal experiences and in constructing our feelings—have been found to get physically thicker (due to increased density of neural networks) when we spend enough time consciously working to use them. What's more, this also increases our abilities to experience empathy and compassion *for others!*<sup>41</sup> So paying careful attention to our own feelings, learning to know and label them as precisely as we can, over time seems to help us find more caring feelings for other people.

This is all a reminder that we don't live in a world of absolutes. Most of us carry around some very positive aspirations and values, as well as some very unsavory thoughts and impulses. It might not be too useful to think of ourselves as “good” or “evil” people but as people with sexist, ableist, or otherwise biased views to varying degrees, degrees that change based in part on our environment and mood.

### Tips from This Chapter

1. There's no one criterion we use to decide someone is an “other”—they can be as diverse as being on a different sports team, holding different religious or political views, or having any number of personal characteristics.
2. Even if we reject explicit prejudices, most of us still have implicit biases. Knowing this, we can check in with ourselves when interacting with members of an “out-group.” If we notice that we're

feeling uncomfortable or threatened, this could be a sign of implicit bias at play.

3. In particular in individualist cultures, our biases tend to hold both that our group is more trustworthy and admirable than we might actually be and that “others” are more threatening and disgusting.
4. What we notice most seems to us to be most causal of whatever problem we have. We may blame it on whoever stands out to us because of being different. Important causes that aren’t as easy to notice just don’t feel as influential.
5. When we’re in positions of power, we have higher chances of being impulsive and biased.
6. We can use the following techniques to overcome the pitfalls of “us” and “others”:
  - a. Thinking of those around us as unique individuals. When we think of other people as individuals and not just members of a group, especially when we seek to imagine their unique individual perspectives, our biases soften.
  - b. Consciously assuming that people in “out-groups” are friendly and that they like us.
  - c. Consciously identifying what qualities and goals we have in common with someone from an “out-group,” overcoming the tendency to think of “them” as different from “us.”
  - d. Noticing ourselves having prejudiced ideas, and looking for the real-world evidence that contradicts them, or discovering the factors that make stereotypes come true in some instances.
  - e. Working to notice and reject any portrayal, even apparently positive, that shows groups of people as being all the same.
  - f. Trying to get into a better mood (which has been shown to reduce prejudice).
  - g. Paying attention to our own feelings (which has been shown over time to boost empathy and compassion for others).
7. It can be particularly transformative for all involved to have prolonged contact with “out-groups” in a way that includes sharing common goals, a sense of cooperation, and equal status.

### Activity: Transforming Bias

Facilitators ask each member of the group to pick one or more tips from the chapter Us and Others and to report back to the group after at least one week of testing it out. Facilitators ask, “What tip did you pick? What successes and challenges did you experience with it?”