

Five Ways to Find Peace with One's Self and the World

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For persons with disabilities like us, three principles are indispensable for peace: first, if I am going to live in peace with myself, then I must learn to live at peace with my disabilities. Second, if others are going to live in peace with me, then they too will have to learn to be at peace with my disabilities. And third, the more comfortable I am with my disabilities, the more others will be comfortable with me.

As I see it, peace with myself is harmony between where I am right now and where I aspire to be. I am not there yet. But I have peace in knowing I am still on the way. Peace with my disability is harmony between life as I want to live it and the demands that the disability makes upon my strength, energy, and endurance. I am always searching for a way of compensating for what I have lost by having goals that are attainable in spite of my losses.

Peace with others with me is harmony between what I do and say and what others expect from me. I should be open and clear about who I am and what I want. And they must not blindly expect me to follow their wishes.

Just how are we going to live in harmony with our disabilities and with others? As a result of my own experiences with disability, I have developed a five-step plan toward this harmony, and each step begins with a letter of the word "peace."

But I am going to start with the letter "A" because it is the most

important. "A" is for aim. Aim is the goal, the purpose of our actions. Aim as a verb is the lining up of our actions to reach our goal. Without worthwhile goals to aim for, life has no meaning.

If you want to help me get back on target, aimed again toward peace, there are things that I hope you will do for me and, of course, that I should be doing for you.

Be patient with my anguish and uncertainties. These feelings of mine are founded on real loss and real fears. Be positive and upbeat. Gently draw my attention away from dwelling upon what I have lost to recognizing the powers that remain. In your hopes for me, I can find hope for myself. Be enterprising and creative. Because I am unable to do the many things I used to do, help me to find a way to go on doing the few things that I can still do. Try to see and feel things from my perspective. Be warm and accepting. Be open and flexible.

If you want me to be at peace with you, don't pressure me to make your goals my goals. Once I have set my goal, even if you think it is wrong, don't reject me or try to block my path. If I fail to reach it, don't say, "I told you so." Just come over, give me a hug, and help me find another path to follow.

In my experience, the people who seem to adjust most easily to their losses are those with strong principles, because they more readily realize that what matters most in

life is not what one does but how one does it. And they seem to have an inner power that gives them energy to press on in the face of setbacks.

But what about the times we fail through our own fault – doing something stupid, unkind, lazy, or what we should not have done? Although guilt destroys peace, it also restores us to our senses. Peace is regained not by denying guilt or running away from it, but by acknowledging mistakes, learning from them, and accepting the consequences of our actions. Peace is being able to start again tomorrow regardless of what happened today.

Now the second step uses the letter "P" for powerizing prayer. We need to take time every day to withdraw into our inner selves in silence and attentiveness, making contact with the inner source of our energies.

If you are a believer, find and communicate with your God, the spirit in nature, the universal force. If not a believer, touch and draw on the powers of your inner self. Such prayer takes us into a world where disability doesn't matter. It refreshes our spirits, draws on our inner strengths, and gives us renewed purpose and energy. I highly recommend this process as an energizing step toward finding peace in our changing post-polio situations.

The third step is "E" for engage and enjoy. "E" is for the importance of spending our time engaged in meaningful activities.

"E" is for embellishing and emblazoning whatever we do with value and importance. "E" is for getting enjoyment out of whatever we do. Even if the only thing you can do is rest, then enjoy it. Put your heart into it. You have earned it.

Sometimes it is necessary to tramp through mud to get where we are going. So enjoy the squish, squish of the mud; be happier moving instead of being stuck. Be glad you are getting somewhere.

The fourth step is "C" for concern and communication. When we are concerned about others, reaching out to them with understanding and warmth, our troubles are lightened and fall more easily into perspective. Joy shared is joy doubled. Sorrow shared is sorrow lessened. Concern for others muffles pain for ourselves.

Peace also comes in fighting for a good cause such as standing up for our rights to protect what is necessary for our well being, particularly in the face of post-polio realities. But even in these situations, more attention to the concerns and needs of our adversaries can make accommodation and peace easier to achieve.

I am reminded of the little boy who once cut his finger and wound up with blood all over the place. But he went calmly into the bathroom to get a Band-Aid®. When his mother found him

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there, she said, "Why aren't you crying? Doesn't it hurt?" He said, "I didn't know you were home."

The little boy knew that crying was futile if no one heard him, so he solved the problem on his own. With his mother's help, though, that boy's finger would have been bandaged much faster, neater, and probably more effectively.

Finally, "E" is for embroidery, representing all types of leisure activities, hobbies, recreation, games, diversions. A peaceful life is a varied life. All work and no play usually adds up to pressure and anxiety and puts a strain on others.

These so-called steps are not steps to be taken one at a time or in any particular sequence; they are five important everyday ingredients for finding peace.

Peace is when the world is falling apart and you are not. Peace is when you are hurting but the pain doesn't make you quit. Peace is when you have to slow down but refuse to stop. Peace is having something to do and doing it with all you've got. Peace is having nothing to do but enjoying it. Peace is when you can enjoy whatever you do without regret for what you aren't doing. Peace is doing well what you would rather not do but have to. Peace is when you have done something wrong and have the courage to admit it and change.

Peace is when you are not afraid to say no when you would rather say yes. Peace is when you stop and commune with your inner self. Peace is doing something right when everything is going wrong. Peace is blowing off steam without burning anyone. Peace is time shared with another. Peace is clearing the tears from your eyes by wiping the tears from the eyes of another. Peace is when

you are in conflict and find a friend. Peace is shaking hands with someone you would rather sock. Peace is giving generously when you would rather be taking and receiving graciously when you would rather be giving.

In 1991 in Beijing, at an Asian and Pacific rehabilitation conference, the delegation from Hong Kong brought with them a supply of dolls as gifts. Each doll was egg-shaped without arms and legs. On the front were the words "Keep me down if you can." To show the spirit of rehabilitation, the dolls were weighted to return to the upright position if put on their sides. In this life of ours, we cannot escape being bowled over from time to time, but we can bounce back if we strive for peace with ourselves and those around us. ■

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