

Does Peace Have A Price Tag?

Does peace have a price tag? The answer depends on what we define as 'peace'. Is it simply the absence of conflict between one country or another? Or is it a collective state of inner harmony, unity and happiness? One marked characteristic of peace is certainly the absence of violence, and in reaching this conclusion we can begin to question the conventional definition of peace. If bloodshed and power are the opposite of peace, how then can "peacekeeping" missions involving hundreds of armed troops, or systematized and disciplined societies controlled by an absolute power reasonably be associated with peace? In a word, they cannot- not unless you are willing to pay a price. If peace is forced by laws and rules put in place by a government, the price will be the freedom of its people, and result in a consumerist society obsessed with finding happiness in objects and not in inner peace. To truly achieve peace, we must first change our perception of the word. Peace cannot be achieved in a regimented society that breeds fear and mistrust- rather, it takes a collective change of mindset within a civilization, shaped by compassion and a true desire to achieve a state of happiness through harmony and inner peace.

Living in a society where bureaucrats rule and capitalism is the norm, it is not difficult to understand why peace is so hard to achieve on a superficial level. The government attempts to sell us war by renaming it peace because it is good for the economy, the supposed humanitarian leader of the United States refuses to sign treaties banning landmines, and our buying habits support inhumane labour in third world countries. Individuals in western culture, as a general rule, focus primarily on wealth and material objects as a source of accomplishment. Rather than focusing our energy on achieving a sense of oneself through altruistic behaviors and actions, we enclose ourselves in a claustrophobic cycle of consumerism and self-absorbance. It is evidently unreasonable to simply stop consuming the goods and products forced down our throats by advertisements, but as a materialistic culture focused on wealth and objects, we have successfully avoided peace for hundreds of years. Maybe a shift in thought towards a less inward thinking mindset would help us change our attitude to one that will better promote peace. In this case, the price of peace caused by a complete reversal of the attitude of our society would simply be enlightenment, the cultivation of awareness and wisdom, and a sense of acceptance of those around us who have different beliefs and appearances.

However, it would be entirely untruthful to say that total peace has not been achieved in some parts of the world. Many parts of the world experienced almost a century of peace under “pax britannica” during the 19th and early 20th century, and Singapore has more recently experienced a reversal from societal turmoil to a complete absence of conflict, crime and poverty. However, under closer inspection, we begin to see that at the base of this peace lies unrest and the absence of the ability to speak one's mind. The authoritarian government of Singapore imposes strict punishment on any who ignore laws that, to many of us may seem ludicrous (such as the rule that chewing gum is not allowed), and thereby imposes a severe peace that causes its people to question and dispute the laws and even the government itself. In attempting to create a homogenous populace, they are only alienating the country's residents. Therefore, we can come to the conclusion that peace forced upon a society that is not prepared to undergo a change of mindset will only result in the people of the society questioning the strict laws imposed upon them, and will eventually result in uneasiness and skepticism. In a situation such as that of Singapore, where a temporary peace is prescribed by strict laws and the nonexistence of essential human rights such as freedom of expression and speech, we can recognize that the price of peace imposed by the government of a country is the freedom of its people.

Essentially, there is no concrete way to answer the question of whether or not peace has a price tag, because it depends on the perception of the person asking it. In principle, for a society to achieve peace it would need to have in place a number of things, including a lack of violence and a shared desire to consume oneself in bettering the lives of themselves and others through actions, and not through material objects. A regimented society built on a populace that is oppressed and ridden with distrust will, like a building built on a faulty foundation, eventually collapse. One of the most peaceful and content groups of people that come to mind are buddhists, who base their beliefs on the idea that one must be enlightened, tolerant, and engage in selfless actions—thereby liberating themselves. Perhaps we should take a leaf from the book of the buddhist religion, and in doing this pay the price of liberation and self-awareness rather than losing our right to be an individual.