

# PRIMARY POINT

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## PRAYER AND MEDITATION IN THE NUCLEAR AGE

### How can religions help to avoid a nuclear war?

(Zen Master Seung Sahn, Father Kevin Hunt, Rev. Robert Sweet, Rabbi Daniel Liben, Dr. Danette Choi, Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche)

**Zen Master Seung Sahn:** (pause, then raising his Zen stick and hitting the table) World peace is already finished.

Many people and all religions want world peace, but what is world peace? World peace only for human beings? There are all kinds of world peace: dog world peace, cat world peace, tree world peace. Human beings want world peace just for human beings, so this means their world is very limited. This world is infinite time, infinite space, but the human world is very narrow. Who made this human world?

The world means three things: time, space, cause and effect. Take the concept of one hour. Somebody is suffering, perhaps waiting at the airport for his girlfriend. The airplane is very late, so this hour seems like one year. When someone goes dancing, dah dah dah! One hour seems like only one minute! Contemporary physicists say time and space are not absolutes. You yourself make your time, space, cause and effect. The dog makes a dog world. God makes a God world. Buddha makes a Buddha world. Christians make a Christian world. There are also Jewish worlds, Indian worlds, and so forth. All things make worlds in different forms. So what kind of world peace are we talking about? I don't know.

Human beings are the worst animal. Many people have seen the movie "Never Cry Wolf." When you see it, you will understand wolves. They catch and eat only the sick animals, or animals who cannot move. They never touch the strong ones. They understand their correct situation.

Human beings kill the strong animals, eat their meat, sell their skins for money. Human beings do many things like that: fishing, hunting, nuclear weapons, bombs that kill many other human beings. They make pollution and destroy the natural cycles. Other animals do not make as many problems in this world as human beings. So the animals all say, "If all human beings would die, then world peace would be possible."

It is necessary for human beings to wake up right now. In this world, cause and effect are very clear. One plus two equals three. If you plant yellow beans, you get yellow beans. If you plant green beans, you get green beans. Good action yields happiness. Bad action yields suffering. Human beings have done many bad things in this world, so much suffering is necessary. That's the way the world is.

There are three kinds of thieves. A small thief goes to jail. If many small thieves appear, it's not very good for this country. The thief who makes nuclear weapons and steals a country, we call a middle-class thief. Many modern thieves have appeared and the situation is terrible. It will take many people's efforts to make the world okay again. Lastly, if someone steals your mind, we call him holy. Nowadays, many messiahs, many holy people are appearing, so we have problems, such as happened in Jonestown. This world is now in a complicated and difficult time with a great deal of suffering, so many holy men have appeared. When people are suffering, they want to depend on someone. Then many holy men appear as teachers and steal people's minds. If all holy people died, we would have world peace. Holy people only keep a mind that says, "That's my money, my student, don't touch!"

It's very important to understand how to support this world, human beings and all beings. We must put aside our individual opinions.

What Buddhism says about this is very interesting. Zen Master Un Mon said, "If you meet Buddha, you must kill the Buddha. If you meet an eminent teacher, you must kill the eminent teacher." If you cling to Buddha, or to an eminent teacher, you will have a problem.

World peace means that all holy people must put aside their opinions. Don't hold Christian mind, don't hold anything. If all holy people disappeared, then we would have world peace. This means don't hold or be attached to your religion. That's very important.

I have sent two letters to the Pope. In the first one I asked him to invite the leadership of the world's major religions to Rome or New York, but not to talk: to take off their religious uniforms and take a hot tub together, eat dinner together, and then go their separate ways. World peace would begin right there. If you take a hot tub together, you don't see a Catholic priest. a



Zen Master Seung Sahn and Episcopal Bishop George Hunt.

Buddhist monk, or a Jewish rabbi, just original human nature. Then eat together. This eating together is very important. It is already harmony and world peace. Then religious people, politicians, businessmen, teachers would look at this event and say, "Ah—wonderful!" Not saying anything, only being together, that's world peace.

How many people really want world peace? How many people are there in the world, perhaps five billion? Some Americans don't want to die, so they don't like nuclear weapons. They want world peace. But this is not correct world peace. A world peace based on such preferences is okay, but how many people would this kind of world peace affect?—only the other countries with good situations or ones that aren't too difficult, countries like America, Italy, Germany, Japan, parts of Korea.

What about the people in India, Cambodia, Africa? Maybe 90% of the people in this world don't care about world peace. They don't worry if the world explodes tomorrow because today they are very hungry. Give them food and their world seems wonderful. That's world peace.

We are hungry, very hungry in both body and mind. People with hungry minds make nuclear weapons. Also, they make religious preferences. "My religion is correct, yours is not." Today, all religious people are

### An Ecumenical Conference on Peace

This issue of PRIMARY POINT is devoted to the proceedings of the ecumenical conference on world peace held April 7 and 8, 1984 at the Providence Zen Center and co-hosted by the Kwan Um Zen School. Over 250 visitors attended the two days of talks, panel discussions and workshops given by 22 religious leaders from different traditions. This conference was the second ecumenical effort initiated by Zen Master Seung Sahn since 1982. Providence Zen Center and the School would like to thank everyone who attended and helped.

mind-hungry. For example, in Iran now there is a holy war. This is the worst kind of religion. It's very important that religious leadership come together, and that we have many conferences.

If the people with hungry minds get "enough mind," then the people with body hunger will not be a problem. The "enough-mind" people will know what to do. All these problems will disappear and world peace will be possible. So as religious people, we must come together and make the correct energy.

Don't cling to your ideas, your condition, your situation. Come together and find primary point. When I hit (hits the table with his Zen stick), it makes a sound. At that instant nobody has an opinion. There is only the sound. That is world peace, already finished. Return to primary point (hits the table) and just hear, see, smell, taste. When you're doing something, just do it! There's no subject or object. Inside is outside, outside is inside, already

and know that I am God." Buddhists say, "Appearing, disappearing, that is stillness." But if you say stillness, it's not stillness. Only... (Hits the table).

If you keep this mind for a long time, you get absolute energy and become one. Then it's possible for all energy, good or bad, to become one. If you digest good and bad energy completely, then world peace is possible. So I hope we will all put down our opinions, situations, and find our true self. Thank you.

**Father Kevin Hunt:** I think one of the most horrible realities of our human existence is the fact that every religion has at one time or another perverted the insight, the grace, the words of its founder. In fact, more suffering has been caused in this world in the name of religion than for any other reason. It's amazing why religious people have done these things. It's usually for some very picayune and insignificant reason.

One of the great differences between the Western Christians and the Eastern Christians is that when we bless ourselves, we go from the head to the breast, to the left side, to the right side. When the Eastern Christians bless themselves, they go from the head to the breast, to the right side, to the left side. And yet wars have been fought over such a thing!

We have a tendency because we are human, to narrow in on what we can handle—and God we cannot handle. God, or the Absolute, is complete freedom and He or It frightens us. When Yaweh spoke to the Jewish people at the foot of Mount Sinai, they said to Moses, "Don't let him talk to us. You go up and do it." We allow our fright to dominate our lives. What can religions do?

I don't think there are any political answers to the nuclear war issue, or the peace issue. I think the issues of war and peace are found in each one of us, as well as the willingness to search for and discover the truth. Jesus said, "The truth will set you free." His freedom is a complete and absolute freedom, as is the Buddha's.

So the first step, for those of us who are professional religious, who have given ourselves to a religious tradition, is to witness from the heart. I'm not saying everyone has to say all religious traditions are hogwash. I'm a very strong believing Catholic. Yet there is a level on which I have to reach out and embrace the Rabbi and the Rinpoche and Soen Sa Nim. If I don't embrace them,

*"I have to reach out and embrace the Rabbi and the Rinpoche and Soen Sa Nim. If I don't embrace them, how can I expect America to embrace Russia?"*

*Father Kevin Hunt*

get absolute energy. Then you can control opposites energy, which even if it is good in itself cannot control bad energy. Good and bad have no self nature. Our human nature makes good and bad. If we call something good, it is good. If we call it bad, it is bad.

Everyone eats food and it goes down into the stomach. Your stomach is your nuclear power center. It's where you make energy. If your thinking is good, then good energy appears. If your thinking is bad, then bad energy appears. If you have no thinking, correct energy appears. This no-thinking is a silent practice. Christians say, "Be still

how can I expect America to embrace Russia?

It starts right here in the heart. We have to be willing to witness and be strong in our tradition, but to have that strength and that witness come from the heart. Then we can go out and meet somebody else whose witness and strength also comes from their heart. Sharing heart to heart, the peace that is within us, in the security of belief in our faith and practice, we start peace.

If we really work for peace in this way, in

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# Avoid nuclear war

Continued from page 1

ourselves and with our brother, then war or no war, no one can destroy us. Someone might do it physically, but no one can really destroy us, and we will win peace.

**Rev. Robert Sweet:** It's a pleasure to be here and to bring the greetings of our spiritual leader in New England Methodism, Bishop George W. Bayshore, to this conference.

The first and most important thing that the church or any religion can do to help avoid a nuclear war is not to lose sight of the vision of Shalom and the kingdom of God. Religious leaders are the ones who keep that vision alive, through our preaching, teaching, and the providing of resources. We have the task to equip the people who come to us to deal with what it means to live in a nuclear age.

If we should find ourselves with some kind of prayer, or at least time for meditation, in the public schools, we might take advantage of that "horrendous" opportunity to provide all the kids with a prayer for peace. That might be a very concrete way to keep before them the vision of peace.

In a very concrete fashion one of the things that many of the churches are involved in, and our denomination in particular, is parenting for peace and justice in the world. That's the kindest thing we can try to do with our children when they are growing up.

I can remember back to my first parish. We had a delightful couple who had teenage children that seemed to drive them up the walls. The kids grew up, and one went off to live in the wilderness and become actively involved in Outward Bound, helping people have a deep appreciation for nature, conservation, and human potential. Another went to Boston and with her husband bought a large apartment house in the ghetto. They decided to live in the middle of that apartment house and make the rest of the apartments available to people in the ghetto who helped to work on the apartment and make it presentable and livable.

I can remember the parents saying to us: "I don't know what she's doing in Boston. I worry about her all the time." Then she and her husband looked at each other, and she said, "But I guess our kids are living out some of the values that we tried to teach them."

We have not lost the opportunity as long as there is another generation coming along. In parenting and helping our children learn how to set priorities and develop lifestyles, by the ways we manage conflict within our family life, by the things we have around the house that represent other cultures, by the magazines and books that we put in front of our children, by the ways we teach them what it is to live in a world that has limits: insofar as we can pass these values on to our children, and to other children and adults we have contact with through the church, we are able to work for world peace.

Our church has long been supportive of young men who have been conscientious objectors to war. We have not always done

the best job of letting them know ahead of time that we'd be there to defend them and support them, if that was the choice they made, but we've done a better job of that in recent times.

It seems to me the Church can provide opportunities for international and intercultural exchanges so that we can at least stimulate parishioners, so we can have exchange students living in our homes to help us appreciate other cultures. We can become part of work teams that go to other parts of the world and discover how other people live, the conditions under which they live, and what our affluence means to them. These are some of the very concrete things we can do within the religious traditions.

**Rabbi Daniel Liben:** I think what each of us has to do is to look back into our own religious tradition for metaphors that fit the reality we're living today. One that comes to mind, for anyone coming from the Biblical traditions, is the story of the Flood. It's the only incidence in the Bible where the entire world is almost completely destroyed.

What's interesting to me about that episode in the Bible is that it's not termed war. The word "war" is not used in that story, because utter total destruction is beyond war. War is talked about in other parts of the Bible. The Book of Deuteronomy in Chapter 20 talks about the rules of war. The Jewish tradition assumes there can be justifiable wars, but within certain contexts.



Father Kevin Hunt addressing the conference.

Those who have come from the tradition of the Ten Commandments know the commandment "Thou shalt not murder." The translation of the Hebrew does not mean "Thou shalt not kill," it means "Thou shalt not murder." That's the key to understanding the Jewish concept of justifiable and unjustifiable war.

Our tradition teaches that although there are times when wars must be fought, murder is never justifiable, even in the context of a justifiable war. Not only is extinction of innocent human life never justifiable, but that same chapter in Deuteronomy says that you cannot chop down a tree in order to build a defense. You cannot divert a river that feeds trees in order to lay siege to a city, because although you are fighting a war against man, you have no fight against the world in which you live.

I think it's the job of rabbis today to make our people aware that to be against nuclear arms is a commandment, because the result of nuclear arms is not war in any justifiable sense, but something beyond war, something that is nothing short of murder. Of course there was a time when wars were kept separate from populations, but that's no longer true today.

In World War II the Jewish people had a special glimpse of what might be, God forbid, in the event of a nuclear holocaust. Elie Wiesel, one of the foremost speakers and witnesses of the Holocaust who survived Auschwitz, takes that experience as proof for himself that as a Jew, he and all Jews must stand up and fight against nuclear armament.

As a Jew, I feel that not to speak out against nuclear arms is indeed breaking a commandment. To allow the world to continue to arm is only to see the eventual realization of the ultimate murder.

**Dr. Danette Choi:** I am able to sit here and talk about nuclear war, so I think I must not have much war karma. This is true for all of you. I came from Korea and I've traveled a lot in the Orient, where people do not have the chance to sit down

and worry and talk about nuclear war. Their eyes see only food. A lot of people are hungry out there. All of you are very lucky to be able to sit down and discuss nuclear war.

Before I start my speech, I want you to give me an honest answer. How many of you really know what you want to do? How many of you have correct direction? Please raise your hand.

One, two, three, four. The people who raised their hands, they are 50% enlightened. If everyone in this room had raised their hands, everyone would be 50%

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Rev. Dr. Robert Sweet

enlightened. Then we would not have to discuss nuclear war.

Nowadays people don't even know what they want. They do something just because somebody else is doing it. We have to know ourselves, free ourselves, so that we can give love and compassion. These are great things, but it's even more important not to create bad karma or any kind of war.

A Confucian saying is, "We have to watch three tips. First, the tip of the sword. Second, the tip of the tongue. Third, the tip of the pen."

so difficult to see how short it is? For example, three people are traveling a road and they sit and share a bench. They've only been resting for five minutes when they start fighting and shoving each other. It's the same with countries, which are made up of groups of individuals.

Another example is going to a shopping center. You're only there for a few minutes, you meet people, you buy what you want, and you leave.

First of all, you must realize that each person wants to be happy. In general we must not destroy other people's happiness,

but keep your own. In the beginning when you talk to people about world peace and say they should practice religion, they will not listen. So first talk about impermanence: how impermanent this life is, that we are here for a short time, that we are all seeking happiness. Then slowly, slowly each person will come to understand, through the idea of happiness.

In the short term, we think of happiness. In the long term, we think of enlightenment. First we start out with good intentions. Today we have all gathered here with good intentions, which have some power and blessing. I would like to dedicate this power and blessing that we have gained from all of our minds and good intentions coming here today, to all beings.

Why is there a need to dedicate? For example, on the altar there are many precious jewels, but they are just lying there and we really don't use them. Nobody really uses them. The idea of dedication is first, to have generosity. In order for the hand to give, the mind must first have that intention. It is very important to have that generous mind and the dedication. After that, the hand is able to give.

**Q.** Father Hunt, the Catholic Church has a lot of power, politically and monetarily throughout the world. There's a lot of people, including myself, who don't understand spirituality and its powers. Can the Catholic Church reach out to those politicians who think and feel as I do? General Dynamics has one billion dollars invested in a nuclear weapon and we can take that money away. To me the problem is spiritual. But it's physical in that there are a lot more people saying the problem lies in the physical creation of weapons, the factories, the money. Can the Catholic Church reach out to that?

**Father Hunt:** Primarily you're asking a religion to operate on the same level as the politicians and the power brokers, which is a continual temptation for religion. God knows the Catholic Church has repeatedly sinned on that level. But you're destroying exactly what you want to achieve if you try to operate on that level.

*Green wants red.  
Hot wants cold.  
Quiet wants action.  
Action wants peace.*

*World, world, never satisfied world.  
So, many megaton missiles  
to explode the aching ignorance.*

*In a bird's beak is the hydrogen bomb.  
In the nose of a gun,  
spring rain.*

Jane McLaughlin

Jesus did not say, "When someone comes and strikes you on the cheek, say to everybody that his hand should be tied." He said, "Turn the other cheek." If someone takes your shirt, give him your coat. If someone forces you to go one mile, you go two. They were hard sayings then and they are hard now.

The temptation is always there. We say we want peace, not violence, but [we say], "Damn it all, I'll kick your teeth in." If we don't say it, we think it. If we don't have the power to do it, we maneuver until we can get the power.

For the Pope or any other religious leader to try to do that is wrong, it's a perversion. Much better that the Pope takes off his robe and gives it to the poor, leaves the Vatican and lives among the people. Much better that you and I begin the peace, that we turn the other cheek. □

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