WAGING PEACE SERIES

As far as is known, the term “Waging Peace” originated with Warren Wells, late husband of Ethel Wells of Santa Barbara, in a letter to President Eisenhower. It was a long-standing practice of Mr. Wells to keep in close touch with key national figures and give them his views on peace issues as well as other vital matters. This series is dedicated both as a memorial to him and in gratitude to Mrs. Wells for her continued efforts in this cause.

Just as peace is more than the absence of war, waging peace is more than supporting arms reductions. In addition, it embraces positive steps toward genuine harmony. In this series the Foundation will distribute short booklets stressing ideas for attaining peace. Some publications will be scholarly, others more popular in style—most will combine elements of both. Concepts expressed will include views of many authorities, and will not necessarily be those of the Foundation.

Suggestions for topics and your reactions to this issue are welcome. Quantity lots are available at minimal charge from the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation.

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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PEACE
PSYCHOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE CAUSES, COSTS, AND CURES OF CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL CRISIS

by

Roger Walsh, M.D., Ph. D.

WAGING PEACE SERIES

Nuclear Age Peace Foundation

Booklet 8
INTRODUCTION

What can I do? This may be the most important question of our time.

The world—life itself—is threatened by nuclear holocaust, by nuclear “war” which could begin accidentally or by design. Today worldwide military expenditures have risen to over $800 billion annually in a world in which 40,000 children die daily of starvation and preventable diseases.

These are well known facts. Yet, for most people they remain in the blur of background information rather than rising to a point of central focus. To understand why this is so it is important to gain the insights of psychology. The role of beliefs, perceptions, motivations and inhibitions in human behavior deserve thoughtful study. We need to learn what inner processes of the mind allow our dangerous world situation to be interpreted as acceptable, and which inner processes lead to asking the question, “What can I do?”

Asking the question is the first step toward accepting personal responsibility for changing the world and assuring the future. It is a step of enormous affirmation of life. The question is at once oriented toward action and grounded in spirituality. The question demonstrates reverence for the sacred gift of life and a desire to do one’s part to preserve and enhance this sacred gift.

In this issue of Waging Peace Dr. Roger Walsh, a psychiatrist and award winning author, explores the question of “What can I do?” in the context of delineating a psychology of peace. His insights will hopefully help each of us to find more effective personal responses to this critical inquiry. The Foundation would welcome hearing of any new ideas set in motion by this issue of Waging Peace.

David Krieger
President
Nuclear Age Peace Foundation
THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PEACE:
PSYCHOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE CAUSES,
COSTS, AND CURES OF CONTEMPORARY
GLOBAL CRISES

"Only on the basis of an understanding of our behavior can we hope to control it in such a way as to ensure the survival of the human race."

—Senator J. William Fulbright

It is no secret that we have reached a critical time in human history, a time which may decide the fate of both our species and our planet. On the one hand we possess knowledge and capacities undreamed of only decades ago. On the other, millions starve, our ecosystem is threatened, natural resources are being plundered, and nuclear war raises the possibility of global suicide.

What is unique is that for the first time in history all the major threats to human survival are human-caused. All of them stem from human behavior and hence can be traced in large part to psychological origins. Our global "problems," in other words, actually represent "symptoms," symptoms of our individual and collective psychological condition.

At one level this may seem quite obvious, but it is tragic how little we appreciate or act on the basis of this understanding. Almost all discussion and action tend to be military, political, or economic. What this means is that we may be treating only the symptoms and not the underlying psychological causes within us and between us. Therefore, if we are to be truly effective and ensure human survival, we may need, not only to feed the starving and reduce nuclear stockpiles, but also to correct the psychological factors which led us to create them in the first place.
The question which therefore arises (and it may be one of the most important questions of our time) is this: how can we create and apply a psychology of human survival? How can we create a psychology which will help us understand the world's problems and our role in creating them, which will mobilize and empower us to correct them, and even to learn and mature both individually and collectively as we do so? (1)

We can begin by drawing open-mindedly from the best insights of all schools of psychology from both the East and the West. Each school offers a particular view of human nature, behavior, and pathology, and thereby of our current global problems.

Causes of Global Crises

For example, cognitive psychologies emphasize the importance of beliefs. Particularly important are those beliefs which limit our sense of power and effectiveness. "There's nothing I can do" and "I can't..." are the classic beliefs of self-imposed impotence. This impotence can then be rationalized with that all-time favorite, "It's not my responsibility." People holding these beliefs tend to see themselves as helpless pawns, unable to influence the course of their lives or societies. The net result is a wonderful validation of that wisdom of the great American psychologist Henry Ford, who said that "those who believe they can do something and those who believe they can't are both right."

Behavior modifiers would point to the powerful role of reinforcers in creating and correcting our current crises. Clearly we reinforce our political and business leaders for decisions which favor immediate gratification for us, e.g., copious oil and gasoline supplies, even at the risk of long-term shortages and disasters. Behavior modifiers would also point to the powerful role of our media in reinforcing consumptive, aggressive lifestyles and largely ignoring global issues.

Psychoanalysts emphasize the devastating role of fear and defenses. Clearly, many of our current difficulties are expressions of fear: fear of enemies, fear of losing raw materials or economic supplies, fear of being seen as less powerful than other people or countries. Unfortunately, one of our responses to these fears has been to build the awesome weapons which now threaten our extinction. These weapons create more fear and so a vicious and potentially lethal cycle is set up.

To mask these fears we create a variety of psychological mechanisms with which to blind and distort our awareness. These defenses present us with an illusory picture of the world and ourselves as we would like them to be rather than as they are. We therefore deny and repress our awareness of the extent of suffering in the world and the urgency of its problems, as well as our role in creating them.

Indeed, we go further by projecting onto others those motives and behaviors that we are unwilling to recognize in ourselves. We thereby maintain a convenient blame-free image of ourselves, a wholly negative image of "the enemy," and establish the conditions for a potentially lethal paranoia. Conflicts, competitions, and even wars are now entirely their fault, whether they be Russians or Americans, socialists or capitalists, blacks or whites. The current Soviet-American impasse is in part a powerful example of this. It is also a powerful example of the old idea that defenses create what they are designed to defend against.

The ancient psychologies of the East also offer insights into our dilemmas. Classic Buddhist psychology, for example, would trace our problems to three root causes of greed, hatred, and delusion. Clearly much of our resource depletion and international competition can be traced to greed and hatred. "The world has enough for everyone's need," said Gandhi, "but not enough for everyone's greed." The idea of delusion suggests that our fears, defenses, greed, and hatred so color our awareness that we perceive only
distorted images of the world and ourselves, yet assume these images to be correct. We live, in other words, in a culture-wide illusion, which the East calls "maya."

Eastern psychologies also describe the powerful and dangerous, yet usually unrecognized, effects of excessively dualistic ways of thinking and seeing. We tend to see the world in terms of opposites: good and bad, us and them, in groups and out groups. Of course we need dualism; we need to be able to recognize opposites. The problem is that we tend to become fixated on this particular way of seeing and only see opposites, thereby ignoring the commonality of unity that underlie them. Then we see not one planet but only competing nations, not humankind but only communists and capitalists, or men and women, or blacks and whites, not us but me and them, not people with common human characteristics but only goodies and baddies. This fixation on dualistic seeing is the essence of conflict and a recipe for war.

It is obvious, therefore, that a psychology of human survival can clearly identify many of the psychological mechanisms creating our current crises. In doing so it points to errors in our ways of thinking and perceiving that must be corrected if we are to ensure our survival.

Effects of Global Crises

In addition to identifying their causes, psychology can also point to some of the effects that contemporary crises exert on us. (1) These effects can be both positive and negative. As the old saying goes, life will either grind you down or polish you up, and which it does is our responsibility. Tragically, it may be that we will choose to respond with yet more of the fear, defensiveness, and aggression that created our dilemma because the same psychological defenses, distortions, and inauthenticities that contribute to global crises may also result from them. For as stresses mount so also does the temptation to resort to defensiveness and deceit. Yet defenses are always purchased at the cost of awareness, authenticity, and effectiveness. When we deny reality we also deny our full potential and humanity. When we distort our image of the world we distort our image of ourselves. When we fear to look out at the world we fear to look in to ourselves. Therefore we remain unaware of the power and potential that lie within us and are us; the power and potential that are the major resources we have to offer the world. In short, the costs of being unwilling to know the world truly are not knowing and underestimating ourselves.

Here then are the makings of another vicious cycle. For it is our sense of inadequacy and vulnerability that causes us to erect psychological defense mechanisms and behave unskillfully in the first place. Yet these defenses help create the global problems that in turn tempt us to greater defensiveness. As at the individual level, so also at the global: defenses create what they were designed to defend against.

In summary, as long as we are unwilling to look honestly at the world and ourselves then our responses to the world's problems may increase those very actions and defenses that created the problem in the first place.

On the other hand, these threats may also afford us great opportunities. Great threats can call forth great responses. Might our current global threats do likewise? Perhaps today's unprecedented threats may call us to more thoughtful living and greater contribution. If we choose to let them, they might strip away our defenses and help us to confront both the condition of the world and our role in creating it. They might call us to examine our lives and values with new urgency and depth, and to open ourselves fully, perhaps for the first time, to the fundamental questions of our existence.

This opening, this willingness to question, to see the world and ourselves as we really are, may be vital to both our survival and to our psychological well-being. For to open ourselves fully to these fundamental issues of life is not only one of the hallmarks of psychological health, but also one of its causes. When we are willing to recognize the enormity of
preventable suffering in the world, of the rampant inhumanity, greed, hatred, and defensiveness, and of the precarious existence of ourselves, our families, and our fellow humans, then we are moved to question and reflect. Then we are open to explore at new and deeper levels the meaning, purpose, and appropriateness of our lifestyles, values, and personal and national goals. As has been pointed out by religious sages for centuries and more recently by psychologists, to the extent we confront these issues honestly and fully, to that extent will we mature and contribute. For such confrontations are likely to evoke the recognition of the fragility and preciousness of life, of our shared humanity, of the many ways in which we have been unconscious, unthinking, and insensitive, and of how, in the depths of our hearts, we really want to live with awareness and ethicality, compassion and contribution.

Such responses tend to flow automatically from a willingness to see things as they truly are. For to see the extent of needless suffering in the world is also to feel compassion; to see the cost of our defensiveness is to desire to let it go; to see what our lifestyles really do to the planet is to want to live with greater sensitivity. Awareness per se—by and of itself—can be curative. To see things and ourselves as we really are! This is a crucial means for psychological growth and well-being of individuals and for the well-being and survival of our planet. Perhaps then our crises may call forth from us, if we so choose, the very responses necessary to correct them and to accelerate our individual and collective maturation at the same time. For it may be that we will either live together as mature adults or die together as squabbling children.

The Call To Service

Considerable research indicates that psychologically healthy people tend to be particularly concerned for the welfare of others. For, as Albert Schweitzer said, "The only ones among you who will be truly happy are those who have sought and found how to serve." It follows that if we do manage our current dilemma with maturing responses, then these responses may include greater compassion and contribution.

Obviously we need contributions of all kinds: letter writing, education, public speaking, media presentations, publishing, political lobbying, donations, and more. But inasmuch as the fundamental problem is psychological, then we especially need people who not only do these things, but who also do them with an understanding of the underlying psychological issues. We need, in other words, people who are both socially effective and psychologically mature.

Therefore, we need people who commit themselves to two types of service. The first is to the symptomatic relief of suffering in the world. The second is to psychological awareness, both their own and that of others, to relieve the mental causes of this suffering and to make themselves more effective. For as has been pointed out time and time again, "Our have to start with changing ourselves." The most far reaching social and global transformations must all start in the same place: in us. For if we are serious about relieving the suffering of mankind, we must cultivate the only source of help we have—ourselves.

If we need this kind of two-pronged approach in the world and in ourselves then it would make sense to combine them. It would make sense to approach our work in such a way that we learn and grow from it. This approach has been used in many forms of service. In the West it is known as service-learning; in the East as karma yoga. This is the discipline of service and work in the world, in which that service and work are viewed as opportunities for learning and awakening. The aim is impeccable service that simultaneously relieves suffering and also awakens self and others. In doing so, it aims at inclusive treatment of both symptom and cause, self and other, psyche and world. An excellent and practical discussion of this type of service is available in the book How Can I Help? (2)
People using this approach go into themselves in order to go more effectively out into the world and go out into the world to go deeper into themselves. The deeper this exploration and the greater their psychological understanding, the more they are able to appreciate that many of the psychological factors causing our crises stem from widely accepted cultural beliefs, values, and behaviors. Therefore in order to be most effective, these people work toward extracting themselves from limiting and distorting cultural biases. This is the process of "detribalization," by which a person matures from an ethnocentric to a global world view: from "my country right or wrong" to "our planet"; and from identification with one particular group or nation to identification with humankind.

Duane Elgin, in his excellent book *Voluntary Simplicity*, has summarized the situation as follows:

"In conclusion, hard material necessity and human evolutionary possibility now seem to converge to create a situation where, in the long run, we will be obliged to do no less than realize our greatest possibilities. We are engaged in a race between self-discovery and self-destruction. The forces that may converge to destroy us are the same forces that may foster societal and self-discovery."

**What Can I Do? How Can I Help?**

What all this leads to is simply the question "What can I do?" or "How can I help?"

But there is a still more important question we can ask. This is not only "What can I do?" but also, "What is the most strategic thing I can do?" Therefore, our first task is to look for ways in which our contributions can have optimal impact; the ways in which the talents and opportunities that are uniquely ours can be put to best use.

This is no small task. To find our optimal contribution (which includes both what we do and how we do it) requires a sensitive awareness of ourselves and our world. Yet most people assume that they should easily and immediately be able to know what they should do. This is not so. It may take years of careful thought, reflection, exploration and education before we find the particular contribution which feels right for us. Gandhi, for example, sometimes withdrew for months to think and pray before choosing his strategy. We, also, may require time.

The first step, then, is simply to reflect deeply and carefully on our life situation. We need to examine our desires and find the answer to, "What would I really like to do?" Here it is important to set aside the tyrannical self orders about what we should do, the limiting beliefs about what we cannot do, and first simply find out what we would like to do. It is important to recognize that doing things out of guilt or "shoulds" is counterproductive. Such motivation spawns anger, tension, and righteousness which then infects other people. This is hardly helpful since emotions such as these are part of the problem and our task is to reduce them. That is why it is so important to learn a little-known secret about contribution and service: it's okay to have a good time while you're doing them. All too often we approach service with grim-faced determination and a hidden assumption that we are not really serious about it if we are not suffering.

From this education and reflection you will gradually become aware of the responses that feel right for you. These might usefully include any traditional approach such as organizing groups, lobbying and writing to those in power, educating others, donating or raising money, writing or public speaking, and more.

But the challenge for all of us is also to create new approaches that fit our particular talents and situations; approaches that reach new people and that have an impact in novel ways. What would Gandhi do if he lived at this time in
your unique situation? How would he go about looking for
the most strategic contribution he could make, and what
would it be? Here is a challenge for creativity and a game
worth playing.

There is another whole aspect to this game of strategic
contribution, and that is its psychological side. We have been
discussing what we can do, but equally important is how we
do it. When we remember how crucial are the psychological
causes of our difficulties then it becomes obvious that
whatever we do should take this into consideration. The
question now becomes this: “How do I approach whatever I
do in a way that reduces the psychological causes of global
problems and enhances psychological awareness and
maturation in people, including myself?” In other words,
“How do I practice and apply the psychological principles
discussed in this booklet?”

The first step is a shift in attitude, a change in the way we
approach our work, our world, and ourselves. It involves
bringing to everything we do a desire to learn and grow.
Every experience is viewed as a potential source of learning
about the world, other people, and ourselves. We explore
both the world outside us and the world within us, learning
from our subjective experience, our hopes, fears, thoughts,
and emotions, as much as from events outside us. To each
thing we experience or do we bring as much careful
attention and awareness as we can.

Once we have begun to adopt this attitude, then other
people and all our experiences become a kind of feedback. If
something we do works well, we explore it to learn why. If
we make a mistake (which we will, repeatedly: it’s part of
being human), we explore it also. If we hold this perspective
then there is no need for regrets and recriminations; these
are sorry substitutes for learning. Our mistakes can
ultimately prove as valuable as our triumphs, sometimes
even more so.

As we slowly learn to bring greater sensitivity and
awareness to all that we do, we become aware of the
mistaken beliefs, perceptions, and actions that limit us and
our ability to contribute. As we recognize them, then we
learn from and relinquish them. If we find faulty limiting
beliefs such as “I can’t do that,” or “I could never...” we
recognize them as mistaken beliefs, and belittling ones at
that, and go right ahead to do what we formerly thought was
beyond us. If we notice ourselves condemning and attacking
people, including ourselves, we learn from that, finding the
causes of our anger, and noticing its costs.

If we become fearful and defensive ourselves, which being
human we will, we have an opportunity to learn how these
emotions affect our minds. We will also get a chance to
understand the addiction and insecurities from which they
spring. From this understanding can come empathy and
compassion for those who are dominated by fear and
defensiveness and who attack and destroy because of them.
When we are tempted to be dishonest and unethical we can
become aware of the costs of guilt and paranoia in ourselves
and of the pain brought to others. However, it is important
that this awareness is cultivated, not to condemn and punish
ourselves, but to learn and grow.

As we cultivate awareness and make our contributions,
we will soon see that we are addicted to having certain things
happen. Perhaps we want praise and recognition or crave
anonymity, perhaps we must have our ideas accepted, or
perhaps we must always lead or always follow.

Almost all of us will find some addiction to having our
contributions produce the results we want. This certainly
seems a reasonable enough goal, which it is, but when we
become addicted to it the result is sure to be trouble. For now
we have said, “I must get my way,” and we have set ourselves
up to experience frustration and disappointment as well as
anger at those who block us. Remember that many of the
people creating our global crises are doing so because they
are addicted to their particular solutions, whether those
solutions be communism, capitalism, more resource usage, or nuclear weapons. That is why it is so important to remember that even our best intentions can be mistaken. It is also why it is crucial that we reduce our addictions, even those addictions to the successful outcomes of our contributions.

Once we have reached this stage we can use our suffering as feedback that we are addicted to things being a particular way. For psychological pain is like physical pain, a signal that something is wrong. If we respond only by trying to change the world then we maintain our addictions and suffer again the next time they are not gratified. But if we work to change the world and reduce our addictions then we are healing both psyche and world, self and other.

With increasing awareness and understanding we may begin to notice ways in which our lifestyles conflict with what we truly want and with what would be ecologically appropriate. These discrepancies can take many forms. For example, perhaps we are buying, consuming, and discarding without regard for ecological impact. Perhaps we are using heat instead of insulation, a car even though good public transportation is available, or nonreusable goods rather than reusable ones. Perhaps we are working for or investing in an industry that is harming the environment, creating dangerous products, or taking unfair advantage of underdeveloped countries. Perhaps we are buying from companies that sponsor particularly violent television programming, or are not expressing our appreciation to sponsors and stations that show educational programs about global problems. Perhaps we could donate more of our time or money to the causes that inspire us. Perhaps as the excellent book Voluntary Simplicity (3) points out, we could have lives of greater peace and deeper satisfaction by consuming less. The list is endless since the stuff of social transformation is identical with the stuff from which our daily lives are made. The challenge for each of us is to examine our lives and find how we can live them with greater ecological and global sensitivity.

There is one further contribution we can make and that is to allow regular time for ourselves and our own learning. Given the urgency of our global situation, such a suggestion may seem paradoxical. Yet as we become sensitive to the world and ourselves, the costs of our psychological foibles and the benefits of cultivating learning, awareness, and growth become increasingly obvious. As they do so we may feel a growing need to set aside time devoted specifically to our own healing, learning, and maturing. Such time is not selfish; it is vital both for our own well-being and for our ability to contribute.

Sadly enough, this fact is rarely appreciated even though many wise people have echoed it for many years. "Finding the center of strength within ourselves is in the long run the best contribution we can make to our fellow men," say psychologists, thereby echoing the words of the Buddha, who argued that "to straighten the crooked, you must first do a harder thing—straighten yourself." For this reason the economist Schumacher (4) remarked that:

"It is a grave error to accuse a man who pursues self-knowledge of ‘turning his back on society.’ The opposite would be more nearly true: that a man who fails to pursue self-knowledge is and remains a danger to society, for he will tend to misunderstand everything that other people say or do, and remain blissfully unaware of the significance of many of the things he does himself."

So crucial is this phase of inner exploration and work that it has been found in the lives of most of the truly great contributors to mankind. Such people tend to withdraw periodically for days, weeks, or longer from the hustle and bustle of daily life in order to follow the perennial advice to "know yourself." In knowing themselves they seem also to better know how to help others.

The question that naturally arises then is what environment and situation would best help us to know ourselves. What
environment and people will allow us to dip most deeply into our psychological resources and tap the strength and healing powers that lie there. Where is the best place for us to withdraw?

This is an individual question that each of us must ask and answer for ourselves. For some, the answer might be that we need periods of solitude and quiet; for others, it might be that we could benefit from spending more quality time with family or friends. Some of us may find greatest insight and inspiration in nature, others may find periods of time spent in quiet reflection, contemplation, prayer, or meditation to be particularly helpful. At times, we may benefit from groups or workshops with people working on similar psychological and/or global issues. But whatever we feel will be most helpful to our learning and well-being, it is important that we give ourselves the time to do it. When we have done this and feel ready, we can go out into the world again.

As the cycle of withdrawal and return continues, the distinction between what benefits us and what benefits others becomes more and more transparent. Each contribution becomes a learning opportunity, each learning becomes an opportunity for greater contribution. As the boundary between what benefits us and what benefits others becomes thinner, then egocentric desires, fears, and comparisons diminish. Gradually we look past the veils of separation and otherness and begin to recognize our shared humanity. And as we do, the words of an ancient Indian proverb begin to make sense:

When I do not know who I am I serve you.
When I know who I am I am you.

This, then, is one form of service and contribution. It is a form recommended across centuries by both the great growth disciplines and the great religions and can be viewed either psychologically or religiously as one chooses. "Seek, above all, for a game worth playing," is the advice of certain psychologists. "Having found the game, play it with intensity—play as if your life and sanity depended on it. (They do depend on it.)" Conscious, choiceful contribution and learning is a game worth playing, and the fate of the earth may depend on the number of people who elect to play it. For we are called to a task greater than that demanded of any generation in human history: to preserve our planet and our species. In accepting this challenge we are also called to understand, develop, and redirect the awesome power of our minds. Never in the course of human history has the need been greater. There may, therefore, be no more urgent or rewarding task facing each and every one of us than to apply ourselves and our psychological understanding to human survival.*

*A fuller discussion of these issues can be found in Staying Alive: The Psychology of Human Survival.
REFERENCES


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Roger Walsh, M.D., Ph.D. is on the faculty of the Psychiatry Department of the University of California Medical School and the School of Social Sciences at Irvine and is a consultant at the Metropolitan State Hospital. His writings have received over a dozen national and international awards, and his book *Staying Alive* has been nominated for New Options Political Book of the Year Award.