



THE PEACEMAKER'S PATH

MULTIFAITH
REFLECTIONS
to DEEPEN YOUR
SPIRITUALITY

JERRY
ZEHR

Praise for *The Peacemaker's Path*

“In Pastor Zehr’s gorgeous engagement with the fundamental elements of the world’s faith traditions we learn how close we all are in our efforts to honor and love God and each other. We owe a debt to Pastor Zehr for providing this road map to spiritual intimacy among the varied religions of our world.”

—Rabbi Steve Gutow, Visiting Scholar at NYU’s Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service and co-director of the Religious Leadership and Civic Engagement Project

“I thank God for the way Jerry Zehr has brought together spiritually inspiring quotations from ten different religious traditions along with many superb illustrations of spiritual truths. If you want to grow deeper spiritually and wider in compassion for all people, I encourage you to ponder the meditations in this book.”

—Dr. Kent Millard, president of United Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio

“In this illuminating and spiritually rich book, we are inspired to examine how our shared and common values can transcend differences, divides, and stereotyped thresholds; and together contribute to our collective peace and goodwill as enlightened beings and blessed peacemakers.”

—Kanwal Prakash “KP” Singh, artist, author, interfaith leader, public speaker

“Few books offer such a rich and easily understood examination of the complexity of some of the basic components of the world’s major religions and spiritual belief systems. This book accomplishes this, and also provides an informed and practical set of tools to promote peace and a deepened understanding, respect, and common ground between individuals with assumed diverse faiths.”

—Lawrence H. Gerstein, PhD, George & Frances Ball Distinguished
Professor of Psychology-Counseling and Director,
Center for Peace and Conflict Studies, Ball State University

“Jerry Zehr has produced a book that can promote better understanding of various religions and, thus, contribute to peacemaking in our fractured era. Readers may be surprised at the areas of commonality and have their appreciation for other faiths expanded.”

—Rev. Dr. Michael Kinnamon, author of *The Witness of Religion in an Age of Fear* and *Unity as Prophetic Witness*

“The spirit of Jerry Zehr shines throughout this book. Thoughtful, insightful, and immediately and immensely helpful. You’ll revisit this book time and again.”

—Phil Gulley, author of *If the Church Were Christian*

“At a time when our divisions seem to tear us apart, this book offers the secret to the unity and peace we need.”

—Rob Fuquay, senior pastor, St. Luke’s United Methodist Church
and author of *The God We Can Know; Which Way, Lord?: Exploring Your Life’s Purpose in the Journeys of Paul; A New Reformation; and The Passion Play: Living the Story of Christ’s Last Days*

“Illuminating and enlightening, *The Peacemaker’s Path* is an outstanding gem. A beacon of hope where pluralism and religious diversity are sometimes seen as a threat to any singular claim of divine truth. The book is a wonderful introduction to the world’s religions with a very pragmatic and accessible format.”

—Charlie Wiles, executive director,
Center for Interfaith Cooperation

“Jerry Zehr has brought together immensely powerful insights from the world’s great religions that demonstrate that, while we differ in some important religious practices and particulars of theology, we are all children of the Divine, called to live in love and community with each other. I commend this book to every Christian who wishes to live in the way and spirit of Christ.”

—The Rev. Dr. Dick Hamm, former General Minister and President of
the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the US and Canada

“A trove of wisdom, ancient and modern, to enrich personal meditation and communal worship experiences. This book embodies the passion and the vision of a caring and sensitive pastor and a seasoned and respected civic and interfaith leader.”

—Dr. Dennis C. Sasso, senior rabbi,
Congregation Beth-El Zedeck

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BROADLEAF BOOKS
MINNEAPOLIS

I dedicate this book to Rabbi Dennis Sasso, K. P. Singh, and the late Dr. Shahid Athar, who were doing interfaith work in Indianapolis long before I came there. They have been beacons of light for me and have helped our country value its diversity of faiths.

No peace among the nations without peace among the religions.
No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions.

Hans Küng, *Islam: Past, Present and Future*

INTRODUCTION

The world is in a state of turmoil and transition. People are painfully divided politically, religiously, and culturally. Many people use their religious beliefs to justify separation and even acts of cruelty against others. However, there is a commonality in our faith traditions that can help us turn away from polarization and re-create a greater sense of community in which our differences are honored. One immediate problem is that we do not understand the actual beliefs and scriptures of others. As Hans Küng, a Swiss Catholic priest, theologian, and author, states, “No peace among the nations without peace among the religions.” This book is intended to help people come to a better understanding of different faiths as part of our journey to find unity and common bonds of humanity. I hope this book will help you find inner peace and will help you find your role in bringing peace to our world.

For more than thirty years as a local pastor, I have been involved in interreligious dialogue aimed at bringing us together as one people, one world. I wanted to write this book for three reasons:

- to make a healing contribution to the ethnic and religious polarization of our time
- to deepen and broaden our relationships as individuals and congregations with people of other religions
- to help people find inner peace and become peacemakers in our world

The book has six themes that are central to the major religions of our world. Each topic will include a week of daily reflections, and each day includes scriptures from faith traditions, three questions for you to reflect on, a call to action for the day, and a closing prayer from a faith tradition.

- Theme one explores *walking the enlightened path*. All religious traditions encourage people to awaken and grow in our relationship with the Divine. We will examine the value of connecting with creation, respecting others' beliefs, and embracing mystery and wonder that can enhance our spiritual journey.
- Theme two is learning how to *claim the power of prayer*. We will explore aspects of prayer and how they can increase our inner peace and connection with the Divine. In reading scriptures from our faith traditions on mindfulness, gratitude, patience, and connecting with others, we can reach new depths in our own prayer lives.
- Theme three is reflecting on the importance of *loving ourselves*. As we grasp the aspects of being created in the image of the Divine, see the importance of being true to ourselves, learn to trust, and forgive ourselves, we can strengthen our personhood.
- Theme four discovers the richness we gain as *we love others*. Let us explore the values of listening, empathy, compassion, generosity, encouragement, and forgiveness. When we embrace these aspects, we will make an impact on those around us.
- Theme five explores the theme of *actions and impact*. We have different names for this universal truth: karma, reaping and sowing, cause and effect, the law of attraction, and so on. Let us see how our desires—with intentionality, character, and perseverance—can improve our quality of life.
- Theme six is our *quest for peace*. As we learn to develop peace within, advocate for others, offer mercy, and initiate reconciliation, we can become peacemakers.

Many of the essential truths that help deepen and expand our minds and spirits are present in all major religions. One example is the teaching of the Golden Rule. This important spiritual truth is at the heart of many of our faith traditions.



Bahá'í: "He should not wish for others that which he doth not wish for himself, nor promise that which he doth not fulfill" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 194).



Buddhism: “Treat not others in ways that you would find hurtful” (*Udana-Varga* 5:18).



Christianity: “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets” (Matthew 7:12 NRSV).



Hinduism: “This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you” (*Mahabharata* 5:1517).



Islam: “Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself” (the Prophet Muhammad, *Hadith*).



Jainism: “One should treat all creatures in the world as one would like to be treated” (Mahavira, *Sutrakritanga*).



Judaism: “What is hateful to you do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary” (Hillel, Talmud, Shabbat 31a).



Sikhism: “I am a stranger to no one, and no one is a stranger to me; indeed, I am a friend to all” (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1299).



Taoism: “Regard your neighbor’s gain as your own gain and your neighbor’s loss as your own loss” (*T’ai Shang Kan Ying P’ien* 213:18).



Zoroastrianism: “Do not do unto others whatever is injurious to yourself” (*Shayast-na-Shayast* 13:29).

As in the teaching of the Golden Rule, we will see the major religions of the world have many of the same teachings on love of neighbor, forgiveness, compassion, peacemaking, respect of others, and many more. When ISIS came on the scene, many of my Christian friends believed that Islam was a religion of not peace but violence because ISIS quoted from the Qur’an to justify their killing. I would remind them that ISIS was killing more Muslims than any other faith group

and that Christians have used their Scriptures to justify the slaughter of others throughout our history. Each of the world's religions can be twisted to justify violence, but each is rooted in peace. The more we can understand our neighbor's faith, the better chance we have to build paths of peace.

Over the years we have seen more than a quarter of the world's countries experience a high incidence of hostilities motivated by religious hatred, mob violence related to religion, terrorism, and harassment of women for violating religious codes.

We need to help people see that we have much more in common than what divides us. This book offers "multifaith reflections" because the purpose is not to blend our faiths into one single religion but to offer us a greater understanding of each of our faiths. Learning about others' faith traditions can enhance our religious beliefs and help us see the other as a child of God.

No peace among the nations without peace among the religions.
No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions.

DAY ONE

AWAKENING

The story goes that after his enlightenment, Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha, was walking down the road when he met a fellow traveler. The other man perceived a great radiance emanating from Siddhartha, so instead of asking, “Who are you?” he asked, “Are you a God or Divine being?” “No,” answered the Buddha. “Are you a shaman or sorcerer?” “No,” replied the Buddha. “Are you a man?” Again, the Buddha replied, “No.” “Well then,” the man questioned, “what are you?” The Buddha replied, “I am awake,” and indeed, this is what Buddha means when he says “one who is awakened.”

When we awaken, we realize that the things we accumulate, the money we make, and the degrees and titles we obtain do not ultimately feed our souls, and we begin to look inward to the deepest parts of our hearts and minds. One of the world’s great mystical poets is Saint John of the Cross (1542–91). When we awaken our minds to our interaction with God, we can find inner peace. His poem reveals a profound tender experience of Divine communion.

DIG HERE THE ANGEL SAID

*She caught me off guard when my soul said to me, “Have we met?”
So surprised I was to hear her speak like that I chuckled.*

*She began to sing a tale: There was once a hard-working man who
used to worry so much because he could not feed and clothe his
children and wife the way he wanted.*

*There was a beautiful little chapel in the village where the man lived
and one day while he was praying, an angel appeared.*

The angel said, “Follow me.” And he did out into an ancient forest.

“Now dig here,” the angel said. And the man felt the strength in his limbs he had not known since youth and with just his bare hands he dug deep and found a lost treasure, and his relationship with the world changed.

Finding our soul's beauty does that—gives us tremendous freedom from worry.

“Dig here,” the angel said—

*“in your soul,
in your soul.”*

At some point, we begin our search for what gives meaning to our lives. Initially, we might believe that earning lots of money or becoming a person of influence and power will make us feel validated as human beings. Eventually, we realize the external accolades are fleeting and do not substantively feed our souls. May you journey as Saint John says, “digging deep into your soul.”

REFLECT ON THESE SCRIPTURES FROM DIFFERENT FAITH SOURCES

Those who seek Oneness ceaselessly find the Lord dwelling in their hearts. (the Bhagavad Gita, Hinduism)

The way is empty yet contains all. Words cannot describe it. Better that one should look for it within. (the Tao Te Ching, Taoism)

To begin the journey in the way . . . first, set yourself straight. You are your only master. (the Dhammapada, Buddhism)

Those who know your name trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you. (Psalm 9:10, Judaism)

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. (Matthew 13:44–46, Christianity)

We shall worship thy God, the God of thy fathers, Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac, One God and unto Him, we have surrendered. (Qur'an 2:133, Islam)

The Universal Creator God. The name is Truth. Creative being personified. No fear. No hatred. Image of the undying, beyond birth, self-existence. (Guru Granth Sahib, *Shri* 1:1.1, Sikhism)

Lauded and glorified art Thou, O Lord, my God. How can I make mention of Thee, assured as I am that no tongue, however deep its wisdom, can befittingly magnify thy name, nor can the bird of the human heart, however great its longing, ever hope to ascend into the heaven of Thy majesty and knowledge? (*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, Baha'i)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. As you dig deep into your soul, what are you hoping to find?
2. Do you remember your first experience of “awakening” as you began your spiritual journey?
3. What have been some experiences of enlightenment that have brought you to this time and place?

CALL TO ACTION FOR TODAY

As you go through your day, open your eyes wide, take a deep breath, see life as if you have awakened from sleeping for twenty years. Look at your surroundings as if you are seeing them for the first time. Be aware of the Divine within and around you.

CLOSING PRAYER FROM THE NATIVE AMERICAN LAKOTA TRIBE, NORTH DAKOTA

The Lakota is considered the first nation in North America. Often referred to as the Great Sioux Nation, these people are divided into three

distinct groups based on language and geography: Dakota (Santee, eastern Dakota), Lakota (Teton, western Dakota); and Nakota (Yankton, central Dakota). *Dakota*, *Lakota*, and *Nakota* mean “friends” or “allies.”

SIX DIRECTIONS OF AID

Oh, our Father the Sky, hear us and make us strong.

Oh, our Mother the Earth, hear us and give us support.

Oh, Spirit of the East, send us your wisdom.

Oh, Spirit of the South, may we tread your path of life.

Oh, Spirit of the West, may we always be ready for the long journey.

Oh, Spirit of the North, purify us with your cleansing winds.