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- *Affirming the dignity of all life*
- *Praying for peace*
- *Peace and the abolition of self-interest*
- *The importance of community*

God speaks to each individual according to his or her own needs. Notice we say *needs*, not according to one's own *ability*, for all human beings are endowed with the ability to find the reason, the peace, the resolution of conflicts that you so clearly seek. The issue is one of needs and the perception of needs. When you perceive the need to be guided, to be directed by God's presence, you turn to that central loving power. It is the human condition that when no need is recognized, there is little effort to seek that presence.

The reaction of God's response is directly related to the amount, the intensity, the seriousness of recognized need. God reacts because there is need. You are helped because you recognize the need for help. You are given peace because you recognize the need for peace. People at war and people committed to warring acts are not receptive to the peace that is available to them. You must acknowledge your needs in order to strengthen God's actions towards all humanity.

We have mentioned before the needs of God, those needs being your commitment to one another. Your actions strengthen directly the responses of God. Even though God is all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving, that love that is identified with God can only expand through your direct commitment—commitment to loving and commitment to allowing yourselves to be loved. God's response therefore is a direct result of your own perceived needs. The nature of that response may not always be according to your own individual needs as you see them, for your vision is limited. You work toward a greater vision, but you see what you see, you understand what you understand, and therefore your perceptions will vary.

You are all concerned about peace and each of you has a perception about what must be done to achieve that peace. For some, the perception or need that is recognized is human dignity. For others, the need is for defense, and for yet others, a need to be strong, and yet for others, a need to live simply and freely. Each of these needs finds its own expression in prayer. Each expects God to respond in such a way that the prayers are recognized as being fulfilled, given full value, given more weight. However, each individual can see only a portion of reality. The end result may be common from one individual or nation to another, but the means to achieving a common objective will be so different. It is important to you how your perceived needs are responded to, but from our perspective, the how is not as important. What is important is the objective, and the objective is the affirmation of the dignity of all life. This we have emphasized so often.

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But how does one get to such affirmation from so many different places? When you pray for peace, you are really praying for dignity. When you pray for peace, you are praying for a loving understanding of the value of others. With such a loving understanding, there is no reason for war, as you may define it. When you pray for peace you expect God to deliver on that prayer, to deliver as you would pray in the terms that you would define. It is obvious that God's response to your prayers, to the prayers of all of humankind, cannot always meet the specific objectives of every individual viewpoint. But you can be absolutely certain that as you pray for a resolution that affirms the dignity of human life and the dignity of all that has been created, that God's response will indeed allow for that to happen.

We have said so often there is no time, and yet as you pray for peace you place, subconsciously perhaps, an element of time into that prayer. Of course you want peace to occur now, immediately. Human nature is such that a spontaneous cessation of hostilities between people cannot take place. Two individuals cannot immediately and spontaneously eliminate all disagreements for all time. Two individuals can however agree to the need for the cessation of hostile thoughts and behavior, and such agreements can lead gradually toward a condition free of strife. But such progress evolves first from attitude, not action. The first step must be attitude; the action follows closely behind. If the attitude is toward greater mutual understanding and respect, the actions will affirm that perspective, and those actions will lead to a greater sense of peace, as you so fervently pray for.

We do not express this with the intent that you should expect no moves toward peace. But we share this perspective that it may help you understand how to direct your prayers in the most beneficial manner. Your prayers for understanding, for vision are the prayers that most closely respond to the needs of all. Such understanding takes time, as you measure it. It takes generations. Such understanding is not achieved from the perspective of a select group of individuals. Understanding is collective. If you seek peace in your nation, your nation must grow in its understanding. If there is to be peace between nations, then understanding must evolve within each nation, not just among the leaders, but among everyone.

Praying for peace means working for understanding. When you work for understanding, you are serving as the hands and the eyes and voice of God. That is why you are living your human lives. You are working to spread the love which is so essential to creation. You are not living your lives to pursue particular dogma. You are not living your lives to pursue self-interest or national interest or regional interest. You live so that all may benefit, so that all may grow. Your actions as individuals certainly have an effect on the whole. We have addressed this so recently, but you must make that recognition a part of your own identity. You must allow that common shared life to permeate your acknowledgment of needs.

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Will peace throughout the world be achieved? The answer is an emphatic *yes!* Will it be achieved in your own human life span? The answer is of course *no*. Peace, the sense of belonging, of identifying with all human beings, is a process that moves slowly, but it is constantly moving in the proper direction. Through your own prayer and your own relationships with individuals around you, you are moving that process forward. You are contributing in your own way to the goal of peace and the abolition of self-interest.

Peace and self-interest do not exist together. Real peace means the abolition of self-interest. As long as there is self-interest, there will be issues of territory, there will be turf wars, as you may call them, whether on a personal or an international basis. You cannot be concerned about what is in your own best interests and serve the greater humanity. It is not possible; it is not logical. The direction of your lives must be away from self-interest, must be away from concerns about your own personal needs at the expense of others. You may have those personal needs and that is fully acceptable in God's sight. But what is not acceptable is when those needs, are at the expense of others.

If your needs are to achieve peace, that can only be collective. If your needs are seeking understanding and compassion, that can only be achieved collectively. If your needs are to support and affirm, they can only be achieved collectively. There is nothing of great value that is achieved without a view of collective humanity. You cannot understand every nation, every religion, every custom, but you can affirm your neighbor. If everyone affirmed his or her neighbor, there would be peace worldwide. Peace does begin close-by. The achievement of peace is reached through your daily relationships with those with whom you work, family members. That is the source, that is the direction that leads to the peace that you all seek.

Relationships between individuals are at the core of your experience of human life. You do not live alone, you do not function alone. You always live in community. You may feel that you are alone at times and you may be physically alone, but your relationship is based on community. For those whose religious convictions call for them to be physically isolated, they are in their physical isolation seeking to understand and enhance the human condition. They are not committed to just their own enlightenment regardless of any others. They seek to be enlightened so that they may enlighten. You seek to be loved so that you may be loving. There is no point in being loved if you cannot be loving. There is no point in being enlightened in an isolated location without the opportunity to enlighten. That enlightenment directed outward may be through teaching, it may be through prayer, but it is ultimately directed outward and thereby comes the community, even to those who are physically isolated from others.

The sense of community is the center point for your lives among the human spirits that populate the earth. You should feel that community. You should find ways of interacting, either through your actions directly with another or through your prayers

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directed toward another. Both are equally important and necessary. You may experience times in your life when you are unable to reach out personally to others, but you can always reach out through prayer. You are then connected to the community.

If you pray for another, you are incapable of killing another. Prayer is the connection to be sought. It is through that prayer that action is directed, that vision of the present is ultimately achieved. Be guided by your acknowledgment of community, and let that recognition of your community help you identify the needs that result in the hand of God acting among the people of the world.

You can make a difference. Your prayers for those who make decisions affecting peace, as you define it, are helpful. They do make a difference. They are necessary. The act of praying for those objectives strengthens your own soul, and affirms and assures the response of God to those needs that have been voiced, that have been expressed, that have been felt in prayerful manner. Continue to pray, continue to pray for vision—your vision and the vision of community. Pray for the process of vision, for it is a process. It is not a spontaneous product. Pray for your guides, for they are empowered to broaden your vision according to your needs.

You are blessed as your vision broadens. You are blessed as you pray for the broadening vision of others. Have faith that God is indeed a part of the process that you are sharing with one another. Believe in that Presence and know that that Presence is strengthened and given voice through your actions and your prayers. It is a wonderful opportunity that you are given and you have all reason for faith in an outcome that is guided by God. Rest and rejoice in your faith!

Amen.