

SIMPLE LIVING MAKES PEACE POSSIBLE

When we read or listen to the news, we encounter horror stories every day. We hear of agonizing violence between nations, between groups within one nation, within cities and families, and even within one person that causes heartbreaking suffering for thousands. We hear of terrorists sacrificing their lives in order to kill many others. We see greed all around us and the fragmentation of society, leading to poverty, loneliness and despair. Often we feel powerless—what can we possibly do?

Many of us want to do something to help, to raise our voices against the violence. We wish for peace, pray and meditate for peace, sing and dance and walk and march for peace, write letters, attend seminars and workshops, stand in protest demonstrations or silent vigils for peace. We may encourage international exchange work to hasten peace, and may wear or display peace slogans on T-shirts or bumper stickers. I have done these things and would not want to discourage people from these kinds of activism. They may inspire or plant a kind thought momentarily in someone's mind, but it is not enough. The next moment that person's mind is distracted and on to something else.

The truth we need to realize and begin to act upon is this: no matter how fervently expressed, words or wishes alone--whether in prayer, politics or on protest placards--will not bring the results we long for. As Mahatma Gandhi said, we must be the change we want to see in the world, and it must happen consistently and on a broad scale. So long as we live wastefully, which in effect treats other people and the planet arrogantly, and we ourselves are too time-stressed and mentally scattered to be peaceful ourselves, we continue to negate the peace we say we want. As in all things, we need to begin with ourselves.

This book is intended to describe the activism of changing our own habits, outlining what we can do that really *can* make a difference, especially if groups of us decide to pursue these changes together. We must make a demonstration or silent vigil of our very lives, and show others by example how to live in simpler, more conscious ways. Authors of earlier books about simple living have pointed out what such a lifestyle will do for us personally in increasing our life satisfaction, or what it will do for the environment. We'll review some of those arguments in these pages, but we urgently need to broaden our vision. Simple living is not only for ourselves and our planet's resources, but a way to make more food available; to reduce war, terrorism and crime; to address the ravages of overpopulation; to reverse the skyrocketing rates of obesity, heart disease, cancer, and other Western diseases; and to restore sanity to our society as a whole.

Simple living does more for world peace than being nice to one's neighbors can ever do. Although friendliness is important, I believe even a cantankerous curmudgeon does far more for peace if he lives frugally, than does a kind and politically active person who is profligate with resources, setting an example of callousness and waste.

It's true that the simple living practices of limiting our possessions and focusing our awareness can bring *us* peace as well. When I have traveled in third world countries, I have been amazed at how much joy some of the poorest people exhibit. They live reverently, strong in their families and in their sense of place. They work hard but are rarely in a hurry, and are unpretentious and friendly to strangers. Some suffer from malnutrition and disease and/or live in the midst of wars, and so cannot be said to be living

peaceful lives. Seeing them, I found myself thinking that if they just had access to basic health care, enough money to adequately support their families, and freedom from living in a war zone, they would have what they need to live in peace. Most of us in the U.S. can obtain health care, have more than enough money to meet our needs, and do not live in the midst of armed conflict, yet surveys show we are not happy. There is no reason why we cannot re-learn qualities of a simpler, more peaceful life.

As we'll see in the following pages, obstacles to peace may arise from the personal choices we make, over which we can have considerable control; or from corporate or societal forces, over which we may feel we have little control. As we examine each of these, we'll see how simple living can effectively address them all. The despair and paralysis we may feel in the face of human selfishness and conflict all around us can be greatly alleviated by the realization that simple living is something we personally can do, without waiting for others to change, and *it works*.

I hope you will join with those who have already caught the vision of simple living as a concrete and practical answer to creating a more peaceful world. You always have a choice. You can retreat into cynicism or apathy and resist changing your habits, adopting the view that world events are in an inevitable downward spiral beyond anyone's control. You can decide you are able to remain unaffected by such events. Or you can make one small change after another, even if you are not always consistent, knowing that you are trying, and that how you live matters.

If you make the latter choice, may this book help guide your way.