As the Christmas holidays approach, I quiet my spirit and think about what is most important. I think about the song, “Let there be peace on earth…, and let it begin with me.” I realize that whether one is a Christian, Muslim or Jew, this part of the year reminds us to stop and think about why we are all here and what we are meant to accomplish. After all, isn’t that why they call it a “holy-day?” According to Webster’s Dictionary, the word “holy” means “exalted or worthy of complete devotion as one perfect and in goodness and righteousness,” and “having a divine quality.” Consequently, more than toys or gifts or over-eating opportunities, holidays require us to re-evaluate our degree of congruence between our spiritual selves and our earthly selves. We have to compare what we say we are all about against what we actually do. Thus, observing holy days requires that one become thought-filled, live in harmony with others and ourselves. Finally, we must seek to be, at peace, and honest in spirit.

Learning to promote peace in one’s life and in the lives of those around you requires diligence, effort, and stick-to-it-ness. In fact, I once remember a cartoon from a local newspaper when a young girl was told by her mother to “Seek inner peace.” The little girl promptly responded to her mother’s request by asking the question: “*How on earth can I seek inner peace, when there is so much o uter obnoxiousness* ?” Sometimes I ask myself that same thing.

Sometimes my lack of peace has come from inside of me. I noticed that as I got older, I began to accept my faults more and work to correct them. However, when I was younger, I would find it very difficult to accept my mistakes or errors in judgment, at times. . Sometimes, it was hard to accept criticism or responsibility. I find that even today, I can easily be wrapped up in “other people’s” opinions about me. I can get lost worrying about “man’s inhumanity to man.”

It is true that all around me, there are people who want to use me, abuse me, and confuse me. All around me there is hate, jealously, scheming, game-playing, lying, cheating, rejection, disrespect and anger. All around me there is fear, hurt, abuse, neglect, abuse of power, racism, discrimination, systemic barriers, apathy, and inactivity. All around me are people who want something from me that I don't have, can't give, and who don't care. Yes, there surely is a lot of "outer obnoxiousness." Therefore, being negative is the easy part. That negative part of me does not lead to peace, love, humility, patience, or compassion. When I experience those feelings, I notice that I am short-tempered, dejected, less patient with others and I feel unhappy, tearful and irritated. My blood pressure goes up, I over-eat and I don't smile much. In fact, I do not want to be bothered!

Therefore, each day of my life, I choose to be positive. I choose to say to myself, "all around me are people who want to help me, protect me, educate and empower me." All around me, there is love, support, alliance building, honesty, fair play, acceptance, respect and peace. All around me, there is safety, healing, growth, attention, sharing of power, reconciliation, recognition, systemic strategies for success, caring and action. All around me are people who value what I can give; ask for what I can share and who care about me. These thoughts give me peace. Some days they are much harder to come by than the thoughts that give me anxiety, but when these peace-fill thoughts are present, I find that I am more loving, more patient, more joy-filled and more in congruence with others and myself.

On the days that I see the world in a positive light, I realize that all of us have our own journeys of change, loss, grief and challenge. Each of us has the path to inner peace that only comes from realizing that we are not here alone. We are here because we were created to glorify the God who sent us and to love (really love) those around us. We must see that we all are special. We all are beautiful. We all have gifts and talents that only we have (knowing that people can do what you do, but not like, you do it!).

True peace also requires faith in yourself and other people. Faith that every Black male who passes by your car with saggin' pants is not a gang-banger. Faith, that not every Black woman who asks if you have a job is a "gold digger." Faith that not every police officer who stops you is planning to slam you against the hood and inappropriately touch you or your partner. Faith that people will help when you are stranded. Faith that there is HOPE for you to get a home, a job, find a mate or heal from your addiction. To be at peace requires that you do not think that you have to be the one to fix everything and everyone around you, but that when the people in your life need to learn, *life* will provide the teachers and the lessons.

To have peace, also requires that we have a child-like compassionate, playful, and joyful spirit. You must learn to laugh in order to have peace. You must learn to sing in order to have peace. You must learn to dance in order to find peace. You must learn to let go and play in order to find peace.

There is a Serenity Prayer that is popular among folks in the recovery community. The words of the prayer are "G*od grant me the Serenity to accept the things I can not change, the Courage the change the things I can, and the Wisdom to know the Difference."* Thus, the key to serenity and peace is acceptance of yourself and others, recognition that you can choose how to view the world, and wisdom to "let-go" of controlling people and situations for which you have no control.

Additionally, to be at peace requires that one has HOPE. Hope that things can get better and people can be good, kind, thoughtful, considerate and love. Hold on to the Hope that we all have a chance to live our best lives, if only we can believe. We must hold on to the Hope that there is Divinity in all of us, and that our lights will shine through our words and actions of peace.

Finally, in order for us to "*let peace begin with us,*" we have to have "good-will" toward others and ourselves. Our hope depends on our ability to see our possibilities of change. Each breath is a new chance to start over. Each breath we take is God's way of saying, "keep going." There is only one breath between the "past" and "now." There is only one breath between "now" and the "future." One moment ago, you can say, "I was," but the next moment, the next breath you can say, "I am."

Be at peace with the Hope of tomorrow, breath deeply and inhale the future. A further filled with "good will" for yourself and others.

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