

## **Planting Seeds of Peace**

(Original)

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Growing up in a rural, “middle of nowhere” cottage in the embrace of a vast forest, I have often turned to my biological elders in nature for their wisdom. After all, humans learned to soar among clouds in airplanes from birds. Humpback whale fins inspired the creation of more efficient wind turbines. An apple falling from a tree even led to the discovery of gravity. So when pondering how to create a peaceful world, well, how do the trees do it? How do birds do it? How do the stars do it? Nature has not only shown me the peaceful future I would love to have, it taught me ways to make it come true.

Nature teaches an appreciation for the nonmaterial. The intrinsic beauty of nature, sparkling snow and brilliant stars glowing in dark skies, can neither be bought or sold, knowing no limits of possession. For me, watching a golden sunset over a turquoise ocean holds more value than a Chanel purse. In a broader context, many problems disturbing peace in our society are rooted in overconsumption. In the realm of wealth and power, humanity has long been divided between nations and individuals that have possessions and ones that do not. When happiness becomes gauged by material abundance, property, salary, and luxury, discontentment and greed manifest. Climate change and pollution are all waste products of human greed, contributing to environmental degradation. We need to think beyond numbers and objects. A peaceful future starts when we connect spiritually with Earth, feeling at peace with what we all share, nature.

Like nature, people should coexist harmoniously like a biodiverse ecosystem. While observing the myriad of colorful birds in my backyard, I noticed that the bluebird doesn't exclude red cardinal because he has red feathers. Instead, I always see the two perched together atop tree branches, singing songs of peace!

Contrarily, humans are often born from the similarities between the words “skin” and “sin.” During the Coronavirus pandemic, I experienced elevated levels of racism because of my skin. People equated the entire Asian community, our golden skin and traditions, to the deadly virus. If my community has long suffered racism, resulting in unnecessary bloodshed, then why did Mother Nature create not one, two or a handful of species, but an entire kaleidoscope of them? Earth adorned herself with billions of diverse organisms not only because it would be beautiful, but likewise because it was essential. If we respect, not just tolerate a Sikh’s need to carry his kirpan, a Muslim’s need to pray among other traditions, hatred and warfare may become artifacts of history, replaced by unity in diversity.

In a peaceful world, individuals and nations would also behave like trees of a forest. Trees exchange information and nutrients with each other through underground systems of connected mycorrhizal roots, allowing a forest to behave as a single organism. For me, one tree symbolizes a country or an individual, and the rich forest it’s a part of represents our world. Wealthy, peaceful countries and poor, unsafe countries—the two seem worlds apart. But our interconnectedness on this planet transcends all borders, meaning it’s of utmost importance that wealthy countries lend a hand to other countries lacking resources, just as young saplings in forests receive nutrients from stronger trees.

As a leader in the Alliance of Youth Leaders in the United States, a volunteering organization, I play my part in extending my country's roots, our system of cooperation across the globe. Over the past months, I’ve led hundreds of children in collecting thousands of books to build libraries for kids in Malawi, and in light of the devastating Russia-Ukraine war, created a musical fundraiser, with youth playing instruments at charitable recitals raising money for orphaned children of war. Though these children live countless miles away, I’m reminded that we’re all trees of one forest, from the air we breathe to the water we share.

So go spend some time outside in Mother Nature’s embrace, and see what you can learn from the classroom that is nature. Together, we can grow beautiful flowers of peace on land where bullets and bombs once fell. Let my generation be known as peacemakers.

May peace prevail on Earth!