

PSR Sacramento 2016 Scholarship Essay Contest Finalist

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In a world where we have yet to achieve a single provision the 14th Dalai Lama laid out for lasting peace, his quote could be disheartening. However, it is actually quite optimistic. He says that to have permanent peace, all we have to achieve are three incredibly high goals. This is certainly better than the alternative: that humanity is incapable of attaining and preserving peace. My father always told me, "The best predictor of the future is the past," but if this holds true, our future might be condemned. The whole of humanity has never been free, fed, and allowed human rights. We have never had enduring peace.

Stepping outside, I see our world floundering in hate-filled floodwaters. Neo-Nazi parties spread like an epidemic through an economically-stricken Europe as racism rises ever higher in the United States, all flowing from the foaming waters of xenophobia and egotism. And amongst all this, refugees continue to drown fleeing their war-ravaged homes. Worst still, these are just the handful of human horrors that are new enough to make the news. Daily, we think we are dodging storm clouds when we ignore the downpour of strife in developing countries and the sidewalks of very own streets. But whether we as individuals are dry or soaked, we must not ignore this rain. Unchecked, it could erode the foundation of our civilization. Whether we acknowledge it or not, more than 1 in 10 people in the world today do not have enough food, 21 million people remain trapped in the bonds of slavery, and human rights everywhere risk being carried away in the streams of crisis.

Pessimism is easy, but it is also useless. Cynicism cannot save lives from going under. This much is certain: peace will never last while freedom remains a fantasy for many and people starve with their human rights tattered on the ground. Maybe we need to correct more than this to achieve lasting peace, but we can begin here. We must oppose politicians who advocate carpet-bombing and discrimination. We must reorder our priorities to place funding food-stamps above a billionaire's next vacation home. We must support those escaping bondage or oppressive regimes. Finally, we must demand that our country facilitates rather than impedes other nations' right to self-determination and freedom. Rhetoric will not be enough; our behaviors must reflect our principles.

My dad taught me, "The best predictor of the future is the past," but perhaps we need to understand that the best predictor of the future is our actions today. We all want peace; it is time we all worked for it. All of our actions combined determine the shape of tomorrow. The 14th Dalai Lama leveled a lofty challenge, but is it not time we all sought higher ground? Imagine the world he described, one of lasting peace. Now, pursue it.

Footnotes: "Statistics and Indicators on Forced Labour and Trafficking (Forced Labour, Human Trafficking and Slavery)." Promoting Jobs, Protecting People. International Labour Organization, n.d. Web. 13 Mar. 2016. <<http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/policy-areas/statistics/lang--en/index.htm>>.

"Hunger Statistics." World Food Programme. United Nations, n.d. Web. 13 Mar. 2016.