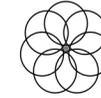


Introduction



*There can never be peace between nations until there is first known that true peace
which is within the souls of men.²*

— Black Elk

There is a common belief that global peace first starts with inner peace. This theme has been described by great sages throughout the centuries. Yet how does one find that inner peace in the midst of crisis, and how can that peace translate into practical approaches to day-to-day challenges, let alone address the seemingly overwhelming complex global problems such as climate change and violent conflicts where children are used as weapons of war?

This book is an exploration of these questions through a personal journey that includes living for four years in the bush of Sierra Leone, West Africa with subsistence farmers, an experience that changed my life and perspective of the world forever. The people of Sierra Leone and their way of life started my inner exploration and questioning about “the pursuit of happiness” through consumerism and its impact on the world.

The devastating war in Sierra Leone drove me to seek the elusive peace that supposedly existed in my own soul and to ask the age-old question of how could God allow such suffering to happen. These questions led me to numerous spiritual teachers, an ancient yoga meditation tradition, and trips to India and Nepal, along with mystical experiences in divine love.

Meanwhile, I was privileged to work on tangible peacebuilding projects in war-torn African countries with colleagues who were pioneers on how to *transform conflict* across entire societies. Participating in a peacebuilding project in Sierra Leone was beyond an answer to a prayer — it was a dream come true to be able to help people I loved.

By diving inward through meditation while working on practical peacebuilding projects, I began to see parallels between the inner and outer peacebuilding processes. I could see intersections between science, spirituality, and peacebuilding in how they relate to energy and consciousness across a *peace continuum* from inner to international levels.

I also came to see conflict as a natural part of the human experience and an integral part of a spiritual path and societal evolution. How we deal with conflict across the continuum of inner, interpersonal, family, community, national, and international levels, as well as with the environment, determines how we evolve individually and as a species.

At the heart of all of these conflicts is the human soul and its relationship with God/Spirit/Universe, whatever word works for you. On this journey, my concept and experience of God has been evolving — and continues to evolve. It is my intention to share these insights and unresolved questions through transparent and often-revealing struggles that I have encountered on the inner, interpersonal, and international levels.