

We are coming up to 77 years ago that two nuclear fission bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, August 6th, and 9th respectfully. The rationale was that it would bring an end to the Theatre of War in the Pacific, which it did, and, that more lives would be saved in the long run by dropping the bombs. It would appear that the intended saved lives were that of the allied forces, at the expense of the Japanese civilians. The most credible estimates cluster around a “low” of 110,000 mortalities and a “high” of 210,000 (immediate death and later due to radiation poisoning). Those looking upon the devastation could hardly believe that this was possible: not merely that we could create such weapons, but that we would drop not one, but two of them. One might have assumed that an immediate ban of such weapons of mass destruction would have been enacted. But here we are today, 2022, with nine countries, who continue to possess nuclear weapons: the United States, Russia, France, China, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, India, Israel, and North Korea. In total, the global nuclear stockpile is close to 13,000 weapons. It would take more or less only 100 of these bombs to end all life on earth. Fortunately, there are plenty of extra bombs to go around, in the event some happened to go missing.

With this history, and these facts, I suppose it begs the question: What kind of highly evolved and intelligent creature commits itself to preserving its own life, even if it is at the expense of all other forms of life? The short answer, human beings. When it comes to war, especially nuclear war, this is the scenario we have created. We have not only the potential, but at the present time, the ability to end all life, which includes ourselves, 130 times over. But why? Why would we as human beings, as evolved as we apparently seem to be, continue to commit ourselves to such a self-destructive behaviour? There are a multitude of reasons that are given meant to justify and validate why one begins a war, as there are to justify one’s use of violence as a means of defence. But what about peace and mutual respect towards one another, are these not as valid a reason for not engaging in war? The moment war breaks out, then we hear everyone clamoring for peace. What in fact we want is an end to the violence and blood shed, which is more likely than not, having one group of people or a country being subdued by another. Peace for us then is the re-assuming of life before the “inconvenience of the war” that had disrupted our way of lives. So, if we can quickly reassert our way of life upon another, and we do not directly feel (or have to witness) the ugly horrors of war, then there are few voices of dissent opposing such a move.

What occurred 77 years ago was allowed to happen because of secrecy, ignorance, and a total disregard for the respect and honouring of all humanity, everywhere. It is not a matter of “lest we forget” for we are long past that. This is the era and the time for all people of good will and steadfast ethical principles, to speak up and to demand their governments to do away with all forms of weapons that would be the harbingers of our death. It was the prophet Isaiah, inspired by God’s spirit, to speak to the nation of Israel, to “beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks, that this nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore” (Is 2.4) This was God’s will for us all. It would seem that this passage of scripture was not lost on Jesus, for he instructed us not only to refrain from killing another, but from even becoming angry (Mt. 5.21).

Interwoven throughout his teachings, words, and actions, he promoted an active non-violent response to others who would aggress against him, regardless of the situation or possible outcome. But this has been for the most part, completely lost on Christians. We know this passage as part of the Sermon on the Mount, but we have chosen to ignore it. Many of the great global conflicts in history have been Christian's warring against other Christians as well as Christian's fighting against non-Christians. On some level we ought to know better, but we provide ourselves with a rationalization as to why it is permissible. It was Benjamin Franklin who once said, "those who beat their swords into ploughshares, usually end up plowing for those who kept their swords." This may be cited as a reason to always be prepared and ready to defend yourself, so that you do not fall under the yoke of slavery to another. But it is actually acting dishonestly and elevating hypocrisy to the level of being a virtue. Oh yes, and it should be noted that Benjamin Franklin did own two house slaves. It would appear he kept his sword.

It is when we mistaken self-interest for justice, that we can call any war just. For all the reasoning of why it is not only permissible, but it is good, right, and just to go to war, there is only one reason why war, why any form of violence, must never be considered a possibility. It is because we are injuring, hurting, and taking the life of another. It is really that simple. We are ending the life of someone who was a husband or wife, a son or daughter, a parent, or a friend to someone else. It is incumbent upon us then to look into the eyes of the one before us and make ourselves see our loved ones in their eyes. Can I really take the life of a loved one? But that is not who I see when I look into the eyes of another; they are not a loved one. What I allow myself to see is someone who is not like me, and I do not want to think that there is anything in common with him or her. This person does not speak the same language as I do, their skin colour I find off putting at best, their food, customs and culture is so foreign to me that all I can think of at best is, "why can't they be more like us" and at worse, "why can't they simply go away." But they cannot be anyone but who they are. They have been created to be, just as we have been created to be, the persons we are. Harkening back to why they had chosen to drop the bombs on these two cities, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki, was it merely to end the war more quickly, or was it in part because they were Japanese and not Europeans?

If seeing the other through eyes of understanding and mutual respect, seeing the other as a loved one in that moment, is not a good enough reason to do no harm or violence to another, then private interest and power makes right, becomes the perfect recipe for all of our mutual destruction. Is this not the hour to unite and to courageously seek a better way of living in this world, without fear, weapons, poverty, and violence? In 1918 US Senator Hiram Warren Johnson is purported to have said: "The first casualty when war comes is truth." Turning a blind eye not only gives consent to war, but may one day be used to write in our own blood the horrors we allowed, and then who will speak of justice?