



Culture of Peace: Cultivating a culture of peace takes a series of choices

BY **BERT ETLING** July 02, 2018

As an editor, I'm prone to ask questions such as, "What's that mean? Does this make any sense? What's really going on here?" I figure readers might wonder the same.

So when, as an Ashland Culture of Peace Commission (ACPC) commissioner, I was tapped to expound on my piece of the culture of peace firmament, I decided to take a deeper dive into what does this "culture" thing mean, anyway?

The starting point for the word "culture" (along with cult, cultivate and a few other words, according to "Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English"), is the Latin word "colere," "to till or cultivate."

According to the relevant parts of the current Webster's New World College Dictionary entry, "cultivation of the soil" is still the primary meaning. Then there's "development, improvement, or refinement of the intellect, emotions, interests, manners, and taste" and "the result of this; refined ways of thinking, talking, and acting."

It's not until the sixth definition we get to the heart of the matter at hand: "a) the ideas, customs, skills, arts, etc. of a people or group, that are transferred, communicated, or passed along, as in or to succeeding generations b) such ideas, customs, etc. of a particular people or group in a particular period; civilization c) the particular people or group having such ideas, customs, etc."

So culture, in this sense, boils down to a matter of what you do, what your habits are, your way of behaving.

But remember the starting point: This culture is something that has been cultivated. It's intentional. It's not an accident or inevitability — it's a choice, a deliberate outcome from a series of intermediate

steps that have plowed the ground (colere, to till), planted the seeds, watered and weeded and finally harvested the fruits of those labors.

Why does “culture” make a difference? It’s a choice. There’s the wild and then there’s the cultured, the cultivated.

But in the context of a “culture of peace,” we might infer that the choice involves a choice to overcome the natural instinct to be suspicious of the “other,” the unknown, the different; the natural (unchosen) instinct to retreat to the comfort of tribal attachments, to the calming familiarity of the known terrain, both physical and, well, cultural.

In a culture of peace, the aspiration is to see past superficial differences to the far greater number of interests we have in common — and that what differences there may be beneficial, lending color and texture and possibilities to our lives.

To get there, we need to do some “culturing” (verb) to achieve a culture (noun) of peace.

Here’s the mission of ACPC, as posted at www.ashlandcpc.org:

“To inspire, activate, and model a Culture of Peace in Ashland, Oregon which will serve as a beacon of light for all humanity.”

How are you going to get there? “We engage all sectors of Ashland, Oregon in activities that promote harmonious relationships with each other and the natural world.”

Another sense of “culture” is the kind of culture in a Petri dish. But a culture of bacteria is a unconscious colony. But the “culture” part came through the intention of the scientist to grow this thing, to propagate it for some end deemed useful. It is a culture, a choice, something that’s been created through intentionality.

That’s what it’s going to take to achieve a culture of peace — the intent, the willingness to make choices about our interactions with others. Again, from the ACPC website:

“We pledge to always treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves, exercising compassion, the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions. ... We honor, welcome, and serve all people without regard to race, class, color, creed, sexual orientation, and gender identity. ... We recognize and affirm the inherent value of all people and the interconnected web of all beings, treating all with equity.”

Words worth living by, I think. And speaking of culture, the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission will take part in the Ashland Independence Day festivities Wednesday. If you believe we can and will do better in making our relationships with each other and the world we live in better, give ACPC a cheer when they pass in the parade and drop by its booth on Winburn Way later in the day.

And mark on your calendar Sept. 21, International Day of Peace, when Ashland will dedicate its World Peace Flame, only the second such installation in the U.S. The flame is an enduring symbol of what's to be accomplished, but the more enduring warmth will come from a gathering of kindred seekers focusing their efforts towards a common goal — that's what it takes to light a fire, to cultivate a culture. Let's do this thing.

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