

## **The Beatles and creating a peace culture**

**By Philip M. Hellmich**

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As I boarded a flight in San Francisco, I received a call from David Wick inviting me to write an article on the culture of peace for the Ashland Daily Tidings. The timing was impeccable as I was headed to Rishikesh, India the same place where the Beatles had gone 50 years earlier.

The Beatles were the biggest cultural icons of their time and they appeared to have everything — fame, fortune, success, etc. Yet they sought out the quiet refuge of an ashram on the banks of the holy Ganges River and the ancient sciences of yoga/meditation to explore the deeper meanings of life.

The Beatles wrote much of the White Album while in Rishikesh. They sang about the importance of universal themes such as peace, love and harmony and, by their example, they helped introduce meditation and yoga to the West.

Yoga and meditation have since spread around the world and are helping people find peace one posture and one breath at a time. The United Nations has declared June 21 as U.N. International Day of Yoga. My colleagues and I are going to Rishikesh, the birthplace of yoga, to interview swamis, swaminis and yoga teachers at the International Yoga Festival, where people from more than 100 countries will gather to practice yoga. In the interviews, we will focus on the deeper essence of yoga and how it is helping harmonize humanity one person at a time.

My colleagues and I also have interviewed hundreds of peace builders over the past seven years — scientists, business people, government officials, law enforcement and military professionals, Nobel laureates, educators, musicians, spiritual leaders, etc. (All of these interviews are available for free in the [worldpeacelibrary.com](http://worldpeacelibrary.com).)

From conducting these interviews, we can see a culture of peace is emerging around the world from inner to international levels. Considerable progress has been made since the time of the Beatles. Three broad areas that hold promise are: Narratives for Peace; Self Mastery: Where Ancient Wisdom Meets Modern Science; and Positive Peace: Uplifting All of Humanity.

Narratives are an integral part of humanity. The stories we tell shape our mindsets around the past, present and future. Stories awaken imagination and possibility. It is important that each of us look at what stories we are telling about the world we live in.

The Alliance for Peacebuilding, a Washington, D.C.-based consortium of more than 100 peacebuilding organizations, is partnering on a global initiative called Narratives for Peace. The focus is to counter narratives of polarization, anger and fear with stories about common humanity, interdependence and practical peacebuilding approaches. The idea is to rebrand and mainstream peacebuilding.

As my dear friend James O'Dea likes to say, "This is not your parents' anti-war movement." The emerging peace movements today are grounded, practical and transformational, meaning they seek to engage all sides in collaborative problem solving. Plus, peace builders are learning to embody peace while working for peace.

Self-mastery highlights the importance of inner peace and social-emotional intelligence as a foundation for all other peace — interpersonal, community, global. Since the time of the Beatles, there has been an exponential growth in scientific research looking at the intersection of neuroscience and ancient wisdom traditions, such as yoga and meditation. Scientists at Stanford University's Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education and elsewhere are proving humanity is wired for compassion and altruism; and, more importantly, that these innate qualities can be cultivated through practical tools that literally help rewire our brains.

Positive peace describes the attitudes, structures and institutions that underpin and sustain peaceful societies. Positive peace is being promoted and quantified by the Institute for Economics and Peace, the organization that creates the annual Global Peace Index which tracks trends in peace and conflict — for instance, the economic impact of conflict globally in 2016 was estimated to be \$14.3 trillion.

The Institute of Economics and Peace is proving peace is not only good for individuals and society, peace is also cost effective, measurable and essential for healthy economies and thriving communities.

What may surprise many people is that there has been an exponential growth in the practical approaches to creating positive peace — the spread of nonviolent communication, increased use of peer mediation and alternative dispute resolution, a rise of peace and conflict resolution programs in K-12, colleges and universities. The War Prevention Initiative in Portland has documented the evolution of a “Global Peace System.”

When taken from a birds-eye view, we can see there are elements of a culture of peace quietly emerging around the world. Humanity knows how to create peace on individual, interpersonal, community and larger levels.

On this 50th anniversary of the Beatles going to Rishikesh, India, it is a good time to pause and reflect on the considerable progress humanity is making towards creating a culture of peace, as you are doing in Ashland. It is a time to “imagine” what we can do by making peace a priority in our hearts, minds, homes, schools and communities.

— Philip M. Hellmich is a thought leader in creating a new narrative of peace, from inner peace to international peacebuilding and serves as the director of peace at The Shift Network. For more on the ACPC, see .....; like the commission on Facebook at

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