

Peace Prayer: Run the Race of Peace

By: Thomas Jefferson

Peace is our passion. I have ever cherished the same spirit with all nations, from a consciousness that peace, prosperity, liberty, and morals, have an intimate connection. From the moment which sealed our peace and independence, our nation has wisely pursued the paths of peace and justice. Peace and justice should be the polar stars of the American societies.

The happiness of mankind is best promised by the useful pursuits of peace. Our desire is to pursue ourselves the path of peace as the only one leading surely to prosperity. Go on in doing with your pen what in other times was done with the sword; show that reformation is more practicable by operation on the mind than on the body of man. Peace and friendship with all mankind is our wisest policy.

I believe that through all America there has been but a single sentiment on the subject of peace and war, which was in favor of the former. I abhor war and view it as the greatest scourge of mankind. I love peace, and am anxious that we should give the world still another useful lesson, by showing them other modes of punishing than by war, which is as much a punishment to the punisher as to the sufferer. If nations go to war for every degree of injury, there would never be peace on earth. We think that peaceable means may be derived of keeping nations in the path of justice towards us, by making justice their interest, and injuries to reach on themselves. We have, therefore, remained in peace, suffering frequent injuries, but, on the whole, multiplying, improving, prospering beyond all example. Peace has been our principle, peace is our interest, and peace has saved to the world this only plant of free and rational government now existing in it. My hope is in peace.

Thanks be to God that Napoleon, the tiger who reveled so long in the blood and spoils of Europe is at length, like another Prometheus, chained to his rock, where the vulture of remorse for his crimes will be preying on his vitals and in like manner without consuming them. Having been, like him, intrusted with the happiness of my country, I feel the blessing of resembling him in no other point. I have not caused the death of five or ten millions of human beings, the devastation of other countries, the depopulation of my own, the exhaustion of all its resources, the destruction of its liberties, nor its foreign subjugation. All this he has done to render more illustrious the atrocities perpetrated for illustrating himself and his family with plundered diadems and scepters. On the

contrary, I have the consolation to reflect that during the period of my administration not a drop of blood of a single fellow citizen was shed by the sword of war or of the law, and that after cherishing for eight years their peace and prosperity I laid down their trust of my own accord and in the midst of their blessings and importunities to continue in it.

It will be a true testimony of my principles and persuasion that the state of peace is that which most improves the manners and morals, the prosperity and happiness of mankind; and although I dare not promise myself that it can be perpetually maintained, yet if, by the inculcations of reason or religion, the perversities of our nature can be so far corrected as sometimes to prevent the necessity, either supposed or real, of an appeal to the blinder scourges of war, murder and devastation, the benevolent endeavors of the friends of peace will not be entirely without remuneration. I hope we shall prove how much happier for man the Quaker policy is, and that the life of the feeder, is better than that of the fighter.

I wish that all nations may recover and retain their independence; that those which are overgrown may not advance beyond safe measures of power, that a salutary balance may be ever maintained among nations, and that our peace, commerce, and friendship, may be sought and cultivated by all. My hope of preserving peace for our country is not founded in the greater principles of non-resistance under every wrong, but in the belief that a just and friendly conduct on our part will produce justice and friendship from others.

We, I hope, shall be permitted to run the race of peace. To preserve and secure peace has been the constant aim of my administration. Twenty years of peace, and the prosperity so visibly flowing from it, have but strengthened our attachment to it, and the blessings it brings, and we do not despair of being always a peaceable nation. I pray for peace, as best for all the world, best for us, and best for me, who have already lived to see three wars. That peace, safety, and concord may be long enjoyed by our fellow-citizens is the most ardent wish of my heart, and if I can be instrumental in procuring or preserving them, I shall think I have not lived in vain.

Heaven bless you, and guard you under all circumstances; give you smooth waters, gentle breezes, and clear skies, hushing all its elements into peace. Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace.

Excerpted from the book Light and Liberty: Reflections on the Pursuit of Happiness by Eric Peterson, and brought to our attention by Anne Creter, New Jersey Co-state Coordinator, Campaign for a U.S. Department of Peace and Nonviolence