

Introduction

Peace is a word that on the surface seems easy to define, then expands in the way we understand it in different contexts. Dictionaries use such definitions as:

1. Freedom from war and violence.
2. Freedom from oppressive thoughts or anxiety.
3. Harmony within personal relationships, at home or in the workplace.
4. A state of tranquillity or quiet.

The term has its origins in the Latin 'pax', meaning peace, compact, agreement, tranquillity, an absence of hostility, and harmony. There is an ancient connection in English as a greeting with the Hebrew word 'shalom' which extends its definition to 'being complete, or whole, with a wish for good health, well-being and prosperity'. We also use it as a farewell, particularly at a funeral service, with the phrase 'rest in peace'.

In a social sense, peace is commonly used to mean a lack of conflict and freedom from fear of violence and death. Leaders of nations have used peace-making and diplomacy to establish agreements and treaties that have allowed for regional development and economic growth.

An 'inner peace' involving our thoughts and emotions is not so easy to define outside of a religious context but is perhaps a feeling of quietness, well-being, coupled with a lack of anxiety about the uncertainties of daily life. Being 'at peace' can be associated with a healthy mental state.

The United Nations General Assembly has declared 21st September each year as the International Day of Peace, a day devoted to strengthening the ideals of peace, through observing 24 hours of non-violence and cease-fire. The UN website adds this comment; 'But achieving true peace entails much more than laying down arms. It requires the building of societies where all members feel they can flourish. It involves creating a world where we treat people equally.'