

AI Tool Acknowledgement & Disclaimer

A) I acknowledge the use of **ChatGPT** (<https://chatgpt.com/>) on multiple occasions between September and November 2025 to support my work. I used the following prompt:

1. Summarize the following session's transcriptions into lecture notes that are academic and useful for studying and revision. Try not summarizing much while keeping the key insights from the session.
2. Summarize the following chapter into a comprehensive study note with the key insights and takeaways.
3. An autoethnographic or imaginative essay on essay on a positive peace initiative of your choice. Under the course positive peace theory and practice; what is meant exactly by it and what is a possible expected outcome or outline based on this request.
4. Refine the structure, clarity, and academic tone of my written content. Check for any suggestions related to refining grammatic, sentence structures or spellings. Please highlight the suggested changes in bold.
5. Based on the following list of readings, highlight the ones related to my personal story sharing. Ones in which I can academically link personal experience with theory and vice versa, wherever applicable.
6. I want to write about Initiatives of Change, The essay should reflect how their philosophy connects to the idea that 'the personal is political' and that 'wounds that are not transformed are transferred.' I also want to include their tools and practices, like mindfulness, storytelling, non-violent communication, and reflective dialogue.

B) I acknowledge the use of **Duplichecker** (<https://www.duplichecker.com/>) on 11th of November 2025 to check my final work for plagiarism and ensure originality before submission. There was no prompt to be used, just pasting the content and scanning for any plagiarism.

I confirm that I have not presented any AI-generated or AI-assisted materials as my own work. I confirm I have copies of all drafts, notes, and other resources used before, and after, the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

Positive Peace: A Journey from Inner Transformation to Outer Change

An Autoethnographic Reflection on Inner Transformation and Peacebuilding through Initiatives of Change

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Introduction

It was during the last year of my university studies, in which I was still wondering what my next steps were and should be in life. I was studying my BA in business management, a course that hadn't resonated much with me, but which I had settled for due to the lack of clarity and limited options. I was guided by an intuitive feeling that I am meant to play a role in bringing positive change to people's lives in one way or another. In 2013, on a random day, I stumbled upon a Facebook link to an internship program on my university professor's page. It was a call for applications to a leadership program in Caux Switzerland, under an organization called "Initiatives of Change". The description mentioned being an experiential learning and service program that focuses on personal transformation as a prior condition for societal change, peacebuilding, and conflict resolution. My interest was immediately taken by this post, resonating with that intuitive feeling of contributing to the betterment of the world.

I was intrigued by the notion of 'changing the world, starts with changing oneself'. Ironically at that time, I didn't think that anything within me needed to change. I wanted to contribute to the greater purpose of this cause by bringing change to the world through changing others; or at least that's what I thought back then.

Through self-reflection, storytelling, dialogue, and practical experience the organization invites individuals to look inwardly and address any unhealed internal wounds, traumas, and/or conflicts that feed into the greater picture of sustainable peace outwardly. In sum, their work is centered around the idea that social harmony can only be achieved with inner healing.

This essay explores how personal healing and inner transformation can act as a foundation to positive peace. One that transcends conflict to encompass justice, empathy, connection, and a clearer sense of direction in one's life purpose. Drawing on my personal experiences with the organization and the theoretical examination of positive peace, I argue that the building block of any practice in building bridges of compassion and understanding between communities toward a sustained peace, lies inner work and transformation.

I. Theoretical Framing: Understanding Positive Peace

The term of peace has been widely debated without a mutual consensus of its definition, but one of the most significant contributions to its understanding comes from Johan Galtung. He introduced the distinction between positive and negative peace in his foundational article “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research” (1969). He defined positive peace as the active presence of social justice, equality, and cooperative relationships that help people flourish, whereas negative peace refers to the simple absence of open violence or war. Galtung describes positive peace as “the integration of human society,” adding that removing conflict alone does not create justice. He explains that “Peace is not merely the absence of war but the presence of conditions that foster human fulfillment” (Galtung, 1969, p. 183).

Galtung expands on his work in *Peace by Peaceful Means* (2015) by adding cultural and structural dimensions to understanding peace. He defines structural violence as being a result of injustices built into systems, whereas cultural violence consists of beliefs that legitimizes harm or violence (Galtung, 2015). He concludes that positive peace requires healing both social systems, and internalized attitudes, in which both structural and cultural violence must be transformed to attain sustained and positive peace.

When it comes to connecting outer peace to inner and personal transformations, Gill & Thomson in their book *Understanding Peace Holistically* (2019), they propose that peace must be seen “from the spiritual to the political” (p.27), emphasizing on the pendulum between inner awareness and collective transformation. “To cultivate peace in the world, one must first cultivate peace within oneself.” (Gill & Thomson, 2019, p.27).

On a similar note, to Gill & Thomson, Fitz-Gibbon in *Positive Peace: reflections on Peace, Education, Nonviolence, and Social Change* (2010), expands on presenting positive peace as a moral and educational process; from learning empathy, nonviolence, and self-awareness as foundations for attaining social harmony. He suggests that “Peace education begins in the transformation of the human heart” (Fitz-Gibbon, 2010, p. 52).

Finally, John Paul Lederach in his work *The Moral Imagination* (2005) redefines peace as being creative and relational art. In which he argues that sustainable peace requires the capacity to imagine oneself in relationship with one’s enemy, through building on empathy and emotional transformation. He states, “True peacebuilding is the meeting of the heart’s capacity for imagination with the discipline of practical engagement” (Lederach, 2005, p. 29) supporting the belief that sustainable peace arises from both inner transformation and external social action. In his description of the “heart’s capacity for imagination” (Lederach, 2005, p. 29), he sheds light on the moral and emotional courage required to imagine relationships beyond the confining structures of violence, dehumanization, fear, and revenge. These confining structures that often stands as an obstacle from seeing the possibility reconciliation and conflict resolution. Lederach implies that imagination alone is insufficient peacebuilding, if not coupled with the discipline of practical engagement. He then clarifies by describing peacebuilding as being a long-term commitment to building relationships and structures that have been broken by conflict. He also links peace building to restructuring relationships and social systems to restore trust and mutual respect. (Lederach, 2005, pp. 27–34)

II. Organization's Philosophy and Practices: Initiatives of Change International

“Initiatives of Change (IofC) is a world-wide community of people of diverse cultures and backgrounds, who are committed to the transformation of society through changes in human motives and behavior, starting with their own” (Initiatives of Change International, n.d.-a, para. 1). It's an organization that was founded in the 1920s on the work of Dr. Frank Buchman, who was an American Lutheran Minister who believed that sustainable social changes starts with personal transformations. After he experienced his own moral and spiritual transformation at a church conference in 1908, Buchamn began encouraging others to seek inner reconciliation and find value in its moral clarity that drives judgement and action.

During the Spanish war, just before the WWII in 1938, Buchman created a movement called Moral Re-Armament (MRA), calling for rearming conscience rather than weapons (Mottu, 1970). By early 2000s, the movement evolved into an organization under the name of Initiatives of Change International, safeguarding MRAs core values and vision. The name reflecting the organization's essential message that change starts with oneself, before attempting to change the world. The organization's ethical and spiritual foundations and values revolves around four: honesty, unselfishness, purity, and love; linking personal integrity and accountability to public peacebuilding. (Belden, 1979; Lean, 1985).

During the Spanish War, just after the Second World War in 1938, Buchman and his colleagues brought this philosophy into reconciliation practices between France and Germany through hosting conferences, gatherings, dialogues and other similar spaces for building bridges. These events took place in Caux Palace in Switzerland, originally a former hotel, which has since become the IofC International Center (Mottu, 1970).

Switzerland was already positioned as a neutral party throughout the war, hence Caux was viewed as a neutral meeting space for dialogue among conflicting parties and former enemies. Caux was even recognized by the United Nations for its postwar peacebuilding initiatives. One famous episode that stood out, due to its exemplary layout with respect to the organization's philosophy, was a story of a women who went through a transformative journey of healing and forgiveness. Under a dialogue for healing and forgiveness supporting Europe's moral reconstruction, a French woman named Irène Laure was invited to the event. Upon her arrival, she heard that a large delegation of Germans was arriving, she decided to leave unable to face the people she held responsible for her nation's suffering. At that moment, Frank Buchman, asked whether she believed that Europe could be rebuilt without the Germans, in which she later chose to stay. In one of the private sessions, Laure vented her anger out on a German woman, only to discover that she was speaking to Clarita von Trott, who had lost her husband her children to the Nazi regime. Clarita listened and then said, “I realize that we did not resist strongly enough, nor soon enough. Because of us you have suffered a great deal. Forgive us, please.” Laure later said, “On that day I felt free — free as never before” (Mottu, 1970, p. 105).

The same day, Laure addressed the plenary session of over 500 people, including 100 Germans, telling her story of suffering, concluding with these words: “although nothing could be forgotten, she chose to forgive” referring to Clarita. Then, astonishingly, she asked the Germans to forgive her hatred. The hall fell silent before a German woman rose to respond, offering her own confessions and apology. In the audience that day was Peter Petersen, a former Hitler Youth and Wehrmacht officer, who later wrote that he could not sleep for several nights after listening to Laure speak, realizing that “my entire past was revolting against this woman’s courage” (Henderson, 1996, pp. 74–75). He and others later dedicated their lives to reconciliation and democracy in post-war Europe.

This single episode drawn from an ocean of other similar stories across the world inspired by IofC’s philosophy, embodies its enduring conviction that “wounds that are not transformed are always transferred”. Demonstrating how inner change and forgiveness can liberate individuals and reshape societies, outlining that reconciliation is not only a political negotiation but a profound moral transformation (Belden, 1979; Henderson, 1996).

III. My Personal Journey: Facebook Link to Inner transformation

My journey with Initiatives of Change (IofC) began unexpectedly, more than a decade ago. It started with a simple click on a link I saw on Facebook about a month internship in Caux, Switzerland, focused on communication and leadership development. I was intrigued, mostly by the mention of four ethical values and something called “inner listening.” The idea that an organization could combine leadership, spirituality, and self-reflection seemed almost too idealistic.

Those three weeks in Caux opened a door I never knew existed. It made me realize that peace is not abstract, that it is not something 'out there'; it is deeply personal. It starts with me. The community I met talked about changing from within, about the courage to face one's ego before trying to change the world. What they said echoed what Galtung (1969) termed positive peace: not just the absence of conflict but the presence of conditions under which human beings can flourish.

Wanting to go deeper, I applied for another IofC program a five-month internship in India. That experience would prove to be the turning point in my life. In Panchgani, surrounded by people from different faiths and backgrounds, I felt myself being drawn into the rhythm of community life built around silence, storytelling, and shared service. In the beginning, I struggled with the idea of “inner listening.” To sit in silence was unbearable. Every time I tried, forgotten thoughts and emotions would rise, things I had avoided or buried for so long. Through my reflections, I learned that silence was not emptiness; it was the space where truth began to speak. Smith (2004) wrote about the practice of silence in IofC communities: “thoughts disappear, ink does not; writing makes the invisible visible.”

Through that process, I discovered parts of myself I had never confronted including my impatience, need to control, and my quickness to judge others. Slowly, I realized that the things that frustrated me most in other people were often reflections of my own inner state. I was, in Galtung's terms, recognizing a kind of inner structural violence patterns of thought and emotion that enabled division within myself and in my relationships externally. Healing that inner aspect of myself became my first step in peacebuilding.

One of the most transformative experiences during my time in India came after one of the story-sharing sessions with participants from Meghalaya (Indian State). One man spoke about losing the chance to reconcile his relationship with his father before he passed away. His story echoed within me. It made me think about my own father, about the invisible wall between us, a distance that had always existed, but I had never named or addressed. My father was a hardworking man who had spent most of his life away from home, providing for our family; working long hours under harsh conditions. Yet as a child and teenager, I had felt embarrassed and resentful towards him for not being able to provide a high-end luxurious lifestyle like what my friends had.

I remember sitting in silence one morning when realization hit, seeing how my ingratitude had wounded not only my relationship with him but also myself. My heart ached under the weight of an invisible knot that had been there for years. I wrote him a letter to address this knot through. In this letter, I expressed my longing for connection, reconciliation and forgiveness. When my father called acknowledged the reception of the letter, expressing gratitude, it was as if a huge weight lifted off my chest. My father's words dissolved years of unspoken tension. That single act of vulnerability opened space for love to flow again; not only between us but within me.

In that instant, I finally knew what Henderson had meant when he wrote in 1996 that "forgiveness is the key that unlocks the prison of resentment." My apology wasn't, in fact, an act of reconciliation with my father but one of reconciliation with myself. Soon, I found myself apologizing for everything-for my brother, my cousin, anyone I hurt or overlooked. With each apology, I had a feeling of release, as if some kind of lens within my inner guide was being cleared. The more I let go, the more space I provided for empathy and joy. I began to see that what Lederach (2005) calls "the moral imagination", the capacity to imagine ourselves in relationship with those we have wounded or who have wounded us, is not an abstract concept. It is a lived practice.

Conclusion

In essence, peacebuilding is not strictly bound to an external or political process, it extends from a deep human-centric one. The journey toward peace begins within oneself, through introspection in stillness and connection with oneself; often involves uncomfortable states of self-confrontation personal accountability. As my experience with Initiatives of Change revealed, inner transformation is not a withdrawal from the world as an escape, but a redirection toward it. By connecting to oneself whilst addressing internal wounds and hurts through transformation, one eventually gains a renewed sense of direction and purpose.

When individuals begin to reconcile with their own unhealed wounds, they become capable of authentically and empathetically engaging with others. Lederach's (2005) echoes this view, that sustainable peace requires the meeting of imagination and disciplined engagement, as well as Fitz-Gibbon's (2010) belief that genuine peace education lies in the transformation of the heart.

Upon reflecting on both personal experience and scholarly teachings, it's safe to conclude that peace is not the absence of conflict, but the existence of connection and trust-building. Through self-examination we learn to breakdown internalized structures of violence that projects and manifests outwardly into our communities and systems. As a case study, IofC's philosophy and approach embodies this principle: that personal change and transformation leads to social change. Therefore, authentic peacebuilding, can be looked at as the art of aligning the inner compass with the betterment of the world. It is through humility, honesty, and forgiveness, one becomes an agent of reconciliation, which establishes that the work of healing hearts and societies for peace, are not two separate processes but an interconnected one of the same journeys.

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