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Awareness

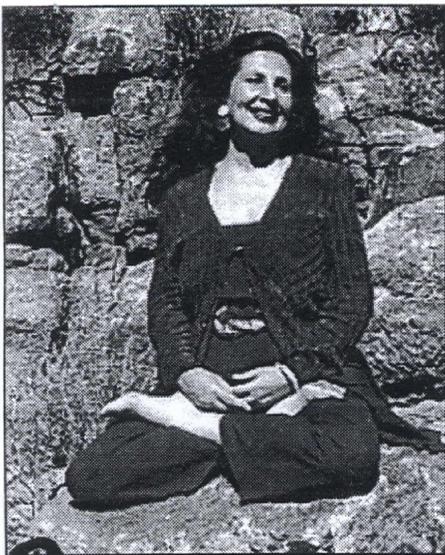
GUIDE TO HEALTHY LIVING FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

RAMA VERNON

WHAT ONE WOMAN CAN DO
TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD

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What one woman can do to make a difference in the world

By Kay Walburger

Rama Vernon, housewife and mother of five children asked herself, "What can one woman do to make a difference in the world?" The reason for the question was the fear her children and their school friends were experiencing from the world events taking shape at that time. The cold war was escalating and the threat of nuclear holocaust was a clear and present danger. The impenetrable Iron Curtain kept Russia isolated and its people unreachable. Our national mood was reflected in our President's words as he called Russia the "Evil Empire!" And the tone of peace negotiations was depressing since most of the time allotted for peace conferences was wasted squabbling over the size and shape of the peace table and who would sit where.

It was a time of mistrust and posturing. While continuing to stockpile weapons of destruction, the progress of the peace process was impeded at every turn. The people of this planet were choosing sides and fear of impending doom was echoed in the screaming headlines of the media around the world. The whole world watched and waited with bated breath as a nightmarish chain of events unfolded. Everyone knew this would be a war no one could win because radioactive fallout would poison the planet's health and resources for thousands of years of contamination.

Major doubt about anything surviving at all was a fact each person had to face. Who wins a toxic war that destroys all or most of the life on earth? "My children were so frightened they would not live long enough to grow up, I knew I had to do something about this situation, but what? What could I do? What did I know of peace and how to communicate it to others? With a mother's heart I asked myself for this wisdom, and prayed and meditated on the answers," reminisces Rama.

A PLACE OF PEACE

Rama's own childhood had taken place during World War II and she was fortunate to have parents who were natural healers and spiritual-minded people who had taught her profound principles of metaphysics and mysticism. The family entertained guests and friends that read like 'The Who's Who' of the trans-

formational world of wisdom. Edgar Casey, Dale Carnegie, Norman Vincent Peale, Ernest Holmes, Joseph Murphy, and many more would come to breakfast with her parents. Her father came from a long line of holy men and mystics from the Middle East and was a pioneer in the holistic and natural health practice movement.

Rama became enthralled with Yoga at the tender age of 15 and found within its practice and wisdom the inner peace she longed to see in the outer world but felt was not possible. Her Yoga practice gave her a 'place of peace' within her being and she felt she could send that out to the world. For the next 30 years she studied the postures, breathing and philosophy of Yoga. She became a teacher, and then a teachers' teacher. In 1974 Rama Jyoti Vernon, founded the American Yoga College, built upon the foundation of the California Institute for Yoga Teachers Education (IYTE—a non-profit educational organization) offering a comprehensive integrative approach to Yoga teacher education. The emphasis is the alignment and integration of asana, breath, and the philosophy of Yoga. She is also co-founder of the Yoga Journal.

As a renowned master Yoga teacher she was contacted about taking Yoga into Russia. As Yoga is spiritual but not necessarily religious, it might be permitted into the country where religious practitioners were persona non-gratis. Perhaps they might welcome Yoga more readily than anything else. Rama was willing to overcome her personal fears and doubts to go into Russia and find out. She was a mother who would do this for her children's sake and all for the children of the world.

On her first journey to Russia she learned two amazing facts. First, she was scared to death of all the stereotypes she had been programmed to believe in. She remembered what a friend said long ago, "What is held in mind produces after its kind!" She recognized the option to change her own mind. And second, one day in Red Square a woman fell to her knees in front of Rama and begged for Peace! They were as afraid of us as we were of them! It was then that she knew she had to do something dramatic, but what? She reasoned that since the Russians were not per-

mitted to leave their country, she would have to bring many Americans here so they could meet each other and see for themselves that we are more alike than different. She realized at that moment, it was not the time for Yoga, maybe later.

The Heart Connection we made with people we were taught or conditioned to believe were our 'enemies' was the essence of the peace work. It called on us to cross national borders, and most significantly, our own borders of consciousness. As we looked into their eyes, into their faces, we found only friends. As we looked deeper, we saw the mirror reflection of our own selves! She began bringing hundreds, then thousands of Americans to Russia and they were called "Citizen Diplomats!" Rama says, "A Citizen Diplomat is one who transcends their own personal ideological, religious boundaries to see the 'oneness' and experience the 'oneness' in all. We began a process of Dialogue to begin exploring peace. Dialogue is not a debate where one person has to win the point. It is rather an exchange of stories, ideas, thoughts, experiences shared with no thought of 'one-upmanship'."

"I think of it as a river that flows between two banks. The river is a steady stream, inside the two banks are receiving this exchange of energy. One person speaks and the other person really listens, then the other one speaks and is really listened to in a transaction of energy expressed as thoughts, ideas, and feelings.

"Dialogue is not a win or lose process where one sits and tries to think what they will say when it's their turn. It is really listening and taking in the message another is sharing. Good Dialogue scenarios require both parties to listen to what is 'not' said as well as what 'is' being said. We call this Active Listening at the Center for International Dialogue where we train our Citizen Diplomats. The Center teaches 23 steps to Active Listening, which is the prerequisite to True Dialogue."

Tens of thousands of American visitors to Russia later, and after more than a thousand joint ventures between our two countries, Rama thought her work was done, but returned one more time to receive the gratitude of a grateful country and its people.

Mikhail Gorbachev said, "We helped to end the cold war stereotypes!" He said, "It wasn't me and it wasn't Reagan, it was the people!" One of Gorbachev's advisors said to me, "You have laid down your life for all these years for our people, you were even ready to die for us, and we acknowledge you and how you have helped prepare the way for peace. Thank you for bringing the best that the heart of America has to offer. You have brought people of spirit, people of heart, to meet and develop joint projects with our people." I asked him "Why is it each time we bring a group together and it is time to say goodbye, do they hold on and cling to each other?" He replied "Because we are brothers and sisters who have been separated by our borders for a very long time, and now that we have found each other again, we don't want to say Goodbye!"

RAMA VERNON A LIVING LEGEND!

"I don't think of myself as a legend, I'm really a very simple housewife and mother. When people say to me "How did you bring about conflict resolution to countries which have not been able to do so for themselves for many years?" I answer I am a mother of five children! The great conflict of the world can be resolved just as we resolve conflict in our own homes and more than that within our own hearts! I never thought my life that began so many years ago with Yoga would take me to all the places in the world that it has. All I *did* know is that inner peace is the way to world peace! All I knew was to do my practice, meditate and find my own inner peace, and then send that out to the world.

"I never dreamed I would meet so many presidents, monarchs, and ambassadors, from so many countries throughout our world. As I crossed borders between many countries, I learned that I also had to cross the borders within my own self! Within my own mind and within my own heart! Love is the greatest power in the Universe and I realized I didn't need to speak the languages of other countries when I could feel the love within my own heart.

"Once in the Soviet Union, I was to meet with a very tough woman and receive her approval for our project.

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Everyone said you will never get her to agree. We asked for our project to be approved by her and she said "Nyet, nyet, nyet!!!" I stopped and sat across from her in silence, looking at her as I felt my own heart with a line crossing over to her heart. After a while she turned and looked at me in a new way and said in perfect English, "We'll do everything you asked." All I did was sit there and feel love for her and would not take 'no' for an answer. Love is the greatest power in the Universe, it's the greatest healer and it transcends all the boundaries and all borders we have created with our own self-limitations. The limitation we have created in our own communities, our nations, and our world!

"This begs the question, can we do this right here in our own country? Those lines of separation that divide us through religion, race, nationality, and all the other ways in which we have learned to divide ourselves demand us to cross over our self-imposed boundaries of consciousness."

ACTIVE LISTENING, THE PATH TO PEACE!

"Active listening flows only one way. It is to help the speaker get clear and helps them get to the root of their issues or conflict. The listener is there for the person speaking and must not give advice, make comparisons, or relate answers. By non-contradictory, in-depth listening, you help the speaker get clarity and find answers within themselves! We have found that truly listening to people share their stories without interrup-

tion is healing for them. In difficult situations, when we think we might have an answer or clue, we form it into a question to the speaker. "Do you think this might be what is happening?" "Do you feel that perhaps this might be a clue or help?" When the person finds answers within their heart and mind, they own it and feel peaceful about the next step in their life.

"I have personally done this compassionate active listening with women from most of the war-torn countries of the world. Some tell about their personal pain, grief, loss, anger, hurt and feelings of betrayal. They feel an urgency to tell their stories and especially to Americans, whom many of them believe are somewhat responsible for part of their suffering. Mostly they feel 'Hope' that we can get the word out and retell their stories, especially in America. There is major healing among these women and their families resulting from our not trying to return the sharing, or trying to fix them, rather giving them the experience of truly being heard!

"When people say to me "I don't feel heard", I ask them, "Are you listening?" We have discovered that when we really listen, we don't have to share our story because we find their story is our story!"

Rama Vernon, mother of five and grandmother to six, is very busy in every corner of the world today helping to create bridges of peace, love, and compassion to the weary warring world!

For more information, please contact the Center for International Dialogue, P.O. Box 5194, Walnut Creek, CA 94596 or call (888) 784 2443. Or you may contact the American Yoga College, P.O. Box 5201 Walnut Creek, CA 94542 or call (888) 949-YOGA(9642) Check out www.americanyogacollege.org