

Hildegard

A opening presentation on the virtues of life taught by Hildegard von Bingen at the International Hildegard medicine conference, Konstanz (Germany), 2016.

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Let's look at peace from a holistic perspective – body, mind and soul.

The word peace in Chinese is 和平. The first character is a combination of grain and the mouth which means to have food to eat and the second character is a symbol of a balance. First of all we need to make sure everyone has a means to earn a decent living without discrimination and with just distribution of food.

Our late founding prime minister believed that we need to take care of the stomach first before we talk about individual rights and ideology. This is implemented in various policies to ensure all citizens regardless of race, gender, religion and culture can have the means and equal opportunity to earn a decent living and own their own homes.

This I believe is one of the secrets of harmony in Singapore, despite being a small country and without any natural resources. You probably cannot find us in the map.

However going a bit deeper, the food we eat and what we feed to the brain have an impact on our emotions and inner peace or conflicts.

For example studies have shown that a diet lacking in essential fatty acids, Vitamin B6 and folic acid for example, is shown to cause impulsivity, irritability and aggressiveness.

A diet with excessive sugar, salt, refined /processed food and saturated fats can deplete the above nutrients.

Therefore is not surprising that St Hildegard said:

'Therefore, those of us who wish to keep from sinning (my words - sin means any action or thought that creates disharmony in our relationship between ourselves and Providence, other people and nature), should avoid meat because meat often causes the fleshy part of our nature to fall into sin.'

St Hildegard in Book of Divine Works

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Therefore, what we feed to our bodies most of the time do affect our inner peace.

Now we come to our mind and inner spirit.

I believe to have lasting peace (after our physical needs are fulfilled like food), we need to start by having a peaceful mind in the first place. For our thoughts determine our peace. If we are not peaceful or harmony within, we cannot have peace without. If our inner mind is one of conflict, hatred, jealousy etc., how can we create peace in our outer world or environment?

Our thoughts are determined by our beliefs. That is why in my book *Leaf to Life: Unlock nature's secrets to true health*, I listed 9 Credos as the foundational life enhancing beliefs. One of the Credos and belief statements is - **I am in harmony with all.**

I believe to have peace or harmony, we need to be very humble.

I used to belong to a religious group during my college years. I would go around to share or to organise seminars to tell the world how superior my religion compared to others. On the other hand, some fundamentalist groups in my campus would demonise our religious practices. You may think this is very naïve. But this was what actually happened in our campus in the 1980's. Actually after reflection, I realised that it has nothing to do with the religions. It has to do with my own ego – the craving to have a false identity and wanting to feel special. We think we are the 'chosen' ones. As long as we think we are the only chosen ones and everyone else need to conform to our standards, there will be no peace on an individual level and all the more on a national level.

Therefore to have peace, we need to humble ourselves, to have empathy and to understand others.

What about the spiritual level? I am not a theologian nor a guru.

Let me share with you my personal experiences. Whenever I am depressed, I would lock myself in a prayer room and sit in silence in adoration. I would follow Mary's (Mother of Christ) example – They have no more wine, my Son. I would lament that I don't know what to do, I don't have a solution and I wait. I would feel a sense of peace and often the answers to my problems would surface.

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To sum up, let me quote from St Isaac, the Syrian Orthodox monk –

If you make peace with yourself, heaven and earth will make peace with you.

Thank you for your attention and may you be blessed with peace and health.