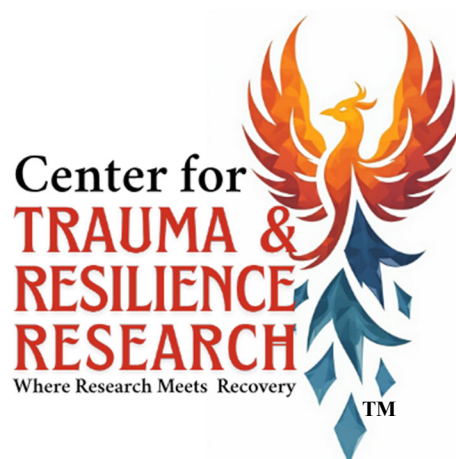**The Emotion of Peace: Embodied, Relational, Cultural, and Clinical Dimensions**

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Abstract

Peace is often framed as the absence of violence or conflict, yet it is also a lived emotional state shaped by embodiment, relationship, culture, and meaning. This essay conceptualizes peace as an emotion characterized by felt safety, coherence, acceptance, and relational openness, and it synthesizes interdisciplinary scholarship spanning peace studies, psychology, education, healthcare, technology, and spirituality. Drawing on research on emotional climate and cultures of peace, the paper describes how collective affective patterns and social sharing of emotion influence public trust, human security, and the plausibility of peaceful coexistence (Basabe & Valencia, 2007; De Rivera & Páez, 2007; Rimé, 2007). It also examines emotional barriers and emotion regulation in intractable conflict, emphasizing how threat, fear, and identity dynamics can inhibit peace even when peace is cognitively endorsed (Halperin, 2011; Halperin & Pliskin, 2015). An embodied lens highlights peace as a psychophysiological state supported by mindfulness, compassion practices, and somatic approaches that reshape emotional evaluations and strengthen regulation (Grossman, 2015; Khoury et al., 2017; Schroter & Jansen, 2022). Applications in peace education and leadership underscore emotional intelligence and skill-based supports for reducing aggression and promoting prosocial climates (Bardol & Connor, 2013; Haber-Curran, 2024; Wong & Power, 2024). Clinical and palliative care findings further position peace as a measurable outcome associated with quality of life, existential integration, and spiritual support (Pearce et al., 2012; Sauer et al., 2024; Steinhauser et al., 2017). Finally, the essay addresses how gendered discourses, mediated intimacy, and modern wellness cultures shape which forms of peace are socially legitimized and accessible (Agius, 2024; Alinejad, 2021; Nisbet, 2019). Overall, peace emerges as a multidimensional emotional reality that can be

cultivated through embodied regulation, relational repair, cultural responsiveness, and meaning-centered care.

Peace as an Emotion: Embodied, Relational, Cultural, and Clinical Dimensions

Peace is often treated as a political outcome—an end to hostilities, a signed accord, or the absence of violence. Yet peace is also an emotionally lived reality: a felt sense of safety, coherence, acceptance, and relational openness that can be experienced in bodies, communities, institutions, and spiritual life. When peace is approached as an emotion (and not only an event), it becomes possible to study how peace is cultivated, disrupted, communicated, and repaired across contexts such as conflict resolution, education, healthcare, technology-mediated relationships, and faith-based healing. Contemporary scholarship increasingly frames peace as a layered phenomenon: political and interpersonal; individual and collective; cognitive and embodied; culturally patterned and developmentally formed (Basabe & Valencia, 2007; De Rivera & Páez, 2007; De Rivera et al., 2007; Zembylas, 2015, 2021).

Conceptualizing Peace Beyond "Absence of Conflict"

Peace, as an emotion, can be understood as a regulated internal state marked by lowered threat activation, increased capacity for meaning-making, and the ability to remain present in relationship without defensive withdrawal. This framing aligns with work emphasizing peace-related constructs such as equanimity, acceptance, and existential integration (Sauer et al., 2024; Steinhauser et al., 2017). It also corresponds with scholarship showing that public attitudes toward peace processes are shaped not only by ideology but by emotional barriers and emotion regulation in contexts of intractable conflict (Halperin, 2011; Halperin & Pliskin, 2015). In this view, peace is not merely "calm," but a deeper integration of cognition, emotion, identity, and belonging—an emotional posture that can be stable or fragile depending on environmental safety and social meaning.

Historically, governance and social order have been linked to the regulation of passions, demonstrating that the "emotional politics" of peace and security can be embedded in institutions and cultural norms (Andrade, 2020). Contemporary peace and security discourse continues to carry emotional and gendered expectations about what "neutrality" or "peacefulness" should look like, often framing certain approaches as weak or naïve (Agius, 2024). These representational dynamics matter because they shape which emotional stances are culturally rewarded and which are ridiculed, thereby influencing whether people and communities feel permitted to pursue peace as a legitimate goal (Agius, 2024; Zembylas, 2021).

Peace as Embodied Experience

If peace is an emotion, it is also embodied. Embodied cognition research suggests that emotional states are not only "in the mind" but distributed across bodily perception, action readiness, and social interaction (Fugate et al., 2024; Khoury et al., 2017; Shalin, 2017). Practices that engage attention, breath, posture, movement, and compassionate orientation can shift emotional evaluation of others and reduce reactive judgments (Schroter & Jansen, 2022). Mindfulness scholarship similarly argues that awareness is informed by embodied ethics—how we inhabit attention, desire, and interpersonal responsibility (Grossman, 2015; Khoury et al., 2017).

Embodied peace also appears in applied domains that explicitly use the body to reduce conflict and restore social connection. Somatic dance approaches for conflict transformation, for example, conceptualize peace as learnable through movement, rhythm, attunement, and shared embodied meaning (Eddy, 2016). Related work on expressive bodies and charisma suggests that emotional communication is often "felt" before it is verbally understood, shaping trust, affiliation, and the sense of safety needed for peace to emerge (Freund, 2009). These lines of

inquiry converge on a key point: peace is not only negotiated through words; it is also enacted through the body's capacity to remain grounded, open, and regulated in the presence of others (Berents, 2015; Fugate et al., 2024).

Peace as Relational and Culturally Patterned Emotion

Peace is shaped by culture, emotional climate, and social learning. The emotional climate framework proposes that societies develop shared affective patterns—collective feelings that influence perceived security, trust in institutions, and the plausibility of peaceful coexistence (Basabe & Valencia, 2007; De Rivera & Páez, 2007; De Rivera et al., 2007; Rimé, 2007). When collective emotions are dominated by fear, humiliation, or threat, peace can be cognitively endorsed yet emotionally resisted (Halperin, 2011; Halperin & Pliskin, 2015). Conversely, prosocial collective narratives can foster more peaceful attitudes and reduce intergroup hostility by reshaping affective meaning and moral imagination (Castro-Abril et al., 2025; Long & Brecke, 2002).

Culture also shapes the texture and interpretation of positive emotions such as peace of mind. Research in second-language acquisition, for instance, highlights cultural specificity in how peace of mind relates to enjoyment, motivation, and emotional antecedents (Zhou et al., 2024). More broadly, intercultural psychology emphasizes that emotional meanings shift across contexts; what counts as "peace" may be experienced as restraint, harmony, liberation, acceptance, or spiritual resting depending on cultural values and sociostructural conditions (Cushner & Brislin, 1996; Misra & Misra, 2024). These findings caution against one-size-fits-all approaches to cultivating peace, especially in multicultural settings or international peacebuilding work (Wallis, 2024).

Emotional Intelligence and Peace Education

A consistent theme across peace education is that peace is sustained through emotional skills. Emotional intelligence (EI)—including self-awareness, emotion regulation, empathy, and relational repair—has been framed as foundational for peace leadership and peace making (Bardol & Connor, 2013; Haber-Curran, 2024). In school settings, social-emotional learning and structured initiatives can create climates where conflict is addressed without humiliation and where students gain skills for cooperative problem-solving (Djabrayan Hannigan & Hannigan, 2020; Trujillo, 2019). Programs such as classroom-based peace interventions aim to increase children's emotional intelligence to reduce aggression and foster prosocial behavior (Wong & Power, 2024), while "peace spaces" in schools can be evaluated as practical environmental supports that increase regulation and constructive coping (Liang et al., 2024).

Interpersonal conflict scholarship similarly underscores that peace requires learnable skills—communication, negotiation, perspective-taking, and emotion management—especially when disagreements threaten identity or belonging (Donohue & Kolt, 1992). In professional settings, emotional labor research shows that people often perform socially acceptable emotions (e.g., warmth, calm) regardless of internal state, raising ethical questions about authenticity, burnout, and the relational conditions required for genuine peace (Cossette & Hess, 2015). If peace is reduced to performed pleasantness, it can become coercive; when peace is supported by skillful emotion regulation and mutual dignity, it becomes sustainable and restorative (Bardol & Connor, 2013; Zembylas, 2015).

Peace, Personality, and Psychological Mechanisms

Individual differences also matter. Research linking personality traits to peace attitudes suggests that stable dispositions (e.g., agreeableness, emotional stability) can influence openness

to peaceful orientations, though always within contextual constraints (Cavarra et al., 2021). Cognitive-affective neuroscience perspectives on brain networks highlight that cognition and emotion are integrated systems rather than separate modules, supporting the idea that peace involves coordinated structure–function relationships across cognitive-emotional processes (Clark, 2023). Related clinical work emphasizes the importance of access to internal states; when individuals have diminished interoceptive awareness (as theorized in certain psychopathologies), it may be harder to identify, regulate, and sustain peaceful emotional states (Liberman et al., 2023).

Because peace includes the capacity to tolerate distress without escalating, therapeutic and self-help approaches often target cognitive patterns and emotion regulation strategies. Cognitive tools for challenging negative thoughts can support a more stable emotional baseline, increasing the likelihood of sustained inner peace during stress (Clark, 2020). Mindfulness practices can reduce mind wandering and improve emotion regulation, contributing to inner peace in children under significant life stress (Gong et al., 2025). Together, these perspectives highlight peace as both a skill and a state—supported by attention, cognition, and embodied regulation.

Peace in Trauma, Post-Conflict, and Peacebuilding Contexts

Peace is frequently constrained by trauma and historical violence. Educational and peacebuilding scholarship argues that traumatic conflict shapes emotional life, including grief, moral injury, fear, and identity threat, and that healing requires more than cognitive instruction— it requires relational and emotional repair (Zembylas, 2015). Post-conflict societies and individuals can carry emotional legacies of war that complicate reintegration and reconciliation, including shame, numbness, and mistrust (Nussio, 2012). Work on everyday peace emphasizes

that peace is sometimes practiced in the "in-between" spaces of daily life, even in contexts where violence remains present, through routines, mutual care, and small acts of embodied safety-making (Berents, 2015). Peacebuilding practitioners themselves are shaped by emotional and embodied experiences that influence how they interpret and enact peacebuilding work (Wallis, 2024).

Movements for peace likewise require "emotional work"—collective efforts to sustain moral motivation, hope, and courage amid political setbacks and social conflict (Maney et al., 2009). This suggests that peace is not only achieved by policy but maintained by emotional communities that practice endurance, meaning, and solidarity.

Peace in Health, Serious Illness, and End-of-Life Care

In healthcare contexts, peace is often described as a protective emotional factor tied to quality of life and existential well-being. Studies of cancer experience, for example, validate measures of peace, equanimity, and acceptance and link them to mental health and health-related quality of life (Sauer et al., 2024). Spiritual peace and life meaning may buffer anxiety's impact on physical well-being among cancer survivors, indicating that peace functions as an emotional resource under conditions of uncertainty (Sleight et al., 2021). Among advanced cancer patients, unmet spiritual care needs can harm emotional and spiritual well-being, underscoring how relational and existential supports contribute to felt peace (Pearce et al., 2012). Interventions addressing emotional and existential needs during serious illness also point to peace as a clinical target—something that can be supported through structured conversation, meaning-centered support, and compassionate presence (Steinhauser et al., 2017).

Similarly, surgical oncology literature examines "peace of mind" after mastectomy, indicating that peace is not a vague ideal but a measurable outcome shaped by medical information, decision support, and psychosocial care (Hamid et al., 2024). End-of-life care resources emphasize practical tools for emotional, social, and spiritual support, highlighting peace as a multidimensional need in dying and caregiving (Strada, 2013). Overall, health contexts show that peace as an emotion is often built through coherent information, relational trust, spiritual support, and compassionate communication—not through denial of reality.

Faith, Spirituality, and Inner Healing

For many individuals and communities, peace is inseparable from spiritual meaning. Christian healing ministries and therapeutic cultures often frame inner peace as linked to embodied emotions, prayerful practices, and relational restoration (Althouse, 2023; Phillips & Jakes Roberts, 2023). Spiritual resiliency models in older adulthood similarly emphasize meaning, transcendence, and faithful coping as pathways through suffering toward steadier emotional equilibrium (Ramsey & Blieszner, 1999). Forgiveness scholarship also conceptualizes peace as emerging through processes that resolve anger, reduce rumination, and restore hope—especially when interpersonal harms have disrupted safety and trust (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015). In this frame, peace is not simply calmness; it is a moral and relational transformation that integrates grief, justice, compassion, and renewed identity (Tedeschi, 1995; Long & Brecke, 2002).

Technology, Learning, and Modern Emotional Life

Modern life also reshapes how peace is experienced. Technology-mediated intimacy can intensify emotional demands and create new forms of long-distance care, with platforms shaping how closeness and reassurance are expressed (Alinejad, 2021). At the same time, new

technologies (including AI-mediated systems) raise questions about embodied experience and social participation: how does relational presence, empathy, and "felt peace" change when interactions are partially automated or structured by digital feedback loops (Graves, 2023)? Emerging work on AI-generated feedback in writing contexts, for example, connects motivational dynamics, trait emotional intelligence, and "peace of mind," suggesting that learning environments can be designed to reduce threat and enhance calm engagement (Mohammed & Khalid, 2025). Yet cultural critiques caution that "mindfulness" can also be commodified in ways that detach peace from justice and social conditions, raising ethical questions about whose peace is being protected and at what cost (Nisbet, 2019).

Even within high-performance learning cultures, peace may require pacing, reflective attention, and sustainable growth practices—an idea aligned with broader arguments for adaptive learning and continuous development (Hess, 2020). Peace, in this sense, becomes a modern competency: the ability to remain internally coherent amid rapid change.

Conclusion

Treating peace as an emotion expands peace studies beyond treaties and toward lived human experience. Across research traditions, peace appears as an embodied state of regulation (Fugate et al., 2024; Khoury et al., 2017), a culturally patterned and socially shared climate (Basabe & Valencia, 2007; De Rivera & Páez, 2007; Rimé, 2007), a skillset grounded in emotional intelligence and relational repair (Bardol & Connor, 2013; Haber-Curran, 2024), and a measurable outcome in clinical and spiritual care (Pearce et al., 2012; Sauer et al., 2024; Sleight et al., 2021). Peace is also vulnerable: trauma, political fear, identity threat, and gendered narratives can obstruct peace even when people intellectually desire it (Agius, 2024; Halperin, 2011; Zembylas, 2015).

Ultimately, peace is best understood as a multidimensional emotional reality that is cultivated through safety, meaning, skillful emotion regulation, embodied practice, and supportive relationships. When peace is approached as learnable and relational—rather than purely ideological—it becomes something that can be strengthened in classrooms, clinics, families, faith communities, and public life.

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