

Seven Actions to Create Peace on Earth

David Gershon



In 1986, at the height of the cold war, a torch of peace was passed around the world. The First Earth Run, in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund directly engaged twenty-five million people and 45 heads-of-state in 62 countries. Over a billion people watched the torch via the media circumnavigate the globe. For 86 days wherever the torch of peace went all wars stopped and the world was united as one. Since then this modern day mythic story embodying humanity's noblest aspiration for peace on earth has continued to be told all over the world.

Now the torch has been reignited through these seven actions to continue its quest to create peace on earth. Why now? One of the reasons the First Earth Run succeeded was because it benefited from the physics of change whereby a deep contraction in the global psyche creates a forcing function for expansion. Humanity is once again experiencing deep contraction in the form of despair about our future prospects as a species. Once again the system conditions are ripe for profound transformative change to occur on the planet.

These seven actions are designed to enter into this opening. They have the power to do this because they represent the best practices that enabled the First Earth Run to unite the world. They also are accessible. Every woman, man and child on the planet can participate. And with all the networks so networked, they can rapidly be disseminated to tens of millions people all over the world.

Every year the First Earth Run story becomes more powerful because it embodies a vision that became a reality of humanity experiencing itself in a unitive state. Because we experienced the impossible becoming possible once, the torch of peace can reunite us again through its archetypal aspiration to create peace on earth. All people of good will are invited to carry the torch and make this future our reality. These actions provide a means.

ACTION 1

A Critical Mass of Dream Keepers

Share the Story With Your Network and Invite Them to Do the Same

The starting point for creating peace on earth is a critical mass of people who believe it is possible. As I took my tentative first steps to create the First Earth Run I encountered my share of cynics who said there was no way we could pull this off, and even if we did, the world was too far gone to make any difference. It was painful to experience such hopelessness. Fortunately, that was not the norm. Most people told me the First Earth Run gave them hope for the future and many wished to help. They did so in numerous ways from organizing torch lighting ceremonies in their communities, to contributing financially,

to praying for our success. They were dream keepers. They believed in our future and were willing to take action to bring it into existence.

The First Earth Run is a planetary scale teaching story of how what seemed impossible, slowly became possible as more and more people around the world starting believing in it. How will we ever get the world to believe that humanity's greatest aspiration—peace on earth—could be possible? It requires dream keepers. To activate dream keepers they need to see how their dream can manifest. This first action invites you to become a keeper of this great dream for humankind and provides you a means to help bring it into reality.

It is so simple it can be done in a few minutes; and so powerful it will send a transformative signal across the planet that keeps rippling through time and space. With the Internet we don't need to run around the world with fire to empower a critical mass of humanity to belief that peace on earth is possible. In an e-mail and/or social media post invite your network to watch the inspiring First Earth Run video, read the story, and take one or more of these seven actions. Let them know why you are doing this and encourage them to do the same.

If enough of us take this action, within a short time a planetary unitive field will be created of people envisioning and creating peace on earth. This will cause a new belief to emerge that we can create the world we want! We will create the world we want! It will be! And then watch our collective dream turn into our reality! Who says one person doesn't make a difference!

ACTION 2

And a Child Shall Lead the Way

Pass the Torch of Peace to the Next Generation

The slogan created by UNICEF which hung in the United Nations General Assembly Hall during the First Earth Run closing ceremony was: "Give the World a Chance: Children Need Peace." The First Earth Run was dedicated to the children of our world and their future. It was the children who opened the hearts of the political leaders with their entreaty to give them a peaceful world in which to grow up. Many children I met in war-torn parts of our world had lost one or both of their parents. All too many had also lost a leg to land mines. I was touched by how emotionally they responded to the torch. It seemed to provide them hope that adults just might be able to create a different kind of world to grow up in.

The pervasive violence in today's world has caused many of our children to lose hope for their future. Without hope they lose heart. We cannot allow this. The short-term goal of this action is to open our children to hope. The long-term goal is to help them sustain hope by being able to directly reduce a major source of conflict in the world: fear of others who seem different from them. As children all over the planet begin taking this action they will discover the power they have to shape their future. The torch will have been passed to the next generation.

Invite the children in your life to watch the First Earth Run video and read the story. This is particularly powerful to do as a family. If they are young, read it to them. Invite them to open their hearts and fully let the story in. After they have taken in the video and story invite them to tell you how it made them feel. They will have many different feelings from sadness as they witness children affected by war, to joy as

they view people celebrating the torch's arrival in their community, to awe as they observe the diversity of humanity. For many children this will be the first time they have experienced themselves as part of the larger world and it will be quite exhilarating.

Then explain that a major reason for the conflicts in the world is the fear we have about those who are different from us. To create peace on earth we need to overcome these fears. Let them know that as more and more children take this action these fears will start to fall away and a better world will emerge. Then invite them to help create that new world by reaching out and learning from schoolmates or other children in their community who's skin is a different color than theirs, or practice a different religion, or are excluded for one reason or another by other children. Create time to talk regularly about their challenges, successes and what they are learning.

When the children build up their confidence and have success stories to share, encourage them to become torchbearers by inviting their friends to also take this action. And do make sure to learn from them as they lead you into the future they are creating for our world.

ACTION 3

Vive la Difference

Befriend the Other

For the First Earth Run to succeed many people of different cultures, races, religions, and political ideologies had to work together. This was not easy because our differences at times caused us to clash. The simple act of organizing a torch ceremony in each country was such an experience. The Japanese wanted it highly choreographed, the Africans wanted it celebratory and more spontaneous, and for the Russians and Chinese it was quite political. I had to expand beyond how I thought it should be and enter into each of these cultures with an open mind. Each time I was willing to enlarge my way of thinking and doing things, I felt myself evolving as a human being.

I also discovered that although there were differences, there were also similarities. We each wanted to make a contribution with our lives. We each wanted to create a better future for the children of the world. We each were excited by the possibility to do something important. In the end, it was learning how to combine our differences and similarities that allowed us to succeed.

Our world needs many signing up for the great adventure of learning from each other. For the human experiment to thrive, it will require us to stretch beyond our comfort zones. We may not always agree with a person's thinking or approach to life, but we and the world will get bigger through the effort.

This simple and profound action invites you to befriend and learn from the people who are different from you. Look for them throughout your life: they live your block, you work with them, they are in your community, they show up in your email inbox, and if you are more adventurous, they live all over the planet. Take this action with a group of people you would like to spend more time with such as friends, neighbors or a faith-based group. Five to eight people is a good size as it allows for more intimate sharing.

Invite these individuals to your home to view and discuss the First Earth Run video.

Having shown this video to thousands of people over the years it is catalytic. It brings to the surface

one's hope and dreams for the world. It rekindles a person's idealism that may have gotten buried under the busyness of life. It provides the rare experience of our shared humanity. And for some, it puts them in touch with their despair about the world and belief that they can't do anything to make it better.

After viewing the video, invite people to share how it made them feel. This is a rich process and will surface the feelings above. Then help them translate this opening into action by asking them these three questions: What can I do in my life to befriend and learn from those who are different from me? What might happen if many people took this action all around the world? What commitment am I willing to make to act on these insights?

When everyone has finished writing, invite each person to talk about what they wrote. After all have spoken, ask them to share with the group what they learned. Then inquire if the group would like to take this further by scheduling a time to meet every month or two to discuss what everyone is learning and provide one another support. We call these support groups "Field Unifying Nodes" or FUN for short. Imagine FUN breaking out all over the planet. Imagine you and your friends being at the epicenter of peace on earth. Imagine yourself creating this future for our world.

ACTION 4

The Unitive Impulse

Celebrate Our Shared Humanity

One experience that was indelibly imprinted in my soul was watching the millions of people around the world respond to the fire. Whether they were Masai warriors from the East African savanna, Chinese children witnessing the flame ascend the Great Wall, or Prime Minister Maggie Thatcher receiving the flame from eleven ethnic neighborhoods in London at 10 Downing Street, each reacted with a palpable sense of awe. Witnessing the fire that was encircling the world provided each an emotionally uplifting experience of our shared humanity. I have come to call this experience the "unitive impulse." It is the yearning for a connection with the other human beings with whom we share this planet. The quickest pathway to peace on earth is experiencing the unitive impulse that connects us all as human beings.

The First Earth Run was coded with the unitive impulse. This included torch passing rituals, candle lighting ceremonies, musical and cultural events, poster competitions, following the torch of peace around the world through the media and in classrooms, even speeches of heads-of-state about our human connection and their aspirations for peace on earth. Several heads-of-state commented that they had never been asked to talk about such things and how ennobling it was for them.

How you activate the unitive impulse is only limited by your imagination. The whole world is your palette. Some ideas include creating a peace table where you invite people from different cultures to share their food and break bread together; a living room conversation where you honor and learn from each other's differences; and a community cultural event where you partake of the richness of each other's music, dance and poetry.

Imagine a planet where people celebrate that which connects us as human beings. Imagine a world where the richness of each culture is honored. Imagine bringing the unitive impulse to your community.

ACTION 5

For the Common Good

Shed Light on Acts of Cooperation

Peace on earth is about more than avoiding war; it is achieved through the active skills of cooperation. Otherwise our differences can devolve into unhealthy conflict. Further, to create the world we want requires us to learn how to cooperate for the common good. To catalyze this skillset during the First Earth Run, we honored the groups inventing cooperation solutions for the common good in each community we visited. We shed light on these initiatives to increase the community's collective intelligence around the often unheralded, but hugely important, skillset of cooperation.

They ranged from women in a West African village hand-building a dam to irrigate the farms of their community; to mothers in a drug-ridden inner-city Philadelphia neighborhood turning their homes into recreation facilities and safe havens for their sons; to honoring the cease fire between Nicaraguan President, Daniel Ortega and the head of the contras who had their children carry the torch of peace together through at the height of their civil war.

Each required vision, determination, and cooperation skills. What it took to succeed was rarely known by anyone other than those directly involved. Turning this hard-won knowledge into a community or national legacy was one of the First Earth Run's greatest sources of satisfaction. This action allows you to do the same for your community.

It can be done by an existing community group or you can establish one for this purpose. Develop your project selection criteria by defining the common good and what acts of cooperation look like. Developing these criteria as a community-wide activity is a powerful way to establish them as new social norms. It is the easiest to piggyback on an already existing community activity in which you just add this element. Then enjoy watching your community glow with acts of cooperative goodness.

ACTION 6

Blessed Are the Peace Makers

Support Those Creating Peace on Earth

While there is a lot we can do personally to further peace on earth, some things require organizations dedicated to this undertaking. We had the good fortune during the First Earth Run to partner with the United Nations Children's Fund and their visionary leader Jim Grant. It was very gratifying to be able contribute to their noble mission by raising millions of dollars for children suffering from the ravages of war. We were told that it was equally gratifying for them to experience our support. We were like the cavalry bringing fresh reinforcements to these intrepid souls on the peacemaking front lines.

While peace on earth is humanity's most noble aspiration, when push comes to shove most people on the planet feel it is just not attainable. But what if it was? What if working for peace on earth was a natural way of life? What if the peacemakers were so supported by the rest of us they had abundant success in their mission? What if mother's told their children as they were growing up that one day they could be a great peacemaker and children aspired to this like they do now to being a super hero?

The peacemakers are our planet's healers. The more we help them, the more they can heal the differences in our world. The more they heal that which separates us; the better will be the world we inhabit. It is a virtuous spiral. This action invites you to support an organization in your community or somewhere in the world practicing the skills needed to create peace on earth.

How do you find such an organization? Look for the ones teaching people how to befriend the other. Find those who believe in the oneness of humankind. Seek out those who honor the dignity of each human being. While many organizations may espouse these sentiments you will be able to discern the true peacemakers by the outcomes they achieve.

Where they exist, the world is more whole. Where they practice their craft, people feel more in harmony with themselves and those around them. When you come into their presence you feel better about yourself. They are the planet's true peacemakers. Bless them with your support and learn from them. And if you find an organization that aspires to achieve this but is falling short, use these seven actions to help them become who they wish to be.

ACTION 7

The World Heart

Pray For and Become Peace on Earth

A number of people I approached to participate in the First Earth Run spontaneously began praying for my success. In the Netherlands a woman created thousands of peace candles with the First Earth Run torch logo and invited people to put them in their windows each night and pray for us. Many did this devotedly for the 86 days of the First Earth Run to show their support. Variations on this theme happened all over the world. I am convinced that the many people praying for us across the planet contributed to our success.

Praying for peace on earth creates a powerful collective intention. It is through our intentions that our world comes into existence. It also fills our heart and mind enabling us to be a person of peace. When the torch peace went to Thailand, Buddhist monks greeted us in meditation holding the sign: "A peaceful world begins with a peaceful mind."

Every day millions of people pray for peace on earth using the prayer "May Peace Prevail on Earth." As a way to keep this prayer in our minds and hearts, Gail and I planted a peace pole in our yard with this prayer in English, Chinese, Arabic and Hopi.

In 2001 the United Nations General Assembly designated September 21st as the International Day of Peace. Millions of people around the world participate in prayer vigils on that day. Consider organizing a prayer vigil in your faith-based group or community on this day. To learn more, visit www.idpvigil.com. To take this action further, be one of the people who keeps the world safe by praying for peace on earth each morning upon awakening. Then, like the First Earth Run, watch how peace on earth shows up in your world.

* * *

Is peace on earth humanity's destiny? I deeply believe it is. It is my fervent hope that these seven actions will inspire that belief in you and enough others to hasten it into reality. Let those of us living in the 21st century be known in the history of our world as the ones who created peace on earth! I wish us all God speed on this momentous journey.

I leave you with a poem that deeply inspired those of us in the First Earth Run as fire to light your way.

We Carry the Torch

Bob Bagar

We carry the torch. Not for any special interest, cause or movement, but as a mission of the heart. The torch passed hand to hand, will wreath the earth with a fragile band of light.

We carry the torch. For ourselves, friends, loved ones, the people of the world and our neighbors in the global village, that all might be linked by sharing a commitment to the future of the world and its children.

We carry the torch. We can rejoice in the knowledge that no one is better qualified than we are for the task. With this torch brandished high, we can joust with gods, vanquish fear, rout despair and flash it as a beacon to light all the days ahead.

We carry the torch. We carry it also to honor others who have come before us. Who held it fast – for a precious moment to keep the spark alive before passing the torch now burning brighter with the passion of their conviction.

Of David, there will be one salient line written in the history books. It will say: "He brought a torch around the world in the 20th century. He would not let us lay it down." Yet he, too, knows the vision is not his alone; it is ours for safekeeping.

If enough of us come to the realization that, "We want to make it," the world will resonate with that truth. If we want the journey to continue, a new resolve will manifest itself. The torch dramatizes a decision we each must face alone. When we affirm the light, a subtle change occurs. We change from passive observer of the miracle of life, to a champion of its sanctity. When that happens we begin to mobilize others and the balance shifts in favor of survival.

If the First Earth Run does nothing more than bring a quorum of the world's people to the simple affirmation, that we care, that will make the difference. It will be enough of a difference to preserve the future.

This torch is become our mind, our heart, our voice. The stirring accents of the First Earth Run anthem can be heard to the accompaniment of footfalls beating softly on the earth's outer rim, echoing footfalls of other ears back to the beginning of time.

Let them say of this generation:

They had enough strength to carry the torch, enough courage to venture forth. The immensity of the journey did not deter them. There were a multitude of willing hands to sustain them.

Come ... let us finish this work. Let us celebrate together. Let us come to the banquet table where candles will be bright. Where there will be song and hearts will be filled.

Come to the feast as neither king nor artisan, warrior nor savant, scribe nor patriarch. Come only as a torchbearer. As one of those who brought the light and was strong enough to cross the borders of the night.