



# Finding Peace Within to Bring Peace to the World

Shirley Gatenio Gabel<sup>1</sup> · Cathryne L. Schmitz<sup>2</sup>

Accepted: 16 February 2024 / Published online: 9 March 2024  
© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2024

For most of us, the decision to become a social worker was based on a desire to make the world a better place. The foci of our efforts and interests are broad, but at the heart of it is a strong desire to improve people's lives. Yet, sorting through articles, social media posts, and conversations with colleagues, one could have the impression that our intent is to criticize all that is wrong in the world or a situation. We spend a lot of time revealing shortcomings and not enough time showcasing what is right in the world. This may result from decades of practicing from needs-based models that position us as experts who diagnose wrongs and select solutions. A rights-based approach re-centers the profession and calls on us to act to find paths that lead to greater justice for all.

Many of us watch the snow blanket the earth this time of year. The snow brings a sense of peace and time to pause and reflect. Beneath the snow lies all the complexities of our world and the roots of our problems. We disrespect one another and the earth, and this manifests itself as poverty, marginalization, violence, pollution, climate disasters, and more. Yet, looking out on the freshly fallen snow is beauty and peace.

The authors of this issue share with us their work investigating the wrongs occurring in the world. The narrative review conducted by Bowie-Viverette and Saulnier finds that student loan debt and repayment challenges perpetuate inequities in access to higher education. Wilfong writes a *Human Rights in Action* piece that calls on educators to advocate for raising the compensation levels of social work practitioners. As we move to India, Parwez demonstrates how the increased contractualization of labor has weakened

labor rights. Keeping us in India but turning us to the intersectionalities of female domestic workers, Karunakaran Prasanna exposes how these employees are harassed and exploited due to gender, caste, class, and ethnicity.

Our next set of articles discusses the exploitation and discrimination of women and girls in other than work situations. Olujobi shows us how laws and legal processes allow for religious followers to be sexually exploited in Nigeria, while Hanson-DeFusco exposes the prevalence of statutory rape among female children in Liberia. Moving to Azerbaijan, Hasanova and Aghazadeh show us religion, cultural practices, and gender issues intersect to prevent women from pursuing their education. Similarly, Vincent, Nalini, and Krishnakumar reveal how the lack of sexual health education for parents of adolescents with intellectual and developmental disabilities results in fear and uniform decision-making that further disadvantage adolescents with disabilities in India. Moradi studied ways in which laws and practices violate the rights of children who lived in prisons with their mothers in Iran, calling for mothers to serve their sentences in home environments. Elsayed, Alsalhi, Eltahir, and Al-Qatawneh share with us their findings on the role of autism centers in promoting social skills among children in the United Arab Emirates, urging that social workers advocate for greater skill training of staff and further research in this area.

The next set of articles cast fresh eyes on known problems. Zimmerman looks at how involuntary hospitalization violates the rights of homeless individuals with mental health issues and is used as a form of detention in New York City. Despite the long history of food security in social work, most social work curricula lack attention to food justice according to the study conducted by Hall-Faul, D'Angelo, and Libal, who offer suggestions for how the right to food can be incorporated into social work curricula and practices. Ramachandran explores the architecture of the social infrastructure in the UK that promotes the destitution of asylum seekers.

The effects of international agreements and relations are investigated in the next two articles. Liyew engages us in a

✉ Shirley Gatenio Gabel  
gateniogabe@fordham.edu

Cathryne L. Schmitz  
CLSCHMIT@uncg.edu

<sup>1</sup> Graduate School of Social Service, Fordham University, New York, NY 10023, USA

<sup>2</sup> Department of Social Work, University of North Carolina Greensboro, Greensboro, NC 27402, USA

controversial examination of how China's increasing role with countries in Africa promotes the realization of human rights in African countries. Ramirez reminds us of the importance of the Sustainable Development Goals to social work and presents methods for integrating knowledge of the SDGs into social work curricula.

All these issues are important and understanding them in greater depth leads us to finding better ways to help people and better this world. We need to focus and celebrate what we do *right* and how by practicing from a rights-based approach, justice is served.

As we plunge into 2024, which promises to be a year of controversies and tensions, we call on each of us to begin by finding peace within ourselves.

Find time to express *gratitude*. Gratitude has been found to modulate neural activity and improve emotional regulation and motivation. It's also been found to increase mental and emotional resilience, reinforce social behaviors, improve communication, enhance appreciation and compassion, encourage collaboration, and heighten understanding among groups (Algoe et al., 2020; Bohlmeijer et al., 2021; Cregg & Cheavens, 2021). We can express gratitude to one another verbally, in writing (not only on a personal basis but also on social media and through professional publications), at home, at work, and throughout our daily activities.

Being *mindful* of our own thoughts and emotions. As social workers, we strive to better understand the feelings of the people we work with, but as humans, we bring our own lens to the situation. How are we reacting to the wars and conflicts in the world? How is this affecting our sense of justice and interpretation of human rights? How is our angst over political battles affecting our practice? In what ways are we conveying our fears and anxieties to our work with individuals and communities and the social infrastructure

we perpetuate? What are we posting on social media, and do our posts promote love, creativity, and peace, or do they further fear and anxiety, leaving us paralyzed?

As social workers, we are well-versed in the challenges confronting people and communities. What actions can we take to make the world a better place? Rather than allowing ourselves to be weighed down by these realities, focus on possible ways to grow the positives in our purview while we dismantle the injustices we have created. Change is always happening, and our responsibility as social workers is to direct changes toward the light rather than the darkness. Accept that some changes take time and persistence.

When we find this peace and understanding within ourselves, we can share it with others, who in turn can share it with others and a new vision of our future will arise.

## References

- Algoe, S. B., Dwyer, P. C., Young, A., & Oveis, C. (2020). A new perspective on the social functions of emotions: Gratitude and the witnessing effect. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 119(1), 40. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000202>
- Bohlmeijer, E. T., Kraiss, J. T., Watkins, P., et al. (2021). Promoting gratitude as a resource for sustainable mental health: Results of a 3-armed randomized controlled trial up to 6 months follow-up. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 22, 1011–1032. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-020-00261-5>
- Cregg, D. R., & Cheavens, J. S. (2021). Gratitude interventions: Effective self-help? A meta-analysis of the impact on symptoms of depression and anxiety. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 22, 413–445. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s1090>

Shirley Gatenio Gabel and Cathryne L. Schmitz, Co-Editors

**Publisher's Note** Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.