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Body, Mind & Spirit

Seeking Peace: Notes and Conversations Along the Way
Johann Christoph Arnold
Plough Publishing House
978-0-87486-958-3
(August 31, 1998)

From the title, one might expect this volume from Arnold, a veteran peace activist, to outline solutions for ending conflict in various world hot spots. But Arnold makes it clear in the first chapter of Seeking Peace that this will be an introspective journey as he attempts to guide readers to a sense of what Jesus called “the peace that passes understanding.”

Arnold, who has traveled to places such as Chiapas, Haiti and Baghdad on peace missions, notes in this, his fifth book, that “our culture is awash in the language of peace” to the point that the word is almost a cliche. Many people who work for peace as a social cause “turn back once they realize that they cannot bring it to others unless they experience it themselves,” Arnold writes. To find the peace of which Jesus spoke, Arnold provides 15 “stepping stones,” including simplicity, silence, surrender, prayer, trust, forgiveness, gratitude, honesty, humility, obedience, decisiveness, repentance, conviction, realism and service.

This is no weekend seminar in self-realization. Arnold’s prescription is not for the faint-hearted or half-committed. As a pastor and leader in the Bruderhof movement, Arnold lives in a small religious community that models itself on the early Christians. Members pool their assets and income and share meals, decisions and provisions. They base their communal life on Jesus? teachings, particularly those concerning brotherly love, love of enemies, mutual service, nonviolence, sexual purity and marital fidelity. Arnold does not suggest that readers must join the Bruderhof to find inner peace, but he does avow that the peace process requires total surrender of self-interest.

To illustrate his points, Arnold shares personal stories of fellow Bruderhof members, including his grandfather, Eberhard Arnold, the community's founder. He also includes writings and interviews from noted philosophers, theologians, poets and other luminaries, as well as his friends in various pacifist and religious organizations. Revered Vietnamese Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh lends his endorsement with a short preface.

Whether by chance or intent, most chapters can be read in 15 minutes or so, making them ideal for daily meditative readings. The devoted spiritual seeker should find this volume a worthwhile guide.

Sharon Flesher