

Journal

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Issue 3— 8/04

THOUGHTS ABOUT OUR TIMES

A letter from Dorie Blesoff to her mother—

My friend Helen told me recently she is so worried about the times that she has had physical symptoms and difficulty sleeping. What's a person to do? I mentioned this to my daughter, who wrote me a letter to share with Helen, which I've also shared with our InnerPeace/WorldPeace group, and now this Journal.

—Jean Ellzey

Dear Mom,

I'm sending some thoughts for you to share with Helen if you choose. These are the thoughts I try to remember to help me get through these days. I, too, have stomach aches, anxiety feelings and nightmares, but I also experience gratitude for so much that is precious in my life—loved ones, butterflies, Latin dance music, conversations that go to new places, and that's just the beginning.

I believe that the earth and humanity are at a critical evolutionary point and that we are being offered choices. We can heal and find new patterns of relating to each other and all of life, or we can also cling to the mindset that has dominated during the past several thousand years. I believe we are being called to move to a new level (vibration) of consciousness that has unconditional love as its frequency, is available to all, freely, at any time, and asks only to be acknowledged and connected with. To some this is God, to some, the Life Force, to some a particular religious deity or symbol, to some, a simpler and healthier lifestyle...all different formulations for essentially the same new way of being together on the planet.

Why does it feel so awful right now? Yes, the war in Iraq. Yes, the reflections about how racism has not greatly improved since Brown vs. Board of Education. Yes, the widening gap between haves and have nots. Yes, the complicity between a consumer society and the growing number of addictions. Yes, the disappearing rain forest and the threats associated with global warming. But these have been around for awhile. What's happening that seems to be bringing all these toward a critical mass?

One of my spiritual advisors has said recently that the Creator is determined to put the truth of our actions in our faces, to shed light on the consequences of certain patterns, and to give us the chance to come to a higher awareness. What used to pass as harmony is now being revealed as an unjust peace. What used to pass as love is now being revealed as fear/control, etc. The Creator knows that for the human race to evolve, we must awaken to the power of our thought forms, our belief systems, our unconscious habits, and choose wisely how to relate to each other so that we can have peace on the planet.

—cont. pg. 2

“Gratitude for life is a significant spiritual starting point for all healing and hope.”

—Dorie Blesoff

Mission Statement

InnerPeace/WorldPeace advocates for nonviolence by means of spiritual disciplines, group meetings, education and activism. We believe there is a necessary connection between inner transformation and finding effective alternatives to violence in the world. We welcome dialogue with others.

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What can be done? That question is part of the problem. We're so used to "doing" that we overlook the lessons to be learned from "being." "Being peace" is as important as "doing peace." Both are part of peacemaking. We want to fix things, to make other people believe what we believe, to change the world. I have lived out of this understanding for a long time. I still believe activities that inform, involve, inspire, and create honest harmony are worth investing in, and should be done according to what one feels called to participate in or imitate. Now I am coming to a larger understanding: What is also being asked of us now is to attend, to remain awake, to be aware, to vibrate with love and forgiveness and live as though heaven were on earth.

It's not easy to stay "awake" because to really come awake means, initially at least, to feel the pain one has chosen to deny or ignore. It's like feeling the pain after the anesthesia wears off. The anesthesia is all the things we have been taught to keep us from really feeling our connection with all of Creation. When we choose to really feel, our hearts ache and we fear that they will break. But we need to allow this "heart-breaking" to continue because through it we will begin to experience our real connection with others and our inner divinity. What we experience as horrible now, may present us with amazing opportunities for change. What we do not want to happen may present us with gateways to new levels of awareness and healing.

My new spiritual practice is to say, "Thank you," even when I feel pain or confusion. Saying thank you reminds me that life itself moves powerfully through every situation, even when we are tempted to despair. Gratitude for life is a significant spiritual starting point for all healing and hope. I don't know whether this will help anyone else. It's my truth, and the most I can do is live it and offer it to others.

I love you, Mom,
Dorie

Peacemaking, Peacedoing, Peacebeing

With each edition of our journal, we become a little more experienced with peacemaking and a little more aware of its nuances, complexities and interlocking dimensions. We begin to see that peacemaking is not just an occasional activity on the part of well-meaning people. It is a way of life, a set of attitudes, an orientation towards the world that may issue in specific actions but is grounded in hope. The Vaclav Havel quotes below clarify for me the nature of hope. A term used by one of our new contributors Dorie Blesoff, "Being Peace," gives me the idea for the title to this introduction, which points to the balance and tension between being and doing. Peacemaking is a balancing act. It is a journey within but also a reaching out. It is the cultivation of a deeper spirituality but also a very pragmatic brainstorming of strategy and tactics. It is theoretical. We do not shrink from talking about what makes a healthy democracy, what makes for a just society and how to be effective agents of change. It is also very personal. We advocate and witness. We spend ourselves and are energized and nurtured by each other's presence. Each article in this issue reflects some aspect of that multidimensionality.

—Bud Hayes, Editor

“Hope...is an ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed.” —Vaclav Havel

“Hope...is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.” —Vaclav Havel

“Hope is not prognostication. It is an orientation of the spirit, an orientation of the heart; it transcends the world that is immediately experienced, and is anchored somewhere beyond its horizons.” —Vaclav Havel

Standing With Friends of God and Prophets

by Ceil Roeger, O.P.

Earlier this year I read a book by S. Elizabeth Johnson, C.S.J., entitled *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints*.^{*} While the focus of the book is the life of Mary of Nazareth and her place in the communion of saints, the author talks about being friends of God and being prophets in a way that includes me. It led to this reflection. She describes a friend of God as one who enters "into a mutual relationship with God, freely, with trust and affection; knowing and letting yourself be known in honest intimacy; taking time to savor the relationship with its delights and challenges in prayer and contemplation; caring passionately about what God cares about..."

On Friday nights I gather with other friends of God. We are men and women from various backgrounds, faith traditions and life experiences, who are searching for peace. Johnson goes on to say that "to be a prophet is to raise your voice in criticism against injustice because, being God's friend, your heart loves the world the way God loves it; your imagination sees how it should flourish. When this collides with the social arrangements people make at one another's expense or at the expense of the earth, you are moved to speak out and act in service of the reign of God, thus creating possibilities for resistance and resurrection."

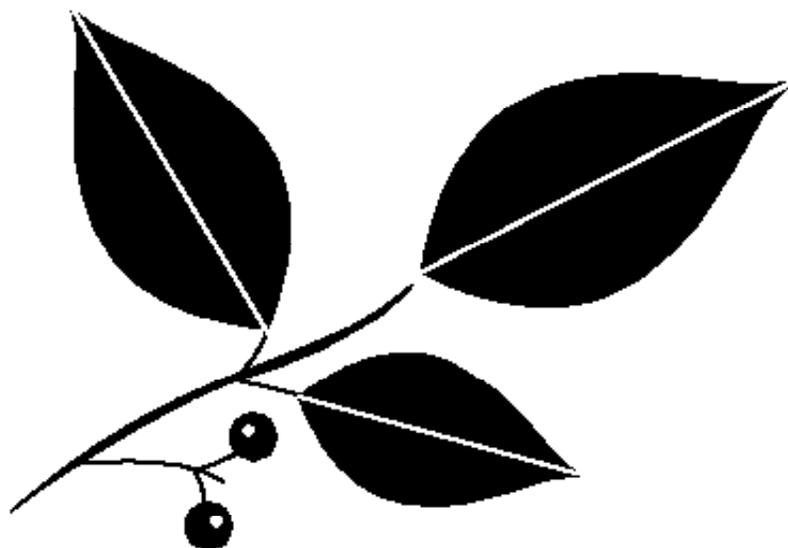
As I contemplated these words, I realized that we are prophets as well. We stand vigil from 7 to 8 p.m. in front of the First United Church of Oak Park to pray for peace in areas of the world wracked by violence. We share our reflections, join in prayer and song. We hold banners and signs so those who are passing by will know why we are there. We nod, smile, wave and share a sign of peace with those who indicate their support. Some honk as they drive by and may indicate the peace sign or just wave. Sometimes a passer-by will stop and talk and may join us in our vigil. Some return to stand with us again.

We also share a struggle and raise among ourselves questions which are not easy to answer. How do we respond to the violence that enters into our own lives and the domain of family and friends? What is the best response to those who challenge our peacemaking or shout obscenities? We do not have quick and easy answers, but we draw strength from listening to and supporting one another. We realize that in a world which is so accustomed to "solving" problems through violence, it is not easy to learn another way. It is this standing vigil on Friday nights and exploring other ways to bring about peace in our lives that makes us truly friends of God and prophets.

^{*} The Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc. 15 26th St., New York, New York 10010. Quotes are from page 307.

"Peace is not simply the absence of violence; it is the cultivation of understanding, insight, and compassion, combined with action. Peace is the practice of mindfulness, the practice of being aware of our thoughts, our actions, and the consequences of our actions..."

—Thich Nhat Hanh,
Creating True Peace, Free Press, p. 5



Deconstructing “The Bully”

by Mary Erkins

“When you feel like shaking him until his teeth rattle, STOP, take a deep breath, and try to do the exact opposite.” This suggestion was made by Professor Benjamin Wright while teaching teachers to deal with students who have behavior disorders. “What do you mean?” asked one doubting teacher. “Well,” he replied, “how about using a warm loving touch instead of an angry aggressive one? Come here.” Then, in front of the class, he demonstrated the two responses.

The scenario: a bully victimizing a younger weaker child on a playground. First response: Grab bully away from victim. Shout at him to stop fighting. Take him to the principal along with the victim. Second response: put arm gently around shoulder of bully and ask, “Has he been trying to get you into a fight?” We were shocked by this second approach. So was the student who was acting the bully role. He stopped immediately and looked at the teacher with amazement, totally disarmed.

The class then analyzed each approach in terms of our own feelings. All of us agreed that we only wanted to continue fighting when we were yelled at and when the teacher sided with the victim. “It was the warm loving touch,” insisted Professor Wright. “It’ll work every time. Most bullying is a reaction to having been bullied. It’s a vicious circle in which the bully never gets what he really needs, which is understanding, acceptance and love.”

Our feelings of anger, outrage and revenge must be neutralized if true change is to take place. The realization that made me able to abandon those negative feelings and to really FEEL like putting my arm around the bully

was Dr. Wright’s admonition:

“Remember, whenever any child is pushing your buttons, you can be sure he is hurting more than you are.” That’s the realization that makes it possible to respond in a caring rather than a punitive fashion, and to want to understand, to protect and to love.

Our class then explored follow-up methods. Removing both parties from the scene was essential but not to the principal’s office. A quiet neutral place is best. Speak to each individually and affirm each. “Speak to the angel in the child,” Dr. Wright said. “Let each know you like and respect him and want to get this problem solved. Make a plan to discuss it together the next day. Deal with feelings, not accusations.”

We practiced this with each other, then in our own classrooms with wonderfully positive results. I’ve even had bullies break down and cry while blurting out all kinds of emotional abuses they had suffered in the past. The healing comes in the loving touch, not in trying to talk “logic.” They’re so accustomed to rejection that they’re really caught off guard. In thirty years of teaching, I have found that this way of handling bullies has never failed. I’ve also applied it at home with my own children. Lately I’ve been trying to apply it when discussing politics with someone who doesn’t share my views. The loving touch can be a tone of voice, the choice of words, warm eye contact, a calm relaxed manner of talking. The loving touch comes from within.

“Remember,
whenever any child
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—Dr. Benjamin Wright

Who Is On My Team?

by Demetrios Pappageorge

This is a question I keep asking myself these days. Who is on my team? Along with me, who is actually working to better our collective life? How many of us do I need to serve? The answer to this question is in perpetual flux. I would like to think that most often I am concerned with the welfare of my family and even my whole village and that we are all working together to make our world a better place. Sometimes, however, the team is just one person...ME. I know there's that old cliché — There is no "I" in "team" — but I must confess that sometimes the only one working for me is me, and the only team that needs to win is, well, just me. And I have a new cliché for the world — The word "me" is exactly half of the word "team"!

It usually happens when my defenses are down. I'm tired, stressed out, and in a hurry. I pull out in front of someone I probably could have waited for. Next, I see the car facing me in the intersection trying to make a left turn before the light changes to red, but I zoom straight through the yellow light anyway. Why am I doing this? So that I can get to the store and home again and save two minutes? Intellectually I know that the pay-off for this type of aggressive driving is minimal, but in the moment the impulse to win is just too great. If I win, I go home without any further thoughts on the race. If I lose because someone else cut me off or turned in front of me, I carry that loss with me on the big scorecard in the back of my mind.

At other times my team is a bit larger. Soccer matches are a perfect parallel for what this whole team thing is about. When our men's team plays against rough clubs who seem to be playing for pride and money, my team consists of the eleven on the field wearing our usual blue and gold. The impulse to win is too strong to overcome, and I go home with a win or a loss on my scorecard. When we play teams whose focus on recreation is equal to ours, however, all is well; my team actually grows to include the good-willed opponents whose shins and shoulders are just as important to

protect as my own. Win or lose, after these friendlier games my thoughts are centered on the sheer enjoyment of being able to play at this age. No scorecard—just a big fat smile.

Recently, during a high school game, one of my daughters experienced something that did not make her smile. She broke her nose. Or, as the assistant coach, six of the players, and some of the fans told me, "A girl from the other team broke it on purpose with an intentional elbow to the face!" Some even went so far as to say that they heard the opposing coach tell his players to knock our girls down and make sure they didn't get up again. It was the championship game of the village tournament against their cross-town rival high school. The winners could claim bragging rights for the year, and the parents could feel somewhere deep down inside that their children were going to the right school.

The outcome of the game was just as unfavorable as the prognosis for our daughter's nose. Our school's team lost and our daughter was out for the season. Parents claimed it was the dirtiest game they had ever seen at the high school level and that the referee should have thrown several players and the coach out of the game. Our daughter came home with a crooked nose, swollen face, and blood all down her front. No one from the other team even inquired how she was doing or apologized for the incident.

The hardest part for me was that I was not at the game to help her with her pain, or to see exactly what happened. I was, therefore, at the mercy of those who claimed to have seen it happen. Once again I asked myself impulsively, "Who is on my team?" My wife immediately jumped into Mama Bear protective mode, so I knew she was in. I then asked around to see who saw what and how to proceed to make sure that whoever was responsible for this injustice would certainly come out on the losing end. We pushed the athletic director to look into the situation. We interviewed our coaches and players. We asked administrators what to do. Even the surgeon who examined her nose said it probably was an elbow to the face. It seemed that my team had numbers and some fairly heavy hitters who

cont. on next pg.

The word "me"
is exactly half
the word "team"!

—Demetrios Pappageorge

“Make your
team larger.
Reach further
toward the
other side.”

—Demetrios Pappageorge

cont. from pg. 5

could lead us to victory.

All was building feverishly. People spoke out about the whole affair and it had reached the boiling point. There were even several articles about the rivalry and the aggressive coaching style of the other coach. I could not sleep with the thought that my beautiful daughter had her face smashed and her stellar season ruined. We all wanted justice to be done—perhaps an official apology and a coach to be fired.

Then a funny thing happened. After many prayers and the successful surgery, a sudden calm came over me. I began to question the whole affair. I realized that in the 28 years I have played this game, I have never seen even the roughest players try to elbow someone in the face to take him or her out of the game. Could it have been an accident?

I felt the need to broaden my team to include parents from the other school. I phoned an old friend whose daughter was now playing for the “other team” to see what she saw. She told me that she saw two girls who did not see each other go up for a ball and conk heads. She also told me that one of her team’s parents had videotaped the game. I asked our athletic director to procure a copy of this video so we could see it for ourselves. She said she would, but stalled by telling me to find out who it was that recorded the game. Members of my original team said my chances of seeing that tape with “all of that damning evidence” was less than one percent. But something deep inside told me, “Make your team larger. Reach further toward the other side.”

Our athletic director begged me to let her handle it, but I no longer trusted the narrowness of our team’s approach. I needed to see the video, and to do that I had to go to the other side.

I decided to include the athletic director from the rival high school on my team. I told him that emotions were way too high on both sides about the game and that I wanted to help him separate fact from fiction so that we could settle the whole affair once and for all. He responded in kind by saying that he wanted nothing better

than to do just that. Within a few days he called me to watch the video with his coach. And so, at 6:30 a.m. the next morning, I went to meet my new teammates. He and their coach greeted me with an apology and inquiry about my daughter’s face. We watched the video and clearly saw the two girls watching the ball and not each other. There was nothing intentional, no elbow, just an unfortunate collision. We parted friends and went back to our respective teammates to tell them that everything was clear and finished.

It was amazing how the whole knot untangled with a broader perspective and a larger team. How lonely, frustrating, and difficult it was when the team was so small. How nice it is when there is no score, just cooperation.

I guess the best answer to my question about who is on my team should be—everybody. If I truly want what is best for the whole village and the whole world, my team must include everybody. I must see everybody as a member of my team, my family, my self. Only when I view members of an opposing political party, an opposite gender, a different culture as teammates will I help to win the bigger games like the race to head off global warming, world war, and the daily rush for self-advancement at the expense of other teammates. Glory, it seems, only comes when we all win through care and cooperation. Slow down, breathe, and envision everyone is on your team. No scorecard, just smiles.

**We Have Not Come
To Take Prisoners**

We have not come to take
prisoners
But to surrender ever more deeply
To freedom and joy.

We have not come into this
exquisite world
To hold ourselves hostage from
love.

Run my dear,
From anything
That may not strengthen
Your precious budding wings.

Run like hell my dear,
From anyone likely
To put a sharp knife
Into the sacred, tender vision
Of your beautiful heart.

For we have not come to take
prisoners
Or to confine our wondrous
spirits,

But to experience ever and ever
more deeply
Our divine courage, freedom and
Light!

—From *The Gift*, by Daniel Ladinsky.
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**Keeping Score
In The Culture Wars**

So much of what is in the news these days has to do, directly or indirectly, with the so-called “culture wars.” I have not heard a definition of this term. One is apparently not needed. People seem to know when it’s appropriate to use the term. Nevertheless I can’t resist giving it a try. For me the culture war means that our current, often passionate and rancorous disagreement over a whole range of issues is rooted in divergent world views. Each world view represents a response to a cluster of changes we associate with modernity. I think one reason arguments are so charged is that the underlying world view is not made explicit. Those who argue one view or another may not even be aware of the world view implicit in their argument, but they may have a profound emotional attachment to it.

I don’t want to get into specifics. What concerns me is what happens to the dialogue when we are at war culturally. The lines of argument tend to harden. Opinion polarizes. The potential for meaningful exchange of views declines. The belief that open-ended dialogue can bring out the truth gives way to the the certainty of “being right” and the desire, which can become consuming, to prove the other view “wrong.” There is a growing urge to frame the opposing position in a negative light. The shrinking bipartisanship in Congress and other political bodies, commented upon by many, is one symptom of this. The stalemate over a variety of issues within church bodies (Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist) is another.

I am no exception to this process. I can feel myself being drawn into the negativity. More and more, taking in the news is, for me, a matter of “keeping score.” I am obsessed with finding what will count for and against what I support and what I oppose. I also find myself vacillating between negative and positive modes. Part of me wants to lash out, critique, protest. I derive no little pleasure from sarcasm, satire, snide remarks about what and whom I don’t like. I join with others of my persuasion in poking fun, passing

along the latest uncomplimentary caricatures, and, yes, getting the quick and bitter belly laugh from gutter humor about those who embody all that I think is wrong with our country today. My attendance at the Friday night vigils and involvement in *InnerPeace/WorldPeace* on Saturday mornings has made me more self-conscious about these negative modes. I have had my consciousness raised, but I am not anywhere near integrating these two modes within myself.

More and more, however, I find myself wanting to call all of us off the bickering and the name-calling and the accusations. The negativity perpetuates the culture wars and isolates us even further in the cultural ghettos from which combatants for these wars are recruited. Take an example: I am talking with someone with a different point of view. As I advance my argument, this intensifies this. Seeing that I am not going to alter this view, the temptation is to turn negative. When this happens in a discussion, whatever potential there is for dialogue is lost. To frame someone else’s point of view in a negative way is an act of violence. To critique it is not. The distinction may sometimes be a fine one, but it is absolutely basic.

As we continue to navigate our way through the culture wars, the task is not to “keep score,” but what I would call centering. The object in meditation, each time we become distracted, is to bring our attention back to the focus of the meditation. In the same way centering is a benign and loving process in which, over and over again, we seek to clarify what it is that we really want. F. D. Maurice, a British theologian, once said that “We are more often right in what we affirm than in what we deny.”

Here are some suggestions for a way out of the “culture wars.”

Instead of fighting, learn
Instead of attacking, welcome
Instead of striking, reach out
Instead of defending, embrace
Instead of trying to win, join
Instead of having to be right, be open
Instead of thinking you have to give up, give of yourself.

— *Bud Hayes*, August, 2004

**Love
Overcomes
Violence
Everywhere**

LO.V.E. Works

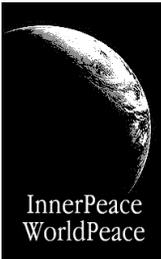
(From 1953 to 1981 a woman who called herself a "Peace Pilgrim" walked over 25,000 miles on a personal pilgrimage for peace. She was fearless and unfailingly loving in the face of violence. In the course of her 28 year pilgrimage she touched the lives of thousands of people all across North America. Here is a story from one of her newsletters.)

Once I was hit by a disturbed teenage boy whom I had taken for a walk. He wanted to go hiking but was afraid he might break a leg and be left lying there. Everyone was afraid to go with him. He was a great big fellow who looked like a football player, and he was known to be violent at times. He had once beaten his mother so badly that she had to spend several weeks in the hospital. Everybody was afraid of him, so I offered to go with him.

As we got up to the first hilltop everything was fine. Then a thunderstorm came along. He was very terrified because the thundershower was very close. Suddenly he went off the beam and came for me, hitting at me. I didn't run away although I guess I could have—he had a heavy pack on his back. But even while he was hitting me I could only feel the deepest compassion toward him. How terrible to be so psychologically sick that you would be able to hit a defenseless old woman! I bathed his hatred with love even while he hit me. As a result the hitting stopped. He said, "You didn't hit back! Mother always hits back." The delayed reaction, because of his disturbance, had reached the good in him. Oh, it's there—no matter how deeply it is buried—and he experienced remorse and complete self-condemnation.

What are a few bruises on my body in comparison with the transformation of a human life? To make a long story short, he was never violent again. He is a useful person in this world today.

The complete text of the Peace Pilgrim Book is located on the website at www.peacepilgrim.org. Or contact Friends of Peace Pilgrim at 530-620-0333.



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From Our Readers

We would like to hear from you. This journal is about conversation and dialogue about the things that matter most. All responses will be acknowledged. Some, with your permission, will be included in our journal as space allows.

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