

Sulak Sivaraksa | Medicine of Peace | Kondo Genko: Peace Roshi

TURNING WHEEL

Turning the Wheel for Peace

Fall/Winter 2009, \$7.00

Alice Walker

Overcoming Speechlessness

A poet finds her voice around the horrors of Rwanda, Eastern Congo and Palestine/Israel war

Is Iran the Enemy?

Rebecca Griffin visits Iran to discover their visions of peace with America

Vocabulary of Peace

Lin Jensen reflects on the creation of violence with language

Dar Papaya Project

Everett Wilson interviews young Buddhists resisting war through art in South America

When You Give a Child a Gun

Caroline Acuña reflects on children as soldiers



THE NAME “TURNING WHEEL”

The Buddhist Peace Fellowship uses the name “Turning Wheel” for its magazine as a way of acknowledging Buddha’s teachings on social action. Within these pages we create a community of compassionate voices that address the social issues we face in today’s world. Our intent is to foster peace and educate the public in how Buddha’s teachings can impact contemporary causes of suffering.

Specifically, the term “Turning Wheel” refers to an activity: setting in motion the dharma-chakra, or the wheel of the teaching. Though different Buddhist schools took different teachings of Buddha (known as sutras, suttas, or sermons) as their basis, all agree on the first turning of the wheel.

In the Dhammacakkapavattanasutta, the first turning of the wheel at Sarnath near Varanasi, Shakyamuni Buddha first taught the Four Noble Truths of suffering:

- We suffer.
- We suffer because we crave a permanence that does not exist.
- We can end this suffering by ending the craving.
- We can end the craving by following the Eightfold Path.

The Eightfold Path includes Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

Many Buddhists mark the second turning of the wheel as the teachings given at Vulture Peak, Rajagriha. This is the Prajna Paramita literature, which expounds the Perfection of Wisdom in many different sutras ranging from one letter to many thousands of verses.

Often the third turning of the wheel is given as the teachings of Sravasti or Vaishali, which further expound the teachings on the infinite variety of expression of the Dharma. Sometimes the “turnings of the wheel” are given as: first teachings, Abhidharma, Mahayana, and Yogacara.

By using the name Turning Wheel, BPF wishes to uphold part of the teachings of the Buddha that otherwise might stay in the background. The Buddha went against social convention to unite people. Therefore, we publish writing by and about people who are working nonviolently alleviate suffering caused by institutionalized violence or hatred against sentient beings and the environment.

We are grateful that you have found us. ■

TURNING WHEEL

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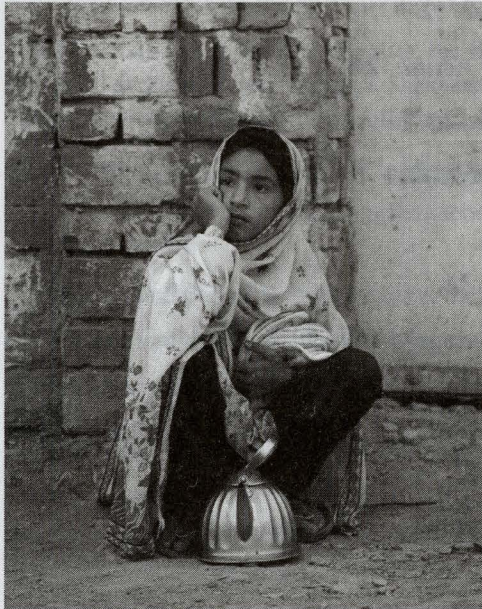
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For All Beings

May all beings be cared for and loved,
Be listened to, understood and
acknowledged despite different views,
Be accepted for who they are in this moment,
Be afforded patience,
Be allowed to live without fear of having
their lives taken away or their bodies violated.
May all beings,
Be well in its broadest sense,
Be fed,
Be clothed,
Be treated as if their life is precious,
Be held in the eyes of each other as family.
May all beings,
Be appreciated,
Feel welcomed anywhere on the planet,
Be freed from acts of hatred and desperation
including war, poverty, slavery, and street
crimes,
Live on the planet, housed and protected
from harm,
Be given what is needed to live fully,
without scarcity,
Enjoy life, living without fear of one another,
Be able to speak freely in a voice and mind of
undeniable love.
May all beings,
Receive and share the gifts of life,
Be given time to rest, be still, and
experience silence.
May all beings,
Be awake.

— Rev. Zenju Earthlyn Manuel

From the Executive Director

Passing On the Medicine of Peace

One Sunday, sitting in the midst of trees and birdcalls hovering above our women's talking circle, it became clear to me that the medicine of healing comes in circles, rounds, and spirals. Ancient medicine, if delivered in its purest sense, without ownership, is given to all who are willing to receive it. All we need to do is pass medicine around the circle of living beings. Who is willing to continue passing the medicine of peace in the midst of inexhaustible war occurring on almost every continent in the world?

There is the Tibetan medicine wheel that one turns with the palm of the hand, sending prayers out to the world. In Lakota Sundance ceremonies, the dancers dance around the arbor in a circular pattern from the west, north, east, and south gates in a movement to end the suffering of family and community. In the African Dagara tradition, the circular medicine wheel encompasses five elements of the universe, including fire, water, earth, nature, and mineral, and when brought together in the movement of divination and ritual, there is healing. The Buddha's teachings of the four noble truths on suffering were set in motion as the *dharma-chakra*, or the circular wheel of the teachings.

In essence there is no linear path toward peace. We cannot simply rely on logic, legislation over nuclear weapons, or social scientific methodologies of change. This would only continue our creation of thoughts that result in debate, imperialism, and war. Today, we are being called to align with our true nature, in which peace exists. The Buddha expounded that there is no need to have a discussion about real peace.

In the book *Returning to Silence*, Roshi Katagiri speaks of a story when the Buddha sat under a dead tree in protest of a coming war between his Shakya clan of Kapilavatthu and another clan in Magadha. He sat there so that others would realize peace at the root of death. In the end Buddha's protest did touch the heart of the King of Magadha. And it is this peace that I see as the medicine we can cultivate and bring forth into the world.

As I encountered the words of the contributors to this issue on war and peace, the haunted faces of mostly children made me toss at night. What kind of medicine are we passing them? In Alice Walker's piece *Overcoming Speechlessness*, the worldwide torture of mother and child

in war zones is never ending. Walker's essay is unusually long for a magazine, but once you read it you will understand the reason for not cutting this profound piece. In Caroline Acuña's essay on training children for war, the thought of guns being designed for the tiny fingers of young soldiers has nothing to do with peacemaking and all the more to do with America's ever-increasing fear and addiction to violence. In Everett Wilson's interview (also an unusually long piece that deserved to have the space it takes here) with American youth activists in Colombia, there is no doubt that reconciliation must be the path of our young. What is the path of reconciliation?

Rebecca Griffin visited Iran with reconciliation in mind. Her quest to solve the mystery of that country's attitude toward America resulted in transformative discoveries. Her inquiry "*Is Iran the Enemy?*" Could the medicine of peace be somewhat like the stories she gathered to balance our media's depiction of violent Iranians? Perhaps the medicine is in our language, our speech, as Lin Jensen so precisely dissects in his piece, the "*Vocabulary of Peace.*"

The movement of peace is not the shooting of an arrow targeting governments and people, but rather a long spiral of *repeatedly* setting the wheel of life in motion toward peace. As most American 1960s baby boomers age, perhaps our final acts of rebellion can be to bring our youth into our circles and let them take the lead. Perhaps we can pass on the medicine of peace by seeing our children as worthy without them proving that they are strong in aggressive sports or the military. Maybe the peace medicine wheel can be redesigned so that tiny fingers can get ahold of the peace movement and turn it faster and faster. Can we leave the children a legacy beyond the material possessions we are sure to abandon in our death? These are the questions that will help us bring forth the medicine of peace. ■



Zenju Earthlyn Manuel

Photo by Judith Keenan

Contributors



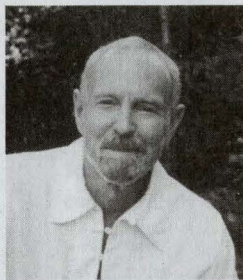
Alice Walker is a Pulitzer Prize winner, poet, short story writer, novelist, essayist, anthologist, teacher, editor, publisher, feminist, activist, and pan-dharma teacher. Her upcoming collection of poetry is *Hard Times Require Furious Dancing: A Year of Poems*.



Sulak Sivaraksa is a prominent and outspoken Thai intellectual and social critic. He is a teacher, a scholar, a publisher, an activist, and the founder of many organizations, including the International Network of Engaged Buddhists.



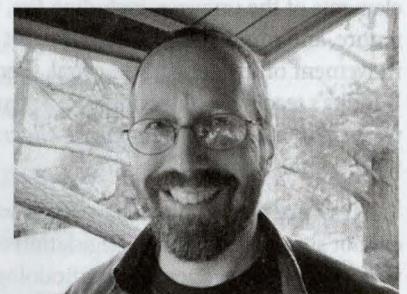
Rebecca Griffin, Political Director for Peace Action West, has traveled extensively throughout the western states organizing with community leaders, citizens, members of Congress. She has spearheaded campaigns to support nonmilitary solution in Afghanistan, end the war in Iraq, and promote diplomacy with Iran.



Lin Jensen is Senior Buddhist Chaplain to High Desert State Prison, Susanville, California, and founder and teacher of the Chico Zen Sangha in Chico, California, where he writes and works on behalf of nonviolence and in defense of the earth. Lin is a frequent contributor to *Turning Wheel*, *Shambhala Sun*, *Mandala*, and *Tricycle* magazines. Lin's latest book, *Together Under One Roof: Making a Home of the Buddha's Household*. (Wisdom Publications, 2008)



Caroline Acuña is an "organic intellectual", musician, sound practitioner, curandera, dancer, and ritualist. She is currently the chapter and membership coordinator for Buddhist Peace Fellowship.



Everett Wilson is a writer and Zen student living in Moraga, California. He left Tassajara Zen Mountain Center at the end of 2006 after four and a half years of monastic practice. He is currently working on a memoir when he's not busy working at the Buddhist Peace Fellowship as the business administrator.

History

Kondo Genko: Roshi of Peace

by Diane Patenaude Ames

It was the autumn of 1937. The Japanese invasion of China, with all its atrocities, was well underway. The Japanese government was whipping up war fever. Nonetheless the Soto Zen monastery Seiunji was training students as usual, which is to say rigorously. It was time for the evening dharma talk by the abbot, Kondo Genko Roshi (1879-1941?). And although Zen trainees must be prepared for anything, everybody was stunned when he said, "It is troubling that hostilities have broken out between Japan and China. War is an activity in which people kill each other. Whether it be friend or foe, the killing of people is monstrous. There is nothing more sinful in this world than the killing of people....I intensely dislike villainous, inhumane things like this war. It must be stopped immediately."

Outside the monastery's walls, only hysterically jingoistic cheerleading for the war was being heard. And despite a façade of parliamentary democracy, Japan had never been a haven of free speech. Dissidents, especially leftists, had been routinely imprisoned and tortured throughout the 20th century, and with the power of the military growing every day, things were getting worse. Sadly, organized Buddhism mostly did the politic thing, melting down temple bells to make weapons and blessing the war. Any Buddhist priests (or other people) who questioned the war were already being arrested. Just being a member of an organization that opposed militarism and ultranationalism, such as the Youth League for the Revitalization of Buddhism, was enough to ensure being rounded up. Prosecution on such charges as "spreading fabrications and wild rumor" (that is, making virtually any disapproved public statement), could bring years of imprisonment, if the accused survived interrogation long enough to appear in court at all.

Despite all this, Kondo Genko apparently made antiwar statements to his students on several occasions. Not surprisingly, a police car appeared at the monastery's door. At first Genko was let off with a warning. Since the fascist authorities considered Buddhist priests little more than funeral directors, they normally would have been satisfied if he had remained silent on sensitive subjects from then on. But it is possible that Kondo Genko did not fall silent enough. It is also possible that he declined to lead the military Zen retreats being organized to introduce officers to the rigors of Zen discipline. The record is sparse.

It is clear that in 1941, the military completed its takeover of the Japanese government by making General Hideki Tojo prime minister. Perhaps not coincidentally, Genko resigned his abbotship, probably under pressure, and returned to his family home in Akita Prefecture. Soon after that he disappeared, or, more likely, was disappeared. ■

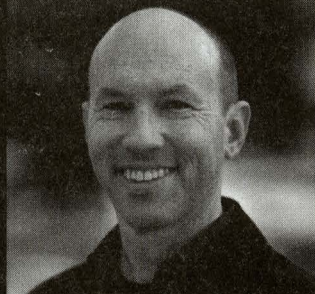
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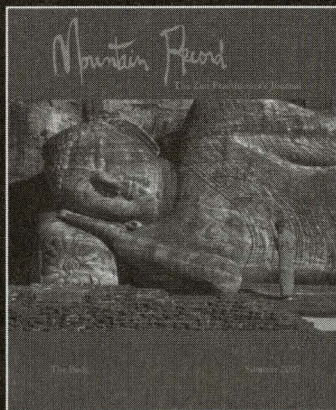
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Is Iran the Enemy?

Building Peace Between Iran and America

By Rebecca Griffin

At the fourth store we visited that morning, I surveyed more racks of manteaus, the modest yet fashionable jackets women in Iran wear to comply with Islamic dress code. I finally decided on a green one, and our leader and translator, Leila, began the requisite haggling. In Iran one must haggle or risk being seen as socially inept. Throughout their back-and-forth in Farsi, it somehow came up that I am American. The tenor of the conversation immediately changed. The shopkeeper pulled out a chair for me to sit down and served us tea and cookies. Suddenly, rather than driving a hard bargain, he was trying to give me the manteau for free. Iranians have a cultural practice call

ta'arof, in which merchants refuse your money as a matter of politeness, and you respond by insisting, and eventually you pay what you owe. But Leila said his insistence went beyond the normal custom. Ultimately, I gave him the price she had negotiated with him, and he gave me back some more of my money.

To most Americans, Iran is a mystery. Fewer than 500 non-Iranian Americans travel there each year. The American public sees a country distorted in our media—a closed society that belongs to the Axis of Evil, run by instable mullahs and full of Muslims who hate America. It was fascinating to hear the reactions of Americans when I told

them I was getting ready to leave for Iran. They ranged from excitement to fear for my safety to accusations of legitimizing an authoritarian government. As I expected, the 10 days I spent in Iran gave me a wonderful experience that defied stereotypes and laid the groundwork for bonds that rise above government feuding.

I can't imagine that a traveling American could receive a warmer welcome than I received in Iran. From Tehran to Esfahan, Persepolis to Shiraz, I was always greeted with warmth and hospitality. Because so few of us visit, people were often very excited to meet an American. The first question they tended to ask was what I think of Iran and Iranians. When they would follow up by asking me what other Americans think of Iranians, I would explain that most Americans want peace with Iran but are also dealing with fear because of how our media and politicians portray Iran. A recent poll showed that Americans pick Iran as the biggest threat to the United States, despite that Iran hasn't invaded another country in hundreds of years. My mission was to help change that by bringing back video messages of peace from Iranians to Americans and giving them a glimpse into the real Iran.

While there are serious human rights concerns that should not be ignored, Iran resembles nothing of the authoritarian society in many people's minds. Iranians are constantly soaking up information from satellite TV and the Internet, and some know more about American politics than many Americans I've met. Our tour guide in Tehran, 27-year-old Sami, is a big fan of the film *Milk*, about the iconic gay rights activist Harvey Milk, and told me she is in love with Freddie Mercury of Queen. At dinner with a friend Payam and his family in Esfahan, I couldn't keep up with their American movie references. At Tehran University, I met students pursuing master's degrees in American studies. Their activities ranged from reading Barack Obama's books in English to studying family life in the U.S., to examining representations of Muslims in post-9/11 literature. Iranians are a highly educated people, with a sophisticated understanding of the United States.

While it was fascinating to recognize our shared cultural interests, it was even more amazing to experience the depth and beauty of Iranian culture. In Esfahan, I viewed the intricate tile work of mosques in Imam Square and heard the powerful echo designed to amplify the call to prayer. In Tehran, I marveled at pedestrians who fearlessly weave their way through speeding cars to cross the busy streets with no traffic signals, a prospect that often left me cowering on the sidewalk. In Persepolis, I examined ruins of palaces dating back as far as 515 B.C.E. In Shiraz, I visited the tombs of Iran's most revered poets and observed as Iranians placed their hands on the tombs and recited verses from the Koran as blessings. On every step of my journey, I was greeted with

an outpouring of warmth and openness toward the American people.

When engaging with people on this most basic human level, it can be difficult to understand how our countries can maintain such a fraught relationship. One must look to our governments to see the barriers that decades of mistrust have created. While most Americans are unaware of this history, Iranians remember clearly that the United States participated in the overthrow of democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953. Even fresher in Iranian memories is the United States' support for Saddam Hussein during the brutal Iran-Iraq War, a conflict that caused the loss of more than one million lives. I spoke to many young people who were small children at the time, but they still bear the scars of the conflict. In 1988, Iranians watched in horror as the United States Navy shot down a passenger plane, killing 290 innocent civilians, and the government followed by awarding a Legion of Merit medal to the captain of the ship. President Bush's "Axis of Evil" speech, on the



Iranian women in black. Photo by Frank VandenBergh

heels of Iran's assistance in stabilizing Afghanistan following the overthrow of the Taliban government, was more salt in the wound.

Americans see murals in Iran saying "Down with the USA," without realizing that this in no way reflects the feelings of Iranians toward Americans. Many remember harrowing scenes from the 1979 hostage crisis, when Iranians

held 52 Americans hostage at the U.S. Embassy in the immediate aftermath of the Iranian Revolution. They see President Ahmadinejad on television spewing hateful rhetoric and are fed misinformation about an imminent nuclear threat coming from Iran.

While many Iranians I met were cautiously optimistic, given President Obama's respectful tone and pledge to negotiate, they are still wary of the U.S. government's intentions. One local businessman in Tehran described U.S. policy to me as holding out a carrot while hiding a bottle behind its back, ready to strike. Offers of diplomacy seem disingenuous to

the Americans who do want that invaluable experience, visas can be very difficult to obtain from the Iranian government, another unfortunate product of lingering suspicion. Many Iranians expressed a similar frustration in trying to visit the United States. A young man wearing a hat with "TEXAS" emblazoned across the front approached us in Persepolis and told us how much he likes the United States but fears he will never be able to visit in his lifetime. An engineer from Shiraz told me the only things he knows about American people come from movies; he wants to experience the real thing.

These barriers do not only prohibit people from having a valuable cultural and social experience; the fear of the unknown is a building block for dangerous policies that make us more isolated and less safe. It is much harder to support military action or harsh sanctions when you know a six-year-old boy who lives near the nuclear facility that would be a target of bombings. As Americans, we must challenge ourselves to understand how our fate is inextricably linked to our fellow human beings in other countries.

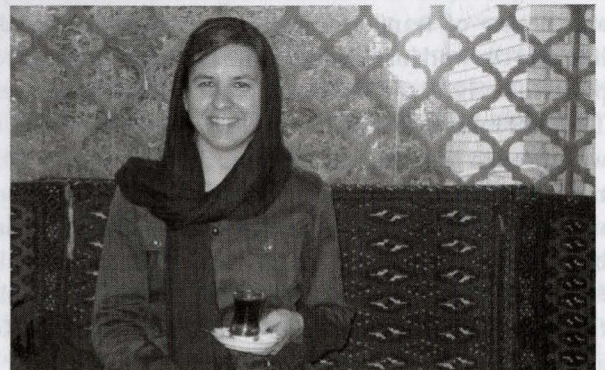
As I write this, Americans have been watching intently as Iranians take to the streets to fight for democratic representation and have seen an outpouring of sympathy from the United States. This window into Iran will hopefully lay the groundwork for greater understanding and an opportunity to pressure our government to pursue peace with Iran. Ashkan, a 24-year-old tour guide in Shiraz, told me that of all the people he has given tours to, Americans are the most like Iranians. In his message of peace to our country, he said, "similarity can bring peace." Our best hope for long-term peace is refusing to let our government exploit fear and difference to pursue policies that harm our fellow human beings. We must recognize our similarities, respect our differences, and band together to protect us all. ■

One cab driver in Tehran asked us, "Why is your government always telling us what to do? Another said he hates the current regime but would pick up a gun to defend it."

Iranians when more than 200 members of Congress are cosponsoring sanctions bills to cut off gas imports to Iran. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-IL), a lead proponent of the bills, publicly acknowledged that Iranians are going to die if sanctions are put in place. One does not repair decades of tension with threats and saber rattling. One cab driver in Tehran asked us, "Why is your government always telling us what to do?" Iranians are very proud of their country and will defend it, despite any problems they may have with the current regime. Another taxi driver told us that his brother was one of thousands of political prisoners murdered by the government in the 1980s. He said he hates the current regime but would pick up a gun to defend it. A full, honest reconciliation of tensions between the United States and Iran will require respect, humility, and an ability to understand each other's perspectives.

Breaking through these tensions becomes even more difficult when the two countries know so little about each other. This applies to both the people and our governments. Unfortunately, travel between our two countries is quite difficult, creating another barrier to understanding. Few Americans think to travel to Iran because of fear and misinformation. For

Author Rebecca Girffin in tea house. Photo by Abbas Khoram Rouz



Vocabulary of Peace

By Lin Jensen

In practicing right speech, I've tried to do as the Buddha taught and avoid telling lies. I've also worked to refrain from language that slanders others and causes enmity and distrust between people. I've tried as well to avoid rude and abusive language, and to let go of all idle, useless talk and gossip. My success in this has been varied and uncertain. But in the effort, I've become increasingly aware of how the language I speak—the actual words that come out of my mouth—tend to shape my view of the world and determine what I think and do. That shaping is probably self-evident, but it is nonetheless common to assume that language is in the service of thought and not the other way around. However, once a word has gained currency among a body of speakers, that word feeds back on its inventor, continually reinforcing whatever connotations the speakers have attached to its common usage. In a certain way, we truly become what we say—and this has critical implications for the work of the bodhisattva.

As Buddhists, our human work, now, as always, is to realize a sane, nonviolent, just, and merciful human society. It is work to be done without apparent assurance of success, but it is not work to be done without preferences. It involves a choice between those who include the interests of all beings equally—whoever and wherever they might be—and those who are selective. It is a choice between those who place themselves first and those who would sacrifice themselves to the interest of others when fairness requires it. And it is a choice between those who would rely on military and economic force as a final resort to settle differences and those who would, as a final resort, rely instead on the persuasion of kindness, compassion, and love. Persuasion of this sort can only go forward when we truly talk to each other as equals, putting aside all instruments of coercion. This is the talk of “let me be your friend,” of “let me understand.” It's not a talk we've been getting much practice in as of late. But it is the one conversation using the vocabulary of the peace we long for.

The vocabulary of ambition, greed, hatred, and force is quite another thing. It's the sort of vocabulary that disguises its intent in euphemisms like “national

interest,” one of the cruelest expressions current in the English lexicon. The phrase's capacity for cruelty lies in the narrowness of its application and in being so familiar that it goes unquestioned and unexamined. Contend that any policy or action is in our national interest, and it's cheerfully assumed to be a good thing. Whether or not it's in anyone else's national interest is not seen as an issue. It seems that the common response is the thought “If it's good for me, that's what matters.” Thus, in the name of national interest, governments the world over suppress, exploit, and threaten other nations, and do so by cultivating their citizens' tacit or explicit consent.

Any dialogue that serves to promote the national interest will fail to answer to the world's urgent call for the dignity of a fair and accessible livelihood, for peace, justice, and mercy, for political and foreign policy that doesn't insist on putting others last. I'm speaking here

The single complete and encompassing value is the universal connection of all beings—human, animal, plant, and mineral, sentient and insentient.

of the one value that can redeem our species and set right our long history of greed and violence.

The single complete and encompassing value is the universal connection of all beings—human, animal, plant, and mineral, sentient and insentient. All other expressions of real value are footnotes to this fundamental truth. It's a truth whose realization requires a continuing dialogue conducted in the language of peace. If we want to speak truly to each other, we must speak as people of one tongue, one mind, one flesh, one human family. It's easy to see how the call for patriotism—a concept Samuel Johnson defined as the last refuge of a scoundrel—runs counter to universal connection.

As Tolstoy once put it, “A patriotic ideal tends to unite people within a designated group to the exclusion of others outside the group. This is true of all patriotic emblems, with their anthems, ceremonies, and monuments, which, while uniting some people, make that very union a cause of separation between the selected people it unites and all others; so that union of a patriotic kind is often a source not merely of division but even of enmity toward others.” *Patriotism* is a word whose currency increases whenever a country’s national interest is best served by rallying the population around a common opposition to a perceived enemy.

Look at any political map, and you’ll see a world of complex boundaries dividing the earth into separate jurisdictions—continents into nations, nations into states, states into counties and townships, and on down to the survey lines of the lot on which your house rests. Within each of these subdivisions, there reside people and governments claiming varying degrees of sovereignty for their portion of the planet. And larger political jurisdictions, such as the United States, claim the right to absolute sovereignty comprising complete independence and self-governance, inviolable from outside interference of any sort. From this heartless and exclusive notion of sovereignty arises a consequent reliance on militarism, bringing the powers of the world to expend their resources not on cultivating the seeds of universal love but rather on building unmatched military capability. We must do these things, we are told, in defense of our sovereignty.

National interest, *patriotism*, and *sovereignty* are staples of the vocabulary of force. They are instruments of citizen control, designed to cultivate in the innocent and gullible attitudes that serve to promote ambitions of unscrupulous intent. But the greatest pity is that such language obscures clarity, tempting its users to seek comfort in terms that disguise their own predilection for greed and advantage. It’s a language that lies to the one who speaks it.

I ask myself what my obligation is to the world and its peoples. The overriding ethic of all Buddhism is *ahimsa*, or the practice of nonharming. That means that I’m sworn to live a life free of violence, but, by implication, I’m also sworn to the cultivation of peace. Is it enough that I live my own life as

peacefully as I can, or am I called upon to do more? Do my Buddhist vows require me to intervene when violence occurs and encourage peace whenever I can by direct and active means? I obviously can’t settle this for anyone else, but my conscience insists that I act on behalf of peace in every way that I can.

What’s more, the struggle for a peaceful society is as much a struggle over who controls language as it is over who controls wealth and armaments. You can’t wage wars, either economic or military, without the consent of the people. And to get such consent, the vocabulary of ambition, greed, hatred, and force, deceitfully disguised in words of apparent virtue, is broadcast through a vastly expanded media into virtually every neighborhood and home throughout the world. If I am to practice right speech in a way that really counts for something, it’s not enough anymore for me to merely watch what I say—I must watch what others say as well. I take it as understood that the fulfillment of the bodhisattva vow to save all beings obligates me to counter the manipulative and deceitful language of force wherever it occurs.

Even so, the language of peace already rides our tongues. We know for ourselves how to say love, kindness, forgiveness, mercy, compassion. It’s the heart’s own sutra written in the blood and failure of centuries of forceful coercion and strife. ■

*The unique breeze of reality —
Don’t let it blow in your eyes;
it’s especially hard to get out.*

— Book of Serenity, Case 1

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The Liberation of Europe

Haibun by Ken Jones

Monet's water lilies were yesterday. Tomorrow, the creamy limestone of a ruined abbey by the Loire. But today is what they call the *Tourisme de Mémoire*.

Near the entrance, in laundered khaki and field grey, waxworks with real guns stand about indifferent. But there are lots of videos, where reliving liberation is easier on the feet. Second time round—the same pill box, torched again. The camera in the screaming Stuka shoots the terrified refugees. And the roar of the Spitfires in Our Finest Hour is punctuated by bored infants' screams.

Thumbs up and grinning
sixty years later
nobody smiles back

Liberated from a death camp, and begging next to the Café, a shrinking skeleton stares out from his photo.

In the shop you can use The Allied Commanders as fridge magnets, or take home a Tiger Tank.

D-Day jigsaw
reassemble Omaha Beach
four hundred pieces

Outside, all spotless lawn and smooth cube buildings. The flags of Europe hang bland and reassuring. Its peoples crowd their car park, subdued by that nightmare of the past thrust into the grateful present.

Ken Jones is a Zen practitioner and teacher of thirty years' standing, and a pioneer of socially engaged Buddhism in the UK. He is a co-editor of *Contemporary Haibun*, and has contributed regularly to haiku magazines. This haibun comes from his most recent collection, *Stone Leeks: More Haiku Stories*, 2009, Pilgrim Press, available through the Welsh Books Council website www.gwales.com.

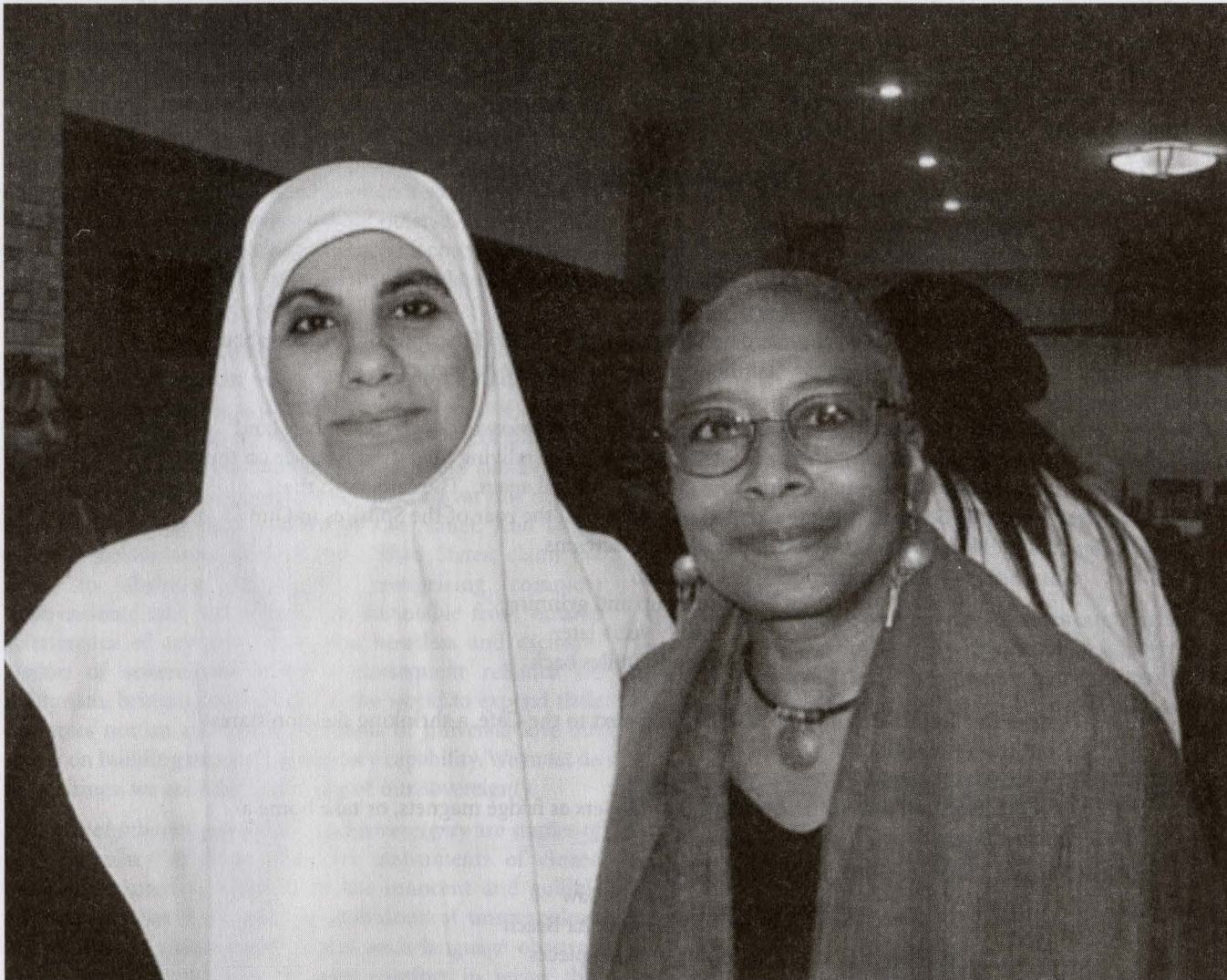


Photo by Kim Elliot

Huda Niam, mother of five and member of Parliament and Alice Walker in Gaza

*In this essay, Poet Alice Walker writes of encountering “the horror” (as in Joseph Conrad’s novel, *The Heart of Darkness*) in Rwanda, Eastern Congo and Palestine/Israel and finding her voice again after a period of speechlessness. Part of what has happened to human beings, she believes, is that we have, over the last century, witnessed cruel and unusually barbaric behavior that was so horrifying it literally left us speechless. We had no words to describe it even when we viewed it; nor could we easily believe human beings would fall to such levels of degradation. We have been deeply frightened.*

This self-imposed silence has slowed our response to the plight of those who most need us, often women and children but also men of conscience who resist evil but are outnumbered by those around them who have fallen victim to a belief in weapons, male or ethnic dominance, greed and drugs. Walker also envisions a one-country solution to the ongoing crisis in Palestine/Israel.

Overcoming Speechlessness:

A Poet Encounters “the horror” in Rwanda, Eastern Congo and Palestine/Israel

by Alice Walker

Three things cannot be hidden: the sun, the moon, and the truth.

— Buddha

Three years ago I visited Rwanda and Eastern Congo. In Kigali I paid my respects to the hundreds of thousands of infants, toddlers, teen-agers, adolescents, young engaged couples, married people, women and men, grandmothers and grandfathers, brothers and sisters of every facial shape and body size, who had been hacked into sometimes quite small pieces by armed strangers, or by neighbors, or by acquaintances and “friends” they knew. These bodies and pieces of bodies are now neatly and respectfully buried in mass graves. Fifteen years ago, these graves were encircled by cuttings of plants that are now sturdy blossoming vines that cover their iron trellises with flowers. Inside the adjacent museum there are photographs of the murdered: their open smiles or wise and consoling eyes will remain with me always. There is also, in the museum, a brief history of Rwanda. It tells of the long centuries Tutsi and Hutu lived together, intermarrying and raising their children, until the coming of the Belgians in the 1800s. The Belgian settlers determined, because they measured Hutu and Tutsi skulls, that the Tutsi were more intelligent than the Hutu, more like Europeans, and therefore placed the Tutsi above the Hutu. (Before the Belgians, the territory had been colonized by the Germans.) When the Belgian colonists left for Europe, over a hundred years later, and after many changes to each of these groups, they left the Hutu in charge. The hatred this diabolical decision caused between these formerly co-existing peoples festered over generations; coming to a lethal boil in the tragedy of genocide.

Though I had done research while in college and written a thesis of sorts on the “Belgian” Congo, where King Leopold of Belgium introduced the policy of cutting off the hands of enslaved Africans who didn’t or couldn’t fulfill their rubber quota: collecting the latex for the rubber that made tires for the new cars everyone was beginning to want, in America and Europe, I had not known these same activities spread into the Kingdom of Rwanda. But apparently, to the Belgians, and to the German colonialists before them, it was all one vast

“empty” territory, to be exploited without any consideration for the people living there. Indigenous Africans didn’t seem to exist, except as slaves. While visiting the set for the film *The Color Purple*, many decades after college, a sad older man from Africa, who had been a doctor in the Congo, and was now hired as an extra for our film, lamented the loss of his country, his people and his land, telling me that the Firestone Corporation had taken millions of acres of land, “leasing” it for pennies an acre, in perpetuity. The people who’d lived there since the beginning of humanity, had been forced to tend the trees planted there on Firestone’s vast rubber tree plantation. Needless to say I immediately thought of every car I’d owned and all the tires that ran under them.

From Kigali

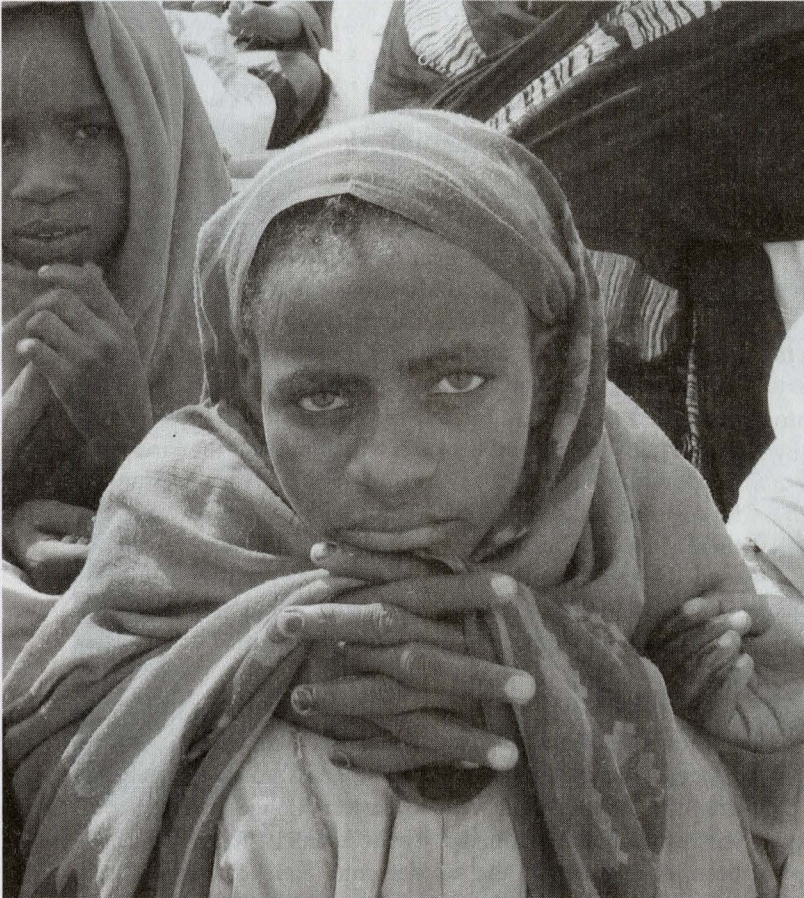
From Kigali, and meetings with survivors, witnessing their courage and fortitude, their willingness to move beyond unspeakable tragedy, I went to Eastern Congo. There, I met with women still victimized by the killers of Kigali who had been chased across the border into their country. These women had been the victims of rape on so large a scale – rape as one of the cruelest weapons of war – it seemed impossible they had not, in their despair, chosen to destroy themselves. Their villages had frequently turned against them, because of their abuse; if their husbands were still alive, they regularly dismissed them, refusing them shelter in their own homes. One beautiful woman, who came to meet me wearing white and purple, had been a sex slave in the bush for over a year, forced to carry loads that bent her double, her eyes repeatedly struck to damage her vision so that she would not be able to identify her assailants, her whole body beaten until, over a year later, there was still a discernible limp when she attempted to walk with what one assumed was her former grace. We embraced each other with tears, and with joy. I was more thankful to see her radiant resurrection than I had been to witness anything in my life. She had been raped with every imaginable instrument, including machete handles and gun barrels. Thanks to you, my sisters of Women for Women

International, she said, I have come through. Many of us have come through. We will not go back. We will not be slaves and beasts of burden.

Over four million Congolese have been murdered in an endless war whose foundation rests on the mineral wealth of the Congo. One of those minerals, coltan, makes cell phone use possible. Millions of

of speech, speech about the unspeakable, and is a source of my ability to share the following story, which propelled me into a period of speechlessness. While in Congo we were invited to visit a young woman, just my own daughter's age at the time, thirty-six, who was in a local hospital. When we first saw Generose she was lying on a pallet on the floor in an outer passageway, waiting for us. Taking up her crutch, she led us to a quiet area at the back of the hospital where we sat circled around her, as she told her story. Her story was this: Her village had been terrorized by the Interharmwe murderers (presumably Hutu) that had been chased out of Rwanda by the Tutsi forces of Paul Kagame (now president of Rwanda); the suffering had been unbearable as people were chased from their homes at all hours of the day or night; many of them choosing to sleep in the forest or hide themselves in their fields. She was home with her husband and two children because among other reasons, such as this was her home, her husband was sick. One evening, there was a fierce knock at the door, gunmen who also carried machetes entered, demanding food. There was little to offer them but the staple diet: a boiled vegetable (that to my eyes, being shown it in the fields earlier, looked like okra leaves) and a few balls of steamed millet. The men ate this, but were angry and not satisfied. They went and found the husband, still in bed, and hacked him to pieces on the spot. They came back to Generose and her children and took hold of her. Holding her down, they began to cut off her leg. They cut off her leg, cut it into six pieces, and began to fry it in a pan. When some part of it seemed nearly done, they tried to force her son to take a bite of it. Strongly, beautifully, and so much the son of our dreams, he said: No, I will never eat my mother's flesh. They shot him to death without more conversation. The daughter, seeing this, watching her mother bleeding to death, knowing her father had been hacked to pieces, was now offered the same opportunity. Terrorized, she bit into a piece of her mother's body. Her mother, having crawled away, does not know what became of her. Though she does know that her assailants went next door that same evening and murdered a couple who'd been married that day, raping and mutilating the bride, and tearing out her eyes.

This was the child Generose was hoping we could help her find. Apparently she had escaped after this gruesome torture, and now, where could she be? Generose hoped for only two things from us: that we help her find her daughter (beyond our capacity, probably, though Women for Women International would try) and that we help her start a small business so that when her daughter is found she can provide a safe place for them to live. A proud woman who



Refugee girl. Photo by Unknown

families are homeless and in ruin, living in the rain and heat. War continues, like a sickness that has no cure. Infectious diseases are rampant. Weapons flow into the hands of the young, even into the hands of children. How can she smile? I wonder, about my just met Congolese sister. But she does so because she is alive, which means the Feminine is alive. There is the work of The Mother to do. There is the work of The Daughter to do. This is a source of joy. We embrace, parting. She will learn how to start a business and longs to take lessons in computer use.

Coming home

I found, coming home, that I could talk about this woman, and, indeed, she would later come to America and talk about herself. She understood the importance

reminded me of a young Toni Morrison, she did not once stammer in the telling of her tale, though those of us around her felt a quaking in the heart. I have not forgotten this child who was forced to bite into her mother's flesh for a moment. Yet it has been almost impossible to speak of it. Coming home I fell ill with the burden of this story, as I had fallen ill after reading in the New York Times a year or so earlier, of similar torture used against the so-called "pygmies" of Africa's rainforests. That, in order to frighten them away from their homes, to ultimately make way for lumbering and mining interests located in the West, mercenaries were indoctrinating their soldiers to believe that killing them ("pygmies" because in ancient Egyptian the word means elbow high) and the eating of their hearts, would make them invisible and capable, as these smaller people seem to be, of evading capture by blending with their environment. Reading this story I felt as if my own heart had been taken out of me, and this assault on the planetary human body that I represent, brought me low.

Sangha

I was fortunate to have a sangha (a Buddhist circle of support) to which I could eventually turn. Sitting around me as I talked, two of our members realized I needed even more of a healing than simply being able to speak about what I had witnessed and heard of happening to the people of the earth. They immediately devised a ritual for my care. Placing me on the green grass of my yard, surrounding me with flowers, stones, photographs of those who comfort us (I placed several under my blouse: John Lennon, Pema Chodron, Howard Zinn, the DaLai Lama, Amma and Che among them) and their own loving words, they helped me shed tears of hopelessness, as I asked myself and them: What has happened to humanity? Followed by more tears of resolve. Because whatever has happened to humanity, whatever is currently happening to humanity, it is happening to all of us. No matter how hidden the cruelty, no matter how far off the screams of pain and terror, we live in one world. We are one people. My illness proved that. As well as my understanding that Generose's lost daughter belongs to all of us. It is up to all of us to find her; it is up to us to do our best to make her whole again. There is only one daughter, one father, one mother, one son, one aunt or uncle, one dog, one cat, donkey, monkey or goat in the Universe, after all: the one right in front of you.

Once again

And so I have been, once again, struggling to speak about an atrocity: This time in Gaza, this time against the Palestinian people. Like most people on the planet

I have been aware of the Palestinian –Israeli conflict almost my whole life. I was four years old in 1948 when, after being subjected to unspeakable cruelty by the Germans, after a "holocaust" so many future disasters would resemble, thousands of European Jews were resettled in Palestine. They settled in a land that belonged to people already living there, which did not seem to bother the British who, as in India, had occupied Palestine and then, on leaving it, helped put in place a partitioning of the land they thought would work fine for the people, strangers, Palestinians and European Jews, now forced to live together. When we witness the misery and brutality still a daily reality for millions of people in Pakistan and India, we are looking at the failure, and heartlessness, of the "partition" plan. Though it might be true that the partitioning of what became India and Pakistan came after the insistence of

No matter how hidden the cruelty, no matter how far off the screams of pain and terror, we live in one world. We are one people.

a Muslim leader, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, it is extremely doubtful that separating their millions of people into different countries would have occurred to the Indians, Hindu and Muslim, had England not spent centuries telling each group its misery was the other's fault.

Who would tell her?

I got to Gaza the way I have gotten so many places in my life: a sister called me. My friend, the writer, Susan Griffin, with whom I was arrested protesting the start of the war against Iraq in 2003 sent an email. Would I be interested in going to Gaza? With CODEPINK, the women's peace group that had gotten us into such soul strengthening trouble six years before. She would go, she said, if she could sell the book she was currently writing. This is how so many of us live; I remember this when I look about the world and want more witnesses to the scenes of horror, brutality, chaos. We all have to work to feed ourselves, look after our families, keep our heads above water. I understand this completely; and wasn't sure I was free enough myself, to go. However, it happened that, in the same week that the Israeli military began its 22 day bombardment of Gaza, a refugee camp that became a city and is today a mere sliver of Palestine left to the Palestinians (a city and environs that Israel had laid siege to months before, keeping out food and medicine and building materials, among other necessities) my own sister had died after a long illness. Our relationship had been a good one for most of our lives, and then, toward the end of her life, it had become strained. So much so that when she died

I had not expected to feel devastation. Surprise. As I was grieving her loss, I learned of the dropping of bombs on the people of Palestine. Houses, hospitals, factories, police stations, parliament buildings, ministries, apartment buildings, schools, went up in dust. The sight of one family in which five young daughters had been killed was seared into my consciousness. The mother, wounded and unconscious, was alive. Who would tell her? I waited to hear some word of regret, of grief, of compassion, from our leaders in Washington, who had sent the money, the earnings of American taxpayers, to buy the bombs destroying her world. What little concern I became aware of from our "leaders" was faint, arrived late, was delivered without much feeling, and was soon overshadowed by an indifference to the value of Palestinian life that has corrupted our children's sense of right and wrong for generations. Later our government would offer money, a promise to help "rebuild." As if money and rebuilding is the issue. If someone killed my children and offered me money for the privilege of having done so I would view them as monsters, not humanitarians.



Palestinian Grandmother in Gaza. Photo by Ibraheem Abu Mustafa

I consulted my companion, who did not hesitate. We must go, he said. The sooner we reach the people of Gaza, the sooner they'll know not all Americans are uncaring, deaf and blind, or fooled by the media. He went on to quote Abraham Lincoln's famous line about fooling the people. You can fool some of the people some of the time, but not all of the people all of the time. Americans, we know, are, for the most part, uninformed about the reality of this never-ending "conflict" that has puzzled us for decades and of which so many of us, if we are honest, are heartily sick. We began to pack.

A long way to Gaza

It's a long way to Gaza. Flying between San Francisco and Frankfurt, then from Frankfurt into Egypt, I kept my mind focused by meditating as much as possible, reading Aung San Suu Kyi and Alan Clement's book *The Voice of Hope*, thinking

about Desmond Tutu and his courageous statement earlier in the month about the immorality of the walls Israel has built around Palestinian villages as well as the immorality of the siege itself. President Jimmy Carter's book *Peace, Not Apartheid*, I had read before leaving home. I also ate a good bit of chocolate. And slept. Arriving in Cairo at three-thirty in the morning, my first task, assigned by the beautiful, indomitable and well loved co-founder of CODEPINK, Medea Benjamin, was to meet with her and the U.S. Ambassador to Egypt, Ambassador Scobey, at ten-thirty a.m. to ask for assistance in crossing the border into Gaza from Egypt. After a few hours rest, I appeared early for the meeting (concerned that Medea had not arrived yet) which, though cordial, would yield no help. Even so, I was able to have an interesting talk with the

Ambassador about the use of non-violence. She, a white woman with a southern accent, mentioned the success of "our" Civil Rights Movement and why couldn't the Palestinians be more like us. It was a remarkable comment from a perspective of unimaginable safety and privilege; I was moved to tell her of the effort

it took, even for someone so inherently non-violent as me, to contain myself during seven years in Mississippi when it often appeared there were only a handful of white Mississippians who could talk to a person of color without delivering injury or insult. That if we had not been able to change our situation through non-violent suffering, we would most certainly, like the ANC, like the PLO, like Hamas, turned to violence. I told her how dishonest it seems to me that people claim not to understand the desperate, last ditch, resistance involved in suicide bombings; blaming the oppressed for using their bodies where the Israeli army uses armored tanks. I remembered aloud, us being Southerners, my own anger at the humiliations, bombings, assassinations that made weeping an endless activity for black people, for centuries, and how when we finally got to a court room which was supposed to offer justice, the judge was likely to blame us for the crime done against us and to call us chimpanzees for making a fuss.

Medea arrived at this point, having been kept circling the building in a taxi that never landed, and pressed our case for entry into Gaza. While appearing sympathetic to our petition, our ambassador emphasized it was dangerous for us to go into Gaza and that her office would be powerless to help us if we arrived there and were injured or stranded. We were handed some papers telling us all the reasons we should not go.

Pastrami from "the butcher"

Next we were at a strange ministry whose name never registered, to fill out forms whose intent escaped me. Several CODEPINK women were already there, waiting their turn for the bit of paper we needed to move a step closer to the Egyptian border crossing at Rafah, the only one available (maybe) for us.

There I met a CODEPINKER who instantly made me happy to be with CODEPINK again. She'd been waiting for hours, felt she was growing into her chair, and we laughed at the absurdity of bureaucracy everywhere, which keeps you waiting interminably for some bit of paper that you feel sure is thrown into the trash or into a

creaking file drawer as soon as you leave the room, never again to see the light of day. I also reconnected with Gael Murphy, who reminded me we had shared a paddy wagon after being arrested in front of the White House a few days before George Bush started his ill-fated war on the people and animals, rivers and dwellings, mosques and libraries of Iraq. She handed me an illustrated postcard that showed plainly what the situation between Israel and Palestine came down to: in 1946 the Palestinians owned Palestine, with a few scattered Jewish villages (picture one); some years later, under a United Nations plan for partitioning, Palestine and Israel would each own roughly half of the land (picture two); from 1949-1967 the Israel "half" grew by about a third; after the 1967 war, Israel doubled its land mass by virtue of the land it took from Palestine at that time. The last picture shows the situation in 2008: Palestinian refugees (in their own country) live in

camps in the West Bank and Gaza, and the whole land is now called Israel. On the back of this card are words from former Israeli president Ariel Sharon, known as the butcher of Sabra and Shatila (refugee camps in Lebanon where he led a massacre of the people) where he talks about making a pastrami sandwich of the Palestinian people, riddling their lands with Jewish settlements until no one will be able to imagine a whole Palestine. Or know Palestine ever existed.

Turtle Island

No one can imagine a whole Turtle Island, either; now known as the United States of America, but formerly the land of Indigenous peoples. The land of some of my Native ancestors, the Cherokee, whose homes and villages were

obliterated from the landscape where they'd existed for millenia, and the Cherokee forced – those who remained – to resettle, walking "the trail of tears," a thousand miles away. This is familiar territory. As is the treatment of the Palestinian people. On the bus ride through the Egyptian desert, toward the



Rafah gate, which leads into Palestine, I think about this particular cycle of violence humans have made for themselves. Hitler learned (partly) from the Americans how to "cleanse" Germany of the Jews. Even to the use of Jewish hair to stuff mattresses. Indian hair had been mattress stuffing long before. Indian skin made into various objects. Indian children and families, massacred. Not because they were "savages" – one glance at their art told anyone who they were, but because the European settlers who came to America wanted their land. Just as the Israelis have wanted, and have taken by force, Palestinian land. Like Americans they have attempted to hide their avarice and cruelty behind a mountain of myths: that no one lived in Palestine, that the Palestinians are savages, that there's no such thing as a Palestinian (Golda Meir's offering), that the Israelis are David and the Palestinians Goliath. Which is ridiculous, if you haven't been indoctrinated against the

Palestinian Boy with U.S. members of Neturei Karta in Gaza. Photo by Ismail Zaydah

Palestinians for centuries from reading the Bible where, as the Philistines, they are forever causing trouble for God's children, the Hebrews. And then, there's Hollywood, which has a lot to answer for in its routine disregard for Arabs, generally, but which, where Palestine and Israel are concerned, projects Israel as always in the right, no matter what it does, as American politicians, for the most part, have learned to do. This is not good for Israel, or the United States, just as always praising the regrettable behavior of one's child,

It was moving to hear the stories of why the Jews on our Gaza bound bus were going to Palestine. Many of them simply said they couldn't bear the injustice, or the hypocrisy. Having spoken out against racism, terrorism, apartheid elsewhere, how could they be silent about Palestine and Israel?

or of anyone, can only lead to disaster. A disaster, where Israel is concerned, that is happening before our eyes, even if the media in America refuses to let Americans fully see it.

So many Jews

I had not been on a bus with so many Jews since traveling to the 1963 March On Washington by Greyhound when Martin Luther King, John Lewis and others spoke so passionately of Black Americans' determination to be free. I went with a half-Jewish young man named, not so ironically when I later thought of it, David. He was not considered really Jewish because his mother was Irish, and you can only be a real Jew if your mother is Jewish. I didn't know that then, though. I thought his behavior, coming to the side of the oppressed, very Jewish. It was fairly Irish, too, but at the time the Irish in Boston, except for the Kennedys, seemed far from their tradition in this area. They were regularly stoning and /or shouting obscenities at black children who tried to attend "their" schools. It was moving to hear the stories of why the Jews on our Gaza bound bus were going to Palestine. Many of them simply said they couldn't bear the injustice, or the hypocrisy. Having spoken out against racism, terrorism, apartheid elsewhere, how could they be silent about Palestine and Israel? Someone said her friends claimed everyone who spoke out against Israeli treatment of Palestinians was a self-hating Jew (if Jewish) or anti-Semitic (though Palestinians are Semites, too). She said it never seemed to dawn on the persons making the anti-Semitic charge that it is

Israel's behavior people are objecting to and not its religion. As for being self-hating? Well, she said, I actually love myself too much as a Jew to pretend to be ignorant about something so obvious. Ignorance is not held in high regard in Jewish culture.

One story that particularly moved me was this: A woman in her late Fifties or early Sixties stood at the front of the bus, as we passed donkey carts and Mercedes Benzes, and spoke of traveling to Palestine without her husband, a Jewish man who was born in Palestine. Several times they had come back to Palestine, renamed Israel, to see family. To attend graduations, weddings, and funerals. Each time they were held for hours at the airport as her husband was stripped, searched, interrogated, and threatened when he spoke up for himself. In short, because his passport was stamped with the place of his birth, Palestine, he was treated like a Palestinian. This Jewish husband sent his best wishes, but he could no longer endure travel in so painful a part of the world. By now most of us are aware of the dehumanizing treatment anyone not Jewish receives on crossing a border into Israel. Especially brutal for Palestinians. I thought: even our new President, Barack Hussein Obama, were he just anybody, and not the president of the United States, would have a humiliating time getting into Israel. The poet, and rebel, in me instantly wanted him to try it. To don the clothing of an average person, as truth seeking people do in Wisdom tales, and travel into Israel. To learn what is real and true, not by traveling through the air, but by walking on the ground.

Riding on the bus

Riding on the bus, listening to the stories of people drawn to the side of the Palestinian people, I leaned into the landscape. Mile after mile of barren desert went by, with scatterings of villages and towns. The farther into the Sinai we went the more poverty we saw. One sight in particular has stayed with me: the Bedouin, formerly the Nomads of the desert, attempting to live alongside the road or on the barren hills, without their camels, without mobility. Sometimes in dwellings made of sticks and straw. Occasionally lone women in flowing black robes walked along a ridge in the heat, going someplace not visible to the eye. Hundreds of tiny white brick houses, most unfinished, studded the hills. I asked my friend: What do you think those small white buildings are? He said: bunkers. Mausoleums? But no, seeing them appear in all manner and stage of construction, over hundreds of miles, I saw they were poor peoples' attempts at building housing for themselves. They looked like bunkers and mausoleums because no one was around them, and because they

were so small: some of them barely large enough to lie down in, and often with no windows, only a door. I realized people who worked far away and were able to return to build only sporadically were building them. This is true in many places in the world, and I was moved by the tenacity of people trying to have a home, no matter how uprooted or displaced they have been. Creating and having a home is a primary instinct in all of nature as well as in humankind; seeing these tiny dwellings, with no water sources, no electricity, no anything but white mud bricks, made me remember my own childhood feelings of insecurity around housing, and the preciousness of having a home, as we were forced to move, year after year.

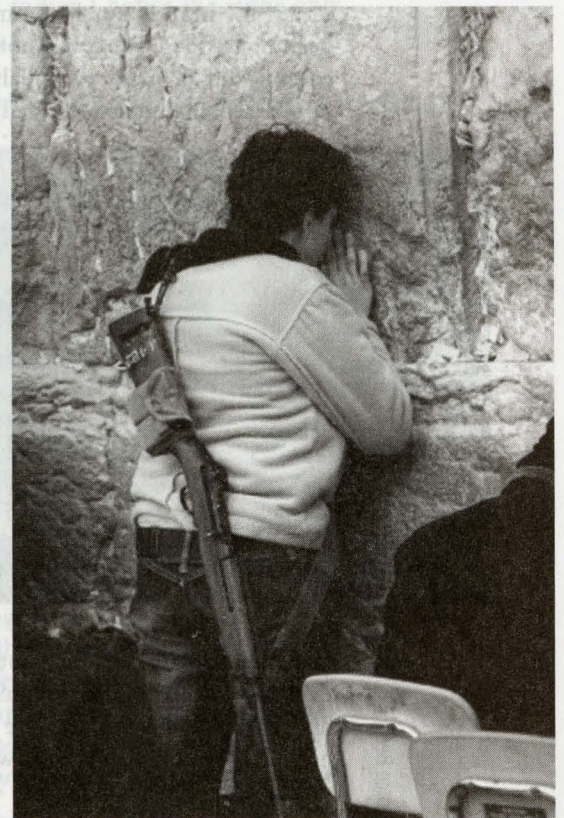
Rachel's parents, Cindy and Craig

I came out of this reverie to hear the story of Cindy and Craig Corrie, the parents of Rachel Corrie. Rachel Corrie was murdered when she tried to stop an Israeli tank from demolishing a Palestinian house. I was struck by her parents' beauty and dignity. Cindy's face radiates resolve and kindness. Craig's is a study in acceptance, humility, incredible strength, and perseverance. Rachel had been working in Palestine and witnessed the ruthlessness of the deliberate destruction of Palestinian homes by the Israeli army, most surrounded by gardens or small orchards of orange and olive trees, which the army consistently uprooted. No doubt believing the sight of a young Jewish woman in a brightly colored jumpsuit would stop the soldier in the tank she placed herself between the home of her Palestinian friends and the tank. It rolled over her, crushing her body and breaking her back. The Corries spoke of their continued friendship with the family who had lived in that house. Everywhere we went, after arriving in Gaza, locals greeted the Corries with compassion and tenderness. This was particularly moving to me because of a connection I was able to make with another such sacrifice decades ago in Mississippi, in 1967, and how black people became aware that there were some white people who actually cared about what was happening to them. The "three civil rights workers" as they became known, were James Cheney, a young African American Christian man, and Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, both white Jewish men from the North. The Northerners had been called to the Civil Rights Movement in the South by their conscience, having watched the racist and sadistic treatment of black people there. The three young men were riding through the backwoods of Neshoba County, Mississippi when their car was firebombed. They were dragged from the car, bludgeoned and shot to death; their bodies were buried in a dam that was under construction in the

area and would not be found for months. While America waited for the bodies to be found, black and white people working for black liberation in the South discovered new ground. Who could not love these young men, all three of them, for risking their lives to change ours? And so, in every church, every Sunday, prayers went out for James, yes, but also for Michael and Andrew. They became ours, just as the Corries have become family to the Palestinian people. This is one of the most beautiful passages for human beings. It is as if we enter a different door of our reality, when someone gives her or his life for us. Why this should be, is a mystery, but it is the mystery, I think, behind all the great myths in which there is human sacrifice – not on an altar but on the road, in the street – for the common good. At a meeting of the Veterans of the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement held in Jackson, Mississippi last year, I saw the widow of Michael Schwerner. There she was, over forty years later. There she was, still belonging to her own people, and still, also, one of us.

Mother force

We arrived in the Gaza strip in the afternoon, after being kept at the border crossing for about five hours. Just inside the Palestinian border, reminding the Palestinians of the Israeli presence during the cease fire. I had never been so close to bombs being dropped before, and I took the opportunity to interrogate my life. Had I lived it the best way I could? And so forth. A young Palestinian man, Abdullah X, a student of video at a school in Egypt, had come on the bus with us. His story was that he had managed to leave Palestine on scholarship to go to school in Cairo three years ago. Because of the siege, and all borders being closed, he had not been able to see his family. He had not seen them for three years. Because of Israel's bombardment of Gaza he feared for the lives of his family and was determined to see them.



Israeli woman soldier at the Wailing Wall. Photo by Natalia Bratslavsky

Abdullah might have stepped out of ancient Assyria. With his large dark eyes, olive complexion, and hair in curly dark ringlets, he is a striking young man. Between Cairo and the Gaza border, he had, without doing anything special, made many of us on the bus care about him. Sure enough, the Egyptian border patrol gave him a hard time. When I was told of this by a woman who had stood next to him until ordered away by a patrolman, we decided to stand some distance from him, while he seemed to be pleading to be allowed to visit his parents, and to send the mother force, the universal parent force, to speed his liberation. We stood together, closed our eyes, and sent every ounce of our combined energy to Abdullah's back. When he was given his passport and allowed to join us, we cheered. We could only imagine what going back into Gaza meant for him. It was his home, and much of it had been obliterated. We could not know at the time that, coming out of Gaza, Abdullah would be kept at the border crossing, not permitted, as he had feared, back

struggle, of resistance, just as you do. The man driving the donkey cart. The woman selling vegetables. The young person arranging rugs on the sidewalk or flowers in a vase. When I lived in segregated Eatonton, Georgia I used to breathe normally only in my own neighborhood, only in the black section of town. Everywhere else was too dangerous. A friend was beaten and thrown in prison for helping a white girl, in broad daylight, fix her bicycle chain. But even this sliver of a neighborhood, so rightly named the Gaza strip, was not safe. It had been bombed for 22 days. I thought of how, in the U.S. the first and perhaps only bombing on U.S. soil, prior to 9/11, was the bombing of a black community in Tulsa, Oklahoma in the 1920s. The black people who created it were considered, by white racists, too prosperous and therefore "uppity." Everything they created was destroyed. This was followed by the charge already rampant in white American culture, that black people never tried to "better" themselves.

There is ample evidence in Gaza that the Palestinians never stop trying to "better" themselves. What started as a refugee camp with tents, has evolved into a city with buildings rivaling those in almost any other city in the "developing" world. There are houses, apartment buildings, schools, mosques, churches, libraries, hospitals. Driving along the streets, we could see right away that many of these were in ruins. I realized I had never understood the true meaning of "rubble." Such and such was "reduced to rubble" is a phrase we hear. It is different seeing what demolished buildings actually look like. Buildings in which people were living. Buildings from which hundreds of broken bodies have been removed; so thorough a job have the Palestinians done in removing the dead from squashed dwellings that no scent of death remains. What this task must have been like, both physically and psychologically, staggers the mind. We pass police stations that were simply flattened, and all the young (most Palestinians are young) officers in them killed, hundreds of them. We pass ministries, bombed into fragments. We pass a hospital, bombed and gutted by fire. If one is not safe in a hospital, when one is already sick and afraid, where is one safe? If children are not safe playing in their schoolyards, where are they safe? Where are The World Parents of All Children? The World Caretakers of All the Sick?



Man praying. Photo by Bruce Bean

into Egypt with us. We would wait for him, but ultimately we would leave him there. He had realized his education, his future, were at risk. But the love of his family, his home, his land, was very strong. Later we would also have a glimpse of his father, and his relationship with his father. We were moved by the love and affection expressed between them. For what could it mean to know from day to day that you could easily lose each other to the madness of war? A war brought to your door by people who claimed everything you had, no matter how little was left, was theirs?

Rolling into Gaza

Rolling into Gaza City I had a feeling of homecoming. There is a flavor to the ghetto. To the Bantustan. To the "rez". To the "colored section." In some ways it is surprisingly comforting. Because consciousness is comforting. Everyone you see has an awareness of

Two sisters

My companion and I are assigned to the home of two sisters who share their space with friends and relatives who come and go. One morning I get up early to find an aunt sleeping on the floor in the living room. Another time, a cousin. In the middle of the night I

hear one of the sisters consoling her aged father, who sounds disoriented, and helping him back to bed. There is such respect, such tenderness in her voice. This is the same place that, just weeks earlier, was surrounded by rocket fire, a missile landing every 27 seconds for 22 days. I can only imagine what the elderly residents must feel, as, even in their old age they are subjected to so much fear. Each morning we are sent off to learn what we can in our four days in Gaza, well fed on falafel, hummus, olives and dates, sometimes eggs, tomatoes, salad and cheese. All of it simple, all of it delicious. More delicious because we realize how difficult it is to find such food here; the blockade keeps out most of it. Delicious also because it is shared with such generosity and graciousness. Always the culinary student, I try to learn to make the especially tasty dish that consists mainly of tomatoes and eggs. I learn the tea I like so much is made out of sage! On International Women's Day we leave for the celebration for which we have come, a gathering with the women of Gaza.

Hatred and headscarves

Gael Murphy, Medea Benjamin, Susan Griffin and I, along with twenty or so other women had been arrested for protesting the war on Iraq on International Women's Day, 2003. If the world had paid attention we could have saved a lot of money, countless sons' and daughters' lives, as well as prevented a lot of war-generated pollution that hastens globe-threatening climate change. How doofus humans are going to look -we thought as we marched, sang, accepted our handcuffs - still firing rockets into apartment buildings full of families, and dropping bombs on school children and their pets, when the ice melts completely in the Arctic and puts an end to our regressive, greed sourced rage forever. That had been a wonderful day; this International Women's Day, of 2009, was also. It was the kind of day that makes life, already accepted as a gift, a prize. Early in the morning of March 8th, we were shuttled to a Women's Center in the North of Gaza City, to meet women who, like their compatriots, had survived the recent bombardment and, so far, the siege.

This center for women was opened under the auspices of the United Nations, which has been administering to the Palestinian people since 1948, when thousands of Palestinians fleeing their homes under Israeli attack, became refugees. It is a modest building with a small library whose shelves hold few books. It isn't clear whether most of the women read. The idea, as it is explained to us, is to offer the women a place to gather outside the home, since, in Palestinian culture the mobility of most women is limited by their work in the home as mothers and caretakers of their

families. Many women rarely leave their compounds. However, today, International Women's Day, is different. Many women are out and about, and women who frequent this particular center are on hand to welcome us. After arranging ourselves around a table in the library, we, about thirty of us, sit in Council. I learn something I'd heard but never experienced: Arabs introduce themselves by telling you they are the mother or father of one of their children, perhaps their eldest: then they tell you how many children they have. They do this with a pride and joy I have never seen before. Only one woman had one child. Everyone else had at least five. There is a feeling of festivity as the women, beautifully dressed and wearing elegant headscarves, laugh and joke among themselves. They are eager to talk. Only the woman with one child has trouble speaking. When I turn to her, I notice she is the only woman wearing black, and that her eyes are tearing.

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Unable to speak, she hands me instead a photograph that she has been holding in her lap. She is a brown-skinned woman, of African descent, as some Palestinians (to my surprise) are; the photograph is of her daughter, who looks European. The child looks about six years old. A student of ballet, she is dressed in a white tutu and is dancing. Her mother tries to speak, but still cannot, as I sit, holding her arm. It is another woman who explains: during the bombardment, the child was hit in the arm and the leg and the chest and bled to death in her mother's arms. The mother and I embrace, and throughout our meeting I hold the photograph of the child, while the mother draws her chair closer to mine.

What do we talk about?

We talk about hatred.

But before we talk about hatred I want to know about headscarves. What's the deal about wearing the scarf? Why do so many women wear it? I am told something I'd never considered: in desert countries most of one's hydration is lost at the back of the neck, which can quickly lead to heat stroke, so a headscarf that wraps around the neck is essential to block this loss. The top of the head is covered because if a woman is living a traditional life and is outside a lot, the sun

beats down on it. This causes headache, dizziness, nausea, stroke, and other health problems. In Gaza, one of the women pointed out, there were many women who did not wear scarves, primarily because they worked in offices. This was true of the women in whose home we were sheltered. They seemed to own a lot of scarves that they draped about themselves casually, just as my friends and I might do in the United States.

Because I had shaved my head a week or so before going to Gaza, I understood exactly the importance of the headscarf. Without a covering on my head I could not bear the sun for more than a few minutes. And,

It feels very familiar, I tell them, what is happening here. When something similar was happening to us, in Mississippi, Georgia, Alabama, and Louisiana, I say, our parents taught us to think of the racists as we thought of any other disaster. To deal with that disaster as best we could, but not to attach to it by allowing ourselves to hate.

indeed, one of the first gifts I received from an anonymous Palestinian woman was a thick black and red embroidered scarf, which I wore everywhere, gratefully.

Our host told us a story about the uglier side of the headscarf business: On the first day of

bombing she was working downstairs in the basement and wasn't aware that her apartment building was next to one that was being shelled. When the policemen came to clear her building, and she stepped out of the elevator, one of them, a political and religious Conservative, was taken aback at the sight of her bare head. So much so that instead of instantly helping her to a shelter, he called a colleague to come and witness her attire. Or lack thereof. He was angry with her, for not wearing a headscarf, though Israeli rockets were tearing into buildings all around them. And what could we do but sigh along with her, as she related this experience with appropriate shrugs and grimaces of exasperation. Backwardness is backwardness, wherever it occurs, and explains lack of progressive movement in afflicted societies, whether under siege or not.

It feels familiar

One of the triumphs of the Civil Rights Movement is that when you travel through the South today you do not feel overwhelmed by a residue of grievance and hate. This is the legacy of people brought up in the

Christian tradition, true believers of every word Jesus had to say on the issue of justice, loving kindness, and peace. This dove-tailed nicely with what we learned of Gandhian non-violence, brought into the movement by Bayard Rustin, a gay strategist for the Civil Rights Movement. A lot of thought went into how to create "the beloved community", so that our country would not be stuck with violent hatred between black and white, and the continuous spectacle, and suffering, of communities going up in flames. It is astonishing, the progress, and I will always love Southerners, black and white, for the way we have all grown. Ironically, though there was so much suffering and despair as the struggle for justice tested us, it is in this very "backward" part of our country today that one is most likely to find simple human helpfulness, thoughtfulness and impersonal courtesy. I speak a little about this American history, but it isn't history that these women know. They're too young. They've never been taught it. It feels irrelevant. Following their example of speaking of their families, I talk about my Southern parents' teachings during our experience of America's apartheid years. When white people owned and controlled all the resources and the land, in addition to the political, legal and military apparatus, and used their power to intimidate black people in the most barbaric and merciless ways. These whites who tormented us daily were like Israelis who have cut down millions of trees planted by Arab Palestinians; stolen Palestinian water, even topsoil. They have bulldozed innumerable villages, houses, mosques, and in their place built settlements for strangers who have no connection whatsoever with Palestine, settlers who have been the most rabid anti-Palestinian of all, attacking the children, the women, everyone, old and young alike, viciously, and forcing Palestinians to use separate roads from themselves.

It feels very familiar, I tell them, what is happening here. When something similar was happening to us, in Mississippi, Georgia, Alabama, and Louisiana, I say, our parents taught us to think of the racists as we thought of any other disaster. To deal with that disaster as best we could, but not to attach to it by allowing ourselves to hate. This was a tall order, and as I'm talking, I begin to understand, as if for the first time, why some of our parents' prayers were so long and fervent as they stayed there, long minutes, on their knees in church. And why people often wept, and fainted, and why there was so much tenderness as people deliberately silenced themselves, or camouflaged atrocities done to or witnessed by them, using representative figures from the Bible.

At the end of the table across from me is a woman

who looks like Oprah's twin. In fact, earlier she had said to me: Alice, tell Oprah to come see us. We will take good care of her. I promised I would email Oprah, and, on returning home, did so. She laughs, this handsome woman; then speaks earnestly. We don't hate Israelis, Alice, she says, quietly, what we hate is being bombed, watching our little ones live in fear, burying them, being starved to death, and being driven from our land. We hate this eternal crying out to the world to open its eyes and ears to the truth of what is happening, and being ignored. Israelis, no. If they stopped humiliating and torturing us, if they stopped taking everything we have, including our lives, we would hardly think about them at all. Why would we?

Overwhelm

There is, finally, a sense of overwhelm, trying to bring comfort to someone whose sleeping child has been killed and buried, a few weeks ago, up to her neck in rubble; or a mother who has lost fifteen members of her family, all her children, grandchildren, brothers and sisters, her husband. What does one say to people whose families came out of their shelled houses waving white flags of surrender only to be shot down anyway? To mothers whose children were, at this moment, playing in the white phosphorous laden rubble that, after 22 days of bombing, is everywhere in Gaza? White phosphorus, once on the skin, never stops burning.

There is really nothing to say. Nothing to say to those who, back home in America, don't want to hear the news. Nothing to do, finally, but dance.

Dance

The women and I and everyone with us from Code Pink went across the hall to a big common room where music was turned up full volume. At first I sat exchanging smiles and murmurs with an ancient grandmother who was knitting booties, and who gave me two pairs, for my own grandchildren. Sitting didn't last. Without preamble I was pulled to my feet by several women at once, and the dance was on. Sorrow, loss, pain, suffering, all pounded into the floor for over an hour. Sweat flowing, wails and tears around the room. And then, the rising that always comes from such dancing; the sense of joy, of unity, of solidarity and gratitude to be in the best place one could be on earth; with sisters who have experienced the full measure of disaster and have the heart to rise above it. The feeling of love is immense. The ecstasy, sublime. I was conscious of exchanging and receiving Spirit in the dance. I also knew that this Spirit, which I have encountered in Mississippi, Georgia, the Congo, Cuba, Rwanda and Burma, among other places, this Spirit

that knows how to dance in the face of disaster, will never be crushed. It is as timeless as the wind. We think it is only inside our bodies, but we also inhabit it. Even when we are unaware of its presence internally, it wears us like a cloak.

They broke my house

I could have gone home then. I had learned what I came to know: that humans are an amazing lot. That to willfully harm any one of us is to damage us all. That hatred of ourselves is the root cause of any harm done to others, others so like us! And that we are lucky to live at a time when all lies will be exposed, along with the relief of not having to serve them any longer. But I did not go home. I went instead to visit the homeless.

Coming out of a small grouping of tents, with absolutely nothing inside them, no bedding, no food, no water, were middle-aged and elderly people who looked as if their sky had fallen. It had. An old, old man, leaning on a stick, met me as I trudged up a hill so I might see the extent of the devastation. Vast. Look, look! He said to me in English, come look at my house! He was wearing dusty cotton trousers and an old army great coat. I felt dragged along by the look in his eyes. He led me to what had been his house. It had obviously, from the remains, been a large and spacious dwelling; now he and his wife lived between two of the fallen walls that made a haphazard upside down v. She looked as stunned and as lost as he. There was not a single useable item visible. Near what must have been the front entrance, the old man placed me directly in front of the

remains of bulldozed trees: They broke my house, he said, by bombing it, and then they came with bulldozers and they broke my lemon and olives trees. The Israeli military has destroyed over two and a half million olive and fruit trees alone since 1948. Having planted many trees myself, I shared his sorrow about the fate of these. I imagined them alive and sparkling with life, offering olives and lemons, the old man and his wife able to sit in the shade of the trees in the afternoons, and have a cup of tea there, in the evenings.

You speak English, I observed. Yes, he said, I was once in the British army. I supposed this was during the time Britain controlled Palestine, before 1948. We walked along in silence, as I did what I had come to do: witness. Code Pink members and my companion and I walked through the rubble of demolished homes, schools, medical centers, factories, for half an hour. After the

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bombing the Israelis had indeed bulldozed everything so that I was able to find just one piece of evidence that beauty had flourished on this hillside; a shard from a piece of colorful tile, about the size of my hand. Someone in our group wanted it, and I gave it to her. They had taken pains to pulverize what they had destroyed.

Coming upon another grouping of tents, I encountered an old woman sitting on the ground in what would have been, perhaps, the doorway of her demolished, pulverized home. She was clean and impeccably dressed, the kind of old woman who is known and loved and respected by everyone in the community, as my own mother had been. Her eyes were dark and full of life. She talked to us freely. I gave her a gift I had brought, and she thanked me. Looking into my eyes she said: May God Protect You From the Jews. When the young Palestinian interpreter told me what she'd said, I responded: It's too late, I already married one.

I said this partly because, like so many Jews in America, my former husband could not tolerate criticism of Israel's behavior toward the Palestinians. Our very different positions on what is happening now in Palestine/Israel and what has been happening for over fifty years, has been perhaps our most severe disagreement. It is a subject we have never been able to rationally discuss. He does not see the racist treatment of Palestinians as the same racist treatment of blacks and some Jews that he fought against so nobly in Mississippi. And that he objected to in his own Brooklyn based family. When his younger brother knew he was seeing me, a black person, he bought and nailed over an entire side of his bedroom the largest Confederate flag either of us had ever seen. His brother, a young Jewish man who had never traveled South, and had perhaps learned most of what he knew about black history from *Gone With the Wind*, expressed his contempt for black people in this way. His mother, when told of our marriage, sat Shiva, which declared my husband dead. These were people who knew how to hate, and how to severely punish others, even those beloved, as he was, of their own. This is one reason I understand the courage it takes for some Jews to speak out against Israeli brutality and against what they know are crimes against humanity. Most Jews who know their own history see how relentlessly the Israeli government is attempting to turn Palestinians into the "new Jews," patterned on Jews of the holocaust era, as if someone must hold that place, in order for Jews to avoid it.

Jewish friends of the planet

Lucky for me, my husband's family were not the only Jews I knew, having met Howard Zinn, my history teacher at Spelman College in 1961, as my very first (secular) Jew, and later poet Muriel Rukeyser, at Sarah Lawrence College, who like Grace Paley, the short story writer, raised her voice against the Israeli Occupation of Palestine and the horrible mistreatment of the Palestinian people. There are my Jewish

friends of the planet: Amy Goodman, Jack Kornfield, Noam Chomsky, Medea Benjamin, and Barbara Lubin, who are as piercing in their assessments of Israeli behavior as they have been of African or African American, or Indian, or Chinese, or Burmese behavior. I place my faith in them, and others like us, who see how greed and brutality are not limited to any segment of humanity but will grow wherever it is unchecked, in any society whatsoever.

The people of Israel have not been helped by America's blind loyalty to their survival as a Jewish State, by any means necessary. The very settlers they've used American taxpayer money to install on Palestinian land turn out to be a scary lot, fighting not only against Palestinians, but also against Israelis, when they do not get their way. Israelis stand now exposed, the warmongers and peacemakers alike, as people who are ruled by leaders that the world considers irrational, vengeful, scornful of international law, and utterly frightening. There are differing opinions about this, of course, but my belief is that when a country primarily instills fear in the minds and hearts of the people of the world, it is no longer useful in joining the dialogue we need for saving the planet. There is no hiding what Israel has done or what it does on a daily basis to protect and extend its power. It uses weapons that cut off limbs without bleeding; it drops bombs into people's homes that never stop detonating in the bodies of anyone who is hit; it causes pollution so severe it is probable that Gaza may be uninhabitable for years to come, though Palestinians, having nowhere else to go, will have to live there. This is a chilling use of power, supported by the United States of America, no small foe, if one stands up to it. No wonder that most people prefer to look the other way during this genocide, hoping their disagreement with Israeli policies will not be noted. Good Germans, Good Americans, Good Jews. But, as our sister Audre Lorde liked to warn us: Our silence will not protect us. In the ongoing global climate devastation that is worsened by war activities, we will all suffer, and we will also be afraid.

The world knows

The world knows it is too late for a two-state solution. This old idea, bandied about since at least the Eighties, denounced by Israel for decades, isn't likely to become reality with the massive buildup of settlements all over what remains of Palestinian land. Ariel Sharon is having the last word: Jewish

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settlements exactly like a Pastrami sandwich; Palestinian life erased, as if it never existed, or crushed under the weight of a superior Israeli military presence and a teaching of Jewish supremacy sure to stunt Palestinian identity among Arabs living in Israel.

What is to be done?

What is to be done? Our revered Tolstoy asked this question, speaking also of War and Peace. I believe there must be a one state solution. That Palestinians and Jews, who have lived together in peace in the past, must work together to make this a reality once again. That this land (so soaked in Jewish and Palestinian blood, and with America's taxpayer dollars wasted on violence the majority of us would never, if we knew, support) must become, like South Africa, the secure and peaceful home of everyone who lives there. This will require that Palestinians, like Jews, have the right of return to their homes and their lands. Which will mean what Israelis most fear: Jews will be outnumbered and, instead of a Jewish state, there will be a Jewish, Muslim, Christian country, which is how Palestine functioned before the Europeans arrived. What is so awful about that?

The Tribunals, the generals will no doubt say. But both South Africa and Rwanda present a model of restorative justice in their Truth and Reconciliation Councils. Some crimes against humanity are so heinous nothing will ever rectify them. All we can do is attempt to understand their causes and do everything in our power to prevent them happening, to anyone, ever again. Human beings are intelligent and very often, compassionate. We can learn to heal ourselves without inflicting fresh wounds.

Liberation for the tyrant

Watching a video recently about Cuba's role in the ending of apartheid in South Africa, I was moved by the testimony of Pik Botha, once a high-ranking official of white South Africa. He talked about how liberating it had been when South Africa was forced to attend talks prior to negotiating Nelson Mandela's release from prison and a change from a fascist white supremacist regime to a democratic society. He said the feeling of not being hated and feared and treated like a leper everywhere he went was wonderful. The talks were held in Egypt and for the first time he felt welcomed by the Egyptians and took the opportunity to visit the pyramids and the Sphinx and to ride on a camel! As a white supremacist representative of a repressive, much hated government, he'd never felt relaxed enough to do that. His words demonstrate what we all know in our hearts to be true: allowing freedom to others brings freedom to ourselves. It is true that what one reads in the papers sometimes about the birthing pains of the New South Africa can bring sadness, alarm, and near despair. But I doubt that anyone in South Africa wishes to return to the old days of injustice and violence that scarred whites and blacks

and coloureds so badly. Not just citizens of South Africa were demoralized, oppressed and discouraged by white South Africa's behavior, but citizens of the world. Israel helped keep the racist regime in power in South Africa, giving it arms and expertise, and still the people of the world, in our outrage at the damage done to defenseless people, rose to the challenge of setting them free. That is what is happening today in Palestine.

The world has found its voice

The world has found its voice and though the horror of what we are witnessing in places like Rwanda and Congo and Burma and Israel/Palestine threatens our very ability to speak, we will speak. And we will be heard.

Suggested reading, listening, viewing

A Letter to the Editors of Ms. Magazine, in my book *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, Womanist Prose. 1983. This is an essay/memo written a few weeks prior to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and a few months before the Beirut massacres; in response to an article by Letty Cottin Pogrebin: "Anti-Semitism in the Women's Movement" which appeared in the June issue, 1982. I am writing about my refusal, as a woman of color, to be silenced. And how black history supports this stance.

My interview in Gaza with reporters from "Democracy Now," on YouTube.

"Sister Loss," an essay about the bombing of Gaza that appears on my blog: alicewalkersblog.com.

Peace Not Apartheid, by President Jimmy Carter.

One Country, by Ali Abunimah (probably the most important book to read on Israeli/Palestinian issues at this time). Abunimah gives a remarkably balanced account of the Palestine/Israeli history, as well as a convincing argument for choosing a one-state solution.

A People's History of the United States, by Howard Zinn. Israel learned a lot of its behavior from America; this vital resource illustrates this.

Also: On YouTube: A wide selection of Noam Chomsky's teachings on Israel and Palestine.

The writings and taped lectures of Edward Said.

Interviews with Israeli Soldiers on YouTube, Alternate Focus, AlterNet and World Focus, also on Democracy Now, and the BBC.

Movies: *The Battle of Algiers*, 1966, and *Waltz With Bashir*, 2009.

I wish to thank everyone who offered their gentle assistance in correcting spelling, syntax and fact. AW

When You Give a Child a Gun

by **Caroline Acuña**

A wise one once said, "Until adults learn to love as children do, our children will not be safe."

When we hear the words child soldiers, we tend to think of children outside the U.S. borders. We tend to think of war-torn and so-called third-world countries. We don't think about the children within the borders of the U.S.

Today we are training our children to be soldiers here in the U.S. We train them in a more institutionalized way than in chaotic war-torn countries but under the guise of programs that seem more civilized, neat, and tidy. Most of the youth are kids of color striving for greatness, financial stability, discipline, and regularity. They have been numbed and seduced by violence through the fear of adults. The Explorers program, a coeducational affiliate of the Boy Scouts of America is training thousands of young people in skills used to



Iranian girl during police festival in Tehran. Photo by Morteza Nikoubazi

confront terrorism, illegal immigration, and escalating Mexican border patrol. This program is considered honorable, but it can be seen as institutionalized violence. The Explorer program uses key buzzwords and phrases like youth empowerment or serving our country. The language we use here in the U.S. is different from that used in other countries, where it is understood that children are being trained as soldiers. The youngest participants in the Explorer program are 14 years old. The main hub of this program is in California's poorest county, Imperial, which borders Mexico. (New York Times 5.13.09)

According to the New York Times (May 2009) in an article by Jennifer Steinhauer, titled "Scouts Train to

Fight Terrorists, and More," membership in the Explorers has been overseen since 1998 by an affiliate of the Boy Scouts called Learning for Life, which offers 12 career-related programs, including those focused on aviation, medicine, and the sciences. However, 2,000 law-enforcement posts across the country form the Explorers' most popular career-related program. They account for 35,000 of the group's 145,000 young members, said John Anthony, national director of Learning for Life. Since the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, many of the law-enforcement posts have taken on an emphasis of fighting terrorism and other less conventional threats.

The training includes chasing down illegal border crossers; facing down terrorists and taking out "active shooters"; fighting terrorism, illegal entry into the U.S., drugs, and human smuggling. The following are some quotes from adult commanders of the Explorers:

"Our end goal is to create more agents," said April McKee, a senior border patrol agent and mentor at the session here."

"Before it was more about the basics," said Johnny Longoria, a border patrol agent here, "But now our emphasis is on terrorism, illegal entry, drugs, and human smuggling."

"If we're looking at 9/11 and what a Middle Eastern terrorist would be like," he said, "then maybe your role-player would look like that. I don't know, would you call that politically incorrect?"

"This is about being a true-blooded American guy and girl," said A. J. Lowenthal, a sheriff's deputy here in Imperial County, whose life clock, he says, is set around the Explorers events he helps run. "It fits right in with the honor and bravery of the Boy Scouts."

Border patrol, part of the Homeland Security Department, has helped shape the program's curriculum, and its primary goal is to prepare the Explorers as potential employees. The Explorer posts are attached to various agencies, including the FBI and

local police and fire departments that sponsor them much the way churches sponsor Boy Scout troops.

When adults are being brainwashed to live in fear, suspicion, hatred, and xenophobia, it creates an atmosphere of acceptance for our children to become soldiers. In human history, children have looked to adults as mentors and role models. They watch and duplicate our behavior. They duplicate our nationalism, our racism, sexism, classism, and, most tragically, our suffering.

According to Amnesty International, approximately 250,000 children under the age of 18 are thought to be fighting in conflicts around the world, and hundreds of thousands more are members of armed forces who could be sent into combat at any time. Although most child soldiers are between 15 and 18 years old, significant recruitment starts at the age of 10 and the use of even younger children has been recorded. Amnesty International has drawn attention to human rights abuses in the context of child soldier recruitment both by governments and armed opposition groups.

The U.S. is the number one manufacturer of weapons, (CRS Congressional Research Service report for Congress, U.S. Arm Sales: Agreement with and deliveries to Major Clients 1997-2004) both selling and giving away weapons to mostly countries of color where children are displaced by wars and greed. According to the World Policy Institute Arms Trade Resource Center, in 2003, the last year for which full information is available, the United States transferred weaponry to 18 of the 25 countries involved in active conflicts. From Angola, Chad and Ethiopia, to Colombia, Pakistan and the Philippines, transfers through the two largest U.S. arms sales programs (Foreign Military Sales and Commercial Sales) to these conflict nations totaled nearly \$1 billion.

According to Center For Defense Information, it has become increasingly easier to involve children in armed conflict because of the proliferation of inexpensive light weight weapons. As recently as a generation ago battlefield weapons were still heavy and bulky, generally limiting children's participation to support roles. But modern guns are so light that children can easily use them and so simple that they can be stripped and reassembled by a child of 10. (The Defense Monitor, Vol. XXVI, no. 4, July 1997)

It's been decade after decade that new child soldiers are being trained around the world.

Stopping this cycle of violence is one of our greatest challenges as human beings.

Many societies have compassion for child soldiers,

but when do we lose that compassion? When the children turn 18? The international community has not figured out yet how to deal with the millions of children who are displaced from wars. Adults as participants in governments or as individuals, have taken advantage of the extremely vulnerable situation children are in. Even in the U.S. our children are in great need of life options. Many are living in poverty and are tracked into the culture of militarism through a variety of programs that our government offers them before they turn 18 years old. If not tracked into militarism, they are tracked into prisons for free child labor.



Child with gun. Photo by Unknown.

So what does one do with this knowledge? How do we protect our children from the cycle of violence? What institutions can we create so our children have another choice to showing their bravery, having discipline, and being honored? What international policies can we create to protect our children? Can we call for a restructure of the U.N. and include the voices of ancient wisdom from indigenous populations worldwide? Can we protect our children by consolidating children's rights organizations worldwide or even just here in the U.S. to make a faster, deeper impact? What models are already created that we can build upon? What if all the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the U.S. that are already working for the rights of children consolidated their mission to one basic one that would begin to shift policies for the rights of children? Do NGOs need to unify in this regard? Or do the egos of administrators and financial safety of NGOs get in the way of our unification? If so, how can we become more creative about unifying on a larger scale? Can we really hold our governments accountable to the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child that UNICEF created, when the U.S. and Somalia remain the only UN countries to ratify the convention in whole or in part? What do adults need to let go of to move authentically toward deep unification?

Oppressive institutions set up for free child labor, exploitation, and greed—must end. How do we dance with compassion for all individuals involved in oppressive behavior? The commanders, the politicians, the heads of border patrol, the leader of gangs, the guards, the curriculum team of the Explorers—how do we open our hearts to them? Can we see the hurt child in each of them? Can we see they are defending old ideas in their heads and are tragically suffering from a chronic case of xenophobia? We adults are still in a practice of gripping heavy and hard ideas, behaviors, and mindsets that keep us from a collective liberation. May the hardness soften and fall from our bodies with ease, so we can move forward for the liberation of our children. This is the practice of a peaceful warrior.



Closing prayer

To the children who are on their knees with a rifle, let them be on their knees at the base of a tree in prayer and offerings.

To the children who bow to their commanders, let them bow to the knowledge of our elders.

To the children who can't find their mother and father, let them meet earth angels who will care, feed, and love them unconditionally.

May our children glow in the joyful sound of their own music.

May the animals walk beside them as comrades and teachers. May our children hear their teachings. ■

— Caroline Acuña

Stone Buddha: 10 Meditations

By Karma Tenzing Wangchuk

stone buddha~
never a thought
for himself

stone buddha~
a fly on his nose
but not one twitch

holding still
while his ears are scrubbed
~ stone buddha

stone buddha~
neighbor cat curled up
in his shadow

stone buddha~
tummy tickled
by a butterfly

a witch's hat
on the stone buddha's head
All Hallow's Eve

almost enough flakes
in the stone buddha's hands
for a snowball fight

lifting his leg
the dog leaves an offering
for the stone buddha

looking at life
through rose-colored glasses today
~ stone buddha

fast asleep
in the stone buddha's hands
a baby snail

Karma Tenzing Wangchuk is a longtime practitioner who lives on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington, where he has been active in Port Militarization Resistance.

Creating a Culture of Peace

By Sulak Sivaraska

Following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, His Holiness the Dalai Lama offered these words to then President George W. Bush: "We need to think seriously whether a violent action is the right thing to do and in the greater interest of the nation and people in the long run. I believe violence will only increase the cycle of violence."

President Bush responded by attacking Afghanistan and, less than eighteen months later, Iraq. He said his country's mission was "to rid the world of evil," emphasizing a "crusade" against the "Axis of evil"—Iraq, Iran, and North Korea. I cringed when I heard his words, remembering that Hitler and Stalin also wanted to rid the world of evil. The great Russian author Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote:

If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere, insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being, and who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?

Conflicts flare up over neighbors' fences and national borders, while cleaning the kitchen or cleaning up the environment. They involve our most intimate relationships or encounters with strangers. Conflicts are inevitable. Grappling with conflict provides the opportunity for knowledge, healing, and growth.

*To create a culture of peace, we
must begin by acknowledging
the violence in our own hearts and
then learn to disarm it*

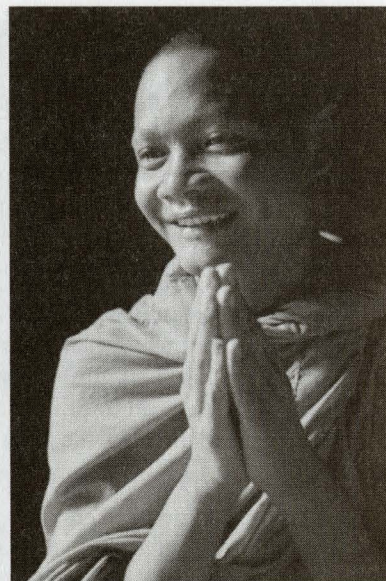
First, we need to stop simply blaming the other party and identify where our own rigid and self-righteous views make their claim on us. At the same time, we must allow in others' viewpoints. When we have explored our own position thoroughly, it is easier to understand those with whom we are in conflict.

Visualize the person you despise the most. Contemplate his or her features that make you most angry. Then think about what makes him happy and what makes him suffer. What motivates his actions? Try to see patterns. Meditating this way, compassion and insight will arise in your heart, like fresh water filling a spring. You may need to repeat the exercise many times before you have this experience. Eventually your anger will vanish. Next, do the same exercise on yourself—to understand your own greed, hatred, and ignorance. With a deeper understanding of yourself, you will see similarities with others. This is essential for preventing and resolving conflicts.

When attacked, your choice isn't simply between violence and inaction. Other responses, including dialogue, law enforcement, negotiation, and diplomacy, are possible. When parties take the time to listen to each other, animosity often dissolves. Rather than divide the world into good and evil, we need to see others, first and foremost, as our fellow human beings.

When asked to summarize the Buddha's teachings, third-century philosopher Nagarjuna answered in one word: ahimsa, nonviolence. Nonviolence does not mean doing nothing. It is a proactive, comprehensive process of addressing conflicts through communication and resource sharing. According to the Buddha, every act of violence is preceded by an intention, conscious or unconscious. To create a culture of peace, we must begin by acknowledging the violence in our own hearts and then learn to disarm it. Greed, hatred, or ignorance is at the core of every violent action. Wisdom and compassion are at the base of every act of nonviolence.

Every one of our actions has an effect. In the Dhammapada,



Smiling monk. Photo by Robert Churchill

the Buddha teaches, "Hatred does not eradicate hatred. Only by loving kindness is hatred dissolved. This law is ancient and eternal." Gandhi summarized it well: "An eye for an eye just makes the whole world blind." The Buddha also said, "If you act with a corrupt mind, suffering will follow.... If you act with a peaceful mind, peace will follow." We cannot avoid the results of our karma. We must be mindful of each act of our lives. Violence is not the result of a faulty political economy. Violence springs from human consciousness.

A culture of violence is one that produces, normalizes, and consumes ideas of division and hatred. Modern societies invest massively in war and violence. The U.S. spends nearly half of the world's total, followed distantly by the UK, France, Japan, and China. Almost every third-world country also

Peacebuilding must be based on nonviolence, on wisdom and compassion. These kinds of activities garner few headlines but are the most meaningful responses to conflict.

invests far too much in its own military budget, and many also host U.S. bases on their territory.

Martin Luther King, Jr., observed that, "our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and misguided men." Gandhi noted, "We are constantly being astonished at the amazing discoveries in the field of violence. But I maintain that far more undreamt of and seemingly impossible discoveries will be made in the field of nonviolence." We live in an age of both pluralism and terror, and it is critical for us to articulate what might constitute a culture of peace. Nonviolence is Buddhism's master precept.

Peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding are three responses to conflict. Peacekeeping stops people from attacking each other. This minimizes the damage but does not ensure stability. We need to put out the fires, but it would be better to prevent them in the first place by addressing the underlying causes.

Peacekeeping sometimes employs the means of conflict to end conflict. At other times, small numbers of people have been able to penetrate violent situations by practicing nonviolence. When the Nazis tried to exterminate the Jews of Denmark, King Fredrick IX declared that if his Jewish subjects were captured, he, too, would wear the Star of David and be subject to arrest. As a result, the Germans did not touch the Danish Jews. Badshah Khan, a devout Muslim, known as the Gandhi of the Pakistan-Afghanistan frontier, was able to persuade his Pashtun brothers to renounce arms and join him in a 100,000-man army of nonviolence.

The 1973 overthrow of the Thai dictatorship, the end of the Marcos government in the Philippines, and the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe are all examples of the use of nonviolence to end violence and oppression and bring about lasting social change. The images of a lone protestor standing in front of a tank in Tiananmen Square and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi confronting the Burmese military are reminders of the great moral and physical courage it takes to engage in nonviolence.

The paradigm articulated by [former] President Bush needs to be dismantled. The true power of America is not its wealth or military might, but its ideals of liberty, democracy,



and generosity. We must stop investing in war and violence, and invest instead in peace and nonviolence. Dennis Kucinich has introduced a resolution in the U.S. Congress to create a cabinet-level Department of Peace.

The second response to conflict—peacemaking—involves not just intervening but actually settling conflicts. The most important element of peacemaking is dialogue. What we call dialogue is often just two monologues. Genuine dialogue requires active listening. We need to abandon our idea of a particular outcome and remain quiet within.

When both sides feel heard, creative problem solving can bring unanticipated results. Reconciliation is key. Acknowledging the past alleviates suffering, heals injustice, and fosters transformation. Called restorative justice, victim and perpetrator listen to each other deeply—difficult as that may be—and, as a result, both change. This kind of education, rather than punishment, minimizes recidivism.

Peacebuilding, the third response, is the never-ending effort to create a peaceful society. It begins at the grassroots level and includes a wide range of long-term solutions—education, grassroots democracy, land reform, poverty alleviation. Like the little parrot in the Jataka tale of the Buddha's former life, a peacebuilder mobilizes his community to bring water drop by drop to quench the raging fire.

Peacebuilding must be based on nonviolence, which, in turn, must be based on wisdom and compassion. These kinds of activities garner few headlines but are the most meaningful responses to conflict. Once a war has started, it is nearly impossible to stop. We need to stop the next war now by creating just and truly democratic societies.

When the Buddha came to understand how suffering arises, he was able to transform the processes that cause and sustain it. He described this insight using the language of four noble truths:

1. Suffering exists.
2. Suffering has causes.
3. We can stop producing the causes of suffering.
4. A path of mindful living can show us the way.

Let us apply these four truths to situations of conflict. We begin by acknowledging both sides' suffering. Each adversary states his experience clearly, with witnesses present to acknowledge their statements. This is the first noble truth, the acknowledgment of suffering.

Second, we try to understand the external and psychological roots of the conflict. When we project our emotions onto an object (animate or inanimate), we experience the "other" as having traits which, in fact, dwell first in our own unconscious mind. We fail to see the line between the object and our own feelings. To discover the roots of any conflict, we must also examine its psychological dimensions. With this understanding, we can explore the external conditions more clearly.

The third noble truth is the cessation of the causes of suffering. This does not presuppose that we can reach a state that is conflict-free, but encourages us to grapple with the details—internal and external—every time. Conflict can be an opportunity to go directly to the heart of the matter and learn more about ourselves. The fourth noble truth—peace as a way of life—shows us how to live in ways that reduce suffering and conflict.

The Buddha called this the eightfold path:

1. Right understanding: understanding the four noble truths.
2. Right Thought: freedom from that which cannot bring satisfaction.
3. Right Speech: speaking truthfully and skillfully.
4. Right Action: not killing, stealing, or indulging in irresponsible sexual behavior.
5. Right Livelihood: not engaging in a profession that brings harm to others.
6. Right effort: encouraging wholesome states of mind.
7. Right Mindfulness: awareness of the physical and mental dimensions of our experience.

8. Right Concentration: staying focused.

This eightfold path encourages peacebuilding as a way of life. It points to ways that awareness can be deepened and the parts of our lives brought into harmony. We begin by living mindfully. Then we can use these tools to dismantle oppressive systems and create a culture of peace. ■

Reprinted from his book The Wisdom of Sustainability (Koa Books)

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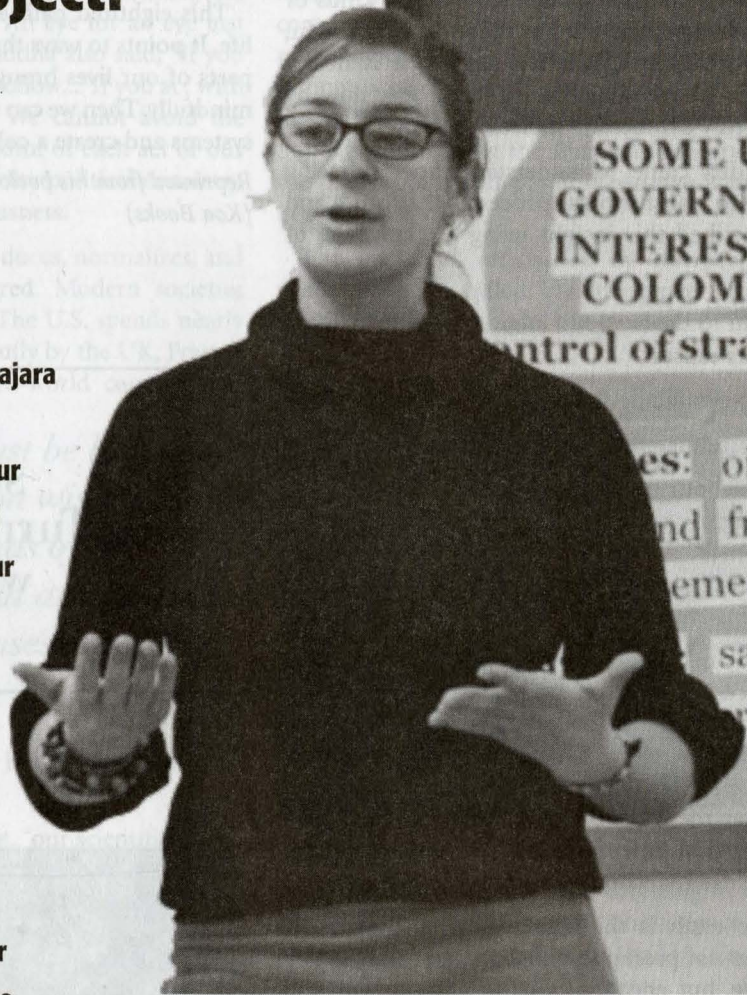
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Dar Papaya Project: Youth Activism in Colombia

by Everett Wilson

I first met Sarah Weintraub at Tassajara Zen monastery in the Ventana Wilderness of California, a two-hour drive southeast from Monterey. I'd been practicing at Tassajara for four years, and Weintraub had come to Tassajara for the first time as a student. Both her parents, Linda Ruth Cutts and Steve Weintraub, are ordained Zen priests with dharma transmission, so Weintraub grew up in the San Francisco Zen Center but had never formally taken up Buddhist practice.



Sarah Weintraub. Photo by Dar Papaya Project

Now she was in Tassajara, practicing Zen and joining me in a writers' group. Every time we met to write and share what we'd written, she read to us about her experience of living in Colombia as a peace activist. In late April, I revisited Tassajara and bumped into her again, where she was preparing to spend the summer cooking meals for the guest season.

She'd just returned from Colombia after filming a documentary titled *The Dar Papaya Project* with her close friend Kore Oliver. They had been covering a youth delegation hosted by the Fellowship of Reconciliation Colombia (FOR Colombia). Weintraub has worked with FOR Colombia for years, so she knew the women leading the delegation and the Colombians representing the human-rights organizations there.

I sat down with Weintraub, her coproducer Kore Oliver, and Liza Smith, who was one of the leaders of the FOR Colombia delegation they filmed. I conducted three separate interviews with these remarkable women. In my first conversation with Weintraub, I stumbled into a much larger question than I had realized:

EW: Why papayas? How did the Dar Papaya Project come to be?

SW: There's a very Colombian phrase, *dar papaya*. It means, if you translate it directly, "to give papaya." *Dar* is the verb "to give." I've only heard the phrase in Colombia, and it has a very Colombian, very specific but multilayered meaning. It's actually one of the themes of what we're doing in the film.

But the way that I've most often heard it used—the phrase as you almost always hear it—is no *dar papaya*.

"Don't give papaya."

What it basically means in most contexts is "don't get yourself in trouble." Don't tell people more than they need to know. Don't share anything you don't need to share. Don't make yourself a target, and that could be politically, or it could mean don't wear your big camera on the front of your chest and walk through bad neighborhoods. So in the cities it's mostly used in that way. No *dar papaya* means don't put yourself out there to get robbed—don't fling your wallet around or talk about how much money you have. No *dar papaya*: Don't be giving away all your papaya.

In the rural region where I lived when I first lived in Colombia, it was used more in the political sense. If you're going through a military checkpoint and they start asking you questions, don't tell them more than you need to, don't start telling them "I'm a member of the peace community, and you all shouldn't even be here and you're all corrupt..." It's just giving them papaya, giving them ammunition to use against you. So it means keep a low profile. No dar papaya.

So we chose the title for a few reasons. I like the way it sounds both in Spanish and in English. In Colombian Spanish—anywhere else it doesn't really mean much—but in Colombian Spanish it has a kind of edginess to it, because you always hear the phrase no dar papaya, so calling the film the Dar Papaya Project is already a little bit edgy or pushy.

EW: You're already giving away the papayas?

SW: People start asking "what kind of trouble are you making?" It's a rocking-the-boat kind of feeling.

But I also just like the way it sounds. And I think it also reads in English, it sounds kind of like tropical, slightly unusual, so I think it works whether or not you actually understand the phrase.

We thought about putting a definition of the phrase on our website, and when I tried to come up with a definition, it was like what I just told you—I mean it's a paragraph long, and there's all these different variations, and people take it in slightly different ways, so we decided not to put up a definition.

For those who know, they know.

People who've lived in Colombia or who are Colombian or who've worked in Colombia get it and have different takes on it. Some people say, "Oh that's so cool!" And other people ask, "Why did you call it that? What are you trying to say? Are you trying to make trouble?"

So aesthetically we liked the way it sounded—both in Spanish and English—and then in the meaning.... On the one hand we're not expressly trying to dar papaya. We're not trying to make trouble or trying to give ammunition to be used against us, and at the same time there is a feeling that we're not not trying to do that. We're not no dar papaya either. We're gonna talk about what's going on, and if people don't want to hear it, too bad. That's the edginess, and that has a lot of resonance with the Colombians we work with.

When I asked Weintraub about what's going on in Colombia, her answer was voluminous and authoritative. She told me that Colombia's conflict has arisen out of its strategic location, its immense natural resources, and an extremely polarized division

between the rich and the poor, and that these elements have existed since the days of Spanish colonialism. She dates the current conflict to 1948, when a conflict known as La Violencia erupted after the assassination of the populist political leader, Jorge Eliécer Gaitan.

Other historians, however, distinguish the current conflict from La Violencia, and date the current conflict to the 1960s with the creation of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), a self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist revolutionary guerilla organization. Either way, there has been open conflict in Colombia for about 60 years. Sarah told me that some people define the conflict as the longest-running civil war in the world and the third-longest-running conflict in the world after Israel/Palestine and India/Pakistan.



The war in Colombia is quite complex. The FARC and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN), or National Liberation Army, are the two major guerilla groups fighting against the Colombian government, but there are numerous paramilitary groups—illegal armed groups that collaborate with the government—acting as death squads. Tens of thousands of people have simply disappeared in Colombia—presumably lying in secret mass graves somewhere. In addition, the number of people displaced by the violence is immense. Weintraub ranks the number of displaced Colombians right behind the number of displaced persons in Sudan and Congo.

One of the reasons the war has continued for so long is because neither has the disparity between rich and poor nor have the money and soldiers required to fight the war disappeared. Soldiers are not lacking because of the obligatory draft supplying the Colombian military and the coerced recruitment of fighters—many of them teens—by both the guerillas and the paramilitaries.

Protesting Wayuu Indians in Bogotá. Photo by John Vinciaino.

Both the paramilitaries and the guerillas make huge amounts of money from all processes of illicit drug production, mostly cocaine, but also heroin, and the Colombian military is getting the money it needs from the United States government through a program called Plan Colombia, a complex initiative developed by the Colombian and U.S. governments with additional financial support from other nations. The original intent of the plan was to provide community development aid to help move along peace negotiations between the FARC and the Colombian government, but since its conception in 1998, most of the money coming from Plan Colombia has been earmarked for combating the illegal drug trade. Plan Colombia has become very

The peace movement in Colombia is enormous and very courageous, committed, involved, and varied, with groups that represent very different viewpoints—from anarchists, to people who want women to have more political power. The indigenous groups there, Colombians of African descent, are very strong and there are youth groups.

controversial, primarily due to abuses and corruption in the way the money is used. On the Dar Papaya Project's website, Weintraub states, "The Colombian conflict is the United States' hidden war."

SW: So that's what's happening in terms of the conflict. That's not all that's happening in Colombia.

There's a kind of general feeling in this country that Colombia is scary and dangerous and violent and that's all it is. When I went on a speaking tour around the United States, that's what people told me they knew about Colombia—drugs or violence or that kind of thing.

But actually the peace movement in Colombia is enormous and very courageous, committed, involved, and varied, with groups that represent very different viewpoints—from anarchists, to people who want women to have more political power. The indigenous groups there, Colombians of African descent, are very strong and there are youth groups. It's just

hugely varied. So one of the objectives for the FOR project has been to show that violence isn't all that's going on in Colombia, that there can be a negotiated solution to the conflict and that's what our money should be supporting, rather than more militarization of the conflict, which is what's happening now under Plan Colombia.

That was an objective that we continued with the Dar Papaya Project. I had worked with a number of incredibly inspiring, interesting, vibrant peace groups, or human-rights groups in Colombia, and so when Kore and I started talking about what to focus the project on, I had tons of ideas about different groups we could work with—who could really share what was going on in the conflict—but through what people were doing in resistance to it, as a way to talk about it, without it being so heavy. Who wants to be bashed over the head with all these horror stories when also what's happening is constructive? These groups are so dynamic and inspiring, really, for our own peacework from here.

Kore and I have been superclose friends since we were 15, so I told her all about Colombia many different times. She actually came and visited me with a number of our other friends on vacation in 2005, and really loved it. When Kore decided to go to study film, one of her inspirations was that she wanted to do documentary film, particularly social-justice documentary film, and she wanted to work in Colombia. She wanted to make a film with me in Colombia, so we've been talking about this for years.

Then in fall of 2007, when I was living in Oakland, we started getting more serious about it. I think I was really clear that I wanted to continue working with peace movement people, and from the beginning Kore and I have been incredibly beyond-belief creatively aligned. We really are interested in the same things in the same ways. So from the beginning we wanted to tell the stories of people who are both resisting violence and also creating something else. One of our taglines is "resist/create." We wanted to tell the stories through people's personal stories, through following individuals.

Last summer I was back in Colombia helping out FOR for a few months, and at the end of my stay Kore came and stayed for a week or two. We met with the groups I was interested in working with, who I'd actually had relationships with for years. We met with a number of different ones, but the two major ones were a women's group called Ruta Pacifica, which is a feminist pacifist group, and a youth group called the Red Juvenil, which means the "Youth Network of Medellín," who are just superawesome and do work in all different areas of economic justice, environmental justice, counterrecruitment and conscientious objection. They're all over the place.

We were interested in the Ruta and the Red, and they were both interested in us. Then right around that time, another good friend of mine, Liza, who I know from Colombia work, had just led the first FOR youth delegation, which was

structured a little bit differently from the other delegations FOR has been doing for years. Instead of kind of trying to get a general survey of the peace movement and traveling all over Colombia, Liza's delegation met with just two groups—with the conscientious objector group in Bogotá, and with the Red Juvenil in Medellín. The American youth they brought were all activists also, so it had more of a feeling of an organizers' exchange and a sharing of experiences, rather than delegates coming in, receiving information from the Colombians, and then bringing it back to the U.S. It was more like a sharing.

I read this article that Liza wrote about the youth delegation, and I was really, really moved by it. She's a Buddhist practitioner, too. She grew up in the Shambhala Center in Colorado. We met leading a delegation together in Colombia. You don't often meet other people who grew up at Buddhist centers, but it's happened to me once. In Colombia.

Anyway, I was really moved by her article and by the resonance between the U.S. youth and the Colombian youth, how much they understood each other, and how some of them were facing the same situations. There isn't a draft here, but there's what they call the poverty draft, where for young people in certain areas it feels like there aren't any other choices in terms of getting out.

I shared this article with Kore, told her that I was really moved by it and that maybe we could do something with the next youth delegation. She also really liked that idea. We were still going to work with the Red Juvenil and other dynamic, interesting youth, and we liked the idea of being with a group of U.S. delegates as a way to make Colombia more accessible to a U.S. audience. We wanted to direct our work mainly towards a U.S. audience, so the idea that being with a group of U.S. delegates and kind of following their journey, and their experience would be more of a way in for people. We checked it out with the Red Juvenil and FOR. Then last fall, we had some meetings with FOR, with Liza, and presented our idea of coming along on the next youth delegation in March 2009 to make this film about youth responses to violence. We wanted both U.S. and Colombian responses and also the Colombian context as the major themes. FOR was really, really enthusiastic, thought it was a great idea, that it was beneficial to everyone. It would mean more publicity for them, more delegates, more support, and that kind of thing. From then on we had a plan.

We were going in March. That ended up being a kind of ideal vehicle for this project. It's our first—my first film altogether, and Kore's first full-length film. Having a structure of going with the delegation, filming the whole thing, and then doing some follow-up interviews was really supportive

for us. We were a small crew: just the two of us as coproducers. Kore was the technical woman, cinematographer, and director of photography, et cetera, and I did logistics, translation, security, whatever. It was really supportive to be with this group led by Liza and another wonderful friend named Mayra. They took care of some of the details, so we could really focus on the filming.

Another supportive element was that the theme of the delegation we were filming was youth, arts, and action. They were using art and creativity in activism, which is something that all the Colombian groups do. It was actually a perfect fit, because we were actually doing an art-in-action project while



we were on the delegation. That's what the film is.

The delegates fit, too. Our idea from the beginning was to collaborate with them as much as possible. We wanted to create a feeling of ownership, or at least a feeling of participation in the creation of the film from the delegates and the Colombians. That was the idea: that this film would be a collaboration between Dar Papaya, FOR, and the Youth, Arts, and Action delegation, including the various participants—the U.S. delegates, Red Juvenil, and *Accion Colectiva de Objetores y Objektoras de Consciencia (ACOOC)*, or **Conscientious Objectors Collective Action, in Bogotá**. That worked out really well.

EW: So what does it mean to be a conscientious objector in Colombia?

SW: Good question. I feel the definition of conscientious objector in Colombia is much wider. It's not actually a recognized category in terms of the military. You can't object to the draft by saying you're a conscientious objector legally. People do. A number of the people we worked with have

publicly said, “I’m a conscientious objector.” But it’s not recognized under Colombian law and they’re in various abysses of bureaucracy, because the government doesn’t know what to do with them. The government doesn’t know how to sort out their status, and different things have happened as a result.

But people use the term widely. I am an objector to anyone telling me that I have to kill anyone. I’m an objector to all forms of violence, an objector to all sides of the war. I am not going to participate with any of them. So I am really objecting to violence, and I think there is also an element of creating the world that we want to live in.

The Colombians who we worked with are so creative in terms of the way they do their work, their strategies, their approaches, and their lives. There’s a lot of fun and enjoyment and dancing. Yelling. Singing. Hugging. Kissing. It’s just full of life, being in those offices. The offices are covered with art. People are into break dancing or tattoos or making T-shirts or karaoke or whatever. There’s just so much going on: a strategy of not just resisting war but of actually living joyfully. The Red Juvenil, particularly, decided at a certain point that

community of resistance to violence and the creation of a better world.

EW: So if you can’t use the status of conscientious objector to avoid the draft, legally, what does that do for you? What does that mean for you to say that I can’t kill people and then be drafted into the army? Does the army make some sort of accommodation for that?

SW: Some people refuse to be drafted. They say you can’t draft me. It’s

EW: Do they go to jail for that?

SW: It’s not figured out yet. The Colombian government doesn’t really know what to do. They haven’t taken people to jail, I think because they don’t want to make it a bigger deal than it is. They don’t want anyone else to hear about it. They don’t want it to get into the papers that there’s someone saying they’re a conscientious objector. The conscientious objectors are working on building a rapid-response network so that if they are taken to jail, or more likely, forcibly drafted and taken to a battalion, there would be a national and international response.

The conscientious objectors’ legal stance is that within the Colombian constitution there is a line that says no one can be forced to do something that’s against their conscience or something like that, but everyone has to pay their obligatory military service. It’s a year and a half of service, and without the *libreta militar*—a little card that says you did your obligatory service—you can’t get into college, you can’t get a job. However, there are ways around it. There are many, many different things people do. People who are rich often buy their cards. But some of the kids who we were working with—the group in Bogotá—are focused on actually getting conscientious objection to be a recognized legal category.

There are a whole range of strategies that people have. Someone may be drafted, but they just never show up, and they kind of fall through the cracks. They hope that they’re not caught, and maybe they will be able to get some other job. Others get dismissed for some reason, by claiming they’re physically or mentally inadequate or whatever—you know, those kinds of things—but the kids we were working with in Bogotá don’t want to fall through the cracks. They’re actually using their individual lives to help widen the space.

they wanted their protests, their resistance actions, to be fun and beautiful and inviting for people to join in, and not to be scary. So they have these huge puppets and dancing in the street and all these kinds of ways of creating, not just being in opposition to something.

In Colombia, conscientious objector is a pretty common term. Both men and women define themselves as conscientious objectors—even though women aren’t drafted—in that wider sense of being part of a



“Faces covered with hope.” Photo by Fredy Bulliés

For two of the young men we talked with, their recruitment date came up. They were told they needed to present themselves to this battalion on this date, and they went with a lawyer and each said, "I'm a conscientious objector. You can't recruit me."

The military said, "That doesn't exist. You can't be a conscientious objector."

The young men said, "But I am. What are you going to do about it?"

And, like I was saying, they're in this sort of bureaucratic hell realm. One of them has been in this process for six years, and now, suddenly all his records have been lost, and it's like he's never been drafted, and never shown up to anything. It's like he doesn't exist. And now he's in university, but he can't graduate without the libreta militar.

The other young man was recorded as a draft dodger, and he said, "No, I didn't dodge the draft. I actually showed up on my draft day and I told you what my stance is."

These two young men are courageously and powerfully using their own lives and their own situation of being drafted to help make the category exist. Now they kind of want to be recruited or arrested or something so that they can go on, because if they're just floating out there in nothing, it's hard for them to make a strong stance.

EW: Do you see any parallels between what Colombian youths are facing and what some of the American delegates are dealing with in their own lives?

SW: We had two young men on the delegation who come from a poor area where it's really common, almost expected, to be recruited into gangs, and they've both, on their own paths and in their own ways worked against that. When they talked about their experiences—growing up in those neighborhoods and gunfire and getting jumped into the gang, and what you were expected to do once you were in the gang, and that kind of thing, the Colombians were spellbound. It was like they were talking about the same thing—what it was like to grow up in a poor, dangerous, urban area. The Colombians were really fascinated and amazed that these Americans had such similar experiences in the U.S. Colombians are told the U.S. is made up of all rich white people, and here are some brown-skinned people who've had a really hard time and whose families have been threatened—or whatever had happened—living in really similar situations of violence.

Often in Colombia—and in the U.S., I think—but particularly in Colombia, there's this feeling among

poor people that they have to choose legal violence with the army, illegal violence with the paramilitaries or the guerillas, or the crushing poverty of trying to be a rural farmer and possibly get displaced and live in the slums. There's not much of a good option. I think that experience was shared by some of the U.S. delegates, who were offered the choice of being in a gang, going to the army to get out of their context, or working in some incredibly low-paying job. Their schools are

The conscientious objectors are working on building a rapid-response network so that if they are taken to jail, or more likely, forcibly drafted and taken to a battalion, there would be a national and international response.

really bad, so they can't get into colleges or get better jobs. I think there were huge, obvious surface resonances that were really powerful for everyone.

Then I think another thing happened when we went around in a circle and each of us talked about our lives, particularly our experiences with violence. We did it as a way of sharing what's going on in the U.S. that you don't hear about when you're in Colombia, and that was really, really powerful because every one of the delegates had experiences with violence. People talked about situations and their families—intrafamily dynamics or family members who had been to war and came back suffering from that, and lots of things. I think that shared human experience was really powerful. Seeing that people can be in very, very different situations but that still everyone has something to say about violence was also very powerful.

EW: I was wondering how Buddhist practice has shaped your peacework in Colombia? And how has your peacework in Colombia shaped your Buddhist practice?

SW: Let's see, I have so much to say about this. When I was actually living and working in Colombia originally, I wasn't practicing. I didn't have a practice. I had grown up with Buddhism and had a lot of internalized understandings of the world that were Buddhist, that I didn't realize were Buddhist until I later came to Zen Center as a student. I started learning more about Buddhism and realized that a lot of things that I just

thought of as life were actually Buddhist. So, I think I did always carry with me a certain kind of Buddhist perspective or understanding to some extent, but I didn't really start practicing regularly until I left Colombia.

I spent about a year and a half in the Colombian peace community and then about a year and a half in Bogotá, and by the end of my stay I was in despair. I was really wrecked. Completely burnt out. Just really not doing well, in general.

EW: *Despair.*

SW: Yes.

EW: *Despair about what you'd seen, or...*

SW: Yes. How can the world be this way? And then, almost by accident, I came to Tassajara. That was the summer of 2006, when you and I were there at the same time. I say by accident because I wanted to go to Tassajara because I love Tassajara. It's beautiful there. I've always loved it there. I'll rest, I thought, and think about whether I'm going to go back to Colombia or not, and recharge. But I think in another way—I didn't really know what I was looking for—but I actually needed a kind of wider context in which to put the despair, because the despair was taking up everything.

Entering into spiritual practice, there was gradually a much bigger plane on which to locate that despair, instead of it filling up everything. I think the ideas of absolute and relative are really powerful, but I didn't have much of a sense of the absolute in my life at that point. I was really, really deeply, fingers-in-the-dirt engaged in the relative world. And what I had seen in the relative world was destroying me. I needed a counterbalance. I mean the world is as terrible as all of that, but there's a way in which it just is what it is—that kind of absolute side of things.

I didn't know that I was looking for that, but that was one of the things that I found, and then I actually had it—the chance to experience what I'd experienced in Colombia. By the end of my time in Colombia, or for a lot of my time in Colombia, I had really shut down. I was numb. It's one of the typical symptoms of burnout—not really feeling what I was going through, even though there were some hard things that happened. I think my first year at Zen Center—summer at Tassajara and then practice period at Green Gulch and then practice period at Tassajara—were mostly about Colombia. I was experiencing, reliving, but actually living for the first time

in some ways some of that emotional experience that I had passed through in a kind of numb way in Colombia. Part of that was Buddhist practice, and another element of that was the writing we started doing and that I've continued doing. Those two things together really helped—they supported each other in unlocking and opening up all this experience.

After that first year at Zen Center, I went back to Colombia and led a Buddhist delegation. Then things kind of settled in a different way at that point. Going back after having been gone for a year and having gone through so much, and then

going back since my experience with Buddhist practice and with Colombia, peacework, or activism work, is like the medicine and the disease curing each other. I don't know which one's the medicine and which one's the disease. I think it varies. I don't think it's that Buddhist practice is always the medicine and it cures me of Colombia; I think Colombia is at the same time what gives my practice

vibrancy and depth and life. I think they both feed each other and go back and forth, reinforcing each other. At this point, I think of Tassajara and Colombia—the actual physical locations—as my poles, the poles of my existence. I swing back and forth between them, and I also am finding some kind of space in between, which I think is Oakland. Oakland is not too far toward one or too far toward the other, but it has enough of each.

I think Buddhist practice gives me the kind of stability and strength and trust in myself and knowledge of myself to be able to withstand the horrors of the world without despairing, without giving up hope. But I'm very relative. I mean, I'm very relative-world.

EW: *You mentioned despair when you came back from Colombia or maybe even before you left, and some horrors. Were the horrors part of the despair? What was it that made you numb yourself or shut down?*

SW: I was living in a village, and got really, really close to the peace community of San José de Apartadó which is a small rural community of people who were displaced. Then they organized and said, "We're going back to our land and we're not going to cooperate with either side of the conflict." That is really not allowed. In Colombia it's a you're-either-with-us-or-you're-against-us kind of dynamic. So they went back, saying, "We're not taking either side." They've been doing that since 1997, and many, many of them have been killed. Other

I don't think it's that Buddhist practice is always the medicine and it cures me of Colombia; I think Colombia is at the same time what gives my practice vibrancy and depth and life.

horrible things have happened, but they are still on their land, and they haven't had to displace to the cities, for the most part.

I was working closely with them, getting to know them, and really loving and sharing with these people who are in extreme danger. Their lives, livelihoods and children are in danger. Horrible things happen to children, and it's just really hard. It wears on you. And I think the particular dynamic when I got to the community was that people really wanted us to know what was going on and told us a lot of the stories, of the horrors that had happened there—the massacre that had happened in the center of town. Everyone has family members who've been killed, horribly, and it took a long time just absorbing that.

After that I was in Bogotá to open the Bogotá office, and during my second month there was a massacre in the community, which was really unexpected. It had been a long time since there had been such a thing, and now more people than ever had been killed—eight people, including four children. One of the people was one of the central leaders of the community, who I had worked with really closely, who I really respected and liked and cared for. It was really hard emotionally, and it was also hard because we were all in over our heads. To a certain extent, it was like “Now what do we do?” There was a good response from us and from the other organizations who worked with the community and from the community themselves. There was a huge response that was very powerful and effective, hopefully. It has been so far, and hopefully will continue to be effective in deterring that kind of thing in the future. That legal process is still going on. And new things keep coming out about the massacre. So that happened.

There were a number of factors that made it really hard. I was alone in Bogotá for months because we needed to have more people in the community, so instead of being two teams of two people, we had three people in the community, and me in Bogotá. That was a lot of work. I was emotionally isolated and constantly on call 24 hours a day, because Bogotá is the first line of defense if something happens in the community.

I say all this not like, “oh, poor me.” That's not my idea with

it; I'm just trying to list the various elements. I was also was in a difficult relationship that ended the same month as the massacre. The relationship had been going on for about two years. It had been a really difficult relationship, and it was also really difficult when it ended. So that all happened at once.

And then the feeling in a lot of Colombian human-rights organizations is a kind of constant crisis mode. Everyone is constantly in crisis, as if we could be killed any moment. All the time. So people work really hard, and then they go out and they drink so much, and they dance all night, like the world is ending tomorrow. It's an extreme lifestyle in Colombian human-rights NGOs and also a lot of the foreign ones—and I fell right into that. So I was living this very extreme life of no down time, either working really hard or partying a lot. It's hard to actually feel what's going on when that's your reality, when you're constantly in high gear.

I think all of those things contributed to that numbing. One of the workshops that FOR offered, which I both received and taught, is about mental health for human rights workers. You're under a lot of pressure, you're hearing victims' stories, and there are a lot of ways that it can be hard. You need to take care of your own mental health, and I didn't do it. We all didn't do it.

EW: Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the Dar Papaya Project?

SW: I don't know how big a role this is going to play in the film, but something that was really powerful for me, a learning experience that I had about my own life, was how one of the strategies that the groups in Colombia use, particularly the Red Juvenil, is the strategy of joy and happiness as resistance, a resistance to a militarized mindset. That was really powerful for me, because I had been noticing how my approach to the projects that I'm involved in that I love and that I'm passionate about—like Dar Papaya, like writing my book—is that sometimes I get into this shape with it, where it's a burden, and I have this work ethic that I need to do it, push through it, work really hard, and get really stressed, and then I find myself asking, “Why am I doing this?”

In Colombia I was able to see how resisting the militarization of life is not just working against it. It's actually the way that we do the work, to do it in a way that's full of joy and love and excitement, and taking a break, instead of doing it in the way you do anything else—make my list, cross off my items...

This is supposed to be something that's passionate, that I'm doing because I love it, and I get too far into the discipline side of things. I lose the devotion and the passion and the joy in it. I think it's a very kind of American—maybe puritanical—a work ethic, workaholic kind of thing. In Colombia I was able to see how resisting the militarization of life is not just working against it. It's actually the way that we do the work, to do it in a way that's full of joy and love and excitement, and taking a break, instead of doing it in the way you do anything else—make my list, cross off my items, in a kind of puritanical way. For me that was really powerful.

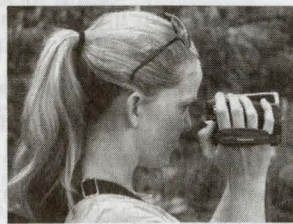
There's got to be a balance. It's not always gonna be like, "Oh, I love this! This is so great!" Sometimes you just have to slog through something, but I think I fall a little bit too much on the burden side of things, and I want to fall a little bit more on the joy side of things. I actually can be that way, but I have to remind myself.

EW: So, if I'm hearing you correctly, you're saying joy tends to get pushed out by too strong a discipline, so that maybe there's something in the spontaneity of art that feeds the activism you've been seeing in Colombia?

SW: I think for me sometimes I have these projects that come from out of my heart and passion, they come up and out, and they land on my to-do list. Then they're one more thing that I have to do, and I don't want to have that relationship to Dar Papaya, or to the book I'm writing. I don't want to be relating to them as one more thing that I have to do and that I'm stressed about. I don't want to relate to anything in my life in that way.

But it's important to find that balance, to know when you have to do the kind of details that you don't particularly want to do also.

Two weeks after I interviewed Weintraub, I sat down with Kore Oliver. We met at the same café in San Rafael where I had interviewed Weintraub. I was struck by how much Oliver's views mirrored Weintraub's, at how deeply their friendship mirrors each other and appears to be finding expression in this film they are putting together. We began by discussing the sheer volume of the project—fifty hours of footage—and now Kore



is trying to find time to view it all, and, by careful editing, uncover the story they found.

EW: Sarah said some interesting things about art and the artistic expression that's coming out of this activism. Since then, I read an article about Plan Colombia on the FOR website, and my reaction was "oh my God..." I came away with this feeling of heaviness, almost despair. These folks—I'm sure they've seen all kinds of horror over there—so now I'm wondering how they find the joyous kind of expression that nourishes their activism, their art, in that kind of an environment? Did you see anything like that there?

KO: I think that's a really astute observation. I think a lot of what I saw from them, from the Colombians especially, was the joy that radiates out of them. The way they're combating this violence and this horror that they've experienced in their lives is a choice. They're choosing to combat it with joy and art. I realized that the art and the joy is a form of resistance in itself. That was really beautiful to see because they're so happy and big and loud and gregarious, and they're hugging and kissing each other. It's infectious. They make you feel welcome and warm, and I was always thinking, "How are they so joyous and happy, with what they've seen?"

Everything's covered in murals. They have concerts, and they're all musicians, and they do dancing. There are all these different forms of art that come out. I think that in these groups, they feel this freedom to be big and take up space and be loud and joyous. I don't think they feel that way in their communities at home. So they come together and create this space that's just alive with all of that. I think it's a form of resistance, because I think it would be really easy to be depressed and sad all the time, with what they've seen. I can't even imagine the images that they have in their heads and the experiences that they've all had. So I think that they do that all as a form of resistance. I think it's conscious. They decided that that's how they want to fight the traumatic experiences and memories they have.

One thing I found interesting was when we did these therapy sessions. The Colombians and the Americans each did community workshops—creative, artistic, and theater workshops or art workshops for each other. The Americans would host one and teach the Colombians, and then we would do it together, and vice versa. It was a way of getting to know each other.

One of the workshops we did was the therapy session that I was talking about, where we sat in a group, and talked about how violence had affected us. Sandra, who's one of the leaders of the Red Juvenil, said that it was really powerful for her, because she said that she

Kore Oliver and camera. Photo by Dar Papaya Project

thinks a lot of times they don't talk about stuff. They're so into this joy and this resistance and this art that sometimes they don't really talk about things. They don't face it. It's a way of dealing with it without dealing with it.

And we're people who believe in therapy and in meditation. We believe in these forms of dealing with your past and in dealing with things. For her that was really powerful. She kept saying, "Oh, I wish that we talked about stuff more." Sometimes I think that their happy joy gregarious stuff is actually...there's not any room for the sad part.

EW: So in some ways, then, the artistic expression is a way of running away, a kind of escapism maybe? Or?

KO: No, I think it's a really healing and beautiful way of dealing with it, and I think it does everything it's supposed to do. But with her I thought it was interesting that she felt that the form that we had of actually sitting there talking about it and being really verbal was a new idea and a really great way to deal with what we're going through. This place, the Red Juvenil, their center in Medellín—it's just an amazing place. I've never been anywhere like that.

EW: What does it look like?

KO: Well, that's an interesting story. They've had threats, they have a presence in the community, and not everybody likes them there. I think in that community, they're known as hippies—they have long hair and piercings and tattoos, and they're artistic and artsy. I think from the conservative side in Colombia they're seen as crazy, artsy people, and they get targeted. They've had threats. So one of the ways that they deal with threats or with someone trying to take them down is to make themselves bigger and louder and stick out more.

When the threats happened they put a huge mural on the front of their center and had a big party in the street. They invited all the neighbors and made them food. I think they're way of combating the threats is to

say "we're gonna be bigger and louder and take up more space. We're not afraid of the threats or what's happening toward us."

And then inside the center are tons of really artistic murals. They do all sorts of stamp art. They create stamps and put them all over the walls. There's lots of music, and they have a smoking room where they hang out and smoke. They have parties until three in the morning. It's a very organized, political group, and then at the same time, as soon as the work is done, they party until three or four in the morning and just dance. It's really different from any of the groups I've seen here. I mean you could never do that here. These are teenagers. They're partying and dancing all night long, and then the next day they come back and work really, really hard. It's kind of like a work hard/play hard kind of thing. The groups I've seen here are a lot more serious. The Red Juvenil has both sides. They're very serious about their work, and they also really believe in joy and fun, too.

EW: Almost to the point of being serious about it, right?

KO: [laughs] They take that really seriously. But it's infectious when you're around it.

EW: Do you see your film as a kind of extension of that?



KO: I think it's really important to me and Sarah. We've talked about it a lot. We want to make a film that's truthful but that also feels hopeful, because I think that that's what these people are—their whole mission is hope—and there's joy, there's so much joy in them. You could easily make a film and talk about the heavy, hard,

depressing stuff they tell you. It's really powerful, but I don't have any desire to make a film that leaves people feeling heavy, depressed, guilty—all those things that I think Americans often feel when they hear about Colombia and the situation there. I want my film to capture some inspiration from these kids, because the kids that we met are incredibly inspiring. They've faced so many difficult, hard things in their life, but all they've done is become optimistic and fight back. They've done as much as they can to make it better, and I just think it's really uplifting. They're uplifting people, so I want to make an uplifting film, but a film that's still truthful and talks about all sides.

Colombia, the country: I've traveled a bit, and it's a pretty amazing country. The intensity. The people there. There's such intensity. There's such despair and grief, and then there's such joy and such happiness. They have this huge spectrum. Coming back to the United States, everything feels a little more middle-of-the-road. I think they have these huge extremes of life. Something else that I want to reflect in the film is they way they live their lives in this really intense way.

But I still haven't looked at all the footage, so it's hard to say some of this stuff. This is going to take me five years.

As the trip went on, I noticed how lonely Americans are. You hear a lot about our individualist culture and how other countries are more community-oriented or more family-oriented. What I noticed as the trip went on was that the Americans got so much more affectionate.

EW: So what's your creative process like? How do you decide?

KO: Well, I've never made a film that's this long before, so this is a new thing for me. I think for me it's first to view all the footage, and I like the idea that I'm getting so excited that I want to make six films. I want to write down every idea I have and find all these different options as big as I can and as broad as I can and then chisel it down. I think that's my process now—just putting down every idea, everything that's interesting to me, and then seeing what I think will meet the goal Sarah and I have for finding the strongest story. I want

to see what the most compelling story is in terms of the individual people, because I think that's what ultimately interests us—telling a really good story that is entertaining, that is interesting to watch, where people feel a connection to the characters. That's what will make the audience care.

I think they're all interesting, and I want to tell all their stories, but there are going to be some who jump out. I'll be trying to figure out that, trying to figure out what's going to be the best story.

EW: Which thread to follow?

KO: I want to tell people stories. I don't want to give a survey of, you know, Colombian history, or what youth face in these countries. I want to tell individual people's stories. I think that's what resonates with people, and that's what will make people interested in the topic. So I think part of my process is figuring out where the most compelling stories are.

Another theme I found really interesting was that as the trip went on, I noticed how lonely Americans are. You hear a lot about our individualist culture and how other countries are more community oriented or more family oriented. What I noticed as the trip went on was that the Americans got so much more affectionate. Colombians are really affectionate. They hug and kiss and touch all the time; they are just so warm. I noticed as the trip went on, the Americans got more and more warm and friendly. I felt like there was this thirst, that we're so isolated here that we're just craving community. Something I really noticed with the Americans was this kind of craving, that they really want community.

We get some of that affection from our partners in our country, but we're not supposed to get it from anyone else. You're not supposed to hug and touch, and I just felt this loneliness in myself and in other Americans that I thought was really interesting, and it was missing from the Colombians. It was really wonderful for us to see them with each other. We told them that, and they thought it was so strange. They were like, "what?" They had no idea that we were so lonely, so isolated from each other here.

Weintraub shared with me the article she read that had so deeply inspired her and ultimately led her and Oliver to the idea of using the structure of the youth, art, and activism delegation to provide a structure for their film. The article was written by Liza Smith, titled "Math, Mac and Cheese in Colombia."

Liza Smith builds her article around the story of Escenthio, a young high-school student who found himself so shaken up by the U.S. government's response to Hurricane Katrina that he left the JROTC program he'd been deeply committed to, and became a peace activist, passionately involved in counter-recruitment in Oakland and the East Bay area of California. Out of this activism he became interested in Smith's new idea of bringing young American activists to Colombia to meet youth activists there and share experiences and strategies for building a better world. He was all set up to go but then discovered that he would not be able to graduate high school without passing a math exam only days after he returned from Colombia. He wrote to Smith and announced that he would not be able to go, that he needed to devote all his time and energy into studying for that math exam.



Weintraub introduced me to Smith, and I spoke with her on the telephone the day after she returned to the United States from Bogotá.

EW: I wanted to talk to you about some of the things you've written in your article. One of the big questions you raise is "why is it that so many white, upper middle-class activists turn toward the romanticized struggles of the third world to 'help' when we have our own atrocious situations to deal with at home?" I see this in terms of Escenthio's story, deciding to leave his JROTC program and become involved in counterrecruitment, and I hear it in your own story, traveling abroad, drawn to Latin America, finding Colombia. You write another phrase that helps me understand a little bit better, "Somehow Colombia shook me, captured my imagination, and snuck its way into my consciousness." Can you tell me how that happened? What was that like?

LS: It's sometimes a little mysterious to me why Colombia took such a hold on me, so, I'm not sure how articulate I can be. I went there in 1997 for a year's study-abroad program, but preceding that I already had a strong connection to Latin America because of my family. A good part of my family lives in Puerto Rico, and I have been there numerous times. I wanted to learn Spanish fluently so I could speak with my cousins. There was a summer I lived in Puerto Rico when I was 16, and I felt like it was really me, that there was a deep cultural connection there that I felt. There were times that I also felt like an outsider, or really different, but there were other times that I felt that

something about this cultural context is really who I am, something that I connect to. So I went to Colombia and it shook me on a whole lot of different levels.

There was the really big macrolevel. I was already in the process of becoming politically conscious and already involved in activist kind of stuff. I was reading things more toward the end of high school, and for a couple years in college I was involved in different things on campus. But going to Colombia just blew my mind in the sense of the impact the U.S. has on other countries, and how global power dynamics are set up. It made me see much more clearly how I would define the U.S. as an empire, and what that means for other countries and other people in other places. On that level it just opened up a budding political consciousness, an awareness that was based on the power relations internally in the U.S.—race, class, gender issues—into a bigger context of...

"Oh my gosh. We live on this planet, and here are these countries, and what are the relationships? And how are they looking for resources, or power, domination, et cetera."

So that was one level. And then, going to the other extreme, the most microlevel was just the daily experience of people and how they connected to one another. When I went to the corner store, the way that the woman at the corner store would really look into my eyes, even if I was just buying toilet paper—whatever it was. Or when I got onto a bus, if there were no seats and I was holding something in my arms, someone who was sitting on a seat would offer to hold it for me, so that I could clutch onto the rail while the bus lurched around. Or if I asked someone for directions, instead of just pointing me the right way, they would actually take me there. I think that a lot of people have had experiences like that.

In Latin America, or in other countries, there's a kind of friendliness that we don't experience here in the U.S. But also I felt like it was just a kind of deep humanity that I connected with on a daily basis, and I remember it in contrast coming back home after that year. I went to Target with my mom, and it felt like all these people pushing carts around the Target were total zombies. I sensed a sleepiness in the materialism of the U.S. manifesting itself in the sleepiness of the people around me. That's making a sweeping generalization—I think there are lots of people in the U.S. that are also alive and awake, or at least working on being alive and awake—but I think I felt that aliveness and an intensity also in Colombia on a daily basis that was really something I loved and connected to and felt.

EW: Can you give me an image of that intensity?

LS: A visual image?

EW: Or an auditory image? A sensory image?

LS: That's a good question. This feels a little bit like a clichéd image, but there's something fiery about it, for sure. There's a heat there, and coming close to it feels really powerful and exciting and interesting and inspiring, but it also feels like too close is scary, that it can burn you for sure. The intensity of what's going on in Colombia is sometimes it's too much for me.

EW: How so? Are you talking about the war?

sensitive and emotional person, and I felt like the violence and the intensity of what goes on in Colombia is too much. Sometimes I feel like I'm a sponge. I get all soaked up with it, then I don't quite know how to not let that block me.

EW: You talked about the way Colombians have a kind of callousness, and you also mentioned a kind of sleepiness in American culture. Are those similar at all? I mean, they come from different sources.

LS: I guess the way I experience it... Those calluses in Colombian human-rights defenders are a kind of survival mechanism to deal with the really awful truth of the violence that's going on there, but there's a real fiery quality that goes along with it, of struggle and resistance and wanting to change things, to build a different kind of community or country or world, or however they define it. Maybe you could argue that the sleepiness here is a kind of survival mechanism, but I would think that those two things are different, although I could also see myself falling into that same trap of romanticizing the struggles of Colombia, and avoiding the reality of what we need to work on here.

EW: This is kind of touching on another phrase from your article where you talk about "a thousand lived moments that were alive with the deepness of humanity, life that I didn't experience (and still don't) in our cyberspace coffee houses and ordered lives in the U.S." Can you picture a few of those lived moments? Describe them to us?

LS: Yeah, it goes along a little bit with what I've been talking about before, that contrast between materialism and the vibrancy that I experienced there. You know, I think part of it is because if we're traveling, things seem so fresh. So when I'm on a bus in Colombia and someone gets on the bus and is selling scented pencils—which is a real example—of course there's a kind of vibrancy in that moment to me. Maybe it wouldn't be there if that's what I'd grown up with always, but I experience it as something like "whoa! This is such a crazy world!" and as a kind of poetic moment and "oh my gosh, there's this life of people who sell things on the streets and on buses, and what are they selling, and what does that mean?"

So that's one kind of moment.

Another moment I had just this past week, when I was there: I went to Meta (which is a neighboring department near Bogotá) for a day that was a commemoration to recognize the assassination of a woman's mother who had been a political leader. She



Holding the Dead. Photo by Dar Papaya Project

LS: Yeah, the war and the conflict, the violence there. People who've grown up in Colombia—specifically people who are involved in human-rights work there—develop certain emotional calluses to be able to deal with their own situation, the loss of their loved ones or their colleagues in the human-rights community, or just the reality of reading day after day what's going on and how the conflict is impacting people. I think coming in as an outsider, as an international, you don't have those same calluses—or maybe those same protective gloves.

There was a woman who worked on psychosocial issues who talked about it this way: If you work in a toxic plant, you go in with eye goggles and gloves, and the same should apply to working with any human-rights situation. I think coming in as an international... I grew up in a very protected community in Boulder, Colorado. Not a whole lot of bad stuff happened there. So on the one hand I didn't have that life experience to protect me, but I think also I'm generally a pretty

was assassinated 17 years ago, I think. This woman—both of her parents were assassinated—was doing an act of memory.

There's a lot of work going on in Colombia right now around memory and recuperating memory, so anyway we went to this farm, and some of the different campesinos in the area came for the commemoration. They put up two big signs that said, "This is in the memory of this woman's mother," and "This land is not sellable." Et cetera. So when we put up the second sign, I sang a couple of songs, and two people on either side of me put a megaphone in front of my guitar, and the other in front of my voice, and we were all kind of standing around in the middle of the open plains of Meta, on the side of the highway, where we had just installed this big sign, and I sang a couple of songs. There was this combination of a kind of community, struggle, expression, art, sharing something which is really tragic, but coming out of that is a real hope. That's a kind of moment that I rarely have in the U.S.

I just don't find that same sort of cross section of experiences.

I don't know if that answers your question.

EW: It does... and it raises another one for me. The sign said this is in memory of this woman's mother, and then it also said this land is not for sale...

LS: It references a little bit of a struggle around a piece of land that the woman owned, the one who was assassinated and so they're trying to, you know, put up something both symbolic and real saying that this farm is of Maria Mercedes Méndez and it's not for sale. So they're trying to resist what had happened to this piece of land, which is maybe a little too complicated to explain, but...

EW: I'd like to hear the story...

LS: Well it had been 17 years since she was assassinated, and this other person somehow got ahold of this land, but the title issues in Colombia are really complex. In a lot of ways the conflict is really about land there. What's happened so often is that people are assassinated or communities are displaced, and then other people occupy their land. Most recently laws have been developed to legalize the land that has been occupied by armed groups. Some people say it's like a reverse agrarian reform. One law says that if land is left without use for five years, then anybody who comes onto it after those five years can just call it their own, which is really crazy, because paramilitaries, mostly, and guerillas

displaced so many communities. Of course they had to leave their land for more than five years, but then if the paramilitaries are occupying it, they can say "well, this land has been vacant for five years; now it's ours."

So in this case, a woman was assassinated. Her four daughters didn't know about the piece of land, and they had been out of the loop for a while, so there was another person living on it, running it, and that person sold two hectares to another farmer, even though legally he wasn't really able to sell those two hectares because he didn't do all the paperwork. But he figured out a way to sell it to this campesino who thought that it was a legal transaction, and now the daughters are in the process of trying to get that farm to be recognized as legally theirs because of inheritance from their mother who was assassinated.

EW: And then there you are, singing a song with two megaphones. What song were you singing?

LS: I'm a singer/songwriter, so I was singing one of my own songs. I sang one which was a kind of love song to Colombia about being in love with Colombia, singing

We were not approaching Colombia as the problem and arriving as gringos with the helping hand. We were exchanging experiences of problems that are fundamentally linked and which manifest differently in our different contexts.

to Colombia as if it were a lover. And then the other song actually was a poem that I did with a man, another member of this organization—both the woman who did this act of memory and this man are members of an organization called Hijos y Hijas por la Memoria y Contra la Impunidad, which means "sons and daughters for memory and against impunity." The man who recited the poem—his father was also assassinated—his father wrote the poem.

So he was reciting the poem, and I was doing some very basic guitar underneath it and also singing a little,

a bit of a chorus that we had come up with.

EW: *Let's talk a little bit more about the delegation work you've been doing at FOR Colombia. One of the things you write is that "we were not approaching Colombia as the problem and arriving as gringos with the helping hand. We were exchanging experiences of problems that are fundamentally linked and which manifest differently in our different contexts." What are the linked problems that you've been finding in your work?*

LS: I guess it's what I was talking about in that article, what I

I think it's really important for people to leave their most immediate reality and hear directly from someone—a person, a human being, in flesh and blood—what's going on in another place and how that's connected to the policies of our country.

think is so important. What we were trying to do that's different in this youth delegation is depart from a kind of traditional model of delegation where North Americans, the people from the U.S. who are generally white and middle-class, go to Colombia and listen to the tragic stories of what's going on in Colombia and then come back to the U.S. and educate communities here, talk about it in the media or do congressional visits. I feel like that's really important work, and I've worked other delegations that are of that model and I think that they're really transformative experiences. I think it's really important for people to leave their most immediate reality and hear directly from someone—a person, a human being, in flesh and blood—what's going on in another place and how that's connected to the policies of our country, the U.S., so I think that that's really important work.

But at the same time I also think it kind of repeats a dynamic where we think "Oh, we have a good situation here in the U.S., and fortunately we don't live with violence, and we don't experience X, Y, & Z, so we're going to go to this other country and hear about what's so terrible there, and then we're going to come back and speak about that in our communities."

But this youth delegation was going with at least the presumption that we have some shared stories. They manifest differently, but we actually are impacted by similar systems in different ways. Youth in Colombia and the U.S. are deeply impacted by militarism and militarization and war and violence, and they're also very courageously and creatively coming up with responses to those systems that are oppressing them or impacting them. We wanted to give them an opportunity to talk to each other and trade stories and strategies so that we can continue to build those alternatives.

It's really as important for Colombians—I was struck again by this in the youth delegation this year—it's really important for Colombians to hear from people in the U.S. who have had those kinds of life experiences. Because the image that we export from the U.S. is Hollywood or TV shows, and the image we export when we bring delegations of upper middle-class white people is a certain reality, but it's not the reality of so many people in the U.S. We are a country of this huge diversity of experiences, immigrants from all over the world, and the kind of struggles that people live here are varied and rich. I think that there's a lot to be learned from that diversity. So, when Colombian young people in this delegation would hear Raffa's story about what he had grown up with in the Mission district of San Francisco and the kind of violence he saw in his neighborhood and the things that he had experienced, the Colombians were just like "Oh. That's my story."

That kind of identification, that kind of human identification, I think is really important when we're talking about the world we want to build. It's really about being able to understand each other as fellow human beings. I think that kind of building and bridging is so important.

EW: *Perhaps we might finish with the close of your article. Maybe you can sort of interrupt me as I go and just elaborate a little bit. "Because our work here and there is to build a stronger global movement to end war... and part of ending war is doing math homework..."*

LS: Uh huh... [smiling]

EW: *Math homework?*

LS: I was trying to get at that issue of the macro and the micro, and I guess at the kind of exploration I was doing about the concept of solidarity in general, that solidarity goes in a billion different directions. In this case I have a deep, deep sense of solidarity with many people in Colombia who are involved in human-rights work, and resistance to the war, and I also experience a profound appreciation for the solidarity of supporting Escenthio to do his math homework here in Oakland and be able to graduate high school and go on to college.

EW: *Did he pass the exam?*

LS: He did! That was a major celebration the day he called me up and said he passed his math exam, and he is in college now. He's just finishing his first year of college.

EW: *Where did he go?*

LS: He went to Evergreen College.

EW: *From Oakland to Evergreen.*

LS: It's a pretty big switch, don't you think? He's doing really well. I guess I just felt like there are so many ways to express our solidarity, and we need to do it. You know it's the local-global thing, too: we need to do it locally and of course we need to do it globally and of course we need to do it in our personal relationships and you can't exhaust the possibilities of solidarity.

But in that delegation, it was just an example of how we can support each other and specifically Escenthio, who was someone who came on the delegation whose situation was different from the other people that came on the delegation. The moment he wrote to me and said "I can't come" and told me that he had to take this math exam to graduate from high school and that he needed to study for it, I was devastated. I wrote to everybody and said "we need to find a way for Escenthio to come and pass his math test."

You know I would never say that Escenthio coming on the delegation was more important than graduating high school, but they were both really important, and I thought that he could do both, and I thought that he could be part of a political struggle and graduate high school and just pass his math test. And everybody on the delegation responded with a huge, "Yes, we're gonna do everything possible to support Escenthio."

So in the article I'm kind of encouraging both myself and whoever is reading it to see that it's not always about crossing those borders to be in solidarity with people. There are a lot of people around us that we also need to be building those relationships with and supporting.

EW: *"Part of ending war is being back here and longing for there?"*

LS: I haven't figured that one out yet, if "back here and longing for there..." is the right setup, but it's the current reality.

EW: *You just got back from Bogotá last night?*

LS: I did.

EW: *So the longing for there is pretty fresh for you?*

LS: It always is. There's something about it that.... Like I said, Colombia has taken hold of my heart, and it's.... Twelve years ago was the first time that I went to Colombia, and my life is intertwined with that place, so that seems like that's what I have to relate to on a daily basis.

EW: *So I get this sense that Colombia's both horrific in some ways and deeply, deeply beautiful and wonderful in other ways and... I've always been a great admirer of Márquez, Gabriel García Márquez, and you can't love his work without loving Colombia, even if it's just a place you read about.*

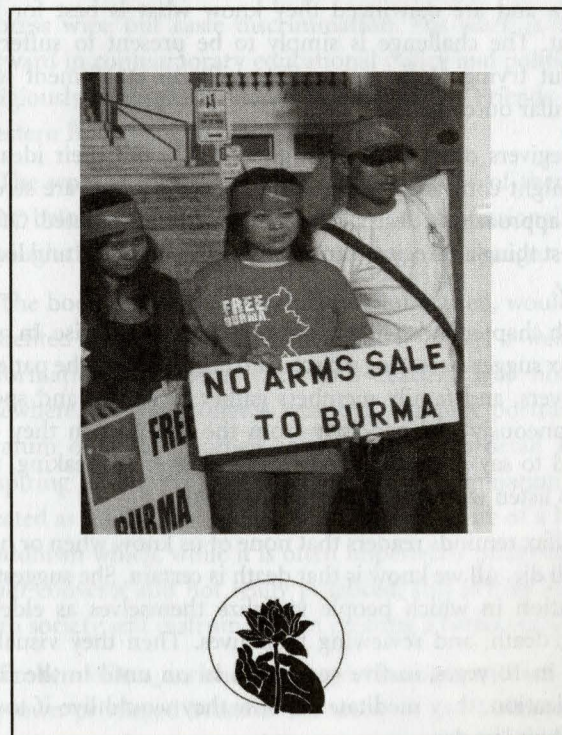
LS: I think that's been a real teaching in some ways. You think what comes out of war is just horror and misery and sadness and destruction, but clearly in Colombia there's a whole lot of other things that come out of war: a pretty powerful humanity and resistance and creativity and vision and really beautiful, inspiring things.

EW: *Would you even go so far as to say that there's a kind of love that comes out of it?*

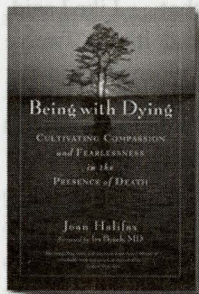
LS: Yes, I think so... I think solidarity is a version of love, and there's a lot of solidarity that you experience in Colombia that's pretty awesome.

For more information on the Dar Papaya Project go to www.darpapayaproject.com.

For more information about the Fellowship of Reconciliation Colombia Program, go to www.forcolombia.org.



Anniversary Protest in Berkeley to Free Burma 8-8-09 Photo by Zenju Earthlyn Manuel



Being with Dying: Cultivating Compassion and Fearlessness in the Presence of Death

By Joan Halifax

Shambhala Publications, 2008
204 pages, \$22.95 hardcover

Reviewed by Bill Williams

Joan Halifax's new book, *Being with Dying*, brims with wisdom based on her years of working with dying people in hospice and other settings. The book also resonates as a profound meditation on the meaning of death.

Denial of death is rampant. "We conduct business, make and spend money and tend our relationships," while doing little to prepare for inevitable death.

Halifax founded the Upaya Zen Center in Sana Fe, New Mexico, in 1990 and later the Project on Being with Dying, which trains healthcare professionals.

Working with dying people initially scared Halifax because she feared she "might get what the dying person had." But she soon realized she already had what dying people have—mortality.

Halifax cautions families and caregivers who often have an agenda and are convinced they know what is best for the patient. The challenge is simply to be present to suffering without trying to fix or cure it, with no attachment to a particular outcome.

Caregivers often envision a good death, but their idea of that might contradict the patient's. Some patients are serene when approaching death; others are angry and agitated. Often the best thing a caregiver can do is simply be present and listen deeply.

Each chapter ends with a useful meditation exercise. In one, Halifax suggests creating a circle of truth, in which the patient, caregivers, and family members gather in silence and speak spontaneously and concisely from the heart when they are moved to say something. When one person is speaking, the others listen without judging or reacting.

Halifax reminds readers that none of us know when or how we will die. All we know is that death is certain. She suggests a mediation in which people visualize themselves as elderly, facing death, and reviewing their lives. Then they visualize dying in 10 years, in five years, and so on until in the final visualization, they meditate on how they would live if today were their last day.

Not surprisingly, those who care for the dying sometimes suffer burnout, which can lead to anger and resentment. Halifax recommends that caregivers set firm limits and take care of their own body and spirit through regular exercise and consistent meditation.

A chapter titled "Wounded Healers: The Shadow Side of Caregiving" lists caregiver traps, such as seeking recognition and gratitude for oneself or playing the role of martyr while secretly wishing the patient would hurry up and die.

Halifax distinguishes between pain and suffering. Pain is the physical sensation, while suffering involves the stories we create around pain. As various teachers have noted, pain is inevitable, while suffering is optional. The terms are often used interchangeably, but the distinction is helpful.

Dying involves more than biology. Too often, Halifax says, healthcare professionals fail to realize the importance of spiritual care. She found that attending to a patient's spiritual needs was the greatest treasure in this work.

Although Halifax concedes she has no idea what happens to consciousness after death, she cites intriguing stories of people who have entered altered states while near death and have returned from the brink to talk about the experience.

Halifax includes scores of anecdotes about deaths she has witnessed. It might have been more effective to include fewer stories with more detail to create more lasting impressions.

Readers should know that the book contains two potentially disturbing scenes, one involving preparation of bodies for viewing at home and the second describing Halifax's experience of lying in a pool of blood among bodies in a charnel ground in Tibet.

Those reservations aside, this is an extraordinary book that should be read slowly, one chapter at a time. Ultimately, *Being with Dying* is about living as well as dying, as both are integral to life.

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Broken Voices: 'Untouchable' Women Speak Out

By Valerie Mason-John
India Research Press, 2008
251 pages, \$29.95, paperback

Reviewed by Sandy Boucher

Slumdog Millionaire left us with images of life in the teeming slums of India, leavened by the rags-to-riches bounciness of the plot and the final Bollywood dance number that sent us home for a peaceful night's sleep.

Broken Voices tells a different story, revealing the lives of women in the villages and slums of India—the mothers, aunts, and sisters of Jamal, the hero of *Slumdog*.

Valerie Mason-John, a British writer, spent months in India involving herself with women at the lowest levels of society in order to give us this book. Many of the women speak of almost unbearable poverty, squalor, and suffering. They tell of spousal abuse, female infanticide, child marriage, bride burning, rape, hunger, despair. Some chronicle their struggle to be educated and then to create or work with organizations whose goal is betterment of the lives of low-caste or outcaste Indian women.

Caste discrimination in India was made illegal in 1950, but the lives of these women illustrate the insidious, cruel continuation of the caste system in contemporary Indian society. An Indian is born into a caste, even now, and can never escape that identification. What this means for the people on the lowest rung of society is a life of servitude and humiliation not much different from slavery. And women take the brunt of it, being subject to religiously sanctioned sexist oppression as well as caste oppression.

Traveling for five weeks in India almost 20 years ago, I found myself in the most patriarchal culture I had ever encountered. The women were invisible, silent, cowed. Getting on a train in Gaya—amid a typical Indian mad dash—I saw a small, skinny old woman in a faded sari trying to board as a crowd of men brutally pushed her, stamped on her sandaled feet, and jabbed their elbows in her face until they literally squeezed her out of access to the car. It was a heart-piercing scene.

That old woman could have been one of the voices in Mason-John's book. To explain the religious and social

justification for this treatment of women, Mason-John offers a chapter on the intricacies of caste and gender discrimination as it was established by the Laws of Manu in ancient Hindu culture and shows us how it continues today. She introduces the word *Dalit*, which means “divided,” or “broken,” and is used to refer to all the people deemed untouchable, who, because of Hindi religious edicts, are denied equal rights and opportunities.

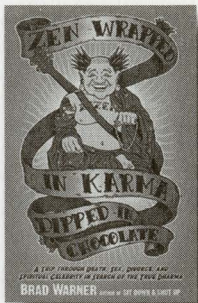
Dalits are not only kept from access to money, influence, and decent living conditions, they are also the target of violence, even murder. Whether they live in isolated villages or the slums of big cities, the women are never safe. One of them reports, “Sixty to seventy percent of Dalit women are raped in the village community, mainly by higher-caste people.” Yet the thirst for justice is strong in them, and they struggle to transcend the prison of their caste oppression through education and social activism.

Central to their endeavor is the example of their leader, Dr. Ambedkar, who brought Buddhism to his people. Mason-John devotes a chapter to this fascinating man, born an untouchable, who managed to become one of the most educated men in India. Ambedkar took up the cause of the untouchables, his campaign ranging from street demonstrations to changes in government policies. He also converted millions of untouchables to Buddhism—a religion he believed would give equality and dignity to them. His goal was to convert the entire population of India and in the process wipe out caste discrimination. His work is carried forward in contemporary educational policy and politics and religiously through the Indian branch of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO).

The women in *Broken Voices* tell how some of them, like their beloved Ambedkar, have risen both professionally and through the ranks of government to work for change.

The book, sometimes repetitive or unfocused, would have benefited from stringent editing, but it brings a wealth of information and experience that readers will not find elsewhere. Its pages offer a nuanced, complex portrait of a stratum of Indian women as shocking in its detail as it is inspiring in the women's courage and determination to be treated as full human beings. It presents a picture of a kind of Buddhism which, while it is often imperfectly understood by *Dalit* converts and not really practiced, still is fully engaged with society and instrumental in creating a better world.

Broken Voices enriched my understanding of lives unlike my own privileged Western existence—a good corrective to complacency. I recommend it.



Zen Wrapped in Karma Dipped in Chocolate

By Brad Warner

New World Library, 2009.
240 pages, \$14.95, paperback

Reviewed by Patrick Carolan

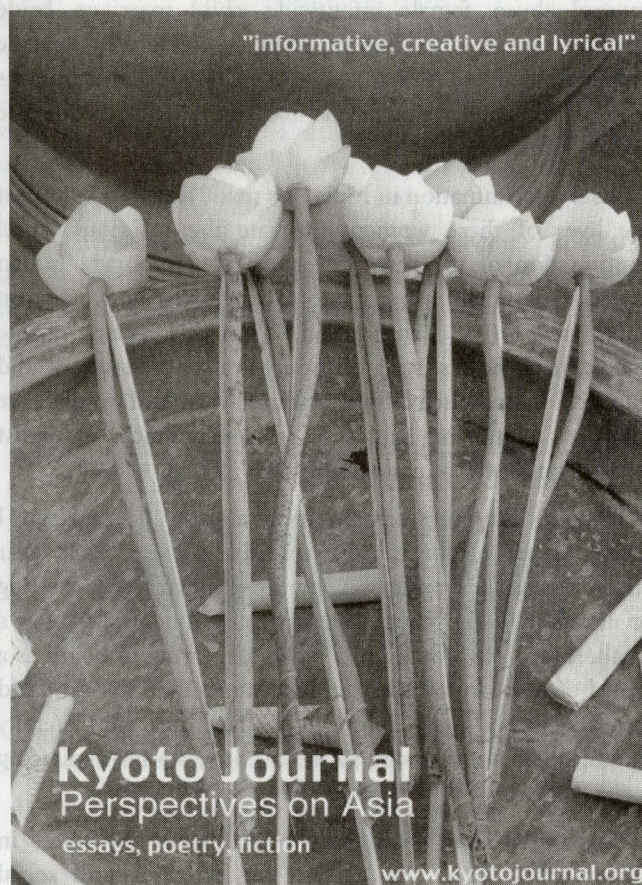
Irreverently described by its author, Brad Warner, as a “snarly ball of confessional” ranting, *Zen Wrapped in Karma Dipped in Chocolate* is a narrative of his life during 2007 and a refreshing bit of cathartic enterprise. In it he humorously chronicles the drama of a year of job uncertainty, marital infidelity, maternal death, and clogged toilets. With his third book, the ex-punk rocker, Suicidegirls.com columnist, and Zen monk portrays himself, warts and all—to dispel the myth of the superhuman Eastern mystic and perhaps to find closure after a period of intense personal upheaval. Its conversational tone and readable nature give the book the feel of a chat with a new friend over an afternoon coffee, while the casually embedded philosophical discussions on the merits of zazen practice remind readers that Warner just might have some useful wisdom to impart—even if he isn’t a spiritual superman.

Warner’s book features a running thread of commentary on various aspects of Zen philosophy. He stresses that Zen Buddhism is neither spiritual nor secular, describing it as not a religion or philosophy but an attitude. As the infamous Porno Buddhist of the West, his insights on the topic of purity are intriguing. He notes that when confronting issues of morality, “the things that disturb me most deeply, I’ve never found them outside me. They were always right here.”

Warner also discusses enlightenment, the achievement of which is a fixation of Westerners exploring Eastern spirituality. He cautions that a teacher who speeds up enlightenment makes it contingent on their approval—giving them control over their pupil. Humans have an inherent impulse to forfeit responsibility, but upon having power thrust at them by an eager student wondering if X experience is enlightenment, a good Zen teacher throws it right back. Any teacher willing to accept this power should be held suspect. Warner relates how once he asked his master Nishijima to confirm a “profound mystical experience” as certified enlightenment. Nishijima’s response? “You watch too many cartoons!” In many ways this book—penned by a teacher who fears the world seeing him as something more than the flawed mortal he is—is the ultimate attempt to keep us responsible to ourselves.

Zen Wrapped in Karma is Brad Warner’s way of exposing his failures while simultaneously giving readers a sampling of Zen culture and a crash course in 1980s punk rock. Although we see his world collapse, it never spirals completely out of control—perhaps because it falls from a fairly stable place, thanks to his Zen practice. He handles the deaths of his mother and grandmother and the subsequent familial infighting in what at first seems to be a removed fashion, taking a “life happens” approach. But readers quickly see that this is more than numbness to heartache. He is simply OK with it in a way that even he might not quite realize. Maybe he’s just a little bit more Zen than he lets on.

As I read Warner’s story, Here was someone who should, in theory, have it all figured out. But he was facing down the same sorts of problems as me: a 22-year-old college graduate during an economic meltdown, dealing with a grandmother withering from Alzheimer’s. While it didn’t quite change my life, the visceral honesty of *Zen Wrapped in Karma* gave me a heartening boost and a few pointers for the road ahead at just the right time—all I could ask for from an entertaining read.



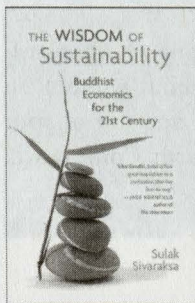
Fearless Press: Koa Books

Reviewed by Zenju Earthlyn Manuel

Koa Books was founded in 2005 by Arnie Kotler, who previously founded and directed Parallax Press. He was the creator of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship newsletter that later became *Turning Wheel* magazine. Koa Books, headquartered on Maui, publishes works on progressive politics, personal transformation, and native cultures.

The Koa tree is the largest native Hawaiian forest tree, whose beautiful hardwood was traditionally used for making canoes and surfboards. *Koa* in Hawaiian means “fearless,” or “warrior.”

We present three fearless books of note:



The Wisdom of Sustainability: Buddhist Economics for the 21st Century

By Sulak Sivaraksa

Koa Books, 2009
101 pages, \$12.50, paperback

Shuffling through the family home of Rev. Hozan Alan and Laurie Senauke, Sulak Sivaraksa is not concerned with a stranger—oh, that would be me—sitting at a table hoping to speak with him. Sulak takes his time to come over after changing his clothes. We are about to journey to UC Berkeley to hear His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The only hope I have that he will come over to me is that I am in the kitchen and he is very hungry. I have quickly toasted several bagels as the first course. He is not interested, but he finally sits down next to me. I have decided not to say a word but wait until he speaks. This way, if he is not feeling like having a conversation, at least I will not have forced it on him.

There is great silence when finally he says, “Where is your temple?” He is searching for my dharma home. Wondering what training I might have had, maybe wondering whether my dharma home taught me anything about transforming suffering in the world. I’m thinking he is asking this because in Asia the temples and monasteries are geared toward cultivating the highest spiritual human potential. We end up having a polite conversation, at least until the brown rice and vegetables are on the table.

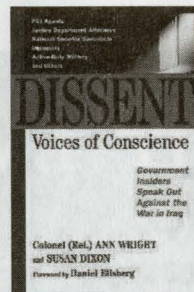
Although he was educated in England and Wales, is considered one of Thailand’s foremost intellectuals, and is a

good friend of the Dalai Lama, he does not walk around as someone who thinks he is more important than another. He is ordinary; ordinary enough that one feels comfortable sitting in the kitchen with him to talk.

I speak of Ajahn Sulak’s being because knowing him is to know what one might expect from his writings. Simple, ordinary, to the point, profound, and so obvious are the lessons on peace and engaged dharma that you wonder why you didn’t think of them.

Ajahn Sulak has waged a long and enduring campaign to educate others about peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding. He is an educator who espouses the objective of education as liberation from ignorance and not as a means of gaining knowledge, skills, or earning a living. In *The Wisdom of Sustainability* he covers the crisis of change concerning the world today. He is talking not about sustaining the path of meeting our individual needs but rather about finding our way back to simplicity.

Take this book and sit at your kitchen table with some brown rice and veggies. Let Sulak’s voice speak to you.



Dissent: Voices of Conscience

By Ann Wright and Susan Dixon

Foreword by Daniel Ellsberg
Koa Books, 2008
278 pages, \$17.95, paperback

Living in a world in which speaking out against the government could have you labeled as a terrorist, Wright’s last words in the book are “Do not be silent!” Does liberty in the U.S. still allow us to speak our minds? Or better yet, do we feel we can speak our minds whether the government says so or not? These are the questions that arise when reading *Dissent*, a book written after Army Colonel (Ret.) and diplomat Ann Wright resigned her State Department post and became one of the insider active-duty military personnel who spoke out about illegal government actions that were leading the U.S. into the Iraq War.

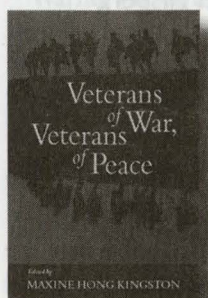
While Wright was busy with speaking engagements, Susan Dixon, who was teaching a university course and working on her doctoral dissertation, must have realized the potency of the material Wright had in her possession and decided to help write this book.

Dissent. The title is taboo. Is it OK to be a dissenter and still be considered an American today? Yet here we are contemplating our silence and wondering how much of that silence moved us into a war in which Senator Barbara Lee (a congresswoman at the onset of the Iraq war), in essence said, "Stop!"

In the foreword, Daniel Ellsberg says it all: "This book in the hands of current, future, or recently resigned officials, with its examples of moral courage in people like their own colleagues, like themselves, could awaken them to do likewise [speak out], to do better than they have done so far. This country will not escape further human, legal, and moral catastrophes, or preserve itself as a democratic, constitutional republic, if that does not happen."

What one learns from *Dissent* is that in many circumstances silence furthers the harm. When we know that someone, a group of people, or a country is suffering deeply and we do not speak, our silence functions as an agreement to be an accomplice to the crime. The consciousness of Wright and other so-called whistle-blowers understood such an agreement and propelled them to follow the consciousness of their hearts.

Many whose voices are in this book have transformed themselves from believing in war to realizing the truth of it all. They serve as evidence that we all are on a continuous path of awakening.



Veterans of War, Veterans of Peace

By Maxine Hong Kingston
Koa Books, 2006
613 pages, \$20, paperback

Twenty years after the fall of Saigon, Thich Nhat Hanh (Thây) gathered war veterans and their family members in retreats for making peace. As part of those retreats Kingston, who had joined Thây in this work, added writing meditation to the program. This book includes the writings of those who participated.

Kingston said of this rare writing community, "Singing, hugging, dancing, we were a community. But it is in words that each individual reveals a unique mind. The veterans needed to write. They would write the unspeakable. Writing,

they keep track of their thinking; they leave a permanent record. Processing chaos through story and poem, the writer shapes and forms experience, and thereby, I believe, changes the past and remakes the existing world."

She went on to say, "The veterans did their most dramatic writing when I presented the First Precept, which is a vow against killing. A moral ethic helps shape and form thoughts about the war chaos. The drama is not just in the battle scenes but in the moral conflict."

The act of killing and the vow to refrain from it runs like a bloodline throughout the essays presented from the Veterans Writers Group, which met monthly from 1993–1996.

In reading some of the many essays—they are all significant stories—it is clear that most of us cannot even imagine the agony or complexity of war as it resides in the heart.

If you have never been to war, know no one who has been to war, or think you know what war is about without no experience of it, then this book will shake you out of your stupor and plant your feet squarely in the earth. Come down, touch the earth, and feel this.

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FOOTSTEPS
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“Therefore, be ye lamps unto yourselves, be a refuge to yourselves. Hold fast to Truth as a lamp; hold fast to the truth as a refuge. Look not for a refuge in anyone beside yourselves. And those, who shall be a lamp unto themselves, shall betake themselves to no external refuge, but holding fast to the Truth as their lamp, and holding fast to the Truth as their refuge, they shall reach the topmost height.”

—*Shakyamuni Buddha (circa 563 B.C.E. to 483 B.C.E.)*

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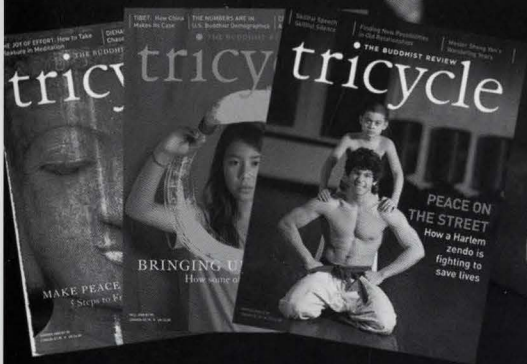
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