

Worship & Action for Peace Letter
November 3, 2005

Dear Friends in New York Yearly Meeting,

On its Opinion Page (4A, October 25, 2005) The Hornell, NY, *Evening Tribune* published the article below with an author's picture of Sharon Hoover smiling, under the headline **Standing for peace on Alfred's Main Street**. Greta Mickey of Bullshead-Oswego Meeting has responded to a call to vigil Sunday evenings for many, many months at the main intersection in Rhinecliff, NY, often "alone." Standing with her has brought a sense of relationship with those who pass by like the "sukkah next to sukkah" relationships asked for below. We are not all called to vigil, we cannot all write eloquently for the newspapers—but we are all called to live in peace.

"In these times, we hear God calling us to live peaceably, ourselves, in all our relationships" (Call to Faithfulness, New York Yearly Meeting, July 30, 2004).

Peaceable greetings,

Linda Chidsey, Vicki Cooley, Fred Dettmer, Lu Harper
Worship and Action for Peace working group

Stand Publicly for Peace

The Silent Peace Vigil on Main Street in Alfred began in the fall of 2001, a place to stand for a half an hour each week and publicly oppose war as an adequate or reasonable response to the world's problems.

Since then, war in Iraq alone has killed almost 2000 Americans; shattered the arms, legs, eyes, genitals, and lives of thousands more; killed about 100,000 Iraqi civilians; honed the skills of terrorists; led to the acceptance of the use of torture as U.S. policy from the highest levels to the many in an indifferent public.

Recently, I read an essay by Rabbi Arthur Waskow "The Sukkah and the Towers." In the fall, Jews celebrate a harvest festival called Sukkot. For this they build a "sukkah," a "fragile hut with a leafy roof, the most vulnerable of houses. Vulnerable in time, since it lasts for only a week each year. Vulnerable in space, since its roof must be not only leafy but leaky—letting in the starlight, and gusts of wind and rain." In evening prayers throughout the year, many Jews pray, "Spread over us Your sukkah of shalom—of peace and safety."

They don't pray for a steel tower, a gated community, or a five-sided military headquarters—places we think of as secure, but for a temporary, fragile hut exposed to the elements. Why?

As 9/11 reminded us, "We all live in a sukkah," Waskow said. "There are only wispy walls and leaky roofs between us. The planet is

in fact one interwoven web of life. The command to love my neighbor as I do myself is not an admonition to be nice: it is a statement of truth like the law of gravity. However much and in whatever way I love my neighbor, that will turn out to be the way I love myself. If I pour contempt upon my neighbor, hatred will recoil upon me.”

It is sad that we have spent our resources and credibility dropping spent uranium on Iraq and brought contempt upon our soldiers and nation by a policy of pouring humiliation on prisoners. We should rather have dropped winterized tents upon Pakistanis and insisted on fairness in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and in the neighborhoods of the United States.

Waskow begs “all Americans to gather in sukkot—in all the places where we might explore the open weave of half-walled space between us and the rest of the world, between humanity and the rest of the planetary web of life. We urge us all to reflect.”

War is not reflection. It is not treating our neighbors as we would be treated.

The rabbi goes on to give those of all religions a message that we can recall during our silent moments on Main Street: “Could we teach all our children the Torah, the Prophets, the Song of Songs, the Talmud, the New Testament, the Quran, the Upanishads, the teachings of the Buddha and of King and Gandhi, as treasuries of wisdom—and sometimes of great danger—that are . . . crucial to the world

“The choice we face is broader than politics, deeper than charity. It is whether we see the world chiefly as property to be controlled, defined by walls and fences that must be built ever higher, ever thicker, ever tougher; or made up chiefly of an open weave of compassion and connection, open sukkah next to open sukkah.”

Indonesia next to Darfur, next to Columbia, next to the United States, next to Israel and Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq. A field of McMansions next to the ninth ward of New Orleans.

Come and reflect with us on Main Street some Wednesday—any amount of time between noon and 12:30. We realize that many of you have classes and jobs and responsibilities that don’t allow you to join us for a half an hour every week. But don’t you have time for five minutes one Wednesday to stand publicly for peace—in our “sukkah of shalom” on the corner of Church and Main in Alfred? Or, if you cannot come to Alfred, perhaps you can spend a few minutes wherever you are reflecting on our choices as citizens and neighbors.

—Sharon Hoover [*Alfred Monthly Meeting*]