

**Worship and Action for Peace**  
**August 25, 2006**

Dear Friends,

New York Yearly Meeting's 2006 Epistle to Friends everywhere proclaimed our experience during our sessions that "The blessed community is here.... *All the time.... All the time.... The blessed community is here!*" " (2006 Epistle of New York Yearly Meeting; <http://www.nyym.org/epistles/06.shtml>.) The Epistle spoke to the sense of community Friends felt in our listening and discernment during the week of July 23–29, 2006:

The theme of the 311th session of New York Yearly Meeting was "Unleashing the Blessed Community," and we knew the Power and Presence of God among us. The agenda was full, the weather hot and humid; yet our meetings for worship with a concern for business were consistently tender and gathered. Friends were repeatedly moved by the ministry and reports of individuals and committees. A spirit of listening, holding, gratitude, and awe prevailed. As one Friend said, "We meet to worship, to seek love and truth, and we rise up changed."

Our plenary speaker, Niyonu Spann, encouraged us to "unleash the fetters of fear, guilt and shame that keep us from the blessed community."

Naomi Paz Greenberg of Flushing Monthly Meeting reflects below on her return from annual sessions at Silver Bay. We encourage Friends to share the stories of how we are being changed; the stories of our journeys in the blessed community, and in the world.

Linda Chidsey, Fred Dettmer & Lu Harper for the  
Worship & Action for Peace Working Group

---

**Some of the First Things**

I have thought about some of the first things that happened to me in the "secular" world during my trip back from Silver Bay, mostly in the language of the theme and queries around which our gathering was conceived:

The Blessed Community  
Unleashing  
What would it be like ...?  
The fetters that bind us.

These are some first thoughts:

Perhaps the greatest portion (though not all) of our work in "unleashing" has to do with ourselves.

We are afraid of change.

Not so much because change involves pain, although it may, but because change requires our attention, calling us to mindfulness, when we are all too often acculturated to prefer mindlessness. Headphones on, Game Boy in hand, we can be completely absent from wherever we are in the interest of ... efficiency? ... or in order to preserve our precious brain power—for what? I can no longer even recall what the thinking behind that approach to living in the world might be.

Traveling home from Silver Bay, I was called again and again, to pay careful attention to my surroundings, to the people around me on the train.

When the conductor came through our car collecting tickets, he said to me that he liked my necklace, a peace symbol on some colored cotton thread, because it matched his pin, as he pointed to the pin he was wearing on his hat, a tiny peace symbol superimposed on an American flag.

Later when I went to the dining car in search of a snack, a man came in just shortly after me and ordered a sandwich. Then, astonishingly, he turned to me and said, “You know, I really don't mind if you want this sandwich, I can have something else.” I must have looked puzzled because he explained that was the last tuna fish sandwich and he thought I looked disappointed that I would not be able to have a tuna sandwich as well. I told him I was fine, I had just wanted a snack, but thank you. And just as I was about to walk away, I turned back and said that was just about the nicest thing a stranger had ever offered me and thanked him again, fully attentive now. He just kept protesting that it really didn't matter to him and I could have his sandwich.

Walking back to my seat it occurred to me that the Blessed Community has long ago, some would say 2,000 years ago, been unleashed, and if we are not ready to take down the walls we have built around ourselves, then at least we might take the time every once in a while to peer through a chink in the bricks.

This revelation called to mind an article I had read somewhere a long time ago. The writer encouraged us to teach children not by catching them at doing something bad and reprimanding them, but by catching them again and again in the act of doing something right, naming it, and rejoicing in it.

To be meaningful, it must be truthful, authentic, but we can catch people all the time at doing something well, doing something kind, doing something beautiful. We can name it and we can rejoice in it.

In doing so we are transformed, and another brick falls out of the wall.

Naomi Paz Greenberg