

Worship and Action Update, 5/2/03

Dear Friends in New York Yearly Meeting:

Spring continues to unfold in our part of the world. This week offered many moments of encounter with the power of life, the rhythms of natural succession, and our human capacity for delight. City or country, house sparrows and pigeons as well as sunshine and rain showers, help us pace our journey to make room for companionship with what was not made by us.

Attending to pace is one suggestion which has come in response to last week's request for input on spiritual practice. Another is attention to a recent article by Tenzin Gyatso, the Dalai Lama, on science and mindfulness in the New York Times (www.nytimes.com/2003/04/26/opinion/26LAMA.html). In this article, he carefully makes clear that sustained spiritual practice can be action for peace.

Reflection on the time of year led Sharon Hoover of Alfred Monthly Meeting to heartfelt questions about our practice and our search for understanding and action:

Alfred Monthly Meeting has had a successful silent vigil every Wednesday since the last week of August, right in the center of the village in the center of the week and in the center of the day. We have had some Meeting and community pot lucks, all successful in some different way. We have a lovely newly built bookcase with literature that has served several groups, and we have reached out in letters to the editor, in some ways on campus, etc. In other words, it has been a winter full of witness and faith, patient and life-changing activity.

Now, comes a great change of season for us. The "war" has entered a new phase, the political rhetoric is turning ever more fully to winning the election in the fall, the two academic institutions are about to have graduations, and Alfred will swing into summer mode. Over half the bodies in the village will be gone for three months. And, the people in the Meeting are tired—they need some 'retirement' as Howard Brinton and other older Quakers (Bill Tabor, too) recommend.

Besides some manner of 'retirement,' we will need to keep up with the news and in August plan appropriate fall activities. Our immediate concern will be to decide whether to carry on the peace vigil all summer, knowing that instead of 14 of us, there may be one or two. We will be talking about that next First Day at pot luck. Some of our non-Quaker vigil keepers will meet with us.

The other issue we have, in my mind, may be one that many Meetings have. As the nation gears up for the election, how are we going to go about keeping faith and politics separate? NYYM Faith and Practice (at page 39) states:

The Religious Society of Friends possesses no blueprint for social order. However, our Society, since its founding, has labored for the ordering of a community life in which all may have free and full opportunity to express and develop that divine potential with which everyone is endowed.... We can draw no clear line between religious and secular affairs. We find ways to serve God in the world. We expect each Friend to live each day in holy obedience, secure in the faith that the Light illumines all relationships. Accordingly, Friends are enjoined to have a deep concern for the welfare of the community. This involves intelligent care for the dignity and welfare of all; love for adversaries, not merely for those who love us, and special care for those whom the world neglects, exploits, or condemns.

The task is never over. The vision is never complete.

Last fall gathering for Farmington Scipio, someone asked when we were going to talk about the economic issue that fuel US policies. We seem to rely on slogans rather than reasoned discussion of economic ideas, such as those in Jack Powelson's pamphlet *Seeking Truth Together: Enabling the Poor and Saving the Planet in the Manner of Friends*. In his last Friends Journal article, 'Friends in Business', Jack stated that 'Unprogrammed Friends are turning themselves into political caucuses for the Democratic and Green parties, and politics now supersedes religion.' That comment holds more truth in my experience than I am comfortable with. How do we find our way through the maze of politics and economics about to descend on us with the election season in the same spirit of worship-based action that the Worship and Action Updates have brought to peace issues this winter?"

=====

Please note a correction: the Internet address for the Guerrilla News Network is www.guerrillanews.com. You can find there an article by Frances Moore Lappé, "The World We Want & the Words We Use."

A number of Friends have sent suggestions for sources of news or information which they find helpful (more welcome!). Each suggestion is marked with an asterisk (*) at the beginning of the line:

* In response to the 4/25/03 Update, a resource I appreciate is the daily newspaper, The Christian Science Monitor (<http://www.csmonitor.com/>). The writing and editing are good and the coverage of the world seems balanced and informative. Worth a look. (Beatrice Beguin, Saranac Lake Monthly Meeting)

* Truthout, News Politics (<http://www.truthout.org/>). I find these articles very interesting, especially since they come from news sources all over the world. (Rae de la Cretaz, Montclair Meeting)

Also about Truthout: They reprint articles (with links to the original where possible), and have a columnist or two of their own. The articles are generally from major media from all over the world. They distribute electronically several times per week, in the form of a simple e-mail, listing headlines with links to the articles. (Tom Rothschild, Brooklyn Monthly Meeting)

* In my not-so-humble opinion, Common Dreams (www.commondreams.org) is the best of the lot. Let it shine. (Paul Busby, 15th Street Monthly Meeting)

* Friends, check out www.aljazeera.us. It is excellent for news. I read it every day. (Helen Garay Toppins, Morningside Monthly Meeting)

* I also find www.electroniciraq.net to be a good source of news. (Helen Garay Toppins, Morningside Monthly Meeting)

It was reassuring to see that I am reading all the resources you list. I also get news from:

* The New Internationalist (www.newint.org). The New Internationalist exists to report on the issues of world poverty and inequality; to focus attention on the unjust relationship between the powerful and powerless in both rich and poor nations; to debate and campaigning for the radical changes necessary within and between those nations if the basic material and spiritual needs of all are to be met; and to bring to life the people, the ideas, the action in the fight for global justice. For subscriptions in the US, contact: magazines@indas.on.ca, PO Box 1143, Lewiston, NY 14092, 800-661-8700.

* Democracy University Video Tapes, videos of speakers around the US, primarily in California from Noam Chomsky to Howard Zinn to Greg Palast, with 8-10 hours of speakers on a tape. For monthly updates of new videos on social justice issues available for a small minimum donation, contact: Ralph Cole at Justice Vision, 1425 West 12th Street #262, Los Angeles, CA 90015, 213-747-6345, DemocracyU@aol.com. You may visit the web site that supporters have put up for them at www.justicevision.org and www.freevideos.org.

I am also kept going by receiving:

* PBI/USA Report, The Quarterly Newsletter of Peace Brigades International/USA, 428 8th Street SE, 2nd Floor, Washington, DC 20003, 202-544-3765, info@pbiousa.org, www.peacebrigades.org.

* The Transformer, Alternatives to Violence Project Newsletter, AVP/USA, PO Box 128, Peterborough, NH 03458

Much love and faith. (Nadine Hoover, Alfred Monthly Meeting)

=====

Dancing through this revolution of seasons and human times, we uphold one another as we are upheld.

Peaceable greetings,

Linda Chidsey, Vicki Cooley, and Fred Dettmer
NYYM Worship and Action working group

The whole world ministers to you as the theatre of your Love. It sustains you and all objects that you may continue to love them.

From Thomas Traherne, *Centuries*, Second Century #65

* * *

Hunger feels like pincers
Like the bite of crabs.
It burns, burns, and has no fire.
Hunger is a dead fire.
Let us sit down soon to eat
With all those who haven't eaten.
Let us spread great tablecloths,
Put salt in the lakes of the world,
Set up planetary bakeries,
Tables with strawberries in the snow,
And a plate like the moon itself
From which we can all eat.
For now I ask no more
Than the justice of eating.

Pablo Neruda, "The Great Tablecloth," trans. Alastair Reid