

## Worship and Action Update, 10/2/03

Dear Friends in New York Yearly Meeting:

After September 11, 2001, our media repeated and our country as a whole accepted the promises and pronouncements of our government's leaders, even when they were not supported by evidence or reason. We experienced a state of mind that George Orwell describes as "words falling upon the facts like soft snow, blurring their outlines and covering up all the details." ("Politics and the English Language," 1946)

The snow is melting. As the media question the veracity of our spokespersons, how can we as Friends serve responsible communication and action for our whole country and the world?

A second, profound shift is also occurring: The common abiding faith in the use of force as an instrument of peace is coming under question. Over the past two years, we have lived amidst a society which readily embraced unleashing lethal violence as its response to the pain and fear caused by the attacks on September 11, 2001. The "myth of redemptive violence" (in Walter Wink's phrase) obscured for many the facts that war creates chaos, not order; that bombs and bullets breed resentment and hatred, not conciliation; that lethal force is a tool of domination, not diplomacy, goodwill, or fellowship in our common condition. Even now, some advocate adding still more force as the solution to the chaos and misery that is Iraq today.

Yet there is also a growing sense that militarism is an ineffective method for building a society and a peace. More and more, voices in the "mainstream" of political debate are urging paths other than militarism, as in two remarkable articles that appeared side-by-side on the op/ed page of the *New York Times* on September, 23, 2003.

In one, Danielle Pletka, of the very conservative American Enterprise Institute, discusses why "*Troops In Iraq: More Isn't Better*" (available online at [www.iraqfoundation.org/news/2003/isept/23\\_pletka.html](http://www.iraqfoundation.org/news/2003/isept/23_pletka.html) and, with registration, at [www.nytimes.com/2003/09/23/opinion/23PLET.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2003/09/23/opinion/23PLET.html)). She focuses attention on the inaptness of relying on US troops to perform critical functions that are both civil in nature and doable by Iraqis:

The time has come to get American troops ... out of the night watchman game.... Indeed, virtually every task that could be done by additional American forces would be better assigned to Iraqis. Iraqis are directly plugged into intelligence. They speak the language, know the local population and are more sensitive to anomalies in behavior, dress and speech that give away bad actors. They are also perfectly capable of painting schools and directing traffic. Most important, a better Iraq will come about only if Iraqis themselves feel a sense of ownership.

On the other side of the *Times'* op/ed page that day, David Brooks - a new regular columnist at the *Times* - focuses attention on the fact that change for the better in Iraq will come at the neighborhood level and not through grand strategies ("Caught In The Iraqi Dramatics", available online at [www.iraqfoundation.org/news/2003/isept/23\\_iraq.html](http://www.iraqfoundation.org/news/2003/isept/23_iraq.html) and, with registration, at [www.nytimes.com/2003/09/23/opinion/23BROO.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2003/09/23/opinion/23BROO.html)). He explains:

The good things that are happening in Iraq are taking place far below the level of grand strategy. On Sunday, 18 bankers and civil servants from 11 central and Eastern European countries came to Iraq to describe the lessons they had learned in moving from tyranny to democracy. Every day, U.N. humanitarian workers, far removed from the marble halls of the Security Council, risk their lives to feed and clothe Iraqis. Every day, U.S. military officers spend millions of dollars building schools and tackling neighborhood issues. That's the work that gives Iraqis hope.

In an article in the October issue of the *Progressive* entitled "The Occupied Country" (available at [www.progressive.org/oct03/zinn1003.html](http://www.progressive.org/oct03/zinn1003.html)), Howard Zinn, the author of *A People's History of the United States*, urges us to remember that people do not readily embrace violence and that we can influence our neighbors away from supporting the occupation of Iraq through nonviolent action. He says:

Human beings do not naturally support violence and terror. They do so only when they believe their lives or country are at stake. These were not at stake in the Iraq War.... And when people learn the truth - as happened in the course of the Vietnam War - they will turn against the government. We who are for peace have the support of the rest of the world.... The power of government - whatever weapons it possesses, whatever money it has at its disposal - is fragile. When it loses its legitimacy in the eyes of its people, its days are numbered.

We need to engage in whatever nonviolent actions appeal to us. There is no act too small, no act too bold. The history of social change is the history of millions of actions, small and large, coming together at critical points to create a power that governments cannot suppress. We find ourselves today at one of those critical points.

How do we, as Friends, join with our neighbors, the media, our whole country? How can truth join us with others in making peace not war?

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Planning continues for the Worship and Action for Peace retreat gatherings to worship on the question *Where is our peace testimony leading New York Yearly Meeting Friends now?* In addition to the Gatherings to be held October 31 - November 2 at Powell House, and October 31 - November 1 at the Rotary Sunshine Camp near Rochester, N.Y., a Gathering at a convenient location in New Jersey quite likely will go forward Friday evening and Saturday, November 14 and 15. Details will be provided as soon as the plans are confirmed.

Peaceable greetings,

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

"In the global family, all wars are civil war," said Ghazi Brigitte, a Palestinian Muslim. He and his friend, Rani Elhanan, a Jewish Israeli, have come together to speak to us from the Association of Bereaved Families. A suicide bomber killed Rani's 14-year-old daughter. Israeli soldiers killed Ghazi's brothers. In their pain, the two men came to understand that killing is not a Muslim or a Jewish custom, but a government policy. They tell me of the 1400 lectures on non-violence and peace building they have given in schools, of blood banks they have organized. Palestinians donate blood for Israeli wounded, and Israelis do the same for Palestinians. Rani calls it, "the same blood for peace."

"Signs of Peace"

Janet MacDonell, O.L.M., of Christian Peacemaker Teams

We are made to love, both to satisfy the necessity of our active nature and to answer the beauties in every creature. By love our souls are married and soldered to the creatures, and it is our duty like God to be united to them all. We must love them infinitely, but in God and for God, and God in them, namely all [God's] excellencies manifested in them. When we dote upon the perfections and beauties of some one creature we do not love that too much but other things too little. Never was anything in this world loved too much; but many things have been loved in a false way, and all in too short a measure.

*Second Century of Meditations, #66*  
Thomas Traherne