

Worship and Action Update, 5/9/03

Dear Friends in New York Yearly Meeting:

I told them that I lived
in the virtue of that life and power
that took away the occasion of all wars.

The experience of George Fox continues to be for us a vision of deep perception and challenge. Friends will always strive to live in "that life and power." In *The Artist and His Time*, Albert Camus said: "If we listen attentively, we shall hear amid the uproar of empires and nations, a faint flutter of wings, a gentle stirring of life and hope." As reflected in the stories shared below, Friends in New York Yearly Meeting continue to listen, to learn, and to discern the stirring of life and hope.

FRIENDS UNITED MEETING CONSULTATION ON PEACE

Last weekend, Friends gathered at Quaker Hill in Richmond, Indiana, for a consultation on peace organized by Friends United Meeting. FUM had issued a call to constituent yearly meetings in North America to send representatives from their Peace Concerns/Social Action/Witness committees and their Ministry and Worship committees, and also invited observers from the American Friends Service Committee and Friends Committee on National Legislation. Carol Holmes shares these reflections:

This gathering of about forty Friends, consisting of both "activists" and "ministry and counsel types," was, so far as any of us knew, the first of its kind. Carolyn Keys and John Randall were New York Yearly Meeting delegates from Peace Concerns (but at the eleventh hour John fell ill and could not attend). I represented Ministry and Counsel. Rosa Packard was there as a member of the FUM consultation planning committee. Bridget Moix, a member of Fifteenth Street currently on the FCNL staff, was there as the FCNL observer and also facilitated a workshop on The Spiritual Basis of the Peace Testimony. The gathering was funded by the interest from the FUM Peace Tax Escrow Account.

Many of those from New England, New York, and Baltimore Yearly Meetings had never visited Quaker Hill before, nor attended an FUM event where pastors and superintendents (or general secretaries) from Indiana, Iowa, Wilmington, and Western Yearly Meetings were present. The plenary discussions began with our attempts to grapple with the two "types" of Quakers - the activists and the contemplatives - and quickly moved to the painful place of challenging each other's understanding of and commitment to Quakerism and Christianity. There was pain and shock as Eastern Friends

learned of the differences among us and of how widespread the adoption of a "just war" theology is across the Society of Friends.

The structure of the consultation contained us. Carolyn Keys reported on her work in Burundi with Friends Peace Teams and spoke of how important it was for her to be rooted in Montclair Monthly Meeting, All Friends Regional Meeting, and New York Yearly Meeting and how these communities provided her with both spiritual and practical support. Bridget Moix spoke of the Peace Testimony as a testimony of hope, and the core of this hope in individual and communal worship. I brought hard copies of almost every Worship and Action Update and directed Friends to www.nyym.org. Rosa presented each attendee a copy of the Peace Concerns Committee's notebook of Resources on Conscientious Objection. There were small group discussions and workshops. There were hymns and Scripture readings. There was "open" silent worship.

As some poured out high emotions and others withdrew into pained and stony silence, the Holy Spirit moved among us. By Sunday morning, we found ourselves blessed to agree that we wanted to continue working at community-building among ourselves as Quakers, and among Quakers as peacemakers. There were calls to investigate the possibilities of:

- * A renewal of inter-visitation and traveling ministry;
- * Networking to create resources for support and for skills in peacemaking;
- * Identifying common works we already share, such as conscientious objection, war taxes witness, nonviolence training;
- * Reconstituting - with constituent yearly meetings' participation - the Friends Coordinating Committee for Peace;
- * Reconvening in a year.

Finally, here are some quotes that are living with me a week later:

- * "The hardest places are where you have to be in order to see where you're going."
- * "We have been taken back to square one. God does that so we can start over in a new direction."

* "In Indiana Yearly Meeting there is about 10 percent support for the peace testimony. Many pastors are rebuked by their monthly meetings for speaking against the war."

* "In Iowa Yearly Meeting, many monthly meetings, even families, are split between Quaker pacifism and brothers and fathers in the National Guard."

* "In Southwest Ohio, pictures of Quakers serving in Iraq are pinned on the monthly meetings' bulletin boards and decorated with yellow ribbons."

* "The most important work for peace we can do is to invite people into a listening relationship with God."

--Carol Holmes

STAN ZAROWIN SHARES HIS PALESTINE-ISRAEL EXPERIENCE AND VISION WITH FRIENDS AT PURCHASE QUARTERLY MEETING

Last Sunday, May 4th , Friends in Purchase Quarter gathered at Scarsdale Meeting for worship and business and to hear Stan Zarowin of Brooklyn Meeting talk about his experience, observations, and inspirations in visiting the Middle East as a Friend born in Palestine of Jewish parents. Here are reports from six Friends:

Stan told us who he is - background, ethnicity, and prejudices - in a way that encourages us to look at our own backgrounds and prejudices. He shared an earlier experience with FUM, in which he had been asked to go to the Middle East for an AVP activity but was later uninvited because he was Jewish, and how that experience colored his expectations in participating in this FUM delegation at the invitation of the clerk of NYYM.

He spoke of a week living with an Arab family, of coming to feel part of that family and promising to return, but still not being able to bring himself to tell them that he was Jewish. He also spoke of his joyous experience, after telling the family of his Jewish background via e-mail upon returning home, of receiving a "love letter" from them full of appreciation, photos, and connections.

He reported going to a smoke-filled shack in the midst of a rubble-strewn lot to meet some of the friends of his host. With little grasp of each other's

language, they struggled to talk about bringing peace to their land. Somehow they were able to communicate. He reflected that most people - virtually everyone with whom he spoke - wanted peace and that polls indicate 78% of Israelis and of Palestinians would be willing to live in a united country with one united government.

Stan described challenging FUM, AFSC, and other concerned persons - before, during, and after the trip - about what we/they/Friends are and are not doing in the Middle East. FUM and AFSC have presences in the Arab lands but no program in Israel. Bringing Arabs and Israelis together - peacemaking - is not part of their programs. Stan offers the discernment that neither Arab nor Jew is blameless, that neither is justified in the evil it or its people are doing, and that this is a profoundly unsettling insight for many Friends and good people concerned with peace in the Middle East.

Stan refers to himself as "naive," as asking obvious questions of situations. But I see the sincerity of his quest and heard in his talk the evolution of a leading. I could feel Stan's strong leading to bring together many people to bring peace to the Middle East. He may not yet have appreciated the scale of his goals, but I believe that - with the help of the spirit and many F/friends - he could do it! It amazes me to put those words on paper. Stan is strong in what he wants to learn and to accomplish. I was humbled.

Anne Wright (Scarsdale Meeting)

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Stan Zarowin spoke to Purchase Quarter with his heart, urgently asking Friends to initiate some action whereby the horrendous situation in the Middle East might turn toward reconciliation.

His presentation incorporated the ambivalence of a pacifist Quaker born in Jerusalem of Russian-Jewish parents, who survived adolescence on the rough streets of New York City by fighting so well that he became a Golden Gloves boxer. While he saw and felt the daily pain and humiliation faced by Palestinians, he saw also the pain and constant fear of Israelis. Stan carried us into his experience, moving many to commit to act for healing in this corner of the Middle East.

Sue Weisfeld (Scarsdale Meeting)

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I was particularly enlightened by Stan's comments on the feelings involved during the reconciliation process. He explained that "peace and justice cannot coexist." For each party engaging in reconciliation, it always feels like they are making unfair concessions; like they are giving away everything they value. It never feels fair, never feels like justice is being done.

Stan also challenged us to consider A. J. Muste's words that "We will not have peace until we learn to love Hitler." During reconciliation, we must often deal with people we have demonized. Feelings of hatred or repulsion must be set aside to achieve progress.

Both of these statements suggest that we, as agents of constructive change in the world, must strive for emotional maturity and self-control. We must honor our feelings (and our biases) by recognizing them, and yet not succumb to their destructive influences during the arduous and complex task of peacemaking. I have been thinking deeply about this. I am sure he is correct.

Jeff Menoher (Wilton Meeting)

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Stan spoke courageously and compassionately as he shared his vision of the need for Friends to initiate peace activism in both Palestine and Israel. He said there are victims and perpetrators on both sides, even in the same person, and that Friends are called to minister to *pain* wherever they find it, not just to the underdog. *Both* the Israelis and the Palestinians are suffering greatly. Stan continually called for *balance* in how Friends approach the problems in the Middle East and urged Friends to try to find ways to bridge communication between the two peoples, perhaps moving toward one government over the land. Stan was exceedingly honest about his struggles with his own culturally bred racism, and encouraged us all to look inside, that we may heal these deep roots of trouble.

A Quiet Friend

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I think I was most struck by Stan's comment that in (the Jewish part of) Israel, everything is done for security, but there is no security. Also worth thinking about: his pacifism stemmed from fear; Quakers are not particularly welcome in Israel because of their work solely with Arabs; the A. J. Muste insight on love and enemies (Hitler). A discussion of these points would be quite interesting.

Judy Inskeep (Purchase Meeting)

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Stan's vision of Jews and Arabs living together in mutual respect is fully in keeping with our Quaker principle that all people are bearers of the Light, brothers and sisters one of another. His vision accords with Gandhi's insistence that Hindus and Muslims not dissolve into Pakistan and India but live together in a single country. Martin Luther King's dream of black and white living together is also Stan's vision for Jew and Arab. At once nourishing and prophetic, Stan left us both informed and concerned to act. The response has been overwhelmingly positive.

Possible action and follow-up: It may seem presumptuous of us to think we could make a difference, but fresh and unfettered peacemakers may sometimes prove to be welcome healers. Stan pointed out that our naivete should not be an excuse for inaction nor necessarily a barrier to effectiveness. I do think Friends in New York Yearly Meeting and our AFSC New York Metropolitan Region should consider taking a lead. This could include: (1) dialogues within our region - just as the AFSC carried out dialogues in the New York Metropolitan Region among Haitians, among Sri Lankans, and between Croatians and Serbs, perhaps we need to consider dialogues here between Jews and Arabs that could lead to further action; (2) establishing and expanding interfaith villages in Israel and the West Bank. The village in Israel of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam serves as an example that Stan's vision is attainable. For more than twenty years, Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel have lived and worked together as equals in this community. See www.oasisofpeace.org. It's good to do workshops, but let's work to establish permanent villages of peace in Israel and on the West Bank, villages that embody peace every day of the year.

Hank Elkins (Scarsdale Meeting)

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Peaceable greetings,

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

There are plenty of cases in our modern world in which ... gods turn out to be strangers, animals, or even plants. The god whom I call on and deem charitable and

empathic is reduced to a devouring monster in the eyes of those on the outside. And the gods of other men, charitable as they may be, become the beasts that threaten to annihilate me.... This is the quintessence of the tragedy and, yet, a familiar scenario, which has not changed since biblical times. Nations fight against each other, invoking their gods in battle. What messages, then, do our respective gods have for us and others who seek their help in this shattered world?

When we look in the mirror to find the true image of ourselves, that is, the Tselem or created image of the divine (Genesis 1:26), what characteristics of divinity do we find there? Is our search for the divine in ourselves a narcissistic trap or an eye-opening event? Do we see what we really are, mirrored reflections of opposing and varied gods, or do we narrow our perspective, as with a magnifying glass, to create a false image or idol of the god we want for ourselves - an exclusionary, partisan, and patronizing god?

Furthermore, once we recognize the true diversity at work in our reflection, does this have the power to change or transform us? ... Our mental state of mind, in which humanism, grace, and compassion should prevail, is in need of a god who does not speak two languages when addressing the same issue. We may be able to show tolerance to one another, if and when we encounter a god who helps us collect ourselves, gather the broken shreds, and regain a sound mind. If we fail - or refuse - to see what is at stake our reflection becomes distorted by our faults, mistakes, perverted wishes, and animalistic drives. And when these characteristics are made manifest and mixed with triumphalist zeal, we deceive ourselves and others by using terms like "humane charity" and "political benevolence." The answer then depends on who we are when we look in the mirror. It also depends on who God is in each case.

The State of Israel celebrates its 55th birthday today, May 7th. For the Israelis this is Independence Day. And when they thank their god for this event and reflect on what it means, they expect him to justify what they have done and what they continue to do. For the Palestinians it is a day of mourning, a reminder of all that has been lost. And when they bow down before their god on this day, he whispers words of hope, peace, and renewed strength in light of deeply felt pain and misery.... Can Israelis and Palestinians look each other in the eye and discover within their enemy a god of empathy? Or are they doomed to see there only eyes that express abysmal difference, hatred, and rage? And, if this is the sad case, can we hope for or trust anything that we see in Our Mirrored Reflection?

We shall see. And hopefully we will.

A Letter from Jerusalem: Our Reflections
by Ithamar Gruenwald

from *Sightings*, 5/8/03

(Ithamar Gruenwald lives in Jerusalem and teaches at Tel Aviv University, Israel, at the Department of Jewish Philosophy and the Program in Religious Studies.)

(*Sightings* is an online Listserv from the Martin Marty Center at the University of Chicago Divinity School, which distributes essays that “seek to illuminate and interpret the forces of faith in a pluralist society.” It can be reached at:
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