

Essay

OPENSOURCE IS A VERB

Towards an Understanding of the Dynamics of Peace

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All my life I have been haunted by a vision, the vision of Peace on Earth. I know I share this vision with others. Women who read Marion Zimmer Bradley's book, *Mists of Avalon*, for example; I have to meet a woman who read this book who was not profoundly moved, who did not feel in reading it, that she had come home to paradise. This novel seems to trigger something in the depths of our souls, and we cannot help but respond to it. Indeed, I feel that not just these women, but all people on Earth, whether or not they realize it, remember such an Avalon.

I feel that the vision of Peace on Earth is our collective one. That the soul of each person living on Earth during this critical time has been impressed with at least some vague glimpse of this vision. As we have for 2000 years been searching for the elusive and mysterious Holy Grail, now we have come to a time when its discovery is imperative. Peace is our Holy Grail, and unless we do find peace, we shall cease to exist. Peace is what we long for in our inmost depths. Peace is our universal mandate, Spirit calling *these* souls in *these* bodies now, to transform life on Earth as we suffer through the great rollover into the third millennium, C.E. "We," all of us alive today, "*are* the Peacemakers."

But just what is "peace," this Holy Grail we all seek? I have spent years reaching the following level of understanding.

I was born in December, 1942, only seventeen days after physicists conducted the first successful nuclear fission experiment under a grandstand in Chicago. Nine months later, my father was called overseas to World War II. When but two years and eight months old, sitting in my mother's lap while listening to the radio with her parents and sisters, I experienced the trauma which would set the tone for the next 38 years of my life. Hiroshima. Nagasaki. The Bomb. The vertical line between my eyebrows started then.

As a child, slinking around the neighborhood in abject terror, I was “Chicken Little,” fearing that, at each moment, the sky was about to fall in. Like Cassandra with the Trojans, I learned not to talk about it, lest others think me crazy. While I pretended to play like other children, inside I cowered under a vividly imagined apocalypse, and could not make meaningful plans for the future. As a good Catholic girl, I became obsessed with the Fatima predictions, which I used to justify my fear. By my senior year in high school I had become so utterly convinced that the world would end before I grew up that my father had to force me to apply to college.

As a young adult, just so I could live, I tried valiantly to forget my fear of the Bomb. But fear, having seized me during early childhood, still held me in its grip, a shadowy menace coiled to spring when the time was ripe. Throwing myself into the business of rearing two children, I also completed a doctorate in philosophy and nervously smoked cigarettes.

Then, in December of 1982, when I was 40 years old, the original design of my life abruptly re-activated: I discovered Jonathan Schell's *Fate of the Earth*, as serialized in the New Yorker. I was ecstatic, knowing the time had come for humanity to break loose from the dread which had been held collectively in a state of denial. Reading that series was an initiation for me. I was not alone, and I was not crazy.

Schell's work freed me. No longer did I need to pretend to be happy, while suppressing the eternal nightmare of a blackened, devastated, lifeless planet. I could describe the nightmare to others, and beg them to remember it, to claim it as their own. The apocalypse of my imagination was our apocalypse, inexorably pushing its way out

into external expression. Intuitively, I knew that the key to avoiding the manifestation of this horror was to remember how we were creating it internally in our collective imagination. Once we had claimed it, I thought, we could transform it into peace.

As a result, I dropped everything in my life to become a peace activist, publishing a magazine, *Heartland*, with the aim of networking peace activists in the “Deep West” tri-state region of Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming. At the time, President Reagan, labeling the Soviet Union “the evil empire,” had decided to place the MX missile, the so-called “Peacekeeper,” into Wyoming, where I lived.

Two years later I stopped to pay attention to what I was doing. There were continuous power struggles among the staff of our magazine. *Heartland* and several other activist projects were claiming the same territory, and each pretended the others did not exist. And my talks on the road to small groups often did more to alienate than to convince. I was shocked to realize that my work as a peace activist was actually creating the opposite of what I had intended. I had become a violent peace activist! My righteous, dogmatic, preachy ways were themselves inciting conflict.

First, with great fanfare and trumpets blowing, I had awakened to my calling: to promote Peace on Earth. Now, I had to stop everything and look within. I was not separate from the world I wanted to change. The war outside was the same as my internal one.

I retired from activism, moved into a small yurt in the Grand Tetons, and stared hard into the fire for four months. As winter snows raged outside, scenes from my life danced in the flames. I shuddered to see my own violence as an adult playing out, with tedious regularity. My violence now was the other side of how I had felt as a child, when my sensitivities had been continuously, if inadvertently, violated. I winced to remember my rage as a mother, when one of my sons would scream his own heartbreak. And how both of them had suffered from their parents’ vicious fights, their bitter mutual sarcasm. Day after day, and one by one, my memories, structured to deny what was really happening, were consumed in the flames.

Thus began my work on myself, a search for inner peace. I committed myself to this work wholeheartedly, not knowing how long it would take. For seven long years I read C.G. Jung and Alice Miller, worked with my dreams and my journal. I co-processed with close female friends, to detail the events in our lives, the patterns they reveal. Taking responsibility for my life. Knowing that I had created it, and seeking to discover how, and why. Intuitively, I knew that I could do nothing of value as an activist until this inner work was completed. The Bomb inside me, whose trigger had been set in my childhood, was counting down, and I had to dive inside and disarm it before it detonated.

This work, undertaken in all seriousness, was full of magic and mystery from the outset. I opened the door into the unconscious, walked through and never looked back. Over and over again, the universe instantly mirrored back to me exactly what I had created. Dream, image, thought and action resonated as one, reverberating out to the farthest reaches of the heavens. Invisible currents bathed me, soothed me within a sea of synchronicities, creating an invisible and boundless womb, within which I floated, in reverie. Truly, the universe was Mother, and I her trusting child.

The more real the inner world became, the more it fascinated. I descended deeper and deeper into the underworld, feeling from the inside, the tangled roots of my own upbringing, of our culture, our civilization. In contemplating the forms things had taken, I learned the difference between form and substance. I learned to let go of form and understand substance as humus, fertile food for the soul, which had enveloped my body and seized my mind as its instrument.

I began this inner journey by letting go, surrendering to the unconscious. Outer world concerns were no longer the priority, making room for this fall into a welcome abyss. And in return, the unconscious nourished me, gradually creating a foundation for my living, an interface between my nature and the whole of nature so that I would be strong and yielding, resilient and spacious. I regret not one day of those seven years, and I remain in awe of the miraculous life-giving and healing powers of the unconscious.

In 1989, I began to emerge from my cocoon. My first act was to start a small journal for other women. Five years later, I have once again morphed into a fully committed activist. *Crone Chronicles: A Journal of Conscious Aging* is now an international quarterly with an estimated 10,000 readers. We seek to activate the archetype of the Crone, She whose wisdom and power and compassion are vitally needed now to rebalance energies on Earth.

The Crone re-awakens *through* us, through our voices, voices of women (and men) of all ages who are stripping ourselves of the preoccupation with appearances (including our own bodies' aging processes) to honor deeper values by revealing who we really are. It may be commonplace, but the Truth shall set us free. As each of us speaks his or her Truth, we release energies which have been ignored and vilified and buried for centuries. We ignite, not with the fires of nuclear conflagration but with those of a divine creativity, our access to source. That creative energy is universal, expressing itself in unique ways through each of us. Delighted, we find one another, laugh and cry together, spill our joy, our hope for the future, our devotion, our love. Relishing the diversity among us, we sense the vastness of our unity, our community.

Our twin needs, for individuality and connectedness, are both being nourished — and at the same time! This is paradise! This is the peace we are seeking! This is our Holy Grail! And we know it. It's obvious: "Unity-in-diversity" has become a rallying cry for those who are interested in creating Peace on Earth. And because it appears obvious, we think it will be easy to achieve, and go about proselytizing it with our usual naïve zeal.

On the other hand, however, this phrase, "unity in diversity," embraces a paradox, and is thus difficult for most of us to fully grasp. We sense that this phrase represents a larger way of seeing, a more spacious dimension of being. We feel in our hearts that this paradox — that we are both utterly free and individual and yet intimately connected, breathing as one — is the only real foundation upon which peace can be created and sustained. Intellectually, however, we have trouble understanding it — and therefore acting on it. Why?

Paradox results when our awareness expands to include both poles of a contradiction. Yet from the beginning of our lives we are taught to avoid “contradicting ourselves,” lest we be labeled “irrational” — or worse, “crazy.” While I was a graduate student in philosophy I was amazed to discover the intellectual assumptions which underlay this cultural taboo.

One day, in a required class on “formal logic,” I innocently asked my teacher why we should avoid contradiction. To my amazement, this normally dry, rational professor exploded in disgust and derision, and finally sputtered at me, furious: “Because from a contradiction anything follows, *anything!*”

“Anything! *Anything!*” Somehow, I knew that hidden in the professor’s dramatic response was a clue, a key — but a key to what mystery? All I knew was, I found it fascinating that my question had bothered him so very very much. Now, many years later, I realize that to center oneself between the poles of a contradiction is to experience a sudden opening. We move from left to right brain. Space expands, and the world begins anew.

Most people, when faced with a contradiction, back off. They redefine their terms to avoid it, or seek a new route around it. This is easy in logic, but not so easy in life. There are such things as “living contradictions.” We call them “dilemmas”: two choices, mutually exclusive, both of which seem necessary, and yet their conjunction feels impossible.

Think about what happens when you are faced with a dilemma. Notice the emotion that comes up. The feeling of paralysis, suffocation, frustration. What can you do? There is no way out. There is no way around the situation. All you can do is go through it, on to the other side. But to go through it is to be changed. We step off a cliff into the void and allow ourselves to be stripped and reshaped in a new configuration.

Hegel talked about this process abstractly, with his theory of “thesis, antithesis, synthesis.” And when we live through a dilemma, we find that a new synthesis has occurred, that we have been changed. And it’s not so much that we solved the problem that the dilemma presented; rather, we underwent an alchemical process, churning in

the cauldron of emotional dross until the gold of our new self emerged. The problem was not solved, but dissolved — within a larger space. We ourselves have been enlarged. We have integrated the two into some third thing and in so doing we have transcended the problem altogether. No longer are we emotionally attached. We are free. We can go on.

This is what I mean when I say that “to center oneself within the poles of a contradiction is to experience a sudden opening.” Or, more likely, an eventual opening. If we can stay in the cauldron of our conflicting desires long enough for the alchemy to take hold . . . For the space within to expand . . . For the world to begin anew . . . This work is magic, and not, usually, the province of professors.

I also now understand why my professor was so upset with my question. For we are afraid of this opening, the chaos which ensues when we first contact the vastness which our minds enjoy, when released from the narrow confines of logic. Yet Chaos, in the old saying, is the “Mother of Invention.” We incubate chaos. Chaos is the pregnancy, which at long last delivers the perfectly formed new child.

Fearing the chaos which follows contradiction, professors continue to worship logic, using it to keep themselves contained, channeled into an off/on digital reality. Their left-brained logic is linear, and exclusionary: “If ‘x’ is true, then ‘not x’ is false.” Yet, as our awareness expands, we realize with the great physicist, Neils Bohr, that “The opposite of one great Truth is another great Truth.” Or, as Emerson put it: “Do I contradict myself? Then I contradict myself! I am large. I contain multitudes.”

So what is the Truth of Peace? Consider our unquestioned assumptions about “peace.” At first glance it seems as if the opposite of war is peace. That peace is the absence of war and, likewise, war is the absence of peace. And yet, as I am discovering in my own life, peace of mind is a certain sort of *presence*. Just as “war in the mind” is its own interminable presence, a hell of conflicting desires, a never-ending boiling morass. Either we devour everything in our need to overcome our own pain, to distract ourselves from what hurts so badly, or we deaden ourselves, contract further and further, curling into the fetal position, immobilized.

In contrast to the presence of war, the presence of peace is a sense of fullness, aliveness, of a world pregnant with mystery, energies of all kinds, all of them interconnected. I become present to the river that is my life, including the awareness of currents within myself which run counter to one another. The more aware I become of the various and conflicting parts of myself, the more I give each of them its reality, its own presence, the more each one feels allowed. Energy, pent up from being denied, can express itself; it relaxes, learns to live and let live. To integrate myself, I discover by truly living my life with awareness, is to transcend. Each situation, no matter how difficult, if lived with awareness, dissolves, is surrendered within a larger space.

As a byproduct of my sabbatical from activism, I learned that integration/transcendence is not a static condition, achieved once and for all (the way we tend to think of “heaven” — as “peace”). Self-integration is a dynamic process, a life-long process. It is the way I move through the process which is crucial, rather than identifying with any particular point in it. I move through the process by fully embracing each point along the way, and as I do this, everything dissolves into a larger space. Nothing is wasted; nothing lost. Everything is food for the whole, and the whole gains its meaning as each part, taken in turn, is honored, accepted, dissolves into what is larger. This is what we mean when we talk about “flow.” To be at peace is to flow with life, rather than denying it, judging it, separating from it, or pretending that it is not happening. And when we do find ourselves feeling “stuck,” not flowing for some reason, it is time to ask ourselves, “What am I denying, or separating from? What is a part of me which I do not see?” This is when we *process*, with another woman (or, rarely, a man) or in our dreams, our journals . . . We discover what we are forgetting, and we rejoice, and surrender to this lost part of ourselves, accepting it, embracing it, opening once again, to the flow of life.

So if it is true that the microcosm mirrors the macrocosm, then the peace we are seeking, the integration of humanity, will not be a static condition either, a “place” to be achieved once and for all. Peace must be a dynamic process, a flow, ongoing and never-ending, as we learn, over and over again, to accept even those who seem most opposite to ourselves. Always, what seems outside, is also inside. We learn to accept the

other within the self and as we do we expand, creating a spacious new world wherein all together we weave the glorious colors of our magnificent diversity into the breathtaking rainbow of our common humanity — and beyond.

Space opens to include all creatures, great and small, all worlds, whether of this earth, this galaxy, this and any other universe.

To create peace is to continuously OpenSpace.