

IS PEACE IMPOSSIBLE?
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PROSE - BY ANDREW OLENDZKI

In a remarkable passage in the Attadanda Sutra, the Buddha speaks frankly about his fear and dismay over the state of society:

Fear is born from arming oneself.
Just see how many people fight!
I'll tell you about the dreadful fear
That caused me to shake all over.
Seeing creatures flop around
Like fishes in shallow water,
So hostile to one another!
Seeing this, I became afraid.

Here the Buddha acknowledged his despair, but then he also describes his breakthrough to a deeper understanding.

Seeing people locked in conflict
I became completely distraught.
But then I discovered a thorn, hard to see,
Lodged deep in the heart.
It's only when pierced by this thorn
That one runs on all directions.
So if that thorn is taken out -
One does not run, and settles down.

The Buddha suggests that society reflects the qualities of heart and mind of each person. Peace in people's hearts creates peace in the world; turmoil in people's hearts creates turmoil in the world. The harmful behavior people manifest in the world can be seen as having a single cause. That cause is desire.

Desire comes in two forms: attachment and aversion. The first makes us grab after things we like and hold onto them. The second makes us resist or attack the things we don't like. Attachment leads us to consume resources at any cost. Aversion compels us to destroy what we fear and do not understand.

But these thorns in the heart can be removed... The Buddha was a healer and his prescription was simply to apply massive doses of awareness to the problem. Because the workings of desire are hidden in the unconscious functioning of the mind, we must bring greater consciousness to bear on the moment. We have only to see things clearly, and a natural process of healing will occur.

A FABLE (anonymous)

An old grandfather, whose grandson came to him with anger at a schoolmate who had done him an injustice said to the youngster,

"Let me tell you a story. I, too, at times, have felt a great deal of hate for those that have taken so much, with no sorrow or regret for what they do. But hate wears you down, and does not hurt your enemy. It is like taking poison and wishing your enemy would die. I have struggled with these feelings many times."

He continued, "It is as if there are two wolves inside me; one is good and does no harm. He lives in harmony with all around him and does not take offense when no offense was intended. He will only fight when it is right to do so, and in the right way."

"But the other wolf, ah! He is full of anger. The littlest thing will set him into a fit of temper. He fights everyone, all the time, for the least of reasons. He cannot think because his anger and hate are so great. It

is hard to live with these two wolves inside me, for both of them try to command my spirit."

The boy looked intently into his Grandfather's eyes. "Which one wins, Grandfather? Which is the strongest?"

"The one I feed," the old man replied.

POETRY - THEY ARE HOSTILE NATIONS (Margaret Atwood)

In view of the fading animals
The proliferation of sewers and fears,
The sea clogging, the air nearing extinction,
We should be kind, we should take warning,
We should forgive each other.
Instead, we are opposite,
We touch as though attacking,
The gifts we bring even in good faith
Maybe warp in our hands to implements, to maneuvers.
Put down the target of me
You guard inside your binoculars,
In turn I will surrender this aerial photograph
(your vulnerable sections marked in red)
I have found so useful.
See, we are alone in the dormant field,
The snow that cannot be eaten or captured.
Here there are no armies,
Here there is no money.

It is cold and getting colder.

We need each others' breathing, warmth.

Surviving is the only war we can afford...

** REFLECTIONS **

A part of me wishes to apologize at the outset for what some may consider a violation of the spirit of Mother's Day. I suspect that most Americans prefer a Mother's Day of unsullied sweetness and light, where no hint of sadness or sobriety is permitted to intrude.

Under different circumstances, I might have prepared a different worship service - one that simply celebrates the women who have nurtured us physically and emotionally. This year, however, I think it's important to remember that our nation is, as the President has repeatedly emphasized, "at war." 140,000 of America's sons and daughters remain at risk in Iraq, and war with Iran remains a possibility. American lives are being lost weekly in the Middle East and millions of Iraqis continue to suffer from the vast disruption of life that our unprovoked, preemptive attack has caused.

Our Unitarian forebear, **Julie Ward Howe**, established Mother's Day because there simply was no public opportunity to highlight the futility of war and to underscore the necessity of peace. The intent of Memorial Day later this month is to honor those who gave their lives for liberty or some other "high and noble cause." On this and other patriotic holidays every effort is made to prove that those who died did not die in vain. The complaint that war is as wasteful as it is distasteful is seldom heard.

In establishing Mother's Day, **Julia Ward Howe** had another ambition -- to inculcate a culture of peace, so that future generations might be spared the observance of Memorial Day.

Although nearly a century has passed since **Howe's** death, the transformation of human culture and the human character remains incomplete. Progress has been made, of course. Nonviolent regime changes have taken place across the old Soviet Empire - in Poland, Russia, Czechoslovakia, Romania. South Africa, Argentina and Chile deposed authoritarian rulers with minimal bloodshed. The number of stable democracies has steadily increased since World War II, and diplomacy settles more disputes than ever before.

Furthermore, our own invasion and occupation of Iraq has been greeted with near-universal disapproval, since it violates every accepted tenet of just war theory. And for all the ongoing complaints about the **United Nations**, it does provide a forum where all countries have a voice, where an international conversation can take place and armed conflict thereby averted. The peace-making potential of the UN and similar agencies is tremendous, and would be more fully realized but for the stubborn opposition of our own government. Still, from time to time we do catch a glimpse of a world beyond war.

But a tremendous amount of work remains to be done. 105 million people died in the wars of the 20th century - nearly 60% of them civilians. **John Gray** notes that since 1950 the human race has experienced almost 20 genocides, with three of them each claiming over a million lives. Today yet another genocide is underway in Darfur, where humanitarian intervention has been stymied by a few self-interested parties.

Some facts and statistics are downright discouraging. For every dollar spent by the U.N. for peace-keeping, the world spends \$2000 for war-keeping. The biggest culprit in the latter respect is the United States, whose military budget equals that of all other nations of the world combined, and whose corporations supply almost half the world's total supply of armaments - its tanks, planes, missiles, land mines and small arms.

Although outspoken mothers like **Cindy Sheehan** and grassroots movements like **Code Pink and Mothers for Peace** have gained stature and influence of late, ours remains a war culture - a culture still convinced of the legitimacy of violence and unwilling to take a hard, honest look at the ultimate cost of its bellicose propensities.

Despite widespread displeasure with the Iraq war, surveys taken within the last few years show little dampening of enthusiasm for militarism in general. A Harvard Institute of Politics poll taken in 2002 showed hawks outnumbering doves in the U.S. two-to-one. In 2002, three-quarters of those surveyed said they had "quite a lot" or a "great deal" of confidence in the military - a rate of approval far surpassing any other social institution, including faith communities. To be sure, Americans admire the armed forces for certain virtues they seek to inculcate -- honor, discipline, the spirit of sacrifice, loyalty. But other factors also affect our attitudes.

There is, in the first place, the ethos of "positive violence" which Americans overwhelmingly support. Power, as **Jonathan Schell** observes, is equated in our culture with force, with physical coercion. "If you don't apply force you lose, and to shun force is to abdicate." Despite the fact that force didn't ultimately work for the British in India, didn't work for the apartheid regime of South Africa, didn't work for the United States in Vietnam or Iraq, didn't work for **Sheriff Bull Connor** in Selma the culture continues to believe, **Abe Lincoln** notwithstanding, that "might makes right."

Most Americans prefer to believe that the force we apply, the violence we inflict, is always benign - always for a good cause or done with God's blessing. Not long ago the neoconservative commentator **Max Boot** wrote a book entitled *The Savage Wars of Peace*. In it he depicted America's many colonial invasions and interventions as liberating and civilizing. Imperialistic, yes, but these "little wars" ultimately benefited conquerors and the conquered alike, **Boot** maintained. The White House uses the same logic with respect to Iraq.

Furthermore, most people still equate the highest level of heroism with combat and killing. Military exploits fill the pages of our history books; our most sought-after entertainments feature "action heroes" brutally killing and successfully overcoming dark, diabolical forces. From the time of Homer, **David Appelbaum** says, "it has been assumed that heroes must meet force with force." Despite a clear tilt in the New Testament gospels toward peace, the hero as "peacemaker" hasn't caught on. Even when the work of men like Gandhi or Martin Luther King is lifted up, it is typically with a disclaimer: "Yeah...but non-violent resistance couldn't have stopped Hitler". Genuine heroes are tough-minded, realistic and aren't squeamish about shedding blood. **Teddy Roosevelt's** conviction that "the battlefield is the best testing ground for the iron qualities that must go with true manhood," is still shared by many people, and until that attitude changes, the "habit" of war will not be broken.

And people's religious attitudes will also need to shift. At the present time America's dominant form of religion -- conservative Christianity - helps sustain the ethos of "positive violence" by preaching a message of moral dualism. The planet is seen as a field of combat between the forces of good and the forces of evil, and this simplistic formula has found its way into our political rhetoric. Ronald Reagan's "Evil Empire" and George W.

Bush's "Axis of Evil" betray the influence of an increasingly combative and paranoid conservative Christianity.

Since the mid-seventies, as **Philip Jenkin's** points out, Americans have been increasingly willing to characterize the opposition as "evil," to attribute Satanic influence to those who do not share our own perspective. This increases the likelihood of war and violence because you don't negotiate, or seek accommodation with the devil. The point is to destroy evil, root and branch, with God's blessing.

Support for war and the ethos of positive violence continues also because we willfully ignore the staggering costs and consequences -- the horrible toll war takes whenever and wherever it is waged. "It is a crude instrument," Harvard's **Stephen Walt** observes, "and almost always has effects you can't anticipate."

Those who have felt the effects of war seldom champion it. **Winston Churchill**, one of George W. Bush's declared heroes, was already sick of war by 1909 when he wrote to his wife: "I feel more deeply every year what a vile and wicked folly and barbarism it all is." As one recent biographer has observed,

Churchill did not think that war should ever be undertaken lightly, least of all preventively; he never advocated it, even against Hitler, until there was truly no other choice when all else had failed.

Fifteen years after the conclusion of the Civil War one of its greatest generals, **William Tecumsah Sherman**, famously told a young audience, hungry for glory: "When you come right down to the practical realities, boys, war is all hell."

Rudyard Kipling was a warm supporter of Britain's wars of conquest until his own son was killed in the gruesome and wasteful First World War. It was only then that he composed the couplet printed at the top of your Order of Service ("If any question why we died/ Tell them, because our fathers lied").

These are not comments a gun-toting culture and a war-dependent economy wants to consider. Ignorance is perhaps the most potent enabler of war - ignorance and deceit. During the first Gulf War, a **Pentagon official** was asked to justify the censorship of news footage from Kuwait and Iraq. With remarkable candor he replied, "If we let people see that kind of thing, there would never again be any

war." But how can the culture be changed if people are not allowed to hear and see the truth?

Dalton Trumbo, a talented screenwriter whose career was ruined by McCarthyism, once wrote a novel about a soldier who was found on the battlefield, barely alive. He has lost both his arms and legs and was blind and deaf. Really little more than a beating heart and a brain, this "Abeing" was retrieved and brought to a hospital. All he can do is think: about his past, his small town, his girlfriend, the mayor sending him off with great fanfare to fight for democracy and liberty.

Eventually, this horribly disfigured man devises a way to communicate with an alert and sensitive nurse using Morse code. Shortly thereafter he is visited by some military personnel who want to give him a medal. Through the nurse they ask him, "What do you want?"

The soldier thinks to himself, *What do I want?* He taps out a response. The military, society can never give him back his arms, his legs, his hearing, or his sight. So he asks them to bring him into schoolhouses, churches, - wherever young people and children are gathered. He says, "Point to me and say, 'This is war.'"

The response of the military brass is simple and predictable: "We can't do that. It's beyond regulations." They want him to be forgotten.

The lesson that **Dalton Trumbo's** story attempts to teach, that "wars are good for destroying things that must be destroyed but useless for doing anything more," is hard to swallow. More than a few servicemen have come back from Iraq in similar condition and they, too, have been rendered invisible. All wars are dehumanizing, normal standards of conduct and morality are always abrogated and even so-called "just" wars are fraught with moral ambiguity. "In the world of war perversion may become moral, guilt may be honor and gunning down unarmed people...defined as heroic," **Chris Hedges** writes.

Nevertheless, we continue to believe that wars can be "good," that they do "make sense" and are a viable alternative to diplomacy. Our faith in "positive violence" remains unaltered.

When assessing its value, the indirect costs of war must also be taken into consideration. For a small fraction of the funds that are used to prepare for and make war, practically all the environmental and health-related problems our planet faces could be addressed. Were this ethos of "positive violence" to be retired, far more

critical campaigns against poverty, disease, global warming, water and energy shortages could be undertaken.

Just the other day I received information that **Dane County** childcare providers are facing a million dollars in lost revenue due to cuts in the Wisconsin Shares program. This will deny childcare to many low income working families and affect the viability of some centers. Like so many other cuts in human services, this reflects the social costs of exorbitant military spending. The more we spend on instruments of death the less there is available to support life.

Shortly before America's entry into World War II, **Aldo Leopold** commented that the nations of the world had devoted themselves to competing for resources rather than toward creating that better life for everybody. Despite our advances in science and technology, the ancestral, predatory order still holds sway, **Leopold** complained.

So can that old order be altered? Will we wake up in time to realize that without a radical reallocation of resources the ecology and many human communities are likely to be irreparable damaged?

I am neither a fatalist nor a biological determinist. The conditions that produce human violence - poverty, religious and ideological fervor, territoriality, fear of scarcity, scapegoating - can be compensated for. "Human aggressiveness is a harsh product of an evolutionary morality that revels in the short-term victory of one's own community without regard for the greater good," primate specialist **Richard Wrangham** writes.

But **Wrangham** doesn't believe that pattern of behavior is unalterable. We are capable of adapting to new realities and formulating new objectives. Human beings are not just competitive; ours is also a highly collaborative species, and that more agreeable side of our nature needs to be vigorously cultivated.

These words by Wendell Berry provide a nice summation:

We can no longer afford to confuse
peaceability with passivity.
Authentic peace is no more passive than war.
Like war, it calls for discipline and intelligence
And strength of character,
Though it also calls for higher principles and aims.
If we are serious about peace
Then we must work for it as
Ardently, seriously, continuously
Carefully and bravely

As we now prepare for war.