

## Thoughts on “The Lie That War Brings Peace”

by *Wendy Woods*

Discussions at our last meal with a theme arose following our reading of two essays: “Quaker Peace Testimony in Times of Terrorism” by Robert Griswold and “Friends’ Struggles Through the Years” by Ron Mock. The idea that resonated for me, after reading the essays and discussing them at our meal, was a lie -- one we have been taught to tell each other, and ourselves – the lie that war brings peace.

Both Griswold and Mock had provided examples of this lie in their writings. In our discussions, we also brought up several moral imperatives and the clear evidence that war and violent or inhumane acts have failed to resolve them. Our examples included:

- (1) WW1’s and WW2’s failure to resolve the imperialism, militarism, nationalism, treaty failure and acts of violence that gave rise to those wars;
- (2) capital punishment in response to murder;
- (3) mass incarceration of non-whites and of people suffering from mental illness;
- (4) abortion and the criminalization of abortion;
- (5) the erroneous and nationalist assumption that ‘the winners’ of wars determine the well-being of those who survive them (someone cited to a recent opinion piece regarding the significance of Cinco De Mayo (<https://www.pressdemocrat.com/opinion/9563816-181/von-drehle-cinco-de-mayos?sba=AAS>)),
- (6) the use of violence by police as being necessary to overcome crime,
- (7) humanity’s reliance on guns for protection of rights and property,
- (8) religious writings and texts used as a justification for violence,
- (9) the idea that resolution of society’s problems can be achieved through violence and/or inhumane means -- in other words: might makes right.

Our discussion eventually turned to the question of whether, if given the opportunity to murder a leader such as Adolph Hitler, we would take advantage of it (“Bonhoeffer’s Dilemma,” according to Ron Mock). As individuals and as a group, we wondered aloud whether we would, by murdering someone like Hitler, destroy our own integrity in the process. Eventually this line of inquiry led us to an acknowledgment that many religious people see death as an opportunity to return to the Creator and life as an opportunity to glorify the Creator. We asked each other whether these prevalent religious beliefs beg the question: ‘What could we lose by murdering someone like Hitler, someone who was using his or her authority over others to carry out attempted genocide?’ And then came the

responsive question: But where would even that sort of murder leave those of us (religious or not) who perceive violence and inhumanity of any kind as actions that ultimately lead only to more violence and inhumanity? Through our discussions, we climbed the mountain of human perceptions around life, death and religious beliefs and found it to be a slippery slope.

Despite the challenges of our discussions, and more than likely because of them, I came away with a more personal array of questions that actively inspire and tug away at my conscience today:

- How do I, personally, respond with loving resistance to the awareness of the pervasive lie in our culture that war, violence and inhumanity have the ability to bring about peace?
- Is the human tendency toward violence and war so deeply embedded in human DNA that non-violent, healing acts of love will never take the place of that tendency?
- Is the replacement of acts of violence/inhumanity with healing acts of love a moral imperative – one necessary for the survival of our species?
- Can I live the life of a peacemaker while also providing for my own food, shelter, healthcare, rest, recreation and transportation? How much of my own comfort am I willing and able to sacrifice in order to model the values of Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community and Equality (SPICE) such that they might make a difference?

As I bring these questions into focus, I am grateful for this group of people who embrace them with me. However, the words we use in conversation and in essays, while useful in their ways, still leave me yearning for actual movement forward. Out of this frustration comes – what? – at this point, a few more words.

Words –

Waterfalls of words

Over jagged rock walls.

Narratives splashing amid hard facts,

The artful articulations of information,

Its mist rising, touching our faces,

Blessing us with a sense of purpose.

Darwinism, capitalism, egoism, terrorism – the endless ‘isms’,

trumpeting downward,

a fearful flow,

into a pool of competition.

Sink or swim, how do our stories go?

Action –

A molten lava flow  
over shifting tectonic plates,  
a mass extinction event fully underway.  
No illusions to save us now.  
Beyond imagination, the sadness mounts,  
our tears evaporating with the heat.  
In darkness, our grieving eyes open.  
And now the sky it lightens – black, violet, blue.  
Clear waters flow again, summoning anew:  
a harmony of voices,  
the steady beat of gentle drumming,  
a new way of being born –  
at last, the second coming.