
Global Peace Services USA

...an idea whose time has come

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An Islamic Perspective on Peace

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“But Allah doth call to the home of peace: He doth guide whom He pleaseth to a way that is straight.”(Quran, 10:25)

The very word Islam means peace and submission. These two concepts however are related, for the inner peace is attainable only if one is willing to submit to Divine laws. The human in Islam is not born sinful but forgetful and it is this forgetfulness of God that underlines sinfulness and inner turmoil. Rebellion against God is rebellion against peace and one who is not in peace will not be a peacemaker. From an Islamic point of view, peace is not absence of war but is a spiritual presence, one that perme-

ates every facet of life and thought by making peace possible in the external world though making peace possible within one's self.

The term jihad, which is generally understood in the West as “holy war,” in Arabic means exerting oneself or striving. According to a famous saying of the Prophet Muhammad, there are two types of jihad, a lesser and a greater jihad. The lesser jihad is a Muslim's duty to defend his faith and land if or when hostility is initiated against it; but the greater jihad the Prophet defined as the war one wages against one's own worldly desires and an attempt to purify one's inner

self. It is by overcoming one's desires that a person is able to create inner and outer peace.

Among the ninety-nine names of God, a great number of them such as al-Rahman (compassion), al-Rahim (mercy), And al-Hubb (love) are closely affiliated with peacemaking qualities. The Quran is explicit regarding peace and harmony and

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On March 27th, Global Peace Services USA sponsored a Convocation in Washington, D.C. Over 80 people attended "Building Blocks for Peace Service" at Trinity College. We are encouraged by the positive responses of so many people and are determined more than ever to make the idea whose time has come into a reality. Together we'll make it happen!

This edition of the newsletter brings you some highlights from our day together. Our next newsletter will bring more highlights.

Dr. Mehdi Aminrazavi addresses the GPS-sponsored Convocation "Building Blocks for Peace Service" as Sr. Mary Evelyn Jegen, Board member, listens.

Education and Training Gleanings

by Harry Yéide

The stimulus for two very lively discussions at our March Convocation was provided by James McCann, SJ, and Kristen Barker. They explained the evolution of peace studies at Xavier University, Cincinnati, as it has moved in the direction of peace service learning; they gave special attention to the highly interdisciplinary capstone course that has recently been developed. While the dialogue moved in many directions, a number of themes were woven into the conversation several times.

One was, of course, the already mentioned movement from peace studies to peace service learning. Both the prevailing philosophy of the Jesuit institution and growing pedagogical insight suggest the need to join knowledge, reflection and action in constant interplay with one another. And if one sees university-level education as a preparation for career choice, it seems all the more vital to include some practical experience that will aid and inspire students to make those important choices.

Discussion often clustered around the phrase “service learning” as a desirable new

emphasis in education generally, and as a mode of learning that does not always work out well. Sometimes it seems to fail because the non-classroom experience is neither eye opening nor challenging. Sometimes it seems to fail for want of meaningful reflection; schools sometimes think they have done enough once they have allowed students to earn credit in other settings. Another issue that emerged regarding service learning was to make sure that spirituality was not ignored. Special value was attached to programs that occur in other cultures.

Many comments reflected the widespread belief that changes in our environment require changes in our pedagogy. The old idea of transferring important inherited knowledge to the next generation is not equal to the task of preparing persons for life in the information age. Education is now increasingly seen as “community formation” in the midst of the flood of information. A special plea was made to create space for the arts; they often seem buried under the mass of information that fills

our lives.

Special attention was given several times to storytelling as a particularly powerful and needed pedagogical mode. This was related not only to education as community formation, but to our capacity to exercise our imaginations in ways that free us to work for a different future.

We also reflected on how living arrangements influence what students learn. The University of Wisconsin was mentioned and praised for making it relatively easy for students to live in co-op settings. While partly driven by economic concerns, it was also being stimulated by the desire of students to live with others who shared their interests.

Our conversation was pretty much confined to the college and university setting, certainly more than enough to make our time meaningful. But education for peace service also occurs in the pre- and post-university years. Another conference might pay more attention to these other phases in education for peace services, and the way in which all phases relate to one another. ■

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Dealing with Conflict Creatively

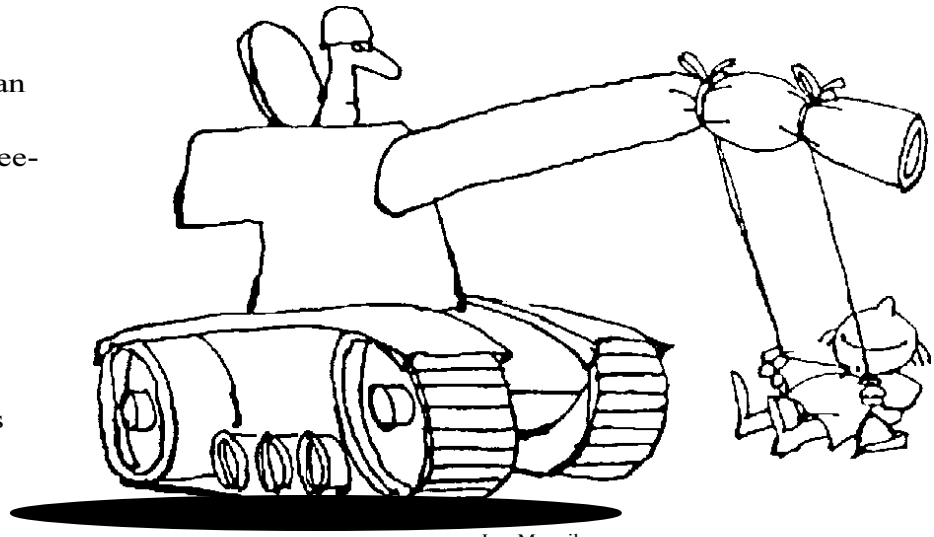
by Sr. Mary Evelyn Jegen

In her workshop on dealing with conflict, Deborah Jordan began by telling us that a conflict is basically a disagreement that calls for careful handling, and that we can learn to deal with conflict well. She led the group, which had a very wide age range, through a series of exercises and then helped us draw lessons from each.

In one exercise partners had three minutes each to share experiences of conflict from their childhood. We were asked to practice careful listening as well as clear explanation. Deborah explained that the messages we received about conflict in childhood can greatly affect our later style in dealing with disagreements. Sharing our experiences with one other person clarified this significantly.

In another exercise we were divided into two groups representing two different imaginary cultures, the Rebas and the Amblers. Each group was given a printed description of its culture traits. After studying and discussing our traits among ourselves, we were sent to interact with each other. Then the conflicts began!

Rebas found it extremely difficult to make contact with Amblers, who in turn found



Lee Munnik

the Rebas' behavior deeply offensive. After a mutually frustrating effort at getting together we laid aside our roles and reflected on our experience, with Deborah's help.

We recognized that Rebas saw the Amblers as unfriendly, while the Amblers saw themselves as reserved and polite; Amblers saw Rebas as "pushy" and invading their space, while the Rebas saw

themselves as friendly, sociable and outgoing, and so on down a list of perceived behaviors. This exercise, which was more fun for the Rebas than the Amblers, helped us appreciate how important it is to understand cultural differences, and also differing perceptions of these differences. We learned to ask constructive questions of others and ourselves. We also experienced a high quality of intergenerational sharing. ■

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Gleanings from Case Studies in Field Work

by Mindy Reiser

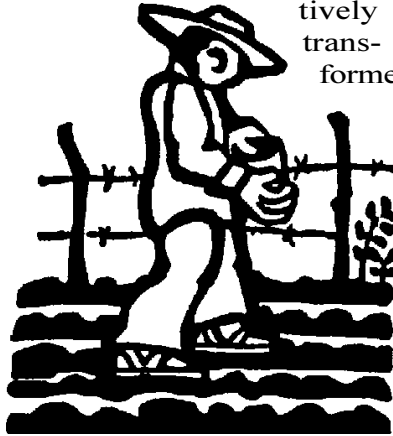
Participants in the workshop on Case Studies in Field Work brought their own rich experiences in peace-building to the gathering. They had been involved in a diverse array of activities spanning the globe in such areas as conflict resolution in schools, anti-weapons activism in the United States, supporting the building of a library in Haiti, a peace walk in the former Soviet Union, and participation in a mission to Chiapas, Mexico.

David Zarembka, who is leading the Africa Great Lakes Initiative of the Friends Peace Team Project, reminded participants of the lasting legacy of war. He pointed to the continuing impact of the U.S. Civil War on American society as illustrative of the continuing reverberations of war through the decades and across generations.

David noted the creativity of the many grassroots peace-building efforts on the ground in Burundi in the aftermath of the devastating ethnic strife in this country. He underscored the importance of locally organized initiatives which integrate peace-building into the very fabric of everyday life. The Peace Primary School in Gitega, Burundi, bringing students, teachers and parents of Tutsi, Hutu and Twa backgrounds together to explore their shared heritages and build a new Burundian identity; and community-organized soccer games between soldiers and villagers of different ethnic groups exemplified these community-building efforts.

Through such projects as rebuilding devastated homes, running a restaurant (whose very name means peace) which serves as a meeting place for communities formerly in conflict, presenting peace-building workshops across the country, Burundians are directly demonstrating their commitment to peace-building and laying the groundwork for a common future.

Burundians working for peace imaginatively transformed



threats to their initiatives into opportunities for dialogue with new audiences — even redefining arrest by the military into a time for discussion with their captors of Burundian needs for peace-building.

Michael Beer, Director of Nonviolence International, spoke about his direct experience in Kosovo in June 1998, supporting the Albanian Kosovar nonviolence movement. Through “nonviolent war games,” Michael explored with the Albanian Kosovars conflicts handled violently and nonviolently and the long-term consequences of

violent and nonviolent choices. From 1989-1998 there were some successes in bridging the divides between the Serbian and Albanian Kosovar communities. But a number of factors — chaos in Albania, the killing of a large number of members of a particular ethnic clan, the flow of weapons into the region — helped precipitate a movement to violence on the part of the Kosovar Albanians.

Michael stressed the need for a variety of interventions in situations of sustained conflict. He called for many “micro-interventions” rather than one large intervention. He underlined the importance for those involved in peace-building work to have a variety of perspectives and approaches, and to have a specific mission. Involvement in particular, concrete activities would enable individuals and organizations to gain trust and learn more about the history and roots of the conflict they were addressing. The issue of whose agenda is to be addressed in transforming conflict situations was a central one. Interveners from “outside” may well bring values, priorities and choices quite different from those of people living within the communities in conflict.

A further challenge to peacemakers and peace-builders lies in addressing the dominant parties in conflict situations. How are the stories of those perceived as oppressors to be heard? How are those who were involved in various forms of oppression to participate in the peace-building process?

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Visions of Peace in Judaism

Opening reflection from March Convocation by Mindy Reiser

Shabbat Shalom, Sabbath Greetings. We are gathered here today, Saturday, on a day of special significance to Jews. In Jewish tradition, the Sabbath is seen as a taste, an anticipation of a world at peace and in harmony. Sabbath serves as inspiration and a catalyst to bringing such a world into being.

An important Sabbath tradition, followed across the Jewish world, is the study of Jewish texts. Many of these teachings, studied and pondered on Shabbat, reflect on peace and the ways to nurture it and nourish it within a Jewish family, within a Jewish community, within a larger world.

Rabbi Simeon used to say: “Note how different from the ways of God are the ways of men. When a human king goes to war, he goes with multitudes and legions, but when he goes on a peaceful mission, he goes alone. Not so the Holy One, Blessed Be He. When He goes on a mission of peace, He goes forth with multitudes and legions.”

But how does a human being, how do humankind, reach the point where the numbers of those involved in peace missions equal and surpass the numbers of those involved in war missions? The rabbis provided some guidance. The art of engendering compromise, showing others ways to cooperate to bring about the desired ends for all, is an approach commended by the great Jewish teachers:

We have been taught, “Justice, Justice shalt thou follow.”

One mention of justice refers to decisions based on strict law, the other to compromises. How are compromises worked out? Say two boats sailing in the same direction meet at a narrow channel of a river. If both attempt to pass side by side, both will sink; but if one is willing to proceed behind the other, both can sail safely.

The mediator, the bringer of those in opposition together, is a revered figure in Jewish tradition. The Talmud teaches: “There were two men who were incited by Satan; so that every Sabbath eve, as the sun was about to set, they fell to quarreling. Rabbi Meir happened to visit them, and for three Sabbaths he stopped them from quarreling until peace was made between them. Then Rabbi Meir heard Satan wailing: Woe! Rabbi Meir has put me out of my home.”

The tradition recognized that if left to fester, anger builds to the kind of fever pitch that can wreck a world. Rabbi Huna said: “Strife is like an opening made in a dam, which widens as the water passes through it.”

The rabbis recognized that it is in a person’s everyday world — the family, friends and acquaintances, business associates and all those encountered in the daily rounds of life — that an individual is called upon to help create a peaceable kingdom. The great sage Hillel taught: “Be of the disciples of Aaron, who loves

peace and pursues justice, who loves all creatures and brings them nearer to the Torah.”

Aaron, the high priest and brother of Moses, is depicted in the Jewish tradition as a man who concerned himself with bringing his fellow beings closer to each other ... and, thereby, closer to God.

The classic rendition of Aaron’s peacemaking gifts is set forth in the following story:

If two men had quarreled Aaron went and sat near one and said, “See what your neighbor says: he is tearing his heart and rending his garments and saying, ‘Woe is me, how shall I lift up my eyes and look at my neighbor, I am ashamed because of him, for I have sinned against him.’” And he sat with him till he had removed hatred from his heart. Then he went and did the same thing to the other man. So when these two men met, they embraced and kissed each other.

The tradition calls upon Jews to take an active role in setting the world aright. Rabbi Simon ben Elazar said; “If a man sits in his place and keeps silent, how can he pursue peace in Israel between man and man? But let him leave his place and roam in the world, and pursue peace in Israel...”

So one moves from one’s intimate world to the broader horizon in working for *tikkun olam* — the mending of a torn world — and then back again to one’s private spaces of hearth and home where peace-building and peacemaking are tasks ever-present, ongoing. ■

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Issues and concerns raised by workshop participants included:

- ▶ The impetus to violence provided by the availability of weapons from a variety of supply sources flowing into regions of conflict;
- ▶ The importance of developing early-warning systems on conflicts, linking this to activities that individual/groups could undertake to address the situation;
- ▶ Individual contributions to peacemaking and peace-building in a context of severe violence and stereotyping (the Iranian revolution, for example);
- ▶ The determination of "who gets to sit at the peace table" — which groups are and are not represented; the impact of these choices on the peace process;
- ▶ The significance of being remembered for those who have been victimized; the energy and recommitment that comes to those engaged in peace-building from witnessing the process of rebuilding a ravaged world;
- ▶ Developing a history curriculum for students that goes beyond tales of war to integrate the stories of those who have made choices for peace-making and peace-building.

David Zarembka reminded workshop participants that the process of peace-building in the Great Lakes regions of Africa and across the world called for many diverse incremental contributions. As Swahili tradition teaches, "haba na haba, hujaza kibaba: drop by drop fills the bucket." ■

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makes numerous references to peace (sulh) such as: "The recompense of an inquiry is not an injury the like thereof; but whoever forgives and thereby brings about a reestablishment of harmony, his reward is with God; and God loves not the wrongdoers." (Quran 42:40)

It is said that a man who could not live in peace with his neighbors goes to a wise imam and asks for guidance. The imam asks "When you accused your neighbors of ill will, did you point your index finger at them?" "Yes," said the man. "When your index finger was pointed at them, did you see towards whom your other three fingers were aimed at?" "No," said the man with surprise, "They were aimed at myself." The imam smiled and said, "If at every conflict we could see the three fingers that are aimed at ourselves, there would be peace on earth." ■

WHAT WE CAN'T DO ALONE WE CAN DO TOGETHER!

There are many ways to multiply our efforts, consider:

- ☑ *Making a financial contribution to GPS-USA*
 - ☑ *Becoming a Partner on one of the Working Groups*
 - ☑ *Praying for worldwide openness to the ideas and actions of GPS*
 - ☑ *Helping establish a staffed national office*
 - ☑ *Sending us names and addresses of potential new members*
 - ☑ *Inviting your organization to become a GPS Associate or Partner*
 - ☑ *Sending us your ideas for the growth of GPS-USA*
 - ☑ *Distributing the GPS brochure or newsletters at your place of worship.*
- All of our contact information is on page 2.*

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