

Plenary Address

“Centered Enough for Peacemaking?”

Helen Horn

NOTE: This is the text of the 2008 LEYM Plenary as originally written, including three poems. Helen Horn abridged her talk somewhat when she delivered it, to keep it to an hour's time.

In the June 2008 issue of *Friends Journal*, Steve Chase has an article called “The Power of Fearful Faithfulness.” He tells us that Martin Luther King’s memoir about the Montgomery bus boycott admits he was nervous about the radical act of mounting a boycott of all city buses. (This was in the week following Rosa Parks’ arrest for refusing to sit in the back of a bus just because she was a woman of color.) Of course King knew well from his seminary studies the call of the biblical prophets to seek justice. But King and other doubtful pastors were acting like scared little boys until they were apparently shamed into joining this bus boycott by an experienced civil rights and labor activist named E.D. Nixon. He challenged Montgomery’s African-American ministers to stand up like grown men to resist segregation. Because Nixon stung his pride, King agreed to join. Not exactly the motivation we would expect of that great man of faith and action. However, his year of involvement with 42,000 working class black people, doing without bus transport until the city government caved in and changed its policy, convinced King of the power of non-violent direct action. He also realized his own power, in spite of being imper-fect among imperfect people, to inspire faithfulness for a noble cause.

Steve Chase writes that, like King, we don’t have to “attain perfect spiritual wisdom or confidence before we become active, we just have to get started right here, right now – even if we still feel fearful, ambivalent, or doubtful.” He challenges those who think we must cultivate a deep inner state of peacefulness and spiritual maturity before we truly can help bring peace and justice to others. His conviction seems to me a good foil for tonight’s exploration of our inner lives as Quakers who want to be fruitfully and sustainably engaged in peacemaking, caring for the Earth, working for justice, and trying to love each other and ourselves.

I have interviewed a dozen people, many Quakers, to get perspective on my own experience as a peacemaker. I'd like to begin by sharing anonymously about four of these folks in the midst of actions they felt led to do. Keep your antennae up for indications of their inner states. Are they centered? Any doubts? Any fearfulness?

An earthcaring friend of mine who is an Obama supporter – we'll call her Rebecca – was concerned to hear him on the news, promising Ohio primary voters more jobs in the coal industry since, he indicated, cleaner coal technology makes it a viable transition energy source until other alternatives are perfected. How could she help educate this gifted candidate of hers about the urgency of reducing carbon emissions long before the 2050 date he has set for an 80% reduction?

An Obama rally was scheduled at a nearby college. In the question period she could raise the issue of whether coal technology is really clean, but she didn't want to show him up in ways that might hurt his candidacy. It came to her that she could go up to him afterwards and give him the book called *Heat* she had recently read. It gives clear cost/benefit analyses of alternative energy sources, like wind, solar, and biofuel, in the face of global warming.

My friend managed to do this after the rally, and also to question, on a blank page inside the book, Barack's side-stepping of single payer health care and gay marriage. She felt right about making her critical comments and giving Barack her book. She admitted to me, though, that it did feel uncomfortable, bucking the tide of enthusiasm in that crowd. She was relieved when a picture appeared in the local newspaper of her looking friendly, not harsh, as she talked with Barack.

* * *

The parent of a seven-year-old – her first child – told me about a confrontation she had with him in an office supply store recently. We'll call her Monica. His attention was drawn by a bright blue strongbox with a key. What a cool way to keep his special stuff safe! Only he would have the key. It cost \$10.67, though. His mom would think that was way too much when he showed the box to her. He pulled the price tag off and stuck it on the side of a shelf, then tugged her over to look at his find. Monica pointed out that he already had a box with a cover for his special treasures. "But that isn't really private," he argued. "Anybody could get into it. This one you can lock up and hide the key."

“Your dad and I are trying not to buy stuff our family doesn’t really need,” she said. “There are so many people that don’t even have money for enough food.”

“But kids at school take things,” her son insisted. “When they come over to play here, I never know about my stuff.”

“Well, what does it cost?” Monica asked.

“It’s probably not much,” her son said.

“Where’s the price tag?” she asked.

“Dunno,” he mumbled.

“It must be here somewhere,” Monica said, bewildered.

“Oh, here it is,” he said, pulling it off the side of the shelf.

“Did you take that off and stick it there?” she asked him, startled at the trickster her son was becoming. He nodded, looking down. Monica felt angry that he would do something sneaky like that to her, but her learning from Non-violent Parenting flashed into her mind and she held her tongue. At least he admitted it. What need does this box meet for him? He *had* lost some toys he cherished at school, where deprived kids were tempted to pocket things. Was there a way both their needs could be met? She couldn’t justify buying him this strong box.

“Well,” she said, “you have ways to earn money, taking care of the neighbors’ animals, watering their plants, and such. Do you want to save up until you have \$11 and buy it with that?”

“Yes, yes!” he said joyfully. Then he clouded over again. “But somebody else might buy it before I get enough, Mom. There’s only one box left.”

“O.K.,” Monica said, aware of all the errands she still had to do. “I’ll buy it now and put it up on our closet shelf until you can pay for it.” They had a hug, made the purchase, and the Saturday errands went on.

Monica thought later, however, “We have two boxes now instead of one. There goes my intention to live more simply. Did I give in to him too much?” She is determined not to follow the “Power-over”

pattern – Obey or Else – that her parents assumed was the way to get kids to do right, but it still feels slow and unfamiliar to negotiate everything.

* * *

An older farming couple I visited recently have seen agricultural land around them sold off and divided up into small lots for double-wide rentals in the last decade. They have lots of new neighbors, some of whom are struggling to make ends meet in these times of recession. “We are encountering poverty close to home,” the husband told me. (We’ll call him Bill). “We send money to folks in Latin America and Pakistan to help out drought and earthquake victims, but it seems like hunger is staring us in the face right here these days. A new neighbor came into the yard last month, wondering if I had any work he could do to earn money for his family. He commented on the junk cars I had behind the barn and asked if I was still needing them for parts. If I wasn’t, he could cut them up and sell them for scrap metal, he said. He wouldn’t charge me anything to haul them away.

“You have a truck?” I asked, since he had come on foot. He nodded. “Got the tools you need?” He nodded again. “Well, let me talk with my wife and I’ll let you know tomorrow,” Bill said. The couple agreed it might well be a godsend to have the old cars out of there. The valuable parts had already been recycled.

When their neighbor – We’ll call him Joe – returned, Bill told him to get his tools and start in. Joe asked if Bill might let him use *his* oxy-acetylene torch for the day. It had not been part of the bargain, but Bill wanted to be encouraging. He agreed, but was sobered when Joe couldn’t light the torch. Did he really know how to take apart cars? Bill got him started and Joe *did* cut up and carry off a load in his old truck that day. Bill and his wife mused about the implications of letting him use Bill’s equipment when he didn’t bring his own torch and fuel the next day either. He hadn’t leveled with them about the extent of his need.

The day after that, Joe came on foot, saying that his truck had broken down. He spent the day with the torch, wrassling apart another car. The next day, he asked if he might borrow their truck to haul the metal to the junk yard. Bill had to decide on the spot whether to keep working with Joe. He certainly wasn’t living up to his word. It seemed to be desperation that had driven him to promise things he couldn’t deliver on. Bill and his wife were living comfortably, al-

though they both worked like beavers. Was God asking them to love this particular hard-up neighbor as themselves? It seemed so. Bill agreed to let him use their truck in return for doing three hours of work for him. He was still hoping to build a relationship of mutual aid. He asked himself, “Am I being manipulated? Might Joe be tempted to steal my truck or my tools? What is the best way, in the long run, to help this man and his family?”

* * *

A peace activist friend of mine we’ll call Jill dreamed that she was speaking at an anti-war rally by the Civil War Monument on the Ohio University Green. In this dream, she was dressed like a gypsy with lots of skirts and scarves on. As she denounced the criminal waste of life and resources in the Iraq War, she was taking those gypsy clothes off, one by one – headscarf, shawl, neck-scarf, apron, blouse, overskirt, underskirt, camisole, underpants – until she was standing there stark naked. The shame of it woke her up abruptly from her nightmare.

Jill is a graduate instructor, used to speaking in front of students. Reflecting on what the dream might mean, however, it came clear to her that speaking out in public to strangers against U.S. foreign policy is another matter.

“By putting my ideas on the line out there, I am laying myself open to criticism,” she said. “I guess it makes me feel exposed, especially in a small town.” Her activism was waking her up at night. Of course, her dream was funny. She would enjoy sharing it with the peace community. But it was still an anxiety dream.

Talking with a friend about it, Jill realized that she had been brought up as a girl-child to respect authority and be compliant. “I must still harbor fear of being powerful and assertive, of being thought ‘full of myself,’ when I state my beliefs strongly,” she said. “I know I can’t always expect to be liked if I stick my neck out, doing what I believe is right. I thought I had developed the ability not to take it personally if I am misquoted or criticized, but I guess it’s still haunting me.”

* * *

What do these four examples have in common? The first person feels urgent about pollution in the environment. The second is trying to parent her son with compassion while resisting the pressure to buy stuff. The third, a couple, are trying to help someone pull himself out of poverty. The fourth is calling for an end to the Iraq War. They are all concerned about violence or injustice in one form or another. They are putting their beliefs into action. They are trying things few others do.

They are taking risks. What might they face? Rejection. Ineffectiveness. Failure to be consistent. Manipulation. Loss of property. Loss of good relationships. They are risking the unknown. They feel the stress of unknown outcomes. Maybe that's part of "fearful faithfulness."

The environmental activist comes from a secular Jewish humanist background. Reading widely, thinking deeply, and conferring with close friends, then working hard for change, is a way of life for her. The other three feel the call of the Spirit. It is in this inner space, as I and you other Quakers here try to act on leadings, try to remind ourselves that God is with us through thick and thin, that each of us asks: "Am I centered enough for peacemaking? These unpeaceful questions I have about what I have attempted, do they mean my inner guidance and I aren't in tune?"

Our search together is about what goes on in our inner space as we dialogue about action with the Spirit – our Deepest Wisdom, with the other voices inside us, and with those around us. The things that most help and hinder the friends I've talked with – and me – from staying centered will come out in more stories as we move along. And the challenge to us in the *Friends Journal* article to just get started being faithful, whether or not we are spiritually mature – let's keep that in the back of our minds.

When I talk about *leadings* from the Spirit, I mean the sorts of concerns, nudges, inspirations, promptings that I have already mentioned. This new neighbor, Joe, needs money for his family. He talks bigger than he can deliver, but maybe we would too if we were jobless and desperate. Let's let him use our equipment as our form of Right Sharing, and hope for the best. Sometimes our leadings are major vocational callings. Other leadings come as small holy nudges: "Have her over tomorrow. She needs a listening ear." *Discernment* is needed to be sure it is our Inner Guide whispering and not old expectations

that don't fit our reality, or peer pressure, or a wish to escape some-

thing right up in our faces that is hard to deal with. That's the devil crooking his finger! Often leadings relate to places in our lives where there is a gap between what we believe, or imagine ourselves to be, and how we actually live, what we really do with our time.

Staying centered means staying connected with God, your Deep Wisdom, the loving Life Source. It means feeling Spirit Power channeling through you – not thinking you're in charge. Jill, the anti-war speaker, while talking about her gypsy-woman dream to a good listener, finds compassion for her own inner child, and the parental admonitions to obey authorities that child absorbed. The forgiveness at the Heart of Things wells up at that moment, washing away self judgment at feeling anxious even though she is a mature woman. Jill journaled about the meaning of her dream that same day as well. Her entry ended with this affirmation, straight from her Center: "To protest is good for us. We're *acting*, not just complaining like malcontents on the fringes of society. To *protest* means to stand forth as a witness, just as *testify* does." It is such fresh wellings up from the Center that give us the juice to sustain our caring work.

Many early Friends called that Center "the Inward Christ." What is that peace that Jesus promised us, according to the Gospel of John, that inner peace at our centers that would lay our fears to rest? Despite our quandaries and questions, part of it is the sense that if we are engaged, trying to be good parents or neighbors or peacemakers, we are working with the grain of the universe. "Blessed are the merciful ... blessed are the peacemakers ... they shall be called the children of God." Another part of that peace Jesus promises relates to the Spirit of Truth he refers to in each one of us who is trying to follow his way. There is an inner Counselor we can count on to hear and guide us. It reminds us of his teachings, and comforts us with God's presence. It is up to us to take time to listen for that Truth from the Center.

Jesus did that again and again. He was so much in demand. He sometimes felt the power draining out of him. After interpreting a passage from the Torah to a multitude in a field, or healing a crowd of ailing people, he went apart and prayed. Or, when the authorities put him on the spot about how to treat the woman taken in adultery, he didn't answer at once. He doodled in the sand, asking God for guidance. Up came the truth from his Center then, so forgiving, so direct and definitive it still hangs in the air of our consciousness: "He who is without sin, let him cast the first stone." Any stone casters here?

To be sure, our prayer life is often far from peaceful or full of immediate answers. We're doing well, some of us, if we manage to thank the Source of our Life for our food in the course of a hectic day. Gratitude *is* most basic, though. I start my journaling at the end of the day with four of its blessings before getting into my doings and challenges. It really helps me put the rest of my scramble in perspective.

Another basic way of praying is simple awareness of being alive, especially when you want to stop the world so you can get off. For instance, Tori is waiting in line at the grocery store, gritting her teeth as a toddler in front of her screams his head off. "Let's get on with this," she mutters to herself. She has had to push, push all day at her AFSC job to get things done. Oh, to be through with shopping and traffic and *home* at last. It comes to her, from that class on Centering Prayer last year, to just take a deep breath and welcome the moment, the break in the press of activity. Imagine being this frustrated two-year-old. Tori breathes deep. Life-giving oxygen fills her lungs. She identifies with the raging kid's determination to be out of that shopping cart as she breathes out, out, out. In her mind he is twirling around and around with his arms flung wide. He is falling down laughing on the rug in his bedroom at home. "Welcome, welcome, welcome, being alive in this moment in time," she says to herself. Suddenly it is Tori's turn to get checked out. The cashier is asking about her Plus Card for discounts ... Cards, cards, cards in her wallet. "Where can it be?" But her mind is more nimble somehow after the twirling, the "being peace now." "Ah, there's that little card on my keychain ... Here we go."

And at the other end of the spectrum, honest anger rearing up when we pray is basic too. A friend I'll call Deborah admitted that she boiled over at God after a manic-depressive resident in their intentional community, in one of her manic phases, talked to her incessantly for hours with very pressured speech, demanding her attention. Deborah finally ran off to their woods, burst into tears, and started to yell at God. "How can you expect me to handle this much by myself? I can't be endlessly supportive to someone who gives us next to nothing in return. What am I supposed to do if she turns suicidal? She's driving me mad too!" For years Deborah had stoically accepted that during the day her farmer husband would do the bulk of the outdoor work and she would relate to the troubled people in transition they welcomed into their community. Now she hurled all her dark feelings at God. How could God possibly count on her to love such

wild, dependent souls? It was praying of the starkest, most honest kind. Out of it, Deborah said, came a feeling of being known in the depths of her weakness, known and loved for herself in her need. She felt a new intimacy with God. She also gained the power, through her sense of God's presence, to tell the others she lived with what help she needed from them and what private time she hoped to take in order to better manage her life. God helped Deborah love herself enough to be able to love her neighbors more.

Prayer and meditation groups often help us center and get in touch with leadings. A friend whom I'll call Elaine belongs to a small bi-weekly meditation group that uses a classic Quaker sequence in Rex Ambler's *Light to Live By*, followed by sharing as led. They call it their "Light Group." During one of their meditations the words came to her, "Get out on the street." She noted this with interest and some curiosity, thinking that, perhaps, further instructions would be forthcoming. As was their practice in the Light Group, she journaled about it, then shared with her deeply listening friends. Some months later, she was dismayed to hear that boys from the urban public high school nearby had had a fight on the street after school and a boy had been shot dead. She wondered how she, a white retired teacher in a largely black community, should respond to this tragedy. She learned that, on the day following the shooting, African-American clergy had surrounded the school in a prayer vigil. From that event, a core group were planning a before-and-after-school program called "Safe Corridor," which would put concerned adults on street corners, Monday through Friday, to talk with students as they came and went and, if a fight was brewing, use their cell phones to alert the police. Elaine suddenly recognized the relevance of her message during the Light Group meditation to "get out on the street." At the end of the school year, the climate on the street was significantly changed. The students were more relaxed and ready to respond to her "Good morning." Elaine told me, "Being on the street was everything. It was being 'out there,' seeing these children face to face. The students are no longer ... just a crowd. The ninth graders are the ones I see most. They are beautiful, so vulnerable, so full of potential. What has been pulled out of me is love ... I'm not in charge. It comes through me."

To be centered, then, is to find a practice, a rhythm that fits our lives to be in ongoing dialogue with our Deep Wisdom, to let the Inner Light show us next steps. Here is a poem that came to me about the

morning practice I need most, although I don't always allow myself the time.

Step Through

The shining door
I look at during
morning stretches
floats up dark
before me when
I close my eyes,
imprinted in reverse
and framed in silver.

Come, it calls. Step
through. There is
your other wakening
to do, your sleepy
inner eye to open,
blink, wash clear.

Wait with it
in the welter
while it finds
its focus. Come,
you know the Deep
will gift you,
what is truly
needful, show.

Come, toil not yet.
Let morning slowly
flower. Once
inner eye is single,
power.

Our discernment process may involve the help of other seekers. In the 1990s, a friend I'll call Martha was led to become involved with efforts to close what most call the School of the Americas in Georgia. This military academy trains Latin American police and military in spying, intimidation, and torture techniques. After Martha was arrested at a mass demonstration and indicted for crossing the line onto the school's property in protest against its insidious influence, her Meeting clearness committee held her in the Light as she weighed what to do next. Should she plead guilty, pay a fine, and get out of three months in jail? She had a painful back by then. Would a prison bed and work at prison labor make her even more disabled?

Her Meeting helped her find clearness to take the risk of pleading innocent and refusing to pay her fine. Buoyed up, she wrote a stirring denunciation of the School of the Americas to read at her trial. The Meeting and the local peace community paid her plane ticket from the West Coast to Georgia and back for the trial, and drove her to prison and back.

Interaction with others, then, in the process of discerning and fleshing out a leading, can be at the heart of what gives us strength and joy in our work for peace and justice. Inward openings or affirmations from others about our special gifts can also be helpful in discernment. One of mine is that I work best small – in intimate situations where I can sense feelings behind words and gradually build healing trust. At this point in my life, I, along with several others, am led to give support to a local Christian Peacemaker working at least half of each year in Iraq. During her leave time we take turns listening to her feelings.

Here is a poem I wrote about that process.

On Leave From The War Zone

You bring us pressed flower notecards
you have made on leave, saving
between their waxy wrinkled sheets
each leaf, each golden petal, curving stem.
They breathe out peace and ecstasy,
preserving innocence to share.

But in the dark behind your eyes
there are those other fused-together
layers, packets of pain preserving
grief at tanks with smoking turret guns
in market squares, at helplessness

among the hungry dull-eyed children,
at the shatterings, dismemberments.

You bring us those as well.
Your telling, deep lamenting, loosens,
unseals edges over time. Our holding
grief in common shifts the weight.
It never gives back innocence,
but room enough inside yourself
to breathe in Spirit, go again.

On the other hand, in this climate of runaway militarism, I have been led to obediently follow FCNL's guidelines for lobbying on specific anti-war legislation with Congressmen hundreds of miles away. I have also been prompted, through poster- and petition-making, and hailing passersby on the main street of our county seat, to collect many signatures to fax off to those Congressmen. Moses knew he wasn't any kind of a public speaker, yet God still made him his messenger to the Israelites. One friend I'll call Mary served the Ohio peace movement three times as a candidate for State Representative. She wrote: "My gifts grew out of my efforts! My commitment forced me into public speaking, into researching, into learning how to peacefully confront and challenge others. I gained confidence and patience and awareness of how important an open mind is." We all know what she means about growing as we go, and feeling that the experience itself, at least some of the time, is the biggest gift.

Being realistic about changes in our availability or our capacities is another important element in discernment and staying centered. We have stages in our active involvement; I keep needing to let go of my image of myself as a certain kind of a helper and welcome new ways of being of use. My spiritual partner is now homebound. For her, letters to prisoners identified by Amnesty International is a meaningful way to give hope. An elderly peace activist friend of mine admits that she can no longer marshal the facts and manage the details to lead legislative action, but she is still a force to be reckoned with as one of New England's "Raging Grannies." They write satirical new lyrics for golden oldie songs, put on red feather boas, and perform at protest demonstrations and rallies. Like Code Pink, their flair for drama draws the media and gives them many opportunities to speak about

the urgent changes we must make to save the planet for our grand-

children. Our limberness in moving from stage to stage in our lives as activists is a core secret for sustainability.

What are some of the inner hindrances to living out our peace testimony, our equality testimony, our concern for the earth that we face as we try to stay centered and search for way opening? Our busy-ness – with our paying jobs, our family life, our volunteering, our Quaker committee work, our home and yard maintenance, our internet correspondence – often becomes workaholism. We grow up being rewarded for academic, athletic, and social service achievements. We are frequently commended for our addiction to work, admired for being able to keep up such a pace. My friend, whom I'll call Sheila, says one gift she brings to her peacemaking is her "can do" attitude. But she admits that the downside of that is multi-tasking, having trouble saying "no." She told me, "After I say 'yes,' it's hard to get out of things. I have to keep a lid on my availability. Overworking short-circuits my brain. I can't remember things." Ever felt that way?

Not only does overworking overload the brain; it – like the addiction to alcohol or drugs or gambling or sex – numbs us out psychically. Fear, joy, despair, real tenderness are all dulled by these patterns turned compulsions. My dad, Douglas Steere, once wrote about what causes burnout in the peace movement. "The rush and pressure of modern life are a form of its ... innate violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects ... is to succumb to violence. More than that, it is cooperation in violence. The frenzy of the activist destroys the fruitfulness of her or his own work because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful."

My peace organizer friend Jill told me that to balance the intensity and complexity of her work with the Appalachian Peace & Justice Network she works in her garden with her husband, tends their goats, or walks in the woods. Doing yoga and breath-focused meditation steady and slowly empty her monkey mind as well. Me now, I can get driven even about picking beans! Here is a poem that came to me about being wooed out of my striving in my garden.

Dissolving

Nearing dusk, I work
between the bean rows,
lifting up each plant
to find the keepers,
inch my stool ahead,
scoot my bowl forward,
bend to left, then right,
keep picking.

But the rising moon
tugs at me, pulls my head
up. Sky tips, spills out,
fills me like a tide pool
with its shell pink light.

Flower stems beyond
the fence thrust up such
jagged spreads of leaves,
such bursts of bloom –
plum purple trumpets,
tawny ruffles, azure,
chartreuse, burgundy –
my firm resolve dissolves.

Down low, a sprout
among the rest, I feel
my fingers turn to beans,
my jeans to greens, my ears
to flaring purple horns,
my bowl to half moon
catching gleams.

In my 20's my bent toward writing poems caused me vocational confusion. It felt in conflict with my "in there pitching" cause-oriented self. Now I realize that we are children of God, we are praisers and mourners as well as movers and shakers. My sensuous, intuitive, symbol-loving self shares her reality with folks on another level, not at odds with my peace activist self. One balances the other as our lives must find balance.

Procrastination adds to my time crunches. That common hindrance often comes from a good-hearted wish to do a job better than we really have time for – a yearning for perfection. I tend to be that way about the many emails from good causes that crowd onto our Inbox each week. Zapping them without reading makes me feel uncaring. Like I am saying the needs of African AIDS orphans, the fate of the polar bear, the urgency of cutting farm subsidies for agribusinesses, and the effects of depleted uranium bombing on citizens in Najaf don't matter to me. So they pile up until, of course, they have to be zapped. David and I have come clear on a list of organizations we will donate to every year, on certain months to help our cash flow. That clarity lifts my sense of guilt somewhat. It is the calls for citizen action through internet lobbying that feel especially overwhelming.

Another hindrance to truly channeling Spirit in our activism is getting stuck with only people like ourselves all the time. My friend Martha described how much her soul was fed by a two-week juice fast she made on the steps of her state legislature with disabled people. They were protesting cuts in funding for medications and support programs. Martha made the fast because she sees the direct connection between social service cuts and runaway U.S. military spending. Although she has an ornery back, she isn't badly handicapped. Hearing stories from those with severe disabilities about their struggles and the choices they face moved her deeply. She became a passionate advocate, helping them articulate their needs with specific examples to the media and the legislators. She has had the same experience going to prison for three months, a deepening of awareness, energy, soul force.

Martha also mentioned the virtual reality of her peace networking world, caught up as she is much of the time at the computer and the telephone. Being face to face with real people, people directly impacted by the situations we are organizing about, as well as reading and sending our myriads of cause emails, is crucial to staying close to the living root of our commitment. I felt that way talking with veterans at AFSC's "Eyes Wide Open" exhibit of empty military boots, and talking with the mothers of boy children begging for war toys, and Middle Easterners standing by the pile of civilian shoes. Their pain and dilemmas were poignant and unforgettable. My energy for peacemaking was renewed. For Quakers like me, it is especially significant to make direct contact with less privileged people and people caught up in the military system. At times it may have to be

the virtual reality of DVDs or books, but somehow we must get outside our own boxes, our in-groups, to come deeply in touch with the violent systems we decry.

Another hindrance to centered work for change is separating ourselves from co-workers, those in harness with us, by being judgmental. The urgency we feel to convince the public to stop supporting something that causes human suffering or planet depletion can make us feel extra critical about how others' strategies differ from our own. Wouldn't her approach turn people off? How many would actually take the time to make that call? Isn't his flyer too crowded with information to be effective? Urgency can be the enemy of good relationships, do violence to them if we aren't aware. Listening fully to where fellow activists are coming from, explaining our thinking as just another possibility, and trusting that the Spirit is at work among us to help a workable solution emerge, are all part of peaceful change making. Sorting out together who has which skills, which gifts, and specializing on some things so it doesn't all involve group decision-making simplifies life too. After a particular project, as we evaluate together, seeing everything we do as an experiment to be learned from, part of a long process with many unknowns, is a big help. And seeing the humor, the ironic contradictions, our own blind spots, the wild surprises, remembering and savoring them together, lifts us into laughter in a healing way.

Angry confrontations with those holding different views are another hindrance to centered peacemaking. An acquaintance I'll call Reed confesses that the rage boiling up in him against the criminal waste of life and resources in the Iraq War often clogs his channel to the Spirit. In the build-up to the 2004 presidential election, the preacher at the church Reed attends with his wife called George Bush, from his pulpit, their "own Joshua, bringing Christianity to Iraq." He urged his congregation to vote for Bush. Reed was so mad he told the minister after the service that he had defamed the pulpit of Jesus and had blood on his hands. The preacher told Reed he needn't come back. Reed wanted to report him to the IRS so they would cancel the church's tax exemption because of political advocacy from the pulpit. Knowing how much his wife's role in the church's musical offerings meant to her, he simmered down and desisted. The departure of the offending minister the following year helped heal the breach. Attending a Quaker Worship Group Sunday afternoons was important as well.

Anger is a clear signal, however, that something is wrong. We can't write it off. It clouds our thinking at first. We need to release the adrenalin it pumps in harmless ways, not take it out on others. As Reed made clear to me he knew, speaking out of anger is often ineffective, even if it's about a glaring injustice. We need to reflect and pray about how best to find common ground with the one who raised our hackles to communicate our deep concern so that it can be heard. It often takes good listening too. The same is true when communicating with officials.

It is easy to keep fueling our anger by going over and over what blows our stacks. We can get stuck recycling our pain or frustration. For many Quakers, especially women, there may be a tendency to repress anger more than to speak in anger. We recycle it down inside. Conflict feels threatening to lots of us, although it is surely a part of being alive and different from each other. We hesitate to raise controversial issues and dialogue about them. We silence ourselves and sometimes others, rather than wading into confrontations. That is as much a hindrance to peacemaking as sounding off.

Cynicism is another way we drop out. We all hunger to have something concrete to show for our efforts to bridge the poverty gap, or replant the rainforest, or stop the terrible dying. There are times when FCNL, our Quaker lobby in Washington, can rejoice that a bill they urged us to lobby for actually passed, like the amendments to appropriations bills in both Houses last year against spending money to build permanent bases in Iraq without the approval of Congress. But then, come to find out, the administration is side-stepping that to negotiate a security agreement with the Al-Malaki government in Iraq predicated on an on-going U.S. military presence in the country. PBS shows mass demonstrations in Baghdad against such an agreement, but negotiations proceed. This week, the appropriations bill with the amendment against funding military bases didn't pass either House when they got right down to the vote. It is hard not to get cynical about our democracy and give up lobbying. Cynicism is contagious too. We catch it from each other. It crops up in emails all the time in bitter satirical pieces. They make us laugh – better to laugh than cry,

we say – but they are often cheap shots, distancing us from responsibility, blaming the government when we ourselves are enmeshed in the System we deplore. It is truly hard to believe that an invisible and

loving Spirit, channeled through us mortals, has the power to overcome the juggernaut of the Pentagon and the giant corporations. It is hard to trust that all we need to do is the best we can, joined with other good-hearted and knowledgeable comrades, and leave the rest to God. Yet that is what Jesus beckons us to give ourselves to. That is what faithfulness is about.

In her book *Getting a Grip*, Frances Moore Lappé writes about old mental frames that block clear thinking when we feel too knotted up to respond to situations that could really use our caring. Like cynicism, they color our responses. See if any of these ever come up in your own minds: “But I can’t stop what I’m doing to deal with this. ... I have to figure it all out before I act. ... People will criticize me if I get involved with this. ... It would be just a drop in the bucket. ... I would just be doing it to make myself feel better.” Lappé says challenges that stir up thoughts like that are “disconcerting, but also precious.” They may search us to our depths and “rattle us out of our resignation.” They may be ours to seize as opportunities if we are so led.

It is crucial to listen to the fear of things beyond our control that can be behind our anger, or cynicism, or sense of inadequacy. It is often hard for men in particular, because of the way they are socialized as boys, to acknowledge this fear or to name it openly to others. Along with personal fears about relationships, job, or health issues, we Americans may understandably be haunted by fear of a nuclear holocaust or biological warfare, a terrorist attack by people in a poor country on us in our rich country, catastrophic storms and floods from global warming, or an economic depression. If we are of the persuasion that thinks it’s up to us, the people in this democracy, to turn things around, and our efforts aren’t clearly making a difference, we may feel guilty as well. Therapist Miriam Greenspan observes that psychic numbing is a common way of handling fear and guilt in American culture. Psychic numbing is a denial of negative emotions due to feeling overwhelmed. In the process of shutting down fear and helplessness, people numb themselves to joy and even a sense of being fully alive.

Seeking to forget fears through overwork or compulsive entertainment, getting involved with buying and maintaining things, using addictive drugs to escape awareness – we know these reactions in the world around us too well, and perhaps in ourselves. For those of us in the peace movement or working for social and environmental change, the sense of being inadequate for the task may sap our strength. The reality of an Inner Guide who undergirds and forgives may not yet have hold of us enough to make us feel we can “mount up on wings like eagles, walk and not be weary, run and not faint” again and again. But we know there are those who are sustained that way. We need to make it our business to connect with them any way we can.

Fear *can* energize us to act. It is often crucial that we share our authentic feelings with others in community as we gather our forces to face fear. The day after the 9/11 attacks, our Meeting held a worship-sharing session. Fear that our government would retaliate in kind was uppermost in the ministry, along with awe at the heroism of the firemen, attempts to explain the depth of hatred Middle Easterners felt against the U.S., and concern about the safety of local Muslims. Out of that gathering came a strong letter to the editors of local papers against military revenge, and attempts to connect with Ohio University’s Muslim population. When U.S. bombing started in Iraq, two of us Quakers were led to join some 30 OU students and townspeople sitting in at the main intersection, refusing to let life go on with business as usual. Neither of us had been arrested before. My friend Sheila was nudged to make a special biblically-inspired vest to wear: On the back it read in big letters: FEAR CASTS OUT LOVE. On the front it said, LOVE CASTS OUT FEAR.

Which brings me back to the *Friends Journal* article on “Fearful Faithfulness” I referred to at the start of this exploration. No, we can’t wait until we are spiritually mature, deeply rooted in the peace that passes understanding, before we take hold in conflict situations or speak out against injustice. Centered peace-making is a “learn as you go” operation. Over-committing ourselves, feeling self-righteous or superior, blowing up at God, flagellating ourselves, being blind, are all part of the messy human business of trying to be the change we want in the world.

But as each of us finds our way to our particular challenges, engages with them, lets them go, and engages in another way, let us give ourselves more time to reflect on what we are learning. Let us take more time to dialogue with our Inner Guide and with each other about

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the dilemmas. Let us take time to celebrate the gains, to forgive each other and ourselves, to laugh. Oh, how we need time for balance, for patient waiting in the midst of urgency. For feeling the Presence of something yearning through the mystery of suffering for us to help channel healing into the world