

Fear or Consciousness: Dare We Change?

The Committee for the Leverett Peace Commission

We are here tonight to continue our discussion about peace. I would like to describe briefly the immense pressures we face, as we worry about our world and our future. We also sense we are in the midst of a profound transformation in every aspect of our local and global lives. Every dimension of human life and of planetary life seems to be under pressure. I will also share with you this evening a re-framing of our global worries which has been of immense help and encouragement to me and many readers of a manuscript I will tell you more about, as I go on.

I. The Question of Peace

We live in a time of overwhelming crises. Long suppressed energies and desires burst forth into public view. We are both excited and overwhelmed. The world is shape shifting before our eyes. US dominance is challenged by new voices; American power is eroding in economies, global politics, control of the seas, and in the emerging developing world. The capitalist global market is not kind to all of us, and we are stunned by the greed and thoughtlessness of the financial elite. Released from their bonds to territory and without obligations to any community, they roam the world making bets on ephemeral financial instruments which reflect very little economic reality. The gaps between the privileged and the poor expand at alarming rates; the US has not been this “unequal” in income and assets since the 1920’s.

Of course, this plays out in domestic and global politics all over the world. We have only to remember Michael Klare's sober analysis of global energy resources, where they are, and who the dominant users are, to imagine cataclysmic conflicts in the near future. And we have not yet really examined the profound impact of climate change and the absolute requirement we establish the conditions for long-term sustainability.

But we gather tonight to discuss peace, how to create it, and how to deny ourselves the ancient tools of war. But to create peace, we must build the conditions for peace. Peace is much more than the absence of war. The fundamental cause of war and aggression is human fear.

2. The Great Transformation

I have been deeply privileged to receive over the last half dozen years a series of Teachings which might be of real value as we struggle with these difficult questions. It all began some years ago as I wrote in my journal one morning of my profound grief over what was happening in the world. I wrote and wrote, trying to name all I could see in my world that was heart breaking. I was suddenly interrupted: "That is not how we see it." And thus began this long and rich conversation, if I may call it that, with some source way beyond me and my own center of thinking and understanding. Let me begin with a brief quotation about our subject tonight, peace.

Humans say they want peace. There is Peace Studies, the Peace Corps, peace workers, peace petitions, peace protests, and peace keepers. But there is no peace. These efforts cannot give birth to peace, unless they go to a different level and ask: where is the fear? Who is fearful? You humans ask: who is right? Who is wrong? But those questions do not lead to peace. That is the argument that started the conflict in the first place. A conflict can only be resolved on a different level. Searching for the fear takes you to that different level. (On Fear, p. 2)

I have found the teachings to offer a complex and clear analysis of the current world situation and the extraordinary “moment” and transition we are in the midst of. The central themes are fear, the necessity to “wake up” and develop our consciousness, and then to recognize our profound and intimate interdependence with all beings on the planet. They describe the reinforcing perceptions and habits of mind of ego, or “little self. They point to the self-destructive dimensions of individualism, competitiveness, and materialist views of reality; they show the dangers of science being our only reputable source of knowledge; and they remind us a world without humans is certainly imaginable, but that what would be lost is the best experiment so far at the universe being able to become conscious of itself. Perhaps their most radical claim is that the fundamental impetus for this radical change comes from outside the global system; it is not the result of reform movements or a new ethics or radical politics. It arises from a realm many of us deny even exists: a non-material realm of Spirit.

This is a time of profound transformation, and earth is caught in the throes of it without having much understanding. . . . This transformation has its origin in the cosmos, way beyond the ken

of humans on earth. It impacts earth via immaterial energy, frequencies very different from those that materialize as form and shape in sentient beings or matter. Humans play an insignificantly tiny role in the earth's energy systems, and earth similarly plays an insignificant role in the cosmic energy system. One piece of this coming transformation is that humans must truly recognize that to become cosmically and astronomically literate would much improve human life together. . . . There is a major energetic transformation underway, within the cosmos, and it is beginning to have an impact on earth and earthly life. Humans have no choice but to respond to it. The question is: what kind of response would be most appropriate, most "cooperative" with the transformation underway? And that is the purpose of this project. We wish to lay out the situation to help all the students understand it as deeply as possible. . . . The more people who can recognize this reframed analysis of the troubles on earth, the easier it will be, or the more likely it will be, that human responses can be sensible and appropriate. The usual human way of describing these moments of cosmic transformation, or the infusion of unusually great amounts of energy from outside the solar or earthly system, is in apocalyptic terms. In fact, that is what apocalypse refers to.

. . . This time, the new energy does not appear as matter. The energy has not materialized. It is subtle, of a very high frequency, and very potent. It is setting the earth's energy at a different frequency, which in turn will affect the functioning of every being on the planet. This you seem to have heard of, though you don't understand it at all. Think of it this way: the earth is a singing bowl, and the regular flow of energy to it and around it has kept it singing a nice steady pitch for millions of years. Now, someone comes along and runs the stick around its edge. The pitch shifts as the bowl gains more and more energy. The volume increases. The harmonics

stretch out further; . . . there is much more resonance, much more sympathetic vibration within the bowl and around it. You can feel it with your hands, if you come close to the bowl. This is what is happening to earth. New and stronger pulses of energy are arriving, and the earth responds; it can't help but respond. The frequencies are higher and stronger. There is much more resonance, more harmonic pulses are released, and even electromagnetic forces shift in response. . . .As the bowl sings at a different pitch,. . . the small bowls around it begin to vibrate differently as well. It really is pretty simple to visualize. But it is very abstract, and it is still simply a visual metaphor. What does it really mean, concretely, in how organisms live? . . .This energy generates changes on every level of planetary life. . . The revolution in consciousness – or in simple knowledge – would be when humans recognize that the major elements shaping human life on earth are not human or material, but non-material and non-human. (pp 12-13)

There is powerful assurance there are many people all over the world, just like us, waking up, rubbing our sleep-filled eyes, looking for a good cup of coffee, and then, wondering what to do. That's us. We expand our abilities to receive more subtle frequencies of energy, and that in turn helps us imagine more complex views of reality and to connect with others doing the same thing. And the Teachers say, "Lights are flashing on all over the earth, and each one is a person waking up, recognizing his or her interdependence with all others, and beginning much more active involvement in the enormous issues of the day." We are being invited to make a

. . . quantum leap in consciousness, which will dramatically alter human behavior. ...Quantum leaps, even for electrons, are very arduous energetically....Humans are gathering up energy, but

you don't know how to use it skillfully. It triggers all manner of neurotic and psychotic processes, especially fear. And when fearfulness receives such a deep energetic charge, it fuels intense paranoia, aggression, conflict, and violence. . . .But this energy can be harnessed and used to shift consciousness. ... If you do not see this much larger picture, you will only see the suffering and violence... and you will believe it is the end of human life as you know it. That is the error of linear thinking.(pp.29-30)

And so we will connect with each other. Here I am always reminded of the wonderful image from India of Indra's Net, and its contemporary incarnation of sorts, the World Wide Web. Both are potent images of our interdependence on so many levels. One of the most positive qualities of globalization is that it makes visible our material, concrete interdependence. We see the dense web of communication elaborating itself, bringing unimaginable possibilities of "being in touch," of networking, of learning from each other and building on each other's experience, and finding cheer and encouragement as we discover we are not at all alone in our hopes and dreams. The Teachings prompt us to explore these possibilities more and more, and remind us these processes are underway on every layer of reality.

We are reminded frequently to keep a focus on the biggest possible picture: cosmic history, the nearly unimaginable idea that humans are the great experiment of Mind, the Universe, becoming conscious of Itself. If so, it would be our great and deeply honorable task and source of meaning. But how are we to do this? Fear is the fundamental obstacle, and much of this long

manuscript gives instruction on how to dissolve fear. That is the “practical core” of the teachings, and I will return to this later.

I take comfort from the Teachers’ reminders that we live in a society riddled with fear, and there are ample reasons why we are fearful individuals. Fortunately, that is also the most effective level for fear-transformative work. Our American society is notable both for its materialist views and its hyper-individualism. This misunderstands both our biology and our humanity. Many reactions to that, from both left and right (evangelicals, “family values,” fundamentalist versions of every great religious tradition, mistrust of new biological discoveries, etc.) express deep unease about the trajectory of American values and politics. I find some calm that it not just me who thinks I live in a deeply flawed, neurotic, and violent culture. I am, after all, not alone in these perceptions, and there are many possibilities for identifying allies and building coalitions. This counters my life-long pessimism about human and global affairs; it literally en-courages me.

3. The Problems of our Global Systems

Globalization brings us many positive possibilities, but it also embeds us in an extremely complex system. What are some of its main features, and how do they impact our ability to act and to create a more sustainable and peaceful world? While that could be our topic for a year’s worth of study and discussion, let me just point to some significant aspects of our national and global world systems now:

- a) Global capitalism. We can neither manage nor control our economy – not production or finance or distribution..
- b) Global communications. There are massive floods of information, drowning us in the knowledge of terrible problems on every continent over which we have little influence and can do little or nothing to solve, in the short term.
- c) Competitive individualism undermines community, our ability to imagine a public good, and our belief we can develop skillful means to pursue it.
- d) Increasing marketization, which is often linked to privatization, another form of undermining communitarian values and institutions, in which markets penetrate further and further into arenas long considered inappropriate for privatization or competition. In markets we become a commodity, not a citizen or an actor. Perhaps worse, markets are unable to balance multiple values or prioritize non-quantifiable or non-economic values.
- e) We have a deeply unresponsive political system, except to money. As a citizenry, we understand very little about how our political system really works.
- f) There is an obsession with security, pretty rational in a society with few safety nets and few community mutual obligations to each other.
- g) We are surrounded by a culture of fear, anxiety, and violence, omnipresent in old and new forms of media; many self medicate with alcohol, drugs, and “entertainment.” We tolerate levels of violence in everyday life that astonish most non Americans.

All of these factors interact, reinforcing each other. One outcome is that we are paralyzed and immobilized by fear. We can't see any way forward. We no longer believe in our own powers as citizens or even as responsible adults. We consider ourselves literally powerless. And we believe we are isolated individuals, without visible forms of connection and community. Of course we are unable to act effectively, for we don't even believe it is possible to have any significant impact. How can we untangle these processes and structures, so we can begin to reclaim our full ability to act on our own behalf and on behalf of our communities and the next generations?

Let's start with a primary characteristic of American culture which has profoundly shaped our economy, society, and political institutions: American individualism. On one hand, it provides us with wide opportunities for freedom, creativity, and personal development. On the other, it intensifies our sense of social isolation, feeds competitiveness in so many realms of life, and sharpens our fearfulness. It undermines our social bonds and our ability to mobilize the resources of our community in pursuit of common goals.

4. The Primary Task

How can we access our own personal and shared community visions of where we long to go?

How can we excavate the fear and hopelessness and powerlessness in each our own minds and hearts and heal that, so we can release our creative energy, build community, and network with others around our region, our country, and the world? We must heal ourselves of our fear, to free ourselves to re-create and re-energize our communities. And then we must find skillful

ways to assist others to also uncover their own fears and discover their own hopes and energies for this shared work.

What are some of those widely shared fears?

- a) I have no power, no way to impact or even resist these terrible global processes. I'm powerless in the face of overwhelming natural and political and economic disasters.
- b) I have nothing to bring to this enormous problem. I'm not skilled or useful or knowledgeable or even worthwhile.
- c) I'm too vulnerable and insecure myself to worry about these huge issues. I believe it's "every person for herself" and it is all a zero-sum game. If others win, I and those I love lose.
- d) I'm just one person, all alone. I'm stuck in my own neurotic fears, and it is impossible to find fellow travelers or others who might share my worries and hopes.

And who do these fears and beliefs serve? That question might not immediately make sense.

But think about it. When we believe we are powerless or ignorant or incapable of changing things, we don't challenge or resist those who gain from our silence and our passivity. I am certainly not a conspiracy theorist, and I don't believe there is a cabal somewhere manipulating the levers of power to protect themselves and their great privileges and resources. But it is quite clear that our silence and resignation serves to buttress the privileges and injustices of our society and our politics. So acquiescence is also a political "act" or a posture with deep political implications. We have only to study Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia, to see this clearly.

Your efforts this winter and spring to stimulate conversations about peace, to bring people together to think and learn together, to create spaces and opportunities to connect, join others,

and begin to imagine first steps, here on the most local level imaginable, is of course a perfect example of moving from acquiescence towards action, from despair and discouragement to hopefulness and vision, and from isolation to discovering rich networks right here in your own town. What a gift that has been, and how provocative and inspiring to neighboring towns in the Pioneer Valley!

5. Working with Our Fears

Don't imagine for a minute that there is anyone here in this wonderful hall tonight who does not have some fear down deep in his or her belly, asleep, perhaps, way below awareness, or beginning to rumble, which is a lot scarier, believe me. We are all in this together, every one of us. If you aren't frightened of what is happening in our world, you are surely not paying attention! And "in our world" includes our own world – Leverett and the Pioneer Valley, our homes and families, the air we breathe and the food we eat and the energy we depend on. There are at least two very good reasons for embarking on the fear work: first, it really does dissolve the major obstacle to our getting together on behalf of our critical, shared values and visions. But second, being gripped by fear, aware of it or not, is also the major obstacle to increased consciousness. Hence the title of my talk: Fear or Consciousness: Dare We Change? How do we do this? The Teacher offers a simple set of four steps:

The first step is to name your fears. . . .To name a deep or strong emotion is often to begin to weaken its effects, and sometimes, even disarm it. The second step is to stand still and try to interrupt the cascade of denials, resistances, defenses, and narratives. To hold still and

experience the fear in one's body and in one's mind, and then to watch it flood into every corner of your being, is a quite stunning experience for most people, especially the first time. The second step then is to stop the automatic cycles intended to quench or contain the fear. . . . The third step follows immediately, if there really has been a "full stop." One watches the fear; where does it go? How does it communicate its presence? How does it mobilize the body? How does it shut down parts of the mind and the self? How does it affect one's best self? One's least developed self? The third step initiates a life-time of paying attention to oneself in new ways. . . . This life-long self-inquiry is one of the most powerful tools available to a human being for expanding awareness and opening the heart-center. This becomes the great highway of opening modes for communicating with others, in body and out of body, your species and other species. It is life-giving and life-enriching work.

. . . The fourth step is quite interesting: how does one then change her life, as she becomes much more conscious of how fear has permeated her being? . . . What is the fruit of relieving oneself of the burdens of fearfulness and of choosing to leave the territory of the reign of fear? . . . The usual results are profound insights, explosions of creativity, much more freedom in speech and action, . . . and dramatic shifts in intimate and personal relationships. (pp 100-101)

And through all of this, every step, one must practice compassion for oneself: compassion for the wounded, fearful part of you; compassion for the brave and steady part of you trying to unravel the layers of hurt and unease. You must breathe compassion to yourself, and wrap the terrified in compassion.

Dissolving our fears, layer by layer, releases founts of energy, energy which had been used to contain those fears and keep us “out of trouble.” I doubt I speak only for myself when I report that with each little plug of fear recognized and released, I receive a strong burst of new energy, new stamina, a new willingness to take a risk, stick my neck out, and get out of one of the boxes I spend too many of my days inside of.

Releasing an old, buried fear gives us access to new sources of energy, as well as everything else that got caught up in that fear, buried there like a fossil in amber. It heals the deep psyche with its old bits of wounded self. Perhaps most significantly, it can open us up to new levels of reality, for we fear most of all that which is invisible and unknown to our five reliable senses. This is no surprise, as we live in an astonishingly materialist culture, despite the alleged religiosity at the heart of American society. As we learn, slowly, I should add, that what we see is not all there is, there is a parallel realization: that ego’s view is also not the whole story.

6. From Fear to Wider Consciousness

Each step of releasing a fear allows us to open our horizon of consciousness a bit further, to include more people, more points of view, more dimensions of reality and what is reality.. I like the vague words of “expansive,” “inclusive,” and “complex” to suggest how much richer a mental and emotional world is available to us. But of course, “complex” suggests as well that we must seek to relate with people in dramatically different worldly positions and to address seriously elaborately different points of view. This is really hard work, as many of you know, but softening the boundaries of our consciousness both makes this possible and then helps it to

bear fruit. And one truly gorgeous piece of fruit, nay, a cornucopia of fruit, is a gradually emerging awareness of our fundamental interdependence. Then we know, that a profound fear is surely dissolving, that the isolation from which we suffer so is being breached, and that we begin to understand that we have allies everywhere we look. Ego, I might add, at least our good old American version of ego, has taken a serious hit, and that is cause for celebration. We are also assured there will be colleagues.

Colleagues are not what is missing. What is missing is your awareness of each other. Then you can build cooperative networks – sometimes simply to communicate and share insights and information, and sometimes to organize sustained action together. These are vastly more effective and are the perfect example of how the whole is much greater than the sum of its parts. Energy is generated, sustained, and then directed at a particular point of leverage.

(p.109)

6. Creating the Conditions for Peace

So, human fear causes war. Powerful shifts of energy are up-ending many traditional structures and ways of doing things around the globe. It is a crisis point, surely, but it is also a time of extraordinary opportunity to re-make our communities and our world. There are no shortcuts, and the work is long and arduous. It requires many citizens around the globe to dissolve their deepest fears and begin the work of envisioning a humane, just, and sustainable world. We are certainly not alone in this longing, and we should be making constant efforts to reach ever more deeply into local and global networks of peace builders. Our first step is to be diligent

about bringing up our own fears, layer after layer, neutralizing them first and then wrapping them in compassion, where they can no longer drive our behavior. Step by step we release the strangle hold and the false judgments of ego and its deeply wired neuroses in each of us. Then it is easy to open to Spirit and the sources of wisdom, in whatever form and shape fits you best. And to give the Teachers the last word:

All you who work for social justice and all the good hearted people of the world must find your joy and your trust again. You are all working without really trusting that you are moving with human history; you experience yourselves as shoring up small pieces of social organization in the face of hurricanes of disaster. Your world, what really animates your world, must become much more spacious. You must learn to think cosmically, for only that will give you adequate access to the energy of Spirit. (p.30)