



Hope Springs Institute

International Celebration of World Peace
Peebles, Ohio, USA
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for Rita Jane Andrews

*visionary leader, teacher of the true heart,
generous ally for peace and social justice, dear friend.
Thank you for bringing this peace celebration to life.*

CLOSING TALK

Alexandra Merrill

Some Thoughts on Hope, Peace and Love and Not Forgetting Why We Go To War

"The eyes of the future are watching us now, praying for us to see beyond our own time."

–Terry Tempest Williams

My thoughts for this talk are as diverse as we are. In many of the old traditions, these solstice days are high and holy, times for prayer as well as for celebrations. So these closing words are a solstice brew of thoughts from the heart and some of mind; some are mine and some are others. They feel woven together at the spirit level by invisible threads, more a tapestry of diverse and connected thoughts, a kind of patch-work quilt. I'll trust the thoughts to flow out towards you and land in you where they will. And right here at the beginning of the story, I can tell you that, by the end, you will see that this whole cloth is a love song for The Great Benevolent Mother of the Universe, to the Earth who bears our weight, to the Bees who pollinate our lives, and most of all to the sweet Children of Forever, without whom we will not continue.

About the Forest

As we end our Peace Gathering, we sit here 100 strong, at the top edge of what's left of the great mother forest called Appalachian, a forest built from Earth's body between 480 and 440 million years ago. Its reach extends across to Greenland, Ireland and northern Great Britain before ending finally beyond Norway out as far as the great Siberian Taiga. Its domain was hundreds of millions of acres of primal original forest. We 100 individuals are immeasurably small against the numinous hugeness of the great mother forest—one tiny, human community, nowhere near as large as a small hive of honey bees or ground bees or even 100 fruit flies on a ripe peach here on top of this small mountain. It's not even a mountain—this Peach Mountain. It's more like a foothill to the great Appalachians, a humble relative and admirer of the nearby venerable Serpent Mound made only thousands of years ago by the indigenous Ancients. We are barely a blink in the cosmic eye. But we matter. We make a difference. The juxtaposition of our human smallness in the presence of the enormity of forest history is both humbling and thrilling. Against the backdrop of earth's historical memory, how extremely fortunate and privileged we are to be with each other in a part of our planet where we still have the freedom to speak what is in our hearts and minds about war and peace.

About This Learning Community – Our Hive

Listen with me to one of our really great peaceful warrior women: the African-American scholar/activist bell hooks, in *Teaching to Transgress*:

"Learning is a place where paradise can be created. In this field of possibility, we have an opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades an openness of heart and mind that allow us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom."

And we here are privileged to have the freedom to practice freedom. Strengthened by each other's presence, good will and our collective longing for peace and justice, we have enjoyed the freedom to build a learning community that values wholeness over division, dissociation and splitting. A certain kind of multi-layered closeness has grown—it's the kind of closeness that does not annihilate difference. Forging bonds across our multiple identities, many languages, racial realities, sex and gender identities, class, caste, religious beliefs and national identities, our common political energies become more potent. As our common devotion to global peace and peace activism matures, so also grows our understanding of the devastating politics and greedy illusions of the empire-builders and their politics of structural violence. Here on Peach Mountain, we have been in a hive of collective benevolence, doing no harm, cross-pollinating our spirits.

About The Bees

In a speech from 1977 that became the book *The Heart of Compassion*, the Dalai Lama said to a huge crowd in New Delhi:

"Nature's law dictates that in order to survive, bees must work together. As a result, they instinctively have a sense of social responsibility. They have no constitution, no law, no police, no religion or moral training but because of their nature, the whole colony survives. We human beings have a constitution, laws and the police force. We have religion, remarkable intelligence, and hearts with a great capacity to love. We have many extraordinary qualities but in actual practice, I think we are far behind those small insects. In some ways, I think that we are poorer than the bees."

The way of pollen is an ancient indigenous way of peace and beauty taught to us by the Bees of all continents. We have injured them, put them at risk. There are times when a formal apology is a path to making amends. To acknowledge my small part in offending the Bees, I offer my formal apology for the dreadful illness that we ourselves have created among them. This disease is devastating the global colonies of bees, honeybees in particular, but also some colonies of ground bees. Colony collapse disorder or CCD, is a puzzling international epidemic, in which all adult bees suddenly disappear from the hive, leaving the honey and pollen behind. Few if any, dead bees are found around the hive. Between 50 and 90% of the honey bee colonies in the US alone have been afflicted by this disorder. The scientists tell us that CCD turns out to be a symbiotic, pathogenic bacterial infection caused by poor nutrition, pesticide exposure and invasions of toxic and parasitic mites. We continue to use our very poor judgement and allow the giant empire of agribusiness to spray poisonous insecticides all over the planet as we allow them to modify genes on crops and lay claim to rights on the genetically modified seed stock. What is this if not the insanity of collective greed? I fully agree with his Holiness when he says he thinks that we are poorer than the bees but I also think that we are stupider and far more cruel. In my harsher moments, I think it's the human colony that seems to have infected itself with CCD. Perhaps we too, are beginning to see signs of our own collapse, of going to pieces in our global orders and disorders of nation states and empires. It might not be a terrible thing—a collapse. There have been so many empires that have collapsed in on themselves, consumed by their own greed while the bees have survived all collapses of empire by just being bees, minding their own beeswax, pollinating our world for us.

Bees have been preserved in ancient amber and painted on the walls of the ancient mystery caves in all over the globe. These small and brilliant creatures precede us by more than 30,000 years. Worshipped as the community of the Mother Goddess herself, we see bees in sacred art of all cultures. And they do sting when they are invaded unexpectedly because their sense of social responsibility rises up and their courage and anger come together in the use of their own form of poison. But ultimately, they teach the path of beauty, benevolence and sustainability. Their industrial complex, the hive, is not military but rather simply elegant and highly functional. It serves to produce both a sustainable culture and a nutritious substance that heals and sustains many species. The hive mind and a shared work ethic merge into buzzing consciousness, which operates as a unified field of energy. Bees have sustained the peace and the delicate collaborative balance in their system for a long time. Why would we annihilate the bees if they have been showing us a path to peaceful collaborative survival for 30-40,000 years? We could emulate them rather than annihilate them.

Here's what the great Spanish poet, Antonio Machado, tells us about the bees he knows in this poem/prayer:

"Last night, as I was sleeping,
I dreamt—marvelous error—
That I had a beehive
Here inside my heart.
And the golden bees
Were making white combs
And sweet honey
From my past mistakes."
— Antonio Machado
(1875-1939)

Facts of War

It seems crucial for us all to have access to accurate facts about our patterns of creating war. Will Durant, the great scholar of western civilisation, tells us that "During the mere 5,600 years of written human history, 14,600 wars have been recorded. Two or three wars for each year of recorded history. There have been only 242 years in which no war is reported in writing." But that doesn't mean no wars were happening but rather that those humans were carrying their history by spoken word and ballad. That fact of 14,600 wars in 5600 years forces me accept the possibility that there is something about war in the human psyche—in my own little psyche—and in yours—which is so strong that we have to bow to it. Even as peace lovers we bow to our terrible love of war.

It is the terrible tension between these two thoughts: the thought of eons of war and the equally constant longing for peace that I feel is so unbearable. Coming to terms with the reality of our often denied terrible love of war—our animal instincts of greedy and aggressive territorialism—and in the same breath, our sincere, deep spiritual longings for a harmonious collective life—this seems to be our larger and most challenging work as the human community. Apparently, our need for war—even as we labor with love and open hearts to turn our course towards peace—is an integral part of our collective psyche. By sitting in the middle of this continuum long enough, my most pressing questions surfaced.

- How will we bring ourselves into right relationship with the raw force of our instinctual aggressive natures?
- What is there in our psyches that will help us side with peace instead of letting ourselves be sucked into the endless vortex of feeding needless and mindless violence?
- Can we bow to the horrible beauty of the natural law of chaos- volcanoes, tsunamis, floods, wildfires, earthquakes—and, at the same time, turn our human labors toward restoring peace and eliminating cultural trauma from our interdependent communities and restoring peace?
- And what do feminism and activism have to offer in the great turning away from the path of destruction and toward the path of peace?

Sitting deeper and deeper into these hard questions strengthens my staying power. What I mean by staying power is my capacity to take the heat and to have a voice, at least, if not an answer to the dilemma. In order to do that staying present, I need an image to serve as antidote to my despair. So I turn to poets, Saints, dead and alive, wizards and seers. The following starburst of a sentence from St. Augustine is a remedy for the despair.

"Hope has 2 beautiful daughters: Courage and Anger."

Those 8 words help me keep my own hope alive in the face of historical facts of war. I love this sentence because it opens my imagination. When I read that sentence, I look into the faraway clouds and imagine a serene Mother floating there with her two beautiful girls, almost adult- each standing separate and still, looking out at me, at each of us—from across time and space, unsmiling—challenging us to know them as benevolent forces in all of us. I see it this way:

Hope is the Energy of love.
 Anger is the energy of raw life force, just as it is-no praise and no blame while
 Courage is the energy to communicate the truth through body, mind and spirit.

In bringing courage and anger together in the service of peace, we might all become the pilgrims Bhanu spoke of yesterday in her talk. I see them as the eyes of the future, calling us out. That Mother of Kindness and her beautiful daughters, Courage and Anger, are harbingers of hope, angels of mercy, a path to follow.

Defining Our Terms of Reference

Language is the biggest power tool we have so let's use our language to define our own terms of reference and thereby increase our efficiency as allies of Peace and Justice. If we are clear about our terms, we can know what we are fighting for. Mental muddiness doesn't help. Getting working definitions we can respect, stand for, defend, and even die for makes all the difference to making the best kind of trouble. To that end, I offer two of my own current working definitions and remind us of Dwight David Eisenhower's defining moment in the last speech of his Presidency in 1961.

Feminism is a political worldview which, at its core, acknowledges that the world's oldest prejudice is misogyny and that women on the planet everywhere still suffer from the grips of this misogynist

hatred of who we are, what we represent and what we are capable of accomplishing. Feminism is also a path, a spiritual path which acknowledges, honors and labors to rebalance the politics of interdependence on earth by denouncing and dismantling oppressive structures, all forms of injustice and wars which are waged in the service of greed, fear and self-interest. To be a feminist is to become an ally of all who work for peace and social justice. Feminism is for everybody who stands against oppression and injustice.

Activism is the embodiment of a policy or action that uses vigorous advocacy strategies to achieve social justice and peace. Activism is fueled by individual and collective capacity to harness aggression and place it in the service of a cause. Aggression in this case is boldly defined as life force rising. Neither good nor bad. Using the clean fire of one's own natural aggressive energy in whatever small ways are possible becomes a spiritual practice, a life work, and a way of being.

Acknowledging that there are as many feminisms as feminists and as many kinds of effective activism, I must stand for my own. As I do that, I need to stay awake to my own tendencies to calcify my beliefs, to fall asleep on my path by not really thinking critically about what I say or to worse, to go stale—like old dog-eared lecture notes—on my actions as an independent feminist/activist. Wary of self-righteous activism and sexist feminism, I want to use my feminism and my activism to engage open discussion of problematic terms such as "global military-industrial complex." This is a term that haunts me since my 20s. It feels like a root term for the current global dilemma.

"The Military Industrial Complex"

This phrase itself forms the big bones of the contemporary empire. Laid in place in Dwight David Eisenhower's last US Presidential speech in 1961, these words now affect all of us, no matter what national passport we carry. His words seem prophetic, precise and pertinent so I want to bring them here.

"A vital element in keeping the peace is our military establishment. Our arms must be mighty, ready for instant action, so that no potential aggressor may be tempted to risk his own destruction.... This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the world experience. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society. In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals so that security and liberty may prosper together."

Surely, we here today, all of us global citizens of the continents, must agree to be that 'alert and knowledgeable citizenry' now, and fiercely so, without losing our love of peace. Eisenhower's phrase 'the proper meshing of the machinery of defense and our peaceful methods and goals...ah, my heart quavers in unknowing just here. "The proper meshing..."what is that? What is that? I really do not understand. And I want to look at the phrase 'a just war.'

A Just War

"First, war must occur for good and just purpose rather than for self gain or as an exercise of power. Second, a properly instituted authority such as the state must wage the just war. Third, peace must be a central motive even in the midst of violence."

Quoting St. Augustine again and linking to our current US president who referred to St. Augustine's definition of a "just war" to justify his decision to send more troops into Afghanistan, I do not feel at peace with this definition. I do not believe that it is possible to justify this war as having a just cause—when the damages are exactly what they are in most cases, cruel, unjust and immoral. And when the eons of Afghan history tell us all we need to know about that tribal stronghold. How can we come to a good conclusion if we refuse to acknowledge the bountiful lessons of Afghan history? That said, I am still not convinced that there IS such a thing as a just war—and I always feel the opposition between the two words. My mind remembers the bees again. When the bees swarm to sting an intruder, it is nature herself they obey, that vast and ultimately benevolent impersonal force that has neither—greedy intent to dominate the bee's culture and their resources—nor violent intent to annihilate the invading intruders. At the end of my day, I trust the laws of nature because they are inherently relational and participate in an interdependency of species structure. I have come to mistrust laws of culture that are split off from natural law, powered by greed and ignore the laws of nature.

I also hear my wobbly ambivalence. On the one hand, I declare I do not believe there such a thing as a just war in the human community, at the same time, I understand and accept that great revolutions have always arisen from the groundswell buzzing of oppressed sectors across all history. It is a natural response to the structural violence caused by dominator cultures, by empires. When hope for freedom gives birth to courage and anger in the form of outrage and resistance to dominator cultures, my energy wants to join. So I too, finally believe that there might come a time when I will go back in the streets. Maybe that's a just war, after all. If it's what I believe in...isn't that just the problem? Getting stuck in my own tiny beliefs and refusing the deepening that comes from dialogue across differences? I just don't know. I see that I do take a situational ethic vis-à-vis war. But like aggression, war, in and of itself, is perhaps neither good nor bad. And I do not believe that war is simply the absence of peace. Or that peace is the absence of war.

In confusion again, I turn to wiser others for guidance to Paolo Freire, who, in his brilliant *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, a core source book for social justice activism, tells me this:

"The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and recreation, is not possible if it is not infused with love. Only by abolishing the situation of oppression is it possible to restore the love which that oppression made impossible. The struggle for hope means the denunciation, in no uncertain terms of all abuses. As we denounce them, we awaken in others and ourselves the need and also the taste for hope."

May I never, ever forget his work on behalf of the oppressed of the earth. And may we all learn to do the right kind of denouncing.

And then to James Hillman who, in his 2004 book *A Terrible Love of War*, tells me something I don't love but have to hang onto. I have read this book three times now. I confess to a terrible love for

this book because it forces me to confront my own animal nature and to accept that I have a part of my own psyche, which will fight to the death, my own, or yours. Hillman is able to name our world in such a way that I can find my truth in my own rawness, mortality and imperfection—while at the same time, accepting all that. It's on my top ten list.

"War is never over, even on victory day. It is an indelible condition in the soul given to us by the cosmos. The word peace can only be understood after you have grasped the word "war." Perhaps we do come into the world knowing it all and that war is in us—not because of the fighting instinct, but in our souls' knowledge of the cosmos—of which war is the foundation. The great realities are given: life displays and confirms them. If war is present to the archetypal imagination, we don't need wars to know them. War belongs to our souls as an archetypal truth of the cosmos. It is a human accomplishment and an inhuman horror, a love that no other love has been able to overcome....War itself shall remain until the gods go away."

It is taking me a long time to absorb this potent message.

And to Chris Hedges, a veteran war correspondent who has survived ambushes, imprisonment, beatings and then divinity school where he was able to integrate the war experiences with hard-nosed realism and deep moral insight. His book, *War is a Force That Gives us Meaning*, eloquently carries his message:

"In the rise to power we become smaller, power absorbs us, and once power is attained, we are often all made smaller—so we can swiftly fall prey to the forces we thought we had harnessed. So too in war. We gain knowledge only as we are pushed down the ladder and stripped of all illusions. Love may not always triumph, but it keeps us human. It offers the only chance to escape the contagion of war. Perhaps it is the only antidote. And there are times when remaining human is the only victory possible. To survive as a human being is possible only through love.

And when death is rising in the ashes of wars, the instinct must be to reach out to those we love, to see in them all the divinity, pithy, and path loss of the human. And to recognize love in the lives of others—even those with whom we are in conflict love that is like our own. This does not mean we will avoid war or death. It does not mean that we as distinct individuals will survive. But love, in its mystery has its own power. It alone gives us meaning that endures. It alone allows us to embrace and cherish life. Love has power both to resist in our nature but we know we must resist, and to affirm what we know we must affirm. For the covenant of love is such that it recognizes both the fragility and the sanctity of the individual. It recognizes itself in the other. It alone can save us."

For me, it is love and hope and courage and anger that make the magic to heal our beautiful and troubled world.

And last, I turn to Arundhati Roy. I love her bold and brilliant integrity. With her brave voice of outrage, she compels me to stand in my own truth and to live into my own definitions. For me,

part of being a feminist/ activist and an independent scholar has to do with being willing to be troubling—be a troublemaker—and then being willing to take the consequences. If making trouble by speaking out against all structural violence, oppression, social injustice and unjust wars helps to shift the consciousness towards more then, then let me become a really competent professional troublemaker so I can use my energy to midwife the shift, but non-violently, please....I want to interrupt structural violence at all levels with structural compassion.

"Fearlessly, but non-violently,
We must disable the parts of the machine that is consuming us.
We're running out of time.
Even as we speak,
The circle of violence is closing in.
Either way, we will change
Change will come.
It could be bloody.
It could be beautiful.
It depends on us."

And in closing, here is what lives in my heart in this moment. It is not necessary to destroy human communities or communities of bees, it is not necessary to lay waste to the body of this earth by punching holes in her belly, or to drown millions of fish in the oil of greed, or to prolong the endless violent and oppressive omnivorous structures of empire that devastate communities of animals, people and plants and minerals. And it is more than criminal to destroy the future generations of children who would bring the peace we long for them to have, especially since we have set such a poor example. We have a choice to embody a more hive-like relational consciousness such as what we witness in the politics of hive-life, the Council of the Indigenous Grandmothers or Veterans for Peace or Code Pink. Or the Midwives for Peace group on the Palestine-Israel border. Or Women in Black Or The Mothers of the Disappeared. Or the Pachamama Project. Or right here in the field of our labors and our dreams, right here on Peach Mountain where we long to make peace so our children will not have to die from our greedy mistakes. Turn back to Hope, Courage and Anger— and above all Love for inspiration because:

"The eyes of the future are looking back at us and they are praying for us
to see beyond our time."

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