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I am not disturbed, as many people are, by the rifts and wrangles among world leaders, the differences of opinion within administrations, or the balance of opinions of people within countries. Quite the contrary. I am encouraged. What I believe it represents is an important part of a change that is taking place in the world. We are no longer marching lockstep to war as we often have in the past. Instead of giving in quickly to the herd instinct that has dominated us for centuries that inclines us to solve some of our most difficult problems by killing "enemies", I believe that we are entering a new era in which reason and rationality are weighing in AGAINST war, giving peace a chance, as many people have been pleading for years!

I think these changes will continue. They have been long awaited and the ground has been well prepared in many ways. By the Vietnam war, as one example, which was a fundamental consciousness-raising experience for millions of people around the world. Why it took so long for our experiences to bear fruit I will turn to in a moment.

There are new elements in the current world wide opposition to THIS war. First, improvements in communications (especially the internet) are allowing instant, inexpensive and personal influence in a way that has never been possible before. Second, there has been much more time for this protest to develop because it has come BEFORE the war rather than during it. People have been able to think things through in a different context, without the distracting pressures of body bags and government propaganda and appeals to patriotism under duress. Third, many of the peace and justice organizations that grew out of Vietnam protests did not pack up and go home, but, recognizing that there were systemic problems that were responsible for it, kept going; researching, educating, and making more and more people aware of the problems and alternative solutions.

Fourth, the United Nations has gained in credibility and influence, and I for one do not buy the notion that if the security council does not give its blessing to this war it is a failure. Rather, it would be further evidence of the collective wisdom of this international body, and of my thesis here. WAR would be the failure.

In recent years there have been advances in non-violent conflict resolution, in technology (surveillance techniques, e.g.) and even in our understanding of the complex motivations that underlie our reactions to threat and aggression. What is missing is not knowledge, though there is much more we NEED to know about what drives us to violence - something that is learned, not something we are born with. What is missing is the will and the patience to put what we know into practice.

Another element, still missing, that could put us over the hump once and for all is an accurate and long-term appraisal of the CONSEQUENCES of wars. We've always been fairly good at celebrating the "victories", remembering them, and paying our respects to those who fought them, but to my knowledge no one has ever followed up on the consequences in detail for very long after ANY war. The war itself is usually analyzed in GREAT detail by historians. What we need now is historians who will follow the process from day one for several generations, putting before us the true and complete costs to the survivors, the families, and society as a whole.

A running account with updates, keeping the matter before us, would make us much less inclined to engage in this destructive and barbaric practice.

Old habits die hard and new ones develop slowly. The psyche, which is the source of most of our problems AND their solutions, is not easily changed.

And change seldom comes suddenly. In matters of the mind and heart it usually sneaks up on us slowly. I have been committed to non-violence for 40 years, and I've been a clinical psychologist even longer. I served in the U.S. Air Force for four years, and worked with veterans for another ten. I have tried very hard to understand the change process. How do people change? That they do is obvious. And there are numerous examples in human history of practices that declined and eventually died out. But we do not know nearly enough about how it happens, and even less about how to MAKE it happen. If we put a tenth of the money and effort into exploring human motivation and the individual and collective change process that we do into the exploration of OUTER space and weaponry, we could someday understand INNER space and its influence on our affairs.

But however much we learn and try to put into practice what we know, the changes will take time. To conclude, I will quote from something I wrote years ago.

“A real commitment to non-violence is not yet possible for very many nations OR for very many people. We have accepted violence as a way of responding to conflicts for too long, and the habits are too deeply ingrained. Many people believe that violence is INEVITABLE – that our freedom to influence our future does NOT include a choice in THIS matter. After all, they say “It is human nature.” Or “The Bible says there will always be wars and rumors of wars.”

“There is little SUPPORT for this belief in terms of what we know about human nature, but it is comforting in a way to many who are trying to make sense out of all the senseless violence.

“But however we view the situation it IS possible to move in the right direction, a step at a time. And, in fact, many people are doing it. Even nations are doing it! And ultimately, it can bring us to the point towards which we are tending – the point which we all hope for, and are in our various ways working for (including even those who see arms and armies as necessary deterrents to war and violence!) - a just and peaceful world.”

I believe we are now witnessing another step in the right direction.

Shalom, Barry

