

Culture of Peace: The coming American spring

By David Hazen Emerald Compassionate Action Network

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The greatest challenge for those who would be nonviolent is to restore the experience of connection, cooperation and trust. Our entanglement with our culture of isolation, division and violence is so deep that to attempt to extricate ourselves from it is emotionally painful and terrifying. We use the endless distraction of external situations to avoid awareness of feelings. We keep ourselves numb to the fear and depression that linger in our subconsciousness.

Fortunately, our existential crisis is tipping our willingness to risk an inner journey for which we have had almost no preparation. This is not an intellectual process. It becomes more obvious every day that it's easier and faster to take the risk of acting our way into a new way of thinking than to think ourselves into a new way of acting. We can quickly learn by practice, immersing ourselves in the experience of just doing it, moment by moment. For our culture of violence to shift radically toward a culture of peace, we each need to have a transformative experience that changes our perspective and attitudes about who we are, who we are working with, and where we are going.

When it comes to collaboration and teamwork, we can stretch our imagination to what perhaps 30 or 50 people could do on a football team, or even what a few thousand people could do for NASA to put a man on the moon — but seven and a half billion people working together for world peace? This is “beyond the beyond” of anything we’ve done before, which makes it so difficult to grasp. It is thus very practical to begin with small, local experiments in peace-building which can be scaled up later.

Our most appropriate response now is to empower emotional resilience in ourselves and others, i.e. build personal and community support networks such as the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission for those rehearsals of seeking

cooperation and trust. We need to create for ourselves constant mutual reinforcement within a community of like-minded seekers for a surrender of selfish interests to the common good, which is where we are going, ready or not.

Choosing to join this next step in humanity's evolution is a complex, painful, and transformative personal process requiring us to become someone we probably never intended to be, may have never imagined we might become, and yet has far-reaching healing powers for any catastrophe. The American public is being propelled by crisis after crisis forward faster than most of us, especially the bloggers and media, can possibly fathom. Spring is coming!

It is time to let go of our unconscious, personal habits of perpetuating the culture of separation. It's a demanding process to become strong by sharing power, to become decisive by sharing analysis, to build community by letting go of one's fortress mentality, to become internally balanced and secure, to find strengths and courage we never knew we had. However, any small progress we make will immediately send tremors of peace not only into our own lives but also into our interconnected society.

What are our specific options for thriving during this rippling collapse of the culture of violence?

- 1) Each one of us individually seeking to overcome our denial about the violence in our own thoughts, words, and deeds,
- 2) Each one of us seeking connection with others who walk the nonviolence path,
- 3) Collectively discovering and constructing a local nonviolent social structure,
- 4) Networking with other groups, globally, who are also moving outside the status quo,
- 5) Making the network and structures visible,
- 6) In a moment of crisis, offering the nonviolent alternative to the status quo directly and be prepared to take no for an answer, and
- 7) While waiting for all this to happen, keep breathing, praying, singing and dancing.

There is no timeline for doing this work. We will frequently move back and forth through the varying levels of hope and despair as we go deeper into it. Just remember that even though whatever you do may seem insignificant, as Gandhi said, it is very important that you do it. You, dear friend, must be the one to discover why it is important.

—David Hazen, a long-time advocate for peacebuilding, is a co-founder of Emerald Compassionate Action Network in Eugene, Oregon, and author of “Love Always Wins: Hope for Healing the Epidemic of Violence” and “The Work of Love.” Email comments and questions to The ACPC website is; like the commission on Facebook at; follow twitter.com/AshlandPeace on Twitter. All are welcome to join the ACPC’s Talking Circle at 11 a.m. each Tuesday and Community Meeting at 4 p.m. each Wednesday, both at the ACPC office, 33 First St., Suite 1, diagonally across Lithia Way from the Ashland Post Office.



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