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In 1969 I left Vietnam sick at heart from what I'd seen and been part of. Last February I returned to the country that had been America's *Moby Dick* and talked with survivors of "that dirty little war." Heart rending accounts of suffering and loss flowed spontaneously, often over meals together, punctuated by apologies for distressing American guests with the past. Those stories and the questions asked of me--what I did during the war and why--evoked stronger than anticipated emotional responses. In turn this has led to some deeper reflections on the nature of war and evil which I share in this article.

Hearing the other side and becoming aware of the extent of our folly and its consequences shifts the perspective dramatically. Americans still suffer the effects too; especially the millions of scarred Vets. The number of suicides among Vietnam Vets long ago outnumbered those killed during the war. But if our world was turned upside down, theirs was shattered by the thousands of tons of explosives and toxic chemicals, by the relocation camps and other means employed "... to win the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people." We killed over a million there by the most conservative estimate (estimates range to 3 million) and hundreds of thousands are still unaccounted for after all these years. And yet, after all that, I was greeted and treated with civility and in some instances with genuine warmth almost everywhere I stopped. And it's obvious that our brutal legacy has not been passed on to the children. I found them generally open and trusting, a joy to watch and interact with. The Vietnamese are a remarkable people!

Birth defects are still being attributed to Agent Orange. An internationally acclaimed film ("Where War Has Passed" by Vu Le My) shows the daily lives of some of the 2 million afflicted and the nightmarish results which these people wake up to every day. Many children were killed during the war. In fact, because American strategists applied the same tactics used in WWII - targeting life supporting infrastructure, civilians and their homes - most of the casualties in Vietnam (59%) as in the "Good War" (60%) were civilians (World Watch Institute - 2001). First hand accounts of the daily slaughter of non-combatants in Vietnam are chillingly presented in two classics: "Bloods," an oral history taken from Black Vets by Wallace Terry (Random House, 1984) and "The Real War" by Jonathan Schell, a distinguished journalist covering Vietnam in 1967 (NY: Pantheon books, 1987). Schell recounts hearing soldiers say, "You (or they) wouldn't believe it!" Believing it, the wholesale murder of women and children by us, "the good guys," would likely, as it did for me, shatter one's fantasies about war, the military, our culture and ourselves. But many big and comforting lies about war still prevail, setting up yet another generation of naive youth with the thrill to kill and for the slaughter of the innocent.

The most intense encounters on my trip back were those with survivors of the massacres at My Lai and another massacre in the mountains to the west of My Lai. Letters I sent from the war zone during 1968-69 contained first hand and insider accounts of the killing of civilians. The most egregious were the daily sport of crushing unsuspecting mountain people under the wheels of an earthmover near Pleiku in the summer of 1968; the murder of many children by a high ranking officer at Landing Zone North English near Bong Son in January of 1969; and, a few weeks after that, a small village south of the Bong Son Bridge was strafed without warning and the homes set ablaze with rifle grenade explosions. We had all survived a minor ambush miles away from that village but retaliation was necessary, I was told, because "we had to teach them a lesson." But subsequent letters from family and friends made no mention of the horrors I described. **THEY DIDN'T BELIEVE IT!**

I couldn't blame them because disbelief had just come full circle. When 9 or 10 years old I listened intently to a disabled WWII Vet (I remember the bulging red scars crisscrossing his back) grapple with the savagery he had witnessed. He had expected this savagery from the "enemy" but not from his fellow Americans. A few years later my high school teacher, friend and mentor confided something even more unbelievable. In a tone of anguished despair he recounted that throughout the war all prisoners taken by

his WWII unit were tortured and executed and some of those murdered were barely teenagers. He noted that the murders were reflected in unit member's military records (via a then secret SPIN-number code) and nearly cost him the teaching position. But their first-hand accounts were so dissonant with everything else I'd been taught that they didn't register. The big lies I'd been steeped in won out and consequently I was shocked to witness in our own ranks in Viet Nam the brutality ascribed to the "enemy." One of the oldest soldiers Schell interviewed on the ground in Vietnam was also a veteran of WWII and Korea. He described his Vietnam experience as similar to that in the other two wars. Vietnam, the only televised war, seemed worse because the public saw some of the brutality: American soldiers executing wounded Viet Cong and some of the absurdities of war live on the evening news.

But media coverage is not the most damning evidence available. The righteousness of the Vietnam "cause" was unquestioned by the Military at the time and many (perhaps all) of the massacres and atrocities were filmed, taped and otherwise documented. During the massacre at My Lai the most riveting photos of the victims were taken by an official army photographer. In Terry's book "Bloods" a soldier is worried during the My Lai trial because of his participation in a massacre at Cam Ne "... and they have us on film." (Page 13). The statistical facts and first hand accounts show that the murder of unarmed civilians or "collateral damage" is predominantly what all modern wars are about. This will be especially true for the present "holy war" on terrorism. BELIEVE IT! Civilian casualties in Afghanistan already exceed the number of people killed during the terrorist attacks of 9/11 (CBC Radio, Canada, September 2002) and reports of atrocities are surfacing. The whole truth would be staggering for Vets and non-vets alike and would draw us to an inexorable conclusion: modern warfare itself is a crime against humanity! Knowing this would help drain public enthusiasm for all "holy wars".

So how can we make all this common knowledge and not just the dirty little secret of Veterans? For starters, everyone should see and pass along the documentary video "The Sound of the Violin in My Lai." The My Lai massacre is especially important because, of the hundreds of such incidents covered up by the Military, it's the only cover-up successfully exposed. More significant still, it was exposed by the courageous efforts of a single soldier who, on first hearing, didn't believe it! Next, to expose the cover-ups of other massacres in WWII, Korea and Vietnam, we should push for a Truth Commission that would give safe haven to Veterans who tell it like it is. Only those (including our Generals and other architects of war) who failed to cooperate or tell the whole truth would be handed over to the International Criminal Court and prosecuted for war crimes. A Truth Commission would be a significant first step. A full realization of the extent of damage inflicted and the magnitude of the evils committed as part of our past and present military actions would compel many to address some practical issues.

For an in depth review of the practical issues involved I recommend "The Atrocity Paradigm -- A Theory Of Evil" (NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), by Emma Goldman Professor of Philosophy, Claudia Card. There she elaborates on "the moral burdens and obligations of perpetrators" re: apologies, restitution, reparations and so on, "the moral powers of victims" such as forgiveness, and in general what we can and should do in response. Her critique of evil may be the best available from a secular perspective and the topic is of crucial importance in our troubled age. It's frightening to witness a world wide resurgence of fascism and to recall how the "good citizens" of Germany supported Hitler's Reich. The most enthusiastic support was generated by the "German Christian" movement, a popular "religious" ideology in many ways similar to today's "religious" Right. They associated Hitler's rise to power with the second coming of Christ. Will there be a revival of this dark chapter in history?

Presently, the sterile intellectualism based in positivist philosophy is giving way to relativism and an anti-intellectual over-reliance on feelings. It's sobering to note that Hitler's fervent conviction: "your deepest feelings will never lead you astray" lead him to incest, war, and suicide. Then consider what WE are now supporting if only by acquiescence and our tax dollars. There has been a near collapse of constitutional checks on power and we have an un-elected president. His inner circle includes felons who orchestrated an illegal war. His administration is heavily influenced by "religious" fundamentalists who equate war, especially in the Middle East, with their salvation - re: the second coming of Christ. Therefore, they

encourage and fund what they hope will be the suicidal policies of benighted militarists like Ariel Sharon. The fanatics among them are openly pushing for a "holy" war based on a childish, literalized rendering of religious Myth. Ominously, an affinity for fascism is evident in the affiliations maintained by the "religious" Right. (For a detailed account of the links between old Nazis, the "religious" Right and the Republican party read - "The Beast Reawakens" by Martin A. Lee - Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1997). Further signs of that old familiar pattern are the "Men's [reactionary] Movement", the anti-abortion crusade, the increasing scapegoating of minorities, and the penchant for filling the prisons by extra-legal means. Unfortunately, religious leaders forthrightly opposing this demonic trend are seldom seen or heard. Will we quietly allow this growing fanaticism to engender yet another SELF-fulfilling "prophecy" of suicidal destruction?

Since the war I've been searching for the reasons why ordinary well intentioned people tacitly support such evils. I needed to understand why the greatest evil of the day appears and feels to the majority like the good and right thing to do at the time. A passionate search for answers led me eventually to the world's wisdom traditions. There I found a more radical (to the root) perspective on evil and the most profound insights into the nature and causes of war. For example, the preeminent historian of the world's religions, Mircea Eliade, found that in contrast to religious models, military boot camp training is a degenerate form of initiation into adulthood ("The Sacred and the Profane," Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959). Where regenerate forms of initiation are designed to root out and resolve psychic dependence on parents, military training merely represses childish ties to mother and inculcates blind obedience to surrogate parental authority. The former generates the violence associated with "proving" one's manhood while in fact remaining emotionally dependent. The latter directs us to the scapegoats on which it must be vented and an endless cycle of violence ensues. Repressed emotional dependency plays into the use and abuse of women as an inseparable component of war. Tellingly, a war Vet and drill instructor at Fort Dix ended his exhortation on becoming an effective soldier with this retort: "a man who don't f--- don't kill!"

It takes courage to face death. All wisdom traditions admonish us to face our fear of death, to fully resolve its thorny issues and to live each day as if it's our last. No problem with the first part - the close calls and near misses under fire did that for me! So I thought. But I discovered later in life that I hadn't really FACED death at all and I'm now convinced that few soldiers do. Military training, weapons and high-tech gear tend to instill comforting illusions of invulnerability. The close calls we survive serve to augment those illusions. Paradoxically, the unconscious psycho-dynamics engendering death-dealing make it the ultimate form of death DENIAL! That paradox was explored against the backdrop of the Vietnam war by the distinguished psychologist Ernest Becker ("Escape From Evil," Free Press, 1975).

Unresolved and banished to unconsciousness, the problem of death looms large on the battlefield and throughout our culture. A blithe leap to a comforting belief in immortality is yet another form of denial - not a resolution. If denial of death is an unconscious driving force behind wars, including our suicidal war against nature - what is the origin of this compulsion? Why does it persist? What alternative state of consciousness distinguishes the great peacemakers? How might we all become thus transformed? The most compelling answers I've been able to find are contained in the common core of the great traditions but it takes an overview to flesh them out. I'll try to do that at the end of this article. Although inner transformation is primary, it's always a twofold movement and outer changes can aid that inner process.

An important movement in the right direction is the transition from our present glorification of war via War Memorials to the promotion of Peace Parks. I encourage one and all to support the efforts of Mike Boehm and Phan Van Do in their efforts to complete the Peace Park near the site of the My Lai massacre. A Peace Park provides a space and symbolic structures mutually designed and constructed to facilitate meetings between former "enemies" that inspire cooperative efforts to repair the damage of war. The focus, in contrast to war memorials, is truth and reconciliation with whatever "enemy" we unconsciously created during a fit of war fever. The scholar of religions, Huston Smith, notes that even for Islam the big Jihad is the battle against the enemy within our own psyches. For a closer look at the real enemy we need only a mirror. A Peace Park is about transforming the "them and us" mentality that promotes unconscious

tendencies of projection and scapegoating into people- to-people relationships. It's about giving something back and receiving immeasurably more in return. Giving something back aids the healing process for all involved. Supporting the Madison Quakers projects in Viet Nam is an effective way of doing so. The results of projects like the micro-loans to poor women that I witnessed were both remarkable and heartening. It was obvious that they were deeply appreciated by the people I met. Until the Quaker projects came to their aid, most of the My Lai survivors lived in abject poverty. That fact reflects shamefully on all countries involved but most especially on the US. Working with the Quaker delegation in Viet Nam was the most rewarding part of my trip back. In contrast, retracing my steps during the war was a disappointment partly because those still vivid memories are rooted in a past that is barely recognizable in today's Viet Nam. For example, the population has increased exponentially; the once beautiful rainforests in the Central Highlands have been clear-cut; the farming villages of my memory are now modern cities; organic farming methods of the 1960's have been subverted by the use of pesticides and herbicides; Western style consumerism has taken hold, and so on.

In summary, I'll note the obvious: that the absurdity of killing the innocent for peace is evident in the track record. In a single lifetime this approach has taken us from the bloody "war to end all wars" to the present world war without end. And yet I still hear so-called religious leaders sanctifying "the end justifies the means" rationalizations. In contrast and speaking from the heart of all wisdom traditions, Gandhi reminded us that "means and ends are like seed and tree respectively." Therefore we should nourish only the seeds of peace. We can do this individually by exposing our own "shadow" side and then doing the inner work necessary to heal the splits and re-channel that passionate energy toward constructive means. We can do it collectively by insisting on the redirection of the immense wealth and resources now being squandered by the military. Redirected wealth and resources could help establish a federal Department Of Peace and fund a peace force dedicated to Gandhian principles of non-violent confrontation. The effectiveness of these principles is compellingly captured in the inspiring documentary film, "A Force More Powerful" produced by Jack Duvall. The key to change is a transformation of consciousness.

Addendum - An Overview Of The Wisdom Traditions From A Non-dual Perspective

Scholars like Joseph Campbell have demonstrated the universality of religious symbols and archetypal deities. The non-dual approach reveals the common source from which they all spring and the overarching pattern that unites them. As the term implies, the focus is ultimate unity or Oneness so this perspective both includes and transcends the diversity of Mythical content across traditions. It also includes and transcends the scope of Aristotelian logic - our usual, dual mode of understanding. So this approach requires additionally what Einstein considered more important than knowledge, or what William Blake called our divine vision: i.e., imagination. Imagination is the transport to the creative source - to the fire at the core of our being. The UNI-verse revealed from a non-dual perspective is larger than the one modern science explores because it also includes the immeasurable inner dimension of consciousness itself. This dimension is accessible only through imagination and direct experience. It cannot be viewed or contemplated from a safe psychic distance - the creative source like the eye cannot see itself.

The universal pattern begins with unity, followed by a fragmentation of human consciousness and ideally with a transformation of consciousness back to unity. All wisdom traditions allude to an original unity followed by an historic shift away from our center of all inclusive wholeness. At that point we perceive separateness within and without. Around age three while playing out in the yard, I first became aware of being separate and alone. I ran for the house! There was no noticeable change in the external world during that fateful moment but my way of seeing it was drastically altered. I became afraid of the dark. At this point Shakespeare's famous line rings true: "nothing is good or bad but that our thinking makes it so." After the shift, what we either ignore or perceive as negative (traditionally the feminine), due to our semi-consciousness, becomes profaned--cut off from the sacred unity or ultimate whole. Harmonious death/life process becomes life versus death and a virtual cultural world at odds with the real takes form.

Metaphors differ but all traditions associate the genesis of evil with some variation of the fall into a dualistic mode of semi-consciousness. I demonstrate one aspect of our thus truncated perception with a simple figure/ground experiment. I draw a small white square in the center of a large blackboard and then ask students what they see. Being only half aware they see a white square (the figure - or the positive THING) and totally ignore the larger ground (the negative - or NO-THINGness) that surrounds the figure (the white square) and makes its existence as a distinguishable figure possible. I'll come back to nothingness and its connection to true center. But first it will help to contrast the fallen condition we call normalcy. Eastern traditions refer to this condition as the state of unnecessary suffering (*ducha*). Western traditions call it a state of sin. The original imagery associated with *ducha* (the skewed hub of a wheel), and sin (missing the mark or center), directs us to an identical original meaning - to be OFF CENTER. Once off center all our perceptions are skewed and we experience two-ness at odds - masculine vs. feminine, mind vs. body, the sacred vs. the sexual, life vs. death, etc.

The impact of these bifurcations on our actions was dually noted by Paul in the first century: "that which I would, I do not - that which I would not, that I do." Same in the 21st century. We should devote at least the majority of our wealth and resources to constructive products and endeavors promoting peace. We surely wouldn't devote, as we currently do, over 50% of our wealth and resources to destructive products and endeavors that fuel the wars against nature and each other. We should leave our beloved children a world at least as good and as full of life as the one we inherited. We surely wouldn't leave them the current world of rapidly expanding war zones and environmental dead zones generated by an ignorant life style. Our "successes" have led to overpopulation, our greatest problem according to WorldWatch.

Given the historical associations it's clear how this fallen condition led to the violent patriarchy that still dominates our world. Since time immemorial the negative has been designated feminine and associated with females via the attributes of vagina and womb. Conversely, the positive has been designated masculine and associated with males via the attributes of the penis. In the fallen condition where "opposites" are mis-construed as literally separable, the vast majority are drawn to the positive/masculine as opposed to the negative/feminine. Therefore, the Feminist movement or any other movement that fails to fully embrace and harmoniously integrate the negative/feminine, will at best be a mere revolution or swing of the pendulum. It matters little whether it's a Henry Kissinger or Madeleine Albright at the helm if both are stuck in the same old pattern and the results are similarly brutal and counterproductive.

Ego is the modern term for the off centered "self". It's pictured as the tip of consciousness rising like an iceberg out of a sea of unconsciousness. Transpersonal psychologist, Michael Washburn, has noted that the ego building project is essentially masculine in both males and females. Much psychology is devoted to building and improving this masculine ego because a "strong ego" correlates closely with success as defined in a patriarchal culture. Are those psychologies thereby promoting a secular form of the demonic? The best of intentions notwithstanding, many "successful" graduates of therapy have become more effective cogs in brutal corporate enterprises, the war against nature, and so on. Many psychologists like many so-called religious leaders avidly support the military and the present status quo based on violence and war. Before being sent off to VietNam we all had to pass a battery of psychological tests. Only those with "healthy" egos were trusted to participate in the slaughter. Psychologists can be as absurd in the name of "mental health" as is the Chaplaincy that blesses the bombing of innocents in the name of the Prince of Peace. In order to promote peace in others, physicians of the soul and psyche must first heal themselves.

The great peacemakers have demonstrated how illusory and unfree the ego "self" is. Comprised of infantile or incestuous family and cultural programs it can easily be reprogrammed for suicide by advertising or propaganda. The ego creates problems where none existed and its story is - "...a tale told by an idiot"; the larger and more willful the ego, the more "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." So the process and goal of the peacemakers is the reverse of modern "self" psychologies. The process is ego deflation, the goal its dethronement. That bundle of programs and programmed responses blocks the light of our true center and it must get out of the way. Our religious task (Latin- *religere*, to re-bond or Greek- *religio*, to re-link) is to surrender that illusory island of consciousness and re-bond or re-link with our true

center in the depth of the ocean of consciousness. The transition from ego "self" to unique Self-center isn't easy - we don't fall into wholeness and freedom as we do into ego fragmentation and human bondage. The transition process requires that we acknowledge the truth about our idiot tales. The whole truth evokes grief and regrets for what was said and done and for what was not. We discover in ourselves what we hated in others and our judgements of them come back to us. The issues of real guilt and the importance of compassion and forgiveness come to the fore. But we're admonished not to get stuck anywhere along the path. We must avoid the twin dangers of wallowing in guilt or regrets and succumbing to demonic inflation - we must get beyond ego altogether. The peacemaker's journey eventually leads to the awesome and mysterious plenum void or cosmic womb - to the creative source of all emanations and of consciousness. The path leads back to no-thingness from whence we came. This invisible and immeasurable dimension is too important to ignore! Its potency is reflected by the immense universe and by the extraordinary creations of human imagination that spring from it. It's the lost dimension of our consciousness. A realization of its presence and importance is the first step; but to get to the bottom of no-thingness we must experience it directly.

There is a meditation practice common to all traditions that takes us beyond the thoughts and sensations of normal ego consciousness. With perseverance we reach a state of stillness and emptiness from which we experience the timeless now moment. The timeless can be accessed through intense activity as well. It's what we experience in those memorable moments when we are so fully present, so totally engaged, that we LOSE "ourselves" (the false or split sense of ourselves) in music, nature, the love of another, etc.. Either way, from total stillness and emptiness or that of total engagement in the present, we glimpse a state where time does not hold sway. Those who have counseled trauma victims in a state of extreme distress know how important it is to bring them fully into the present moment. When we unwittingly give the illusive past and future the full weight of reality, they can crush us. But we can adequately handle whatever is here and now. In fact, "Life can only take place in the present moment. If we lose the present moment, we lose life." (Buddha). "The Power of Now" by Eckhart Tolle, offers an excellent presentation on the topic (Novato, CA: New World Library, 1999).

When we become consistently centered, totally present, and our actions flow directly from the source - from no-thingness without ego interruption, we have attained the peacemaker's state of consciousness. This is the state of inner peace the traditions refer to as at-one-ment or attunement with ultimate wholeness, the One - Tao, Allah, Brahman, God, etc. Peace within promotes peace without, so here lies the basis for real change as opposed to mere revolutions of the day. From the perspective of true center we discover the center is everywhere - at the heart of all. From this vantage point no longer clouded with ego programs we can see the unique center of the other even when the other is unaware of their own. This is the sound basis for loving our enemies and ourselves unconditionally on the path to transformation. "All real living is meeting and only the whole person can meet" said the distinguished theologian Martin Buber. When asked, "how do we become whole?" he replied: "by meeting." The center to center dialogue with the rest of life which he prescribed goes beneath ego generated thought and feelings and calls forth our full humanity - our Christ or Buddha nature, the peacemaker within.

If we compress the world's history to 24 hours it would allot modern man only one second. In one destructive second our "progress" has "frozen" (says cosmologist Brian Swimme) the principle of natural selection which generated the evolution of more abundant life for 5 billion years. By default "cultural selection," the actions of humans will now decide the world's fate. But our ego driven actions are destructively at odds with natural selection of the fittest - "those fitting in best with the rest of life." A general definition of insanity is the inability to perceive and/or constructively interact with reality - the rest of life. On the whole we are acting as an egotistical cancer on creation - turning paradise into a wasteland. The great peacemakers of the wisdom traditions show us the way toward unity and cooperation with the rest of life. The next geological second will see the elimination of the cancer on creation by either suicide or a transformation of consciousness. We don't have to destroy the world to "save" it or annihilate all life including our own in a mad quest to eliminate death. The death of our illusory ego "self" will suffice.