

The Third Shift
The Long Journey to Unite Humanity and Heal Our Woundedness
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I want to thank the Niwano Peace Foundation for this extraordinary recognition. Your commitment to faith-inspired peacebuilders and emphasis on interreligious cooperation are deeply appreciated.

Across nearly four decades I have worked in places portrayed as war zones. While human suffering was ever-present, courageous and compassionate people kept hope alive with patient and unwavering conviction that change for good was possible.

In Medio Magdalena and Montes de Maria in Colombia, I found local communities who in the midst of armed fighting set out to establish zones of peace and committed to dialogue over violence.

In Wajir, Kenya women decided they could make their local market safer for people from all backgrounds to buy and sell. Their initiative grew into a broad network of unusual alliances that together ended the war their area.

In Nepal, I found people from all caste and ethnic backgrounds who decided to share and protect their forest and water sources through careful preparation of community-wide dialogues transforming decade-old violent conflicts.

These people, in the midst of violence, chose to see their humanity and share the resources of their communities. They are pioneers, innovative geniuses of survival against the odds.

When we look back at peace scholarship and practice two historic shifts seem apparent.

The first shift came in the period of the great World Wars of the last Century. Peace studies initiated research into how wars emerge, how the international order could prevent interstate conflict, and how to promote cooperation between nations.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the proliferation of internal armed conflicts peacebuilding expanded our strategies. This second shift increasingly focused on civil wars and national peace processes. We slowly learned that durable, flourishing peace compelled recognition of local agency. Peace practices expanded to face the challenges of multi-tiered sustained dialogue, transgenerational trauma, reparative and restorative justice, social healing and reconciliation.

In 2019, we are now witness to a third shift in peacebuilding.

If the first quarter of the last Century let loose two World Wars addressed by the question of international order among independent nation-states, the first quarter of this Century has unveiled the search for how humanity will survive. How will we face planetary fragility? How will we address the fundamental right to belonging in an age of massive human mobility? How

will we shape a global politic of sustenance in service to dignified life while facing deep polarization and authoritarian impulses that manipulate fear and seek exclusionary control?

In 1539 Menno Simons, for whom my Mennonite faith community is named, wrote that faith requires us to respond to the suffering of fellow humans, *it feeds the hungry, does good to those who do it harm, and binds up what is wounded*. Centuries later Desmond Tutu noted that “my humanity is bound up with yours, for we can only be human together.”

Today, we have deep wounds across our global family and we live on a wounded planet.

To survive this woundedness, we need an ethic of peace guided by healing and earth-bounded dignity.

An earth-bounded ethic compels us to imagine ourselves as a profoundly interdependent global family. It invites us to tap healing wells that feed social courage and the compassionate resilience necessary to shift away from systems devouring the future of our yet-to-be born. It requires that we rally the all-embracing resources of our richly diverse humanity.

Earth-bounded humanity

Local communities that survived violence, these pioneers of healing change, had a common starting point: People imagined themselves in a web of relationships that included their enemies.

In Colombia one group coined this with the phrase “we have no enemies.” In South Sudan a group of youth expressed this as “we are 64 tribes with one mother.” This imagination opens toward seeing our common humanity far beyond our immediate fragmentation. They found ways to unite humanity through boundless love and boundaryless belonging.

We find this same impulse in spiritual and religious origin narratives, particularly from indigenous wisdom. Gratitude and awe for the fragile beauty of life and creation provide resources from which humility, care, and love bubble and offers a clear ethic: We are called to treat others as we would wish to be treated.

As stated by St. Benedict, this ethic invites us to *incline the ear of the heart* as the pathway of re-humanization, the capacity to touch our shared humanity. As friends in Medio Magdalena, Colombia say, *we will seek to understand those who do not understand us*.

In my Mennonite tradition I found parallel teaching: Faith is less about words than the life we choose to lead, exemplified by service, compassion, and love. Mennonite practices suggest that the quality of God’s love for humanity finds its clearest expression in how we respond to and care for others, including those who may wish us harm.

For me, the deepest aspirations of my faith tradition provided inspiration to move beyond barriers and boundaries. The infinite, boundless, and audacious love of the Divine toward humanity stirs us to notice and learn from this gifted diversity, to build lasting and improbable friendships across our brokenness, and to fearlessly seek to understand and respect those with

whom we disagree. I found myself drawn not to judge others in the midst of difference and conflict, but to come alongside our challenges and seek alternatives to violence together.

This understanding provided the insight to engage in interreligious cooperation for here we find the spiritual resources to imagine earth-bounded peacebuilding. Our most significant challenges require us to imagine and move beyond borders and boundaries.

We know this to be true: Walls have no capacity to address pandemics of disease or halt human engendered ecospheric and climatic shifts. Borders have precious little capacity to address the conditions driving human mobility in the search of well-being and belonging. National boundaries cannot stop the flow of ideas, instant communication and technology, nor the rivers of extractive global economies. On their own, state-drawn frontiers have proven incapable of containing the ceaseless flows of weapons, drugs, and human trafficking.

In our fragmented world today, too often filled with suffering and displaced humanity we need the resources that permit us to re-humanize, to be grounded and bounded together even amidst conflict and fear.

This planetary moment reveals that no nation on its own can assure the well-being of people within its borders without equal concern for the well-being of the most vulnerable beyond those borders.

To rise to our challenge, we need a wholeness of compassionate presence and social courage. We must tenaciously weave a deep inner strength with equity and dignity across diverse relationships that truly bind our wounds, embody the right to belong, and unite humanity.

Tapping Healing Wells

In *The Cure at Troy*, Northern Ireland's Nobel Laureate poet, Seamus Heaney penned extraordinary lines when he wrote:

*So hope for a great sea-change
On the far side of revenge.
Believe that further shore
Is reachable from here.
Believe in miracle
And cures and healing wells.*

In the midst of violent conflict I always found remarkable people carving their way toward that far side of revenge. At a personal level I also understood that intellectual and professional skill could not be disembodied from inner preparation. The quality of our *inner works* tie intimately into the quality of *dignified relationships* we need to forge if we are to shift systems that perpetuate harm.

It matters how we show up.

Over time, I discovered that interreligious accompaniment and an appreciative approach to spiritual wisdom strengthened my Mennonite vocation and faith. This is my first extended visit

to Japan, though I have long appreciated the inspiration I gained from haiku and haibun of the master poet Matsuo Bashó. Allow me to share I experienced this interreligious gift.

I start with a story I first read about a conversation between Bashó and his disciple Kikaku. One morning, following a walk in the fields, Kikaku shared a haiku he had composed.

*take a pair of wings
from a dragonfly you would
make a pepper pod*

Bashó responded. *This is not haiku. You kill the dragonfly. Haiku gives life. The haiku is this.*

*add a pair of wings
to a pepper pod you would
make a dragonfly*

From Bashó's *The Narrow Road to Oku* I learned haibun, the practice of the haiku pause embedded in the daily journey. I slowly began to appreciate how this simple form of poetry offered a resource I experienced as both internally healing and externally revealing. For me, haiku become a daily peace practice.

I now teach haiku to my university students. We leave the classroom and walk across the campus. We explore the emergent and complex conversation between our immediate experience of nature, the human senses and spirit, and the creative act, all as elements giving life to both the peacebuilder and the long journey of weaving peace.

Haiku provoked me to notice with all my senses. I could practice being awake in every moment.

Haiku prepared me to be touched by beauty. I could practice being open to awe.

Haiku required me to hold the full complexity of the moment in its simplest form. I could practice humility, the ceaseless search for deeper essence.

Haiku invited me to wander and wonder. I could practice the purity of childlike curiosity.

Haiku allowed me to play. I could practice creativity and wandering mind.

Haiku let the poet inside me summon experiences that I had not named. I could practice voice rising from the unspeakable.

Bashó reportedly said near the end of his life that he had written only 5 or 6 haiku, a surprising statement as he surely had written thousands. The *haibun* found in *Oku no hosomichi* provide two grounded yet profoundly spiritual understandings of Oku as travel into the interior.

First, Oku symbolizes the pathway Bashó followed into the interior of this great country. He sought to be present to the spirit, rooted in the story and people of each place along his journey, a profound commitment to the wisdom of the local.

Second, for Bashó, Oku infers the steady and intrepid journey into the vast inner world of consciousness, the search for locating one's place in the world, and the yearning to belong.

The journey itself is home, Bashó wrote in his opening lines. It is in the search for home where the meanings of Oku integrate into grounded wholeness that acknowledges shared place while tendering belonging.

This was the healing well I received from Bashó. The long journey to forge a shared home can have daily pause, joy, and clarity.

The full richness of our beautiful humanity

Let me conclude with a final appeal. We cannot attend to the complexity of our planetary fragility unless we are able to mobilize around the blessing of diversity.

Local communities transcending violence taught me that peacebuilding is not about a single person but rather how whole collectives cohere, how communities rise and respond to challenges. These communities embraced every human resource they could mobilize, respected equity while forging unexpected alliances, and led from their intuitive acumen of survival genius. Innovation often emerged because they recognized and followed the courageous and resilient leadership of youth and women.

If peacebuilding is to become survival relevant, I am convinced that we must pursue the simple *50/50 principle* in everything we do: 50% of decisive leadership participation should be youth under forty years of age and 50% should be women.

In Nepal I saw the power of this principle applied in a small group of people committed to protecting forests, the Federation of Forest User Groups. They required that all local community user groups must have 50/50 shared leadership of women and men in a local chapter. Starting with a handful they grew to a national network of millions and have retained this principle at every level of their work. I found clarity and pragmatic brilliance in the Women of Wajir who led their community toward transforming long patterns of violence in Northeast Kenya. We witnessed the extraordinary commitment of the *Ruta Pacífica de Mujeres* in Colombia, the Women's March for Peace that threaded voices, memory and hope, impacting both local communities and the national accord.

The same can be said of youth. I note that some of the most significant movements and advancements in human history share a startling fact and example. Martin Luther King, Jr. was 34 years old when he gave his most famous "I have a dream" speech. Leymah Gbowee was in her early thirties when she helped co-lead *Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace*, the movement that ended her country's second civil war. And lest we miss this point in reference to our religious traditions, Jesus' ministry that gave rise to Christianity began when he was 30 years of age. The Buddha is said to have been in his mid thirties when he attained enlightenment.

The surprising shift we find in these examples comes from what I would call *in-between wisdom*. Commitment to intergenerational accompaniment opens us up to unanticipated insight and breakthrough that rise when extraordinarily diverse people commit to deep listening, mutual encouragement, and courageous joint action.

We do not approach the 50/50 guidepost because we seek to fill a quota. We draw from and bring together the full richness of the creation blessing, our beautiful wayfaring humanity, because only in the sustained mix of our full potential together will we find our way through and beyond the challenges of this Century.

Conclusion

Today we again face the rise of fear-driven and hate-based exclusionary politics that prefers building walls instead of bridges. But only love can transform fear. Only in recognition of our common humanity and shared belonging can we unleash the creativity and social courage necessary to bridge our deepest divides.

We need the courage of conviction that our global security is not determined by the size of our walls or the quantity of our weapons, but rather is found in the quality of our relationships.

I return to the ever-youthful wisdom of Bashó and his most famous haiku.

*the ancient pond
a frog leaps in
the sound of water*

We sense the wisdom of ages.

We notice the wonder of the beginner's mind.

We recognize the inclined ear of the heart, listening ever deeper.

We sense wholeness and healing.

We breathe the fullness of beauty nourishing the human spirit.

We feel our common humanity.

We seek and offer grace and kindness precisely because we are grateful, awed into humility for life on this extraordinary planet.

So again, I offer deep appreciation to the Niwano Peace Foundation. Your recognition gives us courage that our global beloved family can move beyond hate and division; that we can create the bonds that truly heal.

Led by spirit, we remain steadfast that only we, earth-bounded together, can leave a legacy of healing and wholeness for generations to come.