

The following is adapted from an essay by Deena Metzger called "Personal Disarmament"

In a small country, those in power have, long ago, forced all those not belonging to their group on to reservations far from the cities and power centers. The government is a dictatorship, an apartheid. The dictator, and the power base he is supported by, knows little of the culture, values, or spirituality of his perceived enemies and fear and control is behind every decision. It is believed that if those without power ever came to prominence, the entire way of being of the country would be threatened. One day there is a serious power outage. The power lines have been cut. Power, which has been the major export and resource of this country, has stopped flowing entirely. The government is paralyzed. The marginalized groups do not deny they cut the lines, but assert that the power has always belonged to them...

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This scenario could describe conditions in many countries. In fact, it is a description of my own inner state of being. For, I have come to understand that an individual is also a country, a society, that contains multiple selves who are governed as nations are governed and run as societies are run.

A few years ago, confronted by an inner coup in the form of a deadly illness, I realized that, despite my perceptions of myself, I was not identifying with the oppressed within but completely with the dictator and the empowered. Unthinkingly, I was supporting the status quo, order for its own sake, efficiency, production, and growth. Forced to consider negotiating, I was overcome with terror. The marginalized voices within were virtually unknown to me. I distrusted and denigrated them. I believed that they were irrational, incompetent, irrelevant people. I ridiculed the assertion that they could govern themselves, let alone the entire country. I had to learn to negotiate with these "barbarian" forces. There was no choice; my country—that is, my life—was at stake.

I had managed to suppress some selves up to this time, but I suspected, and even those in power, and later the marginalized came to know, that extermination of the opposition meant death for all. Therefore, slowly and painstakingly, I began to dismantle the minority, supremacist government and to open lines of communication. I did this although this established power base insisted this meant the end of safety, progress and growth, that it meant disaster.

Terrorism existed on both sides. Time and again, I was deprived of sufficient energy while, in response, books and other creative projects were burned. Censorship and spying flourished. I fell into the pattern of punitive, relentless, even mindless work, followed by periods of utter collapse. The work was insisted upon by the minority while the collapse was the retaliation of the not-yet-enfranchised majority. But while this desperate cycle continued, something new was occurring. There was someone in me watching it, some interim government, peacekeeping force, some conscious leadership that managed to hold another vision and to continue the careful process of change. Somehow, a decision was made to forego violent revolution. Very slowly things began to shift and the balance of power changed.

The real crises of conscience occurred after I regained a more natural affiliation with those who were marginalized. Within the reality of my own psyche, *I learned that the former brutality and ethnocentricity of those in power came from enormous trauma, grief, and pain in their ancient and forgotten history.* Despite loathing, I was forced to a position of compassion. Sometime in the past, my inner society had suffered a series of crises that threatened the existence of the nation. At that point, the dictator and his group came to power through certain naive but what it thought were necessary decisions. Later these emergency procedures were codified as holy law. The culture of the ruling minority followed from this, developing out of the intention, at least in part, to protect the country. This ancient grief did not mitigate the suffering of those who were marginalized but it had to be acknowledged. Just as I was finally reunited with the marginalized, I had to recognize the value of those who had held power. It became clear that if they were massacred or imprisoned, the entire country would become demoralized and disoriented, energies would be diverted endlessly and unproductively toward defense and armaments, and the cycle would begin again in the other direction. I had to find a way to allow the people to govern with the former powerbase, despite the history of persecution and marginalization.

Each time something interfered with the process of change, I could feel it in my body. I experienced on the inner plane the violence, discrimination, power grabbing, and unconscious privilege that characterize contemporary political and social life. But before long, it became clear that a lost function of my inner government was being restored: to nurture, sustain, and protect the entire population, and to facilitate conscious communication between the elements.

Protection took on an entirely different tone. It did not have to do with police, prisons, armies, walls, or armaments. It meant providing for diverse needs, supporting them adequately. Rather than being militaristic or aggressive, protection began to feel maternal or paternal in the sweetest way. It was characterized by tenderness. In this long recovery period foreign travel was curtailed; there had been so much of it. Emphasis was necessarily put upon domestic travel (inner exploration).

After a time, I was ready to attempt the most difficult work of all. Having achieved some harmony within my

own nation, my own inner society, having begun to dismantle the inner police force and the system and values upon which it depended, I turned to the outer world and foreign relations (friends, family, community, and career). The concept of enemy had been a false and dangerous premise, wasting my resources and diverting my nature. I hadn't known how severely I'd been deprived by being alienated from half of myself. Now I was ready to examine my systems of defenses and control through my connections to the public world.

I began to seek out each instance where I created or reinforced the idea of an enemy. I began to evaluate my rules and practices, my failures to act as well as my actions. I began to look at my walls, to take down the unnecessary ones, to use them with greater discernment. I would not have been able to believe that a country could return to less lethal, less oppressive forms, were it not my own personal experience. But I am learning it in the only place I can know it thoroughly, in my own psyche, my own body, and my own life.

I realized that I was beginning to experience a complete revolution in the spheres of the political, social, military, cultural, and spiritual. There was a change in every aspect of my way of life. Long before I could begin to enact these changes, I came to understand that the systems that controlled me internally were similar to the systems of control in the world. I was always projecting into the world the systems by which I was living and, in turn, this world reinforced my internal make-up. *It was heartbreaking to realize that all the work I'd done in the world was undermined by the constant seepage of contrary values from my inner being.* I could not promote democracy while I was a tyrant within. On the surface, I had devoted my life to democracy. It looked good in terms of paper and deeds, but I had to admit that my efforts were ineffective. Each day of my life, I had unwittingly reinforced and re-seeded the world with what threatened it, me, and everyone I knew: tyranny, slavery, oppression, militarism. I couldn't hope to accomplish change in the outside world until I changed the inner one.

This filled me with despair at first. How was it possible to make any change if almost everyone had to change themselves internally? Gradually despair was replaced by hope and confidence as I began to make some personal changes and I saw it was possible. I began to see that the despair so many of us feel when confronting world conditions might also be alleviated because there is something they can do, *that only they can do*, a real and substantial contribution. They can at the very least (which might turn out to be the very most) institute a government, a society in their inner world that has integrity with their ideals. And the very mundane living out of that system they can project in to the outer world some of the ways they hold dear: democracy, equality, equal access, deep value for all people, environmental protection, peaceful co-existence.

This new way of thinking is very humbling. I have had to lay aside all glorious ambitions to save the world, either by myself or with a special group. The task of change, the ant work of only one individual, is tedious, absorbing, and takes all my energy. Each individual has to do it for himself or herself. I can't be a hero though I must confess the difficulty of doing it even for myself does at times make me feel heroic. Still I persist, humbled and devoted. Why? Because I discovered I really care for this little nation, this little society within myself as well as for the world, and I do not want to continue to do them harm.