Reflections FOR NONVIOLENT COMMUNITY

A BOOK OF READINGS
THE OAK RIDGE ENVIRONMENTAL PEACE ALLIANCE
FEBRUARY - MARCH 2020
The “Refugees Welcome Here” march has become an annual tradition in Knoxville, growing in numbers and support every year. Started by the Riverside Catholic Worker Community in 2016, this year’s march was opened by the Associate Pastor of First Baptist Church who called on his fellow Christians to show compassion to the strangers among us.

About this booklet

This booklet grows from an intentional exploration of nonviolent community embarked upon by members of the Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance. It has since expanded to embrace many members of our peace community.

Our intention is to use the booklet to build spiritual community. Those who are using the book are invited to participate by contributing readings to it.

The common thread in these reflections is the struggle of human beings to improve the world. In OREPA, our struggle to end bomb production is part of that struggle. In these reflections, we join ourselves with the larger community that works to heal the world.

The reflection booklet has been provided free of charge to all who request it. We welcome donations—$20 would cover the cost of paper, printing and mailing for one year—but they aren’t required.

Each Thursday you will find the name of a member of the community who is using this booklet. This is an opportunity to bring that person and all those who work for peace into the light on that day.

‡ contributions, suggestions, requests can be sent to OREPA, P O Box 5743, Oak Ridge, TN 37831 or by e-mail to orep@earthlink.net
Saturday, February 1
1902: LANGSTON HUGHES BORN
1960: GREENSBORO, NC WOOLWORTH’S COUNTER SIT-IN

I will say to any of the children and young people we cherish and lift up: You are brilliant beings of light. You have the power to shape-shift not only yourselves, but the whole of the world.
~ Patrice Khan-Cullors

Sunday, February 2
GROUNDHOG DAY

Why are you asking me about access to food and water in my country when I have seen my friends executed in front of me? Why don’t you ask about that?
~ Hassan, age 14, from Syria

Monday, February 3
1965: SELMA, AL SCHOOLCHILDREN ARRESTED IN MASS PROTEST FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

We say men and women were created in the image of God. I refuse to imagine a God who is miserable, poor, ignorant, superstitious, fearful, oppressed and wretched—which is the lot of the majority of those created in God’s own image.
~ Julius K. Nyerere

Tuesday, February 4
1913: ROSA PARKS BORN

I am a person of dignity and self-respect. I should not set my sights lower than anyone else.
~ Rosa Parks

Wednesday, February 5

We are not hope turned to dust. We are dust turned to hope.
~ Elie Weisel
We all know nations that can be identified by the flight of writers from their shores. These are regimes whose fear of unmonitored writing is justified because truth is trouble. It is trouble for the warmonger, the torturer, the corporate thief, the political hack, the corrupt justice system, and for a comatose public. Unpersecuted, unjailed, unharassed writers are trouble for the ignorant bully, the sly racist, and the predators feeding off the world’s resources. The alarm, the disquiet writers raise is instructive because it is open and vulnerable, because if unpoliced it is threatening. Therefore the historical suppression of writers is the earliest harbinger of the steady peeling away of additional rights and liberties that will follow. The history of persecuted writers is as long as the history of literature itself. And the efforts to censor, starve, regulate, and annihilate us are clear signs that something important has taken place. Cultural and political forces can sweep clean all but the “safe,” all but state-approved art.

~ Toni Morrison
Friday, February 7

Always make the connection between individual heartbreak and the heart-brokenness of the world.

~ Nancy Schreck

Saturday, February 8

1968: ORANGEBURG, SC MASSACRE KILLS 3 AND INJURES 69 PROTESTERS
1978: LONGEST MARCH BEGINS, SAN FRANCISCO TO WASHINGTON, DC

Christianity is being concerned about your fellow man, not building a million-dollar church while people are starving right around the corner.

~ Fannie Lou Hamer

Sunday, February 9

1944: ALICE WALKER BORN
1996: US REVEALS HUMAN RADIATION EXPERIMENTS ON 9,000 SUBJECTS

In South Korea, they believe that when you turn 60, you’ve become a baby again and the rest of your life should be totally about joy and happiness, and people should leave you alone, and I just think that that’s the height of intelligence.

~ Alice Walker

Monday, February 10

My bread may be a material matter. Another’s bread is a spiritual matter.

~ Nicholas Berdyaev

Tuesday, February 11

1967: A J MUST DIES | 1990: NELSON MANDELA RELEASED FROM 27 YEAR IMPRISONMENT

I wonder if gratefulness is the bridge from sorrow to joy, spanning the chasm of our anxious striving.

~ Philip Gulley

Wednesday, February 12

1909: NAACP FOUNDED

We cannot play ostrich. Democracy just cannot flourish amid fear. Liberty cannot bloom amid hate. Justice cannot take root amid rage.

~ Thurgood Marshall
I have been told that there are two human responses to the perception of chaos: naming and violence. When the chaos is simply the unknown, the naming can be accomplished effortlessly—a new species, star, formula, equation, prognosis. There is also mapping, charting, or devising proper nouns for unnamed or stripped-of-names geography, landscape, or population. When chaos resists, either by reforming itself or by rebelling against imposed order, violence is understood to be the most frequent response and the most rational when confronting the unknown, the catastrophic, the wild, wanton, or incorrigible. There is, however, a third response to chaos, which I have not heard about, which is stillness. Such stillness can be passivity and dumbfoundedness; it can be paralytic fear. But it can also be art. Those writers plying their craft too near or far from the throne of raw power, of military power, of empire building and countinghouses, writers who construct meaning in the face of chaos must be nurtured, protected. And it is right that such protection be initiated by other writers. And it is imperative not only to save the besieged writers but to save ourselves. The thought that leads me to contemplate with dread the erasure of other voices, of unwritten novels, poems whispered or swallowed for fear of being overheard by the wrong people, outlawed languages flourishing underground, essayists’ questions challenging authority never being posed, unstaged plays, cancelled films—that thought is a nightmare. As though a whole universe is being described in invisible ink. A writer’s life and work are not a gift to humankind; they are its necessity.

~ Toni Morrison
Friday, February 14
1817: FREDERICK DOUGLASS BORN

The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress. One's greatness consists in one's ability to do and the proper application of one's powers to things needed to be done.

~ Frederick Douglass

Saturday, February 15
1920: SUSAN B. ANTHONY BORN

There shall never be another season of silence until women have the same rights men have on this green earth.

~ Susan B. Anthony

Sunday, February 16

There is no human community in any manner separate from the larger community of all those living and nonliving beings that surround us and on which we are totally dependent for every breath that we breathe. The created world forms a single community, the universe itself. So intimate is the human with every other being in the universe that we must say that the human community and the natural world will go into the future as a single sacred community or neither will survive.

~ Thomas Berry

Monday, February 17

It is our prophetic task to create an alternative society, a society where serving is at the center, not power; where to share matters more than to have, where compassion disciples competition, a society...of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love and peace.

~ Fintan Sheeran
Tuesday, February 18
1931: Toni Morrison born | 1934: Audre Lorde born

I remember how being young and Black and gay and lonely felt. A lot of it felt fine, feeling I had the truth and the light and the key, but a lot of it was purely hell.

~ Audre Lorde

Wednesday, February 19

We are each other’s harvest;
We are each other’s business;
We are each other’s magnitude and bond.

~ Gwendolyn Brooks

On the first Sunday of Advent, 1999, OREPA held a vigil at the Y-12 Nuclear Weapons Plant in Oak Ridge, Tennessee—and for more than 1,000 Sundays ever since we have been a persistent presence for peace, never missing a Sunday. On December 2nd we gathered for the 20th Anniversary vigil.
Globalization, hailed with the same vigor as was manifest destiny, internationalism, etc., has reached a level of majesty in our imagination. For all its claims of fostering freedom, globalism’s dispensations are royal, for it can bestow much. In matters of reach (across frontiers); in terms of mass (of populations affected and engaged); and in terms of riches (limitless fields to mine for resources and services to offer). Yet as much as globalism is adored as near messianic, it is also reviled as an evil courting a dangerous dystopia. Its disregard of borders, national infrastructures, local bureaucracies, internet censors, tariffs, laws, and languages; its disregard of margins and the marginal people who live there; its formidable, engulfing properties accelerating erasure, a flattening out of difference, of specificity for marketing purposes. An abhorrence of diversity. We imagine indistinguishability, the elimination of minority languages, major cultures is in its sweep. Even if those dreaded consequences are not made completely manifest, they nevertheless cancel out globalism’s assurances of better life by issuing dire warnings of premature cultural death.

~ Toni Morrison
Friday, February 21
1965: MALCOLM X ASSASSINATED

Don’t be in a hurry to condemn. There was a time when you didn’t know what you know today.

~ Malcolm X

Saturday, February 22

Love takes off the masks of fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within.

~ James Baldwin

Sunday, February 23
1868: W E B DUBOIS BORN

Freedom, by definition, is people realizing they can be their own leaders.

~ Diane Nash

Monday, February 24

To keep our faces toward change and behave like free spirits in the presence of fate is strength undefeatable.

~ Helen Keller

Tuesday, February 25
1912: 20,000 WOMEN STRIKE FOR BETTER WORKING CONDITIONS

A true friend is someone who is there for you when they would rather be somewhere else.

~ Len Wein

Wednesday, February 26

Life is no brief candle; it is a splended torch which I’ve got hold of for the moment. I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.

~ George Bernard Shaw
Let us be reminded that before there is a final solution, there must be a first solution, a second one, even a third. The move toward a final solution is not a jump. It takes one step, then another, then another. Something, perhaps, like this:

Construct an internal enemy, as both focus and diversion.
Isolate and demonize that enemy by unleashing and protecting the utterance of overt and coded name-calling and verbal abuse.
Enlist and create sources and distributors of information who are willing to reinforce the demonization process.
Elevate “us” even as “they” are demonized.
Palisade all art forms; monitor, discredit or expel those that challenge or destabilize the process of demonization and deification.
Subvert and malign representatives and sympathizers of the enemy.
Solicit collaborators from the enemy to sanitize the dispossession process.
Pathologize the enemy in scholarly and popular mediums.
Criminalize the enemy. Prepare, budget for, and rationalize the building of holding areas.
Reward mindlessness and apathy with monumentalized entertainments and with little pleasures, the illusion of power and influence.
Maintain, at all costs, silence.
Racism may wear a new dress, buy a new pair of boots, but neither it nor its succubus twin facism is new or can make anything new. It can only reproduce the environment that supports its own health: fear, denial, and an atmosphere in which its victims have lost the will to fight.

~ Toni Morrison
Friday, February 28
1958: Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament launched in England

A soul flare is what happens when someone shines their light no matter what it is. In a song, a smile, or a cup of well-made soup, they send out a flare of light that inspires others to shine their own. Soul flares make this world better.

~ Annie O’Shaughnessy

Saturday, February 29

How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points? This is a case of exclusion. Can we continue to stand by when food is thrown away while people are starving? This is a case of inequality. Until exclusion and inequality in society and between peoples is reversed, it will be impossible to eliminate violence.

~ Pope Francis

Sunday, March 1

Do not lose heart. For years, we have been learning, practicing, been in training for and just waiting to meet on this exact plain of engagement. To display the lantern of soul in shadowy times like these—to be fierce and to show mercy toward others; both are acts of immense bravery and greatest necessity.

~ Clarissa Pinkola Estes

Monday, March 2

If we really want peace, we must represent it in all areas of life. We cannot injure love in any way or for any reason. So we cannot kill anyone; we cannot harm anyone economically; we cannot take part in a system that establishes lower standards of living for manual workers than for academics. We must spurn anything that breeds hatred or oppression.

~ Eberhard Arnold
Tuesday, March 3

Reflecting on the affirmation of life as an act of resistance, I gradually came to see three aspects of life which are in stark contrast to the powers of death. They are humility, compassion, and joy. These three aspects of life therefore must also characterize the “Yes” of the resister.

~ Henri Nouwen

Wednesday, March 4

1917: Jeannette Rankin First Woman Elected to US Congress

When two people each have an apple, and then exchange those apples, each person still only has one apple. But if two people have an idea, and they exchange those ideas, then each person has two ideas.

~ Margaret Self

Leaving St. John's Episcopal Church on December 19, the Welcome Refugees march continues to Yassin's Falafel House where Yassin Terou celebrated the decision of Tennessee's Governor, followed by the Mayor of Knox County, to declare immigrants are welcome here. "I texted the Governor," Yassin said, "and he answered me within one minute. He said, 'This decision I made with my heart.'"
Excluding the height of the slave trade in the nineteenth century, the mass movement of peoples in the latter half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first is greater now than it has ever been. It is a movement of workers, intellectuals, refugees, armies crossing oceans, continents, immigrants through custom offices and hidden routes, speaking multiple languages of trade, of political intervention, of persecution, exile, violence, and poverty. There is little doubt that the redistribution of people all over the globe, voluntary or involuntary, tops the agenda of the state, the boardrooms, the neighborhoods, the street. Political maneuvers to control this movement are not limited to monitoring the dispossessed. While much of this exodus can be described as the journey of the colonized to the colonizers (slaves, as it were, abandoning the plantation for the planter’s home), and while more of it is the flight of war refugees, the relocation and transplantation of the management and diplomatic class to globalization’s outposts, as well as the deployment of fresh military units and bases, feature prominently in legislative attempts to control the constant flow of people.

The spectacle of mass movement draws attention inevitably to the borders, the porous places, the vulnerable points where one’s concept of home is seen as being menaced by foreigners. Much of the alarm hovering at the borders, the gates, is stoked by (1) both the threat and the promise of globalization and (2) an uneasy relationship with our own foreignness, our own rapidly disintegrating sense of belonging.

~ Toni Morrison
Friday, March 6
1970: NUCLEAR NONPROLIFERATION TREATY ENTERS INTO FORCE

Failure is not falling down. It’s staying down.
~ Mary Pickford

Saturday, March 7
1965: SELMA TO MONTGOMERY CIVIL RIGHTS MARCH

Twenty-three publishers rejected Dr. Seuss’s first children’s book. The twenty-fourth sold six million copies.
~ Ann Landers

Sunday, March 8

If at first you don’t succeed, do it the way your wife told you to.
~ Yvonne Knepper

Monday, March 9

No bird builds a wall.
~ Naomi Shihab Nye

Tuesday, March 10
1913: HARRIET TUBMAN DIES

Freed from the burden of unbridled desires, we can enjoy what we have, celebrate what we’ve attained, and appreciate the familiar. If we can’t be happy now, we’ll likely not be happy when.
~ Philip Gulley

Wednesday, March 11
1899: ALBERT EINSTEIN BORN

Community cannot feed for long on itself; it can only flourish where always the boundaries are giving way to the coming of others beyond them—unknown and undiscovered brothers.
~ Howard Thurman
The space in which both civic and private life is lived has become so indistinguishable from inner and outer, from inside/outside, these two realms have been compressed into a ubiquitous blur, a rattling of our concept of home.

It is this rattling, I believe, that affects our uneasiness with our own sense of foreignness, our own rapidly fraying sense of belonging. To what do we pay the greatest allegiance? Family, language group, culture, country, gender? Religion, race? And if none of these matter, are we urbane, cosmopolitan or simply lonely? In other words, how do we decide where we belong? What convinces us that we do?

~ Toni Morrison
Friday, March 13

We can see Spirit made visible when people are kind to one another, especially when it’s a really busy person, like you, taking care of a needy, annoying, neurotic person, like you.

~ Anne Lamott

Saturday, March 14

There would be no society if living together depended upon understanding each other.

~ Eric Hoffer

Sunday, March 15

I never pray for anything temporal. But when each morning comes, I kneel down before the Rising Sun and say, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord—give me this day my work to do.”

~ Florence Nightingale

Monday, March 16

1921: WAR RESISTERS INTERNATIONAL FOUNDED
2003: RACHEL CORRIE MURDERED IN GAZA STRIP

We need a new and universal solidarity. All of us can cooperate as instruments for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents.

~ Pope Francis

Tuesday, March 17

Give a man a fish and he has food for a day. Teach him how to fish and you can get rid of him for the entire weekend.

~ Zenna Schaffer

Wednesday, March 18

Wisdom comes with the ability to be still. Just look and listen. No more is needed. Let stillness direct your words and actions.

~ Eckhart Tolle
Thursday, March 19
Bob and Beth Gehres

2003: US ATTACKS BAGHDAD, STARTS SECOND GULF WAR

Whatever the cause, warrior discourse has become childlike. Puny. Vaguely prepubescent. Underneath the speeches, bulletins, punditry, essays lies the clear whine of the playground: “He hit me. Did not. Did too.”

I believe this represents a fundamental change in the concept of war—a not-so-secret conviction among various and sundry populations, both oppressed and privileged, that war is, finally, out of date; that it is truly the most inefficient method of achieving one’s long-term aims. No matter the paid parades, the forced applause, the instigated riots, the organized protests, pro or con, self- or state censoring, the propaganda; no matter the huge opportunities for profit and gain; no matter the history of the injustice—at bottom, it is impossible to escape the suspicion that the more sophisticated the weapons of war, the more antiquated the idea of war. The more transparent the power grab, the holier the justification, the more arrogant the claims, the more barbaric, the more discredited the language of war has become.

I understand that my comments may appear disjunctive on this fate in 2002 when legislatures, revolutionaries, and the inflamed do not “declare” war, but simply wage it. But I am convinced that the language that has the most force, requires the most acumen, talent, grace, genius, and, yes, beauty, can never be, will never again be found in paeans to the glory of war, or erotic rallying cries to battle. The power of this alternate language does not arise from the tiresome, wasteful art of war, but rather from the demanding, brilliant, art of peace.

~ Toni Morrison
Friday, March 20

2004: TENS OF MILLIONS MARCH WORLDWIDE IN PROTEST OF US WAR IN IRAQ

A person in Northern Ireland sends me a message with a quote from Rainer Maria Rilke, a German poet: “And now let us believe in a long year that is given to us, new, untouched, full of things that have never been.”

That’s sort of what I’m afraid of.

~ Naomi Shihab Nye

Saturday, March 21

1960: SHARPEVILLE MASSACRE KILLS 69 IN SOUTH AFRICA

Perhaps we cannot prevent this world from being a world in which children are tortured. But we can reduce the number of tortured children. And if you don’t help us, who else in the world can help us do this?

~ Albert Camus

Sunday, March 22

As a child, the saints had thrilled me. I could see the nobility of giving one’s life for the sick, the maimed, the leper. But there was another question in my mind. Why was so much done in remedying the evil instead of avoiding it in the first place? Where were the saints to try to change the social order, not just to minister to the slaves, but to do away with slavery?

~ Dorothy Day

Monday, March 23

We should deal with nature the same way we deal with ourselves: nonviolently. Human beings and nature are inseparable. Just as we should not harm ourselves, we should not harm nature.

~ Thich Nhat Hanh
Tuesday, March 24

1980: Archbishop Oscar Romero assassinated in El Salvador
1999: US and NATO begin 78 day bombing of Serbia

A church that doesn’t provoke any crises, a gospel that doesn’t unsettle, a word of God that doesn’t get under anyone’s skin, a word of God that doesn’t touch the real sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed—what gospel is that?

~ Oscar Romero

Wednesday, March 25

As Mother Earth protectors we must build up the global environmental grassroots movement; resist politicians, war makers, and fossil-fuel corporations; deepen our active nonviolence; and stand with Mother Earth, come what may.

~ John Dear

Year after year, OREPA’s giant puppets are the highlight of the MLK parade. Here, Cindy Collins and Dennie Kelley stand with the group—five Birmingham girls, Gandhi, Cesar Chavez, Desmond Tutu, MLK, Sarah Moore Green, Myles Horton and Sojourner Truth.
It was or it wasn’t

Arabic fairy tales begin this way, so do Arabic days.
A pantry is empty but Mama still produces a tray of tea and cookies for the guest.
West is still the way we stare— knowing there’s blue space and free water over there. There’s a Palestinian and a Jew building a synagogue together in Arkansas. They’re friends, with respect.
Actually our water isn’t free either nor are the fish my friends in Gaza aren’t allowed to catch.
It was or it wasn’t a democracy, a haven for human beings, but only some of them.
You can’t do that with people, pretend they aren’t there.
It was or it wasn’t a crowd.
Diploma, marriage, legacy, babies being born, children being killed, it was or it wasn’t going to work out.

~ Naomi Shihab Nye
Friday, March 27

We must be willing to get rid of the life we have planned so as to have the life that is waiting for us.

~ Joseph Campbell

Saturday, March 28

1979: THREE MILE ISLAND (PA) NUCLEAR REACTOR FAILURE

Along the way to knowledge, many things are accumulated. Along the way to wisdom, many things are discarded.

~ Lao-Tze

Sunday, March 29

The Earth is too small a star and we are too brief a visitor upon it for anything to matter more than the struggle for peace.

~ Colman McCarthy

Monday, March 30

To be civil means showing hospitality, inviting others to join in our common life, even the stranger and sojourner. Civility at its best is capacious. Civility encourages a spirit of fraternal correction, something we need in an age of denunciation and Twitter mobs that gather to celebrate cyber-lynchings.

~ R R Reno

Tuesday, March 31

1927: CESAR CHAVEZ BORN

We humans are herd animals of the monkey tribe, not natural individuals as lions are. Our individuality is partial and restless; the stream of consciousness that we call “I” is made of shifting elements that flow from our group and back to our group again.

~ Anna Louise Strong
Allies of Knoxville’s Immigrant Neighbors (AKIN) unfurled their banner to walk in the 2019 Refugees Welcome Here march on December 19.

sources

Readings for this reflection booklet were contributed by Mary Dennis Lentsch. Thursday readings taken from The Source of Self-regard by Toni Morrison and The Tiny Journalist by Naomi Shihab Nye.
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