



a journal of positive futures

Positive Futures Network
P.O. Box 10818
Bainbridge Island, WA 98110-0818

telephone 206/842-0216
facsimile 206/842-5208
subscriptions 800/937-4451
yes@yesmagazine.org
www.yesmagazine.org

YES! #32, winter 2005 healing and resistance

YES! Discussion Guides are designed to help you explore your own experiences, opinions, and commitments as they relate to material found in YES! magazine. Use them in group discussions, classrooms, or study circles. We believe that when people discuss with mutual respect and caring the critical issues of our time, they create a powerful avenue for constructive social change.

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November 2 dashed the hopes of millions. After an election that stirred such passions, how do we move forward as a nation? In this issue, we look at the fractures underlying our present social landscape, the new fears and old scars, and how we can heal them. Fear itself is a major scar left from September 11, shaping the country's direction and perhaps determining the election results. Violence deepens in Iraq, and that violence returns home to America, as the veterans of the Iraq war return home scarred, maimed, or troubled. How can we resist these destructive spirals? How can we overturn ancient patterns of harm? What sources of healing are within and around us?

- Van Jones, "A Phoenix From the Ashes"
- Carolyn McConnell, "Finding a Way Home"
- John Mohawk, "The Warriors Who Turned to Peace"
- Parker Palmer, "A Life Lived Whole"

A phoenix from the ashes

It's really bad, says activist Van Jones of the election results. Though we may be tempted to minimize the results, he suggests we should acknowledge what really happened and what it will bring. However, he also urges us to take note of the "genuine, cross-class, multi-racial, pro-democracy movement" that emerged in only 18 months to oppose the Bush administration. This movement broke down divides among progressives, pioneered innovative political uses of technology, tapped into youth energy, and brought new heroes to the fore. The bright promise of that movement "will someday be a great flame," Jones promises.

- Did you vote this year? If not, why not? Have you sometimes not voted in the past? If not, what made you decide to vote this time?
- Did you participate in election campaign work? What did you do? Did your work feel effective? Why or why not? If you didn't participate, what kept you from getting involved?
- Have you participated in previous political movements, from the civil rights movement or anti-Vietnam war struggles to local efforts, say to improve a local school? What setbacks did you have along the way?

Finding a way home

Thousands of soldiers are beginning to return from combat in Iraq. Already, studies suggest these soldiers are



suffering a great deal of trauma and stress. They are fighting a guerilla war whose rationale has been increasingly proved false and which is resulting in the deaths of many civilians.

- Do you have any friends or family fighting in Iraq? Do you know anyone who died while serving in Iraq or who was wounded there? If so, what has been the experience of these soldiers? What has been the experience of their families? If you know anyone who has returned from Iraq, how are they dealing with their experiences?

- Have you or anyone in your family experienced war, either as a soldier or a civilian? How did it affect you or your family members? What helped you or them recover from it? How did the experiences from various wars differ?

- What do you think of Rachel MacNair's claim that to kill someone is the most traumatic war experience? Does that fit with your own experiences or those of people you know?

- What actions to help returning veterans could you take in your community?

- A number of soldiers and former soldiers have recently refused the orders calling them to serve in Iraq. When if ever, is one obligated to fight for one's country or community? Would you put these beliefs among your "moral values"?

The warriors who turned to peace

John Mohawk describes an ancient tradition for building peace. He argues that the existence of violent people who cannot be controlled by laws is nothing new and that we are always in need of ways to make peace between people who share no structures of law or nation, but may share a long legacy of violence and revenge. He describes practises that do not remove all conflict, but keep people talking rather than killing.

- What does he mean by progressive pragmatism? How might we apply it to current conflicts, including the war on terror? How might you apply it to conflicts within your community or your family?

- Mohawk says we must negotiate even with our most bitter enemies, including terrorists. What do you think of this claim? Why do people sometimes argue that we cannot negotiate with terrorists?

- What experience have you had of resolving conflict? What worked, not only in the short term but in the long term?

- Near the end of his article, Mohawk describes his tradition as a sophisticated way to "play politics." Is peacemaking what you think of when you hear that phrase? What do you associate with politics?

- Do you share political values with those around you, in your community or your family? If not, how do you deal with that? Do you speak about politics with those with whom you disagree? How might you? How might you have a productive conversation at a holiday celebration with someone with whom you strongly disagree?

A life lived whole

Parker Palmer believes that we should seek wholeness in our lives, integrating our deepest values with our work. Dissonance between what we believe is right and the values we serve in our jobs makes people unhappy and harms the world. Palmer argues that by resisting institutional demands that conflict with our deepest values, we do not undermine the institutions, but help to serve their true purposes better. He advocates not withdrawing from institutions but instead pushing them to better serve their aims.

- In what ways do you feel that you serve your values by the work you do? Have you ever felt a conflict between the demands of a job and what you felt was right, as the employee at the Agriculture Department did? If so, how did you resolve it? Have you made a job or career change because of such a conflict?

- Consider the list that begins on page 33 of Palmer's article. Have you experienced any of these forms of the divided life? What led you into them? How did you or might you go about resolving them?

- Many people consider it honorable to work simply to earn a living and feel there is nothing to be ashamed of in making compromises to do so. Do you think Palmer is correct to emphasize seeking wholeness in work? Why or why not?

- In what activities do you feel most whole? What least?



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