

# A Spiritual Perspective on the Gulf War

By Gordon Davidson & Corinne McLaughlin

Many spiritually oriented people have reacted with horror, grief, and a sense of the spiritual failure of humanity at both Hussein's aggressive invasion and the Allied military response. People of goodwill are responding with compassion to the suffering of all those affected by these events, doing all they can to help remove the underlying causes of war in human consciousness, but they are often overcome by a sense of futility.

Yet there are other ways to view the crisis than the usual "spiritual" point of view that says "peace now" is the only desirable state. In the Ageless Wisdom teachings (the esoteric or inner teachings of the major religions), it is said that before humanity can have peace, we must first develop a consciousness of unity of the entire human family. This will then lead to true peace, and eventually create plenty and prosperity for all people. The consciousness of unity is causal to the condition of peace, for, as Czechoslovak President, Vaclav Havel recently stated, "consciousness precedes being." This means that our state of consciousness or awareness determines what manifests in the world.

If the conscious realization of human unity is our evolutionary goal, what effect will the outbreak of war have on the massed hatred, separation and oppression that dominates much of the Middle East? To understand the spiritual effects of war, we must appreciate the function of Divine Will, the energy that is known as the Destroyer or Shiva energy in the Hindu trinity (which also includes the Creator and Preserver functions of Divinity). Most spiritual people emphasize Love and Light, but often give little attention to the higher function of Divine Will. This Will, or Destroyer aspect of Divinity, serves evolution by breaking down all rigid and crystallized forms of thinking, feeling and civilization that prevent life from progressing into

more whole, unified and synthetic expressions.

Most people of goodwill are horrified at the loss of life and suffering on all sides in war, and seek to prevent conflict. We all feel compassion for those on both sides who were killed or wounded and for their families. But from a spiritual perspective is the loss of bodies, (not lives, since we know that life continues through many embodiments toward perfection) a worse effect than the continued massed hatred and separateness of consciousness so widespread on all sides? War is an expression of this collective negativity and mutual shadow projections which, given current attitudes in the Middle East and the U.S., could perhaps be transformed only by the cataclysm of war. War can at times provide major spiritual lessons in transcending self-centeredness and sacrificing oneself for the larger whole.

Those souls who participate in war often choose to do so in order to learn from the horrors of the experience, to guarantee that they will never again participate in wars lightly, but will use the warrior energy only in defense of the highest principles and true good of the whole world. It is not insignificant that the easy "surgical" victory that the U.S. seemed to have was later undermined by the painful plight of the Kurds - proving once again that war ultimately never solves the real underlying human problems. Many of the young soldiers who fought in the sands of the Gulf participated in what spiritual traditions call the "desert experience," in which all familiar trappings and circumstances are stripped away from the individual and he or she has to face him/herself alone in the desert. With no possibility of escape into alcohol, drugs, or sex with local people, a purifying and transforming experience, leading to deeper self-knowledge, may result for many of the young people who were stationed there.

Conflict can also bring into focus questions of values and principles, and provide a way for resolution and harmony to emerge out of the conflict. According to the Ageless Wisdom, "harmony through conflict" is the energy and process that humanity uses in its evolution. Peace is a dynamic process, and when stagnation occurs at certain periods in human history, conflict eventually erupts to facilitate change and growth. If enforced harmony is used to ensure the continuation of feudal monarchies, vast injustices and materialistic, wasteful lifestyles over dependent on oil, then spiritual death may result. The true goal for humanity is realization of unity, which leads to true peace, and conflict seems to be the way we struggle through to this unity. War and conflict can lead to rebuilding societies on sounder and more principled lines, as we have seen in Europe and Japan.

Today we see an Arab world that is still expressing many of the social forms of the past centuries, i.e., tribal and sometimes feudal societies where violence, religious extremism, rejection of contact with other cultures and severe oppression of women are accepted organizing principles.

At the same time, (although couched in fundamentalist and often fanatical terms), the Islamic emphasis on following the Will of Allah, or God, is a much needed value in our Western materialistic culture. However, Islamic attempts to integrate the Will of God into a religious, tribal social fabric have not been very successful. The human excesses have reached their apotheosis in Iran, (and in a less religious form in Iraq). Israel, too, has entrenched patterns of separateness and superiority. Both Arabs and Israelis look to the past with a long list of unforgiven grievances and hope for the restoration of the past glory of their cultures. These attitudes have hardened into the hatred and separateness we see on both sides today. Israel's restraint in responding to Iraq's missile attacks is indicative of a small, progressive step in consciousness, however.

In the midst of this extreme separateness, a massive inflow of spiritual energy is awakening and moving the world towards integration and

synthesis, counteracting these rigidified patterns and positions. It seems clear that the evolutionary thrust for humanity is guiding us to join in a world community of nations, to see our common unity and work together for the betterment of all. Those who resist this movement are going against the evolutionary tide of Life itself and ultimately cannot hope to stop this unfoldment. The current positions of Arabs and Israelis are currently deeply entrenched, with little willingness to voluntarily embrace forgiveness and together build a future that serves all people in the region. In the current crisis, both sides (as well as the U.S.) have refused to negotiate, and so the opportunity for peaceful settlement passed, leaving only one way these attitudes can be changed - by war. Saddam's invasion was only the trigger for the inevitable karmic explosion caused by the ancient inner warfare of thought and emotion raging in the region. The outer bombs and missiles are an extreme way to release these karmic effects and to break down the separative attitudes, beliefs and social structures that prevent people from seeing their underlying unity.

It is very possible that after a long and difficult period of conflict, all the nations of the Middle East will become exhausted by the stress and suffering of war. Aided by a world community desiring peace and stability, they may be willing to let go of old hatreds and grievances and reach a negotiated agreement that takes into consideration the legitimate needs of all people in the region. Such an agreement was the result of two World Wars in Europe where nations fought to the death with massive destruction and loss of life. Out of all the fire, upheaval and suffering, values were clarified, and a determination grew to balance the power of nation states with the need for European unity, which has led today to the formation of the European Community, as well as the League of Nations, and ultimately the United Nations we have today.

What is the evidence that this war will lead to harmony and justice rather than to more hatred and separation? It can be observed that Iran's long,

exhausting war with Iraq has led to Iran's moderating its stance in relation to the rest of the world. Likewise, both Kuwait and Iraq, and indeed all of the Middle Eastern countries, are likely to be very different societies now that the war in the Gulf is over. Many Kuwaitis are already demanding more democratic participation in their government, rather than continue the absolute rulership of the Emir of Kuwait. Israel may finally realize that it must find a just solution for the Palestinians or risk continued attack from its Arab neighbors. Many excellent proposals for a mediated, just settlement in the Middle East have been circulated, such as one proposed by Roger Fisher of the Harvard Negotiation Team.

The assistance of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Syria in the United Nations multinational force constituted a major realignment of the Arab world with the West. This is one of the most significant aspects of the crisis, as Saudi Arabia and probably Kuwait will have troops and dependents from the U.S. and other western nations living within their borders for an extended time. This will help gradually to modernize the Arab world and integrate it into the family of nations. The freeing of women and the modernization of feudal Arab states are necessary steps in the planetization of humanity and the fulfillment of the Divine Plan.

What lessons can the United States learn from this war? The U.S.'s involvement in the war has many karmic aspects. As soldiers of one of the greatest arms suppliers in the world, young Americans are now facing weapons manufactured in the U.S. and financed or sold to Saddam's military machine by the U.S. government. Literally and symbolically we are facing the shadow of America's own aggression and greed. Also operating are the karmic results of all the shadowy, secret dealings of arms for hostages with Iran and other Middle Eastern nations during the Reagan/Bush years. This war also resonates with karmic overtones of the Crusades, which underlie the depth of sensitivity of Moslem countries to attack and invasion by Christian nations and the potential for inflaming the passions of the Moslem masses.

The U.S.'s particularly militant response toward Iraq reflects a deep insecurity in the American psyche. When someone threatens the American "way of life" - that is, addiction to a highly consumptive, oil-based lifestyle - Americans respond with great fear. Instead, they might have seen this as a message from the Universe to change and simplify their lifestyle - thus reducing their vulnerability. (And if a deepening of the economic recession results from the massive deficit military spending, the message will be doubly clear.) As oil is essentially the stored solar energy of the past nurtured in the earth, it is the heavy, black symbol of the industrialized West's reliance on the past. By choosing to direct more money into research on energy efficiency and solar development, restoring the programs cut during the Reagan era, America could connect more directly with the sun, the symbol of Spirit in cultures around the world, and truly the energy of the future.

Just over a year ago it looked as if the world was miraculously transforming - the United States and the Soviet Union were becoming friends, the Berlin Wall came down, and the nations of Eastern Europe managed a peaceful transition to democracy. There was great jubilation in the human family - and yet also a certain uneasiness. We no longer had a major enemy - an "evil empire" on which to project the un-owned "shadow" elements (aggression and deceit) in ourselves that we didn't want to admit. Something in us collectively needed a new "bad guy." And almost immediately, Saddam Hussein willingly obliged by invading Kuwait. Suddenly a former "friend" (whom we had gladly supplied with arms against Iran) became the new "Hitler". America (like other countries) continually creates a monster-enemy, whether it is Khrushchev, Noriega, Khomeini or Saddam, rather than comes to grips with the darker side of its own unconscious impulses - greed, fear, anger and hatred. Should we perhaps look a little deeper into ourselves and try to understand this deep need for an enemy - and perhaps our insecurity about imminent Defense cuts? Were we secretly delighted with

an opportunity to try out our fancy new weapons and avoid the harder work of negotiation - and needing to admit legitimate concerns on all sides of the conflict in the Middle East - Israeli, as well as Palestinian and Iraqi? We could acknowledge that Saddam may have some legitimate grievances, including the slant drilling into Iraqi oil by Kuwait and the arbitrary boundary lines of Kuwait and Iraq drawn by the colonial British. The United States also needs to educate itself about the beauty and positive contributions of Arab culture to the world.

Of course Saddam Hussein (and many other dictators around the world) are brutal, violent and need to be stopped. Many of the Americans soldiers and citizens who support the war are motivated by higher principles of liberating an oppressed people and protecting the world from naked aggression. And one of the most positive consequences of the crisis is the utilization of the United Nations as an international body to protect weaker nations and the strengthening of its collective identity and will. The problem is that these international principles are very selectively applied throughout the world, in this case only when Western self-interest is threatened. The long-term results of the intervention in the Gulf will ultimately be determined by the selflessness of our intent.

Yet America may be choosing to go to war, and further risk an already fragile economic system, for a deeper, unconscious reason to purify itself of the greed, racism and inequities that exist in the current system. The strains which financing the war will place on the American and world economy will likely result in a further downturn. This may then allow a clarification of values around allocation of resources, and questions of wealth inequities will surely arise. The tension between the haves and have-nots of the world will remain fierce and volatile until there is a world-wide resolve to seriously address the imbalance. Out of economic difficulties can come a regulation of world trade and finance to provide greater stability and security for nations now suffering extreme deprivation.

It's significant that the Gulf War symbolically

encapsulates most of the major spiritual challenges confronting the world today: the need for an empowered world government to deal with regional conflicts; the long-term problems of solving differences by force instead of by win/win negotiation; the need to bring the Arab world into the 20th century in terms of human rights, elected governments, etc.; the issue of justice for the Palestinians and the separateness of Israel; the immense class and wealth disparity between wealthy Arab nations such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and poorer nations such as Iraq, Iran and Jordan; the repressed status of women in the Arab world; the West's over dependence on oil and energy-wasteful lifestyles; the huge budget deficits increased by the military deployment in the Gulf; and the power of defense contractors to influence public policy. How we deal with all these spiritual challenges will determine the future of our planet and the pace of our movement into a world of unity, peace and plenty.

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