

Cost of War Meditation  
April 28–29, 2012  
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Once a month, as a spiritual practice,  
we turn our attention to the reality  
that our nation is at war  
thousands of miles away from this room.  
It is difficult to be reminded of the cost of this fighting,  
For us, as a nation, and for the people  
of Iraq and Afghanistan,  
But there is a cost, too,  
In tuning out, in choosing to look away.

In this spirit, I invite you to take a deep breath,  
To sit comfortably, as we turn inward together  
For a time of centering, meditation and prayer.

A young girl hugs her books close  
As she walks with her brother to school.  
It is a beautiful spring morning.  
The sky is a deep blue, the air is crisp.  
The sun warms their faces  
As it rises higher in the sky,  
Above the jagged mountain ridges.

She looks forward to school today.  
She is learning how to read.  
Her own mother doesn't know how to read or write.  
She dreams that some day,  
She would like to be a teacher.  
Some day.

She walks past soldiers  
On the way to school.  
All of her life, her nation has been at war.  
She hates living in constant fear  
of being caught in the middle  
of gun fire, of bombings.  
She hates the soldiers.  
They don't respect her religion or her nation.  
They burn the Q'uran.  
They desecrate dead bodies.  
They are infidels, barbarians.  
She dreams of a day  
when they are gone.

The American soldier watches her cross the street.  
His body on edge, mind alert,  
eyes peeled for danger.  
He thinks of his own daughter back home  
and misses her terribly.  
He wonders, just as this girl's mother also wonders,  
what will happen to this young Afghan girl  
when he is gone,  
when we are gone?  
Will she be allowed to continue school?  
Will the streets be safe?  
Will people's lives return to normal,  
And what exactly would normal look like for a people  
Who have known some form of armed conflict for decades?

The soldier, the girl's mother –  
they both know the truth,  
the difficult history of women in Afghanistan.

Generations ago, this country  
had a constitution  
based on Islamic law, that granted  
Men and women equal rights  
In education, work and politics.  
And then the Taliban came.  
Under Sharia law, educated women were slaughtered.  
An entire generation of women --  
the mother's generation --  
Were kept as prisoners in our own homes.

Ironically, this same war that has brought  
So much horror and destruction to the people of Afghanistan  
Has also brought a sliver of hope to some  
By opening up schools again to girls.

These little ones on their way to school,  
hugging their books on a spring day,  
talking about their lessons,  
they are the key, in so many ways to all of our nations' futures, the key  
to a better world,  
a brighter hope, a world without war.

I invite you to turn inward,  
To imagine these children in your mind's eye.  
Walk alongside them as they head to school.  
Walk alongside this young girl in love and in hope  
In the belief that a new world is entirely possible.  
I invite you now into a time of shared silence together.

May the silence we have shared continue to help hold and to help heal  
us all. Amen.