

Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors

**An Extraordinary Correspondence on
What Prevents Peace
From Two Young People Taught to be Enemies**

These are the thoughts of all men in all ages and lands, they are not original with me. If they are not yours as much as mine, they are nothing or next to nothing. If they do not enclose everything, they are next to nothing. If they are not the riddle and the untying of the riddle, they are nothing. If they are not just as close as they are distant, they are nothing.
—Walt Whitman From Leaves of Grass

Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors

This book is a docudrama, a fiction based on reality. The names chosen to use in the following letters are not real names. The fictional names of Rebecca and Ahmed have been chosen for they represent ideological differences that have been and still are in conflict. It was decided to have names that are anonymous because of the potential danger to families of the same names by political fanatics, religious zealots and nationalistic extremists in reaction to questioning conventional ethnocentric divisive belief systems.

It is vitally important to encourage young people to develop questioning minds to understand how conditioned ideological beliefs divide us and create terrible conflict worldwide. Many people could feel threaten by this insightful inquiry and could react with hostility to prevent this questioning.

All the names of the people at the peace camp and the location of the camp will also remain nameless. However, the events and the dialogues are real. What you are about to read has occurred and is continuing to take place.

The main intent in presenting this book is to encourage everyone to look at what prevents peace – and therefore, what creates conflict. This is the fundamental concern for the future of humanity. For if we refuse to look at the underlying factors that prevent peace, we will forever be creating conflict.

It is important to speak mainly to young people, like the characters in this book, because we think most older people are already too identified with some ideological viewpoint to want to understand the destructive nature of this type of conditioned thinking. It's up to the younger generation to create a real revolution in our thinking and acting, to innovatively educate a new generation.

This book wants to encourage you to find out for yourselves if what is being said in these letters is indeed true, factual. If so then there is a possibility to create a new world through questioning the old, conditioned ways of thinking – in so doing, we will have peace – because we will have understood what prevents it.

Dear Ahmed,

September 9th

I miss you and I miss the peace camp. There is so much I want to say to you. So much happened while we were there, that I can now only begin to think about it. The one thing that I cannot get over is realizing that I was considered your enemy and that you could have hated me.

I couldn't understand what I did to deserve that hate, or should I say fear, just because of what I represent. I couldn't understand why people like me are so hated. I had to find out. I didn't know how I could find out, but you know how things happen sometimes? In Political Science, we are working on a peace project, which I suggested after we came back from the International Youth for Peace Camp last summer. Oh, I do miss you and the rest of our friends! What a wonderful summer we had! Well, our teacher started this project on peace.

He took us on this special trip to the Holocaust Museum. Since we live close to Washington, it wasn't too difficult to get there. Our teacher felt we should see what happened all those years ago. He said it was important for young people to experience what terrible things prejudice can do.

But, he said we were going to do it in a different way. Most peace projects start out with trying to find out what peace is and then try to bring it about. He felt this was a mistake. I didn't understand what he meant. He said we couldn't bring about peace...that peace is already here. We prevent peace from happening and we have to find out how we prevent it. This was our assignment.

He also said we had to find out what prevents peace as if we were scientists or detectives; we needed to look without bias at the facts, find clues, and form what he called a "working hypothesis," like scientists do. I guess he will explain more of what all this means as we go. I will write you about what happens. Maybe we can do a project like this next summer at Peace Camp!

So we visited the Holocaust Museum last week. I knew I had to see for myself what happened that took the lives of my grandparents and so many of my relatives. I had to see it, to feel it. So I went to that place I feared. It was a nightmare. I dreamt about it for days afterwards. All that horror! I felt as if I were actually in the Holocaust. There are four floors in the main exhibit. You go up an elevator that has a TV monitor in it, telling

you right off about the Holocaust. I felt so nervous waiting in the elevator with all those people, even though they were mostly students I know. I felt as if I were going to die.

I felt as if I were going back in time. On the top floor, we got out and started to move forward into this large, dark room. It all seems like a vague dream now. I think a large part of me didn't want to see what was there.

They had all these exhibits about how the Nazis persecuted the Jews and started these terrible hate campaigns. There were exhibits which had the actual uniforms worn by the prisoners at the concentration camps. Each one had to wear a yellow Star of David sewn to his or her clothes. Everything looked so old. And the smell was sickening! I mean there was a section where they had piled thousands of shoes belonging to the murdered people. They were the real things. All those shoes rotting, smelling of old leather, like the smell in old books or in your grandparents' attic. It was that musty, dead smell. But, these shoes had a different and terrible odor to them.

It was fear! It was as if the fear from the thousands and thousands of people, knowing they were going to die, was pressed into the leather of the shoes. I could actually feel it! It was so real! I felt ill and trapped. I wanted to get out, but there were so many people there, crowding around these horrifying exhibits.

All I could think was "Why? How could this happen?" And I was frightened. I knew some of my relatives had died in the concentration camps. My grandparents told me stories about it when I was young. But when I was younger, I didn't understand it fully. I just saw their fear. It seemed there was always fear around our home, lying underneath everything else. It was as if there was a monster hidden in the basement. Now I know what frightened them.

I kept thinking, "What did the Jews do to deserve this? Why did the Germans hate us so much?" You know, Ahmed, I really can't understand this. All I feel is fear and rage.

We went down through all the exhibits. At first, I listened to some of the survivors telling us their experiences. I felt as if the real world of sun and blue sky and birds was a million light years away. I felt as if I had entered a nightmare so immense the whole universe disappeared into a black hole in space.

Our class moved so slowly through those four floors. I remember photographs of the beatings and the deaths. The masses of bodies piled

Into heaps like dead lumps of human garbage. And then there were the gas chambers and crematoriums. I tried to go faster through the endless exhibits, but the crowds had us packed in. I felt like we were cattle in a boxcar. They actually had a boxcar there. I don't know if it was just a replica or a real one used by the Nazis in transporting Jews from home to camp, but we walked through it. I felt as if I were really there, like my spirit had been there. Or perhaps I felt the spirits of the millions of dead souls crying out for justice, for reason, for some understanding of how this could happen.

I think this is why our teacher took us there—so we could really feel this horror. I'd seen movies about this before on TV and read about it in my history books, but never really felt it like I did at that moment.

I felt as if I were going to faint. It seemed so airless in those rooms. Everything began to mix together, a blur of tortured faces, starvation, cruelty and death. It was too much! I had to stay with the group, so I couldn't just leave. I think what kept my sanity was thinking about the Peace Camp and you and Rahmat, and Sean Duffy and Kyaw, even Zuela and Mamal, from East Los Angeles. All of us from around the world—from Israel, the Gaza Strip, Beirut, South Africa, Northern Ireland, Liberia, Burma, the United States, Bosnia—all of us at that incredible camp. I thought about all the wonderful friends we had made.

Do you write any of them? I received a letter from Sean in Belfast. He said things go from a strange quiet to sudden violent outbursts. The IRA feels the Brits should go home. So do I. I mean it's their country, the Irish, I mean. But, the Brits feel there would be a blood bath between the Catholics and Protestants if the British Army left.

Why is it young people have to suffer so much? I mean, why don't the generals and politicians just go off to some island and have it out, but leave the rest of us alone? It's the innocent who die at the hands of the crazy ones.

Do you remember at camp when we talked about the situation in Northern Ireland? And when the argument between the kids happened, the ones from Belfast? What was so wonderful was how it was settled. Do you remember those incredible questions Sean asked, stunning everyone? "Why do we separate ourselves in our beliefs? Why can't we all just stop taking sides? Why does someone need to be a Protestant or a Catholic?"

I remember the shocked look on the kids' faces. How could anyone say that? But he was right! We do separate ourselves by our beliefs, our different ways of living. And do you remember the conversations that came out of his questioning? I will never forget it! It was like someone opened a big door and a great fresh wind came rushing through...almost as if springtime happened all at once in a single moment. I felt sane! I

mean I really felt sane. It's hard to describe, but I had this sensation that everything was all right, as if I'd been in a dream and all of a sudden woke up!

I remember that next morning like it just happened to me. I had dreamt the night before about everything we had discussed, and when I was waking up to the new day in the shower, I again started thinking so hard about what Sean had said, about what all of us had been talking about. I don't quite understand what happened, but I had the most incredible experience. I told you about it then, but it came back to me while I was in that dark, frightening museum. I remember while standing in the shower, everything suddenly got bright, like when you turn the light on in a dark room, except the room was already lit.

But the difference between what was light before, and what was light then, was completely different, I mean, like night and day. It was as if I had actually woken up, as if my life up to that point had been a dream. But then I remembered when I was a small child I had felt this way. I felt as if everything was well with the world. I felt no fear, no anxiety, and no worry. I felt this immense trust and calm. I remember saying to myself, "Oh, so this is what it's all about. How wonderful!"

Unfortunately, it went away—little by little—the brightness and the tremendous feeling of openness. But some has stayed with me, like a small light, a powerful candle inside me. Sometimes it comes back again, but never as strong. Yet, it's always there if I need it. And I needed it then in that place of death and horror.

We finally made it through the four floors. On each floor I wanted to run out the exit, but I stayed. It felt like forever. I don't remember much of the rest of the floors or the other exhibits afterwards, but what I do remember is that IT REALLY HAPPENED! Maybe that is what the purpose of it is, to show people that it was real. Very real!

But there's a major piece I don't understand: nowhere, NO where, did I find anything trying to tell us why it happened. I just saw the horror and felt the horror. They didn't explain it. That's why I'm so glad I went to Peace Camp. There, at least, I began to understand why and how. And that is why we are doing this project at school. My teacher was so impressed by the report I'd written about the camp, he created this special assignment to get the students to understand what prevents peace.

At the end of the tour, we went into the Holocaust Museum Library. You know me, Ahmed. I just love books. Someday, as you know, I want to be a writer and write to all the young people like us around the world on what prevents peace. I mean, when you see something like we did at the

Holocaust Museum, you've got to say something to others about it. If I don't, I think it will eat me up inside.

Well, I started to look through all the books there. Most were first-hand accounts of the Holocaust and the concentration camps. There were the famous books by and on Anne Frank. I read her book. Oh, so sad. But again, I couldn't find any real insights into what created the Holocaust. I mean, there are the history books we've studied at school, but they talk about it as if it were just a matter of record, something to record for history. And there are the big, complicated books by all the social authorities, like politicians, psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, religious leaders, and even military people.

Can you imagine a military person understanding what prevents peace? If he (or she, now) understood anything, it would be that being a military-minded person thought they were preventing war, because that is the way they have been conditioned to think. (Remember how much time at camp we talked about conditioning, and how important it was in understanding how we created war?) Well, again, I couldn't find any books that could tell me how this terrible thing happened. Most just seemed to be written to frighten you.

I also have a hard time with people making money from writing about war and violence. Can you believe war criminals write books and make money from it? I find that sickening. And on TV here, I've seen murderers interviewed on talk shows as if they were experts on understanding violence. And these murderers are treated as authorities and paid huge sums of money.

Maybe if Adolph Hitler was alive today, they would have him on all the talk shows and he would make millions of dollars. I can just see it now, "Well, Mr. Hitler, would you like to tell us your thoughts on the Jews today? What are your impressions on today's politics?" He would probably become a celebrity, considering all those politicians who have been caught for being corrupt. It is amazing how a former U.S. President, who was almost impeached, could have come back and been considered an "elder statesman." Why do we reward and honor criminals, especially here in the United States?

Well, I'm going off the main point. Truly, this visit to the Holocaust Museum has really shaken me up. And so did our Peace Camp, Ahmed. I want to keep writing you and let you know what I'm doing with this project. I feel it will be very important and could really change the way we think. It could affect the whole world.

I know I'm only seventeen, but I can see these things. They are real to me. But most of my friends are not interested. They are just interested in boys, or clothes or going to the mall. (They should spell it "maul".) I

guess I'm interested in books and in understanding why there is so much prejudice in the world. That is what we are going to use as the central theme of our project—prejudice. To see if this is one of the main things creating war, or as my teacher puts it, “preventing peace”!

I feel so selfish just talking about myself and not asking about your family and how you are doing. I know in our first letters we decided to write about what happened at Peace Camp and how it was changing our lives at home—as our teachers at camp asked us to do before next summer—but I am concerned about you!

I see on TV the peace talks go up and down; someone decides it is all wrong so he kills some of the “terrorists” for freedom. (What a crazy way to think!) And then someone on the “other side” feels the need to revenge the death of the “terrorists” and kills one of that side. Isn't it amazing how each side sees themselves as “Freedom Fighters,” as “heroes,” and believe that God is on their side and that the people of the other side are the “terrorists,” the “enemy,” and are driven by “evil fires”? Do any of them see themselves as terrorists? How can we bring about freedom through violence? How can anyone be a “hero” by killing? human beings? And getting awards and medals for it seems crazy. But, here I go again, losing track.

Ahmed, please email me soon. Thank God for computers. It's so easy to write. I miss you so much even though we are supposed to be “enemies,” so we have been told.... I'm so happy we met at camp. I so look forward to next summer.

Oh, did you hear about this? I heard they are going to introduce Martial Arts at the camp! I almost fainted. Martial Arts! Aren't they just more violence? How could anyone in his or her right mind study the Martial Arts? They are calling it “Martial Arts for Peace,” as a way to understand the “martial” in us.

I met a very interesting teacher at my school that also teaches the Martial Arts. She told me about this new approach in the Martial Arts world called Martial Arts for Peace. I will tell you more as I talk with her. I'm thinking of attending one of the Martial Arts for Peace classes to see what she means by it. All I've seen of the Martial Arts are those horrible Martial Arts movies with all that violence. My father hates them. He doesn't like me to see those kinds of films. My mother, too. They both like to watch comedies, or films that educate you, not just violence, violence, violence!

Well, Ahmed, there is so much to tell you. I miss you terribly. I can't wait to see you next summer. (Am I repeating myself?) My love to you and your family. Be safe, my friend.

Love, Rebecca

Dear Rebecca

1 October

How happy I was to receive your letter. I now too have a computer so I can write you long, neat-looking letters, like you do so well. And no, you don't ramble. I understand all your feelings and you write so well. I can think back to the day I first met you at Peace Camp. You had all those books with you. I can see you now, standing by the bus, looking around you as if you had landed on Mars. I guess it was your first time away from home, yes?

It is so good we can email each other. Your experience at that museum sounds very upsetting. I don't understand what good it does to go back into the past. It's like digging up corpses. Can't we let the past be? People say we learn from the past. How can this be so? We have libraries and bookstores filled with thousands upon thousands of books about the past! But, do we learn from them? I don't think so. Am I being cynical again? I remember last summer when you had accused me of being cynical. I didn't really even know what it meant until you brought it up. Maybe I am. But here, we live war; there, you just talk about it, or visit museums to see it. Every day I see it. I see the violence around every corner.

Yesterday, I heard yelling and I rushed over. There was a soldier shooting tear gas over and over, just as if he were casually sowing seeds in a field. There were some youths with masks throwing rocks. Just kids throwing rocks. Like David and Goliath. They have all the weapons, while we have rocks. When is this going to end? I have grown up in war, in conflict. It is my life. It is hard to imagine anything else. Except when I went to Peace Camp. What a wonderful thing, Rebecca.

You talk about the Holocaust during World War II, but it is still going on today. The same things that have created the Holocaust then are alive today! And, you know why—because we have not understood its real causes. I can see us at camp talking about this. That was the first time I'd ever heard anything intelligent about war: how it starts and what keeps it going. It is so good your teacher is going to do this project about what prevents peace. We talked about this at camp, remember? We looked at how the way we have always unquestioningly thought creates the way we act. All that stuff about "conditioning." I think it is important for you and me to remind each other about what we learned there, so we don't forget. We are supposed to look at how this happens today. That, as you said, was our assignment for the year, to prepare for next summer's camp session.

But sometimes, I feel so hopeless...as if everything is so futile! I feel like just going away to a far-off land. Sometimes I really get depressed and just want to end all this. But, after camp, I felt a new strength, a new hope. I don't mean hope for the next life or anything like that. That is what all the frightened old people believe. I see that way of thinking doesn't help us understand the problem of what creates war. These old people have been conditioned for too long. They hide in their temples and mosques and pray to God, like frightened sheep. They don't realize the very thing they are doing to buy them freedom, security, and peace (or so they think), is the very thing that is creating conflict!

I remember us discussing this in camp. How in the beginning, people gathered together in tribes for security, to feel safe, to feel protected. And how important

this group or tribe became to each of them when they became the tribe, and the tribe became them. Our teacher talked about “identification” and how strongly people become identified with a particular group and how every tribal identification became a ritual, a custom, and then finally, a tradition to be passed down from generation to generation. So, today, we’ve inherited that tribal tradition which we call our heritage or birthright. This tradition has become our legacy. And for this legacy, we kill each other!

It makes me feel like we’re living with the shadows of our forgotten ancestors, as though we cannot ever live in peace, because we have inherited the war-like past. The people with their old ways banter on about the traditional divisions of the old clans and tribes.

The other day, I saw an interesting thing on TV. It was taken at two different times, so each person interviewed could not know of the other’s interview. A Jew and an Arab were shown on a “split screen,” where they put the two faces side by side at the same time. Although this is usually done when it is live TV, this was taped earlier, at separate times. Anyway, what happened was amazing.

The one person was saying, “Our forefathers were here first; our traditions give us the right to claim this land as our holy place; our holy book tells us we are the chosen ones and the others are the infidels, terrorists, and enemy.” This was nothing unusual, for I have heard it so many times before, except when we questioned it at camp. (That questioning was so amazing to me!) The unusual part, at least for me at that moment, was hearing the other person saying exactly the same thing. “Our forefathers ...sacred tradition tells us...we are the chosen ones...and they are the terrorists, the defilers, the enemy!”

All of a sudden, I had this unusual feeling. It is hard to tell you what, except that I started to laugh. And I laughed and laughed and laughed. My parents must have thought I was crazy. My brother, Bandar, looked at me like I belonged in an institution. But I really saw what was happening! Do you understand, Rebecca? You must, for we learned about this at camp. But, it really didn’t hit me until I saw that TV program. Both people were saying exactly the same thing!

Each looked alike, because each shared the same racial background. But they both were divided by their own particular brand of conditioned thinking, by their own particular tribal traditions and culture. And both thought that identifying with their own tradition would bring them freedom and peace. They couldn’t see, but it was so obvious to me at that moment, how stupid the whole thing was: how incredibly ignorant we are of the simplest, most obvious facts! Those two people, who represent the two sides here, who, in fact, represent all sides throughout history (because they all have the same causes, the same fact of established conditioned beliefs), are blinded by their own little worlds of tribal heritage.

In that moment, I really saw the problem—and the “solution”—I saw the conditioning. Just like you at camp, I felt like I’d woken up, and I saw they were “asleep”: so conditioned, so brainwashed, so programmed (like this computer I’m writing to you on) that they couldn’t see the obvious! If they had, perhaps they also would have laughed, or cried. I laughed so hard, I cried. I think my parents understood, since we talked about it and also what had happened at camp.

But I think my brother still thinks I’m crazy. (You know that Bandar is a part of the problem, to the dismay of my parents. It hurts them so much since he joined

the rebels. He is just hurting. I can understand. His best friend was killed last year in the fighting. So was his girlfriend. He loved her so much I thought he would die of sorrow. I'm only nineteen and he is a man now, at twenty-one. There is a world of difference between us. I wish he could go to the camp. I try to talk to him about it, but I think he is in too much pain.)

Well, this simple realization has made me even more committed to understand what creates war, or as you say, what prevents peace. I can see the terrible sadness in those men on TV. I can see they suffer so much that their families, friends, and loved ones suffer, too. The terrible twist about all this? They feel that they are acting right, honorably, and justifiably.

Do you remember (I can see it now) the time Marina, one of our teachers from Russia, talked to us about war? (You know her; she was with Sasha. They have a daughter Masha. We used to joke around by saying Sasha, Masha, Sasha, Masha.) Well, I'm thinking of the time Marina told us of how war ended in a second. Do you see that in your mind now, Rebecca? I can't remember it all. Wish I could.

It was a wonderful story of the two enemies who created peace in an instant. I think she said she saw it in an old American movie about Russians, or something like that. Well, I felt like conflict ended in a flash when I realized what was creating the conflict between these two men on TV, and between all the people or peoples they represent. I saw the old tribal identifications and how strongly they had been conditioned into these old men. They each had been raised to be war-like, yet they all thought what they were bringing peace.

All those years of prayers and rituals and prayers and rituals—on and on until the brain became a robot's brain. The habit became so strong there wasn't any room for questioning, for intelligence. It was just conditioning, like the Pavlovian experiments with the dogs. (Have you learned about this? The scientist, Pavlov, conditioned dogs to salivate every time he rang a bell, even though there was no food there. Didn't we talk of this at camp?) It is like mice in a cage where they get rewarded for pushing the right lever by automatically receiving a pellet for their correct choice. I think religion is like this.

People at first got angry with me when I spoke up about religion at camp. But I think there was a good understanding of this, Rebecca. Religion in this part of the world causes so much violence and conflict. We have "Holy Wars"! How can war be holy? Holy means "whole," undivided. But religion teaches division; religion teaches us to believe in a particular god or system of behavior, according to a particular tribal heritage. Religion is what keeps people from being whole; it keeps people divided, under the pretense that it is creating peace and security.

I saw that even more that day on TV when those men were saying how their holy books told them they were right, and that their god said they were the chosen ones. How can there be so many gods, each saying a particular religion is the "chosen one"? It sounds like god has many helpers—and all, who, like politicians, promise everything to everybody.

I saw that religion was just conditioning the minds of people to stay within their little groups, to think narrow thoughts, creating the illusion of peace and safety when actually, they were creating division and conflict. I remember the teachers

at camp mentioning how we had to feel sorry for certain people because they didn't know what they were doing. But I can't feel sorry for them. I see the destruction that all conditioning creates. I feel real sorrow at the outcome of organized, conditioned, religious thinking.

Have you ever thought about religion? Not just accepting or rejecting it, but really looked at it without judging it? I tried to. On one level, I can, but when I see the daily horror of it, I find it hard to look at it, without the tremendous emotion I feel about it. However, when I can look at it without judgment, I can see how it came about and its origins.

Religion is based on belief, yes? Do you know the word 'belief' means, "to act without sufficient evidence or proof"? A lot of people believe in their religion so much they will kill for it—and they have killed for it, for thousands of years. Do you know about the Children's Crusade in the Middle Ages, or the Inquisition in Spain? There are so many examples of the terror of religious holocausts. I know this sounds very cynical, but it's true. Religious wars have killed millions of people—and all in the name of God—or someone's made-up reason for hope in the "next life." Perhaps I am being cynical, but there is good reason for it. What I can't stand is the arrogance of religious leaders, the contrived, elaborate ceremonies they create, the incredibly fancy costumes they wear, and the control they feel they should have over all of us.

Let me give you an example of what I mean. I was in England when I was twelve years old. I guess I was always precocious, too smart for my age, but I've always seen things clearly. My parents and I were visiting the country and we went to two very interesting places—Eton School and Windsor Castle. When first saw this famous English school, I thought it looked so old and falling apart. I wondered why anyone would like going to learn in such a cold, stuffy, formal place. Even though I was only twelve, I felt this. I couldn't really express myself, but when my parents talked to me about it, I began to put words to my feelings. (My parents have always been interested in peace and have always helped me to understand what prevents it.)

That day at Eton School really made me think. As you go into the entrance of the school, on either side on the walls are plaques with hundreds of dead students' names on them, dead because they had gone to war and been killed. And next to these poor, young, dead men's names, I saw another plaque with a saying that went something like this: "Be proud of these young men who have gone before you for they have given their lives for your freedom." The name of God was in there some place too, as if God thought it was all right that these young men died in "His Name."

We walked around the open courtyard. The place seemed haunted by the shadows of their long lost, forgotten ancestors. We visited the boy's chapel, which was really something to see. Now that I look back on it, I can see why it was built the way that it had been—to impress you, to make you feel small, but at the same time, very powerful. After all, this school was supposed to be preparing the next generation of leaders for England to "rule the seas"!

While we were in there, someone started playing an organ. The sudden feelings I had were so strange and powerful because of the sound of the music.

Even though I had been raised in another culture, this Christian music was very powerful.

I can see now how this type of religious music could help reinforce the conditioning of religious teaching. I can see how important it is to get the emotions “tuned up” in order for conditioning to work. We talked about emotions at camp; how what we call “sentiment” can be very dangerous, how someone like a Hitler used music and ceremony and ritual to condition people to act, as he wanted them to. I felt this in that chapel, even at twelve years old. Now I can begin to more fully understand what it means and how dangerous it can be, when used in this way.

We also visited Windsor Castle. Our family discussed this for months afterwards. It is easier when you go to a foreign country from another culture, and you are not conditioned by that particular foreign culture, to see the conditioning and what makes it up. It stands out so clearly, if you are looking for it. So, here’s what happened: we went into the King’s Chapel (I think that is what it is called) and stood there, amazed at the surroundings. My father was excited to point out to us that the way the building was constructed, including all the religious things in it, was deliberately planned to influence you to be impressed, to be in awe, to be conditioned to accept without question the authority it represented.

As we were walking through, looking at everything, and my father was giving us this “tour” of religious conditioning, a pale looking man in a black robe, with a look of authority on his face, came up to us. I could feel his arrogance. He said in a voice that seemed to represent the history of the place, the voice of the forgotten ancestors, that my father must remove his hat. He had bought an English hat and was wearing it in the chapel. My father was not one to immediately do what others told him, especially if he felt what was being asked of him was not right. So he asked, “Why?”

“Out of respect!” the pale faced, black robed man almost shouted, as if bearing the commanding weight of all the dead kings represented in the chapel. This was all my father needed to hear. He started to lecture the black robed man on the history of religious war and the destruction of religious, conditioned thinking. The black robed man’s pale face grew even paler, until suddenly, as if a switch had been flicked, it turned red with anger. After a few moments of intense lecturing, the black robed man left in a huff, retreating down a corridor to the safety of his religious sanctuary.

My mother mentioned anxiously to father that perhaps the man was going to call the guards we had seen outside, so we left the chapel and the grounds. For a long time afterward, and still vividly today, I remember that confrontation and all my parents’ discussions.

You know, each day, I see the lasting destruction caused by religious belief. There is such hate among the different factions, yet they profess love and peace. I know now what the word ‘hypocrite’ means. I see the ancient traditions played out. It’s like theatre. What is that quote from Shakespeare, “Life is but a stage.” It reminds me of this except this is all too real.

I have seen fights among the religious leaders. A while ago, one was pushed down the steps of the religious site. This place contains many, very established, religious beliefs, each saying that God is on their side, each group with its

religious symbols, its holy traditions, its particular religious gestures. One bows constantly. Another kneels on the floor prostrate before some icon of someone's imagination.

I think people will believe almost anything. I thought about making up my own religion. We would worship Coca-Cola, the highest representation of the God Mammon, the symbol of all that is holy in the world. Our holy place would consist of a gigantic Coke bottle with special spotlights on it, signifying the heavenly lights of God's blessing. Hundreds of Coke bottles would surround this gigantic centerpiece with candles stuck in them, dripping holy wax. There would be special prayer rooms where you would be surrounded by a virtual reality machine, taking you to the heaven of your choice. Each heaven is your own personal dream of success. You could have anything you want. And there would be special fax machines where you could fax a request directly to corporate heaven for your reservation in the after-life. The ceremony would consist of people hopping up and down on one leg, pulling on their left earlobe and chanting, "Coca-Cola, Coca-Cola, Coca-Cola."

I know what you must be thinking as you read this—how cynical Ahmed is. But, dear Rebecca, this is what keeps me sane.

I await your letters eagerly. I am thankful for our friendship, for this is the greatest hope for me. I am also thankful for the Peace Camp. Finally, a place where we can learn to understand this horror!

But let's not end on such a negative note. Let's look at the possibility of really creating peace, through our efforts in our letters to each other, and to our other friends from Peace Camp. Let us look forward to starting that Peace School we talked about last summer.

Let us look at the beauty of nature, the fragile birth of flowers each year, and the power of the universe to take us beyond ourselves.

With great affection, Ahmed

Dear Ahmed,

October 27th

I feel for you and your family. Since I do not live there, I cannot really imagine how it actually is for you. But I can understand fear, for I feel it every day here. America is becoming a terribly violent place.

Each day on the news, there is more violence. I think the media plays on this, to keep you “hooked,” like an “emotional drug addict.” They exploit every new incidence of violence. It becomes a “feeding frenzy,” a term they appropriately use to describe themselves. They show all this violence, but tell us nothing to understand and resolve it. I watched a well-known newscaster host a panel of “experts” on violence after there was a particularly hideous murder near here, one that seemed to have no reason behind it whatsoever. They talked so eloquently, so intellectually about all the incidents of violence, comparing this incident with that incident. They looked back in history for examples. They spoke about sociological statistics and psychological case studies. Some were politicians, who said much without saying anything at all. I call it psychobabble or politico-babble.

During one of the breaks, there was an expensive ad for a very violent movie that had just been released. I was shocked that the station allowed this, when the program was about resolving violence. I really think these “experts” are paid well to not resolve violence, so they can go on getting paid to say all their fancy words! (Now I’m beginning to sound like you!) At the end of the program, there was unanimous agreement that no one understood why the violence happened. And yet they still maintained their ignorant self-importance.

Sometimes I really wonder about our educational system, which turns out experts who only see their own expertise. It’s like looking at life through a keyhole, thinking that what you see is the whole of life.

By the way, I do remember Marina’s story of how war ended in a moment of understanding. It was the story of the time the Russian submarine came into a port in New England and how the Russian sailors and townspeople almost had a war. If I remember it correctly, the submarine somehow either got lost or needed repairs. Anyhow, they landed in a small coastal town of New England where they were met by a frightened, but determined, group of townspeople who were going to defend their town with a few guns, pitchforks, and so on. Well, there was this scene when both groups were about to defend themselves—the captain of the submarine would not surrender to the townspeople’s demand and the townspeople would not back down. Everyone aimed their

guns at the other, and they were about to fire when a child's scream ripped through the sky. Everyone instinctively looked up and saw a young boy dangling from a high rooftop. He apparently had climbed up to that precarious position and had fallen, being caught at the last moment by his belt on the edge of the roof. He was terrified and, as everyone could see, in real danger of being seriously hurt if he fell.

For a long moment, there was a pause. Everyone was frozen by the sudden occurrence and they knew they had to act quickly if the boy was to be saved. The mother of the boy saw what had happened and started screaming for help. Some of the townspeople put down their weapons and rushed to her. Then more and more people flocked to the site until finally, everyone, including the Russian sailors, captain and all, arrived at the foot of the tall building where the boy was barely hanging on from far above. Some of the people in the group started to form a human ladder to reach the boy. Not knowing each other's language, they gestured to each other to get on one another's shoulders, until finally they were high enough for the last person to scramble up and grab the boy. The last person, who was a Russian sailor, handed the boy down to the next person on the human ladder, and down he went to safety and his terribly distraught mother.

There was great joy over saving the boy. Everyone was laughing and hugging each other. In all the joyous celebrating, the head of the townspeople's group met up with the captain from the Russian submarine. They started to hug, but suddenly remembered "who" they were. And, for a tense moment, it seemed they would revert to their former antagonistic positions, the enemies they were moments ago. But then they both began to smile and finally, they hugged each other.

Well, at that moment, another townspeople, who hadn't been there to see the Russians and townspeople working together, rushed in. He had left to contact the U.S. Air Force about the enemy Russian sub before the boy screamed. For a moment, everyone was silent in fear.

Then the leader of the townspeople proposed an idea. He called out for anyone with a boat to escort the Russian sub out of the harbor to safe waters. Since everyone was now friendly, they agreed. Forming an armada of fishing boats around the sub, they escorted it out to safety. The U.S. Air Force came jetting in to see this unusual phenomenon, but decided they could not attack the sub because they might accidentally hurt the townspeople. The Air Force planes left. The final scene of this movie showed the head of the townspeople saying good-bye to the captain of the Russian submarine. As they each went their own way, they pledged their friendship.

I remember our conversation at camp about this seemingly simple movie: how people who were conditioned to be prejudiced to hate the other as their enemy could end that terrible prejudice in a moment, because of the natural instinct for love. That small child, who had been hanging precariously from the tall building, broke the barriers of difference, and united them all in mutual respect and understanding. Everyone could relate to children and to the danger that child was in. All the conditioning separating those two “enemies” vanished in a flash when their attention was drawn to that boy. The moment they realized the immediate danger he was in, they were pulled out of their brainwashed states of mind to respond to the real danger, not to the supposed one they at first thought they had to fight over.

This story sticks in my mind because of the incredible simplicity of it and because of the truth of it. We can end our conditioned prejudiced thinking in a moment, whether it’s an emergency or not.

I don’t know if I told you this last summer, but a teacher of mine related a story I want to share with you. It has to do with what you call “shadows of forgotten ancestors”: how our past, our heritage and traditions, condition us to continue society’s divisive ways. This is a simple story, too, about my teacher’s visit to East Berlin. She had to pass through the highly secured border at the Berlin Wall. The guard demanded her papers in an apparently threatening and aggressive manner. She complied, and was finally let through. It was a nerve-wracking experience for her.

Well, later that day, she had to go back over the border to the other side. She passed through the same gate and met the same military guard she had encountered earlier. When he saw her, he smiled and waved her through. He was extremely pleasant and talkative. She thought she was seeing things! How could the frightening, menacing guard of the morning turn into this happy, pleasant man in one day?

When she got back to her hotel, she learned why. The order had come that day for the end to the Berlin Wall! The guard had apparently been directed to open the gates. My teacher realized that the Wall was also in the guard’s head: it was an internal barrier that had created the external one. When they lifted the external barrier, the internal lifted, too. So simple.

I don’t think this would happen in all situations, but it does show us what we talked about at camp last summer, about how conditioning works, how prejudice is created, and how it is sustained. You speak of your experiences with religion and the conditioning you see there. I do see that; I am beginning to understand what prevents peace. We have talked

about some of these things in our project. Let me tell you what we have learned. Then we can compare notes to see if it's all true.

We went on another trip back to Washington, D.C. We visited the capital in a different way. Our assignment was to find out how the government was helping people understand war. We took a tour bus around the area, visiting Arlington National Cemetery, Lincoln Memorial, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and various other sites. We noticed there were other sites marked out for memorials such as the Veterans of the Korean War. But we saw only memorials, the statistics of the dead and the sorrow of it all. Its sole purpose for existence seemed only to glorify and justify war. I saw no monument to help us understand why we "had to" have all these wars.

We walked down the mall (the central walkway in D.C.) and came upon a demonstration. People were waving flags and arguing. When we got closer, I saw a group of political extremists from two religious factions, one that had special meaning for my family and me. (I don't want to talk about who was who, but rather about what the real lesson was for us. You see, the problems those two groups represented were not "my" problem or "your" problem. They were "our," or the problem, the human problem of prejudice, of conditioning which divides people and creates conflict.)

Anyway, we stood there, watching this demonstration. As I watched, I began to feel certain feelings stir in me, especially when I noticed the flags waving. I started to identify with the one while simultaneously feeling antagonism towards the other. The symbol on the flag I was identifying with represented my heritage, my tradition. That symbol was my "button" and when I saw it, I understood how that "button" was being pushed. My eyes opened wide as I looked at the other symbols, the ones that represented a threat to "my symbol." A small, fanatical group was waving a flag that pushed my biggest button: millions of people had died because of what this symbol has signified to certain aggressors.

I remembered our discussions at camp about nationalism and patriotism, how they were the real "enemies of peace." I remember thinking, "How could patriotism be an enemy of peace?" Do you remember those discussions? We talked about how someone who represented the tribal ways, the upholder of that tradition in that ongoing way, could actually perpetuate conflict in the world, because he or she was keeping people apart in their differences? And that the real work of understanding what prevented peace, or wholeness among humans, actually understood the conditioning that created divisive thinking? Then we began to see that people who upheld the divided or nationalistic view over the perspective of the whole, united view, prevented peace by their conditioned, limited thinking.

At first, I think it was hard for us to see this simple truth, but when we looked at the basic causes of conflict, we could see that holding on to the fragment, the particular tradition, kept the divisions alive and therefore, also fueled the violence and warring this created. I think patriotism is the same as religion. Both are conditioned thinking passed down, separating people. But, both are presented as ways to save us, to give us peace and freedom. This is the most terrible of all realizations—the ways we are going about trying to create peace are simply creating war!

Well, back to the groups in D.C. I remembered our discussions, and then realized if I could just watch the reactions in me without doing anything about them, without judging or condemning them or saying I was justified in having them, maybe I could find real freedom. We talked about this at camp, but I never actually experienced it until that day in D.C.

So, I just looked at all that was happening—the flags, the arguments, the reactions in me, both for and against, the fear, the hatred—all the intense feelings which were crashing through my brain. And there came a point, like the eye of a hurricane, when I felt a sudden calm, a center in all the whirling thoughts and feelings (or “felts” as we called them at camp, since the feelings were of the past, therefore, “felts”). In that “eye,” there was a strange sensation or sensations. All the sensations going on inside and out, sort of blended into one mix of sensations, as if there were no separation between the two. It was as if my skin had become porous, and all sensation was one sensation.

Does this sound kind of nutty to you? It made the strangest sense to me. I mean, not “sense” as in “I was thinking about it”, but the kind of sense that said, “I know!” The “I know” was a realization or more of a “feeling” that there is no separation between anything. That everything is really one movement. I hope I’m not sounding too weird, but it felt “religious”.

I know what you’re probably thinking now, but really, it felt religious. Not religions, not church or temple, or prayer or incense, or chanting or anything like that. But, religious, like the experience I had in the shower, but different. I’m not sure what it means. Maybe I’m just working too hard. I so want to understand this problem of prejudice and conditioning! Maybe I’m under pressure.

Well, anyway, at that moment, I realized the sensations, those reactions in me, were just conditioning—maybe like what you felt when you saw that TV program. I mean the experience was so real! I could stand in that eye of the hurricane and watch the whirling going around me and not get into it! It was amazing, because before, I would always react, and felt justified in reacting, as if that reacting would benefit “my group”

and bring peace and freedom—even peace and freedom to my enemies, the “others”. We discussed that day in class and I told them a part of what happened to me. (I left out the “religious” part because I was afraid they would think I was having some kind of breakdown or something.)

We talked about the memorials and how everything just seemed so depressing, honoring people who killed other people, or honoring people who had been killed. We felt people shouldn’t honor killing and especially give medals for it, and have parades about it! We also realized that we’d seen no explanations at any of the memorial sites to help us understand all this death and destruction. I mean, really understand it.

We talked about how each of us felt watching the demonstration. There were different reactions, but at the end of the class, we realized that we all had one thing in common: each one of us, even including the people protesting, were all reacting. So, we decided to follow that “clue” in our project (since we said we would find out about prejudice and conditioning through our own investigation, and not by reading books about it). We set out to study reaction and we came up with a lot of interesting clues.

We first examined the word. (You know how I love to look up words in the dictionary. I find that if you look at the original meanings of words you can better understand what they mean.) I won’t bore you with the details, but in essence, we found out that a reaction is very different from a response. A reaction is a re- action, an action that has been repeated, and an action from the past coming into the present. We realized a re-action was the same as prejudice, because prejudice is to pre-judge. Do you get it? (I hope this doesn’t bore you. It is so fascinating to me. I feel like Sherlock Holmes looking for the slightest clue to the mystery.)

Now, this is very important in understanding how the brain works, for as you know, the brain is the foundation of the problem. (This is where the scientist in me comes in.) The brain has been conditioned to prejudge or to react to certain past memories and to bring these past memories into the present. Some memories are OK and necessary, but some are harmful and hurtful—like the reactions I was having at that demonstration.

Well, to make my point, we realized prejudice is a mechanical reaction of the brain to certain stimuli, just like Pavlov’s experiments with dogs. But most people don’t realize the reactions they are having are just that. They think they are “real.” I mean, “real” in the sense that their reactions are who they are, and they are constantly living them out as if that were the right and natural thing to do.

So, once we realized that prejudice is just a bunch of re-actions, conditioning and mechanical stimuli in the brain, we had the insight to be

free of them! Do you understand what I mean? (We talked about some of this at camp, remember?) I think we are really on to something with this.

Sometimes think of what these “clues” or insights could mean if people would take the time to look at them, understand them and see how they have been creating conflict. Then I feel so depressed and hopeless, which is not like me. I’m usually “Ms. Optimistic,” as you called me. Maybe we are all wrong because I don’t see anyone else really looking at these causes of prejudice and conflict. All the politicians only seem to care about the surface of problems after they have become problems. They don’t seem to care about the deeper parts. And, except for the class project and our incredible Peace Camp, I don’t know where else this kind of “investigation” is going on.

Maybe I’m just too young and idealistic, but I can’t see why people haven’t understood all this yet. Sometimes I feel so alone and desperate, except for you and our friends, and now my teacher and classmates here. Are we just fooling ourselves into thinking we understand something so important that it could end war, something which has not been discussed by all the great authorities of the past? It makes me really wonder.

Sometimes I feel as though I am in a dream. That life is a dream—a bad one, a real nightmare. This is true because most people, it seems to me, are asleep, having been conditioned to live out the past in the present. Living in the old tribal ways, without questioning, is like being dead. I see all these old people, who are being kept alive through advances in science, but who are “brain dead.” They probably died somewhere in their early life, going to school. I hated regular school. I’m so happy my parents have sent me to this school. I think I would have died if I had stayed at my old school. The teachers there were all so asleep, like zombies. I didn’t really know it until I was older, but I could feel it even when I was very young.

I’m beginning to ramble. There is so much to say. I feel excited by our project and what it is creating. I’m so sorry you have to see all that war, Ahmed. I wish you could come and live here with us. Why do you stay? Well, it’s not my business. It’s just that I care for you. I don’t want you to be hurt. But I guess, as you said to me last summer, being in real war, you can better understand what creates it. Maybe you’re right, but still, I feel the danger you are in. I watch the news on TV and I see the conflicts, the never-ending vicious cycle of revenge.

When will there be real, intelligent leaders who will come forward and lead the world to peace—by helping people understand what prevents it? (as I wrote these words, I realized the danger this represents to many people. That is, if someone, some leader really came forward and spoke the truth...well, you can imagine what would happen.)

As you say, let's not end on a negative note—let's look to the future when you and I and the rest of the Peace Camp start that International Peace School we talked about last summer. Write to me, Ahmed, and tell me your ideas about this new school. Tell me your dreams; tell me what you understand of your life and the lives of those around you. We must keep this flame alive, for it is the flame of truth, of reason, of understanding—it is the flame of intelligence, of love.
My love to you and your family, Rebecca

Dear Rebecca—

20 November

It was with great pleasure I received your letter again. My family is well. My brother, even though he is in constant danger being a part of the rebellion, is fortunately well.

Your email really stimulates my thinking. Sometimes one can forget so easily, and get caught up with the everyday reality of living. But, the real everyday reality, of which you speak, is happening here, too and everywhere but people are not aware of it. They go about their business and think life is this silly, quarreling, haggling over money, the petty political arguments, and the religious nonsense. Everyone thinks his or her world is the center of the universe, that they and their little shoddy group is the most important. What is that expression: "All is vanity."

You see, dear Rebecca, my cynicism keeps me alive. But it is more than cynicism; it is the raw truth. It hurts more seeing a truth and not being able to do something about it than if one were ignorant and just throws up one's hands helplessly.

I am too cynical, yes? We are doing something about it. You and I and our friends at camp. And, now your classmates at school. What a wonderful class! You have such an unusual teacher to want to do something like this project.

So, you would like to hear my ideas on the Peace School we started talking about last summer. Yes, this is of vital importance to us all. Let's converse about this dream, and make it a reality.

What we have begun to accomplish in Peace Camp, what you and I have written each other about, is the curriculum of such a school. Most regular schools are only concerned with what you call the "3Rs." But the most important subject is what I would call the "4th R"—relationships. Where are we taught about our relationships and ourselves?

Many adults would look to their religious authorities for this education, but, because of the separatist conditioning of organized religious belief systems, this would only make things worse. It seems to me we are trying to correct the problems of relationships with the very thing creating the problems. I don't know if I'm being clear. If conditioned thinking has caused the problem in the first place, how can more of the same resolve it? Does this make sense to you?

This school would of course have academics. Excellence in academics is absolutely necessary. But it would not be the central focus. Understanding relationships or human behavior would be the core of the curriculum of such a school. (Do I sound like our teachers at camp? I have thought this through a lot lately, so I think what I say now is more real to me, not just what someone else has told me.)

I like what your teacher said about "understanding what prevents peace." I think that is a wise approach, for to try to get peace seems an impossibility. Peace is there. We prevent it by the way we have been conditioned to think. The key prevention to understanding peace is that we lock out the facts creating conflict from our consciousness. If we could look at our own, and everybody's conditioning, we'd all see why we have conflict. It's such a simple, barebones truth.

I know you can understand what I say. In school, I am looked upon as, how do you call it in your country—a “nerd.” Because I am interested in these things, some of my friends think I am too intellectual. They say, “Ahmed, don’t worry about such nonsense, think of just getting through this war (for they see it as a war), and make your money and live well.” But, I can’t do that, especially after going to Peace Camp.

That experience opened my eyes, Rebecca. I can never go back to how I was before. I just hope more young people will be concerned about these things, for we are the next generation. The adults don’t seem to care. They only want their little piece of the pie; a bone thrown to them makes them content. But I am not content! Remember how Marina mentioned “creative discontent”? So wise!

Our Peace School would understand what prevents peace, like you say. It would examine, like good scientists or detectives, the “nature and structure” of conflict. (Those are the words of Sasha, Marina’s husband. By the way, I love Sherlock Holmes, too!) It would help us understand the real causes of war, not just in honoring the dead. (I agree with you that it is such a terrible thing to do!)

The school would “bridge” all subject matter, like they did in the book *Island* by Aldous Huxley. (I would require this book and his books *Brave New World* and *Brave New World Revisited*.) Have you read *Island*, Rebecca? Do so, for you will find it of immense interest (also the two other books I just mentioned).

In *Island*, they have created a wonderful school. If I understood it correctly, “bridging,” as they call it, is relating one subject to another, like psychology and botany. He gives an example of this when the students are encouraged to understand the real essence of a flower. They are asked to look at the flower in different ways. For instance, as a botanist, looking at its scientifically labeled parts, the stamen and pistil and so on. Then they are asked to look at it like a florist (at least I think so; if not, it is still a good example). A florist would look at the flower as a form of decoration, to arrange it just so. Finally, they are asked to look at it in another way, a way I would prefer to call “as a child looks at it.” (He says as Buddha might look at it, but I think using the name of Buddha gives one the wrong image.)

So, looking at it like a small child would look at it, one can see the flower in its real essence, the thing behind the word, the label, and the image of the flower. It is this seeing which is unprejudiced, innocent, and healthy. It has no image. Can you see the implications in what we have been talking about with conditioned, prejudiced thinking creating enemies and conflict? This is so important, Rebecca, for it gives another “clue,” as you say, to this mystery or puzzle.

Just think about it for a moment. Can a small child hate? Can a small child create an enemy? Sure, they hit each other at times, but creating an enemy—no! That is a process of thinking, of conditioning the brain to re-act (as you put it so well). So what happens to that innocent, unprejudiced mind of the child? What happens to the brain for it to become prejudiced? You can see something happens because the child is taught to fear, taught to hate. We teach the child to be violent because that is what we are doing. (I am referring to most people, perhaps not you and I. At least I hope not!)

Think of this, Rebecca, because what we are doing in our schools, in our homes, in our mosques, temples, and churches, is teaching prejudice, conflict and war. And all in the name of goodness! Do you see this situation? It is amazing, isn't it? The main thing this new school would teach is to question. Like Marina said, to be discontent with the established order, but creatively. "Questioning brings intelligence and it is intelligence which brings order, beauty, love." I am quoting from Peace Camp. I will never forget that statement. "Peace flowers when we understand what prevents it." Do you remember hearing that, too?

So students would look at all this in the new school we are going to start. I have been thinking about that, my becoming an educator for peace. It is amazing how there are academies that teach war. We need academies to teach peace. I think every school in the world should teach about these peace preventatives, but I'm afraid they won't. The most important thing we can do is understand ourselves, but judging by the way people regard it, you would think it was the worst. Self-understanding is real learning. And I don't mean memorizing information and storing knowledge in the brain. That is science and technology. Learning about ourselves doesn't require knowledge. It requires observation. Yet, we think knowledge by itself will solve all our problems. Have you learned more about observation or insight?

In this new school, we would not pledge our allegiance to any government. In this new school, we would help the students understand patriotism, as you spoke about it so well in your letter. (Be careful, Rebecca, for what we say to each other might be seen as dangerous to some people in authority.) In this new school, we would create a place where young people felt safe and unafraid, for when one's afraid, one cannot really learn. As I say all this now writing to you, Rebecca, I am suddenly hopeful we can create a new world, one where intelligence will "flower," a new world where there is real love—not just the sentimental love in the films or sung on the radio and seen on television.

Please let me know what you think about all this, in your own way. Please don't feel you have to agree or disagree. Let's just look at it together as friends who care to find out what is true. For as many have said, "The truth will set you free."

Instead of just responding to what I have written, please delve further into this "mystery": tell me about your new discoveries. Let us make these letters real communication, not just our opinions.

What else should I tell you? Life here is the same crazy affair, so why should you be bothered with the same old nonsense? It's like keeping score. It doesn't make sense to report just the incidents as they are. It only makes people more afraid, and, as you said, the media is partially responsible for this. So are the leaders, for they thrive on the conflict and need the publicity it produces so they can pretend to fix it, to make peace when all they are doing is exploiting it for their own gain. What a terrible thing to do.

Oh, yes, there is something I want to tell you, something I saw on TV the other night. They were showing a program called "Child Warriors." It was so sad. They showed photos of young boys with their legs missing. They had been sent you

into the fields to find the mines, setting them off so an adult warrior would not be killed. The adult military soldiers pinned notes to the shirts of the young boys saying they did this in the name of their God (I won't mention who, for it is dangerous to do so here).

Did you know it has been estimated that around 2,000,000 children under the age of fifteen are bearing arms around the world? They are being trained as killers. Children as young as eight years old are killing adults. They were asked what they thought about the killing, and one of the boys looked puzzled. He said, "I was happy because I killed them."

Can you imagine how deeply and early on these young people can be conditioned? And do you know why they were happy? Because they were told they were killing for their ancestors, for their country, for their God. And, this was to be honored. It is what their ancestors have done for centuries; it was expected of them and it was not to be questioned. "I was happy," was all the boy could say with a dazed look on his childish face.

The film showed how easily these children could be taught to hate because they desperately crave love from adults—children have a deep need to please their elders. The film pointed out how they were brainwashed. They were told that death on the battlefield was not just an honor, but according to their religion, a guarantee of eternal life.

They also showed Belfast (I thought of Sean, I miss him. Have you heard from him lately?). A psychologist told the filmmaker that the young children who don't throw stones at the soldiers are abnormal! The film also showed the "education" of some of the children in certain Middle Eastern countries. The children sit in a windowless room and listen as war, which comes from their religious beliefs, is "indoctrinated" into their lessons. Their heads are shaved and they obediently bow. A math problem becomes a way to establish in the minds of the children that their God is one. History and geography lessons include only their God and country. One of the students said he would rather die than let the foreigners loot his country. He said either he will be martyred or he will kill them.

The image of their enemy is indelibly imprinted in these young boys' brains. I was so upset by all of this. When I saw young people from the countries where I knew people, I could feel their pain. During interviews in Northern Ireland, when asked if they would commit murder, the children replied, "Kill Brits and Orangemen? Yes. But I couldn't kill one of my own."

The filmmaker pointed out how these children were filled with inherited hate, like the shadows of their forgotten ancestors. Most of the kids don't even know why they are fighting! "It has just been this way for as long as we know, so we just do it," said a young Irish boy. The children in these countries were being taught that the honorable thing was to fight against something, that their families, leaders, nation, and religion all wanted them to do this, for it was the right thing to do.

How have we gotten to this place where the honorable thing to do is kill people? Can you see how important our work is, Rebecca? How important your project is, the camp, the new school? Somebody's got to start.

One last thing about the film. There was a scene with young boys sitting in another windowless room, each holding a weapon of some sort. The weapons

almost looked comical, because they were so much bigger than the boys. They were dressed in military fatigues: torn camouflage uniforms. They had been brought there by their adult commanders to get inspired for battle, to go out and kill that day.

In the center of the room were an old TV and V.C.R. The young trainees were watching Rambo III for inspiration. Can you imagine that? I personally think people who make films like Rambo should see the consequences their films create. They should be put into the real battles alongside the children they inspire, and watch how they die. These people who create war films like Rambo pretend to honor war “heroes,” when they never even know what a real war is like. That they should make millions of dollars from these films is criminal. I have never understood how criminals could profit from their crimes. The money made from the Rambo films should go to creating the new school for understanding, so at least there is a hope of educating a new generation of young people who won't be inspired by such films...who won't be conditioned to kill in real war.

Am I being bitter again, my dear friend, Rebecca? Let us continue to write and keep the flame of intelligence alive.

With much care, Ahmed

Dear Ahmed,

December 11

I loved your letter about the Peace School. I too share your thoughts and dreams about such a place. I have also decided to be a teacher because I think that is the greatest profession. But, I will not be just an ordinary teacher of academics. I want to be a PE teacher (Peace Education). I think I can learn a great deal at Peace Camp and perhaps, even teach there some day. I don't know where I will go to college, though. Most universities have no real focus.

Besides, most of the students just want to get a good job and compete, have lots of money and all that stuff which monetary success brings. I feel sorry for them, because their lives are so empty, purposeless. I see them at our local university. The women seem so hard and ambitious and the men seem like boys. I think the women are getting very aggressive and losing their femininity. They look so "manly." Can't a woman be a woman and yet still be able to work next to men as equals? Why have we women become so tough? At least women used to be the caregivers, the nurturing ones, caring for the family, raising the children. Now we want to become men. Many women act like men, as if that is going to get these women what they think they want. But, the men suffered terribly this way. I would think women would learn from men's mistakes.

Here I go off again! There is so much I want to tell you, about the project, about what you said in your letter about how we should go about "getting peace," and the impossibility of that, and about this Martial Arts for Peace class I've joined. Where do I start?

Let's start with the project and what we are learning now. Remember, we are using the issue of prejudice as a main "clue" to what prevents peace? Well, a few things came up in class in relation to that. One was "scapegoating" and "projection" and the other was "tolerance." I don't know if I can say it the way we discussed it in school. I took some notes, so bear with me if this sounds a little academic. Most people would find it boring, but that is only because they don't really understand how important it is—or they are just lazy and don't care. Anyhow, I know you are interested in all of this, so it won't be boring for you.

Well, let's take "scapegoating" first. This is also connected to "projection." I looked up the word "scapegoating" in the dictionary (my favorite book, too!) It means: "One who is made to bear the blame of others." (I emphasized "blame" because it is an important clue.) The key word here is blame. Blame means, "to hold responsible, to find fault with,

condemn.” Well, remember the word prejudice or pre-judgment? Blame is a very important word in understanding prejudice because it is what the brain does with the pre-judgment—it finds someone to blame, to find fault with, to condemn. (By the way, we are studying the brain as the main “computer” source of conditioning; I should send you my diagrams on how the brain creates prejudice. It is really fascinating!) Anyhow, let me give you an example of this:

If I were conditioned (by my ancestors) to think that all “X” people were lazy, then when I encountered them, I would blame them for being lazy. Perhaps I would feel that because “X” people are lazy, I would have to do more of the work in the world to make up for them. And, if “X” people were getting free money from the government for doing nothing, money that I had to work hard to earn, I would be angry with them and blame them for my problems, perhaps. So, anyone I saw who looked like “X”, my brain would automatically re-act against (pre-judge), and it would automatically blame them for the problems of the world.

I know I am stretching the example. It is overly simplistic, but actually, the brain creates this problem in a simple way. It is just a mechanical re-action, a mechanical pre-judgment of conditioned thinking. Amazing, isn’t it? How simple it is at its root.

You know what scapegoating can do to people. The Holocaust Museum is filled with the results of scapegoating. The problem with scapegoating is that the brain “projects” the problem as being “out there” in the world, when actually, the source of the problem, where to understand and end it before it gets “out there,” is “in here,” in the way we have been conditioned to think.

I mentioned the word “automatic,” because that is what happens when prejudice occurs. It is an automatic re-action, based on an outward stimulus. And the word “projection” is a really important clue, too. Projection is the “machinery” of prejudice. It’s like a movie projector that has film in it. The film represents the conditioned images (of “X,” for example). The brain “projects” the image outward onto life and then it thinks the image is real.

Ahmed, did you ever read Plato’s Allegory of the Cave? We were just assigned that in class. I’m not sure if I’ve understood everything it means, but I think it was telling us about conditioning—about assuming that the brain’s conditioned thoughts and projections are real. Let me try to tell you about it. (If you’ve already read it, please correct me if I am wrong!)

Well, there is a cave with people sitting in it. Rows of people sitting, facing a large wall. Shadows move across this wall. The people sitting there think the shadows are real. Then one day, one of the people turns

around and sees there are fires behind them, and that the shadows on the wall are only that—shadows caused by people walking in front of the fires. Realizing that, the person gets up, leaves the cave to go outside into the light of day.

Doesn't this remind you of projection and prejudice? The people are conditioned to think what they see is real. Is this what people are doing when they see another as an "enemy" or "terrorist"? Or the other way around, when they see themselves as "heroes" and "freedom fighters"? Is this what is happening inside our brains when we believe in tradition, in the tribal ways? Is this also what religions do when they pray to their "Gods"? Are the "Gods," the promises of life hereafter, just images on the "walls of caves"? Are we following images, illusions, and ghosts of "reality"? This story really made us think. We had some great discussions about it in class.

There is much more I could tell you about our project, but it seems a bit too overwhelming for me. I can't quite take it all in. I know some of it is just intellectual for me now. But some of it I can actually see, like you saw those men on TV. My teacher says eventually all you have to do is observe your own thinking as it happens. He says at some point, the intellectual understanding will become real; that is, I will really be able to observe what it means in myself and in others. He says books about this have a certain place—at the start.

Actually, though, if we read, for example, a book about prejudice, we have to do the real work of understanding the points in it. By questioning what it's saying, we truly, deeply, find out for ourselves. And when we reach that realization, books about all this will not be necessary. And he says that is the mistake many people make—they only understand it intellectually, through thought. They read what someone says, memorizing that as they would a math problem, and then they think they know.

But all they really know is words, empty concepts. They may be able to give eloquent explanations because they are clever with words, but explanations are not the real thing, the real experience of seeing what the words are pointing to. A lot of these types of intellectuals write books and even get awards and acclamations for them, but, as my teacher pointed out, the words are just second-hand knowledge, hand-me-down concepts. Without real observations, they're just regurgitation.

When telling us about observation, he said that thinking which merely comes from someone else's thoughts is false thinking—in understanding human behavior. He said intellectual thinking has a place, as in science or technology, for instance, when you construct a building or design an airplane. But, it is observation, or insight, which is necessary to

understand and end conditioned thinking—prejudice— at its source, within the human brain. The brains of all people. For, the brain is the same no matter where you live. The content of the brain may differ depending on your culture, beliefs, and things like that, but essentially, the human brain is the source of all human suffering, causing the prejudice which leads to conflict.

Now we see also that prejudice, this innate conditioning is hardwired into the structure of the brain. What this project is proposing that the root cause of prejudice is a genetically inborn instinct hardwired into us for survival – to protect us from a person or group we believe is a threat to us. Prejudicial bullying is therefore considered necessary for our survival – survival of the fittest. Therefore anyone within the group who seems weak becomes a threat to the survival of the group and is perceived as someone who needs to be eliminated, or bullied out of the group. Hence we shun, intimidate, bully – all in the misguided name of survival. The intent of this project is to bring about empirical first hand awareness of this destructive prejudicial survival of the fittest compulsion and in so doing free one from its primitive instinctive influence.

What a class that was! I tell you, Ahmed, I am learning so much. I want to tell you everything. There are so few people interested in this. I want to tell everyone and I have tried, but my friends just get bored and lose interest. I'm so glad we are friends. I have written Sean and some of our other friends from camp about some of this. I hope they write back. I really need to hear from them.

One other thing—about what you said in your letter about how “trying to get peace” is an impossibility. (Dear Ahmed, if I am repeating myself in my letters, please forgive me for I can't always remember what I've written you and you know how I can just go off, thinking this way and that. I just get so excited I can't type fast enough. I wish the computer would just print my thoughts as I think them. It would save so much time!)

We talked about this in class – the impossible task of trying to get peace being a very significant clue. Let me tell you of an experiment we did in class that succeeded in showing us the impossibility of “getting peace”.

Our teacher showed us a map; you know the kind, the ones that pull down. Well, this map was called the “Physical World.” The teacher asked us what we saw. He said, “Look as if you were a young child. Just observe what is there and report what you actually see.” So we did. It was simple because the map showed continents, oceans, mountain ranges, and so on—the physical world. So much for that.

Then he pulled down another map, covering the first one. This was called the “Political World.” He gave us the same directions: “Just look at what is there and report it.” So we did. Besides the oceans, continents, and mountains, there were countries, boundaries outlined by lines on the map. No problem. It was simple.

Next, he asked us to compare the two maps, which we did. The physical world map was a representation of the world as it actually is, without the boundaries of nations. The political world map was a representation of the world as we have made it. However, the astronauts in outer space could actually see that the boundaries of nations dividing the human race into fragments, into different tribes and clans, were illusions. They did not really exist!

We had heard this before, but it was a unique way to show it to us. We talked about how the boundaries came about, from the early cave people who formed groups (tribes or clans) for survival, for safety in numbers—and how the group was kept together by ritual, custom, and then, tradition. (We talked about this in one of our earlier letters, didn’t we?) We also saw how important it was for today’s survival to go beyond the boundaries the old tribal ways had created—much like the Berlin Wall. And that to go beyond them was not a political act, nor one of any outward, or even inward, authority (a subject we should discuss!) In order to go beyond the root cause of it, we had to actually observe it in the brain.

Now, of course, this stimulated some discussion. I remember my friend, Julie, asked the question, “How can we create a whole world? Put the pieces together, like Humpty Dumpty?” (An American nursery rhyme—oh, well, forget the rhyme...it’s not important). This led to one of the students mentioning the United Nations, which has been playing an ever-increasing role in world peace (at the level of only managing world conflict militarily).

I will never forget Jason’s comment about the U.N. He said (I think these were his exact words) “The United Nations is a contradiction in terms.” That stopped everyone for a moment.

Our teacher said, “Jason, what do you mean by that?”

Jason said, “United means whole, undivided. Nations are fragments, pieces. I don’t think we can create a whole by trying to put the pieces back together.”

All my teacher said was, “Wow!”

Well, you can imagine what this caused. There was much discussion back and forth about levels of conflict. We called the root cause level the “primary” level—for understanding conflict—and stopping it before it got to the level of a conflict. We called the secondary level of conflict, “resolving” and the tertiary level of conflict, “managing.” The second and

third levels of resolving and managing were really too late, for they meant that people hadn't been aware of, hadn't cared about, or worse, had wanted to promote the conflict. We finally arrived at the insight that the U.N. was helping "keep the peace" by using only the "secondary" and "tertiary" levels: in other words, the U.N. was only trying to resolve and manage conflict—after it had become enflamed. But we were interested in understanding it—at the root—at its primary level. Does this make sense? I hope so, because it is still new for me.

Our discussion came around to the issue of "creating peace" (or "getting" peace, as you said). Now, after much "dialoging" (a word my teacher likes), we realized we can't "get peace," as peace is "a given," already present. But, that we prevent peace by the way we think and act—that is, conditioned thinking based on our outdated tribal prejudices that get in the way of peace.

We then realized that what prevents peace—at the primary level—was the U.N. and its members who represented the outdated tribal associations called "nations" or "countries"—which were really only primitive clans cloaked in modern dress. Each member of the U.N., identifying with his or her tribal or clannish group, prevented peace by their very association with that fragment. Having a "United Nations" is a contradiction. Only when each member of the U.N. (and all the tribal authorities and leaders and followers) realize that each is preventing peace by their patriotic allegiance to their little part, can there ever be a united or whole, undivided world. What a class that was!

As I write this now, some from remembering what we said, and some from my hastily scribbled notes, I feel a wonderful sense of truth. How do I describe this? I feel sanity, truth, and understanding exist, but that we've been looking at the wrong level. The three levels of conflict helped me to sort out where we had gone wrong and where we needed to really end the problem—at the primary level. Not that we can forget the other levels—we have created them so we need to resolve them, but in some cases, we can only manage the conflict.

Hopefully, by understanding the primary level, at its cause, we'll have an effect on the whole of conflict. Then the extreme levels which seem at first only manageable—like what you are experiencing where you live—will finally get to the level of being resolved. But, we must go deeper, to the underlying causes if we want to avoid the mistakes, which have been made. We have too often let conflict escalate to the worst (tertiary) level and only then are we forced to do something about it. We think we have understood the primary level of conflict through religion, for example, but as we have seen, religion, with its false illusions and tribal associations, has just kept us apart and continued the conflict. So, we really need to

look anew at what this level represents, how it creates conflict—as we have been doing in class and with our letters.

It seems so strange to me that we haven't discovered this before. But I can also understand how deeply we are conditioned, so that thousands of years of reinforcing this conditioning hasn't left room for intelligent investigation. Well except, perhaps, by a few individuals who, for some reason, stepped out of society's mainstream and saw how we were so conditioned. I have read books by people who have had some insight into this, but they were either burned at the stake for being heretics, or worshipped so as to put them above everyone else where no one could really understand, much less live freely that way.

Oh, yes, Ahmed, conditioning (prejudice) is so powerful, we are stuck in the old ways, firmly rooted in the past. I wonder what will have to happen for us to wake up? We have had Holocausts and hundreds of wars. Millions of people have been killed and yet there is still no real understanding. In fact, the opposite is truer—we retreat further into the “security” of our separatist beliefs. When there is any sign of conflict, we cling even stronger to our traditions and beliefs, which is the very act of tightening the noose around our own necks.

I see on TV how all these religious groups here—some ancient, some rather new—are bringing back religious education for their children. They see the terrible violence in the world, and in response to that (or should I say “in reaction to that”), they retreat to old traditions and values. In a way, it's true. We have lost values and because of that, we are violent, out of control. But we have forgotten that the values were not lost, but rather, shunned and rejected, because of the way they were conditioned into us (through the pain of punishment and the pleasure of reward; you know—good and evil. We talked about that at camp...)

So the pendulum swings. The mistake is in going right back to the old ways—ways which were lost sometime ago, rejected because they did not really work. That just created more conflict because the values were based on judging our mistakes as “bad” and creating the illusion of its ideal (of goodness). Of course, that is where the conflict stems—from how we go about trying to bring forth goodness (or peace).

So we are back at the start, like the dog chasing its tail, with people wanting to “teach values,” yet again. But are we going to “teach” them in the same old way (through judgment and ideals) and therefore, just create more pain and rejection again? Or, are we going to see the error of this and begin to investigate “how” to bring about real lasting values ~ which come about through understanding what prevents them!

I must confess I've just been writing from my notes in class, but it is beginning to make some sense. That is what I started to say—about how I

am beginning to feel sane, seeing the truth of how we create conflict and prevent peace.

My fingers are getting tired typing, so I guess I ought to stop. But, my spirit keeps moving me. I am so excited by all this learning. I must definitely be a Peace Educator! There is no choice now, when I see what I must do.

Oh, one more thing before I go to bed. (I am very tired! So much to think about, to realize.) And this is just a word about the Martial Arts for Peace classes I heard about. Do you remember me writing about it to you? Well, I was very skeptical about it, but I went to see for myself. I didn't want to be influenced by all the terrible Martial Arts movies and video games. What I'm finding out is really a "paradox." I thought to myself, "How can the Martial Arts, the arts of physical self-defense, of punching and kicking, bring about peace? Aren't they just more violence?" This really fascinated me, to say the least. So I went to a class.

It was in a building downtown, on the second floor. When I went in, I was surprised by the appearance of the place. It was a large, plain room, with only a few paintings on the walls, and a wide, bare, polished, wooden floor. There was a small office to the left of the entrance with my schoolteacher sitting there at a desk. She greeted me, wearing a plain, white Martial Arts uniform (called a gi), and a frayed cotton black belt. She wore only one patch sewn over her heart area reading, "Martial Arts for Peace" with a picture of bamboo. Two Asian characters separated the words (which translated, meant Karate, or Empty Self).

She showed me around the place. There were rooms for changing and a special place to put your street shoes. I guessed I was early, for I was the only other person there. She said I could watch the class if I cared to, but first, she would like to read me a short story. It was called the "Empty Cup" and was about a college professor who visited a well-known Karate teacher.

It goes something like this: The professor was very interested in understanding what "empty-self" meant in Karate, and how it could bring about world peace (as the professor had heard). The Karate teacher offered the visiting professor some tea, a polite social gesture. The professor accepted. The teacher began pouring the tea into the professor's cup until it was full. And he kept on pouring until the cup overflowed on the table and started to flow onto the floor. "Stop!" cried he professor. "My cup is full, no more will go in."

"Like your cup, you come to me full of questions and answers," replied the teacher. "Empty your mind and you will understand what Karate, 'empty self,' means."

I understood her story. I had come to her class (or dojo as she called it) with a “filled cup,” full of images and judgments about the Martial Arts. She went on to tell me that what I would see, the physical self-defense part, was only a way to study the martial within us, to explore the biologically conditioned fight or flight reaction which created conflict between people.

Well, you can imagine how that got my interest. And here was something I’d never heard before: “Biologically conditioned reaction” and “fight or flight.” Well, of course, I stayed.

But, more about this in my next letter. I will know more by then.
Love to you, Rebecca

I find your letter anything but boring! It is amazing. How anyone could not be interested in what you say confounds me. It is of the greatest importance.

Things here are getting worse. There is more killing. A young girl was stoned to death. Her only fault was being in the wrong place at the wrong time. She was supposed to be an example, a person to serve as a “scapegoat” for the extremists. A young boy had been killed so she was stoned as revenge. When, when will this madness stop? I think someday I will surely go mad if this continues. But, then, I receive your letter and like sunshine, my heart opens up.

I found your class project “exercises” with the maps incredible. At first, I too said, “So what?” But then, thinking about it, I realized, as you did, the implications of such insights—especially the U.N. I never thought they could do much except contain violence, or as you say, “manage” it. They call themselves “Peace Keepers.” What peace? And is peace just the absence of war? How can we keep peace when there is none? Peace to them is when there is enough power on each side, the “balance of power” so neither side would dare start something.

Again I may be cynical, but I think people don’t want peace. They thrive on war. War is profitable. A great amount of money can be made from it. All the arms dealers, of which the governments are the biggest dealers, profit from tragedy. They have somehow justified doing this. It is amazing how crazy their thinking is, and how incredibly hypocritical they can be!

People also feel that peace is hopeless, that peace will never happen, that war and conflict are inherent in human behavior, that since we have had war for thousands of years, we will always have it. Or, if people do care, they approach peace idealistically, as you said. They condemn war as bad and set up their ideal of peace as “good.” But their “good” is according to the particular divisive system they have been conditioned into. Or, if they rise above the division and try to create a “global” or “world” view, it is still within the realm of thought, ideals. As you have said so clearly and as they said at camp, we don’t need ideals, but an understanding of the facts. We need to look at the actual thoughts, words and/or actions that create conflict. Not at...how did you say it...the secondary or tertiary level, but at the primary level, the root cause of it within ourselves, with the way we have been conditioned to think.

There are peace groups here trying to end the war, but they are all arguing about which “approach” is right, which path they should take. Some say, “Let’s compromise,” and take a little of this and a little of that. And, like Humpty Dumpty (yes, I know the story) put the pieces together to form a “unified plan.” But, as you said, pieces do not together make a whole. As a matter of fact, the piece-meal approach is what originally created the conflict. Now they want to apply the same reasoning to resolve the problem that created the problem in the first place. Crazy! Crazy!

Or people say, “We should be ‘tolerant.’” Do you know what this means? (I, too, have a dictionary.) It basically means, “to put up with.” So we are asked to put up with each other’s beliefs, to respect the traditions and practices of others. “Yes, you scratch my back; I’ll scratch yours.” Do you know what I mean? “Just

don't bother me," is the message. "Let me alone in my little world of illusion. Don't question; don't rock the boat!" as you say in America. So people preach tolerance to bring about peace—forgetting that the separatist traditions and practices divide us and create the conflict. Perhaps at some level, people recognize this, but they want to get rid of the other beliefs and have only theirs. Of course, there would be no conflict if we all believed the same thing. Only a world of robots that unconsciously and habitually live out their dead, programmed lives.

So who wants to be tolerated, put up with, like a screaming, spoiled child? Tolerance is just a way to avoid looking at the real issues, the real causes, because people are so afraid. They cling to their old ways, like to a sinking ship. (Is this the right expression?) They hold on to their traditions, as if they are a lifeline.

I saw a "Holy Man" on TV (I won't mention what religion he represented. That's not important. They all do the same thing.) It was one of the important religious holidays for those people. He was saying, in his holiest of voices that "out of the ashes of our people's suffering, we will rise to unite again in freedom. Being steeped in 3,500 years of tradition, we have our security. We must reaffirm our faith in the holy principles of our ancestors."

And he really believed this. He really believed so absolutely that tradition would lead to security and freedom! I saw no hope for that man ever understanding. You could kill his sons and daughters, his parents, his wife, his whole family and race, and he would still tenaciously, devotedly, hold fast to his faith, his hallowed tradition. And everyone would say, "How noble, how brave, how honorable! Let us build a museum to this martyr, to the ashes of his ancestors, to his family. Let us reaffirm our faith in what he stood for." So on it goes with another generation blindly following in the footsteps of their blind ancestors. How does it go, "the sins of the father...."? That is the real tragedy!

Can I go into this with you, dear Rebecca? Because it is, as you say, a "big clue", to the mystery in the puzzle. And that is authority. I think authority is one of the biggest clues to this whole problem. Let's refer to the dictionary again, our common reference to understanding. (By the way, thank you so much for the present of the Webster's Dictionary. I will treasure it forever. You will see how much use it gets!)

Authority means "the power to enforce laws, exact obedience, command." It also means "an accepted source of expert information or advice." There are obviously some necessary authorities. The person who sells you the right plants for your garden, in your particular area and climate, should be an authority, an expert in that field. This is the healthy use of authority.

But there is another authority that is not healthy, and can create great conflict and suffering. This is the "psychological authority," which means someone who knows what is best for you and is going to condition you into believing it to be true. An example of this can be seen in political or military leaders when they manipulate your thinking to believe in their slogans and promises, their double-talk, when in truth, the only thing they care about is power. These dangerous authorities take advantage of you by playing on your conditioning, your already established allegiance to your own particular brand of conditioned belief system.

And there are other types of psychological authorities who are just as dangerous, but harder to see. Like the religious leader who “guilts” you into believing in their game, or the intellectual, academic authorities who try to intimidate you into thinking their convoluted maze of intellectual nonsense, or the business authority who tries to impress you with his riches, his success, to follow his “god”. What about the authority that says the answer to our problems is through history, or anthropology, or sociology—again all fragmentary thinking, just separated pieces of the puzzle. Then there are the Peace Authorities who say, like all the rest, “I am the only one who knows. You are nobody. My knowledge is absolute and powerful.”

So, through intimidation, false impression, the (how do you say this) “smoke and mirrors” (yes?) of their self-appointed power, you, the individual, the source of understanding, are squashed, whittled down to an acquiescing, appeasing little nobody, with no spirit, no passion, no intelligence. Is my cynicism running at “full steam,” Rebecca, or is there truth in this, even though the words are harsh?

Can you see how these authorities compete? They seem so gentle in their costumes of authority, with all the pomp and ceremony of it. They “debate” and “discuss” the “issues.” They are “concerned” about the “state of the world.” They dazzle and mystify us with their well-tempered and rehearsed words, with their air of authority, their overly polite mannerisms, and their fancy talk. But, dear Rebecca, they are, as you say, “snakes in the grass.” They are the dangerous ones, for they have robbed us of our intelligence, that individual ability to think independently, clearly, democratically.

For it is only the individual who can bring freedom. Freedom can never come through group thinking, through some ideology, however traditional and scholarly. Intelligence comes from self-understanding, through “creative discontent” (as Marina said), through healthy, critical self-observation of what prevents peace within us, at the source of the problem. No politician, no military leader, no holy man, no academic intellectual can ever be an authority for self-understanding. All anyone else can do for you is to say, “Look!” Then it is solely up to each one of us to do that.

But it takes work, which most people don’t like. Most people have been “breast-fed” and they are accustomed to the mother’s nipple. They don’t want to be weaned. They like the seeming comfort of the breast of authority, the milk of knowledge for knowledge’s sake. They have become addicts to the sick pleasure of mental games and want us to fall asleep with them in their misery and confusion. For underneath that thin veneer of authority and respectability is fear, great, gaping, bottomless fear. They are holding on to very thin ice and they are only a pretense, a mask of real authority. With the slightest of touches, they will sink in their own sludge. With a puff of wind, they will be blown away.

I’m afraid that perhaps I have gone too far. I apologize for my crude remarks, but I feel so deeply that it comes out by itself. It keeps a balance in my mind. I know you will understand this, dear Rebecca, for I know you feel the same way. But you are more polite than I.

Sometimes I feel so desperate that nothing we can do will stop the madness. What frustrates me also is that people think about what we are saying as either too simplistic, and therefore not worthy of serious consideration, or as “negative.”

I think they view what we are saying about prejudice or conditioning as overly simplistic because they have been conditioned to think it is complicated—too difficult for the “average” person to understand. They have been brainwashed to think only the “great” authorities can answer these questions. That is the biggest error, and it is what keeps people in bondage.

I also see that people are conditioned to be “positive,” to seek and attain ideals (in behavior) so questioning this very process would be considered “negative” and resisted. For those whose lives are built up around “becoming peaceful” or “nonviolent,” questioning the process of bringing about peaceful, nonviolent behavior is a threat. Trying to become nonviolent through judging certain behavior 'violent' and therefore forcing 'bad' behavior to mold to a conformed ideal is ironically, violent in itself. Through this judging, molding and reshaping, we're creating only a fantasy of nonviolence. “Thought” is a funny thing. It's a part of us, but sometimes it acts as though it's all of us. I'm going to talk about “Thought” (with a capital “T”) as though it's a being, because sometimes it feels that way. Here's what I see Thought doing when it's asked to change behavior.

Thought judges certain behavior as bad and then sets up the opposite ideal of good or God to motivate us to change. “To be good, you should live according to this ideal,” says the good, ideal, ever-judging Thought God.

“Change this negative trait! It's no good.” ...“You should affirm this positive one. Come on, change!”

So thought inside us struggles and judges, judges and struggles, and feels the bad, and tries to eliminate it by exchanging it for the positive, the good.

But of course the thing judged “Bad” keeps popping up and saying, “Here I am! What are you going to do about it?”

And the “Ideal” inside us wrestles around until it finally yells, “Behave! You know what the Ideal Good is! Don't question the process. Just put your Good Judgment Cap back on. You know, the ones that our traditions, or our Manual of Positive Affirmations told us were the only way to behave!”

So this process of judging “what is” versus conforming to the ideal of “what should be” is itself violence, for it builds up a great tension between the judgment of “being bad” and the ideal of “being good.”

Contemplate this Latin expression for a while: “Demon es Deus Inversus.” Do you get it? In case your Latin's not too good, it translates to “The devil is god reversed.” So, good and evil are two sides of the same coin. The forces that create one, also and equally create the other.

Most people won't get it, because they are blinded by their ideals: ideals that too often kill. They have been habituated, compelled by them, and feel a false sense of security in what they think they represent: security within the group. They feel protected by believing in them. They don't want to give them up, for they seem pleasurable and secure, like a drug, but in reality, they are painful. And no one wants to get rid of them, for no one wants to feel the pain they are covering up. And no one wants to feel insecure, left outside the protection of his or her own particular ethnocentric tribal group. It's too frightening. And when frightened, they will defend their ideals to the death if need be. For them these ideals are an absolute necessity. Do you see the terrible irony in all this? I live it daily, see it all around me in the conflict of ideals. This is my everyday life here,

and even if I stood on the street corner and screamed what I see, no one would listen. And when I do tell it to people here, they think I'm crazy. But they don't know that they are asleep and I am awake to all this. Their nightmare is killing them and is a danger for everyone around them, especially me, because I see through their dream and in so doing, threaten them.

So I can understand why people would resist what we say, see it as “negative” and want to avoid it, for it would fall under the judgment they have created in their minds about anything which is not positive, not in the image of the ideal. I feel so tremendously frustrated, seeing this so clearly.

Sometimes I wonder why we can see these things so clearly and others cannot. I feel like a stranger in this world. I can sit with friends and know they are not at all interested in any of this. It wouldn't even enter their minds, and if I mention it to them, they either humor me by being polite or make a pretense at listening, or they just don't want to hear it. I can feel their defenses, their walls inside. And the older they get, the thicker their walls are.

Since I was a small child, I wondered about things. My parents told me that I always questioned. “Why this?” “Why that?” Why do I see what I do? I am no one special. Although I have done well academically, been an honor student and received academic awards, others have, too. I just work hard at it. I decided one day when I was young that I was going to memorize the English-speaking dictionary. I was fascinated with North America and its freedom of thinking, its democracy. I still think there is much freedom there and I sometimes envy you your education.

I have studied very hard to learn about the world. I have read many books and have always been interested in how things work. My parents read to me constantly when I was young and helped me to think critically and clearly. They have been a great influence on me, not like my friends' parents who are too busy making money. Since my parents are both scholars, I think that has had an influence.

It sounds as if I am feeling sorry for myself. Perhaps I am. But, what sense does it make if you see something so vital, so important, and almost no one else cares—even to look for a moment? I think the key lies in this new school we talked about starting with a few dedicated families who want to educate their children differently, to educate them to really understand relationships, as well as academics. I think young people, before they become corrupted by society, by the media's influence, could blossom in such a school. Also the teachers and students at Peace Camp would be interested.

I shouldn't despair, or be so harsh with my criticisms, but what is it that will get people to see the problem of prejudice, of the deeply held conditioned patterns of thinking which uphold the divisive, fragmentary way of life? We need to wake up, now!

I want to add something to what I said before about people resisting what we are saying. (I just thought of it.) I think another reason why people resist listening is because they have a deep-seated arrogance that says, “If I don't know, how can you?” or “If I can't understand this (because only the authorities can), who are you to say you can?” What they are saying, which I don't think they are aware of, is that since they don't know, nobody can, especially a “nobody.” If perhaps

you were really famous, some grand authority, then maybe they would listen—with one ear, meaning they would probably analyze what you said, comparing it to what other knowledge they had memorized from other “authorities.” Then they would quote you and others as they recite what they know about the subject. All they know is what they have memorized. They really don’t understand anything, although they sound like they do.

And I am not being negative saying all of this. Harsh, cynical, hurt, angry—yes! But this is of the highest order; it is the most “positive” (I don’t like that word). Perhaps because people sense it as being “negative,” they resist the process we use to investigate the issue of prejudice – conditioning. When you look at it, it is rather like Sherlock Holmes—logical deduction—putting aside all the impossibilities until we arrive at the solution, as you said “eliminate the impossible and what ever is left over, how ever improbable, must be the case. I guess it’s this process of elimination which some could think of as “negative.”

Yes, I could see why one would hate hearing this and instead hearing all the positive promises. When you look at what the politicians promise, how idealistically they talk, how uplifting their words seem to be, you can understand how we have become so used to the pleasure of it. Have you ever just analyzed the speeches of politicians or religious leaders? If you don’t know who said what, and you were not influenced by the speech writer’s name, then just looking at the bare words, you can see how silly they are, how childish and superficial. They remind me of the speeches the typical upper school valedictorian students give, full of idealism and promises of greatness...but just words!

Regarding your insightful comments about prejudice being hardwired in the human brain I saw this quote in one the American papers from a former Marine Corp helicopter pilot in Vietnam. It shows also that the brain is hardwired for combat.

“Most honest combat vets will tell you, perhaps not eloquently but in their own way, the same thing: essentially that combat is in our human DNA and demands to be exercised.... The question is, can we humans evolve peacefully, or will we succumb to instincts we can’t transcend?”

Is it possible to be aware of it in the moment when we are prejudicially challenged by “the enemy” instead of making it an intellectual supposition, a theory to debate about, as all the academicians seem to do?

It seems so simple to see that we need to have to have a prejudicial image of the enemy to go to war. Here is a simple quote, “NO IMAGE–NO ENEMY–NO WAR.’ Does this make sense? Perhaps in our case we could say, “NO MORE IMAGE–NO MORE ENEMY–NO MORE WAR.” Isn’t this a logical deduction?

May your life be peace and your family be safe.
Affectionately, Ahmed

Dear Ahmed,

January 25

I don't think you are being rude or harsh. You feel what you see, especially since you experience the terrible outcome of conditioned thinking each day in the streets. No one will judge you, especially not me.

Yes, I can see why people would resist what we say, how conditioned they are to hear only what they think is "positive," not "negative." (My grandparents told me of a song with the line, "Accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, and watch out for Mr. In-Between." I'm not sure what it meant in the song, but it sort of makes sense in our discussion, don't you think?)

Please always feel free to say whatever your heart tells you. Don't censor anything. Only when we feel we can really trust each other, will there be true communication. I am your friend and our communication and our letters to each other is of the greatest importance. Maybe we need to forget what other people think and just focus on the few who are interested. If we get attached to results, to wanting something to happen, we will surely despair. I know you're probably thinking right now, "Sure, it's easy to say, but to do it?"

Yes, it is easy to say, but what else can I say? I, too, feel that desperate frustration, especially when I watch TV and see the children being hurt and killed. Then I cannot stand it one second longer. I feel like I'm going crazy. But all I can do is what I'm doing. If I let myself get caught up in all the horror, then I will go under, too. And that will not help anyone, especially me. I don't mean to be selfish, but I have to take care of myself, too.

But, enough of that—I have so much to tell you. Where do I start? Let's start with the class project and what I'm learning. And I can't wait to tell you about my Martial Arts for Peace classes—which I'm taking!

Someone in class (I think it was David, who also goes to the Martial Arts for Peace classes) brought in this quote for us to think about. David said he felt it was a really important statement about the essence of what we are doing. It must have been, because it generated a lot of conversation. (I took notes so I will be able to tell you more clearly what we said, rather than just trying to remember it all.)

*We are what we think.
All that we are
Arises with our thoughts.
With our thoughts,
We make the world.*

I'm not going to say who said this, because it would probably influence your thinking and it really doesn't matter. What matters is what it says. Can we see what it means—in our daily lives? Now, I think David got this from the Martial Arts for Peace class before I started going to the classes. I'll ask him, because I can see it would be a part of what these classes are also trying to teach. (More on that later.)

It's a pretty powerful statement. No room for doubt. "We are what we think." The first line reminds me of a statement I'd seen when I first stopped eating meat and became a vegetarian. (I don't like to be called a "vegetarian," for it sounds like I'm the weird one. I would rather be called a "healthy eater" and others would be "fleshitarians," or something like that.) The statement was, "You are what you eat." I'll never forget that.

Well, anyway, the quote, "We are what we think," again made me realize how important it is to understand this, to understand "thought." In school, we are taught what to think, the subject matter. We are even taught how to think, like how to find out information. But we have never been taught what thought is, what it does to us—until we started this project on how prejudice prevents peace. By understanding prejudice (pre-judgment, projection, identification, re-action, tradition, heritage, ritual, custom), we are beginning to learn about what thought is, and how conditioned thinking creates conflict in human relationship.

If the statement is true—that we make the world with our thoughts – then we had better be sure to understand our thoughts, or examine more closely the actual process of our personal way of thinking. For if we get caught up in trying to understand our thoughts, we will get lost in a self-centered, selfish point of view. My thoughts, my problems stem from that, and then ironically grow to become our thoughts, our problems. So my problem is the problem (as we said before). Thus, if the statement is true, and I feel it is, then we had better start understanding thought. And if thought is the basis of our actions, especially as it creates great conflict, why hasn't it been looked at before? Why isn't it being taught in school?

The only classical books which try to talk about this (at least that I'm aware of) are *Brave New World* and *Brave New World Revisited* (as you mentioned in one of your letters, about Aldous Huxley's book, *Island*). At least he attempted to make the issue of conditioning important, and tried to show us the danger of it. I have also been thinking of the new school, too. I would use these books in my classes as a teacher. I would design a class on "Understanding the Conditioned Mind." (Sound too academic?) I am digressing.

Well, this “We are what we think” statement was so clear and concise that it helped us to see the importance of not just understanding the various parts of conditioned thinking (that I just mentioned), but just the process of “thinking” itself. I wish I could convey better in words what I felt when I saw this statement.

It was just so clear. I said to myself, “Oh, yes! That’s it!” It was like a beacon of light in a dark world.

But there is a very big danger, a warning, in all of this. This statement, and the person who supposedly said it, has been turning “We are what we think” into a religion, a codified way of thinking, giving people hope and faith in this troubled world. People began to “believe” in the words without understanding what this statement was saying. They need to look at, observe their thinking—as it is happening, not to think about thinking generally and abstractly!

Then they began to create a religion out of “We are what we think”. Do you know what I mean? They just memorized the words, which led to needing an answer, a conclusion, and so the statement became lost in a maze of questions and answers—the intellectual merry-go-round. Having no satisfying answers led to worshipping the words, and the person who said them. Any future words emanating from that person became “holy.” The next deed was to create associated holy images for the holy words.

Then people fell in love with those images. “We are what we think.” They set up symbolic rituals to attain their interpretation of “The Words.” Then they fell in love with the rituals. So they created great “holy places” to practice their beloved rituals. They developed sanctified traditions and customs that supported and justified what the rituals and words symbolized. And over time, those traditions and customs became law and divine right.

They even created a god beyond the mere human who had first said The Words, for now The Words had become so important (being “divine”) that it was impossible for any human being to have been capable of having created this almighty utterance. For if a human could have put together those original words, so could any human—and, after all, being human is not being divine. And since humans are not gods, only a god could have said The Words in the first place, the human only being a “messenger of god.” And since no human could understand or live out the truth of a god’s words, as gods were divine and humans were not, The Words then could only be understood after you were dead and in the next life. So The Words became a promise in life hereafter, never to be understood or attained in this life. (This comes from my notes which I scribbled down after our class— seemed like a mental knot.)

Sounds like a nightmare. But, people have actually done this with the words of some people. They have set The Words and people up on a pedestal and worshipped them. But, like a double-edged sword, they set them up to knock them down—a strange quirk in human behavior; set up the ideal in order to destroy it.

Maybe there is another clue here? Why would people create the ideal just to destroy it? Or is the process of setting up ideals (people/words) a destructive process, because in having to conform to the ideal, you have to judge the actual behavior as un-ideal or bad. Therefore we have created a “knot”, in that every time we are motivated to worship the ideal, then, at the same time, we are tying ourselves up, or condemning our actual behavior. Now, does this make sense? I’m just thinking out loud, following a clue like Sherlock Holmes with a magnifying glass.

The mystery is this: Why do people set up and worship ideals (people/words) just to destroy them? Ahmed, help me with this; think along with me now. Let’s see if we can solve it.

The clues are: 1) words and people who have become ideals to worship, and 2) the destruction of the words and people who represent the ideals. The “dead body” in this mystery is the idealized person who represents the words, the “hero,” the “god.” Are you with me? It seems to me we are discovering how thought works. (As you say, “Yes?”)

So, in setting up the ideal and the words and people who represent the ideal, are we creating a destructive thing? What is the pressure people feel if they’re made into “heroes,” ideals? Would they feel they couldn’t live up to the ideals, the images of goodness? (It’s amazing how thinking can tie you up in a bunch of knots.)

I know there is a “solution” to this mystery, but I can’t seem to see it yet. Maybe you can help me? Sometimes it is difficult to see all of what it means, “We are what we think.” I just feel people are destroyed when they are idealized, made into heroes. I want to understand why we set people up to fall!

Let me drop this for now and go on to another subject, one which is surprisingly related to our project and to everything we’ve talked about, a subject I never would have thought could be what it’s turning out to be. And that is the Martial Arts for Peace classes.

As you know, I visited the classes a while ago. I think I wrote you about the first visit. Well, I was fascinated by what the teacher said that evening, so I stayed to watch a class. The adult class had about twenty or so students. She has told me she limits her class enrollment so she can get to know each person and be able to spend enough quality time with each and every one of them. (Since she teaches at school here, she has

enough income and time to pursue these classes without having to have a lot of students to pay the bills.)

I had never seen a Martial Arts class before. I had seen the horrible Martial Arts movies on TV and in the videos. This is what Martial Arts meant to me (my conditioning—I had to “empty my cup,” remember?). The students also all wore white “gis” (uniforms) with a patch saying “Martial Arts for Peace” sewn on their gi over the heart area. Each had on different colored belts around their waists. The instructor had on a black belt (I think I mentioned that) and the other belts were brown, green, purple, yellow, and white. I don’t yet really know what they all mean. (I am a white belt.)

The teacher got up in front of the class and they sat quietly for a while. Then they all bowed, and started doing warm-up exercises. After that, they practiced these wonderful, dance-like movements that I now know to be called “kata,” a Japanese word for forms, or patterns. I didn’t realize at the time how lethal these kata dance-like movements were, that they were self-defense techniques. But when I watched that first night, all I saw was a beauty of movement, a wonderful ballet, but with a focus and strength I’d never seen before...not like any dance I knew.

After about an hour of physical “exercises” (because it is much more than exercises), the students sat down and the teacher spoke to them of conflict. She said the basic intent of the Martial Arts was to understand conflict, not to create more conflict. Then they all talked together about what conflict was and I began to hear things that sounded familiar, like we’d studied in our class with the project. But in a different way.

The teacher explained that the physical forms needed to be tempered with an understanding of them. She told the students she could not just teach them self-defense, that she taught them “Karate.” She went on to say the word karate (I took notes on all this as you can probably tell) means “empty self,” empty of the fear which breeds conflict. She said teaching physicals alone were not enough, and even dangerous. What had to be taught was “mental self-defense,” or understanding the martial in us.

I had never heard things like this before and it fascinated me. First of all, I loved the forms since you know how I love to dance. There was such grace and dignity in their movements. I found it hard to just sit still and watch. Now I’ve joined the class and I am beginning to understand more about it and how the Martial Arts can possibly create peace. (Still sounds strange to me—Martial Arts and peace. They don’t seem to belong together.)

I don’t understand it very well, but she has explained to us that we are “biologically conditioned” (did I mention this before?) And, it is this

biological conditioning that is at the root of conflict. Well, this really got my interest, because I thought all conditioning was “psychological.” Here she was introducing a new view, and of course, I had to decide whether it was true or not, for myself— which she encouraged us to do. She said, “Don’t accept whatever I tell you to be true. Find out for yourselves. Then it will be truth.”

Well, now I’m going to give you her explanation about the root of conflict, this biological conditioning. (I hope I get it right!) Human beings, as other animals, have within them a survival mechanism called “Fight or Flight.” This mechanism, in the face of a physical threat, protects us from harm by preparing the body to either fight or run away. She mentioned where in the brain this mechanism is—I can’t really remember—but it is somewhere in the “limbic system” (is this correct?).

But anyway, it’s important to see that this mechanism reacts to being threatened. She gave the example of when a cat and a dog meet. What happens usually depends on a movement from one or the other. If the cat moves away (flight) then the “predator instinct” takes over, and the dog chases the cat. Or, the cat could take a stand and fight, which is still the same instinct.

Now, this is where it gets interesting. We humans have the same instinct and same mechanism. We are essentially still guided at a primitive level by this predator instinct with its fight or flight mechanism. She says that in order to be free of conflict, free of being controlled by our primitive predator instincts and the fight or flight mechanism, we have to “give it what it wants” (her words). In other words, the instinct for survival, this fight/flight predator instinct, has to be made to feel it can fight or run if it needs to in the face of a threat to one’s physical well being.

The average, untrained, non-Martial Arts person doesn’t have the skill to deal with this deeper impulse for survival. At some level, we are aware of this and therefore, build up other forms of defenses for survival that don’t really work. These other defenses are psychological, like identifying with a group or a belief for protection.

The teacher went on (over a period of classes) to tell us more about this biological conditioning. What I can gather is that if we train the body in physical self-defense, we are giving the brain the message that it can handle a potentially threatening situation if the need should arise. We are learning the skills of self- protection, of survival, so we can fight or run away. In this way, the brain thinks it can survive, so in a potentially threatening situation, the person doesn’t go into a biologically conditioned fight or flight re-action! If there is no reaction, then there is the possibility to remove the conflict before it gets to the physical level.

This is where the “mental self-defense” comes in, especially with young people. The kids are taught nonviolent alternatives to deal with a threat. They are also taught how to defend themselves physically if they have to, but if they practice the mental self-defense, the nonviolent alternatives should work. I observed one of her classes for young people, and saw how they took turns acting like a bully or a victim, and with proper guidance, they could find numerous ways of stopping the conflict before it got worse. It was so interesting!

But she warned that if young people are only taught physical self-defense, then that is all they’ll know, so they’ll most likely feel they have to fight. She said when someone is threatened psychologically, then that triggers a biological, conditioned reaction. That’s why it’s important to develop the mental skills along with the physical.

For example, when someone is different from you or your group—like the Protestants and Catholics in Belfast, or the Israelis and Arabs in your land, or the Serbs, or Muslims and all the opposing tribal groups—your biological robot kicks in. The threat, which was only psychological – a symbol, or set of symbols for some beliefs – stimulates the predatory fight or flight mechanism. So the mere symbol trips the psychological fire alarm, which triggers the physical or biological “emergency”. Therefore, one is reacting to the “psychological threat” as if it were really a physical one! Do you get it? That is why someone can feel justified in defending oneself physically when threatened psychologically: for the message is, “You are in real physical danger!” So, one feels really threatened. Also, if the “attack” is against one’s group, the same biological mechanism is triggered: “We are being threatened physically.” Yet there is no physical threat.

Now I realize why people resist questioning all this (what we are writing about) because they see and feel it as a real threat to their physical well-being. Questioning psychological, conditioned patterns of behavior triggers the biological self-defense mechanism to protect itself from perceived harm—but there is no real immediate danger or threat to their physical well-being.

Amazing, isn’t it? I hope I’m getting it right. I rushed home each night and wrote down what I could remember. It all fits in with our class project, with the Peace Camp and eventually, our school. Prejudice is a pre-judgment that stimulates the brain to re-act in a physically challenged way to a psychological challenge. If you are questioning a person’s whole conditioning, all the associations and tribal identifications that person has built up over his or her whole life, traditions which have been passed down over the centuries, traditions and practices which have become the foundation of society, of one’s very self—then it makes sense that the

person being questioned, when challenged, will resist that questioning because it is being interpreted as a threat to one's physical well-being. And there is nothing stronger than one's will to survive. So can you see the problem, and the possible solution?

If this is correct and she is right, then we have to take into serious consideration this "working hypothesis," for if this is true, then we are really onto something. We will need to teach Martial Arts for Peace, teaching physical self-defense skills so the fight or flight mechanism has what it wants: the means to defend itself from a physical threat and the mental self-defense skills to stop the conflict before it happens. And this has to be taught early in a young person's life before she or he gets too "biologically conditioned," beginning to react to psychological "threats" as if they were real physical threats.

Well, you know I'm going to continue to find out what this means, if it is really so. I will write more to you about it soon. Please write when you can. I look forward so much to your letters. Again, my love to you and your family. I wish you well, Ahmed. You have a friend in me.
With affection, Rebecca

Sometimes I don't know what to say, as if I am completely empty. I feel like I know nothing, that words are just air. I feel as if I were in a dream, just floating along. Do you ever feel this?

I wonder how much I have been influenced by my upbringing, my culture and traditions. My family was educated in the West, at colleges in your northeastern states, so they are more broad-minded. I have had the opportunity to go to a school that was also broad-minded and worldly. Yet there is always the feeling that one has "roots." My time at boarding school in Switzerland gave me an international perspective. I could more easily see where my roots were, being removed from them. It is interesting to observe conditioning when you travel. The usual familiar signposts are not there, so one feels lost, but at the same time, free. I have been fortunate to have traveled and studied abroad. I know this has helped me see what I do.

What shall we talk about today? It is barren here. I wish for the woods, the mountains, and the fresh streams of Europe. Nature is healing. Just to be out on the water, even for a few hours, can help one to forget. And when I am out in a boat, or walking in nature, I feel complete and wonder why there are so many problems.

As a side note: We use the word "problem" for psychological "problems," problems caused by thinking. I looked up the word "problem" in the dictionary you gave me and it said a problem is something that needs to be immediately resolved, as in immediate life and death survival, which fits in with your fight or flight theory. But if we are conditioned to have "psychological problems," what is this doing to us? Is it putting us into the realm of immediate, fight or flight survival? Which would in itself be a "problem"?

Further on this side note: Can we use the word "challenge" or something lighter, so we can hold the psychological "challenge" more loosely, preventing it from escalating into an immediate fight or flight for survival? I notice in myself that I get frantic over a psychological "problem," caused by "Thinking" having pushed it into a corner labeled "Warning: Life or Death Situation! Resolve Now!" My brain feels like it will explode if I don't resolve the psychological problem immediately! Here is another piece of the puzzle, another clue to the mystery of how conditioned thinking creates conflict.

Oh, I have lost the feeling of nature by digressing. What a lovely fantasy I was having out in the water. At night I close my eyes and pretend I am in a magnificent, cool woods by a clear, running brook. It is shady and quiet, except for the sounds of nature. It is so peaceful. But I don't want to get lost in that dream.

There are people I know who live in blissful fantasies, especially of the next life. I think the only real "escape" is in the moment, when the brain is silent and observant. In that moment, there is peace, which just goes to show us again what thinking does to us. It all just seems so simple—understand thinking—as you

said in your quote, “We are what we think.” This is so true, but is lost on most of humanity. Most people are caught in their prison of thought. They never see the bars on the windows. They just decorate their cell, thinking they are free, which is an illusion.

There is nothing “I” can do to be free, for I am thinking. “Thinking” cannot think its way out of thinking, yet people practice all sorts of contrived means to end thinking. Any motivation to end thought is still within the field of thought and, therefore, within the field of time, that is, the past projecting itself into the future.

“I want to be free.” Who is this “I” desiring freedom? The “I” is the past, the “me” with all my associations, identifications—the memory of who I am. And that memory wants to be free, but what it is actually doing is perpetuating itself and all the self-centered “problems” it has created.

I, too, see that it is necessary to teach young people about themselves, what thought is, for this is the foundation of real learning. Not cumulative thinking like in science and technology, which we call learning. But rather, and more importantly, learning that is non-cumulative, which observes what is occurring in the moment, evokes insight, understands it and moves on. This learning is immediate, and thought, which emanates from this learning is real, healthy, for it comes from the observation itself. Not just from other people’s words or from the long, accumulated lists of past knowledge.

Does this sound so complicated, Rebecca? I wonder if I am making it sound so. People have accused me of being intellectual. This is not a matter of the intellect. Perhaps they say this because they have not looked at it and don’t want to, so they write it off by saying I’m being intellectual—meaning that it’s just a bunch of words and not worthy of consideration.

I want to tell you of a book I found in the library the other day. I was writing in my journal and I was tired of it, so I took a break. I started to look at the books on the shelves near me, when one, small, old book caught my eye. It was entitled simply Hiroshima and had been published in the United States in 1946. Something about the book made me open it and begin reading. It is an account of a few who survived the atomic bomb blast in Hiroshima in 1945. It reported the actual daily movements of these people just before and after the bomb dropped. Most of them were close to the center, from one to two miles. It is amazing they survived, while so many thousands died.

As I read, I felt as if I this war was just a bad dream. That it couldn’t have been real. But there is a part of me that knew it happened, but perhaps for my sanity, I couldn’t fully allow myself to see it.

I want to write to you about one special paragraph describing what happened just before the bombs dropped. (It was so strange that people close to the center heard no noise, no sounds of the bomb, yet people many miles away heard a most terrible roar.) This paragraph comes right after one of the survivors runs out into the street. The person had just come back from shopping and was standing in front of his house talking to his neighbor who had accompanied him shopping. The house consisted of a wooden frame and wooden walls supporting a heavy, tiled roof. Outside, to the right of the front door, there was a large rock garden. There were no sounds of any planes. The morning was still, cool, and pleasant.

Then there was a tremendous flash of light. It seemed like a sudden sheet of sun. Both men reacted in terror. One man dove among the rolled up bedrolls in the hallway and the other threw himself in the garden between two big rocks. His face was against the stone, so he didn't see what happened. When he dared to raise his head, he saw that the house had completely collapsed, causing a huge cloud of dust. It looked like twilight. In panic, he ran out into the street, where he saw a squad of soldiers who had been shoveling one of thousands of dugouts into the hillside where the Japanese soldiers apparently intended to resist invasion.

The book goes into the terrible accounts of the death and destruction. I will not relate any of that because it makes no sense to me to focus on the number of deaths. What stood out in my mind were the soldiers who had dug these burrows where they were going to resist invasion, hill-by-hill, life for life. I thought of how tenaciously the Japanese fought in W.W.II. How difficult it had been to conquer them. They never gave up. Anyone could see that in their kamikaze attacks on the fleets.

I read how these Japanese soldiers were conditioned to give their lives for their country, how honorable they thought it was, how they would honor their ancestors by upholding their destiny. (I am using my own words. Anyone can read the actual texts on the truth of this conditioning.) The fact that really astounds me is the completeness of the conditioning. Nothing seemed to defeat it, to shatter its intent. It makes me understand how deep conditioning can go, and how impossible it seems to get beyond that conditioning. The Japanese soldiers, for the most part, had been so thoroughly conditioned that they would rather die (a "noble death") than "lose face."

Now this "loss of face" is very important in understanding how people prevent peace. The "face" they were afraid of losing was the self-image they had internalized from the conditioning of society, a conditioning which had been handed down, almost without any interruption, challenge or outside influence, for centuries. The warrior mentality was deeply imbedded in their culture, and so was their military code of conduct. (Please don't judge me on my historical accuracy. I'm only quickly summarizing it, because I'm more interested in seeing how deeply conditioning can be imbedded into the very fabric of the culture.)

In essence, "to lose face," means that you didn't live up to what was expected of you, in this case, the failure to die for your Emperor, for your God (and all the shadows of your remembered ancestors). To the Japanese, "losing face," means a great deal. People who had survived the war, who were somehow spared, were ashamed. They wished they could have died to be like the other honorable ones. What a sick thing to think! How could anyone in their right mind think such a thing—which goes to show you they were not in their "right minds."? And all the innocent people, especially the children, suffered untold misery because of this conditioning around "losing face." Sometimes I can't believe people can be so monstrously stupid as to subject themselves and their families to such devastation. The conditioning is so deep that an atomic bomb still couldn't break the "will" of it. It took two before the military leaders surrendered.

What will it take for humans to understand how we have been conditioned to think and act in ways causing this horrible conflict? How many more wars will it take before we begin to understand the need to investigate the real causes of the “problem,” because the “problem” itself (not thinking about it) is a life and death situation which needs immediate attention.

I think I am repeating myself. But every time I write, I feel it anew. Did I tell you I am going to be a writer? I want to write books for young people on these issues. I think it can be presented simply to them, but I do not hold out too much hope for adults in listening to all of this. There are the exceptional few, but the general public, the “average” person, doesn’t seem to be interested in understanding themselves, or if they do, only superficially.

In reference to your “mystery” about why people set up and worship ideals just to destroy them, I think the setting up and worshipping the ideal (person/belief) is destructive. Inevitably, if people do ever get into questioning their conditioned thinking, ideal-worship will have to be tossed out. Remember when I mentioned that Latin saying, “Deus es demon in vertus”? (“God is the devil inverted.”) Let me give you an example from your country’s Fundamentalist Christian movement. I read of the satanic worshipping going on, and I see how that saying comes out of the Fundamentalist Christian movement itself. It is built into it by the way they are trying to bring about its opposite—goodness.

What they are trying to do is to change people’s behavior, from what they judge as bad to what they envision as good. Simple enough – at the primary level, as you call it. Now what does this mean, structurally, as in the building of a machine? Thought is the agent of change. Thought, which is a good tool in science and technology, is an inappropriate one in changing behavior. Thought is a means of comparison, evaluation, and judgment. It measures height, weight, and so on. Technological. Scientific. It analyzes and synthesizes. It stores itself as information, as memory. In this area it works well.

Now we are asking, “Thought” to enter another arena, the psychological arena of changing behavior. So “Thought” does what it is made for—it evaluates, compares, measures, and judges. There is a recognition that a certain trait (such as anger, jealousy, or violence) wants to be changed—and so it should. But how do we change that? This is what we are looking at in our “mystery.” And why does changing behavior through “Thought”, through judging behavior and conforming to ideals create conflict, destroy the ideal, the goodness, and the person or belief representing the ideal?

Well, what’s the next thing “Thought” does? It enters and performs its job. It judges the trait to be changed as bad, negative (or in religious terminology—evil, represented by the Devil). So the behavior or trait is now judged bad, which also feels bad (because it is a thought/feeling process). Because one doesn’t want to feel bad, there is a more urgent desire to change. The next stop is the formulation of the ideal—of goodness (or in religious terms—God). This ideal (whatever it may be according to the particular culture you live in) is already well established in the society.

So we have a divided situation with the actual behavior, on the one hand judged as “bad,” and the idealized behavior, on the other hand deemed as “good.” This is where you (as your grandparents had sung) “eliminate the

negative and accentuate the positive.” We have created conflict between what should not be and what should be. Do you follow this?

Now the crazy logic of this is that if you were to try to become completely “good,” which is the aim of it, especially in religions, you would have to completely eradicate the “bad”. But the “bad” is you. The “good” is only an illusion, a fantasy, and an idealized image of “goodness.” In trying to become good in this process, one would have to destroy oneself, which includes the good. Everything goes because you go. (I don’t know if I’m saying this clearly!)

And you can never attain goodness, the ideal, because like a carrot on the end of a stick dangling in front of a horse, it is always in the future. So there is endless frustration at never being able to get something that is not possible to get now.

I know this seems too intellectual, but it is actually how the brain creates conflict: trying to become good through judgment of imperfections while simultaneously imposing the conditioned ideals. You can see this in the outward manifestations of what the Christian Fundamentalists call “Demonic Behavior.” Have you seen the symbols these people worship?

One in particular, the inverted Christian symbol of the cross, is very powerful. Just by turning it upside down, some people have, throughout history, been aroused hideously through their conditioned sentiment—strong enough to kill. And they justified this killing in the name of God or goodness.

I think what happens to the people who turn towards Demonic or Satanic ritual and behavior is that the process of making them into Christians, (how do you say), “back-fired.” The intent was to condition the people, especially young people (for it is mainly the young who turn towards Satanic behavior) to be good. The pressure and pain of the judgment they felt was so strong, so powerful that they turned on themselves. “If I feel so bad, I must be bad.”

The ideal could never be achieved, so they were left with the constant, painful reminder of their judged behavior—which is who they are. So the “back-fire” is inherent in the process of becoming good or god-like (the most idealized image of goodness) —because you can never attain it. It is doomed from the start, to failure. Those who do seem to attain some “spiritual goodness” are usually very controlled people, who have become rigid in their ideals and behavior.

But young people, who now have music and media glorifying the Satanic or the Demonic, see an out, so to speak. Having been pressured into being good in this fundamentalist way, they have come to glorify their judged side with a kind of reverse, perverted pleasure. The judged side’s pain becomes the pleasure of an unattainable goal of idealized goodness, a way to embrace the “dark side” of themselves—the “dark side” that has been created, ironically, by becoming good. It represents the judgment of our behavior, the necessary prerequisite in embracing the ideal image of what one should be.

I know I am belaboring the point, but I think it is necessary, for it is somewhat complex, yet at the same time, quite straightforward and directly observable—if we are aware of it or if someone points it out to us and if we care to look.

The, (how do you say), “flip side” of the coin of conventional Christian religious attainment of “goodness” is the accentuation of the “badness,” for the more you

try to become good, the more one judges the undesirable traits in oneself, or that are oneself. So can you see how this fundamentalist process of becoming good is destructive? Do you see how it creates conflict in dividing oneself between what should not be and what should be? It is possible to see that while not being able to attain the ideal, since it is always in the future, one would turn on oneself, like a dog constantly tethered on a leash. Such a dog will turn on others and itself, because it feels trapped.

Actually, sad as it is, the (religiously judged) Satanic or Demonic self is attainable, while the Angelic or God-like self isn't. Since the overwhelming reality is the judged side, then it can easily swell to a point where it's the only thing that exists. It's literally all consuming. Why else would the entertainment people be capitalizing on it, with all their perverted, Satanic-like music for young people? They know that in this, their consumers find their identity, because they are their own judgment, the satanic side—not the God-like or good side.

I think that perhaps this is enough, yes? It has been, and remains to many, a seemingly great mystery.

Oh, let me add one more related comment about some of the religious symbols used to entice one's behavior towards "goodness." They call it "Religious Art." I saw on the television how these old religious paintings in the churches are being restored, and how the media is in awe of this. Huge paintings of representations of God and angels and all of the hierarchy of illusions created to give the feeling of religiousness. I think religion is the greatest entertainment business and making Jesus into Christ was the greatest public relations job ever. Think about it. Think of all the money and power involved in the religious establishment. It is a huge business. Wouldn't the United States' Wall Street love to capture it? What a gold mine!

To dazzle the spectator, the "customer," into a dream-like reverie of what will await him or her in the next life is the envy of every Hollywood producer. The dazzle is this "Art," the images of supreme power beyond our wildest dreams, a power so great that it lifts us right out of our everyday lives into a hypnotic trance so engulfing that it's hard to recognize the reality of its origins (like Plato's Allegory of the Cave.) This self-induced trance is programmed into us early on in life.

And the saddest thing is that these people who preach the sermons and create the religious art, music and buildings, think they are really doing good. I do agree with the same Christian Fundamentalists, as I do with most basic religious intention, that we do need to be "good." It's important to live healthy values of kindness, decency, and love. The thing wrong with the established conventional religious approach is the way it goes about it—how they bring about goodness through conditioned thinking, judgment, and ideals.

Then "how" do we bring about healthy virtues, goodness? First of all, I think we must question the conventional approach to see if it indeed creates conflict. As we enquire into this process of attaining goodness in the conventional sense, what happens to the brain? It begins to become sharp, clear, and intelligent—for it is looking at the facts, at reality, at the truth. And in that process of discovery, there is the potential for goodness. Or should I say the very enquiry is goodness. Intelligence is virtue. I see various definitions when I look up "virtue" in the

dictionary. One meaning is “effective force or power.” An old meaning is “courage, valor.” Also, “goodness.”

When the brain is conditioned to act habitually, mechanically by rote, through re- action, that brain is dead. It can only repeat the past. There is nothing new about it. The capacity for self-discovery is lost, buried. The illusions of life have taken over, and one lives like a sleepwalker. But when there is “creative discontent” with the conventional established “order”, when there is real enquiry, then the brain is alive, alert, and intelligent.

It is this intelligence that will bring about real order, virtue, and goodness. Intelligence is morality. Not as an ideal, or something to attain through judgment and idealizing (through time—yesterday, today, and tomorrow.) Rather, morality is that in the moment, non-cumulative state of learning, of observation. It is that intelligent observation of the conditioned mind that creates the “possibility” of freedom. (I put quotes around “possibility” because one doesn’t want to promise anything, which then could be construed as an ideal, something to be attained through time. We would be caught right back in the old way. The old way has been so conditioned, so established, that at first, it is difficult to see all the nuances of how it wants to maintain itself, its hold on us, for it has been our lives for many years. We have built up a lifestyle around our conditioned ways, and don’t really want that challenged.)

As you can see, I am totally fascinated with understanding how all this works, like looking into the workings of an intricate clock. I remember when I was younger, how interested I was in science, in how things worked. The brain is like this: it is a science. I don’t mean like a brain surgeon or a neurophysiologist. That is very complex. I just mean how the brain gets conditioned, and then how it reacts out of that conditioning, conditioning itself even further. It is indeed a Sherlock Holmes mystery!

I must sleep now. The city is unusually quiet, like the eye of a storm. Last week, a member of an extremist military group gunned down a mosque full of people praying. This has gotten everyone crazy. People have been in the streets at all hours. Sounds of tear gas guns and military vehicles are the background noise I live with. I have become almost immune to it, as if that is the norm. I am only here until summer, until camp. Then I must do something more constructive to deal with this holocaust, this great destruction.

There are many holocausts. It is an ongoing phenomenon. Producing a holocaust film only shows the terror. It takes one horrible example of the holocaust of W.W.II and just creates fear and antagonism. People begin to wonder what the Jew did to be so “punished.” It only makes the mind crazy, unless there is a portrayal of the underlying causes—not the surface causes or politics, but the real, primary root causes—as in understanding prejudice. Like you are doing in your class. Then such a film would have merit.

But now, there is only the sick repetition of the physical horror. And if young people watch it, they become frightened, despairing. Young people need to feel hopeful; they need to understand what these universal causes are. All I can see with the films of the W.W.II holocaust is a justification to hate, and, worst of all, to tenaciously reaffirm religious tradition—which is a part of the vicious cycle, the

pendulum swinging. It will end up in another holocaust. Actually it has been one long drawn out holocaust, with no end in sight—unless there is a deeper enquiry!

It is hard to stop writing. I feel safe with these words, as if I could write the violence away. I seem to feel hope in the words, which can be dangerous. I am aware of that. But writing keeps my sanity. And when someone else also understands the truth of what universally creates conflict, then there is a “communion,” if I can use this religious word. One definition of this word means, “the act or an instance of sharing.” The rest of the meanings have the usual, established religious connotations.

But “an instance of sharing,” the “act of sharing” is intelligence, is love. Not personal love, but as the dictionary says, “a sense of underlying oneness.” For if what we are “communing” about is true (and it is) then in that there is an “underlying sense of oneness” because the truth is universal. It is the truth. With communion, Ahmed

Dear Ahmed,

February 28

Thank you for enlightening me on the “mystery” of how people set up ideals just to destroy them. I shared it with my class as a part of the project. We even diagrammed it on the blackboard so we could see how it worked visually—as we did to know how projection and scapegoating work. On the board, it did look “mechanical” and we could see how the brain was “malfunctioning,” when it thought it could bring about goodness through judgment and ideals.

Our project goes well. We are compiling what we have found in a book. We are formatting the book ourselves, picking the font and cover design. We will publish it ourselves, because we’ve got a modest grant for its production, enough to print one thousand copies. We hope to sell the books and make income, so we can create a fund for further projects, perhaps even a scholarship fund for Peace Camp. It is a big undertaking and we are very excited about it. I will send you a copy of it because much of what you say will be in there.

The Martial Arts for Peace class is teaching me a lot about violence. (There will also be a part in the book about this unique approach to understanding and resolving conflict.) We practice the forms (called “kata”) and spend time discussing how the katas can change or “transform” (my teacher’s word) crude physical self- defensive, self-protective fighting into something of beauty, grace, and dignity. By just practicing kata, the fight or flight protective instinct changes. It’s hard to explain. It’s like taking a formless, crude lump of clay and molding it into a beautiful vase. A person could throw crude lumps of clay at each other, but it would be hard to throw something of great beauty. Not only does the kata give the instinctual survival mechanism what it needs, but it also develops the aesthetic nature of man.

You would have to do it, so you could feel what I mean; it is that sort of thing. Not something to talk about. But all this also depends on the right teacher. When I was a “layperson,” most Martial Arts seemed to me to be the terribly violent, combat poses that they showed in “action films.” Now I also see the inside of the Martial Arts world, and most of that is either competitive sport (tournaments) or ego-centered gymnastic displays, a Hollywood version of the Martial Arts.

I am looking forward to taking it at Peace Camp. I hope the approach is similar. I guess I’m hooked by it—at least by the way my teachers show us. Perhaps one day I, too, might teach this.

Also, here’s another exciting part of the project I almost forgot. (Sorry about jumping back and forth in my writing. Sometimes when I write, one idea stimulates another. I try to keep them in sequence, but the thoughts

run faster than I can write.) We are planning a Peace Museum, one where people can go to understand what prevents peace, not just a museum of the horrors of war, like the Holocaust Museum. The Holocaust Museum is a terrifying place with no understanding—just the underlying feeling of outrage, but no real insights into how this came about. Our museum will be one of understanding. We will create a mini- model in our classroom. And if it is really helpful in allowing people to experience what prevents peace, we're thinking of trying to get a grant to build one somewhere. Or perhaps a portable one, which we or someone could travel around with.

The plans are just in the beginning, conceptual stages, but they are exciting to think about. How do we translate what we have learned (what you and I have been writing about) into a visual, tactile experience? Too often, concepts are just compared and memorized, then stored away for reference. Or they just go in one ear and out the other. We want to create an experience, a place where people can really have insight into what prevents peace. Some of the preliminary ideas include a mechanical replica of the brain, where the workings of prejudice can be experienced. I can see an interactive experience with situations displayed and a series of choices that can be responded to.

I also see a “Mystery House” where visitors can follow in the “footsteps” of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson’s trail, detecting what prevents peace. I think the feeling of the whole museum should be one of serious fun, like they have created the Exploratorium in San Francisco, California, a science museum where the whole place is a hands-on scientific experience. Not the horrible death and destruction of the Holocaust Museum. Of course, it needs to be serious too but not to scare the participants, for most of the participants will be young people. We need to respect them, by showing them how terribly serious we are, without grossly sensationalizing anything.

I can see school trips to our Peace Museum (or if it’s mobile, us taking it at first to the schools. But I think it will need a permanent site after a time). I think after I visited the Exploratorium I had it in the back of my mind to do something like a Peace Museum. (If I am correct, I think the Exploratorium was started by one of the main builders of the atomic bomb. He really should have built a Peace Museum instead!)

We could eventually create a virtual reality machine, able to demonstrate what conditioning is, perhaps by setting up an experience where visitors think that what they see is real, but then it is shown as only an illusion, like religious symbology. Also there could be a section where participants create a robot, a Frankenstein monster, who is made up from all the conditioning they put together for “IT.” They could create

this “monster,” which is conditioned by the military, programmed to defend its “birthright,” its tribal lands.

I wonder how real we can make the museum, how deep we can go to show the roots of the situation? Maybe it would have to be designed so it left lots to the imagination of the participants. I think if we were too straightforward, people would resist. This is something to consider. I hadn't thought of that before.

The main thing, though, is to give the participant an experience that has a reason, a means of understanding the violence in the world. So many films and presentations of violence are just for entertainment. I wonder what some ETs would think if they saw some of the movies we watch and the video games kids play in the name of “entertainment.” When I look at it this way, we seem really crazy! I don't mind if I see violence that has a lesson to it, but just violence for violence's sake? That's sick! It makes us less sensitive to the real thing. The media plays on this sickness, exploiting the fear factor in it, exploiting the addicting emotional content of it—like the need to look at a traffic accident.

There is another part to the project we are thinking about. We'll need to train people as Peace Ambassadors, to study the peace program and to take peace curricula around the world to teach children about what prevents peace. I think young people need to have sane and healthy occupations offered them—like being Peace Ambassadors. Most available jobs only follow the path of the traditional corporate system, which just feeds the divisive, competitive notions we have, notions that are war-like.

So there is much we can do to promote the understanding of what prevents peace. It has to be more than a nice school project, one that is only developed for a grade. For this project to mean something, I think it is necessary to create a livelihood from its occupational value, not that a person would want to make a living from the suffering of others. There are peace organizations that do profit from war (sounds strange, doesn't it?). But a person does have to eat. I will let you know more of my observations on the project as it progresses.

There is one thought I had this morning as I was waking up and it was in relation to what we had talked about before, how trying to be “good” is so destructive. I had seen one of the TV talk shows the day before, on men who were obese. The same theme came up for all of them—that they were never good enough. All of them had a very difficult time with their fathers. They had suffered a great deal of abuse, both physical and psychological. Besides the beatings they had suffered, each was terribly demeaned. “I'm never good enough,” one of the obese men said tearfully to the audience. These poor men weighed from three hundred to six hundred pounds. I felt so sad watching them.

The man's statement about never being able to be good enough stuck in my brain. This morning when I awoke, I realized (in a half-sleep state) that no one could ever be good enough! That judgment called "goodness" is the ideal, the goal, and the never-ending illusion to be gained only in the future. It was suddenly so simple, so obvious.

We have made self-understanding so difficult and complex. The authorities have done this to protect their intellectually vested interest. I can see now that the conventional approach to changing behavior is destructive. The judgment of the behavior is painful, like the mouse who gets an electric shock for "inappropriate" behavior. The reward, becoming the ideal is "pleasurable." But the more we try to achieve the ideal, the more we must inevitably fail. Therefore, the harder we try, even though we are doomed to failure, the more painful it becomes, for we think we must judge ourselves, and therefore, punish ourselves for being bad, or at least "not good enough".

This "good" versus "bad" is a crazy logic that allows people to punish themselves in order to be good. In religious communities throughout the ages, such practices as self-flagellation, the wearing of "hair shirts" and iron plates, rubbing lice into wounds, leaving one's hair long and matted, or worse, animal and human sacrifices, were all deemed necessary so people could suffer—in the name of their religious savior—to be good. But knowing they could never be God, or like His Messenger on earth, people considered themselves damned. Paying penance for one's supposed sins through self-punishment was thought a necessary part of being able to enter the next life, or "Heaven."

I know my viewpoint makes sense to you. But why can't others see the simple elegance of self-understanding? Why hasn't someone pointed out the huge harm we suffer from prejudice? Or from judging each other's so-called sins? Or more stupidly yet, the irony of not only accepting and allowing, but appointing some other human to be the only one capable of interpreting their group's god? By doing that, they're immediately saying other humans have no similar ability, so they're relegated to a lower class. How arrogant and classist! How controlling! But then, I'm letting my anger judge the judges, so you must decide for yourself. Anyway, maybe this has been written about, but I'm not aware of it.

I have heard there are references to the dangers of judgments in the Bible ("Judge not, lest ye be judged," and "Enter the kingdom of God as a child.") Also in Buddhism, with its emphasis on understanding the "self." But why hasn't self-understanding and freedom from prejudice been a part of our everyday studies in school?

There is also another subject, a part of the "mystery" of what prevents peace that I want to write to you about. I was at a friend's house last

weekend. There were a few of us there, some from our class (the school project class) and a few from the Martial Arts for Peace class. I thought it might be interesting to get them all together so we could talk about these issues.

The conversation started slowly, everyone trying to find a common ground. It reached a point where everyone agreed that something had to be done about the terrible violence in the world. After we talked a while about the young people's program in the Martial Arts for Peace on coping with bullying, we got to some deeper levels. We started to talk about "spirituality" – a "loaded subject." (This expression sounds so violent!) The host at this meetinghouse brought out a series of books about the "Masters," the "enlightened" spiritual people who had written about the issue of self-understanding and peace.

Of course, I looked through a few of the books and read some of what these "Masters" had said. As I did, I had this sudden realization that all I was reading was a lot of complicated and esoteric words. The more I read, the more I felt as if I was being sucked down into a never-ending void. The words spun a web of highly sophisticated illusions, of promises, of strange and wondrous experiences of Nirvana and Heaven and transcendence. It was like being in a house of mirrors in an amusement park. (Have you seen such a thing?) I could see how people could get lost in there, not knowing what was up or down. Once inside, the doors would close behind them and they would be caught up in that maze of convoluted thinking.

If I hadn't had the education I had, if I hadn't gone to the Peace Camp and really learned the importance of questioning—and writing to you—I think I, too, could get caught up in that mental circus. Yes, the House of Mirrors is kind of strangely pleasurable, but in a sickeningly sweet way.

Back to those highly spun word webs that I was just talking about: I could see they were just words. The person who showed them to us said these "enlightened spiritual Masters" were in "search of the Truth" (with a big, capital "T"). Seeing that the Truth was not in words, for their words were just clever manipulations, they did not affect me. They had no hold over me. (It reminded me of the story of the Gordian Knot, cutting through the knot with insight.)

What so many people are looking forward to as the "Truth" is only words, empty promises. How can the Truth be in words, or just thought? Words, unless they come directly from immediate observation, are second-hand, of the past, and therefore, stuck in time. Is Truth to be found in thought, memory, and the past? How can time, which comes from the past and projects into the future, be the Truth? It seems to me what we want to capture as Truth, is not thought, but rather, outside of thought and time.

Isn't Truth just the simple moment-to-moment reality of the innocent mind of a child, a child who cannot formulate prejudices, cannot think of enemies, or terrorists? The young child's mind, although naive and in need of "educating" (the right kind!), is essentially unbiased, unprejudiced, unconditioned. Seeking the Truth is like looking for the glasses upon your nose; it is only a projection of our greed, of the desire to be someone, something. For Truth is all around us, living, breathing, being.

Pained by self-judgment and agonized by the futile pursuit of ideal behavior, so many people turn towards the "spiritual life" out of frustration and the need to feel hope—and relief from the self-inflicted, never-to-be-attained "goodness." What a trap! It reminds me of the Chinese Finger puzzle. (At camp, Marina showed us this. Did you see it? It's a woven, braided, bamboo tube: if you stick your index fingers in each end, you feel the trap. Your automatic reaction is to pull your fingers out, but that only tightens the trap. If you think about it, you realize the braid tightens with pulling, and loosens with pushing inwards and turning a little bit, which is the opposite of what you think you want to do. So it's a metaphor for not trying too hard to solve a problem: just relaxing and letting the answer come to you.) We get caught in the trap of thinking our way out of thinking, and the harder we try, the tighter the trap encloses our fingers and our brains.

Do we need "Masters" (spiritual authorities) to show us the Truth, or does the truth come when we nonjudgmentally see what is real and actual? When the brain is quieted through self-understanding, is the truth there? I can only put this in the form of a question, a possibility, for to assert in a statement that something is true or not could merely be agreed or disagreed with, which is just the intellect choosing. It is not an either/or proposition. It seems to me that a question, if not immediately answered, can lead one to looking at where the question is pointing. Arriving at that point, one can observe the truth of the question for oneself.

One of the new students from the Martial Arts for Peace class said she felt there were Karate Masters who knew the truth and had passed down "The Truth" through their students. What is this "Truth" that can be passed down from Karate Masters? (Also, how can one be a "Master of Karate—of Empty Self—of nothing?") If they say that the Martial Arts have anything to offer in the "spiritual" realm, I think it only points out the extent of our conditioned states of mind which prevents "enlightenment" or the "spiritual life." We can enlighten ourselves through self-understanding via questioning. Through developing a curious mind. Anything else is only a false promise, stated in a way to develop followers,

rituals, traditions, and a hierarchy of authorities. (“My teacher’s teacher’s teacher’s master said...”) It constantly amazes me, in this unfolding mystery of the mind, how tricky “Thought” can be!

There is also the issue of meditation, which finally came up in our conversation. Someone suggested we meditate. Of course I questioned that! What did he mean by “meditation”? So I asked, “What is the intent of meditation?”

He explained he, like the new student I mentioned, had also taken a “spiritual form” of the Martial Arts. But it was not Karate, which he looked down on, because the originator of this style of Martial Arts was called “The Great Teacher,” which meant he was enlightened, and therefore his Martial Arts was the only really spiritual one. (Sounds like the same statement in religion—“We are the chosen ones; you are not!”) In his Martial Art, they did not aggressively attack their opponent, but instead, in a more “peaceful” way, they blended with their opponent, and through a series of circular movements, disarmed him or her.

I know of this other Martial Art, and so I could question him with some understanding. I asked him about “Atemi,” a punch for softening up the “opponent” before “throwing” the rival. He had to confess that yes, he did indeed use Atemi. After further questioning from me, he admitted “throwing a person could result in just as much damage [in his Martial Art], if the thrower wanted to, as in Karate.” I explained that in Karate, the physical self-defense skills were learned in conjunction with mental self-defense. The physical gave the confidence not to fight, while the mental gave the student the ability to resolve conflict before it became one.

I think my words fell on deaf ears, for he listened politely, but I could feel his confidence came from being right, or that he practiced what he was convinced was the only real spiritual Martial Arts. I’ve met many others like him from this particular Martial Art. They all remind me of what I would call “Born Again Martial Artists.” One can feel their smug confidence, their polite, yet subtle, arrogance.

Now that I’ve been in the Martial Arts world for a while, I can see how easy it has been to just treat them as a “new religion” or another “New Age” spiritual hopeful. When one doesn’t do the real work of self-understanding, there are so many “easy” paths out there. And yes, they all have a price—not just monetarily, but at the cost of losing one’s own ability to see, to understand for oneself.

Perhaps people only want to be comforted, but not really work at understanding their and others’ suffering. Suffering is created by the way we have been conditioned to think and act. In order to free ourselves from suffering, we have created escapes that are unfortunately based on

the same process, which created the suffering in the first place. Reminds me of Alice in Wonderland, when the Red Queen told Alice to take her hand, for they had to hurry to get there. And they ran faster and faster, but ended up exhausted, in the same, exact spot they had started.

Am I starting to sound cynical? Our letters are the most positive things for me, because, together, we are finding out what prevents peace. By investigating this “mystery,” we are putting aside all those fist-clenching, brain-squeezing, judgmentally unnecessary words, words, words. It’s so refreshing to eliminate the “negative.” By observing our thoughts, the possibility of freedom exists in that flame of attention. As Sherlock Holmes says, “Eliminate the impossible and whatever’s left over, however improbable, must be the case.”

Your friend, Rebecca

Your letter is fascinating, as always. There is always much to think about, and I do think about all you say. That is why my letters take time to reach you. Also the fighting here interrupts our email service. I do not want to focus on the outward violence, the bloodshed, the throwing of stones and the shootings and killings. This is a nightmare. I focus only on understanding the basic causes of them.

I have found a few friends here who are interested in all of this, of what we say. They, too, come from intelligent families and have the means at their disposal to attend Peace Camp. I have shown them the brochure and they are quite interested. It is so good to talk with someone else, face-to-face. There are many people who want to see peace, but their idea of peace is not the same as the people they are fighting. So again, “peace prevents peace,” as one might say.

Each side sees peace according to its own limited, conditioned views, as promoted by its separate belief systems. There is no common understanding, because they are not looking at the basic, underlying situation, the “primary” level of understanding conflict. They are more interested in managing it, or resolving it according to some pet theory that one of their intellectual leaders has. They see it as “my” or “our” problem, not the (mutual, common) problem. But the situation is the situation of all humans, no matter where they live on the earth. It has always been the same situation since the beginning, perhaps in more crude forms, but essentially the same structure. Unless we look at the situation by examining the “problem” at this basic level, there will never be real peace, just at best, an ominous pause between violent outbursts of conflict.

In this part of the world, the proposed Peace Settlements are based mainly on ancient religious traditions. The more modern political parties may not be aware of this, but underneath the cloak of seeming sophistication, there are deep-seated tribal beliefs. We are still clans, tribal groups one step removed from the desert. There is a very thin veneer of civilization that separates us from the nomadic tribes wandering this land.

I think much about religion, as I have written to you in the past. I go out and sit and watch the various religious groups practice their rituals. I am reminded of the phrase “Religious Salvation,” but I think the word “salvation” needs another “I.” It should read, “Religious Salivation,” for what we call religion seems to me to be a form of behavioral psychology. People are conditioned through a system of punishments (damnation, for example) and rewards (heaven, for example).

I remember reading about some of the early religious fanatics in the colonial days of America, how the preachers worked the people up with “fire and brimstone” sermons. They would make people feel they were terrible sinners, and that, unless they repented, they would go to a terrible, fiery hell for all of eternity. Apparently, due to the power and persuasion of the various preacher’s personalities, and because most of their “disciples” were already so conditioned by scenes of a Hell so horrific and so terrifying, the congregation were almost pleading for salvation. So the preachers would offer to save them, too, by

painting another, opposite picture of a Heaven with gold streets, angels, and a life of endless bliss and comfort.

This was pure theater, pure behaviorism, just like the poor mice in the mazes. Or more exactly, like Pavlov's salivating dogs. The ringing of church bells reminds me of Pavlov's experiments. The same goes for any religious ritual, or performance, that evokes the same kind of stimulation. It's all theater—except while watching a stage show or a film, people realize it is only make-believe. They allow themselves to be temporarily convinced, either hopefully in order to learn something of value, or merely to be entertained. This is often called the “willing suspension of disbelief” (I emphasize the word “willing.”)

But in religious services, priests hope that their flocks completely believe what is happening (or going to happen, in the case of Heaven and Hell). Maybe this should be called an “unwilling suspension of disbelief.” In other words, they go to sleep, or fall into a hypnotic trance, and are manipulated from then on by certain reinforced stimuli that help them “salivate” on command. Just ring a certain programmed bell, or make a certain secret gesture, or perform a certain in-group ritual, and “Zap!” The person, like a puppet on strings, dances this way and that. At first, the authority only pulled the strings, but through “religious education” (indoctrination) the string became internalized and was pulled by the willing (or once-unwilling) believer alone.

Perhaps my observations are harsh, but they are not far from the truth. This is not to say that people who join religions are bad, or to blame. They are just victims of the insanity of conditioning. Perhaps I wouldn't be so severely critical except for the fact that they condition children to blindly follow their same crazy ways. And all in the name of freedom.

This really haunts me—freedom. I hear this word so much. We have so many images of freedom. Freedom to do what? To say what you please, no matter how you may offend someone? To do what you want, which just spoils you? Freedom from want, from suffering? Aren't these the tenets on which the North American society was built? Freedom? People even have the freedom to fight for their freedom!

Here, we want to be free of “our” oppressors and “they” want to be free from what they think are their oppressors. Everyone wants to be free. Free of what? Of whom? But isn't this freedom just a reaction, a form of prejudice? What about the freedom to think independently of prejudice? The fact is we are in bondage.

The hope is that we will be free of our bondage. But what exactly is the thing that binds us? First of all, isn't it our notions of freedom, our reactive state of mind? Think about it. What are we trying to be free of? Who are we trying to be free from? And there are some who will deny freedom, for they fear that “freedom” will mean a loss of control. Did those same people really intend to just blindly allow themselves to be controlled by their religious manipulators? Some people will fight and kill for freedom. They say, “Freedom is my right,” as if that justifies their rights being defended. But at the cost of other people's freedom? What is really being defended? We must be very careful when we say things like this, and not just automatically throw about our “rights” or “my freedom.” The terrible irony is that we have created an unfree world trying to be free.

Doesn't freedom come by understanding what prevents it? The same as understanding what prevents peace? Aren't they one and the same? Isn't freedom understanding the conditioned thinking and behavior that creates the need to be free? Is freedom a right or privilege to be legislated? Is it a matter of politics, economics, religion, or any manifestation of thinking? If "Thought" created the situation in the first place, can "Thought" solve the problems it has created? I know we have said this before, but it is so vital to see it again and again—for the habit of conditioning is very powerful. If we truly understand, aren't we then free?

I just wish some of the adults who live or work with children would understand the situation and help the children understand what real freedom is. Oh, if only we knew how we are truly in bondage to ourselves! I think most people would untie their bonds so fast if they could truly see how they'd allowed themselves to jump into their prejudicially conditioned boxes in the first place. And if they understood that, then they could easily ensure that their children had open, questioning, inter-active instead of reactive minds, too.

I was listening to the radio and listening to the speeches about freedom and the problem the lack of it creates. I could feel the frustration and urgency in their voices, but I could not see how their kind of freedom could truly give them freedom. Perhaps relative freedom as each side gives in a little, but only after much bloodshed. The way they talked about freedom really bothered me—the sentimental associations they refer to, the constant insistence on how important their petty little traditions are. Each side calls for "freedom," while each side entrenches themselves in their beliefs. They are only digging their own graves.

Also a word about sentiment. The playing of certain nationalistic anthems, of particular religious songs, evokes deep sentiment, sometimes driving people into an emotional frenzy. This sentiment of music and ritual just reinforces the ties one has to the established orders. It doesn't really make any difference what particular order one is tied to. They are essentially all the same. Some people rebel against their order to embrace another order, but this is like decorating the walls of their prison. They're still in bondage within the confines of the next order's conditioning.

Sentiment is such a dangerous emotion. I rarely think anyone questions it. I remember talking to you about the new school we could create. I think in this school we would need to show children about the danger of sentiment, how the playing of national anthems and the political frenzy generated by melodramatic displays of patriotism are forces which destroy intelligence and only contribute to more conflict.

I can't remember if we already discussed patriotism. (I think we did touch on it). It has been a big issue here and in the world. It is what we would call a "sacred cow," something, like religion, not to be talked about (which just makes me want to talk about it).

I think we spoke of this at camp. Was it Marina or Sasha who saw patriotism as the "enemy of peace"? I have been thinking about this. Most people think

being patriotic will ensure “their” freedom. But does it? On the contrary, does it sustain division, separation, and therefore, fuel the conflict produced by division? Isn’t the next step in expanding that patriotism a “divide-and-conquer-and-acquire” mentality?

The patriot is the “hero” and every young person wants to be a hero. We have been taught that being a patriot or hero is most desirable. The patriot is the most loyal citizen, one who would die for his or her country. But isn’t he or she the one who is most governed by conditioned ideals? Is the patriot, the hero, our paragon of nationalistic pride and virtue, paradoxically the real enemy? An enemy is one who is hostile to another and brings injury or harm. The hero upholds the fragmented nationalistic tribal tradition. The patriot cherishes the image of his or her country over all others. But they only sustain the conflict by this divisive tribal thinking.

I know that to some, this kind of talk is a threat. But actually, the threat is in not talking about it, not seeing the divisive state of mind in patriotism. I am concerned about world peace, about “freedom” for human beings from the self-imposed tyranny of divisive, conditioned thinking. I am not against any country or for another. I am not a “revolutionary” in the traditional sense of that meaning. I am not unpatriotic either; I am concerned only for the welfare of all people, that we take the time to seriously investigate this situation called patriotism, and what causes it, and to see how it paradoxically prevents peace.

I am in no way advocating the overthrow of any country. I am not a communist or capitalist or fascist, or any “-ist” of any kind. I don’t believe in any conventionally political, religious, sociological point of view. I question all established viewpoints. Questioning, or what is called, democratic dialogue, is the “freedom” to find out what is true. This is the essential ingredient in education—perhaps not in the conventional educational system. I don’t think I would be allowed to teach in any conventional system. One is tethered to a fixed point, like a dog on a leash (as we once said). You, like the chained dog, have just so much lead and at some point, you are stopped. That is why this new school is imperative, for perhaps there we can start afresh. The implications of such a school are colossal.

I also see how important this process of non-cumulative thinking is, (I mean questioning, every step of the way) to see what prevents peace. We have to see, what creates conflict, so that, in the process, we can put aside all the negative. You are so right to say this. But, as you say, this kind of correspondence, this investigation will be seen as negative, as being against, as depressing or antisocial. Or people will accuse us of being overly intellectual or simplistic. (But I am repeating myself. We have gone into this before).

If some would just look, just take these things as working hypotheses and see if there were some truth in them, it would all seem worthwhile. There has to be a flowering of this, Rebecca, for we cannot be freaks, people who are so outside and foreign to society that what we say will not be taken seriously. My heart hurts when I think of this!

I read an article recently about peace that I want to share with you. It was about a group of people (a new “religion”) who was proposing world peace by

recognizing that underneath all our differences we are actually all one humanity. Now, I don't want to sound typically negative or cynical, but this "all one" philosophy struck me as dangerous. This group wanted to "affirm our connectedness" and "accentuate our commonality." Sounds wonderful, impressive. But what does it mean? Is it a way for people to end their divisions and embrace all humanity? Or is it actually just another idealistic notion? In fact, another means to just sustain conflict and postpone its resolution?

Is becoming one humanity a realistic thing or is it just wishful thinking? We are actually one humanity, the human race. That is true—relatively. But the fact is that we are divided, separate, and in conflict because of our separate thinking and actions. Some think that if everyone believed in one God, all would be well. But whose God? Whose belief?

And isn't that what all religions preach? Love for all humanity, which is a "oneness" of sorts? But how can we love a united humanity and separate ourselves at the same time? How does the process of trying to become one, a common humanity, actually create conflict? Because trying to become one, or unite in our commonness, is nothing more than another ideal. The fact is that we are separated. The hope is that we are connected.

So the problem occurs when we try to become connected, one, and whole. This process of becoming, of setting up and conforming to ideals, creates division and conflict (as we have mentioned before). Again we have the division of what should not be—we should not be divided and in conflict—and what should be—which is to be ONE, connected.

In essence, I am saying that our need to discover our oneness, our connectedness, arises from human suffering. This suffering is caused by our separateness. By "affirming our commonality," we are just setting up another ideal and are therefore just creating more of the same suffering which we are supposed to be eliminating by "becoming one."

Do we need to connect ourselves to others, to seek our commonality? Or is this the wrong approach? If we understand what divides us and put aside that "negative," will the process of elimination make us whole, connected, one? In understanding what prevents oneness, is there oneness? How else can I put it? Just by letting that "negative" go, can't we attain oneness? By letting it go, aren't we free? Truly free, free from feeling compelled to set up some other, new "ideal" that will only start up the whole, confounding, conflict cycle again? Do you understand what I mean? I don't mean to make it sound complicated, because it is not. To a mind that has been heavily conditioned to believe in ideals to change behavior, then it may seem complex or baffling.

I'm only trying to say that the conventional way we approach resolving conflict actually sustains and compounds it. Why? Because we are approaching it with the same idealistic means that got us into the trouble in the first place. Oh, yes, Rebecca, Sherlock Holmes would have loved this case. I can see him now, talking to Watson: "The game's afoot, Watson!" This is the greatest mystery of all, but there are many clues. With some interest and a good magnifying glass, any good detective could follow the trail.

Excuse me for making light of it, but in itself, understanding the nature and structure of conflict, of prejudice, is quite interesting. That it creates tremendous human suffering is the sad outcome. But if you were to take on the investigation of what prevents peace as a “case,” just for the sheer love and interest of it, it would be worthy of the greatest detective of them all—Mr. Sherlock Holmes.

Actually, it is unfortunate that Holmes investigated merely the tertiary outcome (the external results of the crime)—and not the real roots (the fundamental causes.) It would make an interesting series of mysteries for some writer. Perhaps someday, in a unique way, to get these insights seen, I might write such stories. But only if they were helpful in creating the real deduction, the observations needed to “solve the case”.

My care to you and your family. I have been remiss not sending them my regards. Although I have not met them, I’m sure I would feel I knew them if I had.
Peace, Ahmed

Dear Ahmed,

April 3

The time for Peace Camp is so close now. I will be bringing a friend of mine from school. I have talked a lot about it with other students, both in the project and in the Martial Arts for Peace classes. My friend, Mark, applied and has been accepted. We will travel together. His family is friends with mine. He is a very enquiring person and has added a great deal to the project, especially the discussions. I feel encouraged that there are more people at least somewhat interested in these issues.

I want to discuss with you the subject of death. We talked about it both in the project class and at the Martial Arts for Peace classes. (I brought it up there.) It started with a discussion about conditioning, as usual. We were looking at the state of mind that creates fear, because we felt fear, which we felt, was a basic factor in creating and sustaining conflict.

One of the students brought up death as one of the greatest fears we have: the fear of the unknown. This created a great deal of interest, to say the least. The teacher did an experiment with us about death. He wrote on the blackboard, "Death is..." leaving the answer blank. He asked us to free associate, to write down whatever came into our minds without censoring anything. After a while, he asked us to share our thoughts while he wrote them on the board.

Here are a few of the responses I copied down: Death is—"a black hole; a big door closing; being buried in the ground; the end of everything; meeting with God; living in Heaven; going to Hell; seeing my grandparents again."

Under all the responses, the teacher wrote, "How do you know the above to be true? I actually wasn't able to immediately comprehend what his question meant. Then I realized that we had written down only descriptions, not the actual fact of death.

The teacher asked us to comment on these ideas of death. "Are these descriptions really what death is, or are they only what someone has told you death is?" he asked. As we looked at the descriptions on the board, we began to see that what we thought of death was exactly that—just thoughts—second-hand knowledge. It was a preconditioned image of what we had been told about death, and actually a prejudice.

I remember going to a funeral once and looking at the deceased person. I did not know her well, so there was little emotional response to her death. I had only seen her in the hospital a few months before, when I was visiting with her granddaughter. At hospital, she had looked so old and in great pain. But dead, the funeral she looked younger and quite

peaceful. I remember saying to myself, “Oh, this is death.” There were no images, no fear. Just a non-judgmental observation. It was quite simple, yet extraordinary. It’s hard to describe in words. It just looked so natural, so right. I had seen her alive and then dead. There was no difference except that in death, there was a solemnness about her that was quite elegant.

So I realized that our concepts of death were prejudices, conditioned images based on myth and tradition—that is, fear of death. Someone brought up the fear of death as the unknown. It suddenly struck me that one cannot be afraid of what one doesn’t know, that is, the unknown. One can be afraid only of what one knows, of having grown to realize what death is, in fact, through experience.

The real lesson (again) was in understanding conditioned thinking, the prejudgments programmed into the brain, mainly out of fear. We also realized that fear is thought-induced, that there is nothing to fear except fear itself (as the saying goes). Except there is no need to fear “fear.” Observing one’s thoughts and “felts” as they arise in the brain, one can see the source of all confusion and disorder. And also, the fear and the need to create order.

I have learned that trying to create order out of the confusion one observes only leads to more confusion and even conflict. Because “who” is going to do the changing? Or better said, “Is there an entity separate from ‘thought’, which can bring order to confusion?”

Most change, as we have discussed, comes from “Thought” trying to change thoughts (itself) but this creates conflict through the process of judgments and ideals. But there is another “capacity” that can bring change and order, without judgment and without imposing idealistic behavior—and that is observation or insight.

Physicists have discovered (according to our project teacher) that the act of observation changes the actual thing being observed. (There is a scientific name for it, but I’m not sure I remember what it’s called. Something like Heisenberg’s Principle of Uncertainty, which I really don’t understand. But apparently it has an incredibly important role to play in changing behavior in the psychological realm.)

Concerning conditioned thinking, we did a very simple, yet quite revealing, experiment in the project class the other day. It showed us how prejudiced we are, at the simplest level. The experiment consisted of breaking the class up into pairs, one of each pair being blindfolded, the one who can see leads the blindfolded partner through a series of “sensations.” The sighted partner instructs the blindfolded one to touch and

feel each object – rough, smooth, slimy and dry – all the way through the maze. At the end, they arrived at a bowl of room-temperature water.

As each partner touched it, they all, without exception, suddenly jerked their hands out. (The water was not hot or cold—so temperature had nothing to do with it). Each partner had a turn, the bowl of water changing place in the series so it could not be anticipated. Everybody had identical responses.

Then everybody took the “tour” without a blindfold. At the water bowl, they just put their fingers in the water calmly. Of course, they did not “jump,” because they could see it.

Afterwards, everyone sat down and discussed the “sensations tour.” When asked by the teacher why they had responded to the water as they first did, each replied that they were surprised at what they had felt. (They also “jumped” at other sensations, too, but not like they had with the water.) When asked why they didn’t respond in the same way without the blindfold, they said they could see that it was just water, no surprise; they knew what it was.

So we discussed the seemingly simple and different responses to the water. We realized that in the first instance, since people were blindfolded, the water was new, and therefore, a surprise. When they removed the blindfold and could see the water, it was no longer new and therefore, not a surprise. “So what?” one may ask.

Well, we realized that seeing the water and knowing what it was, was a form of prejudice. Obviously one has to prejudge many things in one’s daily life. Knowing that you can drown in water or be burned by fire is an intelligent “pre-judgment.” But we are concerned with the prejudices we have that are unconscious, that have been conditioned into us and create conflict.

This simple experiment showed us again how the brain “works.” I remember, as a small child going to the beach, how it felt playing in the water, how new and wonderful it felt. And how it was always a “surprise.” But I think that very slowly, without us really knowing it, the surprise, the wondrous newness fades, becomes tarnished, old. And when that happens, the life goes out of it, and the momentary awe of living dies.

The discussion led to where else we “die,” when we unconsciously fall asleep and lose the vitality and passion of living. We could also see how we fall into habitual prejudgments—both bad and good—in our everyday relationships with other people. (These prejudged images become fixed in our brain.) This seemingly simple experiment opened our eyes to the subtle ways thinking can put us to sleep. The Martial Arts for Peace classes (I call them “MAP ”) are enlightening. The central intent is to

understand conflict, which isn't what we see in the Rambo-type films. The history of the Martial Arts has two distinctly different paths—one as a military set of physical self-defense skills and the other, a “spiritual” way of life. I see people are drawn to both for different reasons.

The physical side attracts people who find pride in competition and physical gymnastics skills. As well, people who are afraid of being bullied or attacked (an unfortunate reality) are interested. The other side, the “spiritual” aspect of Martial Arts, attracts mainly people who have been hurt more emotionally or “spiritually” and are searching for a “new religion.” There are a few Martial Arts schools that are more like religious monasteries than gyms.

It seems to me that most Martial Arts teachers don't have a real understanding of what they are teaching. They don't see the incredible potential of the Martial Arts. They are caught in an “either/or” bind: either physical or spiritual. Some profess to combine both, but usually only provide intellectual lip service. Sadly, most Martial Artists are not well educated. They have little or no understanding of the culture that grew the Martial Arts, or any understanding of the philosophy behind them.

Of course, Martial Arts are steeped in Eastern (or Asian) philosophy, which needs to be understood to best study the Martial Arts. Many people react against an assumed “infiltration” of Asian thought, saying this thought (or philosophy) will be a threat to Western Christian theology. And to some extent, it's true. The underlying Asian philosophical insights come from Zen Buddhism, or Chan in China.

Putting it quite simply, this “philosophy” (which is not a philosophy in the way a Westerner would see it) is concerned with understanding conditioned thinking and the formulation of the “self.” They see the self as a psychosocial entity that isolates itself from other “selves,” and they look at how the “self” relates to other “selves” through some common belief system (a religion, a culture, and so on). Zen Buddhism sees that this condition of “self” (or the collective “selves”) creates conflict inwardly as a neurosis, and outwardly as a social phenomenon called conflict, or in its extreme, war.

Zen Buddhism offers an insight into this by presenting “methods” for going beyond “self” (which I think is a big mistake). One of the methods is Zazen, a form of sitting meditation or contemplation, a time when one just sits. Another approach to the “problem” it is a form called “koans,” unanswerable questions putting the intellectual self in a double bind, hopefully breaking the hold that “self” has. (I won't go further into this, for I have just begun studying it. I can only say that I am aware that any “method” implies a “how to,” which is again future oriented. For example,

saying “I will be free tomorrow,” implies a motivation to be free or “enlightened”—another trick of the “self” to stay in control today.)

In order to really understand the whole of the Martial Arts, one must study all of it—the physical and mental. I find it crazy-making that most Martial Arts schools give their students rank advancements based only on physical self-defense skills—which are quite dangerous, especially where young people are concerned. Without understanding the whole, one’s practice is lopsided. Teaching children just the physical side, teaches them only how to fight. It’s like nurturing a generation of trained killers, because the instructors show them lethal self-defense techniques. Children need to learn the mental side, to understand and resolve conflict before it becomes one.

One of the most frightening things I’ve noticed about a lot of Martial Arts schools is that they teach, or condition, students to go beyond their normal limits of aggression. This happens when they put kids into protective pads and let them really hit each other in what they call, “Full Contact Karate.” So the children learn that they don’t have limits, and develop a conditioned reaction to someone’s aggression, that says they must strike out with “full contact.”

Some teachers say that they tell their young students they shouldn’t hit first, or at all, if they can help it. But to kids, this is only talk, and hypocritical talk at that. The real lesson is the age-old primitive mentality of an “eye for an eye” or “might is right.” Over time, practicing full contact Martial Arts creates a conditioned reflex, like a knee-jerk reaction. This conditioning is deeply imbedded in the young person, which just reinforces the psychological conditioning created by fear.

Rarely do Martial Arts teachers teach their young students how to resolve conflict non-physically, nonviolently. Most teachers either don’t have the education (no one has shown them this,) or they themselves are in a state of conditioned reaction from having been physically assaulted when they were young. So they mainly teach their students how to “handle” themselves

As I mentioned in an earlier letter, I understand the place physical self-defense has—but only within the whole. I think Martial Arts Instructors who become teachers have only two to four years experience before they get their first degree Black Belt. And this experience consists of 99% physical self- defense—with no understanding of anything mental, except perhaps a sketchy, superficial, memorized history of their particular style. (As a side note, I am amazed to see the conditioning in the adherence to “my style” versus “your style.” The Martial Arts world looks like the United Nations, a collection of tribal allegiances to fragmentary ways of

living. This fragmentary, divisive way of thinking in the Martial Arts has led to a great deal of politics, and incredible in-fighting. My Martial Arts teacher says she teaches the Art of Karate, of empty self, and that she has no “style,” no politics.)

I think Martial Arts teachers should go to a school of education to learn how to really teach. They need to use curricula (especially in teaching the mental side— which is not teaching Asian philosophy or religion), and they need to develop daily lesson plans for their classes. Since the intelligent Martial Arts practice teaches the understanding (the primary level) of conflict, this has to be accomplished through mental skills. Tournaments, competitions and ego-centered displays of gymnastic skills are all centered on the physical alone. But the Martial Arts, from what I have learned, are much, much more than physical. If the Martial Arts can help us understand the primary roots of conflict and also give us the nonviolent mental skills to resolve dilemmas before they grow into conflict, then indeed, these Arts are incredibly important in the education of all children worldwide.

Instructors in the Martial Arts need to be educated in the highest sense. They should have at least a Masters Degree from a university in some related field with a dual major, such as physical education and psychology. They should learn about nutrition, personal hygiene, and the like, so their classes are well rounded. In other words, a Martial Arts Instructor should be a Martial Arts Educator, an educated person, a “gentleman” or a “gentlewoman,” in the old-fashioned sense, as my grandparents would say. When one reads about the Martial Arts masters of old, one can see they studied much more than mere physical skills. The teacher was expected to be a thoroughly educated person.

“Character development” is one of the most important aspects missing in the Martial Arts (besides understanding how to resolve conflict peacefully.) This means teaching social skills, ethics and manners, which are sorely needed today. And they could be taught so young people will accept them, because they are a natural part of a well-rounded Martial Arts, not just as an isolated, typical, moral, punishment/reward approach. Because the Martial Arts’ original intent was to develop character, isn’t it the perfect place to teach character development?

But again also, the Instructors themselves have to be taught how to teach character development. These are sophisticated skills. It is not something, which is attained by two to four years of the quasi-military type “boot camp” training, which most Martial Artists get. It is an intelligent, well-rounded education for the whole human being. (I also feel

that young people should be taught about the issues of eating meat—the moral, nutritional, health, and ecological reasons that clearly demonstrate how detrimental eating animal flesh is. I don't like to say “vegetarianism,” because it sounds like some weird anti-Christian “religion.”)

The fundamental intent of teaching the Martial Arts is to understand and resolve conflict peacefully, which has tremendous social value. Even teaching simple conflict resolution skills could benefit children tremendously. The number one social issue in the United States, and the world, today is violence, especially with young people. Bullying in all its forms and levels, from grade school to adulthood, individually and globally, is an issue that Martial Arts schools could successfully address, given the right curriculum and the right training for the Instructors.

There is so much that Martial Arts for Peace classes could do for young people—and yet, the mainstream Martial Arts school is still caught up in the most superficial type of training. My teacher's “mission” in life is to assist interested Martial Arts Instructors to learn the skills to be Martial Arts Educators—to learn how to teach, and what to teach—to help young people not only to be “gentlepeople,” but also to understand and resolve conflict. This includes the conflict of war—for conflict is conflict! The basic factors of the general nature and structure of conflict are universal; they apply to conflict, whether on the playground or the battlefield.

As you can see, I've really become involved in these unique classes. I also happen to have a very exceptional and intelligent teacher. I am so fortunate to be able to do this project on factors that prevent peace, and to have incredible Martial Arts for Peace “educator.” I am also so happy to have a wonderful friend like you who will not only listen to me with an open and loving heart, but who also sees what I do—sees the truth, the reality, of this immense mystery, full of clues to creating conflict, and preventing peace.

I feel so sane when I write you, and I look forward to your emails with great excitement. Our emails give me the energy and enthusiasm to continue looking for more “clues,” to further my understanding, to watch the unfolding within myself of the whole of humanity – and the entire, ancient, tribal, conditioned attitudes that have been indoctrinated into the brain. Looking inwardly, the “answer” is revealed. It is a continuous movement of enquiry, a continuous movement of learning.

Dear Ahmed, this will probably be the last letter I write you before camp. I have much to do to finish the project (although, in essence, it will never be “finished”). And, I will be taking more “MAP” classes. I hope you can write me once again, if you have the time. All of this lays heavy on the hearts of humanity. Soon we can spend the summer together under the starlit nights discussing it all. What utter joy! Can there be anything

more wonderful than this? And someday soon we shall start our new school, our life's work. With joy, Rebecca

I am writing to you once again before we meet so very soon. I am very interested in your Martial Arts for Peace classes. I would think that most people would think you “out of your mind” to advocate Martial Arts for Peace! Most people see Martial Arts as martial, military, for hurting and killing people. I have also seen these so-called Martial Arts “heroes” in the films and on television. They are crude representations. They are so violent that people would never imagine them as a way to peace.

The military, politicians, and religious leaders have presented their individual, ironic methods of a “way to peace”, as the way to end conflict. But their “peace” is through conflict. It is just more violence, under the guise of nonviolence. It’s a terrible, perverted twist in logic to say that violent confrontation can bring about peace. Yes, if you shoot someone who is threatening you, there is no more conflict. In a way, one could say that there is “peace.” But this is just more of the crazy illogical logic that is used by those in power.

Like a mental knot, this convoluted way of thinking gets so turned in on itself that at some point, it does a “flip-flop” and it comes out the opposite. It’s just an example of the hypocritical state of mind we’ve been conditioned into, where bad becomes good and good becomes bad. I think this happens when (as we discussed) we try to change behavior through thinking, thinking which is a form of measurement. We judge behavior for the ideal, thereby setting the stage for internal conflict between the “shoulds” and the “should nots.” But as we said, this can’t work, because the “should”, being the ideal always in the future, is unattainable.

So we’re left with the judgment ~ judgment heaped upon judgment upon judgment ~ intensified by our desire to attain the ideal. The judgment becomes us; although we weren’t born that way, soon it is who we are. So at some point, since attaining the ideal can’t work, we are thrown back on what is real—the judgment, the bad, the negative, the “evil” (if you are religiously inclined). This is where, I think, the brain does this “flip-flop,” turning back on itself—and all in the name of goodness, of attaining the ideal, the righteous behavior we desire. Since we can’t attain goodness, we see the bad as desirable, because that’s what we’re left with—the judgment of who we are—the self-image of being bad or evil. This is where I think religious zealots can turn from worshipping God (or Goodness) to worshipping the Devil (or Evil)—often called “Satanic worship.”

All this happens in the brain, at the root of conflict. Due to the pain of being judged, this knot-like convoluted “flip-flop” gets projected outward. The terrible feelings of self-hate are so intense that one cannot stand it. So the hate gets projected outward onto a convenient scapegoat. And of course, there are so many scapegoats in society (hence, as only one of many examples worldwide, the terrible persecution of the Jews in the Holocaust of World War II).

Last autumn, you wrote me about visiting the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. I have thought about this a lot. At some level, it is unfortunately

necessary to display such horror (so we do realize that it happened, and can really feel it.) On another level, it is a mistake. As you said in your letter, there is no presentation of why this happened—especially at the root causal level. Only horror and more horror—which I think will only terrify young people. Maybe people who put these museum displays together are so incredibly overwhelmed by the gruesome facts of it actually happening, that they are stunned and unable to see the possibility of a common universal root to all this outward horror. So they can't take the next step and display the why.

It seems the main attention-getter is the anti-Semitism. And this is true. Hitler and other insane despots have used the Jews as scapegoats for centuries. But it is not their problem alone, although by the way you have told me the Museum portrays it, one would think that it is only a Jewish problem. But this same scapegoating horror has gone on for thousands of years with different races or religions being the scapegoat. The Holocaust is humanity's problem, our problem, not only my problem, or my particular group's problem. It has generally been presented as a personal or particular group's problem. And what we get is an exorcising of the Jew's terribly oppressed fear and rage. Perhaps this is necessary, but it still doesn't lead to understanding why the problem-as-a-whole exists.

Perhaps the Jews and others feel that since the Holocaust was so great, so unbelievably horrible, that there can be no understanding of it—especially with what we are suggesting—that the root of it begins with the way we think, in the way thinking attempts to change behavior. There has been an endless array of “authorities” that have offered solutions to the Holocaust, and to wars generally. Most of them have written intellectual dissertations on historical or sociological levels. Or perhaps tried to analyze it from some particular psychological point of view. But nobody just looks at the problem itself. Just look at the source of it within the human brain—not as a psychologist or sociologist but just simply and directly at its source, without the intervention of any academic or intellectual discipline.

Could it be possible that the source of the terror of the Holocaust or any holocaust resides in the basic “mechanical” pattern the brain creates when it has been conditioned to think divisively, tribally? (For example, the African-Americans in your country have endured their own, divisive “holocaust.”) Once we're divided, we've lost our proper, supportive relationship to one another, so we target all the seemingly negative differences identified in other groups to ensure our own group's survival. Could it also be possible that the conflict created outwardly by divisive, tribal conditioned thinking gets compounded inwardly when we try to free ourselves of the internal conflict created by this conditioned thinking? If so, aren't we then compounding it by the very process the brain has been conditioned to resolve the conflict?

Instead, can we just simply see, be aware of, and observe this fact within the brain itself as it occurs—in each of us, each moment? For it is only in the freedom of the moment, and in the space given by that aware, opening moment, that freedom can happen. As we have seen by the mistaken notion of attaining the ideal (goodness) in the future, doesn't it make more sense to observe the present happening, and work with it, now? Perhaps what we think of as “morality”

is actually immoral. The “moral approach,” the conventional, religious process of becoming good, reinforces divisive, tribal, conditioned thinking. It also tries to free one from the conflict produced by such conditioned thinking through ironically imposing more ideals? Could the very process that we think will save us, bring us peace and produce well being, be the very process that is destroying us?

And there is the convoluted power game of politics that is also trying to free us, with all its many authorities with all their intended intimidations. All that power and authority is an illusion. It is all theater with its grand, self-righteous pomp and circumstance, its theatrical nonsense, its grandiose display of sentimentality. It is what you call “smoke and mirrors,” a slight-of-hand trick which keeps the average person mesmerized and bedazzled by the sheer magnitude of it.

Is it possible that under all the grand illusions, there is the potential for the average, intelligent human being to really understand the problem, and therefore to resolve it once and for all—without the imposition of any religious, political, or psychological authority? Only when one is free from these so-called authorities, can one understand the roots of human conflict (the Holocaust and all holocausts.) Some people would immediately think that anyone who even suggested this would have to be either mad or extraordinarily arrogant. But again, these are reactions based on more conditioned thinking, stemming from the fact that all the “great” authorities have tried to resolve the problem through their many idealistic ways of thinking and have failed so how can anyone who was not a great authority say he or she could possibly understand and be free of this immense problem?

The first mistake is that it has been approached as a “problem,” an intellectual dilemma. The intellects gather around to compare their approaches to other authorities. But this is only “Thinking” comparing itself to other “Thinking.” This is so different from real immediate observation for oneself. Perhaps people did look at it individually and wrote of it, but they created a domino effect of intellectual comparisons. (“So-and-so said such-and-such” and so on, and so on, ad infinitum.) The mistake is that “Thought” by itself, is only a process of accumulation: it adds to itself, which is necessary in the field of science or technology. But in understanding and being able to immediately change behavior, “Thinking” by itself cannot be conclusive—it is always comparing, adding to itself. It is only through observing the immediate fact that people can bring change in behavior—which is called insight or intelligence—not the intelligence merely associated with I.Q., but intelligence that is alive. Not the dead memory of some calcified information.

Thought that comes directly from observation and insight is “Thought” that is alive and vital, for it is aware of itself. Perhaps it would be clearer to ask, “Can thought be aware of itself? Does it know its own movement? Does it see how it creates conflict through being conditioned?” Then it is not mere intellectual speculation, or a comparison of what the authorities have said over the centuries. There is only one authority in all of this: self-awareness. If people have self-awareness, no authority imposes from the outside, no beliefs have to be followed, no causes have to be upheld, and no intellectual games have to be played. So is it possible to see for oneself if the root of conflict resides in the

brain in the way we've been conditioned to think—not “my” brain or “your” brain, but the human brain? I don't see that the content of conditioning makes any difference. We are so caught up in the content of our conditioning that we are not aware of the process of it. People who see through the content and understand the underlying structure or “process” can be seen as a threat to those who hold the content so dear, a threat to the established order.

The fact that humans are conditioned, and that we are acting out of conditioned thinking is the important realization. Then there is essentially no one to blame, no group, race, political government or religion to point our finger at in outrage. Removing the conditioning results in removing the blame. Then one can understand the holocaust of humankind at the root, at the primary level (not the secondary or tertiary levels) and stop it there before it projects itself to outward conflict, creating outward holocausts. It is much too late to resolve the conflict when it gets to the level of war. This tertiary level needs its own care, its own particular tending. But if we don't want this continuous revolving door of seemingly endless conflict, we must end it at the root, at the cause.

I wonder if someone will just put aside his or her prejudices for even one moment, just to look afresh. Put aside all the prejudices about others, about ourselves, about whether we can end conflict at the root or not—just suspend all prejudicing and see for ourselves if any of what we say is true or not. For it is prejudice, the conditioned prejudgments we have, that not only creates conflict, but also prevents our understanding of how we create that conflict. If I would attach one label to the situation, the word “prejudice” could be used to show how we create conflict and prevent peace.

But most people view prejudice only as not liking someone “different.” They advocate “tolerance” or “forgiveness” as a superficial salve, to assuage the wounds of the effects of prejudice. Tolerance is not the answer, for no one wants to be “tolerated.” To be tolerated means to be “put up with.” Forgiveness is only a temporary resolution, because it doesn't get to the root of the condition. Tolerance is a block to understanding, a way offered by the “authorities” to seemingly resolve the conflict produced by prejudiced thinking.

Rebecca, I am in no way trying to demean the Holocaust, one of the most recent and most publicized horror shows of man's inhumanity to man. But to dwell so morosely over it at the level it is presented doesn't really lead us to the next level. People need to understand it at a level that will prevent it from happening again. For it is still happening!

Historians have said that we would learn from the lessons of history. But we are still stuck in a vicious cycle of self-destructive thinking and action—conditioned by our divisive, tribal pasts and trying to resolve the conflict that has been created by more idealistically conditioned thinking. We are caught in a knot, like the Chinese finger puzzle, and the harder we try to extricate ourselves from the situation, the worse it gets. Why? Because we are using the same means that created the conflict in the first place. So how can we expect that to resolve the conflict?

It seems to me that whether one is a Jew, Catholic, Muslim, American, Russian, African-American, or whatever, we all have to understand that

identifying only with our fragmented, divisive belief system—whether racial, national, or religious—prevents peace! In order to think clearly, to open a questioning mind, to lift oneself out of the old brain's reactive patterns, one has to step out of that mainstream of conditioned thinking and no longer associate or identify with any group or established belief system. A Jew is no longer a Jew. An Arab is no longer an Arab. A Christian is no longer a Christian. Yes, we are raised in different cultures and certain cultural differences create a world of variety. But I am talking about identification that establishes belief systems, both psychological and biological (as you mentioned in the fight or flight, physically-triggered psychological threat situations.)

Do you remember in my first letter to you that I mentioned how the word "belief" means, "acting without sufficient evidence?" Holocausts are created from the way we think and therefore act. This is the root cause of it. So this is where we can stop it before it moves outwardly into society. One must stand alone as a true individual. Individual means undivided, whole, not fragmented. When one is truly alone (not lonely, but whole without any need for outside costumes of other identification), then there is peace, because one understands what prevented it, and is able to go beyond those preventative barriers.

But sadly, instead of understanding the cause of it, people cling even more tenaciously to their divisive, tribal belief systems, ignorantly thinking that they must believe even more strongly in their ways. Or they are indifferent, and just don't care about the world's state of affairs. We need to examine the "noose" that is choking them, the noose being the belief system they are clinging to, the divisive conditioned thinking that is causing the conflict. What a terrible irony!

I see the people here so full of hatred and fear. I read about what goes on in other parts of the world and I see the same thing. We are so full of fear and hate that it is all we can see. We are consumed with it, consumed with the self-righteous view that "we" are the victims, the "chosen ones," the heroes, the "freedom fighters" (a terrible juxtaposition of words)—and that "they" are the bullies, the defilers, the enemy, the terrorists. Some of us are so convinced that not even one ray of light can enter our fixed states of mind. People are so thoroughly confident that they are "right" and others, "wrong," that they will "kill or die" for their view. How does that show any respect for humanity?

So who will listen? Who is a little open to hearing something new? Who is still unprejudiced enough to look at all this? Perhaps only the young people. Older people seem too far-gone in their arrogant assumptions that things will never change. For isn't it really a form of arrogance to say that since the "great" authorities have never been able to resolve conflict, then it can never be? These people are actually saying that they know it can't, so how can you—especially if you are a "nobody." This is the worst kind of prejudice: the arrogant, stubborn, fixed view that things cannot really change, that conflict cannot be understood and ended (not just a partial conflict, but war itself).

Rebecca, you are so clear in your observations of prejudice. We must talk with others about this. I would like to publish our letters so others can read them. Not because we are important, but because an enquiry like this is. Please tell me what you think. Perhaps we can find a publisher in your country who is open

mindful and would do this? We must communicate to anyone we can about these issues. They provide real hope for change in our lifetime, not just the hope of desperate wishful thinking that sometime, perhaps, in the “hereafter” life will be better.

I miss you my friend. We will meet soon and, as you say, sit under the starlit heavens and discuss the condition of humankind. And, oh, yes, dear Rebecca—what incredible joy!

I leave you with a riddle to ponder—a simple key to peace and freedom.

What is it that
You cannot see if you look,
You cannot hear if you listen,
You cannot take hold of if you grasp,
Is silent when you speak,
Speaks when you are silent,
And you can only have when you don't want it?

Until we meet—My deepest affection for you,
Your devoted friend, Ahmed

**If Ignorance Can Bring About War,
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The most important element of a free society is democratic thinking. Conflict in human relationship is created by thinking that is conditioned to a particular fragmentary point of view due to the particular environment one has grown up in. Conditioned thinking prevents democratic thinking and action because it fixes antiquated ethnocentric beliefs into dogmatic, rigid patterns of behavior that divided people into opposing tribal ideologies. The foundation of a humane and intelligent society is open- minded, enlightened free inquiry, that is, the freedom to think without any restrictions or pressure due to fear or coercion of any kind. In this way people can intelligently question the underlying conditioning that creates this fragmentation.

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