NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

The three basic movements of the spiritual life

John Dear S.J. | Feb. 27, 2007 On the Road to Peace

The prophet Isaiah wrote long ago that the nations of the world must one day climb the mountain of God. There, on the mountaintop, God will instruct them in God's ways. They will learn what God wants them to do. Then, they will proceed back down the mountain, where they will immediately dismantle their weapons, share their resources with one another and live in peace one another and all creation (Isaiah 2:2-5).

With this great text, Isaiah teaches the three basic movements of the spiritual life: climbing the mountain of God; encountering the God of the mountain; and journeying back down the mountain on God's mission of disarmament and peace. In the first movement, the nations of the world climb the mountain of God. This pilgrimage is the spiritual journey of humanity. All nations, cultures, races and religions are called to search diligently for God. That search is like an arduous mountain climb. It takes preparation, discipline, effort, and determination. It is painful and requires faith and hope. We have not come close to realizing, much less beginning, this conscious global search. Yet as Isaiah foretells, one day the nations of the world, including the people of the United States, will realize that there is no meaning or happiness in money, power, consumerism, fame, revenge, presidents, the Pentagon, Wall Street, Hollywood or war. All nations will undertake the spiritual journey toward a Higher Power.

The second movement of the spiritual life is our encounter with the God of the mountain. According to Isaiah, when each one of us individually and the nations of the world collectively encounter God on the mountain, God will speak and we will listen.

Once we arrive on the mountaintop of God, our job is to listen attentively. This is the definition of prayer. Prayer is not so much talking at God, talking to God, complaining to God, yelling at God, or even praising God. Rather, prayer is a falling in silence at the feet of God and listening deliberately, consciously, attentively to God. It is not just letting God get a word in edgewise. It is allowing God to say whatever it is God wants to say to us. It is listening for God, taking God's word seriously, and deciding that no matter what we may think, we are going to obey what God says.

According to Isaiah, as well as Jesus, the prophets and the saints, God has a definite message for us. God wants to speak to us. God wants to tell humanity what God thinks. God wants us to disarm, practice nonviolence and live in peace. Specifically, the text says that God will instruct the nations of the world in God's ways. The nations will learn on the mountaintop that God is a God of nonviolence, that God does not approve of killing, that God does not bless war, that God does not justify warfare, that God does not support retaliatory violence, that God considers our nuclear weapons as idolatry, that God condemns our nuclear arsenal, that God sees war as sinful, that God turns away from our violence, that God despises our imperial domination, that God wants

universal peace, and that God wants all people everywhere to live according to the wisdom of nonviolence.

Quite simply, when the nations of the world reach the mountaintop summit, God will command them never to kill or wage war ever again. Instead the nations of the world will be told to live in peace with one another, with all peoples everywhere and with the earth itself. This radical commandment will shock the nations because they define themselves by their power to massacre other people legally.

"From Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of God from Jerusalem," we are told. "God shall judge between the nations, and impose terms on many peoples." God will instruct us, give us God's word, judge us, and impose terms on us. God will take action. God is in charge. God will be revealed as Teacher, Master, Ruler, Instructor, Commander, and Emperor. God will tell us what to do and from now on, we will do it, individually, collectively, nationally, and internationally.

The third movement of the spiritual life is the journey down the mountain to dismantle our arsenals, create social justice, and promise never to hurt or kill one another or wage war ever again. After we climb the mountain of God and hear God's message of nonviolence, all nations will immediately undertake one specific political, social and economic task: complete, universal disarmament. After meeting God, the nations of the world will pledge never to wage war again. They will beat their swords into plowshares, stop building weapons, and convert every existing weapon of death into an instrument of life. Spears used for killing people will be turned into pruning hooks that can be used to feed people. Instead of hurting and murdering others, these implements will help grow fruits and vegetables so that everyone everywhere will have enough to eat. Instead of raising the sword against another, threatening one another with war, bullets, chemical weapons, bombs, napalm, depleted uranium or nuclear weapons, Isaiah says "they will refuse to train for war again." Once the nations of the world meet the God of the mountain, they will stop studying, funding, building and preparing for warfare and start acting like sons and daughters of God. They will know that God is a God of peace, and become people of peace.

Once we meet God and listen to what God has to say to us, our entire way of living, thinking and being will change, not just individually but communally, nationally and internationally. We will understand that we are all children of God, that every human being is equal, that no one is above another, that every nation is meant to serve every other nation, that the human race is called to reflect the love and peace of God. We will immediately set ourselves to the task of disarmament. According to Isaiah, all nations will commit themselves to nonviolence and agree to the terms of nonviolence outlined by God on the mountaintop. They will end every war, feed every starving child and create nonviolent methods to resolve conflict. The root causes of war, including hunger, poverty, disease, homelessness, unemployment, illiteracy, and greed, will by eliminated. Everyone will be guaranteed sufficient food, housing, healthcare, education, employment, dignity, and the fullness of life. All nations will embrace human diversity and variety with an all-inclusive love because from now on, they will imitate the God they have met on the mountain.

Isaiah tells us that whenever we meet God, we are disarmed. If we encounter God, we will immediately stop our violence and start practicing nonviolence. If we listen to God, we will know that God loves peace and justice and we will work to create peace and justice everywhere. The atrocious lack of peace and justice in our world today, the widespread acceptance of war and injustice, the huge arsenals of weapons around the planet testify that we have not met God, that we have refused to listen to God, that we do not understand the nature of God and that we disobey God's commandments.

The shocking revelation of Isaiah's testimony is that the God we expect to meet on the mountain -- a God of violence, vengeance and wrath -- is not the living God we encounter on the mountain. To our surprise, we meet a God who is not like us at all. Atop the holy mountain, we come face to face with the God of peace, love, compassion and nonviolence. We experience the goodness and loving-kindness of God and worship the God of peace. Because we feel infinitely loved by this compassionate God, we eagerly listen to God's instructions on how to live in the world below. Once we experience the nonviolence of God, we realize that our primary task in life is to become people of nonviolence. Without wasting a second, we immediately embark on the mission God has given us, the social, political, economic, spiritual and revolutionary transformation of the world into a new realm of perfect peace and unconditional love.

When the nations of the world meet the living God and realize that nonviolence is God's way, they will agree to be nonviolent with one another. It is this radical spiritual encounter with a God we do not recognize that leads us to dismantle our weapons, make justice for the poor, reconcile with enemies, and never wage war again.

If the so-called people of faith in the United States worshiped the God of Isaiah, the God of the mountain, the God of peace, we would not support war or wage war in our names, no matter how noble or compelling the cause. We would not pay taxes to support an immoral military budget. We would not occupy and kill people, including children, in Iraq or Afghanistan. We would not maintain thousands of nuclear weapons, militarize outer space or destroy the environment. We would not allow anyone to starve or suffer in misery. If we believed in the God of nonviolence, we would dismantle every nuclear weapon, make restitution to those who suffer in poverty, close down every U.S. military base and U.S. terrorist training school, abolish the death penalty, feed every starving child and refugee, clean up the earth, and create nonviolent international peacemaking teams to solve conflict.

Because we do not believe in the God of peace and nonviolence, because we do not climb the mountain of God, because we have not listened to God's instructions, we do not do the works of peace. We do not practice nonviolence because we do not believe in the God of nonviolence. We do not live in peace because we do not worship the God of peace. We think incorrectly that God supports violence, vengeance, retribution, and war, that God must be just like us, that God is mean and deadly. We think that because we are violent and warlike, God must be too. But we have never met the God of the mountain. Our faith, hope and trust is not placed in the living God of peace, but in the false gods of weapons, the idols of death which we have manufactured to kill our enemies and maintain our unjust global hegemony.

If we dare follow Isaiah's vision, and make that journey up and down the mountain of God, one day we will learn to live in peace with one another and discover the meaning of life.

This is the last offering of three chapters from John Dear's new book, *Transfiguration* (featuring a foreword by Archbishop Tutu), published this week by Doubleday It can be ordered at **www.amazon.com [1]** or your local bookstore.
John is currently on a month long national speaking tour of Australia. For information, see **www.johndear.org[2]**

Source URL (retrieved on *12/13/2013 - 11:29*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/road-peace/three-basic-movements-spiritual-life

Links:

[1] http://www.amazon.com
[2] http://www.johndear.org