

PERSPECTIVE: 'I Cried Today'

By DIXON HAMBY

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I cried today. It may not seem like a big deal to you, but crying comes to me about as often as we elect a president.

I started out with my normal weekend routine. Up early. Gongyo. A morning run. It's spring and I could hear the red-winged blackbirds singing as I passed by the wetlands. Then cereal and the newspaper. First, the important stuff. The sports section. Had to read about the Mariners' win. Then the technology section. How much more of the world does Microsoft own?

Next, the front page. I glanced down and there it was, that picture again. You've all seen it. The naked, running Vietnamese girl. Beneath it Associated Press writer Anne Gearan writes: "Phan Thi Kim Phuc's family had taken refuge in a pagoda, which took a direct hit. Two brothers died instantly. The napalm burned her clothes, and she ran screaming...."

Then the article. It tells of John Plummer who ordered the bombing of Tang Bang. Another rain of fire on another faceless village. This was the 24-year-old's job. But the next morning he saw the picture. He told Gearan: "It just knocked me to my knees.... And that was when I knew I could never talk about this." John Plummer had been assured there were no civilians in the village.

John went through three marriages and two divorces. Drank too much and tried to forget. Then one day he quit his job with a defense contractor and became a minister. But there was no avoiding the photo. What John needed was to be forgiven. Well, he got that when he finally met Kim and fell into her arms sobbing. And she told him: "It's all right. I forgive. I forgive."

I was a young man in 1965 when I received my draft notice and joined the Air Force. Friends died. Friends killed and parts of them died. As a Vietnam veteran friend of mine told me, after a year of killing, nothing was ever the same.

The piece of paper said Sgt. Hamby report to Da Nang Air Force Base, Vietnam. I had felt enough of war and refused. I went home instead. But I still have blood on my hands and have felt guilt over abandoning those who went.

"Nothing is more barbarous than war. Nothing is more cruel" (*The Human Revolution*, vol. 1, p. 9). And as Michael Meade writes in *Men and the Water of Life*: "Living at the end of the 20th century is like walking through a great weeping.... All the hopelessness felt about the loss of forests and animal species.... The anguish over lives wasted and shot down on city streets.... The losses that pile up as statistics in news reports about this or that atrocity cannot be carried without the heart turning to stone."

I wish I could cry more, then maybe I wouldn't be so angry. In gongyo we recite: "*Jo e hikan. Shin zui shogo.*" ("Constantly harboring such feelings of grief, they at last came to their senses....") Mr. Meade writes, "If the head won't bend, the heart won't open, and grief held too long can make a stone of the heart."

Malidoma Some, an African tribesman, once said he was amazed at the amount of grief American men hold. You see, his culture has rituals for grief. It's encouraged. And when men returned from war they went through a cleansing ritual. They knew better than to bring that killing energy back into the village.

Michael Meade observes: "If a man is overwrought with burning heat and inner rage, deep weeping joins him to the sorrow of the world and diminishes that rage. It calms an excess of aggression and cools the heart.... When tears are shared, the stones that might have been thrown at each other become part of the cairns of grief instead." I have seen that

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when men of different races and cultures see others cry, there is a change in their hearts. The sharing of grief is more powerful than any argument, logic or gun.

My experience is that when you see another man reveal the depth of his grief, you see him and all men differently and recognize the heavy burden that mistrust and hatred creates in your heart.

Fortunately I have the tools to stop repeating my mistakes, gongyo and the Gohonzon; and an organization, the SGI, that is creating a society that no longer sanctifies war. And most important, a master in life. SGI President Ikeda said in February 1990, "Once we awaken to our Buddha nature, we need not be grieved any longer." So let's not be afraid of our tears, for they are the opening of our lives and the pathway to touch others.

There is a proverb: "The elders are wise because they know more dead people." Because of war my generation knows too many dead people, so I say to the young: Never go to war. Never kill. Never let those with political power, talk of the "other" or the false security of a gun lead you astray. Stop. Talk to an elder. Beneath that false pride and anger you will find grief, the opening to your heart.

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