

The Moral Imagination

The Art and Soul of Building Peace

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On Touching the Moral Imagination

Four Stories

A Story from Ghana: "I Call You Father Because Do Not Wish to Disrespect You"

During the 1990s, northern Ghana faced the rising escalation of ethnic conflict mixed with the ever-present tense undertones of Muslim-Christian relationships. In the broader West African region, Liberia had collapsed into chaotic, violent internal warfare, spilling refugees into neighboring countries. The chaos seemed simultaneously endemic and contagious. Within a short period of time, Sierra Leone descended into cycles of bloodletting and cruelty that were unprecedented for the subregion. Nigeria, the largest and most powerful regional country, walked a fine line that barely seemed to avoid the wildfires of full-blown civil war. In such a context, the rise of intercommunal violence, and even sporadic massacres had all the signs of a parallel disaster in the northern communities of Ghana.

These were not historically isolated cycles of violence. The roots of the conflicts between several of the groups, particularly the Konkombas and Dagombas, could be easily traced back into the era of slavery.¹ The Dagombas, a group with a sustained and powerful tradition of chieftaincy, have a social and leadership structure that loaned itself to negotiation with European slave traders. They were the most powerful and dominant group in the north of the country; their allies to the south were the people of the equally strong Ashanti Empire. *Chieftly groups* retained royalty, culminating in the paramount chief, whereas groups in Ghana referred to as *nonchieftly* no longer had or were not accorded a chieftly political structure.

The Konkombas, on the other hand, were more dispersed. Principally agriculturalists, "yam growers," as they at times were denigrated and stereotyped the Konkombas did not organize around the same social and royal features. They were a nonchiefly tribe, not necessarily by their choice. High chieftaincy in this part of the world brought benefits and a comparative sense of importance that translated into superiority. For example, the chiefly groups gained advantage from collaboration with the slave trade; the nonchiefly were fated to live the great travesty of dehumanization and exploitation incarnated in this trafficking of men, women, and children. Following the period of the slave trade, the chiefly groups again benefited during the period of colonization. They received recognition and their traditional power and sense of superiority were further ingrained. The seeds of division sown during the period of slavery flourished in the period of colonial rule.

In subsequent centuries their conflicts were played out over control of land and resources. The arrival of religiously based missionary movements added more layers of division to their relationships. While some groups remained animists, the Konkombas followed Christianity, and most Dagombas, including the powerful royal houses and paramount chieftaincy, became Muslim. One unexpected result was that the Christian missions, with their emphasis on education, provided schools that gave access and entry to rising social status for the Konkombas. This would eventually have an impact on the communities and politics.

As Ghana gained independence, the country moved toward democracy based on elections. Politicians with aspirations for votes understood the existing divisions and fears and often exacerbated them in order to get the support of their respective communities during election campaigns. Electoral periods became regular cycles of repeated and ever-greater violence. Even little events, like a dispute between two people in a market over a purchase, could spark an escalation into violence, as was the case with the Guinea Fowl War.

In 1995 the cycle threatened to explode again. A dispute over land claimed by both groups in a small town in the north suddenly exploded into overt violence during the electoral campaign. The killing sprees spread rapidly, spilled well beyond the locale of the original dispute, and threatened the stability of the whole northern region. The images of recent chaotic collapse in Sierra Leone and Liberia were fresh in the minds of many people. This cycle of intercommunal violence in Ghana appeared on the verge of creating yet another destructive full-blown civil war. In response, a consortium of nongovernmental organizations working in the northern region of Ghana began to push for a peacebuilding effort. A small team of African mediators, led initially by Hizkias Assefa and Emmanuel Bombande, began the process of creating space for dialogue between the representatives of the two ethnic groups. Eventually this process would find a way to avoid the escalation of violence to civil war and would even create an infrastructure for dealing with the common

recurrence of crises that in the past had translated into deadly fighting. But it was not a smooth road.

In one of their early encounters those involved in the mediation observed a story that created a transformation in the process and in the relationship between these two groups and therefore changed the fundamental direction of the conflict. In the first face-to-face meeting of the two groups, the Dagomba paramount chief arrived in full regalia and with his entourage. There were designated persons who carried his staff and sat at his feet. In the opening moments of the meeting he assumed a sharp attitude of superiority. Taking the role of the paramount, he wasted no time in denigrating and verbally attacking the Konkombas. Given the traditions and rights afforded the highest chiefs, little could be done except to let the chief speak.

"Look at them," he said, addressing himself more to the mediators than to the Konkombas. "Who are they even that I should be in this room with them? They do not even have a chief. Who am I to talk to? They are a people with nothing who have just come from the fields and now attack us in our own villages. They could have at least brought an old man. But look! They are just boys born yesterday."

The atmosphere was devastating. Making matters worse, the mediators felt in a very difficult bind. Culturally, when facing a chief, there was nothing they could do to control the process. You simply cannot tell a chief to watch his mouth or follow ground rules, particularly in the presence of his entourage and his enemies. It appeared as if the whole endeavor may have been misconceived and was reaching a breaking point.

The Konkomba spokesman asked to respond. Fearing the worst, the mediators provided him space to speak. The young man turned and addressed himself to the chief of the enemy tribe:

You are perfectly right, Father, we do not have a chief. We have not had one for years. You will not even recognize the man we have chosen to be our chief. And this has been our problem. The reason we react, the reason our people go on rampages and fights resulting in all these killings and destruction arises from this fact. We do not have what you have. It really is not about the town, or the land, or that market guinea fowl. I beg you, listen to my words, Father. I am calling you Father because we do not wish to disrespect you. You are a great chief. But what is left to us? Do we have no other means but this violence to receive in return the one thing we seek, to be respected and to establish our own chief who could indeed speak with you, rather than having a young boy do it on our behalf?

The attitude, tone of voice, and use of the word *Father* spoken by the young Konkomba man apparently so affected the chief that he sat for a moment

without response. When finally he spoke, he did so with a changed voice, addressing himself directly to the young man rather than to the mediators:

I had come to put your people in your place. But now I feel only shame. Though I insulted your people, you still called me Father. It is you who speaks with wisdom, and me who has not seen the truth. What you have said is true. We who are chiefly have always looked down on you because you have no chief, but we have not understood the denigration you suffered. I beg you, my son, to forgive me.

At this point the younger Konkomba man stood, walked to the chief, then knelt and gripped his lower leg, a sign of deep respect. He vocalized a single and audible "Na-a," a word of affirmation and acceptance.

Those attending the session reported that the room was electrified, charged with high feeling and emotion. It was by no means the end of the problems or disagreements, but something happened in that moment that created an impact on everything that followed. The possibility of change away from century-long cycles of violence began and perhaps the seeds that avoided what could have been a full-blown Ghanaian civil war were planted in that moment.

This possibility of change continues. In March 2002, the king of the Dagombas, Ya Na Yakubu Andani II, was killed in an internal feud between the two clans of the Dagombas, the Abudu and Andani families. As long-time adversaries of the Dagombas, the Konkombas could have been expected to take advantage of the internal strife among the Dagombas. On the contrary, they met at a grand Durban of all their youths and elders and issued an official declaration on Ghana television. First they expressed solidarity with the Dagombas in the time of their grief and loss. Then they pleaded with the Dagombas to work together in finding a long-term solution to their internal chieftaincy dispute. They declared that Konkombas would not allow any of their tribesmen to undermine the Dagombas because of the internal difficulty they were experiencing. They concluded by suggesting that Konkombas who took advantage of the internal strife within the Dagombas to create a situation that may lead to violence would be isolated and handed over to the police.

A Story from Wajir: How a Few Women Stopped a War

The women of Wajir did not set out to stop a war.² They just wanted to make sure they could get food for their families. The initial idea was simple enough: Make sure that the market is safe for anyone to buy and sell.

Wajir district is located in the northeastern part of Kenya, near the Somali and Ethiopian borders. The district is made up mostly of Somali clans. Like those in other parts of the Horn of Africa, the people of Wajir have suffered

the impact of numerous internal wars in neighboring Somalia and Ethiopia. With the collapse of the Somali government in 1989, increased fighting inside the country created countless refugees, who spilled over the border into Kenya. Wajir soon found itself caught up in interclan fighting, with a flow of weapons, fighting groups, and refugees who made life increasingly difficult. By 1992 the Kenya government declared Wajir to be in a state of emergency.

The 1990s were not the first time Wajir had experienced clan-based war, but it soon became one of the worst cycles of violence. Dekha, one of the key women leaders in Wajir, recalls that one night in mid-1993 shooting erupted once again near her house. She ran for her first-born child and hid for several hours under the bed while bullets crisscrossed her room. In the morning, discussing the events of the night before, her mother recalled days in 1966 when Dekha was a child and her mother held her under the bed. They were reflecting that morning and feeling sad that the violence had not come to an end. As mothers, they were tired of the violence. Dekha was so affected by her mother's statement that she determined to find a way to make Wajir a place where her daughter would enjoy a violence-free life. She found other women with similar stories. Fatuma tells how at a wedding the women worried about how they would get home and had to leave early. They lamented the rising violence, the thievery along the highways, the guns that were everywhere carried by their young boys, and the fear of abuse and rape with which young girls lived even in their home villages.

So the women quietly gathered, fewer than a dozen of them at first. "We just wanted to put our heads together," they said, "to see what we knew and could do. We decided the place to start was the market." They agreed on a basic idea. The market should be safe for any woman of any clan background to come, to sell, and to buy. Women were looking out for their children. Access and safety to the market was an immediate right that had to be assured. Since women mostly ran the market, they spread the word. They established monitors who would watch every day what was happening at the market. They would report any infractions, any abuse of someone because of her clan or geographic origin. Whenever issues emerged, a small committee of women would move quickly to resolve them. Within a short period of time, the women had created a zone of peace in the market. Their meetings and initiatives resulted in the creation of the Wajir Women's Association for Peace.

While they were working hard on the market, they soon discovered that the broader fighting still affected their lives. Sitting again, they decided to pursue direct conversations with the elders of all of the clans. Though they had access to their elders, this was not an easy thing to do. "Who are women to advise and push us?" was the response they feared they might get. So they sat and thought through their understanding of the elder system, the actual key elders, and the makeup of the Somali clans in Wajir. Using their personal connections within their own groups, they worked with concerned men and

succeeded in bringing together a meeting of the elders of all the groups. They aligned themselves carefully to not push or take over the meetings. Instead they found one of the elderly men, quite respected, but who came from the smallest and therefore the least threatening of the local clans. In the meeting he became their spokesperson, talking directly to the other elders and appealing to their responsibility. "Why, really," he asked, "are we fighting? Who benefits from this? Our families are being destroyed." His words provoked long discussions. The elders, even some of those who had been promoting revenge killings, agreed to face the issues and stop the fighting. They formed the Council of Elders for Peace, which included a regular meeting group and subcommissions. They began the process of engaging the fighters in the bush and dealing with clan clashes.

The women, recognizing that this effort could be very important for Wajir, decided to take up contact with government officials from the district and eventually the national representatives in Parliament. Accompanied by some elders, they transparently described their initiative and process. They agreed to keep the officials informed and invited them to various meetings, but they asked that in return the officials not disrupt the process that was in motion. They received the blessing of the government.

Soon the question became how to engage the youth, particularly the young men who were hidden and fighting in the bush. The women and elders met with key youth in the district and formed what became known as the Youth for Peace. Together they not only went to the bush and met with fighters, they began to travel the district, giving public talks to mothers and youth. They soon discovered that a key concern was employment. Guns, fighting, and rustling had significant economic benefit. If the youth were to leave the fighting, their guns, and the bush, they would need something to occupy their time and provide income. The business community was then engaged. Initiatives for rebuilding and local jobs were offered. Together, the women from the market, the elders commissions, the Youth for Peace, the businesspeople, and local religious leaders formed the Wajir Peace and Development Committee.

Through the work of the elders, ceasefires came into place. Commissions were created to verify and help the process of disarming the clan-based factions. A process of turning over guns to local authorities was coordinated with these commissions and the district police. Emergency response teams were formed made up of elders from different clans who would travel on a moment's notice to deal with renewed fighting, rustling, or thievery.

Solidifying the rising peace, the Wajir Peace and Development Committee brought together all of the groups and held regular meetings with district and national leaders. They could not control the continued fighting in neighboring Somalia nor the influx of problems that came from outside their borders, but increasingly they found ways to protect their villages and stop the local fighting before it spiraled out of control. Key to their success was the ability to take

quick action and stop the potential moments of escalation by directly engaging the people involved. Former fighters now disarmed and, back in the community, became allies of the movement. They helped to constructively engage other fighting groups, increasing the process of disarmament. When crimes were committed, their own group brought those responsible forward, and restitution was sought rather than blind protection and cycles of revenge.

Ten years later, Wajir district still faces serious problems, and the Wajir Peace and Development Committee still actively works for peace and has continued to expand. New programs include police training and work in local schools. More than twenty schools are participating and have formed the Peace Education Network, which involves peer mediation and teacher training in conflict resolution.

Poverty and unemployment remain significant challenges in Wajir. Guns still cross borders in this region. Fighting has not stopped in Somalia, and it spills into Wajir. Religious issues and the global implications emerging since September 11, 2001, with the presence of U.S. marines and the antiterrorism campaigns, have become new issues. But those involved in the Wajir Peace and Development Committee continue their strong work. The elders meet on a regular basis. There is greater cooperation among the local villages, clans, and the district officials.

And the women who stopped a war monitor a now much safer market.

A Story from Colombia: We Have Decided to Think for Ourselves

Josué, Manuel, Hector, Llanero, Simón, Oswaldo, Rosita, Excelino, Juan Roy, Miguel Angel, Sylvia, and Alejandro shared several things that forever bound them together.¹ They lived along the Carare River in an area called La India, in the jungles of Magdalena Medio in the country of Colombia. They were *campesinos*, peasants. They considered themselves ordinary folk. And they faced an extraordinary challenge: how to survive the wicked violence of numerous armed groups that traversed their lands and demanded their allegiance.

The Rio Carare is located in the heart of Magdalena Medio. It is a territory that brings together a stream of influence and people. Water flows through this thick jungle territory, and it brought *campesinos* in search of land from other parts of Colombia around the middle of the twentieth century. They came seeking refuge from the more conflicted zones of Colombia in the middle of the fifty-year-old war, the longest in the Western Hemisphere. It was at best a frontier territory with many natural dangers, a lack of any basic civil protections or law, and requiring hard work. Petroleum was discovered and now flows in this region and out to the Atlantic coast for delivery to the international com-

munity. So does the river of drug traffickers. And, of course, as is the case in many rural parts of Colombia, the river of armed groups and guns flows too.

By the late 1960s the leftist-oriented guerrilla movement FARC (Armed Revolutionary Front of Colombia) entered the territories of Carare. Military response from the national government followed and escalated. Unable to affect or eliminate the influence of the guerrilla movements in the region, landowners privately financed and secretly arranged, often in conjunction with the military, the "paras," armed groups of vigilantes from the Right, which soon gained a greater independence. Battles took place not just for the land where the early *campesinos* had made their homes and against informal war taxes but for their very allegiance. Whoever controlled the particular territory at the time controlled the laws: Whoever robs will be killed; anyone who kills someone will be killed; whoever informs anyone of our presence will be killed. As one statement put it: "[N]o one is obligated to follow our code; you always have the right to leave the territory." The law of silence prevailed: "It is prohibited to talk about the death of any friend or family member, about those who killed them or the reasons why they were killed. If you open your mouth, the rest of your family will be killed." Such were the realities faced by Josué, Hector, Manuel, and the other *campesinos* of the region.

In 1987 the situation reached its nadir. Increased fighting and larger scale massacres began to take over. In response to the guerrillas, a notoriously violent captain of the Colombian army convened more than 2,000 peasants from La India and offered them forgiveness in the form of an amnesty if they would accept his weapons and join the ranks of local militia to fight against the guerrillas. In the eyes of the captain, many of these peasants were guilty of supporting the guerrillas—if not directly participating. So the offer of forgiveness was considered an ultimatum about choosing sides in the conflict. He concluded with what he called the four choices before the *campesinos*: "You can arm yourselves and join us, you can join the guerrillas, you can leave your homes, or you can die."

The crowd was stunned. In the midst of the silence, a middle-aged *campesino*, Josué, spoke from the crowd and from his heart. His speech that day was so memorable that up until today you will find peasants in La India who can recite his response to the captain word for word even though they were not there. Garcia (1996), who did a study of this movement, offered this version of Josué's speech that day. Responding to the captain in the open meeting, he said:

You speak of forgiveness, but what do you have to forgive us? You are the ones who have violated. We have killed no one. You want to give us millions in weapons paid for by the state, yet you will not facilitate even the minimum credit for our farming needs. There are millions for war but nothing for peace. How many men in arms are

there in Colombia? By rough calculation I would say at least 100,000, plus the police, plus 20,000 guerrillas, not to mention the Paras, the drug lords and private armies. And what has all this served? What has it fixed? Nothing. In fact Colombia is in the worst violence ever. We have arrived at the conclusion that weapons have not solved a thing and that there is not one reason to arm ourselves. We need farm credits, tools, tractors, trucks to make this little agricultural effort we try [to] make produce better. You as members of the National Army, instead of inciting us to kill each other should do your job according to the national constitution, that is, you should defend the Colombian people. Look at all these people you brought here. We all know each other. And who are you? We know that some years ago you yourself were with [the] guerrilla[s] and now you are the head of the paramilitaries. You brought people into our houses to accuse us, you lied, and you switched sides. And now you, a side switcher, you want us to follow your violent example. Captain, with all due respect, we do not plan to join your side, their side or any side. And we are not leaving this place. We are going to find our own solution. (Garcia, 1996:189).

Later that week a group of twenty *campesino* leaders decided to play the ultimate card: They would pursue civilian resistance without weapons. As one of them put it, "We decided that day to speak for ourselves." In the weeks and months that followed they organized one of the most unique and spontaneous processes of transformation Colombia had seen in fifty years.

They formed the Association of Peasant Workers of Carare (ATCC). Their first act was to break the code of silence. They developed ways of organizing and participating. Participation was open to anyone. The quota for entry was a simple commitment: Your life, not your money. This was expressed in the phrase "We shall die before we kill." They developed a series of key principles to guide their every action:

1. Faced with individualization: solidarity.
2. Faced with the Law of Silence and Secrecy: Do everything publicly. Speak loud and never hide anything.
3. Faced with fear: Sincerity and disposition to dialogue. We shall understand those who do not understand us.
4. Faced with Violence: Talk and negotiate with everyone. We do not have enemies.
5. Faced with exclusion: Find support in others. Individually we are weak, but together we are strong.
6. Faced with the need for a strategy: Transparency. We will tell every armed group exactly what we have talked about with other armed groups. And we will tell it all to the community. (Garcia, 1996:200).

And these were not just ideas. The *campesinos* created a living laboratory of immediate impact and great risk. They solidified their group by finding a core they called the "key folks," who were uniquely placed as individuals to link them with different geographic parts of La India and with the various groups. Within weeks after consultation with local villages they posted hand-made signs with the title "What the People from Here Say," which included a declaration that no weapons would be allowed in their villages. They spontaneously declared their lands to be a territory of peace.

Delegations were sent to meet with the armed groups. Never conducted by a single individual and always public, each meeting with each different armed group required careful preparation and choice of who would speak. But the message remained the same: respect for the territory of peace and the *campesinos*. They approached each meeting seeking the connection with the person not the institution. The key, as several people reported it, was that they had to find a way to meet the human being, the real person. Informal and in some instances formal agreements and arrangements were reached. The association held to its promise of never giving in to weapons and never giving up on dialogue. In the public debriefing of any meeting, everyone was welcome, friend and foe alike. The doors were never shut. Transparency was carried to its fullest extent.

During the next years violence was greatly reduced, though Magdalena Medio remained and is yet today a hotbed of armed conflict. In 1990 the association won the Alternative Nobel Peace Prize for its innovative work. In 1992 the United Nations recognized the movement with the We Are the People Award. Nonetheless, the local campaign for respect and dignity came with its price. Josué and several other leaders were assassinated by unknown and yet undetermined *sicarios* (hired guns). Survivors believe the murders were due to local politicians, not the armed groups. Their legacy, however, lives on. Today in Colombia many speak of the potential of local groups to develop and build a capacity for civilian resistance as the key to building a permanent peace. As Alejandro Garcia, the history professor who extensively interviewed many of the early and subsequent participants in the association, aptly wrote: "Born in the nucleus of violence, the ATCC introduced into the logic of war a sense of uncertainty: it broke the conventional cycle of spiraling violence and developed through lived demonstration the basic idea that solutions without violence were possible" (Garcia, 1996:313).

A Story from Tajikistan: Talking Philosophy with the Warlord

The following information is based on notes from a trainer's journal, February, 2002.

We are seated in a seminar room in Dushanbe with twenty-four professors from seven universities across Tajikistan. Two small electric heaters, their coils burning bright red, keep the late February cold at bay inside the Republican Healthy Lifestyle Centre. We have the appointed cream of the crop. One or two are deans and a few others are heads of their respective disciplinary departments. From the perspective of the organizers we count ourselves lucky to have five women and a strong showing of younger scholars, though seated each day in the corner, occasionally drifting in and out of late afternoon naps, is the kind and always enthusiastic seventy-year-old head of the Department of Scientific Communism, now re-titled Political Science.

The Intertajik War lies nearly six years in their past. Our seminar on conflict resolution and peacebuilding probes into the challenges and difficulties of responding to violence and building a nation in this newly independent Central Asian country. Following the events of September 11, 2001, the schedule for our three-year initiative, aimed at helping to build the civil society, was set back a few months, as the Tajik-Afghan border and the space above this mountainous region witnessed the anti-Taliban war effort unfold. Our subject matter now seems doubly interesting and urgent.

Our Tajik University colleagues completed their higher education through the Soviet system. Most have doctoral degrees. Travel, when it happened for academic reasons, was to Russia or Eastern Europe. Of the twenty-four, four speak English with any proficiency. Our English-Tajik translation is painstakingly slow. Some would prefer Russian. Under the encouragement and guidance of the minister of education we will produce a Tajik-language text that compiles approaches to peacebuilding from different parts of the world coupled with original Tajik research on conflict and peace in this setting.

The professors become considerably more animated when the topic of the Tajikistan civil war emerges. They have a variety of opinions about what difficulties were experienced and what made the achievement of a negotiated peace possible under the guidance of a UN mandate. One participant asks my co-trainer, Randa Slim, and me, the only two non-Tajiks in the room, why so few in the international community have given careful consideration to what the Tajiks achieved in ending the war. They may well have a point. Tajikistan, as journalist Ahmed Rashid convincingly argues, is the only country in the region or the world for that matter, to have ended a brutal civil war with the "creation of a coalition government that included Islamicists, neo-communists, and clan leaders." He goes on to note: "Islamicists lost elections, but they were *represented* in the elections, and they accepted their loss" (Rashid, 2002:241). The professors want a straight answer: Why don't people pay attention to what we have learned? Neither of us has a good answer.

During that afternoon's chai break, I have tea with the only professor in our group who knows some of the inner details of how the Tajiks negotiated

while war raged and how they brought the Islamic movements into negotiation rather than isolating or trying to defeat them. He draws me to a corner with a translator to tell me the story.

"I was tasked by the government to approach and convince one of [the] warlords, a key Mullah-Commander located in the mountains, to enter negotiations," Professor Abdul begins. "This was difficult if not impossible, because this commander was considered a notorious criminal and he had killed one of my close friends." He stops while the translation conveys the personal side of this challenge.

When I first got to the encampment, the commander said I had arrived late and it was time for prayers. So we went together and prayed. When we had finished, he said to me, "How can a communist pray?"

"I am not a communist: my father was," I responded.

Then he asked what I taught in the university. We soon discovered we were both interested in philosophy and Sufism. Our meeting went from an agreed twenty minutes to two and a half hours. In this part of the world you have to circle into truth through stories.

In the hallway Abdul's gold-capped teeth sparkled with a smile as he finished his idea: "You see in Sufism there is an idea that discussion has no end."

His point well conveyed, the professor picked up the story again:

I kept going to visit him. We mostly talked poetry and philosophy. Little by little I asked him about ending the war. I wanted to persuade him to take the chance on putting down his weapons. After months of visits we finally had enough trust to speak truths and it all boiled down to one concern.

Abdul stopped and leaned over, taking the voice of the warlord. "The commander said to me, 'If I put down my weapons and go to Dushanbe with you, can you guarantee my safety and life?' " The Tajik storyteller paused with the full sense of the moment. "My difficulty was that I could not guarantee his safety."

Abdul waited for the translator to finish, making sure that I understood the weight of his peacemaking dilemma, and then concluded: "So I told my philosopher warlord friend the truth, 'I cannot guarantee your safety.' "

In the hallway Professor Abdul swung his arm under mine and came to stand fully by my side to emphasize the answer he then gave the commander: "But I can guarantee this. I will go with you, side by side. And if you die, I will die."

The hallway was totally quiet.

"That day the commander agreed to meet the government. Some weeks later we came down together from the mountains. When he first met with the

government commission he told them, 'I have not come because of your government. I have come for honor and respect of this professor.' "

The professor stopped. "You see, my young American friend," he tapped my arm lightly, "this is Tajik mediation."

We finished our chai and moved back to the classroom discussions on the theory of conflict and peacebuilding.

Years have passed since the end of the war. The weapons have been laid down. Things are not easy in Tajikistan, but from all accounts, the professor-mediator and the renegade warlord are alive and well, and occasionally they still talk poetry and philosophy.