

**SPEECH GIVEN BY SISTER JOAN
CHITTISTER AT THE IRAQ-US WOMEN'S
SUMMIT**

WHILE EVERYTHING WE'VE HEARD TODAY
IS GOING ON IN IRAQ,
THERE IS ANOTHER SIDE
TO THE STRUGGLE
THAT IS GOING ON
TO US BOTH.

WAR IS AS DANGEROUS TO THE
LIBERATORS
AS IT IS TO THE LIBERATED,
AS DESTRUCTIVE
TO THE SOUL OF THE CONQUEROR
AS IT IS TO THE LIVES OF THE SAVED.

STAYING
AND OCCUPYING
YOUR COUNTRY;

ABOUT BEING EITHER A MILITARY
OR A HUMANITARIAN PRESENCE.

KHIDR, THE TEACHER OF MOSES,
CALLED UPON HUMANKIND
WITH A WARNING:

IN THE UNITED STATES.
THE PRINCIPLES OF THE FOUNDING
FATHERS--
THE PRACTICE OF DEMOCRACY,
THE PROTECTION OF CIVIL RIGHTS--
ARE NOW IN QUESTION HERE.

WAR, WE SEE, IS DANGEROUS

BUT DIFFERENTLY...

I WILL TRY TO GIVE YOU A FEELING
FOR WHAT IS GOING ON
IN THE USA NOW
ABOUT OUR COMING,
CONQUERING,

EVERY DAY FOR THREE YEARS NOW
A TALE OF THE DERVISHES
HAS BEEN HAUNTING MY HEART,
SEARING MY SOUL.

ONCE UPON A TIME,
ALI-SHAH, THE SUFI SAINT, TELLS US,
ON A CERTAIN DATE, HE SAID,
ALL THE WATER IN THE WORLD
THAT HAD NOT BEEN SPECIALLY
HOARDED,

WOULD DISAPPEAR.

IT WOULD THEN BE REPLACED
WITH DIFFERENT WATER
SHE COLLECTED HER WATER
FROM AN OLD WELL,
STORED IT
AND WAITED.

SURE ENOUGH, ON THE APPOINTED DATE,
THE STREAMS STOPPED RUNNING,
SHE LEFT HER PRIVATE PLACE
AND WENT DOWN AMONG THE PEOPLE
AGAIN.

BUT LO AND BEHOLD,
THEY WERE NOW THINKING IN WAYS
SHE NEVER THOUGHT POSSIBLE.

THEY WERE TALKING ENTIRELY
THEY HAD NO WISDOM OF THE SAINTS
LEFT IN THEM.

AND WHEN SHE TALKED TO THEM
--IN THE OLD WAYS--
SHE COULD SEE IN THEIR EYES
THAT THEY THOUGHT SHE WAS MAD.

WHICH WOULD DRIVE THE PEOPLE MAD.

ONLY ONE WOMAN LISTENED.
THE WELLS WENT DRY
AND SO THE WOMAN
BEGAN TO DRINK
THE WATER SHE'D STORED.

BUT WHEN THE WATERFALLS
BEGAN AGAIN TO FLOW,
DIFFERENTLY
THAN THEY EVER HAD BEFORE.

AND, WORST OF ALL,
THEY HAD NO MEMORY OF WHAT HAD
HAPPENED,
THEY HAD NO MEMORY OF EVER
HAVING BEEN WARNED.

SHE COULD HEAR THEIR DOUBT,
SHE COULD FEEL THEIR HOSTILITY.

AT FIRST SHE DRANK NOT A DROP
OF THE NEW WATER--
INSTEAD, SHE WENT BACK

TO DRAW ON HER OWN SUPPLY
OF THE OLD.

BUT FINALLY, SICK WITH THE LONELINESS
OF LIVING AND BEHAVING AND THINKING
IN A DIFFERENT WAY
FROM EVERYONE ELSE,
AND PEOPLE BEGAN TO LOOK AT HER
AS IF SHE WERE A MANIAC
BECOME MILD AGAIN,--
AS ONCE INANE BUT NOW FINALLY
--MIRACULOUSLY--
SANE AGAIN.

DRUNK ON NEW WATER:
THE WATER OF POWER
AND THE WATER OF WAR.
THE WATER OF VENGEANCE
AND THE WATER OF VICTIMAGE.

WE ARE SICK TO THE CENTER OF OUR
SOULS
HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD
DETAIL THE ONGOING DESTRUCTION OF
IRAQ,--
THE GROWING TENSION AROUND IRAN,--
THE SLIPPERY RHETORICAL SHIFTS FROM

SHE TOOK A SIP OF THIS,
A SWALLOW OF THAT.

THEN, LITTLE BY LITTLE,
SHE FORGOT ALL ABOUT
HER INNER STORE OF SPECIAL WATER.
SHE LOST TOUCH WITH THE OLD STREAMS
THE STORY IS AN ANCIENT ONE
BUT THE SITUATION IT DESCRIBES
IS AS FRESH AS YESTERDAY'S PAPER,
AS FRAUGHT WITH MEANING
AS THIS MORNING'S LATEST BODY COUNT.

WE ARE A PEOPLE NOW
WITH THE SYMPTOMS OF IT:
HATE AND ANGER, PAIN AND REVENGE,
DESPAIR AND DISUNITY EVERYWHERE.

BUT INSTEAD OF PEACE,
EVERY DAY WE TALK MORE AND MORE
ABOUT WAR:

"TROOPS" TO "TERRORISTS,"
AND "TERRORISTS" TO "INSURGENTS"
AND "INSURGENTS" TO "SUICIDE BOMBERS"
AND "SUICIDE BOMBERS" TO "SAINTS"
UNTIL WE DON'T REALLY KNOW

WHO IS WHO OR WHAT IS WHAT
OR WHY IS WHY ANYMORE.

TO PROTEST THE INVASION
THAT WOULD, WE WERE TOLD,
DOWN A DICTATOR AND RESCUE A
PEOPLE.
BUT NO ONE LISTENED.

SO THE DICTATOR FELL, YES,
BUT THE PEOPLE--
THE MOST DEFENSELESS OF THEM
--AS REAL AMERICANS SHOULD--
BEGAN TO BE CALLED DISLOYAL,
UNAMERICAN,
UNPATRIOTIC
THE NATIONAL DEBT ROSE
INTO THE TRILLIONS.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT FIVE TRILLION
AT \$1.00 A MINUTE, 24 HOURS A DAY--
IT WOULD TAKE THEM 160,000 YEARS TO
DO IT.

BUT THE US DEBT IS NOT 5 TRILLION
DOLLARS,
IT IS NOW 9 TRILLION DOLLARS--

AND WE WERE WARNED, TOO:
MILLIONS MARCHED IN WESTERN STREETS

BOTH THERE AND HERE, BOTH HERE AND
THERE
FOUND THEMSELVES FALTERING, AS
WELL.

WHILE MANY MADE MILLIONS ON THE WAR
HERE,
WHILE MANY AMERICANS
WHO QUESTIONED THE WAR
DOLLARS IS?
ITS' THIS:
IF EVERY MAN, WOMAN AND CHILD
IN THE UNITED STATES--
ALL 300 MILLION OF THEM--
DECIDED TO PAY OFF A 5 TRILLION DOLLAR
NATIONAL DEBT THEMSELVES--

MOST OF IT MILITARY, MOST OF IT WAR-
WHILE MEDICARE FOR THE ELDERLY,
EDUCATION FOR THE YOUNG,
FOOD STAMPS FOR THE POOR,
DAY CARE FOR WORKING MOTHERS,
AND UNIVERSAL MEDICAL INSURANCE
FOR BABIES

IS NOW BEYOND THE BUDGET
OF THE WEALTHIEST NATION IN THE
FOR YEARS TO COME.

INDEED, WE HAVE BEEN WARNED
AND MAY EVEN BE BEING WARNED AGAIN:

THE BUILD UP TO AN ATTACK ON IRAN,
THE NEW BREEDING GROUND OF
TERRORISTS ACCORDING TO THE US
AS A RESULT OF OUR LAST
UNSUBSTANTIATED
'PREEMPTIVE STRIKE,'
MAY THIS TIME BE REAL FOR A CHANGE.

THEN, WE HAVE THE DECLARATION
OF THE NEWLY THEOLOGIZED,
THEN WE HAVE THE PARADE
OF SABRES AND SWORDS,
OF BOMBS AND BOMBERS.
DESIGNED TO INTIMIDATE
THE REST OF THE WORLD,
OF COURSE,
AND EMBOLDEN THE UNITED STATES
ITSELF.
THE SWASHBUCKLING SPEECHES
OF A PRESIDENT

WORLD.

LEXICON
OF EVIL NATIONS,
SEEMS TO BE IN HIGH GEAR.

IT'S A RITUAL NOW OF RECOGNIZABLE
PARTS:

FIRST WE HAVE A NUCLEAR STANDOFF
WHICH, GIVEN THE FEAR GENERATED
AND THEREFORE HOLY,
"DOCTRINE OF PRE-EMPTIVE WAR."
*WHICH MEANS THAT IF WE DECIDE
THAT ANOTHER COUNTRY HAS
SOMETHING DANGEROUS TO US,
THEY HAVE IT.*

*I MEAN, IF NOBODY CAN BEAT US,
WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE
WHETHER WE'RE RIGHT OR WRONG
AGAIN.
WE'LL WIN ANYWAY.*

AND THEN WE HAVE
ALREADY EMBROILED IN ONE WAR
AND ATTEMPTING, PERHAPS,

TO DISTRACT FROM THAT DEBACLE
BY CREATING ANOTHER ONE.

THE ONLY QUESTION NOW
IS WHETHER OR NOT
WITH WHAT SUCCESS,--
GIVEN OUR PRESENT RECORD,--
IS ANYONE'S GUESS.

THE PROBLEM IS THAT THIS TIME
WE ARE BEING ASKED
NOT ONLY TO BE AFRAID
FORGET THE EMBARRASSMENT
OF THE 'INTELLIGENCE' THAT WASN'T.

FORGET THE NUMBER OF US SOLDIERS
WHO FELL IN THE SAND
AND NEVER ROSE AGAIN

"SAVED" BY US, WE SAY,
ONLY TO BE ABANDONED--
EVEN DEFRAUDED-- BY US,
THEY SAY.

FORGET THE BLOOD SPATTERED
CHILDREN
IN WHOM THE SEEDS OF ANOTHER WAR

THE PUBLIC, THE CONGRESS, THE WORLD
WILL RISK ANOTHER FRIGHTENING FIASCO
IN THE NAME OF FREEDOM.

TO WHAT END, NO ONE KNOWS.
BUT ALSO TO BE NONSENSICAL,
ABSURD,
FATUOUS,
INANE.

WE ARE BEING ASKED
TO FORGET THE BLUNDERS IN IRAQ:
FORGET, OF COURSE, THE NUMBER
OF DEAD AND WOUNDED IRAQI'S
WE NEVER EVEN BOTHERED TO COUNT.

FORGET THE PICTURES OF IRAQI FAMILIES
STREAMING OUT OF BROKEN HOMES
AND POCKMARKED CITIES,
HAVE ALREADY BEEN PLANTED.

FORGET THE BURSTED WATER SYSTEMS,
THE RUNNING FECAL MATTER,
THE DOWNED ELECTRIC GRIDS,
THE SABOTAGED OIL FIELDS.

FORGET THE WOUNDED IN BODY
AND THE SHATTERED OF SOUL.

FORGET THE EVOLVING ANTI-
AMERICANISM
THAT NOW FESTERS
EVEN AMONG OUR MOST TRADITIONAL
ALLIES.

“AMERICANS ARE VERY SHOCKED,”
OVER AND OVER AGAIN
OMINOUSLY AND UNENDINGLY,
“AND THE LAST ERROR
SHALL BE WORSE THAN THE FIRST.”

*WE ARE BEING ASKED TO FORGET
THAT WE HAVE ABANDONED
BECAUSE OF IT,
BUT TALKS WENT ON UNCEASINGLY
DURING IT
UNTIL UNDERSTANDING INCREASED
AND ALLIANCES FORMED
AND BONDS DEVELOPED
AND OLD ENEMIES FINALLY
OUTGREW THEIR ENMITY.
BE THE DISEASE
THAT DEFEATS US IN THE END
WHILE WE PREACH*

THE YOUNG IRISH WOMAN SAID TO ME,
“WHEN THEY COME TO EUROPE
AND FIND OUT WE DON'T LIKE THEM.
WHY WOULD THEY BE SHOCKED?” SHE
SAID.
AND SHE MEANT IT.

INDEED, THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL WARNS
*THE FOREIGN POLICY OF CONTAINMENT
THAT OUT-WAITED THE COLD WAR
FOR OVER 50 YEARS
AND HAVE REPLACED IT WITH FORCE?*

*TRUE, THE WORLD BALANCED
ON AN UNSTEADY PEACE FOR YEARS*

SO NOW WE MUST ASK OURSELVES
IF THERE IS SUCH A THING
AS NATIONAL NEUROSIS,
AND ARE WE IN IT?

WILL PUBLIC PARANOIA

THE FEAR OF FOREIGNERS,
AND SPY ON OUR OWN.

WHILE WE TALK RELIGIOUS FREEDOM,
AND DESECRATE THE QU'RAN.

WHILE WE DECLARE THE RIGHT
WHILE WE PREACH LIFE,
AND PRACTICE DEATH IN ITS NAME....

HAS OUR HYSTERIA REACHED THE POINT
WHERE, LIKE A BLIND GIANT,
WE ARE RAGING AROUND THE WORLD
SWATTING FLIES WITH A PILE DRIVER.
AND ONE KENNEL FULL
OF UNINDICTED PRISONERS
IN LEG IRONS?

WHO ARE WE NOW? WE MUST ASK
OURSELVES.

WHO DO WE REALLY WANT TO BE
WE MUST ASK OURSELVES?
FORGOTTEN ALL OF OUR IDEALS?
IS POWER THE ONLY FOREIGN POLICY
THE POWERFUL NEED TO APPLY?

AND IS IT REALLY WORKING IN IRAQ
—A COUNTRY ON THE VERGE OF CIVIL
WAR, CRIPPLED PHYSICALLY,
BUT ARE WE?

TO INVADE THE BORDERS
OF EVERY NATION ON EARTH,
AND TIGHTEN OUR OWN

IS THIS THE UNITED STATES
THAT WON THE RESPECT AND ADMIRATION
OF THE WORLD
AS RECENTLY AS 50 YEARS AGO
AND LOST IT AS RECENTLY
AS ONE TORTURE CHAMBER
WHO WILL OUR LEADERS INSIST THAT WE
BE?

OR SHALL THEY BE THE VERY ONES
WHO LEAD US INTO
MORE IGNORANT IGNOMINY?

HAVE WE, IN ALL OUR POWER,
FULL OF ANGER,
AND UNSAFE--
BOTH FOR US AND FOR THEM?

THESE ARE THE QUESTIONS
REAL PATRIOTS ASK?

AND WHAT CAN PEOPLE LIKE US--
WOMEN--
WHO UNDERSTAND STRUGGLE
AND CONFLICT
AND POWERLESSNESS
LIKE FEW OTHERS
THE SUFI, ALI-SHAH, WAS RIGHT, YOU
KNOW.
IF, ISOLATED AND LONELY,
WE FIND OURSELVES SIPPING
THE WRONG WATER,
WE MUST, AT VERY LEAST,
NEVER FORGET THAT IT IS MADNESS
TO LOSE THE OLD WAYS
IF WE WANT OUR CHILDREN
TO GROW UP TO BE SOUND OF MIND
AND WHOLE IN BODY,
IF WE WANT OUR COUNTRIES TO THRIVE,
WE MUST NOT DRINK THE WATER
OF DIVISION.
WE MUST NOT DRINK THE WATER
--IN THE NAME OF GOD,
THE MOST COMPASSIONATE,
THE MOST MERCIFUL--
DO/ NOT/ DRINK/ THE /WATER
OF HATE.

BUT KNOW BETTER, AS WELL,
THAT VIOLENCE HAS NEVER
SOLVED VIOLENCE--
AND NEVER WILL
DO ABOUT IT?

OF TALKING KINDLY
AND BEHAVING CARINGLY
AND THINKING RESPECTFULLY
OF ONE ANOTHER--

NO MATTER WHO TELLS US OTHERWISE,
IF WE WANT TO STAY SANE,

OF VIOLENCE.

AND WE MUST CRY OUT TILL THE REST
OF THE WORLD HEARS US:
DO NOT DRINK THE WATER,
DO NOT DRINK THE WATER,
WHATEVER YOU DO,