

# Dirt, passion, rage

on spirituality, peace, & the politics of “NO!”

Starhawk

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**Editor's note:** Last issue, we printed a review of Starhawk's new book *Webs of Power* in the context of our spirituality feature. [See “The Spirit of Global Justice,” FE #359, Winter, 2002–2003.] The following piece comes from a post Starhawk made to an e-mail list devoted to discussing issues raised by that book. It offers a compelling critique of those elements in the peace and justice movement that seek to censor anger and conflict.

What it comes down to is a set of assumptions about what constitutes spirituality and even peace—there's one set of things associated with calm, light, benign thoughts, lack of conflict, and general positivity that is assumed to be spiritual. And another set of things associated with conflict, rage, anger, dirt, darkness, and saying “no” that is assumed to be non-spiritual.

First of all, I don't accept those divisions. My spirituality is about dirt, passion, emotion, and even rage—which is a great life force emotion, a sign that something is wrong somewhere.

But what makes me angry in these debates is that those espousing the first group of things often claim the moral high ground. But in moments when great acts of violence are being proposed and perpetuated, responding with only that first group of things is, to my mind, unethical and inadequate. It's a weakened, watered down form of spirituality that is not effective either spiritually or politically. It's unethical because what we DON'T resist definitely persists—and spreads all over the place. Imagine if there was no resistance to Bush's policies no marches, no demonstrations, no protests—we'd already be nuking Iraq back to the stone age. In fact, over the last ten years when there has been very minimal resistance, sanctions have caused the death of over half a million Iraqi children—many from the cancer caused by our depleted uranium.

And no, I don't think it's adequate or appropriate or terribly useful to respond to this only by praying or meditating or beaming love at world leaders who already are getting more than enough attention. I think an honest, ethical, and spiritual response that includes the whole spectrum of spiritual energies MUST involve a loud and public saying NO! and our rage, our anger, our passion, our outrage as well as our vision for what we want.

Without that loud NO! the system is not getting the feedback it needs to get reset back on a saner course. If you have a car about to run over a cliff, you can't save it simply by showing it a better route—you first have to stop it from continuing in the direction it's going. NO is sometimes necessary and life affirming.

And “peace” can be a code word for “I want all those other bad people to go away and disappear and stop making uncomfortable demands.”

When I got back from Palestine, I almost couldn't use the word because I'd heard so many people claiming they were for “peace” when what they meant was, “I want the problem—and by extension, the Palestinians to disappear so I don't have to feel endangered or uncomfortable or guilty any longer.” If our spiritual tools of prayer and meditation and energy work are powerful, they are most powerful in the midst of the “No” in the protest, in the actions, at the point of confrontation when people need someone there who can embody faith and nonviolence and love in the midst of battle.

If we use them as an excuse to stay silent in the face of great injustice, to stay safe when others are taking risks for justice, to avoid conflict when conflict is necessary, we diminish ourselves and the spirit and collude with the violence.

—Starhawk

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# fifth Estate

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