

## **To the Military Pagan Network:**

Dear John and all:

You wrote me some weeks ago, shortly after 9-11, and I've been pondering how to answer you. At first, I decided not to. It's possible your post announcing your willingness to support Bush's war efforts was not directly addressed to me. And when a person is about to go off to war, the last thing he or she needs, it would seem to me, is a rant in writing from someone who is not going about why that war is a mistake. With that warning, you might want to skip the middle portion of this message.

But as the possibility of a ground war approaches, I decided to write, primarily because as your sister in the Craft, I want to support you, and I want you to know that you have my magical support and daily prayers for your safety and health and lives. I have friends in the military for whom I care deeply. I think of the photo that appeared in so many papers during the Texas controversy a few years ago: of a beautiful young man leaping over a bonfire. My profound hope is for him and all of his comrades to remain safe, alive and vital in intact bodies.

I can support you as individuals, and I have added prayers for your safety to my daily practice. But I cannot support the war you have been asked to fight.

I oppose the war not because I believe that fighting is never right. I'm not a strict pacifist. As a Jew by birth, my sympathies lie with the defenders of the Warsaw ghetto and the Resistance, and I cannot see how pacifism alone could have defeated the Nazis. If I could have stopped the destruction of the World Trade Towers by killing the hijackers, I wouldn't have hesitated. Like everyone else, I have been deeply shocked by the attacks, and in a state of incredible grief at the destruction and the loss of life. And because of the scale and magnitude of the violence, I do understand why the word 'war' leaps to our tongues.

But I think it is a terrible mistake to characterize the attack as a war.

If we call this a war, then we dignify the attackers as warriors, and their indefensible crime becomes a bold strike against an enemy. Once we say 'war', killing becomes okay.

When I try to imagine the mentality of the men who did this terrible thing, I imagine someone so intent on their political aims that they are willing to sacrifice the lives of unknown, unseen strangers.

And then I turn on the television and hear Bush, Cheney, Powell and the rest of our leaders so intent on their political aims that they are willing to sacrifice the lives the unknown, unseen strangers. The bombing casualties have already begun, but much worse is the disaster the raids will precipitate. The U.N. now estimates that unless the bombing stops immediately to allow relief trucks to deliver serious aid before winter, up to seven million Afghans are at risk of starvation.

The terrorists have won. They've manipulated us into becoming them.

I oppose the war because it has made us Bin Laden's greatest recruiters, watering the seeds of hate in the Muslim World into bitter fruit we will be tasting for decades.

And I oppose the war because I mistrust the underlying reasons for going to war, for not accepting the Taliban's latest offer to deliver Bin Laden to a third country, for circumventing the U.N. process for legally declaring war, for issuing ultimatums rather than trying informed diplomacy.

I suspect that this war is as much about oil as about the attacks of September 11, about establishing a U.S. hegemony in Central Asia that cannot be challenged, about opening our access to their rich oil reserves and allowing a pipeline across Afghanistan to be built. It is the deepest disrespect for the dead to use their suffering for those ends, and an even deeper disrespect for your lives to risk them dishonestly.

And I say this all not out of disloyalty, but out of the deepest, most profound loyalty to those values our country is supposed to represent-the true freedom to disagree and dissent.

If we have to have war and a military, I trust the Pagans in it will be a force for integrity, will stand against war's worst excesses: torture, rape, and wanton killing. And I know that you will do your best even in war to exemplify the courage and generosity that our traditions value, to embody the compassion of the Goddess, the respect for nature and for human life.

Over the past two years, in the course of my work as an activist for global justice I've probably been in more combat-like situations than many of you. My experience would have no use to those of you stationed on aircraft carriers or flying planes, but now that a ground war may be imminent, I'd like to offer you a few words of advice about going into danger, from a Witch's perspective.

Remember your magical tools. Grounding and breathing are your best defence against panic. The challenge is to stay in a state of awareness in which you can make a conscious decision about what to do. Practice grounding not as a closed-eyes meditation, but as an open eyed practice of awareness of physical reality. Practice moving while grounded. Activate your peripheral vision. Release fear, but stay in a state of relaxed alertness. Make grounding and awareness a daily practice when you are not in danger, so they will come to you instantly when you are.

Remember your magical allies. Air, fire, water and earth can all be your friends. So can the ancestors, the deities you most strongly connect with.

Remember that exposure to violence and inflicting violence are deeply wounding. As a Witch, you have some skills in healing and ritual that can be helpful to you and your comrades. Use them.

Remember that to a Witch, your conscience and the Goddess are your ultimate authorities. War breaks all the boundaries; what is ordinarily unthinkable becomes commonplace. If your conscience places you in conflict with your superiors, if you find yourself a conscientious objector or dissenter, you can count on my support and the support of many of us in the larger community.

And I know that whatever our differences, we are working toward the same ends: a world of peace, harmony and abundance, with liberty and justice for all.

-- *Starhawk*

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