A distinguished activist for peace for over 30 years, Dr. Scilla Elworthy has met with scientists and nuclear weapons policy makers from all five nuclear powers. She founded the Oxford Research Group, Peace Direct, and co-founded ‘Rising Women, Rising World’ and FemmeQ, and was nominated three times for the Nobel Peace Prize. She is interviewed here about her latest book, "The Business Plan for Peace: Building a World without War." In it, she points out that while 1,686 billion dollars is spent on militarization every year, it would only cost two billion dollars to put into action methodologies that are known to work to prevent war and armed conflict worldwide. What follows is the edited transcript of an Awakin Call interview with Scilla Elworthy. You can listen to the full recording here.

Aryae Coopersmith: It’s a real honor to introduce Dr. Elworthy but it’s a challenge because she’s done so much. I’ll give a few highlights and then we’ll get started.

Dr. Scilla Elworthy is a distinguished activist for peace, working around the world on peace-related issues for over 30 years. In 1982, she founded the Oxford Research Group dedicated to researching defense decision-making and developing effective dialogue between nuclear weapons policy-makers and their critics. She met with scientists and nuclear weapons policy makers in all five nuclear powers of that time, of the US, Britain, France, the USSR and China. For this work, she was nominated three times for the Nobel Peace Prize and in 2003, she was awarded the Niwano Peace Prize from the distinguished Niwano Peace Foundation in Japan.

She founded Peace Direct in 2002 to fund, promote and learn from local peacebuilders in conflict areas. She co-founded ‘Rising Women, Rising World’ in 2013 and FemmeQ in 2016. From 2005 to 2007, she helped set up the Elders Initiative and acted as an advisor to Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu and Richard Branson. Her book "Pioneering the Possible: Awakened Leadership for a World that Works" was published in 2014 and received acclaim from experts around the world. Her latest book published last year, “The Business Plan for Peace: Building a World without War“ digs deeper into shifting our global systems to build for peace. Scilla, thank you so much for joining us today and welcome!

Scilla Elworthy: I’m delighted to be here with you.

Aryae: You’ve been involved on many levels with peace initiatives in the world in many ways and in so many places. From the ones you’re involved with today, what really has the most energy for you right now?
Scilla: When I look back on 45 years of working at the top level of nuclear weapons policy-making, as well as grassroots locally-led peace initiatives, what has most energy for me right now is the business plan for peace. Nobody’s ever done that before. We all in the peace business know about how much it would cost to actually prevent war worldwide and that’s what I wrote about in this book. Just to give you a little bit of contrast, do you know what we spend on militarization worldwide every year?

Aryae: I do not.

Scilla: It’s 1,686 billion dollars every year. It would only cost two billion dollars to put into action methodologies that we know work to actually prevent war and armed conflict worldwide.

Aryae: Wow, that sounds like it could save something like a trillion-and-a-half dollars.

Scilla: Yes.

Aryae: That’s amazing. So how do you present that in your book as a business plan? What are some of the highlights that are involved?

Scilla: I took 25 tried and trusted strategies for peace and estimated the cost of each one over a period of 10 years to cover all the conflict areas of the world. The cost is quite possible when you consider what we spend on militarization today. There has been an extraordinary reaction. Because people have come forward and offered their skills, their partnership, and in some cases their funding, we’re now taking forward nine of these initiatives immediately. I don’t think I’ve ever been as excited about anything as I am about this.

Aryae: Wow! So what are some of the next steps that you see possibly unfolding with this?

Scilla: We know from our experience with Peace Direct and other organizations, that locally-led peace initiatives are the most effective bang-for-the-buck in terms of stopping armed violence before it escalates. We’re planning to fund another 120 of those initiatives worldwide where we know people are waiting for some kind of financial support. We will also offer them media support. These people are risking their lives in areas of hot conflict. If the western media knows about them, they can feel a bit safer and they’re less likely to be assassinated.

We’re also bringing forward initiatives to get more women at the negotiating tables for peace. Currently, about 3.5 - 5% of those people who sit around peace tables are female. That is one of the reasons why peace agreements today tend to only last five years. When more women are involved, peace agreements last up to 15 years and more. This is because women bring the concerns of those most affected by war--the orphans, the bereaved, the wounded, and those suffering from PTSD by serving in the armed forces--to the table. All those people need to have their needs met so that the conflict doesn’t simply flare up again.

Aryae: You’ve been working with Peace Direct now since 2002. Does Peace Direct go into areas and work on local issues?

Scilla: Yes. We have “ambassadors” in nearly every conflict country and they help us to
identify those locally-led peace initiatives that really work and produce results. What we found is it’s local people who know what to do when there is an armed conflict brewing up in their area. So, we decided to work with local people. We provide them with very small amounts of money but mainly enable them to build their skills. We help local people get together with others working on peace initiatives and they teach each other what has worked. This is really what they asked for and thrive on. They need and value getting together once every six months or a year and swapping stories and encouraging each other so that they don’t feel so alone and out on a limb.

Aryae: That is terrific. Another topic you mentioned is that you have dealt at a senior government level with nuclear policy makers, defence strategists and scientists from different countries. You worked with those kinds of people in all five major nuclear powers. Tell us how you got started doing that work.

Scilla: It all started in New York when I was working at the UN and helping host non-governmental organizations at a big UN conference on nuclear disarmament. It went for two weeks and achieved very little, leaving me despondent because we all had such great hopes. I had this flash come into my head that said, “You’re talking to the wrong people. The people at the UN can’t do that. You have to find out who actually makes decisions on nuclear weapons.” I figured out it must be the people who design the warheads, strategize with nuclear weapons, provide the intelligence which appears to make the weapons necessary, sign the checks, build the missiles and submarines that carry the weapons and finally, the politicians who sanction these weapons. So I stopped what I was doing and came home. I set up a research group to find the answers to these questions, literally three of us at my kitchen table.

Aryae: What an amazing shift in consciousness, from talking to the politicians to talking to the strategists and the scientists.

Scilla: Exactly. It took a long while to figure out how the whole system worked. It took us four years to write, produce and publish our first book, “How Nuclear Weapons Decisions are Made.” It included wiring diagrams showing how each of the organization--like Los Alamos--interacts with the military, how the military interacts with the intelligence people, and so on. We were the first people ever to find out how the whole system worked. Funnily enough, later when I was visiting some of the militaries in their offices, I would see a copy of my book on their bookshelves.

Aryae: You must be kidding!

Scilla: No. The books were very well-thumbed because it was the only source of information the militaries had. Then we set out on the very difficult and challenging quest to actually engage in dialogue with these individuals. That took a lot of time and inner work. I had to overcome what was driving me, my own fear and anger. I was very angry about the dangers to which we were being exposed and fearful for my children and stepchildren. I had to deal with that. It helped when I became a Quaker and learned to meditate. It was a long quest to address these personal issues and it was only when I’d done that, that I was really able to make contact with some of these individual policymakers. I started with the British as it was easier to access them and I interviewed them at great length. I asked them why they did the job they did. For 12 out of 13 of them, it was a feeling of being threatened. I drew cognitive maps of how they thought and then went
back and showed them these maps. After about four hours of discussion, they trusted me enough to come to a meeting where they could talk to their counterparts from other countries.

Aryae: By what or whom did they feel threatened?

Scilla: They weren't clear on that. It was just a general feeling that there is an enemy out there. Interestingly, the first set of interviews were during the Cold War before the Berlin Wall came down. Then I did the same interviews after the Berlin Wall came down and the feeling of threat didn't change. When the enemy we thought we knew -- the Soviet Union--was not the enemy anymore, we still needed to find a threat.

Aryae: That's fascinating!

Scilla: Understanding this motivation enabled us to make a safe-enough environment for individual policymakers to come to a retreat center and meet their counterparts. We did this all well below the radar. No press, no communications and you would never have heard about it.

Aryae: Who specifically was involved?

Scilla: For example, the head of Warhead design from Los Alamos in the United States would meet his counterpart from the Soviet Union. Eventually, I was able to develop a relationship with the Chinese and take delegations of British, German, French and American military to China to meet the Chinese nuclear policymakers. I couldn't quite believe what access we were granted. It astonished everybody, I think.

Aryae: That's amazing, but why would the people who were entrusted with some of the most important secrets of each country choose to meet with each other and how did the security clearances work?

Scilla: First of all, we didn't ask them to talk about their hands-on responsibilities. What we asked them to do was investigate the problem of the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the amounts of plutonium and uranium that were freely being moved around the world. They were very interested in doing that. Once they gained confidence in each other, we were able to help design the basis for future formal treaties to be developed. We didn't ask anybody to divulge their personal codes or responsibilities, therefore the clearance for them was easier.

Aryae: So you chose a problem that all five countries would presumably have in common which was to prevent nuclear proliferation.

Scilla: Yes, that was how we started.

Aryae: Besides becoming more comfortable and talking to each other, did you see other changes?

Scilla: Absolutely. First of all, they were willing to not just physically take their jackets off, but take off the huge responsibility that they had on their shoulders for the time of our conversations. That allowed them to think much more freely. Many of them became friends not only with each other, but with our team. When we were in China, after 10 days of discussions including a British General head of Air Force, a German head of Military Intelligence, an Admiral and others from the Ministry of Defense, they ended up showing
pictures of their families to their Chinese counterparts!

Aryae: So they were also changing themselves and changing the world?

Scilla: Yeah, they were amazed by the process and said that it was one of the most extraordinary experiences they’ve ever had.

Aryae: You also founded an organization called FemmeQ. What is that about?

Scilla: It’s about how vital it is for those who carry out this work to have done a lot of inner work. By that, I mean self-reflection and looking at our own shadow, our own anger and fear. Otherwise, what we tend to do is project our anger and fear out onto other people, arguing and trying to be in the right. If we’ve done some inner reflection, we’re much more able to open our heart and listen to what the other person has to say.

Good listening is one of the biggest and strongest peace-building skills. We found with people who fundamentally disagreed with each other, having them work in pairs and carefully listen to each other without interrupting for five minutes, and then respectfully giving feedback on what they heard, shifted the attention from the brain that says, “I’m right and you’re wrong,” to the heart that says, “Oh my goodness, is that how I feel?” That’s invaluable.

When I taught this to 21 Global presidents of a worldwide business chain, they said it enabled them to resolve in 15 minutes what would have taken four hours, and still not be resolved.

Aryae: Isn’t that amazing? It sounds like part of the business plan for peace.

Scilla: It is indeed.

Aryae: So why is that associated with FemmeQ?

Scilla: Well, women are particularly good listeners and they tend to need less training as compared to their male counterparts. Generally, we find it’s women who are leading the way in inner work in countries like Colombia, the Congo, even Northwest Pakistan.

Aryae: In your book, “Pioneering the Possible,” you really focus on inner work. You offer 13 signposts which include listening to self, developing a practice, using conflict as an opportunity, doing nothing, going into the shadow, and learning how to serve. How can the signposts be part of a self-transformation process that makes us more effective out in the world?

Scilla: It’s a step-by-step process and everybody’s way of doing it will be different so what I’ve done is sketch out the kind of things that have been useful to my colleagues and me.

Aryae: I’m curious in using conflict as an opportunity. How does that work?

Scilla: Most of us view conflict as a problem. It’s scary to be in conflict with somebody and we tend to run away from it, or hope it will go away. What I found is that if we walk towards what most scares us, that is the way to transform it. It does take courage
but if we are willing to walk towards, accept and really look deeply into what this conflict is about, and our feelings about it, that is often half the battle.

Aryae: Do you mean that in an inner way, like examining what I am frightened of, or in an outer way, like walking into a conflict area, or both?

Scilla: Both but it’s good to practice on one’s own. For example, do you have an inner critic, Aryae? Most people do.

Aryae: Oh, yeah. (Laughs).

Scilla: Okay. That inner critic sits on your shoulder and mutters at you or wakes you up in the middle of the night and you can’t sleep. When that happens, I sit. I literally put two cushions out and I say to my inner critic, which I see as a dragon, “Why did you wake me up at three o’clock in the morning?” Then I go sit on the other cushion and speak in the dragon’s voice. The dragon will say something like, “Well you haven’t prepared for your talk tomorrow and you’re going to fall flat on your face,” or “You can’t do this,” and so on. Then I go back to my cushion and I say, “That is not very helpful. What is it that you really want me to know?” because I know the dragon fundamentally wants to help me. Then I go back to the dragon’s place and he says, “I suggest you do more research and find out what you need to say about XYZ.” So I say, “Okay, what do you think is the essential piece that I need to say?” And the dragon knows exactly what it is that I should be saying in my talk the next day. I always find that process helps me to resolve my inner conflicts, which often take up so much psychic energy.

Aryae: That’s a beautiful example. I love the dragon.

Scilla: Another example is an extraordinary young woman called Gulalai Ismail living in the Swat Valley in Northwest Pakistan, which is probably one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a woman. When she was only 15, she started getting young girls into school with her colleague Malala Yousafzai. You may remember Malala survived a gunshot in the head for educating girls and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Gulalai trains men and women to go into the schools where young men are being trained for Jihad. These men and women go home with the young men and discuss with their parents why the Quran would not approve of suicide bombing. So far they have dissuaded over 203 potential suicide bombers from carrying out their assignment. If that’s not active peacebuilding, I don’t know what it is.

Aryae: Wow! It’s hard to imagine how many lives Gulalai has saved.

Scilla: Especially when you think of the number of people who could have been killed in those suicide bombings.

Aryae: You brought up the importance of doing the inner work in order to have the effectiveness of the outer work and you also spoke of meditation. Can you share how meditation had an effect on the nuclear discussion process?

Scilla: Yes. When I learned to meditate, I got to know some very profound meditators and realized the power of inner work and meditation in all our lives. I asked five very well-qualified meditators if they would come and sit for two-and-a-half days in the library underneath the meeting room where we had these discussions and they agreed. I didn’t know tangible effect was until the representative from the U.S. state department came to me and said about the room in which we were meeting, “Scilla, this
is a very special room!” And I said, “Yes, it was built in 1360 and is very, very special.” And he said, “No, there’s something coming up through the floorboards.” So I told him about the meditators and he went white. I said, “If you don’t believe me, ask the older people who serve you your lunch. They are doing it.” So he went to lunch and came back and made a little salute to say he understood what was going on. I can’t tell you how strong this influence of meditative support was for all the work that we did from then on.

Aryae: That’s an amazing story.

Scilla: Thank you.

Aryae: I want to turn to a darker side of all this. I understand that being a peacemaker isn’t always sweetness and light. You’ve been at the receiving end of fierce disapproval, both from the British establishment, which banned your Oxford research group, and also acts by private individuals. Why do you think they found you so threatening and how did you find the strength to keep on going?

Scilla: I think it was natural for them to find us threatening because what we seemed to be doing was opening up the whole process of nuclear weapons policy making when traditionally, it had been very secretive.

One of the reasons I started doing all this is because I wanted to make the process accountable where people could understand it and ask questions about it. Of course that was challenging to the establishment. The Ministry of Defence took a dislike to a book that we published and that was the reason for them to ban us. I went to see the Permanent Under Secretary of Ministry of Defence. When we talked and he could see me as a person, not as a threat, they lifted the ban.

Aryae: Ah, that’s great.

Scilla: But all these things required perseverance, a certain amount of courage and a very supportive partner who picked me up off the floor when I was devastated, discouraged and exhausted. I also think it’s very important to have a group of colleagues around you when you’re doing difficult work like this. We find that when we meditate or simply spend time together, it’s very sustaining. It gives us the courage to go back in there, when things don’t work. Inevitably, there are always setbacks. If it weren’t for my colleagues, I don’t think we could have done what we did. We understood and supported each other so much. I think that’s really, really vital.

Aryae: And what about the responses of individuals who took aggressive action against you?

Scilla: In the very early days, my tires were slashed. The garage attendant said if I had gone over sixty miles an hour, my tires would have blown. It was things like that. Now, a lot of people I work with are facing far bigger threats than I could ever imagine. My colleague in the Congo was captured by the militia at the age of 13 and made to kill people. He managed to escape and has devoted the rest of his life to freeing other child soldiers.

When we send him a small amount of money, he buys a herd of goats and takes the goats to where the militia are hiding. He’s risking his life because the militia don’t like
intruders. He bargains one goat for one child. He brings the boys and girls home to their families. Then the problems and challenges arise of how to de-traumatise those children. They have been sex slaves or made to kill their own relatives to show that they were brave. Its horrific what people are facing.

Aryae: Wow! What gives them the courage? Why do that they risk their lives about this? What is their energy source?

Scilla: I think it comes from different things. For some, it is their religion. My colleague in the Congo is a Christian and treats it as his mission, his duty. For some, it is just pure passion. They care so much and do what they feel they can do. People are extraordinarily brave. We just don’t hear these stories enough. What I would love most of all, would be for the media to print or film or write about these incredible people because most of what we see on the daily media is bad and frightening news. It’s depressing news while there are these amazing stories of what people are doing which are so inspiring.

Aryae: You mention in your book that if there were more films and visual stories of these people made available to everyone, it could make a big difference.

Scilla: Yes. I would love one of your networks to take this up as a series. We could provide them with access to the people with whom we work and they could interview them and film their stories. That would be amazing.

Aryae: What a wonderful idea. Maybe one of us has connections at PBS! I’m going to ask one final question. Can you tell us about when you were 13 years old and the Soviets tanks were rolling into Budapest in the 1956 Hungarian revolution?

Scilla: Yes. The TV was showing kids my age being mowed down by tanks and I was so upset and angry. I rushed upstairs and started packing my suitcase. My mom came up and asked what I was doing. I said, “I’m going to Budapest.” She said, “What for?” And I told her. She said, “Don’t be so silly,” and I burst into tears.

She could see how much it meant to me and said, “You are too young. If you unpack your suitcase, I will see to it that you get trained,” and she did. She set me up to work in a home for people who had been in concentration camps. I spent a whole summer peeling potatoes and listening to them tell their stories. Then I went to work in an orphanage in Algiers at the end of the Algerian civil war. I also cared for Vietnamese refugees coming from the Vietnam war to France and so on. With her support, I got myself trained. She was a wonderful mother because she never doubted me. She never said, “That is too dangerous or you can’t do that.”

Aryae: What a wise mother indeed. I am going to ask Alyssa to come in and take over from here.

Alyssa: Thank you both for what’s been a really wonderful conversation. Before we move to the question and answer portion, I had a question myself. It obviously seems the inner work of peace is incredibly important. I can imagine some policy makers are so focused on the external intervention that they don’t fully appreciate or see the point of the inner interventions that you have discussed. What do you say to that and how do you deal with these sorts of situations?

Scilla: Perhaps a lot of people in public positions got where they got without doing any inner work. If we want to approach, persuade or develop a conversation with them,
it's up to us to do that inner work so we are conscious of our own motivation and what's propelling us. If I open a discussion with somebody and I am very angry, I'm going to show, to come across. That person won't want to listen to me at all. I need to deal with my own feelings first.

Alyssa: So you can't really focus on what other people's inner journey is, you have to focus on your own. A lot of it depends on inner work and stillness in order to engage in those discussions with others.

Scilla: Yes, and it's such a worthwhile journey because we learn so much and make more progress. We become much bigger people, more competent and less inhibited by our misgivings or inner critic.

Alyssa: Wonderful. Well, the Q&A is now open and there is someone on it.

Question 1 (Paul): My question relates to the Middle East and what's happening to the Palestinians and the sad situation in the Sudan. What are you aware of being done and are you participating? Thank you.

Scilla: I've been many times to Palestine and Israel, working mainly with women in Ramallah and Jerusalem. Zahira Kamal is the founder and leader of a main Democratic party in Palestine. We work together on these issues. They're up against such difficult conditions. It's heartbreaking for everybody.

The lack of insight and understanding on the part of our leaders regarding Syria was saddening. Peace Direct is helping to build very, very fragile, on-and-off peace talks there which is incredibly challenging. I'm not an expert on South Sudan but if you go to the website of Peace Direct, at www.peacedirect.org, and look for South Sudan, you'll find out what we're doing there.

Alyssa: Thank you, Paul. We have a couple of reflections that are somewhat in the same spirit so I will share both and we can then discuss them. William says, “At the age of 53, I was confronted by two bullies, youngish men. When I was face-to-face with one of them, I looked in his eyes and said, “This is not you, you don't really want to do this, do you?” He looked quite startled and slowly walked away with his buddy following him. While I had some fear about how things might unfold, I realized how infantile their behavior was and that they were probably not acting the way they wanted to be in their highest selves. That awareness allowed me to speak on behalf of their higher selves.

And David says, “You deal with a bully by speaking the truth firmly, directly, and honestly without becoming angry or violent. I have become angry and mean in response to violence and oppression and I don't recommend it. It just added fuel to the fire and contributed to the increase of violence leaving me sad and upset. What are your thoughts, Scilla?

Scilla: Those are wonderful reflections and so true. Anger and force never work with a bully. The responses William and David have described are very good responses for dealing with bullies effectively.

Alyssa: Thank you. We have a question from Wendy.

Caller (Wendy): Thank you, Scilla, for your wonderful work. I'm very intrigued by the focus on women in your organization. What kind of actions do the women in these...
environments of conflict take? What kind of support do they give each other, and what kind of support do they receive from men?

Scilla: Sometimes the men oppose them! For example, Gulalai in Pakistan is very much supported by her father but the men, the elders of the community are very disapproving. Armed masked men have been found at her home waiting for her and her dad phones her and tells her not to come home. Men threaten her life for doing this kind of work.

She’s very much supported by other women but they may not be able to show it very much because it’s extremely daring to do what she’s doing. In some other places, women are in solidarity with each other. We’ve been trying to get more women at the peace negotiation tables and in a number of countries, women have been very supportive. They have collected and sent in the biographies of suitably qualified women so that they can be put forward to take part in peace negotiations. There’s a lot of support taking place, now more than ever.

Caller (Wendy): It sounds like there are also young girls who are being mentored by women who have come together to make peace.

Scilla: Definitely, that’s the way it works. I think everybody was very impressed by the young woman who spoke on behalf of the students at the high school that had the shooting. All around the world we saw that young woman be a model for holding a space without violence, just encouraging all students around the country to ask for gun control to be introduced. We marveled at that.

Caller (Wendy): Are there methods of inner work that you find women are doing in this process that might be different than men in their inner work?

Scilla: Not really. I do notice that women form circles for getting together to pool their ideas and support each other. Perhaps women do that more naturally than men but there are also wonderful groups of men who are organizing themselves to meet up with young men released from prison who don’t have jobs or a future. The men support these younger men to improve their skills, gain self knowledge, get jobs and so forth. It is very tangible support by men for young men and I deeply appreciate that.

Caller (Wendy): Thank you. This is very inspiring.

Scilla: Good. I’m so glad!

Alyssa: We have a question from Gayathri in India. She asks: “Some of your stories almost sound like you have been divinely protected and guided. Do you feel that that’s true? What is your conception of the divine? Do you have any advice on how we can better align ourselves with, and listen to intuition, the divine heart, wisdom, whatever one would call it?”

Scilla: I do very much believe in a higher intelligence. I can see it all around me in the way the abundance of nature comes about in each season. I call on this higher intelligence in the form of a Chinese goddess of compassion called Kwan-Yin. She’s been my invisible mentor for many years.

When I moved into my present house 20 years ago, out of an empty cupboard rolled a poster. It was a picture of a woman in white, very poised, riding on the back of a huge red dragon who was churning his way through a stormy sea. It was Kwan-Yin and she was
pouring compassion out of a bottle into the sea of compassion. I was so struck by this balance of the divine feminine with the divine masculine--the woman and the dragon--that I’ve kept the picture with me. When I teach sessions on the feminine divine, I make postcards of that poster and give them out to all the participants so they can see what I’m talking about. In fact, I’m looking at it right now.

Alyssa: I would love for all of us to see what you are seeing.

Scilla: I’ll send the image to you when we finish the call.

Alyssa: Thank you so much. We have another question from Gayathri which seems very timely. She asks, “Do you feel there is much hope for the denuclearisation of the world? Given that the political leaders of the nuclear powers do not seem very wise or steady and these feel like worrying times in which to live, what do you think of the world today?”

Scilla: I agree with the caller. The occupants of the White House and the capital of North Korea are not very mature people. I don’t feel depressed about this because I believe it’s a wake-up call for us all. It’s time for us to really value the freedoms we have in the West and get into action, whatever your preferred course of action is. Now is the time. We are the most privileged three percent of the world in terms of wealth, having a roof over our heads, enough to eat and nobody shooting at us. So, if not us, who? And if not now, when? So I believe it’s absolutely an opportunity that being shown to us by Mr. Trump and others who appear to be very childish. It’s time we put mature people in political positions. In the United States, many more women are applying to be representatives in Congress and that’s very good news.

In my latest book, “The Business Plan for Peace,” the last part of the book has 35 suggestions of what people can do in their own locality to make a more peaceful world. There are ideas on what people have done, what works, and what doesn’t. If you want the book, you can order it or an e-copy on my website, Scilla Ellsworthy.

Alyssa: Following up on the thought of “what can we do?” seems important. It appears there’s a potential misconception that the work of peace is only something that happens in the echelons of government but what I’m hearing from you, there’s a very important local and personal component to peace. It’s not just waiting on policymakers to do X, Y and Z.

Scilla: Exactly. Now is the time for what you might call the bottom-up approach. When I look out across everything that I know of the world, the real action is coming from the grassroots. It’s almost like green shoots coming up through concrete! Our leaders appear to be stuck in non-understanding of the problems, and inaction, so the real action is coming from below and locally. I strongly encourage everybody see what they can do locally. Young people particularly want to know what they can do so that they don’t feel hopeless and become depressed.

Alyssa: Could you give us one or two examples of something we could do on our own, or do locally?

Scilla: Sure. For example, my neighbor has a child at the local nursery school and she was very worried because there was a lot of bullying going on and many very noisy children. She went to the head teacher and said, "As an experiment, I would like to come in and offer the children 10 minutes of quiet at the beginning of each day," and the teacher
agreed. So she came in and did it very engagingly. After a week, the kids were actually loving being quiet for six or seven minutes at the beginning of each day and it gradually spread throughout the school. That’s the kind of thing any of us can do to help our schools become more peaceful places.

Another thing that young people can do is to boycott the kind of celebrity lists that are really so tiring and boring. Celebrity culture is so empty! They can suggest to the local media, newspaper or TV show that they feature a list of people who make the biggest contribution to their community. For example, listing kids who organize pickups for people who need transportation, or kids who’ve done little cleanups or managed to unclog the local river or waterway. It’s amazing what people do for good but unless we really applaud them, that won’t increase. We need to replace the rich lists or the celebrity lists of this world with people who are really contributing to making everybody’s life better.

Alyssa: Thank you so much for your time. We like to close a call with one final question. Our question for you is, “How can we, as the larger ServiceSpace community, support your work?”

Scilla: Oh, what a lovely question. First of all, have a look at the book and the 25 initiatives that I’m proposing. If there’s one initiative that we are taking and you’d like to support it, please get in touch through my website and let me know what you could offer. It might be your skill or partnership. I’ll explain to you how you can do that. We really welcome that kind of support. My name will get you on my website. I can imagine there are people out there listening who have immense skills and experience and we’d like to use that, if we can. Also, at the moment, we’re most in need of funds.

Alyssa: Wonderful. Well, thank you so much. Thank you, Aryae. Thank you everyone who was involved in this call and for all of the invisible work that goes into making these calls happen. I think it’s been an incredible discussion with so many insights and seeing how much peace is a very realizable goal. I wasn’t really aware of that. Knowing that by spending a small chunk of money on peace building of the money we spend on militarization, we could actually prevent war is a really important point.

The other thing that stood out to me is how much peace is an inside job and all of us could do a lot of work to advance the inner work of peace by addressing the fear and anger that plague many of us. There are concrete things we can be doing now. We will circulate a link to Scilla’s website and encourage everyone to look at those initiatives and also contact Scilla. Thank you everyone for joining us. I would like to invite everyone to hold a collective minute of silence and gratitude for this wonderful conversation. So, we’ll go ahead and do that.

Scilla: Thank you very much, Alyssa, and all your colleagues in ServiceSpace for making this possible.

***

For more inspiration join Saturday’s Awakin call with Tibetan Buddhist scholar and author Alan Wallace: Fathoming the Human Mind and the Nature of Consciousness. More details and RSVP info here.