Profound Nonviolence for a Truly Just Society

For half a century now I have been deeply committed to nonviolence in all areas of life. **Certainly we must work for a peaceful foreign policy, and for nonviolence in all areas of domestic life too. We need a nonviolent criminal justice system, a nonviolent economy, nonviolent ways of resolving interpersonal disputes, and so forth.**

People of all religious and demographic groups need to understand each other and respect our differences so all of us can live nonviolently in our large, diverse nation.

Likewise, humans need to understand and respect our natural environment so we can live sustainably within the natural world, which is teeming with life and complexity, so we must not interfere with Mother Nature’s sustainable wisdom.

In 1972 I was drawn to the Fellowship of Reconciliation ([**www.forusa.org**](http://www.forusa.org)) because it proclaimed the inherent oneness of the entire human family. The FOR also proclaimed the fact that nonviolence and love were the way to resolve conflicts. A few decades ago when I served on the FOR’s national governing board, I was one of the board’s members who helped the FOR amend our governing principles (the Statement of Purpose) to expand the reference to the oneness of all humanity to include the oneness of all of Creation, so we could affirm and proclaim that our oneness and our nonviolence extended beyond people to also include the environment.

These truths seem self-evident, whether a person has joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation or whether a person simply wants to live with good ethics and effective interactions with other people from the family level on up to the global level. These values help us work on the various issues we care about, including working for peace, social justice, a fair economy, a healthy environment,

Unfortunately, some mean-spirited persons (self-serving politicians, unscrupulous employers, etc.) and some cruel special interest groups think they can advance their aims by exploiting vulnerable people, dividing people apart, abusing the environment, and doing other things that violate the values and truths laid out in this essay’s opening paragraphs above.

Mohandas Gandhi (the “Mahatma”) kept pursuing truth as the ultimate goal, so he titled his autobiography ***The Story of My Experiments with Truth***. This is a good approach for those of us who want to help solve the world’s problems. Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and other vigorous and principled social change organizers of various nationalities, races and religions have understood that **a very profound nonviolence is necessary for solving problems from the interpersonal level to the international level. This is how we can effectively counter the forces in negativity I mention in the immediately preceding paragraph.**

**Using nonviolence to actually solve a problem requires us to see with compassion all persons who are trapped in various roles in the problem.** Too often our world focuses on merely defeating and humiliating the enemy, but – as the unjust Treaty of Versailles after World War I led to German resentment and then to Nazism and World War II – the world’s method of defeating and humiliating the enemy only makes problems worse. Polarization and defeating enemies backfire. We see this in the U.S.’s utterly boneheaded “War on Terror,” which only provokes more terror. The U.S. government (and news media and general public) make almost no effort to understand the realities of the people whom our military is attacking. Our nation refuses to understand the original causes of the problems that have caused some people in those parts of the world to lash out in violence.

You can’t “fight fire with fire.” Instead, we should use water to put out fires. Better yet would be removing the hazardous conditions that lead to unwanted fires. Retaliating with violence only provokes more violence. **Instead of getting stuck in violent revenge cycles, let’s understand the underlying problems, practice compassion for all of the various kinds of people who are being hurt by the problems, and create solutions that will actually solve the problems.**

This can be difficult when some people fail to own up to their own responsibility for having caused some parts of the problems. But compassion and nonviolence are excellent methods because they create space for understanding and healing to replace the anger, blame and revenge that poison the human atmosphere in the world’s way of doing things.

So, for example, instead of reacting to an international problem by using military violence, let’s understand what is going on, what the real and underlying problems are, and – with absolutely no threats or ulterior motives – help all the parties solve those problems through understanding, compassion, and practical remedies.

Likewise, our violent and oppressive “criminal justice system” does not provide true justice, but only blames and punishes “bad guys” and reduces their ability to function in society. Instead of our current dysfunctional system, let’s use Restorative Justice that recognizes that a “crime” reflects a brokenness between people and/or a brokenness in society. Restorative Justice recognizes that someone is hurting and seeks to solve the problem in a way that heals the brokenness. Then someone who has been hurt has been restored, and likewise the person who had made a mistake is held accountable in a mature way and this person also is restored to society. This stops the negative cycle of suffering and restores a healthy functioning society.

**Polarizing, blaming, and punishing make problems worse. Let’s practice truth, nonviolence, compassion and healing to actually solve all of society’s problems.**

This is very much different from the way most human societies function. Converting to this humane culture will be very difficult. But I am confident that people will find this so much warmer and more satisfying that once we start the conversion process, most of the general public will become enthusiastic about continuing to make more progress.

Certainly the persons and entities that profit from the status quo (military weapons manufacturers, owners of private prisons, etc.) will oppose this positive conversion. So also will the politicians and organizations and special interest groups that benefit from injustice, cruelty, oppression, hate-mongering, etc. Our task is to win enough public support for this new compassionate culture that those nay-sayers will give up.

Our day-to-day conversations, behaviors, activities and organizing efforts can pave the way toward the new compassionate society. We must “walk the talk” and “practice what we preach.” This means not merely denouncing Trump and the Republicans and the abusive policing practices and the Military-Industrial Complex and all of the other negative forces in our society, but also showing how better remedies exist and organizing to put those better remedies into place instead of the cruel, dysfunctional ones that exist now.

Remember what Buckminster Fuller said: “You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.” Likewise, Gandhi said we must be the change we want to see in the world. For decades I have said that our task is to practice the new society now – to “live it into being.”

This change can be difficult for all people, because the vast majority of people have been acculturated to the dominant dysfunctional systems. Instead of blaming the people who have not yet made enough progress, let’s help each other along. Otherwise we’re adding yet one more level of polarization and blame: “I’m enlightened now, but you are still bad.” **The truth of reality is that we are all in this together, and each of us can compassionately help other folks without blaming or berating them.**

So, for example, when we proclaim that “Black lives matter,” and a white person replies that “all lives matter,” how do we respond? Actually, it **is** true that “all lives matter,” so we should not fall into the trap of denying that universal truth.

Why did the white person give that response? Some people assume that the white person is trying to diminish the value of black lives. Perhaps. But before jumping to that conclusion, let’s also consider that perhaps the person is stating a universal truth and wanting to avoid differentiating. Actually, that is OK.

Instead of jumping to the conclusion that the person is racially angry, we could choose an alternative approach. We could compassionately listen to the other person and hear what they actually meant when they said “all lives matter.” Perhaps the white person is feeling left behind by the deteriorating economy and income inequality that deregulated capitalism has been causing. Trump and other racists have been promoting “white resentment,” so perhaps this person overreacted when we proclaimed that “Black lives matter.” Listening to that person compassionately – without forcing them into defensiveness – might help them discover what’s going on. Retaliating against the person might only force them into deeper racism and Trumpism.

Perhaps an open-hearted, non-judgmental conversation might help the other person understand the economic and social realities that have been causing so many people of all races to be left behind by deregulated capitalism, etc. So instead of polarizing and pushing the person into Trump’s camp, our open-hearted, non-judgmental conversation might help the person see themselves as an ally for progressive economic changes. My point is that rather than assume the worst – and assume polarization that might not even exist – we could choose a nonviolent, compassionate approach that promotes better understanding and might help us recruit a new ally to the progressive side.

When the term “white fragility” is used, what emotional content goes with that term? If someone is having difficulty coping with a new reality (*e.g*., a growing awareness of how pervasive racial injustice is and the reality of long-standing white privilege), we of course want the person to move in a humane, progressive direction. In order to invite the person to do that, we need to understand the person’s current feelings and convey compassion so as to create a space for them to move into. However, the term “white fragility” seems to contain an undercurrent of blame and belittling that accuses the white person of being disabled by privilege and by refusal to accept blame.

This is like when a cruel military drill sergeant berates the new recruits for not being manly enough and loudly condemns them as “girls.” The progressive movement and the racial justice movement should not be like cruel military drill sergeants. **All** people need compassion, grace, support, and welcoming.

**Our broken and contentious society needs compassion on all sides so we can heal and move ahead. Anger and blaming keep us stuck in brokenness and contentiousness.**

Instead, some people who are angry about the suffering they (or vicariously their parents and grandparents) have suffered try to dish it back out and turn the tables by inflicting suffering on their contemporaries for suffering caused by the systems in which the other person’s parents and grandparents had lived under, even if they were not intentional or even aware of the unjust systems they lived under.

Some right-wing Christians still blame Jews as “Christ-killers” because 2,000 years ago a few Jews had killed Jesus. Such revenge is toxic for both groups.

Revenge does not solve problems. But nonviolence and compassionate are powerful enough to radically change human hearts and unjust systems, so we can overturn injustice and create a truly just, humane society.

We need to take bold, positive actions to eliminate many injustices from how our society functions. We need restorative practices, affirmative action, reparations, and other remedies. Our task is to organize skillfully and strategically so our society will choose to create bold remedies to reverse our widening economic inequality, systemic racism, dysfunctional criminal justice system, U.S. Empire (including our economic exploitation and our counter-productive militaristic foreign policy), and other systemic and institutional injustices. **Compassion and nonviolence should be our goals, and also our methods for achieving compassionate, nonviolent and just goals.**

Nonviolence really works! For more information about the validity of nonviolence, see the “Nonviolence” part of my blog, [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org)

Glen Anderson