Nonviolent Grassroots Organizing Creates Light and Progress

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This month’s ***WIP*** theme – “Where do we find light” – is a smart question to ask. I recommend finding light in two places: in ourselves and in the world around us.

Contrary to the cynical assumption that human beings are inherently competitive and cruel (and contrary to the religious assumption that we’re doomed by “original sin”), powerful research affirms humans inherently want to cooperate and be good to each other. I read the book ***Humankind: A Hopeful History*** written by Dutch historian Rutger Bregman. The bogus “conventional wisdom” has led to an economic system that hurts most people, a criminal justice system that is punitive and counter-productive, the military-industrial complex, and nuclear weapons. I recommend this book highly because its solid research lifts up the light and gives us confidence to push ahead.. This article explains further: <https://www.opednews.com/Quicklink/The-Right-Wing-Story-About-in-Life_Arts-Bottom-up_Conservatism_Human-Beings_Non-Violence-211203-501.html>

People are taught that there are only two responses to a problem: “fight” or “flight.” You either use violence or you run away. Actually, there is a third alternative that often works better. Nonviolence is a different way to deal with the problem. It is a way to fight back but without using violence. Nonviolence is much more than a set of specific tactics. It is grounded in human nature, history, psychology, spirituality, and more.

The universe functions in ways that allow nonviolence to work better than violence. Martin Luther King and others have said, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” Geometry defines a “line” as perfectly straight but an “arc” as having some curvature. The moral universe’s arc does bend toward justice. We can help bend it further.

Violence – besides being immoral – usually works badly. Often it backfires. Although some people think nonviolence is naïve and not practical in the real world, actually nonviolence really does work. A hundred years ago the politicians wanted the public to support World War I by promising it would be “the war to end all wars.” It worked badly, and the punitive Treaty of Versailles led to the rise of Naziism and World War II.

We must listen to “our better angels” and recognize that research has proven that political uprisings that were 100% nonviolent actually were twice as likely to achieve their goals as the uprisings that included violence. See research and TED talks by Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan – and their book, ***Why Civil Resistance Works***. I also highly recommend ***This Is an Uprising***, the book by Mark Engler & Paul Engler, and their website, [**www.thisisanuprising.org**](http://www.thisisanuprising.org)

If we ground ourselves – and our political organizing in profound nonviolence, we can connect better with other people and move the public toward peace and social justice.

It has been said that war is a failure of imagination. (If your only tool is a hammer, you’ll treat every problem as if it were a nail.) Nonviolence encourages creativity in organizing to achieve goals.

Yes, we find light by recognizing that “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” The universe and humanity function better when we practice justice instead of injustice, when we live peacefully instead of violently, when we speak the truth instead of deceiving people, and when we respect the environment instead of abusing it.

Nonviolent solutions are sustainable solutions because they are based on truth and they recognize the essential humanity of each person even while we may strongly disagree with their behavior.

We find light when we recognize that all people are one human family. Do not let anyone split us apart from each other or divide any groups into “us” vs. “them.”

Conflict has always existed, and conflict will always exist. What nonviolence does is change the dynamics of conflict so one or both parties can devise workable solutions. Nonviolence changes the script of what the conflict is about and increases the likelihood that the conflict will play out in a better way.

One of the most important reasons why nonviolence works is that nonviolence uses means that are consistent with the ends. If we want to build a world that is peaceful and just, we must use methods that are peaceful and just. In our daily lives and in our efforts to build a better world, we need to sow the seeds of a peaceful and just world. If we live our lives in ways congruent with how the universe functions best – and congruent with the world we want to create – we find light within ourselves. Therefore, we need to actively work to promote nonviolence in fairness throughout our society, so more people can find the light and practice it.

The world is in crisis with powerful forces pushing each way. Will we build peace or destroy the world? Will we achieve environmental sustainability or poison ourselves to death? Will we protect democracy or sink into fascist dictatorship? Really, it is all up for grabs. We can find and share the light by helping people pay attention to their best values – and act upon them.

As human beings aware of our place in the world, we must pay attention, take responsibility, and make decisions about how to live in the world – and how to make the world a better place. When we work for peace, human rights, the environment, and other goals, we create light. When we organize nonviolently at the grassroots, we share our light with other people’s light, and we help the world.

A basic truth is this: Since violence is the problem, it can’t be the solution. In contrast to the people who say “the end justifies the means,” nonviolence asserts that the means must be consistent with the end. If we want peace and justice, we must use means that are peaceful and just. Indeed, Gandhi urged us, “Be the change you wish to see in the world.”

If we practice nonviolence throughout our daily lives we’ll help to bring about what Martin Luther King called “the Beloved Community” or what Jesus referred to as “the Kingdom of God” here on earth.

We could promote profound nonviolence – and the light – throughout every sector of society. We can organize to create a profoundly nonviolent foreign policy, a profoundly nonviolent economy, profoundly nonviolent ways of dealing with people who commit crimes, and so forth.

Jonathan Schell wrote this in his 2003 book titled ***The Unconquerable World***, which explains the power and effectiveness of nonviolent action: “Violence is the method by which the ruthless few can subdue the passive many. Nonviolence is a means by which the active many can overcome the ruthless few.”

I invite people to strengthen your skills by taking my FREE ONLINE WORKSHOPS in a series titled, “Nonviolent Grassroots Organizing.” The series starts with a thoughtful grounding in profound nonviolence. It proceeds through the theory and practice of organizing grassroots movements, including strategizing, practical nuts & bolts, and how to get our message out to the public. Contact me for more information: Glen Anderson (360) 491-9093 [**glenanderson@integra.net**](mailto:glenanderson@integra.net)