**A Solid Case for Nonviolence as Ethical, Practical and Powerful**

by Glen Anderson

More information is at the “Nonviolence” part of my blog, [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org)

I adapted this essay from Session #1 in my 6-session series on “Nonviolent Grassroots Organizing.”
Please contact me if you’d like me to present these workshops for a group of people in your local community.
See information near the end of that document for more information about that.

Introduction:

Our nation is immersed in violence. Our foreign policy is extremely violent. Violence also is part of our domestic systems. Poverty is inherently violent. So are sexism and racism. Our criminal justice system relies upon violence. The list goes on and on.

We need to replace those violent systems with nonviolent ways of running our society. And nonviolence is also the method besides being the goal.

This essay makes a clear case for grounding ourselves in nonviolence and using it in all of our work. It provides insights that will give you a deeper understanding of nonviolence. Nonviolence is not only ethical, but it is very practical and very powerful.

The “Nonviolence” and “Organizing” parts of my blog, [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org), provide some great sources of information. Please explore those parts of my blog.

How I first became committed to nonviolence, peace and profound social justice

People often ask how I developed my commitment to nonviolence. There were three sources:

1. My parents were terribly mismatched for each other. They never got along well. As a kid I could see how conflict was handled badly. I knew there must be a better way to handle conflict.

2. I grew up in a mainstream church. Although it taught the usual middle-of-the-road theology, I recognized that underneath was the very radical message of Jesus and his early followers. They were promoting a new society that would be radically nonviolent, radically inclusive, and radically egalitarian. Mainstream theology missed this larger, more profound message, but as a kid, I saw the radically nonviolent grounding as crucial for a society trapped in racial injustice and the Vietnam War.

3. With Vietnam, the Civil Rights Movement, and other issues, I saw a vast gap between where we were and where we ought to be. I felt the need to do whatever I could to close that gap and create a society based on nonviolent values of peace and social justice.

So in the 1960s I started working in the nonviolent movements for peace and social justice, and I never stopped. Regardless of which issues I was working on, the goals and methods were always grounded in nonviolence.

Violence keeps us “stuck.” Nonviolence offers a creative alternative.

It has been said that war is a failure of imagination. 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.

Violence is immoral. And violence really does not work well. It often backfires. Nonviolence really does work better than violence!

Some people think nonviolence is “nice and moral” but naïve and not practical in the real world. But actually nonviolence is what really does work – and violence only backfires. 100 years ago World War I was ‘the war to end all wars.” Did it accomplish that?

Nonviolence is more than “nice and moral.” It is also very practical and powerful. Research has shown that nonviolence works better than efforts that include violence. This essay provides information and recommends further sources of information.

Nonviolence is much more than a set of 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.”

A profound grounding in nonviolence can help all of us connect better with other people and move the public toward peace and social justice.

The Establishment keeps teaching history as a sequence of wars and other top-down actions without paying attention to the effective “bottom-up” actions of nonviolent resistance and nonviolent organizing for social change.

Let’s recognize the many dimensions of violence so we’ll be able to devise nonviolent responses to all of them. Unjust social and economic systems are violent against people. Likewise, pollution is violent against the environment and public health.

Also, militarism is inherently violent even without actual shooting. The mere threat of violence is itself violent. If someone were to confront you on a sidewalk and rob you by saying he has a gun (even without pulling a trigger, and even without showing a gun, and even without even possessing a gun), that person would be prosecuted for “armed robbery.” The mere threat of violence against a person or nation is inherently violent.

We Americans – more than people of nearly any other nation – are so used to thinking that we can solve international problems by sending troops or dropping bombs or doing “regime change.” Americans tend to think this is normal. It is not normal (and not effective).
It is not how civilized nations behave.

If your only tool is a hammer, you’ll treat every problem as if it were a nail. Since the late 1800s the U.S. has been threatening and using military violence against many other nations. The U.S. has military bases in most countries of the world, and we have overthrown dozens of governments in the past 70 years.

Instead of solving problems, we have antagonized the rest of the world and made problems worse.

Also, our federal budget fails to meet human needs because it wastes huge amounts of money killing and destroying. This is yet one more way in which militarism is inherently violent. President Eisenhower said: “Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies in the final sense a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.” Also, many people have said, “War is a theft from the poor.”

Many of the U.S.’s domestic policies also reveal heavy-handed, violent attitudes.

Instead of dealing with the causes of crime, our nation focuses simply on punishing people who make mistakes. The U.S. imprisons many more people than any other nation, but this does not reduce crime. It just ruins people’s lives and wastes our tax dollars.

The “War on Drugs” is an utter failure, but it persists. European nations recognize drug use as a public health problem, so they treat it by using practical, constructive ways to reduce harm. The U.S. just treats this public health problem as a crime and imposes long prison sentences.

Likewise, the “War on Terror” and escalating U.S. militarization of the whole Middle East area – and now Africa and elsewhere – are only provoking more terror and antagonizing other nations.

The “War on Terror,” Patriot Act, and other repressive policies are abusing the Constitution and destroying our freedoms. They are violent against us.

In ancient times, in the areas around where the Hebrews settled, people used to retaliate against injustices by escalating the violence. If somebody broke my brother’s arm, I was allowed to break both of that person’s arms or break the arms of several of their family members. But the Bible expressed a reform for the Hebrew people, so that you could retaliate only in the same amount without escalating. The rule limiting “an eye for an eye” and “a tooth for a tooth” prevented escalation.

Later Jesus came along and called for de-escalating. He said that instead of retaliating the same amount, we should love our enemies and pray for those who hurt us.

Mohandas Gandhi – the Mahatma – agreed with this nonviolent approach. Gandhi said an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth would leave everyone blind and toothless.

Nonviolence is consistent with how the universe wants to work.

Martin Luther King, Jr., said, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” I agree. The universe functions better – and humanity functions better:

* When we practice justice, rather than injustice
* When we live peacefully, rather than violently
* When we speak truth, rather than deceive others
* When we respect the environment, rather than abuse it

Nonviolent behavior is congruent with how the universe functions best. Nonviolent behavior is sustainable. Violence, militarism, abuse of human rights, and disregard for the environment – all of these are not sustainable. Let’s ground ourselves in nonviolent values and practice nonviolence scrupulously so we can make progress:

* Some people ground themselves in nonviolence because it is ethical.
* Some people ground their nonviolent ethics in their spiritual or religious faith.
* Some people recognize the empirical evidence that has shown NV produces better results.

Whatever your grounding is, nonviolence is a solid foundation for how to live our lives – and it’s a solid foundation for public policy.

Nonviolent solutions are sustainable solutions because they are based on truth and they preserve the human dignity of the adversaries, along with our own human dignity. Nonviolence recognizes the essential humanity of each person even while we may strongly disagree with their behavior. Nonviolence can work on the conscience of each adversary (including ourselves) and also on the conscience of the other people around us who are observing the conflict from a safe distance.

Let’s 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.” Oppressors use that “divide and conquer” scam to oppress us. I encourage you to read this article I wrote in June 2018: **www.parallaxperspectives.org/to-achieve-social-justice-we-must-de-polarize-our-society**

Conflict has always existed, and conflict will always exist. What nonviolence does is change the dynamics of conflict so one party or both parties are able to pursue workable solutions. Nonviolence changes the script of what the conflict is about and how the conflict will play out.

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.

**What we do sows the seeds of the world that will grow:**

* Violent and unjust seeds produce a violent and unjust world.
* Peaceful and just seeds produce a peaceful and just world.

Our responsibility is to live our lives in ways congruent with how the universe likes to function and congruent with the world we want to create – a world of justice and peace.

We need to actively work to promote justice and nonviolence in our local community and in the world around us.

Nonviolence is more than “nice and moral.” It is also very practical and powerful.

Research has shown that **non**violence really **does** work. It works better than efforts that include violence.

Recent research proves that in the 20th century scrupulous nonviolence worked better than conflicts using even small amounts of violence. I highly recommend the well-researched and highly readable book ***Why Civil Resistance Works*** by Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan. I also recommend Erica Chenoweth’s TED Talks and YouTube videos.

For more than half a century, Gene Sharp researched and wrote about nonviolence and how to use it effectively. I recommend the publications available at his website, the Albert Einstein Institution, [**www.aeinstein.org**](http://www.aeinstein.org)

I also highly recommend the book by Mark Engler & Paul Engler: ***This Is an Uprising*** – and their website, [**www.thisisanuprising.org**](http://www.thisisanuprising.org)

A profound grounding in nonviolence can help all of us connect better with other people as individuals and in the larger social and political settings.

A profound grounding in nonviolence can help us move the our society and our world toward peace and social justice.

We must take responsibility to work for peace and justice

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.

**We cannot escape deciding. Failing to decide is deciding to fail.** We must take responsibility to work for peace, human rights, the environment, and other good values and goals.

It’s all up for grabs.

During the 1980s millions of people were scared witless by President Reagan’s reckless militarism and especially his cavalier escalation of nuclear weapons and his willingness to start a nuclear war. Many people asked me whether we were doomed or whether I thought we could survive. I always replied to the person by asking what **they** thought.

**Some** people said we were doomed, so I replied that if they thought that, then they were dooming us.

But **other** people said we could organize and stop the nuclear arms race, so I agreed with them that their willingness to work for peace would indeed turn things around.

In each case I told the people, **“It’s all up for grabs. If we organize smartly and vigorously we can turn things around.  But if we give up, it’s the giving up that dooms us.”** That is precisely our crisis now! We absolutely must take responsibility to reverse the problems.

Some people of faith understand that we are God’s hands and feet here in this world. God is counting on us to solve the problems, so we must act on our best values to do what’s needed.

Other people – without that kind of faith basis – also believe that each human being must take responsibility for acting on our conscience and doing what is right.

The main factor that will determine humanity’s future is the efforts of individuals working alone and groups of people working together to build nonviolent movements for positive social and political change.

If we are grounded in nonviolence – and if we strategize well and act responsibly – then everything we do will make a positive difference.

Each of us is responsible for this.

Nonviolence requires courage.

Many people think that nonviolence means just doing nothing and letting evil prevail. That is **NOT** what nonviolence means! Actually, nonviolence can include many different ways to resist and overcome violence and evil – but without using violence.

There is a huge difference between ***pacifism*** (grounding in principled nonviolence, as we’ve been discussing here) and ***passive-ism*** (merely doing nothing).

The best known nonviolent organizers such as Gandhi and King were very thoroughly grounded in very profound nonviolence – and they acted boldly and courageously against powerful oppressors. They accomplished a huge amount – and liberated millions of people – by using principled nonviolence skillfully and consistently. Their nonviolence was not simply a collection of tactics. Their nonviolence was solidly grounded in nonviolent principles.

Gandhi, King, and many other people of faith ground their nonviolent activism in the faith that God is trying to move the universe toward more justice and unity – and they knew that violence would interfere with that.

Actually, nonviolence works whether or not you have that spiritual grounding. Many kinds of people have other profound groundings for trusting the power of nonviolence. The grounding could be in ethics or in trusting the empirical evidence of nonviolence’s practicality.

A basic truth is this: **Since violence is the problem, violence can NOT 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.**

Nonviolence requires as much courage as violence does. Nonviolence actually requires more courage, since we organize against oppressors who are powerful and violent – and since we rely upon internal strength instead of external weapons).

Also, nonviolence requires a lot more creativity than violence does.

Nonviolence has an inherent advantage because – as I said a few minutes ago – nonviolent methodology is congruent with how the universe functions best.

Traditionally people have thought that the nonviolent teachings of Buddhism, Christianity and other philosophies were relevant only to face-to-face relationships between individuals.

But now we know that these nonviolent teachings are valid and workable at larger societal and political levels too. Martin Luther King credits Gandhi with showing how to apply Jesus’ teachings of love and nonviolence to larger social and political scale. **King’s essay, “Pilgrimage to Nonviolence” explains:**

“Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale. For Gandhi love was a potent instrument for social and collective transformation. It was in this Gandhian emphasis on love and nonviolence that I discovered the method [for social reform] that I had been seeking [for so many months ...] I came to feel that this was the only morally and practically sound method open to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom.”

Gandhi’s understanding of nonviolence

Mohandas Gandhi – warmly called the “Mahatma,” the great soul – was raised in the Hindu faith, and he maintained his Hindu faith throughout his life, even while he saw the depth of all faith traditions and universal truths.

Gandhi defined God as Truth. Gandhi kept asserting that Truth is God. A Bible verse says, “God is Love.” Love is not merely a characteristic of God. God **is** Love. Love **is** God.

**How differently would we and other people live if we recognized these equal signs?**

**God = Love = Truth**

**Gandhi recognized all three as synonyms for each other: God = Love = Truth.**

Gandhi titled his autobiography, ***The Story of My Experiments with Truth***.

Gandhi believed that each person has a part of the truth. This should help us practice humility and patience. Our role is to help each person grow in understanding of the truth.

We need to respect the other’s humanity – and build honest relationships over time – and help the other person and ourselves discover deeper truth.

In the early 1900s Gandhi developed these concepts and coined the term “***satyagraha***” to express his strategy for nonviolent social change. He formed this word by putting together two words in his language.

→ See the next page.

***Satya*** is “truth” or “reality” or “that which is”

***Graha*** is “firmness” or “grabbing and holding onto”

So ***satyagraha*** is firmly holding onto deep truth.

Some people have translated it as “**Truth Force**” or “**Soul Force**.”

The very power of reality – ***satya*** – is at the root of our nonviolent campaigns.

And because the means determine the ends, profound nonviolence is absolutely necessary in order to create a society of truth and peace and justice.

Gandhi believed there is no such thing as defeat for the person seeking the truth of nonviolence. He believed we must always see every person as a child of God. We must always seek and promote the truth. We must always seek and promote justice and love.

The nonviolent strategies of Gandhi, King and others recognized that if suffering is to occur, it’s better for us to accept the suffering rather than to inflict suffering on others.

If we suffer as a result, we must endure the suffering and continue pushing ahead with nonviolent courage and determination.

Suffering unjustly can add power to our efforts. Christians say that Jesus found that his unjust suffering and martyrdom led to actually conquering death itself by rising again after three days in the tomb.

Nonviolence challenges the status quo, but flows with the design of the universe.

So nonviolence works because it is consistent with how the universe actually works. The law of karma is true. You reap what you sow. And, as Martin Luther King said, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” Ultimately, violence is doomed to failure. We need to be faithful and keep working nonviolently over the long haul.

Working toward a nonviolent society – a society grounded in love, truth, social justice, and peace – is an uphill struggle, because the world’s powerful entrenched systems are built on power, greed, and violence.

We will need to work hard – and work skillfully – to turn things around and create the new society that King called “the Beloved Community.”

Our challenge is especially hard when the government promotes war, greed, and injustice. George W. Bush’s administration called for a “War on Terror” that would continue endlessly for decades. The “War on Terror” uses massive violence, and it sacrifices our human rights and our constitutional rights. Because of the relationship between means and ends, the
bi-partisan “War on Terror” is doomed to fail – and will actually make problems worse.

**This reveals the moral and strategic bankruptcy of the whole notion of war as a way to solve the problems!** And it reveals the huge corruption and entrenched power of the military-industrial complex.

The endless “War on Terror” has been bi-partisan. Bush and Cheney handed it off to Obama, who accepted the basic premises and escalated their endless wars further. After eight years Obama handed it off to Trump, who is continuing to escalate the wars.

The “War on Terror” keeps failing to end terrorism, but only provokes more terrorism. The fact that the “War on Terror” is endless and keeps escalating **proves** that it is bogus and fraudulent and doomed to failure. I have written about it in the “Peace” part of my blog, **www.parallaxperspectives.org.** Especially see the item called **“De-Militarize U.S. Foreign Policy.”**

For almost half a century the Cold War functioned in the same ways and served the same corrupt military-industrial complex. The Cold War and the “War on Terror” are part of a long-standing historical scam. **Listen to what Anatole France wrote in the 1800s, and think about what has been happening continuously since the mid-1900s. Here is a quotation from the 1800s:**

“A people living under the perpetual menace of war and invasion is very easy to govern. It demands no social reforms. It does not haggle over expenditures on armaments and military equipment. It pays without discussion, it ruins itself, and that is an excellent thing for the syndicates of financiers and manufacturers for whom patriotic terrors are an abundant source of gain.”

Conflict has always existed, and conflict will always exist. What nonviolence does is change the dynamics of conflict so one party can start pursuing workable solutions.

Nonviolence changes the script of what the conflict is about. And nonviolence changes the script of how the conflict will play out. It allows us to devise creative alternatives based on truth and love that – when we use them – open up new possibilities to turn things around.

Nonviolent solutions are sustainable solutions because they are based on truth and they preserve the human dignity of the adversaries, the general public, and ourselves:

* Nonviolence recognizes the essential humanity of each and every person, even while we may strongly disagree with their behavior.
* Nonviolence puts creative pressure on the adversary and works on the adversary’s conscience.
* Nonviolence helps the other people around us see the conflict differently, engages their human dignity, and works on their consciences too.
* Nonviolence helps us maintain our own human dignity while we pursue the struggle.

Let’s practice nonviolence in our daily lives – and throughout every part of our society.

Grounding ourselves in the spirit and methods of nonviolence can help us practice it – and practice love and peacemaking – in our daily lives!

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.

I often wear a button that says, “When the people lead, eventually the leaders will follow.”

So we not only practice peacemaking in our daily lives, but we also organize for peace from the grassroots level. It might be a long struggle, but eventually we’ll prevail. What the button says is true: “When the people lead, eventually the leaders will follow.”

When the world’s richest and most powerful nation is insensitive to the sufferings of poor nations, we are on the wrong side of history. Our nation is on the wrong side of “the arc of the moral universe.” Our nation is out of compliance with humane values.

Our nation cannot achieve peaceful ends by using militarism or other violent methods. In the long run, our nation’s greed and violence hurt ourselves along with everyone else.

If we believe in nonviolence, why not extend nonviolence to all areas of society? Why not practice nonviolence in every sector?

* How would a profoundly nonviolent foreign policy be different from what exists now?
* How might parents practice profound nonviolence when raising kids?
* What would be some profoundly nonviolent ways of dealing with people who commit crimes
* What would a profoundly nonviolent economy look like?
* Why not practice profound nonviolence in every aspect of our society and culture?

Nonviolent values are grounded in many religions

The world’s great religions and philosophies include values that are the basis for nonviolence. Virtually every religion has some equivalent of the Golden Rule: Do unto others what you would have others do unto you. Love, compassion, sharing, generosity, fairness, and other nonviolent values are at the core of the world’s great religions and philosophies.

**Do not let anyone pervert religion into an excuse to oppress anyone!**

Since Christianity is the most common religion in the U.S., I want to share some insights about nonviolence from that faith.

In 1 John 4:8 and 4:16, St. John wrote, “God is love.” A few minutes ago I suggested understanding love not merely as an attribute of God, but as the definition – an equal sign.

St. Paul’s letter to the Romans (Romans 12:21) says, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” St. Paul says we are responsible to actively replace evil in the world with positive good.

Jesus’ famous Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5, 6, 7) includes **a sequence of three teachings – one right after another** – in which Jesus urges people to use **nonviolent resistance against oppression**. The person who wrote Matthew’s gospel combined these three teachings into this sequence in order to teach people that **Jesus was promoting nonviolent resistance against oppression**.

These teachings (Matthew 5:38-41) made great sense to the audience at his time and place, but modern people don’t know the context. I’ll explain each one of Jesus’ teachings about nonviolent resistance. You will be able to see why the authorities saw Jesus as the nonviolent revolutionary that he was, and why they killed him.

**1. Turn the other cheek:**

When Jesus told people to “turn the other cheek,” he was not tell people to get beaten up. Rather, he was showing how oppressed people can **nonviolently resist** their oppressors.

In that culture the right hand would have been used in this exercise. Notice that in Matthew 5:39 he specifies that you were struck on the right cheek. Notice how your hands and arms work. If someone is facing you and slaps you on your right cheek, your attacker must have used the back of his right hand. (If a man were slapping a man of equal status, he would have used the front of his hand and slapped the man on his left cheek.) Slapping someone on the right cheek with the back of his hand is what a man would do to someone of low status (such as a woman, a child, or a slave). Jesus specified that you were slapped on your right cheek, so this means that Jesus was addressing people of low status who were oppressed.

When Jesus tells these oppressed people to “turn the other cheek,” they would be exposing their left cheeks for the second slap. But – in light of how our arms and hands are constructed – this would require the oppressor to use the front of his hand (not the back). This kind of slap – with the front of the hand – is a slap from one person to another of equal status. So “turning the other cheek” would elevate you to equal status with your oppressor. Therefore, “turning the other cheek” is a clever nonviolent way to expose the oppressor’s class-based oppression and elevate your status to that of an equal in this conflict.

**2. When the court takes your cloak:**

Right after this clever nonviolent resistance strategy, Jesus offers another in Matthew 5:40. He says, “If anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak also.” The poor people he was talking to knew exactly what this meant. Poor people were in debt and had to give their outer garments (their coats) as collateral for their loans. But their law allowed them to reclaim their coats for warmth overnight and return this collateral to the lender the next day. Some people were so hopelessly in debt that they could never pay back their loans, so the lenders would take them to court and permanently seize their collateral – their outer coats. Then they would be cold overnight.

Jesus said that if the court took someone’s coat, he should also take off his cloak (the long flowing cloth that was his only other piece of clothing) and give that to the lender too. Then he’d stride out of court completely naked.

In that culture, being naked was tremendously shameful, but the same was not so much on the person who was himself naked but much more so on whoever had caused his nakedness. So when he leaves the court naked the shame would be on the lender. “First National Bank took all of my clothes.” This was a clever nonviolent way to expose systematic economic injustice and shame the lenders who were oppressing very large numbers of poor people.

**3. Go the second mile:**

Immediately after that, Jesus offered a third strategy for nonviolent resistance to oppression.

The Roman Empire was occupying the entire region for many years. The Roman Empire was oppressing the people, but Rome was savvy enough to limit its oppression just short of the breaking point. For example, a Roman soldier could force a local subject to carry his heavy pack for one mile, but no longer, because the Roman government sensed that forcing a subject to carry the Roman soldier’s pack for more than one mile would seem oppressive, so Rome’s officers would punish a soldier who did that.

Therefore, in Matthew 5:41, Jesus told the people that if a soldier forced you to carry his pack for one mile, carry it for a second mile too. This clever nonviolent action would expose the Roman military’s inherent oppression and would get the soldier in trouble.

Matthew’s Gospel groups these three strategies for nonviolent resistance together – one right after another – so clearly Matthew clearly intended to show how Jesus was instructing the people in clever ways to nonviolently resist oppression. No wonder the authorities wanted to kill Jesus!

Other religions also have teachings and scriptures that support love, compassion, nonviolence and peace. If you identify with any religious faith or and spiritual or philosophical grounding, please look deeply there to find its wisdom and the practicality for nonviolence.

Replace military violence with nonviolent solutions to our world’s problems.

The US spends more than $700 billion a year planning and using military violence. The cost is much higher if we include other military-related costs (nuclear weapons, veterans’ health care, interest on the military’s portion of the national debt, and so forth). We need a profound change of heart, change of consciousness, and change of national politics!

* Let’s call our nation to turn away from arrogant power, greed and violence.
* Let’s cut the military budget and invest in meeting human needs.
* Instead of military violence, let’s devise nonviolent solutions to the world’s problems.
* Instead of believing that military violence will solve our problems, let’s believe in the power of truth and love. What the US needs is not a military build-up but a spiritual build-up.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem and said he wished the people knew of the things that make for peace. Don’t we feel the same way when our government pursues self-defeating policies of violence?

We are responsible for actively working nonviolently.

Earlier I said that every human being needs to pay attention to our role in the world, make decisions about how to live in the world, and take responsibility for what we do and what we fail to do. We cannot escape deciding! Failing to decide is deciding to fail. We must take responsibility to work for peace, human rights, the environment, and so forth.

History does not go in one simple direction. Different historical forces push in different directions. We need to decide which side we are on – and act according to our conscience.

A few minutes ago I mentioned the conversations with people about Reagan’s recklessness with nuclear weapons – and the need for people to decide whether to give up hope or to nonviolently fight back.

Yes, our future really is “up for grabs.” The future is what we make it. If we take responsibility to solve the problems, than we will indeed solve the problems. **The remedy is nonviolent grassroots organizing.**

**The main factor that will determine humanity’s future is the cumulative efforts of individuals and groups of people who organize nonviolently at the grassroots to build movements for peace and social justice. If we strategize well and practice smart nonviolence, then everything we do will make a difference.**

Four expert practitioners of using nonviolence offered these quotations.

**Martin Luther King said**, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” But this does not mean that we can just sit back and wait for a free ride to the Promised Land. Martin Luther King said we must work at it. King said:

“Human progress is neither automatic or inevitable.” He also said, “Human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of man willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation.”

**Mairead Maguire, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and co-founder of the Peace People in Northern Ireland, said:**

“Nonviolence is not for the elite few. It is for everyone to live. It is a way of life based on respect for each human person, and for the environment. It is also a means of bringing about social and political change, and resisting evil without entering into evil. It is a whole new way of thinking.”

**Wally Nelson, African-American civil rights activist, World War II conscientious objector, and peace activist who refused to pay federal war taxes since 1948 (1909-2002), said:**

“Nonviolence is the constant awareness of the dignity and humanity of oneself and others; it seeks truth and justice; it renounces violence both in method and in attitude; it is a courageous acceptance of active love and goodwill as the instrument with which to overcome evil and transform both oneself and others. It is the willingness to undergo suffering rather than inflict it. It excludes retaliation and flight.”

**Muriel Lester, a leader in the British Fellowship of Reconciliation, said:**

“Our job as peacemakers is to stop war, to purify the world, to get it saved from poverty and riches, to make people like each other, to heal the sick, and comfort the sad, to wake up those who have not yet found God, to create joy and beauty wherever we go, to find God in everything and in everyone... To disarm – not only our bodies by refusing to kill, or make killing instruments in munitions factories – but also to disarm our minds of anger, pride, envy, hate and malice….”

**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.”

Nonviolence is absolutely necessary for the peaceful and just society we want.

**Nonviolence is absolutely necessary for the peaceful and just society we want!**

Peace is not automatic, because powerful forces keep choosing power, greed, and nationalism.

In order to achieve peace and social justice, we must commit ourselves to working for peace and social justice, and we must devise strategies that are bold enough and smart enough that – if we work actively – we can actually achieve peace and justice.

**We** have to **actively work** against the entrenched powers in order to achieve peace and justice.

Peace and nonviolence are the goals that we seek. Martin Luther King called this new society “The Beloved Community.”

To reach those goals – to build “The Beloved Community” – we must actively practice peace and nonviolence.

We need to help every person and every nonprofit organization understand profound nonviolence as a core value for improving our local community and the world.

It is not enough for “peace” or “nonviolence” to be nice sentiments or glib platitudes.

We need to work creatively within our society – and **throughout all sectors and all aspects** of our society – to promote and embed nonviolence as a mainstream value and a mainstream methodology for public policies throughout **all** parts of our society.

Each of us must work within our own organizations, faith communities, and local governments to promote nonviolence as a foundational value and the operating principle in all sorts of practical ways.

For example, let’s change U.S. foreign policy so it will become:

* + Based on nonviolence with no heavy-handedness and no military threats
	+ No longer contaminated by U.S. business interests at other people’s expense
	+ Committed to creating right relationships (fairness, egalitarianism, human rights, international law, and so forth)

In order to build a vibrant nonviolent society, we must collaborate across organizations and build grassroots movements that are wide, deep, strong, practical and effective.

Nonviolence really works!
Let’s experiment with nonviolent actions and see what works.

A number of people have compiled collections of successful uses of nonviolence throughout history. Many of these appear in books and websites, including a few that I list at the “Nonviolence” part of [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org).

* In the mid-1970s Gene Sharp wrote a 3-volume set of books about the theory and practice of nonviolence throughout history. He summarized 198 different methods of nonviolent action that have been tried in the past few thousand years. Not all of the case studies he documented actually succeeded, but many did.
* The book and video series ***A Force More Powerful*** documented a number of great cases. I’d be happy to lend my copy of the book and show the videos to audiences.
* I recommend the book by Erica Chenoweth & Maria Stephan titled ***Why Civil Resistance Works***, which proved that purely nonviolent movements in the 1900s achieved better results than those that used any violence. Also watch Erica Chenoweth’s TED Talks and YouTube videos.
* I also recommend the book by Mark Engler and Paul Engler, ***This Is an Uprising***,for practical insights from recent history, and their website [**www.thisisanuprising.org**](http://www.thisisanuprising.org)
* I encourage people to study Gandhi, King, and other great practitioners, and to learn from books, websites and non-profit organizations. I list a few at the “Nonviolence” part of [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org).

As I said earlier, if we are grounded in nonviolence and smart strategies, pretty much everything we do will be useful. We don’t know in advance what will bear a lot of fruit, but if we act faithfully and experiment, we might be surprised at some unexpectedly good results.

* + A frequently told story from the Eisenhower Administration shows how peaceful efforts can bring good results in an unexpected way. In the early 1950s, when much of our nation had been whipped into a fever of fear and anger toward Communist China, China experienced a serious famine, so the peace movement organized Americans to urge President Eisenhower to provide food for China. People sent him small bags of rice, with labels quoting the Bible, “If your enemy hungers, feed him.” Although Eisenhower did not send food, this did convince him not to bomb China, which his hawkish advisers had been urging him to do. During a meeting with military leaders he asked an aide how many of those small bags of rice had arrived by mail. The aide replied that tens of thousands had arrived. Eisenhower said that if that many Americans wanted to feed China they would not tolerate bombing China. That ended the discussion of that military option.
	+ In 1969 Nixon was escalating the Vietnam War, so people organized several monthly days of Moratorium events when people would demonstrate instead of going to work or to school. Nixon had been considering much more severe bombing of North Vietnam at that time, but he stopped that plan because he knew that bombing would cause even more people to participate in the upcoming months’ Moratorium protests.
	+ Irwin Hogenauer was a Seattle peace activist who refused to be drafted during World War II and spent time in federal prison. When he emerged in 1946 and got a job, he resolved that – just as he refused to let the military draft his labor – he would also refuse to let the military draft the fruits of his civilian labor his money through income tax. For all the remaining decades of his life he refused to pay the IRS any taxes on his earnings. He told us, “You never know which one of us will be the straw that breaks the IRS’s back.”
	+ Many people are inspired by the story of snowflakes accumulating on a branch. Each individual snowflake weighs practically nothing, but when they keep piling up on the branch, eventually their collective weight can break the branch. It was not only the final snowflake that accomplished this, but each and every snowflake lent its almost-negligible weight – the first few, the ones during the middle of the snowfall, and finally the vert last ones that were sufficient (along with all of the others) to break the branch. This illustrates the collective power of many individuals working together to do what we can toward accomplishing a common goal, even though each of us is only one small individual.
	+ Participants in the Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation’s peace vigils (Wednesday noon hours and Friday late afternoons) notice how many – and how diverse – are the drivers, passengers, pedestrians, children, and workers in company vehicles who show support for our messages of peace, nonviolence, human rights, and so forth. Our presence and our positively worded signs give people opportunities to resonate with our positive values and take small actions – waving, honking, flashing a peace sign, and so forth – in response. If we had not been there, those people would not have had those opportunities. Every week our presence and our positive messages are accomplishing positive responses that otherwise would not have occurred.

**Everything we do creates an ever-growing track record of small successes along the way.**

Political and economic forces keep trying to separate us from each other. They use “divide-and-conquer” tactics to separate us by races, religions, nationalities, and other differences. But when we join together even for small-scale nonviolent activities, we build social power. Small-scale nonviolent activities decentralize the power of the public and strengthen the entire community to accomplish positive social and political change.

We would become even more effective if would become more profoundly nonviolent and more strategically savvy.

We are organizing against large, oppressive forces, so we must organize for the long term based on sustainable values such as nonviolence.

I encourage people to work with other folks who study and practice nonviolence in principled and strategic ways.

Closing encouragement

We are facing very serious problems in our nation and our world.

We need radically nonviolent alternatives to the cruel, dysfunctional status quo.

We can accomplish powerful changes through strategic nonviolent grassroots organizing.

Nonviolence is ethical and practical and powerful.

The essay you are reading is posted on my blog, [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org). Click the “Nonviolence” category and click that essay’s title, **“A Solid Case for Nonviolence as Ethical, Practical and Powerful.”**

I have posted many excellent resources onto my blog’s “Nonviolence” and “Organizing” categories.

Also, you can watch a video of me delivering a very somewhat similar presentation in a 1-hour TV program. Visit my blog, [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org), click the “TV Programs” link and look for the title of the January 2018 episode, **“Nonviolence Is Ethical, Practical, Powerful.”** That blog post also includes a link where you can read a thorough summary of what I said. The end of that thorough summary includes a great list of sources of further information.

→ See the next page.

Could you find an audience and location where I could facilitate my a 6-session series of workshops on “Nonviolent Grassroots Organizing”? It starts with a session like the essay you are reading, and then proceeds through many practical insights and skills. Also, I offer many printed resources at each of the 6 sessions.

I am looking for audiences and locations where I can present my 6-session workshop series on **“Nonviolent Grassroots Organizing.”**

It 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.

Each session could be as short as 90 minutes, but I recommend each session to be 2 hours to allow even more interaction. Especially for out-of-town locations, in order to reduce the number of times I’d be driving to your location, you may arrange for 2 sessions on each of 3 Saturdays or Sundays.

Contact me for more information: Glen Anderson (360) 491-9093 **glen@parallaxperspectives.org**

Again, I encourage you to see many additional sources of information at the “Nonviolence” and “Organizing” parts of my blog, [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org).Other parts of my blog offer information about a wide variety of issues related to peace, social justice and so forth.

You may phone me at (360) 491-9093 or e-mail me at **glenanderson@integra.net**

I want to close this essay with the encouragement I offer at the end of each of my TV programs:

We're all one human family – and we all share one planet.

We can create a better world – but we all have to work at it.

The world needs exactly whatever **you** can offer!