

Self-Empowerment

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A SEASON FOR NONVIOLENCE

A Season for Nonviolence, January 30 - April 4, is a national 64-day educational, media, and grassroots campaign dedicated to demonstrate that nonviolence is a powerful way to heal, transform, and empower our lives and our communities. The first Season for Nonviolence, was inaugurated in 1998 to honor the 50th and 30th memorial anniversaries of Mohandas K. Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., honoring their vision for an empowered, nonviolent world.

Many organizations, groups, and individuals have participated in promoting nonviolence in communities across the nation through various activities, media coverage, proclamations by many U.S. Governors, and hundreds of ongoing programs. Season co-founders are Gandhi's grandson Arun and his wife Sunanda, of the M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence. The goal of this effort is to demonstrate that every person can move the world in the direction of peace through daily choice and action based on compassion, respect and understanding.

WHY "NONVIOLENCE" INSTEAD OF "PEACE"?

Agape Interfaith Ministries is committed to sharing a vision of Peace through various means, including the promotion of the annual "Season for Nonviolence." But, you may wonder, why bring attention to *nonviolence*; why not just call it a "Season for *Peace*"?

It is often preferable to use language that is "positive," as in being *for* peace instead of *against* violence. However, there is an important meaning that was expressed through the practice of nonviolence as demonstrated by Mahatma Gandhi.

Mahatma Gandhi proposed a method called "Satyagraha" (Sat-ya-gra-ha) to resolve conflict. This method aims at winning over an opponent by love and gentle persuading and by arousing in him a sense of justice rather than forcing him to surrender out of fear. Many have been inspired by Gandhi's successful method. Martin Luther King, Jr. was dedicated to Gandhi's way of non-violence to overcome oppression. It takes courage, commitment, self-discipline and sanity to work through conflict without resorting to violence.

Consider the following quotes of Dr. King:

"The nonviolent approach does not immediately change the heart of the oppressor. It first does something to the hearts and souls of those committed to it. It gives them new self-respect; it calls up resources of strength and

courage that they did not know they had. Finally it reaches the opponent and so stirs his conscience that reconciliation becomes a reality."

"We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force."

"The principle of nonviolent resistance seeks to reconcile the truths of two opposites - acquiescence and violence - while avoiding the extremes and immoralities of both. The nonviolent resister agrees with the person who acquiesces that one should not be physically aggressive toward his opponent; but he balances the equation by agreeing with the person of violence that evil must be resisted. He avoids the nonresistance of the former and the violent resistance of the latter. With nonviolent resistance, no individual or group need to submit to any wrong, nor need anyone resort to violence in order to right a wrong."

In this issue, Pamela Whitman shares her understanding of Satyagraha (page 2) in conjunction with the principles of *A Course in Miracles*. Her commitment to teaching peace has blessed and inspired a wide audience.

How do we resolve conflict? How do we move from a state of disagreement to one of peace? Each of us is invariably confronted with conflicts in our personal relationships, in traffic, at work, in our communities and sometimes in even larger arenas. We disagree on issues small and large, from whose turn it is to wash the dishes, to criminal justice, political stances, economic and moral views, etc. If we have no other choices besides fight or flight, violence or cowardice, there will always be war. There is a better way. Interpersonal Communication (page 4) is an essential building block towards peace. Overcoming the misunderstandings and differences between individuals without resorting to force or violence is foundational to applying similar tools to larger groups. Mediation and conflict resolution must be encouraged if we are to ever heal the divisiveness between peoples.

Join with me in helping to find a better way!

Your fellow traveler, *Rev. Jill*

Join the Miracle Revolution

by Pamela Whitman

We are living in a time of change as a nation and a human civilization. But this is nothing new. Change is a constant factor of the human experience. It is the essence of *evolution* itself. Today's changes appear to be in a period of acceleration. As a peace activist I have the opportunity to travel throughout the country and discuss the trajectory of our nation and world with people who care deeply about peace. The dialogue in our "peace community" must change. Gloom and doom are not the agreements that we need to be making; nor the images we should be projecting from our minds into the universe. While this is a time of challenge, it is not the time to bond through fear and anger. We need to be more conscious with the choices of our thoughts and words.

In the 1960s Martin Luther King Jr. led the civil rights movement using a method of nonviolence known as satyagraha. "Satya" means truth or LOVE and "graha" means force or firmness. "Satyagraha", meaning truth-force or love-firmness is a system of nonviolent civil disobedience that was conceptualized and utilized by Gandhi in overcoming the British rule of India and the pass laws of apartheid South Africa. Of satyagraha King wrote, "Christ furnished the spirit and motivation while Gandhi furnished the method." When King led the Montgomery bus boycott based on the principals of satyagraha, he wrote that this love-force became the "guiding light of the movement". A pastor, King combined Christian spirituality and motivation with Gandhian methodology. King wrote of the time in Montgomery, "Living through the actual experience of the protest, nonviolence became more than a method to which I gave intellectual assent; it became a commitment to a way of life."

The Indian press covered the 381-day Montgomery bus boycott as closely as did the American media. In 1956 India's prime minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru visited the United States. After his visit he remarked that he wished that he could have met with Martin Luther King Jr. Nehru's diplomatic representatives inquired about the possibility of arranging for Rev. King to visit India. Eventually the Gandhi Memorial Trust of India extended an official invitation as well. On February 3, 1959 Martin Luther King Jr. and his wife Coretta departed New York for India stopping in Paris enroute. King spoke at university groups and public meetings all over India. He met with the relatives of Mahatma Gandhi, the man whose teaching of non-violence had inspired him. He visited Gandhi's ashram, countless memorials for the great leader, and finally laid a wreath on Gandhi's entombed ashes at Rajghat.

King later wrote of his trip to India, "I left India more convinced than ever before that nonviolent resistance is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom. It was an amazing thing to see the results of a nonviolent campaign...the way of nonviolence

leads to redemption and the creation of the beloved community."

In studying great peace leaders, it is interesting to see the thread that connects one to the other. These leaders all begin with a dream, a vision. Gandhi had a dream and put feet to his prayers. When we look at many of the most effective peace activists throughout history – Gandhi, Martin King Junior, Mother Teresa, The Dalai Lama, Jimmy Carter and others, we see visionaries with strong

spiritual lives as well as powerful, effective walks in the physical world. Gandhi had a dream and followed through; this dream inspired a dream in Martin Luther King Jr., all the way on the other

side of the world. Gandhi himself was inspired by Tolstoy's book "The Kingdom of God is Within You" which was largely inspired by the Sermon on the Mount. Tolstoy's religious writings came after his famous novels and were suppressed by the Russian government but found unofficial circulation and evoked controversy. Tolstoy found support from the American Quakers, who agreed that Christians should not participate in wars or use force of any kind. Gandhi was also influenced by Henry David Thoreau's essay "Civil Disobedience." Gandhi read "Civil Disobedience" while in jail for committing an act of civil disobedience.

Martin Luther King Jr. said that we were to be physically non-aggressive but that we were to be dynamically spiritually active. This is one of the five precepts of satyagraha. It is not that we do not resist evil. We *do* resist. We are nonaggressive, but spiritually active. The essence of this precept is that when we encounter oppression, the need for healing or change, we are not to react with aggression. Neither do we go into denial. The Dalai Lama concurs that, "Nonviolence does not mean that we remain indifferent to a problem. On the contrary, it is important to be fully engaged."

The second precept of satyagraha is that we are not to humiliate but to seek to win friendship and understanding. The thrust of this is to change the mind of the oppressor through love. Here is a precept that our contemporary community is presently called to embrace. We are challenged to remain in loving dialogue with those with whom we do not agree, rather than deepening a divide. At this point in our nation's history, it is easy to cast blame and judgment when words like "humiliation" are brought into the context of a discussion about peace. It is easy to judge and condemn those who would nod in approval of torture. And yet, when we condemn, when we judge, we become the enemy. Gandhi said that we must become the change that we seek. If there is one side, acting on and condoning violence and another side judging and hating these perpetrators of violence, where are the true pacifists? Who will transform the world?

Another characteristic of the movement is an avoidance of all forms of violence. This includes physical and internal

At the center of non-violence stands the principle of love.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

violence. Our judgments are attack thoughts. In order to fully embrace peace, we must relinquish our judgments and accept the reality that we are all one, despite all False Evidence Appearing Real. The ego will resist this, because this is the ego's final undoing. But if we take a deep breath and appeal to our spiritual source, we can look the ego straight in the eye and keep walking.

Now, I have not come here to tell you "Hug a terrorist today". I AM offering to you the notion that we live in a holographic universe. What we see in the outer world is a reflection of our inner thoughts and beliefs. *A Course in Miracles (ACIM)* warns us to beware of the power of the unrecognized belief. Our global society has manifested an outer projection of terrorism – the physical representation of fear, hatred and unforgiveness. *ACIM* states, "Each unforgiving mind presents you with an opportunity to teach your own how to forgive itself." Isn't it entirely possible that terrorism is a manifestation of our society's unconscious self-hatred? Because all minds are joined, our most conscious response is to forgive. Because we are all one; as we forgive ourselves, we forgive one another. As we forgive one another, we forgive ourselves. To give and to receive are the same BECAUSE we are all one. Perhaps you are thinking, "Well this is not MY responsibility; I'm not harboring serious anger, hatred or unforgiveness." But the Course tells us that "a slight twinge of annoyance is nothing but a veil drawn over intense fury." To be a real part of the solution, to be truly conscious, we must do more than just show up at the airport without liquids in our carry-on luggage. We must purge the luggage that we are carrying in our minds. This is showing up for life miracle-minded. We are told that the Holiest place on the earth is the place where an ancient hatred is transformed to a present love. As we allow our minds to be corrected and freed from anger, hatred and unforgiveness, we raise the consciousness of the collective whole. All that is required of us is our willingness. Our minds CAN become the Holiest place on earth.

Satyagraha reminds us that the struggle is against the darkness of the oppression and not against the people or oppressors themselves. This reminds me of the *ACIM* principal that says that: When a brother acts insanely, he is offering you an opportunity to bless him. You need the blessing that you can offer him. How you choose to respond, as ego or as holy Self, determines who you think You are. Are we all Children of God? Yes. Do we all act like it all of the time? No. So when someone comes at us with their ego, sometimes, in some situations, there must BE a response, but what we are actually responding to is that person's wound – not that whole person. We must stay centered in remembering that this is a brother, or sister who is acting out of a form of pain, but whose essence is perfection. How we view this person's essence is who we think We are. The Course says that the Teachers of God are

generous out of Self-interest. We are all always extending love or calling for it. How can we be our most Divine selves if we deny love to a brother who is calling for it? The oppressor is actually the oppressed, being oppressed by negative emotions. To maintain this perspective is to embrace compassion. We choose compassion that we might claim our own Divine Selves. We perceive the good beyond the wound in others that we might claim our own innate goodness. The Dalai Lama is known as the Bodhisattva of Compassion. He says that as long as we are under the control of negative emotions and thoughts our very existence is a form of suffering. This level of suffering sends us into vicious circles of negative emotions and non-virtuous actions. Once we are able to combine empathy for others with a profound sense of understanding of the suffering they experience, we become able to generate compassion for them.

The final precept of the movement is that of hope. The nonviolent protestor has a strong faith in the future. King had a dream and he proclaimed it. Like the visionaries who have come before us, we must harness the immutable power of hope, the forces of love, and the transcendent mystical abilities of our minds to co-create a world of peace. To become the change we seek, we must change our minds. Our thoughts create our reality. *ACIM* tells us, "Seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world." The world is an effect. When we change our thoughts, the outer world changes automatically. The science of quantum physics is verifying these truths that the metaphysical community has heralded for ages. We create what we envision. In what was to be his last Sunday sermon, Martin Luther King spoke of "remaining awake through a great revolution". Today awakening must be the essence of the revolution itself. The Oxford Dictionary defines revolution as "complete change in conditions and ways of doing things". I invite you to consider that revolution can also be a complete change in thoughts and ways of seeing things. The very community that values peace, and recognizes the benefits of visualization, prayer, meditation and affirmation must now walk our talk. We are being called upon to activate our authentic power. If you are worried about the future of our

country, visualize world peace at least once every hour. You will feel better. It is time to claim our communities, our country and our world for peace. We must *invoke* peace. We invoke that which we proclaim. Say out loud, "I claim

authority over my home in the name of peace. Peace is transforming anything unlike itself now!" Go on to claim your community, nation and our world in the name of peace.

There is great power in invocation. Invocation reaches out from hope and draws our proclamations to present tense. Miracles collapse time and space. Right now, we must now call forth a global miracle. Because we are all

I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent.

Mohandas K. Gandhi

one, when we experience individual transformation, there is a shift in the whole. We can harness the current momentum of planetary transfiguration for forces of growth and rebirth. Yes, the changes are happening; yes it's getting messy out there. But we are in such a state of flux that the time is one of unparalleled opportunity. We in the spiritual community are the people who are awake enough to notice; we've read some books, we've had some practice with the techniques. We are the volunteers. Remember? "Use me, God!" Well, here we go. It's not ten years from now; it's not five years from now. The time is here. We are at choice as to the outcome. Our thoughts must be refined. Transformation requires us to discard thoughts, judgments and aspects of ourselves that have been outmoded. Some days we can feel peaceful, non-reactive and divinely inspired. On other days we are not so wonderful! This can even fluctuate from hour to hour. I know that, personally, in the hours when I have given a few moments to meditation, those are the hours in which I tend to get it right. The demands of the outer world do not allow us to spend twenty minutes of every hour in meditation. Imagine the world we could create if we would make this commitment!

If we commit to invoking peace once per hour, every waking hour, we will create a revolution. We do not have to stop our lives. If you can, join me for a few minutes every hour, sitting quietly, inviting peace to fill you. Any other hour, wherever you are, whatever you are doing...whenever you remember, you *can* silently send peace to a political leader with whom you disagree. Breaking the bonds of anger and hatred is the walk of the peacemaker. The revolution of the new millennium is a revolution of consciousness. Victor Hugo said that an idea whose time has come is more powerful than all of the armies in the world. It's time for peace. It's time for a revolution. Together we can invoke the changes that we seek. Peace.

Pamela Whitman, a decendent of great American Poet Walt Whitman, is a professional musician, producer, radio host, humanitarian, and public speaker to promote peace. Hear Pamela broadcast live Mondays 4-6pm on 91.7 FM in South Jersey, or over the internet at www.wlfr.fm

Her website is www.pamelawhitman.com.

Interpersonal Communication

by Jennifer Akin

Here is a scene with which we are all familiar: Alex says or does something that Bob interprets as an insult or an attack. Bob retaliates in words or action. Alex, having meant no harm in the first place, now sees Bob's actions or words as an unprovoked attack. The situation can quickly escalate even though there was no real reason for a fight to begin in the first place. What has happened here is not a failure to communicate, but a failure to understand communication. More often than not, that is what lies at

the root of conflicts, although in intractable conflicts there may be many other factors as well.

Of course, misunderstanding of ideas or intent can also occur when there is an absence of communication between two groups. When two parties are not speaking, there is no way to clarify positions, intentions, or past actions; rumors can spread unchecked. Sometimes both parties make a concerted effort to communicate as clearly as possible, but cultural differences or language barriers obstruct clear understanding.

Even within a cultural group, misunderstandings can arise because of different personal communication styles. One person will ask a lot of questions to show interest, while another person will find that to be disrespectful. Men and women, in particular, are thought to have different styles. Linguist Deborah Tannen notes that, for women, "talk creates intimacy... [b]ut men live in a hierarchical world, where talk maintains independence and status." [1] Her research has also shown that, when speaking, women tend to face each other and look each other in the eye, while men prefer to sit at angles and look elsewhere in the room. Women also express more agreement and sympathy with one another's problems, while men will dismiss each other's problems. Both sets of responses are meant to reassure, but do not have that effect when used with the opposite gender. For example, women often become angry if a man dismisses their problem.

Fortunately, breakdowns in communication are usually repairable. Misunderstandings can be explained, languages can be translated, relationships can be restored (though sometimes this takes great effort over a long period of time), rumors can be controlled, and escalation limited -- all through clear, verbal communication, i.e. talking. Despite common admonishments to "improve communication skills," the majority of people are already very sophisticated at sending and interpreting messages. The improvement most people need is more akin to a concert pianist fine-tuning a particular technique than to a 10-year-old student heading off for her weekly piano lesson.

A popular misconception about communication is what Michael Reddy calls "the conduit metaphor." [2] This is the belief that language is like the postal service, that it can transfer packages (ideas) from person to person without corruption of the original message: person A puts his thought or feelings into words and "gives" or "sends" these words to B, who "extracts" or unpacks the message. The danger of this metaphor is that it leads one to believe that language is effortless. Misunderstandings are therefore extremely frustrating in that they are not supposed to occur, and if they do occur, then someone must be at fault -- either the speaker did not correctly package the message or the listener erred in unpacking it, or both. However, no such exchange takes place. A more accurate description is that the speaker attempts to code ideas, feelings, and images with words. Those words are transmitted to the listener who then matches them with his/her own experiences. There is no universal codebook,

so what A thinks of as "success" will not necessarily match person B's definition. Words correspond to different ideas and feelings for different people, and it can take multiple attempts before an idea has been understood satisfactorily. The more cultural differences there are between speakers, the more frequently they will have to stop and work out differences of meaning.

The "conduit metaphor" highlights two important aspects of language: metaphor and semantics. Semantics refers to the specific meanings of words, as well as the value they carry beyond their definition. For example, one could call a woman, "lady," "girl," "ma'am," "miss" or any of dozens of synonymous terms. The difference between these terms, and the reason the addressee will prefer some of them and be offended by others, is based on the value she places on each definition.

A clear understanding of semantics is crucial to preventing misunderstandings. Arguments frequently occur when two people think they are talking about the same thing, but really are just using the same word for two different ideas or things. An exaggerated example of this would be a misunderstanding over the question "What state was he in?" where one person is talking about a state of mind and the other about a political region. Hopefully that is a misunderstanding that can be cleared up quickly, but for a few moments both parties are likely to be confused and possibly think the other is crazy. A subtler example would be an argument over the definition of the word "respect." One person may understand "respect" to signify a feeling, while another sees it as an attitude demonstrated through actions. Though Andrew feels respect for Betty, Betty is angry that Andrew did not demonstrate this respect through actions. Andrew, on the other hand, is convinced he was not at fault because he does (or did) genuinely feel respect for Betty. This type of argument can drag on indefinitely with both sides vehemently defending themselves.

Metaphor is one of the most powerful linguistic devices. Metaphor expands understanding by relating the unknown to the familiar. Complex or unfamiliar ideas, systems or relationships are often explained by comparison to something already well known. The heart, for example, is a complex muscle performing very specialized tasks, but it is easier to understand its function by thinking of it as a familiar mechanical device such as a pump. Some cognitive scientists hypothesize that much human knowledge is structured with metaphor. The hidden danger of these linguistic devices is that, while creating associations of function or meaning ("the heart is like a pump"), they also transmit value judgments ("a pump is an ugly utilitarian tool"). Sometimes a metaphor is so subtle or commonly used that one is unaware it is there. For example, to "waste time" is a common English phrase, but how does one actually waste time? It is impossible, unless

we assume that time, like apples (or money!), is a physical commodity. For most Americans, time is indeed thought of as a commodity that can be measured out, spent, wasted, and valued. This conception of time becomes problematic when an American interacts with someone from a culture for whom time is not a commodity.

A final misleading idea about language is the belief that words are harmless. "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me," is a children's rhyme in the United States. Yet words can hurt people very badly. A biting criticism or personal attack can stay vivid in one's memory for years. Some words can provoke a physical response; a punch in the face perhaps. The words themselves may seem weightless, but they can bring about concrete reactions and should be used with care.

The conflict resolution field specializes in helping people communicate more effectively and avoid some of

the pitfalls listed above. Two of the most common techniques taught are active listening, or empathic listening, and the use of "I-messages" instead of "you-

messages." Both of these focus on trying to communicate without placing blame and really trying to hear and understand what the other person is saying. When people are in conflict, making the extra effort to improve communication between the disputants is often helpful in reducing the intensity of the conflict, even if the conflict cannot be that easily resolved.

Footnotes: [1] Tannen, Deborah. "Sex, Lies and Conversation; Why Is It So Hard for Men and Women to Talk to Each Other?" *The Washington Post*. 24 June 1990. [2] Reddy, Michael. "The Conduit Metaphor -- A Case of Frame Conflict in our Language about Language." *Metaphor and Thought*. Ed. Andrew Ortony, Cambridge, 1979.

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Violence is the last refuge of the incompetent.

Isaac Asimov

Bullets cannot be recalled. They cannot be uninvented. But they can be taken out of the gun.

Martin Amis

The essence of nonviolence is love. Out of love and the willingness to act selflessly, strategies, tactics, and techniques for a nonviolent struggle arise naturally. Nonviolence is not a dogma; it is a process.

Thich Nhat Hahn

Discussion is an exchange of knowledge;
argument an exchange of emotion.

Robert Quillen

Daily Word

*The peace in my heart is being expressed
in my thoughts, words, and actions.*

We are all peacemakers. Peace on earth is being established as, one by one, people the world over affirm: *From this moment on, the peace in my heart is being expressed in my thoughts, words, and actions.*

Peace will come about as day by day we live the truth of who we are: spiritual beings on a spiritual journey. And let us never forget the power of good released in our prayers for peace. Through our prayers, our words, and our actions, we are active participants in bringing about peace on earth – the peace that is the reality for every locality and every country in the world.

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The mission of Agape Interfaith Ministries is to encourage, support and inspire a deepening conscious relationship with Divinity for the greater experience of wholeness, abundance, love and peace. We serve to elevate consciousness through individual and group educational activities, and community service.