

The Journey from Conflict to Non-Violence (talk at ULT June 2nd 2019)

Can non-violence really help resolve conflicts? Is war ever a justifiable solution?

Dear Friends,

Let's face it, we all dread wars and conflicts don't we? But the question is why do we create conflict and fight wars directly or indirectly...

Nobody want to live in a war zone, nobody wants to dwell in conflicts yet paradoxically we live each day in that very war zone within. We go to sleep and we wake up in that war zone that we carry within... The war, the conflict that is constantly raging at the very heart of every man... For it is in the heart of man that we FIND THE SEED OF CONFLICT, OF WAR... BUT is also in THE same HEART OF MAN that MUST WE ALSO FIND THE SOLUTION TO WAR or CONFLICT THROUGH THE PRACTICE OF NON VIOLENCE....

For when we think about it, the outside war or conflict whether it be armed conflicts, structural conflict, religious conflict, conflict within a personal relationship, conflict at work cultural conflict, conflict at home amongst members of the same family, conflict between nations it always originate from the heart and mind of those involved, from within without.

Dear friends, more conflicts or wars took place during the 20th century than at any other time in the history of the world. Between 1990 and 2001 there were 57 larger conflicts in the world, the majority in Afrika and Asia. Approximately 3.6 million people have died as a result of conflict since 1990. Violence is not only direct violence, but indirect, as in structural violence resulting in starvation and epidemics. Each year 6.3 million children younger than 5 years old die of starvation. Each day 30,000 children die of illnesses which could be prevented.

In the present situation, wars and armed conflicts are fought within states, rather than between states and are a main cause of stopping development at the same time as they increase poverty, slow down progress.....

Conflict and conflict resolution have preoccupied countless of generation and whether we read the Tao the king, the Bhagavad Gita , the Dhammapada.

The Christian bible etc they all talk about conflict/war, as their teaching is encapsulated in the metaphor of war/conflict and that of the warrior. (reference to 1st and 2nd quotes on the handouts).

The story of Sinha an army general who was faced with despondency and guilt in the face of conflict and war and who went to the buddha to ask for counsel, for advice in relation to the morality and legitimacy of war, is perhaps worth telling here:

One day, Sinha, the general of the army, went to the Buddha and said, "I am a soldier, O Blessed One. I am appointed by the King to enforce his laws and to wage his wars. The Buddha teaches infinite love, kindness and compassion for all sufferers: Does the Buddha permit the punishment of the criminal? And also, does the Buddha declare that it is wrong to go to war for the protection of our homes, our wives, our children and our property? Does the Buddha teach the doctrine of

complete self surrender? Should I suffer the evil-doer to do what he pleases and yield submissively to him who threatens to take by violence what is my own? Does the Buddha maintain that all strife including warfare waged for a righteous cause should be forbidden?"

The Buddha replied, "He who deserves punishment must be punished. And he who is worthy of favour must be favoured. Do not do injury to any living being but be just, filled with love and kindness. All warfare in which man tries to slay his brothers is lamentable. Struggle must exist, for all life is a struggle of some kind. But make certain that you do not struggle in the interest of self against truth and justice. He who struggles for peace and truth will have great reward; even his defeat will be deemed a victory.

"If a person goes to battle even for a righteous cause, then Sinha, he must be prepared to be slain by his enemies because death is the destiny of warriors. And should his fate overtake him, he has no reason to complain. But if he is victorious his success may be deemed great, but no matter how great it is, the wheel of fortune may turn again and bring his life down into the dust. However, if he moderates himself and extinguishes all hatred in his heart, if he lifts his down-trodden adversary up and says to him, "Come now and make peace and let us be brothers," then he will gain a victory that is not a transient success; for the fruits of that victory will remain forever.

Equally when we read The vast mythologies of the secret doctrine it unfolds, revealing conflicts between various primordial races... what lessons can we learn from these?

is there a possibility to engage in right action based on universal ideas, based on right philosophy when we face conflict and adversity in life?

Can we truly go to war, but not against persons and or races but war for the triumph of truth for truth sake, war for justice?

Can we fight a bloodless, non violent war for the restoration of the eternal ideas, the eternal thought in the eternal mind? Can we truly rise against falsehood , error, prejudices, misconception, hypocrisy, fallacy....the idea of separateness so prevalent in our heart? How can we put an end to the war raging at the heart of every man? What have we learnt from conflict? If we look at the end of the World War I or WWII or any other wars fought that ended, can we safely say that the end of the war has brought an end to our troubles, to our hatred, selfishness, greed, prejudices, ignorance, dogmas etc? What do you think dear friends, what do you think can be done other than a self reform, a change in human nature along the line of theosophical teachings? A psychological reform, a mental, moral and spiritual transformation of the masses of man and women of whatever races, nationality, faith, social status....etc

Where shall we find the true foundation for a changed civilisation that all men and women can see and stand on? asked Robert Crosby the founder of the ULT in a speech before the league of nations after the end of the WWI it is not philosophies nor religions, nor political panaceas that are needed but KNOWLEDGE.

And a wider scope of vision than the vicissitudes of one short physical life. The knowledge that is greater than all the forms of religions ever invented.

Is the knowledge of the very nature of man himself, for himself and in himself

For we are not here as things apart, we are here because of one great sustaining cause - infinite and omnipresent - not separate from us, nor from any other beings. It is the same in all beings above the human and in all beings below the humans.

Can such knowledge provide a non-violent resolution of conflict worldwide ? Is war ever a justifiable solution?

Can we say that the seed of peace, justice and harmony lie in the exemplification of this concept of ahimsa (non violence) in practice and what determine the morality and legitimacy of a war?

Nonviolence

“Nonviolence is the law of the human race and is infinitely greater than, and superior to, brute force” – Mohandas K. Gandhi

Nonviolence – a political method based on peaceful dialogue and distancing itself from violent action.

Nonviolence implies to practise resistance without causing physical or psychological injury to living individuals.

Nonviolence implies actively reacting against violence and oppression in our surroundings.

The word nonviolence comes from the word “ahimsa” which is Sanskrit. Ahimsa is the positive opposite of the word “himsa” which means, desire to injure. “Ahimsa” is an ancient word, which is found in Bhagavad-Gita which was written between 200BC and 200AD.

Mohandas K. Gandhi HELPS promotes peace and tolerance for people of all faiths in his native India Trough the exemplification and against the British empire.

Satyagraha and Non-violent resistance

The nonviolence movement develops from 1905 through the Indians people’s movement struggle against racism in South Africa and is established in the struggle against colonialism in India. Here the Leader is Gandhi. Ahimsa/ Nonviolence was politicized and became Non-violent Resistance, Satyagraha was formulated civil disobedience established and nonviolence preparations through the communal village life (in ashrams, a form of community of belief, or “Hindu cloister” and work with the constructive program was introduced as the central element of non-violent resistance.

It is first in India's liberation that a national revolution is achieved in organised nonviolence. Since then it has happened many times in the world.

Historical examples of nonviolence

There are many that have thought and practised nonviolence. A way of showing what nonviolence can be is to describe some examples where it has been used.

The struggle for independence in Southern Asia

During the 19th century large portions of the world were colonised by Great Britain. In the beginning of the 20th century the struggle for freedom accelerated in many of the occupied areas. One of the most noted liberation struggles was that which today is India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The leader of the struggle was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and his goal was to get rid of the colonial rule by means of nonviolence. He used, together with his countrymen several methods of nonviolence to convince the British to return India's sovereignty. One of the methods was the boycott of British clothing. The industrialised England produced large amounts of clothing which was then sold to their colonies. Gandhi urged all Indians to make their own clothes. Gandhi himself worked 1 – 2 hours everyday on his spinning wheel. The spinning wheel became a symbol for the strength of non-violence. The British lost enormous income due to the boycott as India was such a large market.

One of the methods that the independence movement used most, demonstrations. The greatest of them which took place in 1930, was called The Salt march. The British had a monopoly on salt production and placed a tax on salt. Gandhi and his supporters wanted to protest against this. They did so with a long demonstration march which lasted a month. In every village they walked through, more and more people joined the demonstration. When they reached the sea Gandhi took a handful of water as a symbol for salt which is extracted from the sea water. With them, during the march they had both the Indian and International Press who documented everything which happened and spread the news all over the world. After this thousands of Indians broke the law and produced their own salt. The Salt Uprising shocked the British rulers who imprisoned 60,000 people that year for taking part in the demonstration. Disobedience continued, despite this. The salt law was later changed and Indians were allowed to produce salt for private consumption. A small practical change, but the greatest change was symbolic and of great psychological importance. Through united effort the Indians had dislodged British law.

Nonviolence actions disturbed the British, above all economically. They lost very much through the boycott on alcoholic spirits and British clothing. Police and prison costs became an enormous burden for the British. Just during 1930 – 31, 60,000 were imprisoned for acts of non-violence. Because of these thousands who offered their freedom and those who offered their lives Great Britain rescinded occupation of India in 1947.

After a long nonviolent struggle the Indians achieved independence even if finally, the price was high. Many died in the process of dividing India into India, Pakistan and East Pakistan

(today Bangladesh). Today, few of Gandhi's thoughts remain in the region. Both India and Pakistan have nuclear weapons and large armies and have been in conflict with one another over Kashmir in more than 50 years. Nonviolence survives among many ordinary people. For example, nonviolence has been used as resistance against the building of dams in India which force people to move in their thousands. There is also a movement in Northern India for the preservation of trees in the Himalayas, which is called Chipko.

The Citizens rights Movement in the USA

40 years ago in the southern USA racism against Afro-Americans was widespread. Racism was obvious both in law and society. Afro Americans were forbidden to use the same toilets or eat lunch at the same places as other Americans. They were persona non grata at golf clubs and swimming baths. There were many Afro Americans who wished to change the system. The question was how? Many believed that violence was the only way. There were others who believed that nonviolence was the solution. Two of those who lead the campaign were Martin Luther King Jr and James Lawson, both pastors, inspired by Gandhi.

Lawson and King knew that nonviolence needs practise. They collected young Afro Americans and a few Americans who wished to protest against the racial system. They were taught nonviolence action according to Gandhi's principles and trained role play, conversation and discussion. Lawson had been to India to learn Gandhi's nonviolence techniques.

Lawson, King and their followers chose a place where racism was happening: lunch restaurants where Afro Americans were not allowed to sit. Their tactics were to go in and sit in the forbidden places for as long as possible. They called the action "sit-ins", and were taught to always hold eye contact with the person who attacked them, to always be polite, well dressed and never use violence. That they would be attacked they knew. Many wished to retain the racial system and disliked the laws being broken. Nonviolent groups were attacked with fists and kicks, but without hitting back even once. After a while the police came and arrested, not the racists but the nonviolent Afro Americans that had sat in forbidden places.

When a group was taken away by the police a new group replaced them, sitting in the same forbidden places. This resulted in lunch restaurants closing down. Another part of the campaign was to boycott shops and stores that discriminated Afro Americans. The combined effect of this was that owners lost large amounts of money. Finally many of the restaurant owners wanted to change the system so that they did not lose money.

The campaign spread to the greater part of southern USA. In 1960 there were "sit-ins" where Afro American sat in forbidden places in restaurants in 78 towns, over 70,000 people took part in actions and 3,000 of them were imprisoned. The following year the discriminating laws were removed in nearly 100 towns, which is a quick result. Today all Americans are seen equal even if it is proven that Afro Americans are more often convicted in law courts and there is economic injustice.

“Bearing in mind the world’s dependence on violence, most of us choose to give up in despair and say that there is nothing we can do to change the world. Most of us quickly forget Gandhi’s non-violent revolution in India, the non-violent resistance of People Power in the Philippines the nonviolence example of Chinese students in the face of tyranny. We forget Dr Kings non-violent Citizens Rights movement which changed American history, or the nonviolent demonstrations which brought down the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union. As nonviolence has been tried so seldom most of us do not believe it will work.”

– John Dear

The struggle against economic injustice

Nonviolence has mostly been associated with oppressive governments, for example the apartheid regime in South Africa, Great Britain’s occupation of India or the oppression of Afro Americans in southern USA. Nonviolence has also been used a lot against regimes where people suffer great poverty. Oppression and injustice often go hand in hand.

The great global movement against injustice made itself manifest in the demonstrations in Seattle USA, in 1999. Thousands of people joined together in expressing their dissatisfaction with the way that world trade and world order creates a lot of poverty and few wealthy. After Seattle, it became usual with big demonstrations at the meetings of institutions which manage global economics: The World Bank, The World Trade Organisation and The International Monetary Fund.

For a long time, people have protested non-violently and even violently against economic injustice. One of the largest organisations in the world using nonviolence to achieve economic justice is MST – Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra – The Landless Workers movement. MST is a Brazilian and has over a million members. Brazil is world champion in having the largest chasm between rich and poor. In this enormous nation there are millions of citizens living at the same standard as in Sweden, while many more millions are really poor, without work or land to grow food on. This grotesquely large chasm between rich and poor in Brazil originates in the time of colonisation and slavery. The Portuguese noblemen stole land from the indigenous population and shared among themselves. A few got all nearly of the land and it remains so today.

Cowardice asks the question

“Is it safe?”

Comfort asks the question

“Is it polite?”

Pride asks the question

“Is it popular?”

But conscience asks the question:

“Is it right?”

And it comes to a point where one has to take a stand which is neither safe, polite or popular, one takes a stand because ones conscience says that it is right.

– Martin Luther King Jr

The Fall of the Berlin Wall

During the dissolution of the Soviet Union there was both an “upside and down” and a “downside and up” –perspective. From the top came “glasnost, perestroika and democratsatsiya” (openness, restructuring and democracy), initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev. Implacable pressures from below supported creating a climate ready for change. On the one side there was a small but stubborn group of human rights advocates that continuously craved that human rights be respected. The other side, religious, peace and environmental groups, artists and poets, refused in different ways to subject themselves to the totalitarian state.

The failure with the Czechoslovakian experiment in 1968 to create “socialism with a human face” strengthened the widely predisposed opinion that communism could not achieve peaceful change and democratic openness, that nonviolence may well function in India or USA but never in a communist regime. This provided fuel for The Cold War and the nuclear weapons race and the opinion that a Third World War was unavoidable. Few took note of the part of the Czechoslovakian experiment which contained indications of “peoples power” – the revolutions that would come during the 80s.

The 1968 invasion of the Warsaw pacts armies was expected to crush all resistance within the period of a couple of days. It took eight months. Czechoslovakians large and well trained army was ordered to remain in barracks while the population answered in creative and nonviolent ways. The Czech news agency refused to report disinformation such as the leader of Czechoslovakia had asked for the invasion. Road signs were turned the wrong way to confuse the invaders. Students sat in the way for oncoming tanks, others climbed up on the tanks to discuss with the tank crews. People did not fight physically with the invaders but refused to cooperate. Secret messages via the radio helped to maintain a good moral in the population at the same time as radio programmes spread vital information about calling a general strikes. The Czech leaders succeeded in retaining their positions and continuing some reforms until resistance started to give way.

Twelve years later, in 1980 neighbouring country Poland took up the flag of nonviolence when the shipyard workers went on strike. With prayers and meetings the union movement Solidarity was born. Through strikes, sit ins and demonstrations, Solidarity gave the workers an independent voice and started a “grass roots movement” which quickly spread over the whole of Poland. The government immediately proclaimed a State of Emergency in December 1981. Instead of this destroying Solidarity, people started creating an alternative society from below; they chose to live “as though they were free”. A new society was born in the shell of the old one. When eventually general elections were held in 1989, Solidarity won a landslide victory.

The Polish elections were helped by the revolutionary changes in the Soviet Union. Gorbachev’s reforms which started in 1985 opened the dams of longing for change – which ultimately would wash away even Mikhail Gorbachev and the Soviet Block. One after another the totalitarian regimes of Eastern Europe are overthrown by people armed with truth and bravery. A critical mass had been reached by a growing body of people.

The Future belongs to Nonviolence

A commonly held conception is that violence is a powerful method of abolishing oppression or revolving conflict. One of the 20th century's most powerful narratives is about how the allied forces warfare put an end to Hitler Empire. The war the allied waged against the German was justified we could say since it aims to restore peace and harmony for whole. We are familiar with the battles: the invasion of Normandy, Stalingrad and the brave French resistance men's fight against the German occupation forces. Fleets of bombers were needed to free humanity from Nazi tyranny; has violence ever been a good way of creating justice? What would have happened if more Germans had refused Hitler's order to fight? What would have happened if European people had been trained in nonviolence and used it against the German occupation? This we will never know. But even if organised violence in certain situations has possibly been necessary, more and more people mean that the epoch where military measures was a means to achieve political goals is at an end.

Nonviolence is a better method to realise peace and justice, and H. P. Blavatsky warned with great emphasis of the dire dangers that mankind faces using war and violence in conflict resolution, to avoid which we must

“...cultivate brotherly love, mutual help, *unswerving devotion to Truth*. If once men do but realize that in these alone can true happiness be found, and never in wealth, possessions, or any selfish gratification, then the dark clouds will roll away, and a new humanity will be born upon earth.

“Then, the GOLDEN AGE will be there, indeed.”

Our Cycle and the Next, H. P. Blavatsky, emphasis added