

PEACE & NONVIOLENCE

Lay Down Your Sword and Shield



I believe that the basic nature of human beings is gentle and compassionate. It is therefore in our own interest to encourage that nature, to make it live within us, to leave room for it to develop. If on the contrary we use violence, it is as if we voluntarily obstruct the positive side of human nature and prevent its evolution.

—HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA

Nonviolence is a concept that is easily misunderstood. Many people associate it with being soft, passive, or submissive. In fact, nonviolence is an active, vibrant commitment to respect life in all that we do. It is a commitment to life-enhancing rather than life-depleting behavior. Violence is about force, hurting, and demeaning. Nonviolence is about respect, loving, and supporting.

Nonviolence can be understood along a wide continuum. At one end is the individual desire to avoid harming others in body, mind, and spirit. At the other is a lifelong commitment to nonviolent action for

peace and justice for all the peoples of the world. To build a culture of peace, we must align ourselves somewhere on that continuum, for nothing destroys the fabric of peace faster than violence in any form.

73 UNDERSTAND THE HYPNOTIC EFFECT OF VIOLENCE

We live in a culture of violence. Violence has become a way of life for us. We are so used to this that we hardly notice anymore how much violence permeates what we see, hear, and experience in our daily world.

Because we have adapted to violence as a norm, we have become lethargic and unresponsive to it. You might say we are under some hypnotic effect. If we stopped and thought about it, we might say that all that violence is bad for us, and we would feel like doing something to change things. But we don't stop and think about it; we act as if it's not a problem, as if it is "just how things are," or we shake our heads and think how bad it is, but do nothing.

We collude, or go along with the culture of violence not because we necessarily agree with it, but because it's easier to do nothing. Our response-ability becomes dulled.

- Watch your reaction to how violence is portrayed in:

Primetime television shows

Conventional children's cartoons

News broadcasts

Newspapers and magazines

What do you notice?

- Watch your reaction to how violence is present (subtly or directly) in our public discourse on such issues as:

Abortion

Death penalty

Crime

Race

Political campaigns

What do you notice?

- Watch your reaction to the role of violence in sports. What do you notice?
- Watch your reaction to violent video games. Do you yourself play them? Do your children, or children of friends? What do you notice?
- What can you do, what positive action can you take, to lessen the acceptability of violence in our culture? What keeps you from doing it?

74 TAKE A SELF-TEST ON NONVIOLENCE

Nonviolence is not always a clear-cut choice. There are many ambiguities, conditions, and circumstances that affect us when we think about our commitment to nonviolence. Here is a simple self-test that will give you more information about your own relation to nonviolence. There are no right or wrong, good or bad answers—simply a fuller picture of where you stand.

NONVIOLENCE SELF-TEST

1 Rate each of the items below with numbers from the following scale: 1—I strongly disagree. 2—I disagree. 3—I agree. 4—I agree strongly. 5—I'm not sure what I believe.

- ___ **1** Violence is never justified, under any condition.
- ___ **2** Violence can be justified in the following circumstances:
 - ___ To protect a stranger.
 - ___ To protect a loved one.
 - ___ To protect property.
 - ___ To stop a crime from being committed.
 - ___ To stop harm being done to the environment.
 - ___ To protest injustice.
 - ___ To protest or promote issues that I feel strongly about.
 - ___ Other (Please specify).
- ___ **3** There may be times when war is necessary to stop a larger evil.

- ___ 4 I myself would fight in a war if I believed it was a “just” war.
- ___ 5 I myself would never take up arms in a war, under any circumstances.
- ___ 6 Words can be just as violent as action.
- ___ 7 Nonviolence is, for me:
 - ___ An important spiritual value.
 - ___ An important secular, moral principle.
 - ___ A pragmatic choice for effective social change.
- ___ 8 I would take part in nonviolent action campaigns for a cause I believed in.
- ___ 9 I would be willing to be arrested in a nonviolent action campaign for a cause I believed in.
- ___ 10 I would be willing to undergo physical harm (tear gas, water hose, beating, pepper spray) in a nonviolent action campaign for a cause I believed in.

2 Now look at all the questions for which you answered 1 or 2, indicating disagreement. Does the pattern tell you anything about yourself?

3 Look at all the questions for which you answered 3 or 4, indicating agreement. What does the pattern suggest? Look at all the questions for which you answered 5, indicating ambivalence or lack of clarity. What do you notice?

4 Share this test with other people (family, friends, colleagues, social groups), and talk together about the results and the questions raised by those results.

75 DO A NONVIOLENCE INVENTORY OF YOUR HOME AND FAMILY

There are many situations in our daily lives at home with family where the choice for violence or nonviolence is present. Some of these are obvious, some less so.

Whereas the self-test referred to your beliefs, this inventory involves things that you actually do. Again, there is no right or wrong, good or bad response. An honest assessment of your lifestyle may give you useful information about how you choose to live your values.

NONVIOLENCE INVENTORY

Rate the frequency of each of the actions following with numbers from the following scale. 1—Never 2—Rarely 3—Sometimes 4—Often 5—Always

In my household I/we:

- ___ 1 Use hitting (slapping, spanking) for punishment of children.
- ___ 2 Use shaming and blaming words to correct bad behavior.
- ___ 3 Have rules or strong norms against hitting (or other forms of hurting)
 - ___ Children
 - ___ Adults
 - ___ Animals
- ___ 4 Enjoy watching television shows about murder, crime, or other depictions of violence.
- ___ 5 Enjoy watching action, suspense, or horror movies.
- ___ 6 Own a gun.
- ___ 7 Allow toy weapons, war toys, and violent play-acting.
- ___ 8 Enjoy playing violent video games.
- ___ 9 Kill bugs and other pests found inside or outside the house.
- ___ 10 Capture bugs found inside the house and release them outside.
- ___ 11 Have angry fights, using accusations, blame, belittling, or mean words.
- ___ 12 Talk about any of these things.

What did you learn from this inventory? What, if anything, will you do differently as a result of it?

76 PRACTICE NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION

Violence is not limited to physical activity. Words can hurt too. Even our nonverbal communication—looks, facial expressions, body postures—can convey harmful messages.

Embracing nonviolence requires paying attention to the total picture of our communication and replacing patterns that hurt with new patterns that show love, respect, and encouragement.

- Do a negative language fast. Pick a reasonable period of time (a day, a week) and commit yourself to eliminating all words of negativity from your vocabulary during that period. Negative language includes put-downs, blaming or shaming words (*should* or *shouldn't*), belittling words, disempowering words (*can't*), labels, gossip, or other ways of speaking to yourself or to others that are mean-spirited.
- Replace put-downs with positive encouragement. Put-downs are ways of making someone else feel small, unworthy, or unlovable. Positive encouragement helps people stretch and grow and feel capable and lovable. For instance, instead of, “You are so stupid,” say, “I know you can do it; try again.”
- Replace “you” statements with “I” statements. “You” statements are when we wag our finger at someone and tell them what to do or what’s wrong with them. Most people feel defensive when they hear a “you” statement. “I” statements keep us on the only subject about which we can really know anything, which is our own experience. For instance, instead of, “You make me so mad!” say, “I feel angry when you do that, and I want you to stop!”
- Replace sneers with smiles; a rolling of the eyes or raised eyebrow with direct and friendly eye contact; a look of boredom with a look of interest. See how this changes the quality of the communication—and the relationship.

77 SOFTEN YOUR DEFENSES

Defensiveness is a natural reaction to having been hurt. We learn to defend ourselves against rejection, to protect our hearts against

pain. We want to justify our actions and beliefs and guard ourselves from whatever we find frightening.

The shield is the other side of the sword. When we shield ourselves, we tighten up. This makes us more likely to attract attack and unable to receive whatever good energy is coming our way. The more defended we are, the less able we are to let our hearts open in love and peace.

- First step, always, is just to be aware. Pay attention to when and how you feel defensive. What happens in your body? In your mind? In your heart?
- Ask what you are protecting yourself from. Can you actually stop whatever it is you are afraid of from happening?
- Experiment with acting “as if.” For instance, when you feel defensive, act “as if” you felt totally open and at ease, with nothing to defend against. If you are suspicious, act “as if” you were totally trusting. If you are distrustful, act “as if” it’s okay to trust. What do you notice?
- Notice the defenses that others put up toward you. How does that feel? What could you do to provide reassurance that you won’t hurt them?

78 ENCOURAGE NONVIOLENT SOLUTIONS TO CONFLICTS

Conflict is a normal part of human interaction. It can even be a positive experience, because it gives us the opportunity to grow greater love, kindness, and compassion in our relationships. It also helps us learn how to solve problems effectively.

Unfortunately, our society has become used to moving rapidly to violence—of language and action—to resolve our conflicts. We haven’t learned how to manage low-level disputes and keep them from escalating into something more dangerous and explosive. When we commit to the nonviolent resolution of conflict, we commit to peace.

- Develop an internal escalation meter. Learn to sense when a simple difference of opinion or desire moves out of the cool zone

(where things seem quite manageable) and into the hot zone (where emotions run high and danger looms). Find ways to keep your disputes in the cool zone.

- Practice “fair fighting.” Nonviolence doesn’t mean to avoid conflicts. It simply means to move through them in a clean way, without verbal or physical attacks, to find a peaceful and empowering resolution. The rules of a fair fight are:

- 1 Each party has a right to dignity and respect.
- 2 The process will be a win-win effort so that each party gets their basic needs and interests satisfied.
- 3 The outcome will leave people feeling better about themselves and each other.

- Become an expert in negotiation. Read books, take classes, practice negotiation at home, work, and play. Share what you learn about negotiation with your friends, family, and colleagues. Good negotiation skills help promote fair fighting.

- Become an advocate for nonviolent conflict resolution. Actively promote programs of nonviolent conflict resolution in schools, places of worship, the workplace, the community commons, prisons, health programs, government, the courts. Celebrate the success stories from these programs as publicly as possible.

79 PROMOTE NONVIOLENCE IN THE MEDIA

Our media outlets currently provide our greatest exposure to violence as a way of life. The print media routinely report on wars, massacres, and murders in all their grisly details. Television news shows provide graphic details of public mayhem. We watch real-time bombing of cities and towns around the world. TV talk shows provoke passions and encourage people to attack each other on stage. The public sits riveted.

Meanwhile, our television shows sensationalize the seamy side of life. Tales of brutal homicides, twisted serial killers, terrorist attacks, and end-of-the-world destruction scenarios are blockbuster action hits. Our popular music fills the airwaves with nasty language about

women, and about sex as a form of conquest. Our children get educated in the thousands of different ways to kill poor Coyote.

Violence is glamorized and glorified in the media to the point that we have become desensitized to what it really is. It doesn't have to be this way.

- Insist on equal time for nonviolent stories. Editors and filmmakers will say that violence sells because it is so exciting. Find and promote stories of equally high drama involving nonviolent solutions to difficult situations. Lobby hard with local and national media to include them.
- Protest the level of violence in the media. Arrange a community meeting of concerned citizens with the editor of your local newspaper. Organize a boycott of a movie theater showing a particularly gruesome film. Spearhead an e-mail campaign to flood the major networks with complaints about their lopsided programming.
- Talk with children, parents, teachers, and other community members and leaders about the media messages on violence. What do people see and hear and take away from that exposure? How do they make sense of it? Encourage regular family conversations as well as public dialogue on the subject.
- Set limits. Draw your own line about what you will expose yourself to and what you will buy and allow in your home. Encourage your friends and colleagues to do the same.

80 CELEBRATE THE HEROES AND HEROINES OF NONVIOLENCE

We have many inspiring role models of nonviolence. Mahatma Gandhi, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Teresa, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and Nelson Mandela are giants in our times. These people have demonstrated, with their own lives, the miracle and mystery of nonviolent action to touch our souls and change the world.

When we study the writings and the acts of these moral figures, we absorb their wisdom and strengthen our own longing for lives of love and peace in action. They express the ideal that is our highest potential and desire. The more we learn from them, the more like them we become.

- Pick your own role model. Find a hero or heroine of nonviolence who touches something deep in you. While the people mentioned here are perhaps the best known, there are many other figures of current or historical interest who are equally courageous and inspiring. With a little exploration, you can find them.
- Study the literature. Read the writings of your favorite hero or heroine and of other nonviolent giants. Memorize quotes that especially speak to you. Share your favorite passages with friends and family.
- Fill your space with inspirational material. Make posters of your favorite quotes. Find pictures of your hero. Put them everywhere—over your bed, on the refrigerator, on the wall at work or school.
- Imagine you and your heroine are one. Put yourself in her shoes during one of her most inspiring or challenging moments. Can you feel how she might have felt? When you face a moment of testing in your own life, think what she would do in that situation.
- Celebrate the birthdays, anniversaries, or other special events associated with your hero or heroine. Throw a party in their honor. Applaud their legacy.

81 ENGAGE IN NONVIOLENT ACTION FOR A CAUSE YOU BELIEVE IN

Nonviolence can be path for social change as well as a moral value and a way of life. Dedicated individuals or groups practicing nonviolent protest or other forms of persuasion can, literally, change the world. In the twentieth century alone, nonviolent action brought down empires, overturned governments, and ended wars.

Nonviolent action is a way for individuals to show solidarity for people who are oppressed. It is a way to witness for the kind of world we believe in. It is a way to act locally while thinking globally, putting our highest values and ideals into constructive and positive practice. It gives us a chance to walk our talk.

- Pick a cause that touches you. Make a commitment to be actively involved in promoting it—nonviolently.
- Educate yourself. Study the issue carefully, understand the parties involved and the whole range of views before you move to action. Know what's important to you about this cause, and why.
- Find organizations and other individuals working nonviolently for this cause. Learn about their activities. Join with them. Be clear about your goals. Strategize the best kind of action to achieve that goal.
- Stand up for what you believe through a variety of actions, including:
 - Marches
 - Prayer vigils
 - Peaceful demonstrations
 - Teach-ins
 - Walkouts
 - Boycotts
 - Symbolic public acts
- Get trained in nonviolent action and civil disobedience. Many organizations provide such training (see the Resource Guide; look on the Web).
- Participate in a civil disobedience initiative. Use your personal power of love and the power of collective action to confront injustice or repression. Be prepared to endure the sanctions and consequences of your stance.
- Stand in solidarity with nonviolent actions. If you can't, for whatever reason, participate yourself, support those who do. Give money, make posters, cheer from the sidelines, make bail, provide transportation, serve coffee. Take even the smallest step to make a difference.



REVIEW

Practice the Four Principles of Peace and Nonviolence

COMMUNITY

Build a support system for reducing violence and promoting nonviolence in our media.

COOPERATION

Work with people of like mind to confront societal wrongs through nonviolent action.

NONVIOLENCE

Commit to nonviolence as a way of life.

WITNESS

Stand up for what you believe in—live the active power of love.



THE BIRTH OF A NONVIOLENT WARRIOR

A commitment to nonviolence grows through testing. When faced with a moment of choice, which way will we go? Will our fear cause us to run away, or our adrenaline cause us to fight? This story tells of such a moment for one young woman.

When groups started forming on my college campus in preparation for the IMF-World Bank demonstrations in Washington, D. C., I attended my first social action meeting. I learned about the inequities of globalization, but most important, I was trained in nonviolent social action.

On the streets of Washington, all was chaos. Different groups were demonstrating in different ways, and the police were unpredictable. I saw a lot of people get hurt.

One incident in particular stands out. A few of us were trying to find the rest of our team, having become separated in the confusion. As we turned a corner, suddenly there was a group of police in full riot gear. We stopped, and stood quietly. Someone whispered a reminder to stay calm and to recall that our issue was not with the police but with the World Bank.

The police started toward us menacingly, shields raised. I was so scared I wanted to run. But the words of my training came back to me: “The purpose is to witness your love for all humanity.” In that moment, I realized that “all humanity” included not just the poor in the developing world who, I thought, were being hurt by World Bank and IMF policies, but the police right in front of me, who were just doing their job as best they could.

I stood straighter, and let that love for all humanity come through my eyes, as I looked directly at the policeman in front of me. The others in my group must have been doing something similar, because the police stopped just a couple of feet away from us, lowered their shields, and asked where we were headed. They escorted us safely around a noisy crowd so we could rejoin our group.

I realized later how easily I could have become argumentative and confrontational in that moment, seeing those policemen as “the enemy.”

But by staying clear about my purpose for being there, and by including the police in that purpose, I came to understand the true power of nonviolent action.



RESOURCE GUIDE

Check within your local community for programs of nonviolent action or training, for nonviolent communication workshops, or for events honoring nonviolent heroes and heroines. Here are some suggestions:

PROGRAMS AND ORGANIZATIONS

ALTERNATIVES TO VIOLENCE PROGRAM (AVP)

Dedicated to reducing the level of violence in our society, focusing especially on schools, communities, and prisons. A nationwide and worldwide association of volunteer groups offering experiential workshops teaching the same nonviolent skills and techniques used by Mohandas Gandhi and the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

SYRACUSE, NY; PHONE: 713-747-9999;

E-MAIL: avp@avpusa.org; WEB SITE: www.avpusa.org

THE FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION

An interfaith organization committed to active nonviolence as a transforming way of life and as a means of radical change. FOR educates, trains, builds coalitions, and engages in nonviolent and compassionate actions locally, nationally, and globally. Branches and affiliates in 40 countries.

NYACK, NY; PHONE: 845-358-4601; FAX: 845-358-4924;

E-MAIL: for@forusa.org; WEB SITE: www.forusa.org

**THE MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. CENTER
FOR NONVIOLENT SOCIAL CHANGE, INC**

Serves as the national and international clearing house for officially sanctioned King programs and products. Information on King Holiday, community involvement, King's words and philosophy.

ATLANTA, GA; PHONE: 404-526-8900

E-MAIL: information@thekingcenter.org;

WEB SITE: www.thekingcenter.com

TRAINING FOR CHANGE

Spreads the skills of democratic, nonviolent social change. Leads workshops for nonviolent activists to help groups stand up for justice, peace, and environmental harmony.

PHILADELPHIA, PA; PHONE: 215-729-7458; FAX: 215-729-1910;

E-MAIL: peacelearn@igc.org; WEB SITE: www.TrainingForChange.org

WAR RESISTERS LEAGUE

Uses methods ranging from education to demonstrations to lobbying to nonviolent direct action—at all times trying to see those we oppose not as enemies, but as sisters and brothers. Nonviolent activist peace calendar.

NEW YORK, NY; PHONE: 212-228-0450; FAX: 212-228-6193;

E-MAIL: wrl@igc.org; WEB SITE: www.warresisters.org

BOOKS, TAPES, VIDEOS

Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict. Video; PBS documentary showing how, during a century of extreme violence, millions chose to battle brutality and oppression with nonviolent weapons—and won. Available online at www.pbs.org/weta/forcemorepowerful/

Gandhi on Non-Violence: Selected Texts from Gandhi's Non-Violence in Peace and War. Mahatma Gandhi. Thomas Merton, ed. New Directions Publishing Co., 1968.

Love in Action: Writings on Nonviolent Social Change. Thich Nhat Hanh. Parallax Press, 1993.

Martin Luther King, Jr.: Nonviolent Strategies and Tactics for Social Change. John J. Ansbro. Madison Books, Inc., 2000.

Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Compassion. Marshall Rosenberg. Puddle Dancer Press, 1999.

Peace Is the Way: Writings on Nonviolence from the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Walter Wink, ed. Introduction by Richard Deats. Fellowship of Reconciliation, 2000.

WEB SITES

THE NONVIOLENCE WEB

Access to dozens of U.S.-based peace groups. Articles and resources, nationally and internationally organized efforts to pursue nonviolent solutions to today's problems.

www.nonviolence.org

Keywords to explore through your computer search engine: *non-violence, violence prevention, anti-violence, alternatives to violence, pacifism, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr.*