

Nonviolence

Nonviolence, or passive resistance, is prevalent in all cultures, even if it is badly named and hard to define. Nearly everyone will agree that violence usually causes more violence, and that becoming one's enemy is a bad thing. Mohandas Gandhi, the Einstein of nonviolence, called it "Satyagraha," literally "clinging to truth;" sometimes Gandhi would paraphrase it as "soul force." Satyagraha is the use of moral power to re-integrate the violent actor(s) into a shared point of view in which violence is unneeded. Nonviolent people would agree with the physician's maxim, "First, do no harm," which is the opposite of violence (intending to cause harm). Such people avoid being a part of a system that must kill, injure, or abuse any life more than the bare minimum needed for survival.

Perhaps the best way to define nonviolence is with examples. These come from Dr. Michael Nagler's book, [Search For A Nonviolent Future](#), available through mettacenter.org. (The U. C. Berkeley youtube channel has videos of most of his PACS 164 courses on nonviolence.)

The Rosenstraße Prison Demonstration demonstrated that nonviolence worked against the Nazis. "In Berlin in 1943, on a gray weekend at the end of February, police and Gestapo swept through the cold streets and arrested the remaining Jews, mostly men, who had been left more or less at large because they were Jews "of Aryan kin," i.e., married to non-Jewish wives. (...) The arrestees were brought to a large, recently converted building on the Rosenstraße, a few blocks from a major Gestapo headquarters, without incident. (...) in Berlin the "Jewish Radio," as the still-remaining Jews' informal phone network was called, was buzzing, and within hours the wives and, in some cases, mothers of the arrested men learned where they had been taken. (...) By the following morning, from every part of the city," as though in answer to a call—as though prearranged, the women converged on the Rosenstraße detention center, demanding the release of their loved ones. All day they defied orders to leave. As their numbers swelled to more than 6,000, the prisoners themselves took courage and began clamoring through the barred windows to be released. (...) tens of thousands of people were rescued by this impromptu demonstration by untrained women, women who had been living for more than a decade under a regime of authoritarian terror, the likes of which the modern world had rarely seen. Nonviolence was almost never tried against the Nazis, but when it was, it scored a resounding victory. (...) that dramatic weekend reveal a solid nonviolent principle: through a courageous act of self-sacrifice, the demonstrators brought about a momentary rehumanization of the Jewish prisoners—their loved ones—in the hardened hearts of the Gestapo. The large crowd of women demonstrators were not only somewhat awkward to massacre in broad daylight, but the incident also gave a salutary yank on their captors' ideological blinders."

"(...) the emperor Caligula conceived the insane idea of having a statue of himself as incarnate Zeus installed in the great temple in Jerusalem. To Caligula, for whom excesses in the pursuit of egotism were no vice, this must have seemed a wonderful idea, but for once his excess was going to blow up in the imperial face. As his Syrian legate, Petronius, advanced on Jerusalem to carry out the disastrous order, people of all kinds and stations began flooding into the capital—men, women, and children—collecting together in their alarm from cities, villages, and farms from the whole area west of Galilee. They came without weapons in their hands, some of them holding emblems of allegiance to the empire, but they told Petronius in no uncertain terms that this sacrilege could not be allowed. Petronius of course threatened to unleash his troops on them. They replied that they were perfectly willing to die rather than see such an outrage to their religion. Petronius, no particular friend of the Jews, was nonetheless at a loss about how to handle this unarmed resistance. Unable to persuade them, and loath to massacre them wholesale (something that legates had done enthusiastically with violent uprisings), he backed down and took the risk of writing to Rome to make some excuses for stalling the emperor's less-than-brilliant scheme. Caligula, true to form, immediately sent orders for Petronius's execution. But at this point fate intervened. Caligula was assassinated, which saved Petronius (...)"

"World War I almost came apart on the first Christmas, when "enemy" soldiers who had been pinned down in trenches within hailing distance of one another declared their own truce and milled around in no-man's-land, swapping stories and sharing photos of their loved ones back home. Panicky officers on both sides had to threaten the men with draconian punishments to restart the war."

"(...) when the shah's [of Iran] soldiers killed a mullah who had stood up to address a crowd, another mullah stepped forward to replace him, [and was also shot] and then another, until one soldier couldn't stand it anymore and turned his rifle on his own commander—and then on himself."

"During a period of terrible riots some years ago in Gujarat (Gandhi's home state), a "Hindu" mob descended on a rural village, primed to kill. Almost all the village men were out in the fields. The women reacted quickly, however, and took in their Muslim neighbors to hide them from the mob. As they lived mostly in one-room cottages, it often meant

“hiding” the Muslims in the pujan corner, underneath their household altar. The mob stormed up to home after home screaming, “You are hiding Muslims in there!” “Yes,” the women calmly replied. “We are coming in to get them!” Then the women, one after the other said, “First kill me, then only you may enter.” Every Muslim in the village was saved that day. From an eyewitness report of Nirmala Deshpande of the Association of People of Asia (speech, San Francisco, Spring 2003).”

“[Abdul Ghaffar Khan] created a new kind of army without weapons. These were the famous Khudai Khidmatgars, or “Servants of God.” Years later, when Khan himself was at a loss to explain how his Pathans were still nonviolent when most of the Hindus had bolted, Gandhi explained to him, “Nonviolence is not for cowards. It is for the brave, the courageous. And the Pathans are more courageous than the Hindus. That is why the Pathans were able to remain nonviolent.””



Tiananmen Square June 5, 1989

Ancestral humans were very likely a tribal animal, like the great apes of today, living in smallish groups. Most of the time, the number of nearby humans didn't exceed about 150 [Dunbar's Number] until very recently in human history, too recently for evolutionary pressures to adapt many humans for this 'crowding.' Humans are genetically/physically pretty much the same animal that once lived tribally for centa-thousands of years and likely evolved from tribal ancestors. Nonviolent behavior improves the gatherer-hunter or farmer lifestyle so much that evolution must have 'discovered' it very early on.

For all of pre-civ primate history, a sparsely populated planet made traveling (alone or in groups) much more dangerous than today. Self-preservation instincts would make long-term human-to-human relationships inevitable. Since humans were mostly locked into one tribe, the fitness of the tribe directly influences the fitness of an individual tribemember. An injured tribemember is a burden to the tribe, and injuring a relationship is also a kind of wound. Injuring the tribal knowledge base is also burdensome. These human behaviors were minimized by successful tribes. However, modern humans are culturally a fish out of water, apes in a concrete habitat.

Clues to biological 'wiring' for nonviolence are in features like 'mirror neurons.' These neurons were first discovered in a monkey watching a human eat--the same neurons were excited when the monkey watched a human arm move or when it moved its own arm. Other neurons correspond with other body parts. Mirror neurons are involved in 'Einfuhlung,' or 'feeling into' and provide data for another human to know exactly what that observed behavior felt like; the lack of normal emotional cues is instinctively disliked, especially 'stonefaced' humans. Such biological wiring is visible everywhere: in dolphins practicing their synchronized swimming; or in oneself when watching a smiling child; in proverbs like 'monkey see, monkey do' and "If you live with a cripple, you will learn to limp" [Plutarch]. Human moods can spread, even yawning can be contagious. Psychologists can measure behavioral changes present in the average human after experimentally tricking them into smiling or nodding repeatedly. Viewing the after-effects of a violent attack on another human can evoke feelings that reduce such actions in the future.

Sadly, primate characteristics are levers in the hands of those who know of them and who are willing to manipulate them--for example, the act of getting many humans together has unexpected effects, like 'herd poisoning,' often used to irrationally incite affected people to violence against an 'enemy.' Other examples can be found in the effects of

watching five hours of tv every day or other effects of living in a consumer culture. Due to quickly advancing human technologies, novel goods are available, some of which, in the service of currency accumulation, can be made super-desirable or even addicting, and thus consumed to excess or sought intemperately (a 'supernormal' or 'superoptimal stimulus').

Nonviolence 'works' partly because lies, rough speech, and violence are not good behaviors in a human tribe. Empathy is probably the default behavior in a brain, even if it can be over-ridden. Witnesses inhibit violent behavior if physically present, for to be known as a violent person might mean expulsion from the tribe, and, throughout most of human existence, such expulsion probably meant death. The rest of tribe would have been likely to figure out what had happened sooner or later, as tribemembers would know each other pretty well after camping out together for decades. Beneficial cultural practices are likely to minimize intra-tribal violent tendencies (but are less likely to inhibit behaviors like throwing rocks at strange humans).

A person using nonviolence should never act like a predator or a competitor or a prey animal, as these can invoke violent instinctive behaviors. Nonviolent people should not gloat or embarrass other people, for these emotions cause separation (perhaps by invoking hatred or vengeful feelings). All humans should avoid psychological 'primers' of violence like violent videos and other 'entertainments.'

Humans must surely have some sort of inbuilt reconciliation behavior patterns--something like shared laughter, shared songs, shared food, or working together on something worthy. Tribal re-integration must have been important, as these techniques have been proven to have powerful effects upon humans. Other possible 'hacks' of human mental processes might involve giving away presents, like 'money' [fake or legal tender]; or reciting the policeman's oath of office during arrests; or any other way to appear to be a friend/tribemember instead of an outsider/stranger.

"Do not do evil for evil nor return hate for hate." Buddha

"Never return evil for evil." Socrates

When asked how a person can seek revenge on an enemy, Diogenes replied "By becoming a good and honest man."

"(...) it is more wicked to kill ten thousand by hurling an artillery shell into a town, than to kill one man by pommeling him with a stone, yet the latter is by far the more psychologically difficult act. Distance, time, and physical barriers neutralize the moral sense. There are virtually no psychological inhibitions against coastal bombardment or dropping napalm from a plane twenty thousand feet overhead." Dr. Stanley Milgram [this makes me think of remotely-controlled warplanes... known in NewSpeak as 'drones.']

Sergei Plekhanov, when deputy director of the Soviet Institute for U.S. and Canadian Studies was asked what could be used against tanks, replied "Nothing. Nothing but spirit, a sense of legitimacy, and the willingness of some people to risk their lives."

"In a remarkable experiment first reported in the Journal of Abnormal Social Psychology some time ago, schoolchildren of the same age were divided into two groups: one group was encouraged to be aggressive and the other to be cooperative. (In our culture most children are "trained" to be aggressive even before they reach school, but it's fairly easy to overcome that training with a little encouragement of their innate tendency to share, cooperate, think about each others' welfare.) Within a few weeks they were behaving quite differently. Both groups were then brought together and subjected to an acute frustration: They were sat down in a nice big room with a projector that was flanked by several cans of film. For good measure, each child was given a candy bar but told not to start in on it just yet. The room was darkened and the first film started—suddenly, without a word of explanation, the experimenters snapped on the lights, shut off the projector, confiscated the candy bars, and packed the children off to their respective classrooms. Science is rough! But the issue was important—to see if the cooperative training would hold up under such unmerited mistreatment—and the results, duly filmed through the classrooms' one-way glass, were extremely suggestive. The children with pro-aggressive training were of course hell on wheels; their frustration boiled over in fights, arguments, and general mayhem more than ever. That was not very surprising. But the rest was: the children who had been systematically encouraged to cooperate with each other were more cooperative than ever. Apparently their cooperation training not only protected them from frustration, it allowed them to thrive on it. They were able, that is, to divert the negativity it released within them into constructive channels." Dr. Michael Nagler, author of Search For a Nonviolent Future.

"Power is of two kinds. One is obtained by fear of punishment, and the other by acts of love. Power based on love is a thousand times more effective and permanent than the one derived from fear of punishment." Gandhi

"Non-cooperation with evil is as much a duty as is cooperation with good." Mohandas Gandhi

"Sanctions are of two kinds: one, physical force, and two, soul force—Satyagraha. Physical force is nothing compared to the power of truth." Gandhi

"In Satyagraha it is never the numbers that count. Strength of numbers is the delight of the timid. The valiant of spirit glory in fighting alone." Gandhi

"It is not that I am incapable of anger, for instance, but I succeed on almost all occasions to keep my feelings under control. Whatever may be the result, there is always in me conscious struggle for following the law of non-violence deliberately and ceaselessly. Such a struggle leaves one stronger for it. The more I work at this law, the more I feel the delight in my life, the delight in the scheme of the universe. It gives me a peace and a meaning of the mysteries of nature that I have no power to describe." Gandhi

"Non-violence is essentially non-co-operation. It expresses itself in the refusal to participate in the ordinary processes of society. It may mean the refusal to pay taxes to the government (civil disobedience), or to trade with the social group which is to be coerced (boycott) or to render customary services (strike). While it represents a passive and negative form of resistance, its consequences may be very positive. It certainly places restraints upon the freedom of the objects of its discipline and prevents them from doing what they desire to do." Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man & Immoral Society*

"When it gets down to having to use violence, then you are playing the system's game. The establishment will irritate you – pull your beard, flick your face – to make you fight. Because once they've got you violent, then they know how to handle you. The only thing they don't know how to handle is non-violence and humor." John Lennon

"One may well ask: How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others? The answer lies in the fact that there are two types of laws: just and unjust. I would be the first to advocate obeying just laws. One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws." Martin Luther King, Jr.

""Thou shalt not kill," is one; others phrase it, "Thou shall do no murder"; and in this double version we see at once the beginnings of controversy. If you are a Quaker, you accept the former version, while if you are a member of the military general staff of your country you accept the latter. You maintain the right to kill your fellow men, provided that those who do the killing have been previously clad in a special uniform, indicating their distinctive function as killers of their fellow men. You maintain, in other words, the right of making war; and presently, when you get into making war, you find yourself maintaining the right to kill, not merely by the old established method of the sword and the bullet, but by means of poison gases which destroy the lives of women and children, perhaps a whole city full at a time.

And also, of course, you maintain the right to kill, provided the killing has been formally ordered and sanctioned by a man who sits upon a raised bench and wears a black robe, and perhaps a powdered wig. You consider that by the simple device of putting this man into a black robe and a powdered wig, you endow him with authority to judge and revise the divine law. In other words, you subject this divine law to human reason; and if some religious fanatic refuses to be so subjected, you call him by the dread name "pacifist," and if he attempts to preach his idea, you send him to prison for ten or twenty years, which means in actual practice that you kill him by the slow effects of malnutrition and tubercular infection. If he is ordered to put on the special costume of killing, and refuses to do so, you call him a "C. O.," and you bully and beat him, and perhaps administer to him the "water cure" in your dungeons." Upton Sinclair, in The Book of Life

"There are five meditations. The first meditation is the meditation of love in which thou must so adjust thy heart that thou longest for the weal and welfare of all beings, including the happiness of thine enemies." Buddha

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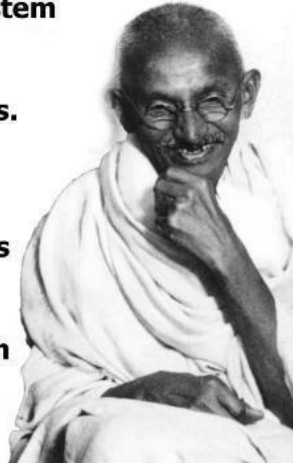
"You assist an evil system most effectively by obeying its orders and decrees.

An evil system never deserves such allegiance.

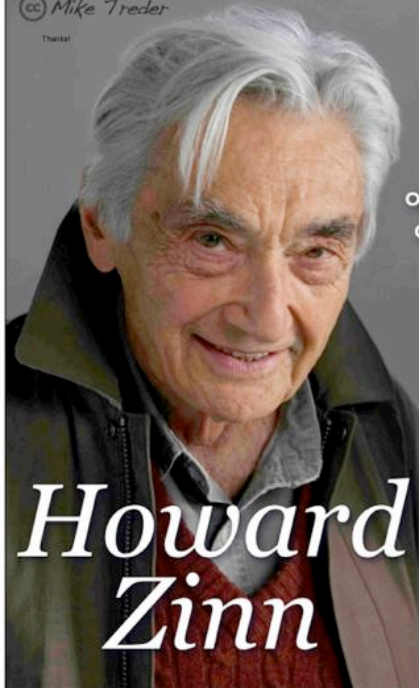
Allegiance to it means partaking of the evil.

A good person will resist an evil system with his or her whole soul."

- Mahatma Gandhi



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**Howard
Zinn**

“ ... are saying our problem is civil disobedience, but that is *not* our problem.

Our problem is civil **obedience**.

Our problem is the numbers of people all over the world who have obeyed the dictates of the leaders of their government and have gone to war, and millions have been killed because of this **obedience**.

Our problem is that people are obedient all over the world, in the face of poverty and starvation and stupidity, and war and cruelty.

Our problem is that people are obedient while the jails are full of petty thieves, and all the while the grand thieves are running the country.

That's our problem.”



What if the soldiers inside the tank start clowning around and retreat just a little after the pebble attack? Of course, modern soldiers are too well 'trained' to clown around with their equipment, not even for the smile of a child-enemy, no matter how brave.

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