

Session Six: What is Loving Resistance for Us?

Gene Sharp: Nonviolence as Technique for Controlling Power

“Nonviolence action, or nonviolent struggle, is a technique of action by which the population can restrict and sever the sources of power of their rulers or other oppressors and mobilize their own power potential into effective power. This technique is based on the understanding of political power...[that says] that the power of rulers and of hierarchical systems, no matter how dictatorial, depends directly on the obedience and cooperation of the population. Such obedience and cooperation, in turn, depend on the willingness of the population and a multitude of assistants to consent by their actions or inaction to support the rulers. People may obey and cooperate because they positively approve of the rulers and their orders, or they may obey and cooperate because they are intimidated into submission by the fear of punishment.

Yet, despite such punishments, acts of protest, disobedience, and noncooperation have occurred frequently in many societies...

Nonviolent struggle does not require acceptance of a new political doctrine or of a new moral or religious belief. In political terms, nonviolent action is based on a very simple insight: people do not always do what they are told to do, and sometimes they do things that they are forbidden to do. Subjects may disobey laws they reject. Workers may halt work, which may paralyze the economy. The bureaucracy may refuse to carry out instructions. Soldiers and police may become lax in inflicting repression or even mutiny. When all these events happen simultaneously, the power of the rulers weakens and can then dissolve.”

~ Gene Sharp, *Waging Nonviolent Struggle: 20th Century Practice and 21st Century Potential*, pp. 39–40.

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Martin Luther King, Jr.: Creating Tension for Positive Peace

"You may well ask, 'Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches, etc.? Isn't negotiation a better path?' You are exactly right in your call for negotiation. Indeed, it is the purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored...

...I must make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers. First, I must confess that over the last few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizens Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says, "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I can't agree with your methods of direct action"; who paternalistically feels that he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by the myth of time and who constantly advised the Negro to wait until a 'more convenient season.'" Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection...

...Let me rush on to my other disappointment. I have been so greatly disappointed with the white church and its leadership...So here we are moving toward the exit of the twentieth century with a religious community largely adjusted to the status quo, standing as a taillight behind other community agencies rather than a headlight leading men to higher levels of justice...There was a time when the church was very powerful. It was during that period when the early Christians rejoiced when they were deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society..."

~ Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," in *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches that Changed the World*, pp. 86–97

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Archbishop Desmond Tutu: Ubuntu

“Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a Western language. It speaks of the very essence of being human. When we want to give high praise to someone we say, ‘Yu, u nobuntu’; ‘Hey, so-and-so has Ubuntu.’ Then you are generous, you are hospitable, you are friendly and caring and compassionate. You share what you have. It is to say, ‘My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours.’ We belong in a bundle of life. We say, ‘A person is a person through other persons.’ It is not, ‘I think therefore I am.’ It says rather: ‘I am human because I belong. I participate, I share.’ A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated if they were less than who they are... What dehumanizes you inexorably dehumanizes me. [Ubuntu] gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanize them.”

~ Archbishop Desmond Tutu, No Future without Forgiveness, p.31

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Mohandas K. Gandhi: Nonviolence as Soul Force

“Nonviolence is a power which can be wielded equally by all—children, young men and women or grown up people—provided they have a living faith in the God of Love and have therefore equal love for all mankind. When nonviolence is accepted as the law of life it must pervade the whole being and not be applied to isolated acts.”

“Nonviolence is ‘not a resignation from all real fighting against wickedness.’ On the contrary, the nonviolence of my conception is a more active and real fight against wickedness than retaliation whose very nature is to increase wickedness. I contemplate a mental and therefore a moral opposition to immoralities. I seek entirely to blunt the edge of the tyrant’s sword, not by putting up against it a sharper-edged weapon, but by disappointing his expectation that I would be offering physical resistance. The resistance of the soul that I should offer would elude him. It would at first dazzle him and at least compel recognition from him, which recognition would not humiliate but would uplift him. It may be urged that this is an ideal state. And so it is.”

~ Gandhi, in *Approaches to Peace*, David Barash, editor, pp. 187–188

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Mohandas K. Gandhi: Nonviolence as Noncooperation

“The basic principle on which the practice of nonviolence rests is that what holds good in respect of yourself, holds good equally in respect of the whole universe. All humans in essence are alike. What is, therefore, possible for me is possible everybody. Pursuing further this line of reasoning, I came to the conclusion that if I could find a nonviolent solution of the various problems that arise in one particular village, the lesson learned from it would enable me to tackle in a nonviolent manner all similar problems in India.

In its positive form, nonviolence means the largest love, the greatest charity. If I am a follower of nonviolence, I must love my enemy. I must apply the same rules to the wrong-doer who is my enemy or a stranger to me, as I would to my wrong-doing father or son. This active nonviolence necessarily includes truth and fearlessness. The practice of nonviolence calls forth the greatest courage.

We should try to understand the psychology of evildoers. They are very often victim of their circumstances. By patience and sympathy, we shall be able to win over at least some of them to the side of justice. Moreover, we should not forget that even evil is sustained through the cooperation, either willing or forced, of good people. Truth alone is self-sustained. In the last resort we can curb the power of the evildoers to do mischief by withdrawing all cooperation from them and completely isolating them.

This is in essence the principle of nonviolent noncooperation. It follows, therefore, that it must have its roots in love. Its object should not be to punish the opponents or to inflict injury upon them. Even while noncooperating with them, we must make them feel that in us they have a friend, and we should try to reach their heart by rendering them humanitarian service whenever possible. In fact, it is the acid test of nonviolence that in a nonviolent conflict there is no rancor left behind, and in the end the enemies are converted into friends.”

~ Gandhi, Essential Writings, John Dear, ed., p. 98

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Shane Claiborne: The Mustard Seed Revolution

“Jesus uses some unlikely metaphors for God’s kingdom...he says God’s kingdom is like mustard...I’ve heard plenty of cute sermons about the mustard seed parable, talking about how God takes little seeds and makes big trees out of them, but I think there’s much more than that going on here.

Matthew strategically places the mustard seed parable in a middle of the story about gardening in which Jesus commands people not to tear up the weeds from the garden but to let the wheat and weeds grow together (Matt. 13:24–30, 36–43). Then he tells his listeners that the kingdom of God is like mustard, which grows like a wild bush (Matt 13:31–35). I once heard a farmer say it is like kudzu, and a city preacher compared it to the wild weeds that grow out of the abandoned houses and crack the sidewalks. The mustard seed’s growth would have been familiar to first-century Jews and its symbolic meaning unmistakably clear. It may have even been growing wild around them as Jesus spoke...

...When those first-century peasants heard Jesus’ images, they would have giggled, or maybe they would have told him to hush before he got killed. Here he is using this infamous plant to describe God’s kingdom subtly taking over the world.

...The Jesus revolution is not a frontal attack on the empires of this world. It is a subtle contagion, spreading one little life, one little hospitality house, at a time...The contagion of God’s love is spreading across the land like a little mustard plant, growing smaller and smaller until it takes over the world.”

~ Shane Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution*, pp.334–340

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Jean Zaru: Nonviolence as Sumoud

“The word sumoud in Arabic might be best translated as ‘steadfastness.’ It plays an incredibly important part in Palestinian culture and self-identity. This is especially true given present-day, as well as historical, challenges to the self-determination of the Palestinian people. To practice sumoud means to remain steadfast on one’s land and, more generally, to remain steadfast in service to one’s homeland and to the struggle for freedom. For example, given the current grave circumstances, just waking up every morning with the determination to carry on with one’s daily routine and to hold fast to one’s humanity in spite of the challenges and dangers in movement—walking through military checkpoints to get to work, driving your children past army tanks to get to school, taking your herd out to graze despite physical and verbal abuse of Israeli settlers—is to practice sumoud or to be samid or samida...

...Nonviolence is threatening to the powers that be because nonviolence undermines their pretense to moral authority. Nonviolence reconceptualizes power and it gives the ordinary person power to effect change. Nonviolence exposes and then challenges the structures of domination and not just the overt symptoms. It then, in turn, requires the oppressor to examine how they, too, are victims of the very violence that they impart. For in the end, the violence of occupation is killing—morally, physically, and spiritually—both peoples.”

~ Jean Zaru, *Occupied with Nonviolence: A Palestinian Woman Speaks*, pp. 71–74

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Walter Wink: The Power of Intercessory Prayer

“Intercessory prayer is spiritual defiance of what is in the name of what God has promised. Intercession visualizes an alternative future to the one apparently fated by the momentum of current forces. Prayer infuses the air of a time yet to be into the suffocating atmosphere of the present.

History belongs to the intercessors who believe the future into being. This is not simply a religious statement. It is also true of Communists or capitalists or anarchists. The future belongs to whoever can envision a new and desirable possibility, which faith then fixes on as inevitable.

This is the politics of hope. Hope envisages its future and then acts as if that future is now irresistible, thus helping to create the reality for which it longs. The future is not closed. There are fields of forces whose interactions are somewhat predictable. But how they will interact is not. Even a small number of people, firmly committed to the new inevitability on which they have fixed their imaginations, can decisively affect the shape the future takes. These shapers of the future are the intercessors, who call out of the future the longed-for new present. In the New Testament, the name and texture and aura of that future is God’s domination-free order, the reign of God.

No doubt our intercessions sometimes change us as we open ourselves to new possibilities we had not guessed. No doubt our prayers to God reflect back upon us as a divine command to become the answer to our prayer. But if we are to take the biblical understanding seriously, intercession is more than that. It changes the world and it changes what is possible to God. It creates an island of relative freedom in a world gripped by unholy necessity. A new force field appears that hitherto was only potential. The entire configuration changes as the result of the change of a single part. A space opens in the praying person, permitting God to act without violating human freedom. The change in even one person thus changes what God can thereby do in the world.”

~ Walter Wink, *The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium*, pp. 185–186

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Dorothy Day: We are called to be saints

“We will print the words of Christ who is with us always, ‘Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute and calumniate you, so that you may be children of your Father in heave, who makes His sun to rise on the good and the evil, and sends rain on the just and unjust.’

We are at war, a declared war with Japan, Germany and Italy. But still we can repeat Christ’s words each day, holding them close in our hearts, and each month printing them in the paper. In times past, Europe has been a battlefield. But let us remember St. Francis, who spoke of peace and we will remind our readers of him, too, so they will not forget.

In the Catholic Worker we will quote our Pope, our saints, our priests. We will go on printing the articles which remind us today that we are all ‘called to be saints,’ that we are other Christs, reminding us of the priesthood of the laity.

We are still pacifists. Our manifesto is the Sermon on the Mount, which means that we will try to be peacemakers. Speaking for many of our conscientious objectors, we will not participate in armed warfare or in making munitions, or by buying government bonds to prosecute the war, or in urging others to these efforts.

But neither will we be carping in our criticism. We love our country and we love our President...We recognize that while in the order of intention we have tried to stand for peace, for love of our brother, in the order of execution we have failed as Americans in living up to our principles.

We will try daily, hourly, to pray for an end to the war...Let us add that unless we combine this prayer with almsgiving, in giving to the least of God’s children, and fasting in order that we may help feed the hungry, and penance in recognition of our share in the guilt, our prayer may become empty words.”

~ Dorothy Day, Letter to all Catholic Worker Houses, Dec. 1941, in *The Power of Nonviolence: Writings by Advocates of Peace*, pp. 50–52