

WELCOME

KINDLING THE CHALICE

CALL TO WORSHIP - *Patrick O'Connell*

This is a quote from Gandhi from volume 1 of *Nonviolence in War and Peace*:

I do believe that, where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence. But I believe that non-violence is infinitely superior to violence, forgiveness is more manly than punishment. But abstinence is forgiveness only when there is the power to punish; it is meaningless when it pretends to proceed from a helpless creature. A mouse hardly forgives a cat when it allows itself to be torn to pieces by her. Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from indomitable will.

Non-violence in its dynamic condition means conscious suffering. It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil-doer, but it means putting of one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant.

AFFIRMATION

SONG # 162 "Gonna Lay Down My Sword & Shield"

WITH THE CHILDREN - *Gandhi* by Demi

OFFERTORY Background Song "Ella's Song" (We who believe in freedom) by Sweet Honey in the Rock

SINGING THE CHILDREN OUT

CANDLES OF CARING

READING #1

Frederick Douglass

Those who favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation
are men who want crops without plowing up the ground—
they want rain without thunder and lightning—
they want the ocean without the awful roar of its waters.

This struggle may be a moral one;
it may be a physical one;
or it may be both moral and physical
but it must be a struggle.

Power concedes nothing without demand.....
It never did and it never will.

Find out just what the people will submit to
And you have found the exact amount of injustice and wrong
which will be imposed upon them;

And these will continue until they are resisted
with either words or blows, or both....

The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.

SONG #156 "OH, FREEDOM"

READING #2

Barbara Deming, from *The Power of the People - Active Nonviolence in the United States*

May those who say that they believe in nonviolence learn to challenge more boldly those institutions of violence that constrict and cripple our humanity. And may those who have questioned nonviolence come to see that one's rights to life and happiness can only be claimed as inalienable if one grants, in action, that they belong to all.

If greater gains have not been won by nonviolent action it is because most of those using it have ... expected too much from "the powerful"; and so, I would add, they have stopped short of really exercising their own peculiar powers – those powers one discovers when one refuses any longer to simply do another's will. They have stopped far short not only widespread nonviolent disruption but of that form of noncooperation which is assertive, constructive – that confronts those who are "running everything" with independent activity, particularly independent economic activity. There is leverage for change here that has scarcely begun to be applied.

The feminist vision ... abandons the concept of naming enemies and adopts a concept familiar to the nonviolent tradition: naming behavior that is oppressive, naming abuse of power that is held unfairly and must be destroyed, but naming no person one whom we are willing to destroy. If we can destroy a man's power to tyrannize, there is no need, of course, to destroy the man himself. And if the same man who behaves in one sense as a tyrant is in another our comrade, there is no need to feel that we have lost our political minds (or souls) when we treat him as a person divided from us (and from himself) in just this way.

CALL TO SILENCE

SERMON "Lessons from Gandhi: On the Power of Nonviolence" Patrick O'Connell

CLOSING SONG #170 "We are a Gentle, Angry People"

BENEDICTION

Lessons from Gandhi:

On the Power of Nonviolence

A Sermon Given by Patrick O'Connell
Sunday, October 6, 2001
(the day we started bombing Afghanistan)

If the September 11th attack had occurred just two days later, I could have been sightseeing at the World Trade Center with my five-year-old daughter and my cousins. Such a barbaric attack has once again caused me to reconsider my commitment to nonviolence. Some of you may be wondering why talk about Gandhi and nonviolence when we have just suffered the most devastating attack on American soil in 50 years? Couldn't this wait until a time when we feel safer, a time when the world is not poised over the abyss of what could become another world war?

I believe this is the most important time to engage in public discussion about violence and nonviolence. One very surprising development of the past two weeks has been our administrations refrain from counter violence. In reality, all of their actions up to this point have been nonviolent: freezing bank accounts and assets; rallying the world to condemn terrorism; and calling for the extradition of those associated with this attack to face criminal charges. We'll see if we can maintain this course.

In the midst of all that has happened, I believe many people are looking for alternatives. The truth of the matter is that we have the greatest military might the world has ever known and still, we aren't safe. Especially at this time, the utter futility of violence and counter violence is most evident for all to see. There is no end to it. The downward spiral goes on and on. Gandhi showed us that there is a powerful alternative. It has been over 50 years since his assassination and in that time, nonviolence has been all but ignored by the world.

Gandhi named his autobiography *My Experiments with Truth*. This book was my first exposure to Gandhi and nonviolence during my sophomore year of college. For Gandhi, nonviolence was not merely a stagnant belief system but a force to be continually explored. This exploration comes out clearly in the quote read for the call to worship. Gandhi believed nonviolence to be infinitely more superior to violence, while at the same time he preferred violence to cowardice, if these two were the only choices one had. To some, this may seem like a contradiction. Most people simply see nonviolence as the belief that all violence is immoral. But this is not the nonviolence I believe in, nor is it the nonviolence that Gandhi showed us. Nonviolence is a powerful force that can be harnessed to liberate all people from social and political oppression. My understanding of this power has grown ever deeper over my past 20 years of study and struggle.

When I was first introduced to nonviolence, through Gandhi's autobiography, as a sophomore in college, I latched onto the narrow and rather simple philosophy that all violence was bad. I did my best to adapt what I believed was a Gandhian lifestyle: I became a vegetarian, as well as a nonviolent organizer and activist, and lived a very simple lifestyle.

My understanding of nonviolence was dramatically changed when I began to read the works of the world's preeminent expert on nonviolence, Professor Gene Sharp. His writings showed me that, aside from being a moral philosophy, nonviolence had also been a very powerful weapon for liberation throughout history. Since most attention has been paid to the philosophy, I would like to focus today on the weapon of nonviolence.

Professor Sharp has analyzed nonviolence in the same ways the military analyzes military history. He has developed the theory of power on which nonviolence is based. According to Professor Sharp, political power does not come out of the barrel of a gun but is based on the consent and cooperation of

the governed. Without this cooperation, there is no political power. This is similar to the explanation of power by Frederick Douglass in the first reading:

Find out just what the people will submit to and you have found the exact amount of injustice and oppression which will be imposed upon them.

And these will continue until they are resisted.

This is as true for the most democratic of societies as it is for the most totalitarian. While a great deal of attention has been paid to the atrocities and monolithic power of Nazi Germany, very few know of the many examples of effective nonviolent resistance to the Nazis.

- In the heart of Berlin, thousands of German women won the release of their Jewish husbands through nonviolent protests in front of Gestapo headquarters. In large part, these protests were responsible for the fact that 98% of the German Jews that survived the holocaust were from mixed marriages.
- In Denmark, the King wore a Jewish star and proclaimed: "We are all Jews." Because of the noncooperation of the Danish society, fewer than 500 Danish Jews were seized and sent to Germany, where they received special treatment and safety.
- In Norway, the entire population resisted all attempts to incorporate Nazism into their society.
- In France, noncooperation saved over 80% of the Jews
- In Italy, over 90%
- In Belgium, not a single Belgian Jew was deported and the same was true for Bulgaria

In her very important book, *Eichman in Jerusalem - A Report On the Banality of Evil*, Hannah Arendt shows how the Final Solution took place specifically because entire populations cooperated. Where it

met with resistance and noncooperation, it failed. This is the real lesson we need to learn about Nazi Germany.

Sharp has outlined 198 different methods of nonviolent action. These methods are broken down into 5 main categories:

1. Nonviolent protest and persuasion
2. Social noncooperation
3. Economic noncooperation
4. Political noncooperation
5. Nonviolent intervention

There is a great deal more to nonviolence than merely turning the other cheek.

He has also explained the dynamics of nonviolent resistance, so we can understand specifically how and why nonviolence works. Rather than respond to a violent opponent with violence, where they are strongest, nonviolence turns the violence of the opponent back against them. Sharp calls this "political jiu jitsu. By using nonviolent strategies, conflict is waged on the resisters terms rather than those of their opponent. Most systems that depend on violence as their ultimate sanction are used to only two responses - violence or passivity. Nonviolence throws these systems off-balance. The excuse of self-defense as a justification for brutality and attack is removed. Agents carrying repression have to actually think about why they are using violence, if it is justified and if they really support the policies they are enforcing. The same dilemma confronts the rest of the society. They are forced to make a choice between the position of those in power and those resisting that power. Dr. King called this process "creative tension."

One common misperception of nonviolent struggle is that when it is used, the opponent will also refrain from violence. While casualties and destruction are comparatively much lower with nonviolent struggle, the goal is not escape violence during a struggle. The real power of nonviolence is that it brings the inherent violence and injustice of the system in power to the surface for all to see. In the American South before the 50s, most people didn't have to consider the injustice of segregation. That was just the way it was. The Civil Rights movement forced our entire country to choose whether such a policy was just.

In *Gandhi as a Political Strategist*, Professor Sharp points out that Gandhi was able to defeat the British Empire, not because he was a holy man, but because he understood and used nonviolence strategically, like a military general. Rather than mere moral statements, his campaigns were aimed at specific weaknesses of the British rule over India. He started and stopped his campaigns as he gauged the relative strength or weakness of the Indian people and of British rule. Gandhi gave the world a brief glimpse of the potential power of nonviolence. Neither the world nor India has taken this lesson to heart.

Even with all of its gains, nonviolence is still in the early stages of its development. For the most part, the people who have used nonviolence and won have done so with little or no real understanding of how it worked. Just imagine how effective the nonviolent technique could be today if we had invested just 1% of what we have spent on the development and export of militarism, terrorism and weaponry, since Gandhi's death in 1948. It is quite possible that the world would be a very different place today.

Just one example should suffice: Imagine how the world would be changed if instead of calling for a violent jihad, the Islamic fundamentalists instead were to call for a **nonviolent** jihad against the corruption and exploitation of the west and 100,000 followers took up the call? We, in the west, would not have the word "terrorism" to hide behind any longer. We would be forced to come to terms with the

destructive and exploitative role we have played throughout most of the world. Personally, I would much prefer this possible scenario to the one we are now faced with.

This is not as far-fetched as it may sound. In the 1920s, Abdul Gaffhar Khan raised a nonviolent army of some 100,000 Muslim Pathans in what was then the Northwest Frontier of India (now Pakistan). The Pathans were the fiercest warriors in all of India. Pride and bravery were their highest values. When Khan showed them that nonviolence was an even better way to show their bravery than violent resistance, they understood. They became a primary force behind India's eventual victory over the British. In *A Man to Match his Mountains*, Eknath Easwaran explores both the Pathans and their nonviolent struggle:

Abdul Ghaffar Khan baffled the British and electrified Indian by raising an nonviolent army of 100,000 soldiers out of one of the world's most violent people, the Pathans. Khan's backward tribesmen turned the tables on the British. These same maligned Pathans stirred the whole Indian subcontinent when they put down their daggers and handmade rifles and faced, without retaliating, the worst the armies of a baffled, panicking empire could deal out.

During the Indian freedom struggle, Khan and his nonviolent army found themselves the target of savage repression. On occasion, the entire province was even sealed off from the eyes of the world, leaving the government forces free to crush the movement in whatever way they could. The impression that the British were fair and easygoing opponents in India is based largely upon the ignorance in which the treatment of Khan and his people has been shrouded. Throughout the thirties and early forties, Pathans had to endure mass shootings, torture, the destruction of fields and homes, jail, flogging and humiliations.

But the Pathnas remained nonviolent and stood unmoved – suffering and dying in large numbers to win their freedom.

Nonviolence may be the key to our future. This becomes clearer every day. The rise of global corporate power requires that we develop ways to ensure the will of the people is heard. Our civil liberties and rights are now under attack in a way they have never been before, as governments define their war on terrorism. Nonviolence may be the last line of defense for these and many other perils.

I close with a quote from Professor Sharp that eloquently states the case for nonviolence:

Technological development in modern weaponry, communications, police methods, transportation, computers and the like all contribute to the further consolidation of control of effective political violence and to the diminution of what can be called freedom or democracy.

For those of us who still believe that human dignity, creativity, justice and freedom are important, the nonviolent technique of struggle may provide one of our last hopes for effective reversal of the current directions toward dehumanization, regimentation, manipulation, and the dominance of political structures of violence and tyranny.