

Foreword



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Growing up as a person of color in apartheid South Africa in the 1940's was not something anyone relished. This was especially true if you were brutally reminded of your skin color every moment of every day. And then to be beaten up at the age of ten by white youths because they considered you too black, and then by black youths because they considered you too white, is a humiliating experience that could drive anyone to vengeful violence.

I was so outraged by my experiences that my parents decided to take me to India and leave me for some time with grandfather, the legendary M. K. Gandhi, so that I could learn from him how to deal with the anger, the frustration, the discrimination, and the humiliation that violent color prejudice can evoke in you. In those 18 months I learned more than I anticipated. My only regret now is that I was just 13 years old and a mediocre student at that. If only I was older, a bit wiser and a bit more thoughtful, I could have learned so much more. But one must be happy with what one has received and not be greedy—a fundamental lesson in nonviolent living. How can I forget this?

One of the many things I learned from grandfather is to understand the depth and breadth of nonviolence, and to acknowledge that we are all violent and that we need to bring about a qualitative change in our attitudes. We often don't acknowledge our violence because we are ignorant about it. We assume we are not violent because our vision of violence is one of fighting, killing, beating, and wars—the type of things that average individuals don't do.

To bring this home to me, grandfather made me draw a family tree of violence using the same principles as are used for a genealogical tree. His argument was that I would have a better

appreciation of nonviolence if I understood and acknowledged the violence that exists in the world. He assisted me every evening to analyze the day's happenings—everything that I experienced, read about, saw or did to others—and put them down on the tree either under “physical” (if it was violence where physical force was used) or under “passive” (if it was the type of violence where the hurt was more emotional).

Within a few months I covered one wall in my room with acts of “passive” violence that grandfather described as being more insidious than “physical” violence. He then explained that passive violence ultimately generated anger in the victim who, as an individual or as a member of a collective, responded violently. In other words it is passive violence that fuels the fire of physical violence. It is because we don't understand or appreciate this concept that all our efforts to work for peace have either not fructified, or the peace that we achieved was only temporary. How can we extinguish a fire if we don't first cut off the fuel that ignites the inferno?

Grandfather always vociferously stressed the need for nonviolence in communications—something that Marshall Rosenberg has been doing admirably for many years through his writings and his seminars. I read with considerable interest Mr. Rosenberg's book, *Nonviolent Communication—A Language of Life*, and was impressed by the depth of his work and the simplicity of the solutions.

Unless, as grandfather would say, “we become the change we wish to see in the world,” no change will ever take place. We are all, unfortunately, waiting for the other person to change first.

Nonviolence is not a strategy that can be used today and discarded tomorrow, nor is it something that makes you meek or a pushover. Nonviolence is about inculcating positive attitudes to replace the negative attitudes that dominate us. Everything that we do is conditioned by selfish motives—what's in it for me—and even more so in an overwhelmingly materialistic society that thrives on rugged individualism. None of these negative concepts is conducive to building a homogeneous family, community, society, or nation.

It is not important that we come together in a moment of crisis and show our patriotism by flying the flag; it is not enough that we become a superpower by building an arsenal that can destroy this earth several times over; it is not enough that we subjugate the rest of the world through our military might, because peace cannot be built on the foundations of fear.

Nonviolence means allowing the positive within you to emerge. Be dominated by love, respect, understanding, appreciation, compassion, and concern for others rather than the self-centered and selfish, greedy, hateful, prejudiced, suspicious, and aggressive attitudes that usually dominate our thinking. We often hear people say: "This world is ruthless and if you want to survive you must become ruthless, too." I humbly disagree with this contention.

This world is what we have made of it. If it is ruthless today it is because we have made it ruthless by our attitudes. If we change ourselves we can change the world, and changing ourselves begins with changing our language and methods of communication. I highly recommend reading this book, and applying the Nonviolent Communication process it teaches. It is a significant first step towards changing our communication and creating a compassionate world.

—Arun Gandhi