

## Basics of Nonviolence

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Greetings. I'm Michael Nagler. I founded the Peace and Conflicts Studies program at the University of California at Berkeley. And I'm speaking to you today from the Metta Center for Nonviolence. And my passion in all of these years in working at Berkeley and here at the Metta Center has been for Mahatma Gandhi and his great discovery of nonviolence. And that's exactly what we're going to be talking today.

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The question is to go over the basics and think, really, what is nonviolence? One of the things that I discovered in dealing with nonviolence these many years is that somehow it is intimately bound up with who we are as human beings. It has something to do with human nature. And I notice that the United Nations has been extremely useful, first of all, as a world institution which is dedicated to the development of nonviolence. And specifically in the declaration of human rights. And furthermore, with the declaration of Seville, which was promoted in 1986 by UNESCO

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It was a time when there was a wide spread popular belief that was being played up by many pseudo scientific writers, a belief in innate aggression. That because of our natural inheritance we're doomed to warfare and violence. So UNESCO collected eighteen distinguished social scientist in **Seville** in Spain. And they laid out a document that stated very, very clearly that we are, nature itself is not violent purely and simply. We are not helpless in the face of a violent nature, that war is a highly developed institution, which human beings have built and human beings can unbuild.

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Along the lines of that famous statement in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that wars are built in the minds of men. And it is in the minds of men and women that they will have to be deconstructed. Now One of the reasons that I say that violence and nonviolence have so much to do with human nature, there was a Kurdish activist recently who was saying that he wanted to carry out his activities as a nonviolent revolution. And some people from peace maker teams who were with him, this is a new institution that the world has today, nonviolent interventionary teams. It's called Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping. A person from one of those organizations, Christian Peacemaker Teams, told this Kurdish man you can do this with nonviolence if you want to, but do be, do be aware that it is risky and it will take much longer.

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As a matter of fact, we now know that that's not true according to a very interesting study developed by the International Center for Nonviolent conflict by Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan. Nonviolent insurrections leading to democratic regime change are twice as effective as violent ones. They are, on the whole, much safer, in terms of the injury to the personnel doing it and to the personnel toward whom it's directed. And surprisingly enough, they can take up to three times faster.

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But anyway, this Kurdish gentleman didn't know that. So he responded, "Yes. I know that it's risky. I know that it takes a long time. I know that it's difficult. I know that it

requires training. But," he said, "you do not lose your humanity in the process. Whereas in the process of using violence we do, apparently, lose our humanity. The appalling number of suicides that we're seeing in service personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan in the last fifteen or so years has led a psychologist friend of mine, Rachel MacNair, to come up with a new concept called PITS. Perpetration Induced Traumatic Stress. And Doctor MacNair was able to show that the damage that you inflict on another person actually hurts you much more than it hurts that other person.

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And in the last twenty years we actually have good neurological evidence with the pathways by which we empathize with the pain of another person and agonize over causing that pain to another person. So it's quite ironic when you talk to people about nonviolence there are basically two objections to it. One, they say it never would have worked against the Nazi's, which is totally untrue. It was tried here and there against the Nazi's and it worked very well. Particularly in an event known as the Rosenstrasse prison demonstration of 1943. The other objection that they have it's just plain not human nature, which is so ironic because nonviolence seems to be, in a funny way, we're discovering this more and more, it really seems to be the core of our human nature.

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And Mahatma Gandhi actually said nonviolence is the law of the humans just as violence is the law of the brute. Now I think what he meant by it's being our law is it is something that we can voluntarily live up to. It's not that animals don't experience compassion, empathy, that they don't have many very sophisticated conflict reduction mechanisms, which we're only beginning to learn about. It's not that they don't have peace keepers. Certain animals will go and interpose themselves in a very non-partisan way. Not even favoring their own companions, if you will, in the society.

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So they have all those things, but they're not doing it by choice. Whereas when human beings opt for nonviolence and go through the risk and the self sacrifices that are necessary for nonviolence, that is precisely what they're doing. They are choosing to live in accordance with their higher selves. Now when Gandhi said law, as in nonviolence is the law of the humans, I'm sure that in the back of his mind he had the word dharma, which means law, but it also means religion. It means the fundamental upholding principle of the universe. And it means the nature of anything or anyone. And in the back of his mind he must have had that famous refrain that one hears in the Mahabharata epic and other sources of ancient Indian wisdom. Ahimsa paramo dharma, nonviolence is the supreme law.

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Now when we try to develop this idea with people, we find that the word nonviolence itself is a stumbling block. It was formed rather recently. It comes into English only in the nineteen twenties. And the formation of the word nonviolence presupposes that violence is something real and nonviolence is only its negation. And as I'm going to be trying to explain, we know believe that that is exact opposite of the truth.

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There's a better term for nonviolence in German, which is Gewaltfreiheit, which means freedom from violence. There's some better terminology in Arabic, that one of the terms used for it is sumud, which means endurance, patience. A very important characteristic

of the nonviolent actor. But the best term that I know of comes from the Tagalog language that was in the Philippines. And it became briefly popular in 1986 during the People Power uprising. And that term was Alay Dangkal, which means to offer dignity. Because when a person is being violent or threatening to be violent toward you, he or she is humiliating himself and demanding you to accept humiliation. One of the first things you do in nonviolence is to refuse to accept that humiliation.

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I remember one episode where a German Jewish person, the run up to the Holocaust, was offered to the yellow star to wear as an arm band and we was supposed to cringe in humiliation because of this thing. But he said to the Gestapo individual who was making him wear it, he said, "Sir, I wear this star with pride." So the first thing that you're doing is you're refusing to accept humiliation and almost as important, you will never use humiliation as a tactic.

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When you respond to a person on the basis that they will be empathetic, that they will not, they can not just be responded to by, made to behave by force, you are offering them dignity. And it's quite interesting that Adolf Hitler said of the British, that the only language they understand is force. And he failed to get anywhere using force against the British. While Gandhi overthrew their entire empire by offering them nonviolence. And, of course, Gandhi had his own invention to describe nonviolence. He called it satyagraha, which literally means a clinging to truth. But this is a truth which is not just a correct fact as opposed to an incorrect fact. It was the reality as opposed to the unreal. And it also it meant the good as opposed to that which is not good. So that word had a tremendous amount of valiance, a bearing for it's Indian ears.

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He also called nonviolence soul-force. And this gets us over to the question of really, you know, what is human nature and where does nonviolence come from? Surprisingly enough none other than Napoleon Bonaparte, who really knew what he was talking about said, "Do you know what astonished me the most in the world?" He said, "The inability of force to create anything. In the long run the sword is always beaten by the spirit." So in his many failures with violence he had kind of backed into an understanding that while violence works on the physical level and appeals to the lowest parts of our nature to fear and anger and sometimes to greed, nonviolence appeals to the higher parts of our nature, which are not physical, but spiritual.

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Now just as a working definition, which can get us started about human nature and, you know, this is to big of a question for us to solve here, but we can say that human beings are body, mind, and spirit. And in a later talk I will be showing that there is a kind of nonviolence that operates on the level of the body, a kind that operates on the level of the mind, and a kind that operates from spirit.

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There's another definition of nonviolence that was developed by one of the greatest peace scholars that the world has known, Kenneth Boulding, almost Nobel Prize winning economist, a poet, a Quaker, and one of the fathers of modern peace research. And he, the last book that Kenneth wrote, in fact he hadn't quite finished it at the time of his death, was called, "The Three Faces of Power." He argued that if we define power

as an ability to get things done among ourselves, among human beings, there are three modes or faces, if you will, of that power.

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There's threat power where I'm saying, in effect, do what I want or I will do something that you don't want. And that is studied intensively by political scientists and carried out by military organizations. Then somewhat less violently we have what he called exchange power, which is how the world economy works and is studied by economists. And here we're kind of saying to one another, "I'll give you something you want if you give me something I want." So we're more or less equals there. Then finally he said there's a kind of power which is studied by almost nobody. And that is called integrative power. And it's a bit subtler. In integrative power we're saying, "I'm going to be authentic as a result of which we will end up closer. More integral. Better integrated." Little story that illustrates this that I'm fond of just now is that of a woman who was getting into her car in a parking lot here in California, where the Metta Center is located. And it's an elderly woman with some physical challenges and gets into her car and a young man jumps into the car and points a gun at her and says give me all your money. The woman refused to be afraid and said to him, "Young man, Jesus is with me in this car. And if you shoot me I'm going to straight to heaven and you are going straight to hell." That was her belief. It reached him and I think what reached him more than the theology was the fact that she did not respond to his threat as a threat. That she didn't lower herself to the situation into which he was trying to drag her. And he [she] was saying do your worst. I'm not going to give you what you want. And he was really affected by this and he started crying, which actually is something that we encounter not infrequently in the world of nonviolent moments and nonviolent interaction. And he started to back out of the car and just before he was leaving she said, "Wait, wait young man." And gave him all the money that she had, which at that time was ten dollars. So it's a perfect illustration of how you have the welfare of the other person at heart you will do something for that person if you can, but not under compulsion.

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And those of you who have studied the history of nonviolence might remember that in Gandhi's first campaign in South Africa the South Africans were being compelled by the South African government to sign passes to take out these identity cards as though they were criminals. And he made an arrangement with Jan Christian Smuts, the head of the South African government that if he would promise to change that law the Indians would take out those passes voluntarily. Very few of his own followers understood that. In fact he was set upon by this burly Pahtan who thought he was selling the movement out. But the point of it was, again, that there are things that you'd be willing to do to help another person, but you will not be willing to do that under any compulsion because that's bad for the other person as much as it is for yourself.

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All right. So what are some of the ways that we human beings can engage this marvelous power in which Gandhi had such confidence and with which he did so much? And he said that it was the greatest power available to the human beings. One way is that we are never against the welfare of the other person. And another way is that we're committed to the belief that wrong means can never bring about right ends. Once we have this in mind how do we, once we've developed this attitude, how do we turn in into

a movement? One important component is training, of course, which is what we're engaged in here. And another is strategy. And within that general idea of strategy it's important to realize that nonviolence has two basic modes, if you will. One is satyagaha, or act of resistance, where you refuse to accept what you believe is wrong, but you do so without hating the other person. And the other is what Mahatma Gandhi called constructive program, which is very powerful because instead of waiting for another person to do something for you, you are going to do build the world that you want yourself. He wrote a pamphlet called Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place. And we have many materials on our website, Metta Center.org, that will explain a good deal more about it. But it's important to know that in a successful strategy you need to have the ability to switch back and forth between constructively cooperating with good. As Martin Luther King said, and obstructively not cooperating with evil.

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That being said, it would be interesting to take a look at the world today after Gandhi and King and see how nonviolence has developed. For one thing, it's spreading all over the world. It's been calculated that more than half the population of the world had experienced a major nonviolent event or campaign in their country, in their society. Many of which were successful. That was more than half the world. That was before the fall of the Iron Curtain, which led to a cascade of insurrections, many of which were nonviolent. And of course it was before Arab Spring. We also have institutionalized learning about nonviolence, which is a tremendous step forward because you always have to reinvent the wheel and figure out what you were doing whenever you were caught in a nonviolent situation. We have new institutions like the unarmed civilian peace keeping that I mentioned earlier. And we have some legislation which is helpful, like the right to protect. We have international courts of law. And, of course, we have the UN. And I believe that nonviolence is the best way for the United Nations to realize its ideals.

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Now by way of closing I just would like to mention one rather spectacular figure in the world of nonviolence who's known as Bacha Khan. Kahn Abdul Ghaffar Kahn. He was a Pashtun, a Pashun. He became a very close follower of Mahatma Gandhi. And he raised an army, if you will, of eighty thousand formerly violent Pashtun warriors who had dedicated and taken a pledge for complete nonviolence. They became a formidable power in the Indian freedom struggle. And in the course of his campaign Kahn was able to defuse or dissolve five myths about nonviolence. And that's what I would like to close with here.

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The first is that we think sometimes that nonviolence is the weak, the weapon of the weak. We don't use it by choice. We use it because we have no choice. We would use weapons if we could. But that is not really nonviolence. The Pahtan's had weapons and were able to use them with extreme courage. The British never succeeded in subduing their area. But they voluntarily renounced those weapons. As Gandhi said, I can make a **satyagrahi**, a nonviolent warrior out of a violent man. I can not make a **satyagrahi** out of a coward. So they completely disproved the idea that nonviolence is a weapon of the weak. They disproved the idea that nonviolence only works against the weak or polite opponent because the British were extremely ruthless in that part of the world, the

Northwest Frontier. They prove, they dissolve the myth that nonviolence only has that resistant, that protest component because like Gandhi, whom he didn't even know at the time, Bacha Kahn began by building schools and reforming the village life of the Pashtun.

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They disprove the move, and this is quite important, that it was not applicable in large scale conflict because here you had eighty thousand people with uniforms, following orders, loyal to their leader, but the only thing was they did not carry weapons and had no intention of using them. So if you can raise that kind of army you could use nonviolence on a large scale even in a situation of armed conflict. And I'm going to talk in another conversation with you about the history of peace teams, where this is being done. And finally it dissolves the myth that there's no room for nonviolence in Islam because Kahn and the Pahtans, generally, were very, very devout Muslims. So I think that I've been able to demonstrate that, as Gandhi said, nonviolence is a weapon that is only, in evolution, its vast potentialities have yet to be tapped. And I'm very pleased that we will be working together to try to tap some of those vast potentialities for the well being of the world. Thank you very much.

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