

## 2 Degrees of Nonviolence 720

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Greetings. Recently during one of the protests that took place in Yemen, a Yemeni who was going out to protest said, "They cannot defeat us because we've left our guns at home." Now this person had begun to understand nonviolence, and this is actually something rather new in our world, the way nonviolence is spreading everywhere. But as I say, he had only begun to understand it and we're beginning to realize, we who have really studied the field, that nonviolence comes in different grades and different flavors. And different words have always been in the discourse. Mahatma Gandhi said of the tremendous achievement of liberating India through nonviolence, he said, "You haven't even begun to see the power of this thing." He said, "So far we have seen the nonviolence of the weak. But I want to show you the nonviolence of the strong."

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So let's try to explore a little what he meant by that. I think that what the Yemeni protester was appealing to is a principle well known to us in the world of nonviolence, which is called the power of vulnerability. Many of the people who are victims of homicide in our world today, many of them, almost two thirds according to some accounts, are victims of what's called victim precipitated homicide. That is they pull out a weapon to defend themselves and they're immediately killed by their opponent. Whereas if you can confront someone without weapons you tend to disarm them. You tend to. It works rather well. But as I was saying in an earlier conversation with you, the human being can, roughly speaking, can be said to consist of mind, body, and spirit. And this is not just a hierarchy. It is an ascending escalating hierarchy.

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So that the power of body is very limited compared to the power of speech or the development of ideas in the mind. And that power is very limited compared to the power of spirit, what Gandhi called soul force. And if our Yemeni friend wanted to give voice to that final power he would have said they can't defeat us. Or rather even, let's go further than that. We are going to be reconciled with them because we have left our hatred at home. Weapons are only an outer symbol and they have a certain amount of power. And it's recently been shown that because most of the nonviolence that we've seen in the world, and it's really very widespread, has been only on this level of weapons and not on the level of attitude.

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Still, it's been very effective. Transitions to democracy are twice as effective when they use even this limited initial kind of nonviolence as transitions to democracy, which you rely on violence. And they're faster and far fewer people are injured. Let's take a simple comparison. In the year 2000 there was an uprising in Serbia to dislodge the then President, Slobodan Milosevic. That uprising climaxed in a single day. No one was killed except one person who was killed at a traffic accident and another had a heart attack, but that's kind of par a city the size of Belgrade anyway on a given day. It cost relatively nothing. I think certain outside powers donated about twenty million dollars. As compared to the NATO bombing of Belgrade and of Serbia, which took, lasted for 16 weeks, cost 3.4 billion dollars, killed many people and failed to achieve its objective of deposing President Milosevic.

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So that gives us an idea of the amount of power of even this initial kind of nonviolence. And why do I say that it was just the initial kind? Because the protesters often carried placards, which were very insulting to President Milosevic. Don't get me wrong, I was no lover of his and I'm very glad that he's out of power. But I'm glad that he's out of power for his sake as well as for the sake of the Serbs. So when they held up posters saying, "Gotov Je!" He's finished. Or even worse, kill yourself Sloba. They were not purifying themselves of hatred.

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The ultimate power of nonviolence comes from the conversion of a negative state, a negative drive like anger or fear. When we refuse to act out of anger or fear, that anger or fear doesn't go away. Miraculously enough, it converts itself into a creative power. Martin Luther King said, "We didn't lead to outbursts of anger. We harnessed anger under discipline for maximum effect." And Gandhi went so far as to say that the biggest lesson he had learned, the supreme lesson that any human being can learn is to conserve your anger. Anger conserved turns into a power that can move the world. So on the level of body, if we refuse to strike out at others and we don't threaten them with weapons we're using an initial type of nonviolence. And there was a term for this that was current for a while. It was called strategic nonviolence. It means you're doing it because you believe it's a good strategy.

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You could be reserving the notion that if this strategy doesn't work you will revert to violence. And it has happened on many an occasion. I think of the Sharpeville Massacre that took place in South Africa in 1960, some 69 people, innocent, unarmed people were killed by the military and by the police and the ANC, African National Congress, decided, well, we tried violence. I'm sorry. We tried nonviolence and it doesn't work. So now we have to go back to violence. And it wasn't until many years later when Nelson Mandela was released from prison and the ANC went back to nonviolent strategies that they succeeded in getting their freedom.

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So we are not saying that nonviolence of body doesn't work. It definitely works. Scientist can show that now. It works better than violence any day. And one thing to be said in its favor, it's much easier. It's much easier if you need to act quickly and you need masses of people. You're not going to get masses of people to overcome all the hatred in their hearts. To have in their minds the belief that the well-being of the opponent and their own well-being are congruous, that they will support each other. So that is one advantage. It's good. It's a very good tool for deposing dictators. You can mobilize people very quickly. You're not demanding much of them. But, you know, as they say, "No pain, no gain." What you cannot do with strategic nonviolence, to use that term for the time being, nonviolence of body, what you cannot do is create democracies. And we've seen this over and over again.

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Particularly right now I'm talking to you in the year 2013, we're seeing this in Egypt, very effective at deposing Hosni Mubarak. No effect really yet that we've seen in terms of building a democracy. And finally what strategic or body nonviolence cannot do, it cannot change our world view. We live in a world where we believe that human beings

are separate material objects. We are doomed to compete for scarce resources and we are doomed to compel one another through threats or, ultimately, violence. This is a very unfortunate world view which prevails in the minds of many, many people.

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Strategic nonviolence doesn't really get very far in dislodging that world view embodying forth another image of the human being. For this we need the kind of nonviolence where you step up to a person as a friend of mine did once in Virginia when he was in a lunch counter sit in and was threatened by someone who was enraged and held a knife up to him and said this is going through your heart if you don't get out of here in one minute. Well, my friend had been sitting at that lunch counter for a day and a half, mostly going through the Lord's Prayer in his mind, which I guess gave him a kind of strength. He looked at his assailant, looked him in the eye, which he first said was very difficult because it was the worst look of hate that he had ever seen. He looked him in the eye and said, "Brother, you do what you feel you have to do and I'm going to try to love you no matter what." Well, astonishingly enough, the person, his hand began to tremble. He dropped his knife. He walked out of the lunch counter. People who saw him walking out said that he was crying, which again, is not terribly uncommon in a nonviolent interaction.

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So what my friend David did was, you can just imagine the enormous fear that had welled up inside of him and possible a great deal of anger also. But he decided I'm not going to act out of this anger or fear. The conversion of those emotions, of that drive into a creative force which kind of happened automatically engages a much deeper power, which sometimes we call principled nonviolence because this is being done by people who are nonviolent on principle. Not because they think it will work, but because they think it's the best way for a human being to be. So you can almost set up a kind of process or step-wise graph where nonviolence of body only, which has the advantage of being able to mobilize quickly and can do a lot in a negative way of deposing counteracting violence.

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Nonviolence of speech, which is often carried out by nonviolent communication and mediation groups goes a step deeper and can have a somewhat longer lasting effect. And finally, nonviolence of spirit, where you really convert yourself into a higher image of humanity and reflect that back to the opponent, is much more difficult to come by. But it's definitely possible not only for a Gandhi or a King, but hundred and thousands of people have been known to do this at least temporarily. And when they do, they really giving us what Gandhi called a harbinger or a message that a new world is possible. Thank you very much.

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