

Peace Teams: Transcript.

Greetings. And I'd like to talk to you now about one of the most important peace innovations in the world. The prevailing term for it is Unarmed Civilian Peace-keeping. UCP. It was also known as third party non-violent intervention. And before that it was known as peace teams. And we still sometimes refer to the groups that go out to do this kind of interventionary work as peace teams. And where do peace teams come from? Well, when I started talking about this at UN and other meetings back in the early 90's I used to say that we can take it back as far as the Buddha who notoriously stopped a war from happening between two rival kings by holding up some water and saying to his followers, or some of the people who were almost about to do this killing.

What is more precious, blood or water? Because they were fighting over water rights, which should sound somewhat familiar to us today. Which is more precious, blood or water? They said blood is much more precious, Blessed One. So he said let us not spill what is more precious for what is less. And he intervened in other ways. And there was a Chinese philosopher called **Mo-Tzu** who used to do this almost for his whole life, going around stopping fights between rival kingdoms. So I said it goes back that far. But recently I've learned it goes back much further. Phineas the Chimp is a famous chimpanzee. It was studied by Frans de Waal. He was the alpha male of his pack. And when he got to be kind of too old to be alpha male, he was forty, which is too old for a chimp. And he decided well, what am I going to do for the rest of my life? And like President Jimmy Carter he decided he would go into peace work. And so what he did was when chimps were getting ready to tear at one another, which can be very damaging, he would bristle up and stand in between them until the screaming stopped and everybody calmed down.

And remarkably enough he would do this even if one of the two chimps was his favorite and was stronger and was likely to win, Phineas was more interested in peace than having his side winning. And those of you who have been involved in peace teams will really smile at this because one of the important principles that we hold very important for our work is called non-partisanship. You cannot be a third party if you are more aligned with one party than the other. So like any parent or any school yard monitor can tell you that this is actually an innate human capacity to involve yourself in conflicts and bring them down. Now as we come down to the modern world there's an interesting episode that plays an important role in the history of peace teams.

In 1931, to be exact September 18th, 1931 the Japanese invaded Manchuria after the so-called Mukden Incident. And fearing that this could lead to a world war, correctly, an Episcopal minister in the UK, whose name was Maude Royden, decided that thousands of people should go to Manchuria and interpose themselves. She didn't use the word yet, interpose themselves between the Japanese and the Manchurian Chinese armies. Interestingly enough this was about nine months after Gandhi had been in London for the round table conference. Actually it was the second round table conference Gandhi was in and it was probably still going on. Now, of course, it's difficult to call into being an organization of that scale from absolutely nothing.

By the time people had signed up for it in any numbers the war had spread out over a wide area and it was not possible. And some of the Indians who were with Gandhi said to her, "You are trying to use a weapon which you do not yet have." But it shows you that this idea of creating not just an individual spontaneous intervention, but a systemic institutionalized intervention has a tremendous possibility and a tremendous power. And some belief, myself among them, that this really could be the way to end the war system. People wage war when they don't have an alternative or they don't know that they have an alternative. Building peace teams up to the point where they can understand that there is an alternative might easily, might make it much easier, at least, for people to renounce war, which is a deeply held value in the United Nations and in the heart of every person.

And although he was primarily concerned with the decolonization of his own country and the breaking down of the colonial era rather than with the war system per se, Gandhi did play an extremely important role in the development of modern peace teams. In fact, the term peace teams and peace army goes back to him. Shanti Sena means peace army. And Gandhi wanted there to be a group of volunteers who would live in every community and who would carry out what we now call constructive program when there was no conflict at hand. And when conflict broke out they were to do good offices to deescalate the conflict. And if none of that worked, for example, the rumor abatement and carrying messages back and forth. If none of that worked, setting up mediations. If that didn't work then they were to be willing to interpose themselves.

Then, believe it or not, this has a very powerful effect. And in terms of getting yourself killed, it's not really nearly as dangerous as trying to defend yourself with a weapon. And in my own observation on my campus when I was teaching at the University of California, in the seventies students were very upset about the ROTC, the military training. And they wanted it off campus. ROTC was in a little building called Callahan Hall. So these students marched on Callahan Hall and they were going to, you know, throw rocks at it and so forth. Inside Callahan Hall were recruits with rifles. And it looked like it could be pretty grim. But there was something called the Campus Peace Union, I think is what they called themselves. It came into existence shortly before and disappeared shortly after. And what they did was they suddenly materialized. They appeared between these two forces and said look, if you throw those stones, they said to the students, you're going to hit us.

And unwilling to do that the students went back and the conflict was resolved. Now, of course, they should have followed that up with real, you know, conversations between, you know, and the rest of it. But in terms of just a spontaneous intervention it was remarkably effective. Now unfortunately, Gandhi was assassinated the very evening before he was to go to a big meeting to start the Shanti Sena in India. It did nonetheless start. And it was led by very prominent Gandhians like **Narayan Desai** and **JP Narayan**. And it had limited successes in the Golan decolonization, which happened shortly after

independence of India and against the Chinese border incursion of 1962. Limited successes but not enough to inspire them to really keep going.

So the idea, more or less, subsided on Indian soil. I'm actually going to be going to a meeting shortly to see if it can be reinvigorated. But then in the rest of the world the idea lived on. In 1981 on Grind Stone Island in Canada a group met which led to the formation of what became one of the most important intervention organizations that does cross border work in South America and many other places, Sri Lanka, Peace Brigades International. Shortly after that there was a book by a friend of mine, Charlie Walker called the World Peace Guard, which calls for an unarmed agency for peace keeping, which should be a world-wide institution.

And that was in 1983. And then in 1993 came from Sister Evelyn Jegen, A report on the Global Peace Consultation. While these consultations were planned and argued for, many other organizations actually started to do this work. Interestingly enough, some of them were explicitly religious or based, religion based. Like Christian Peace Maker Teams, Jewish Peace Fellowship, Buddhist Peace Fellowship, Muslim Peace Fellowship under the aegis of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, those last three. And Witness for Peace. And some of them were nominally secular, like Peace Brigades International. In my view they were equally religious. If you are sacrificing, risking your life for the well-being of another person you have the same spiritual motivation, whether you affiliate yourself with a sectarian group or not.

These groups had a great deal of success in one way and not much success in another. They were incredibly successful in the field. Particularly in developing what became the specialty of Peace Brigades International, which was a protective accompaniment. In one case in particular in Guatemala there was a group called Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo, the Group for Mutual Support. It was human rights group. And incidentally I think that modern peace team work comes from a kind of confluence of humanitarian intervention leading to the idea that borders are not sacrosanct, and human rights work. So the, what they did was call upon Peace Brigades International to send people to accompany them.

PBI would have a person accompany a threatened human rights worker twenty four seven, around the clock. Go to work with them. Go home with them. No one who was directly being accompanied by a person carrying a protective accompaniment has ever been abducted or killed. A few have been taken when our back was turned, so to speak. But in the case of this group in Guatemala it enabled that group to survive and that eventually lead to some kind of peace process in that country. So what you have is a small group of people using very modest resources.

What you have a small group of people who are trained, but not armed, who know something about non-violence and who are willing to go as a non-partisan interventionary force, have carried out tremendously successful small scale work. Non-violent Peace Force, for example, has been incredibly successful in rescuing child

soldiers who had been abducted. This was in Sri Lanka. Who, as I said, they weren't universally successful. Where they have not been successful yet is in attracting the attention of the public and showing people what an incredible potentiality this kind of courage and sacrifice and this kind of organizational work can have.

Now let me go back a little bit if we want to really talk about the potential of peace teams. Gandhi had a close associate, a devout Muslim who's name was Kahn Abdul Ghaffar Kahn, otherwise known as Bacha Kahn, or King Kahn. And in the, his role in the freedom struggle leading to the independence of India was to collect an army of what they call Servants of God, Khudai Khidmatgars. Now the Servants of God, they were, had uniforms, they were very obedient to their ruler. They were drilled, but they were not armed.

And they were dedicated to principles of non-violence. They took out a very strong pledge, one of the strongest non-violent pledges in the world. They were a few hundred in number until they were brutally massacred at the Qissa Khwani Bazaar, again, in 1931. Seems to be a pivotal year for its development. After that massacre their numbers swelled to eighty thousand. This is called sometimes the paradox of repression, where the more you repress people the more they revive. And what this shows us is there is absolutely no inherent reason that we could not take peace teams to scale. There is no reason why we couldn't have enough resources to have rapid response teams which would go into an area where conflict is flaring up and do interposition if necessary. And prior to interposition doing rumor abatement and doing the other things that peace teams have gotten to be so good at doing.

Now as we enter the twenty first century, peace team developments pick up speed, which is very gratifying. And this happens on at least two fronts. There are domestic peace teams working in the US, for example. And this is, in a way, a return to Gandhi's original vision for the Shanti Sena, which, if you remember, was to be community based. Domestic teams are, again, of two types. You have civilian based non-violent, unarmed vigilante type groups working in neighborhoods in American cities where gun violence has become a way of life, or rather a way of death.

Like New York's Guardian Angels that protect passengers on the subway systems and Chicago's Interrupters, who were the subject of a very moving documentary recently.

NEWSCASTER: A man was murdered overnight on Chicago's south side. Police say it happened execution style.

MAN: One hundred and twenty four people have been killed.

WOMAN1: Each and every one of you all can be do right here.

WOMAN2 There are three bullet holes.

WOMAN1: We got a responsibility to bring up our community to be vibrant.

NEWSCASTER: Died last Friday. Shot in the back.

WOMAN1: My brothers.

And then beyond the vigilante type there are unarmed civilian peace keeping teams

who are permanent teams that make themselves available to keep peace at volatile events like a gay pride parade or a Ku Klux Klan rally. And here at the Metta Center we're collaborating in the creation of a Shanti Sena Network to help groups like this get started across the US and Canada. Both these types have in common that, of course, they carry no weapons. They have no government support. They're completely civilian society group. But hopefully they have some non-violence training and usually some distinctive clothing just so that you can see they are third parties when a conflict is imminent or has erupted.

And these groups have been so effective that the police have been known to rely on them. For example, in Michigan. So that's the domestic side. A decisive breakthrough in the global development of these international peace teams came in 1999. It was eighteen years after the Grind Stone Island Conference that I mentioned, when two US peace activists, Mel Duncan from Minnesota and David Hartsough of San Francisco happened to meet at the second Hague Appeal for Peace Conference and discovered that they had a common dream, a World Peace Guard taking the models of Peace Brigades International and other peace team organizations to scale, making it a world-wide resource for the keeping of peace.

In a series of consultations they decided that their first move should be to survey the history of peace teams and get a good sense of the best practices and the dangers to be avoided. Eventually the idea emerged of creating a standing peace army of some two thousand trained interveners who would come from all over the world and be on tap to go into action for the protection of human life and prevention of violence wherever they were called upon by at least one party to a conflict. That goal has not quite been reached. But at an international convening event held in Surajkund, India in 2002, the Non-violent Peace Force was launched.

At that time already more than sixteen countries asked them to please come and intervene in their region, which was far beyond their capacity at that time. And hard choices had to be made of whom to help. The first major deployment was to Sri Lanka. It was to last nine years, from 2002 to 2011. In that course of time Non-violent Peace Force field teams made possible the rescue of dozens of children who had been abducted by the Tamil Tigers to become child soldiers. They did this by accompanying their mothers to the camp where they had been taken. And since then NP with its world headquarters in Brussels has fielded teams to Mindanao, the South Caucasus and the South Sudan. In other words, among the most dangerous conflicts in the world.

There have been occasions where other international groups have deemed it too dangerous to stay in the field, but NP has kept its people there. In Mindanao after helping villagers return to, or remain in their homes, and winning the confidence of all sides in this long standing conflict, by helping villagers return what they were doing was carrying on one aspect of international peace keeping, which was called non-violent protection, non-violent accompaniment, and actually took place in 1974 with the original Shanti Sena that carried out what was called the Cyprus Resettlement Project. Building

on all of this background NP was able to play a significant role in brokering a peace agreement that brought the possibility of more permanent peace to this thirty five year conflict in Mindanao. Today they are protecting children in refugee camps in South Sudan, another case of protective prisons or protective accompaniment.

At the same time they work closely with local groups to foster dialogue among the parties to any conflict. And they've encouraged and supported the creation of local women's peace teams. They also do trainings for and work closely with the United Nations. Back in the 90's when NP was just a gleam in the eyes of Mel Duncan and David Hartsough, John Paul Lederach, the Mennonite theologian did a calculation and shared his findings during a conference on peace teams that was held at the United States Institute of Peace. And he showed that a non-violent peace force of this kind could be preventing wars all over the planet for less than three percent of the world's military expenditures.

The only thing necessary for that to happen is for people to understand the power of non-violence, it's applicability in this domain, and the fact that there are thousands of people who are willing to take this risk to bring peace to the world. Let's hope that with the good offices of the United Nations and other world organizations we may be able to change the perception of people so they do understand the incredible power of this work, and that people are willing to risk themselves to do it even though, in fact, there are far less at risk than military peace keepers are. And that this gets recognized and supported the world over and that if and when that happens I believe that we could be rapidly on the path to true meaningful global peace. Thank you very much.

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