

THE PRINCIPLES OF CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAM

1. Constructive Program is the scaffolding upon which the structure of a new society will be built while struggling against the old.

MICHAEL NAGLER: I would say that it's almost being built before you undertake the struggle against the old. Gandhi said if you think they were going to win our freedom and then fix India's problems, you're dreaming. We have to fix those problems first, strengthen ourselves, deal with our own weaknesses, and then freedom will follow as a matter of course. And it will be really easy.

He also made an interesting parallel. He said that satyagrahis—soldiers of nonviolence—need at least as much, if not more, basic training as soldiers of violence. And whereas military soldiers' basic training is in the art of killing, the basic training for satyagrahis or civil resisters was in Constructive Program. Learning how to cooperate with one another, keeping up a steady pressure of work, sometimes doing things or wearing things that you don't particularly like—all these little sacrifices could be a training for the dramatic, obstructive, confrontational dimension of satyagraha.

Another thing or set of things that I would say about Constructive Program, and why it's so important as a scaffold, is what I would call continuity and community. By continuity, I mean if you are protesting something and that's all you're doing, and your protest succeeds or fails—those are the two generally speaking outcomes—whether you succeed or fail, your movement is over. But if you've engaged yourself in rebuilding your society—as we say here at Metta, building the world you want—that job goes on continuously. You're not waiting for someone to do some kind of atrocity that you're going to react to. So you have continuity in the movement which is so important. Because we've seen so many times: people come together, they express themselves and it either succeeds or fails, then they go home. Something else happens that they feel compelled to resist, and they have to start all over again without the old databases and so forth.

In addition to continuity through time, you also are forming community with other people. Because you can do a certain amount of Constructive Program yourself. The classic

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example was spinning, in India. The spinning wheel, you could do that by yourself up to a certain point. But where are you going to get the cotton from? Whom are you going to sell it to? So eventually Gandhi was able to create a network, a grassroots network that embraced just about all of India, through Constructive Program. We can do that also.

While all this is going on within your community, you're also reassuring the larger community that we sometimes call the “reference public.” This can be critical. If you think of movements that have been resistant but have not had a constructive element to them, they can get pretty nasty. The nastiest example that pops into my mind is the *Sendero Luminoso*, the Shining Path guerilla movement in Peru. They proved they could kill and kill and kill, but eventually the Peruvian people got fed up with them, because they killed some of their relatives. Some of the policemen were related to them, and anyhow they were not showing they had any capacity to run the country once they got control of it.

Another thing—this may be in a way the most important, and we've seen this quite recently in quite a few movements. If you have a well-developed Constructive Program, you can pre-empt the biggest danger in an insurrection. That is, when it succeeds, you topple the existing regime, you create a power vacuum, but who's going to rush into that power vacuum? Not the grandmothers. It's going to be people who were dealing with power in the first place, who have some constituency behind them. Maybe they have weapons, maybe they have money. So over and over, with the Bolshevik uprising in Russia in 1917, how they got swept up with the communists... But if you have built an almost complete, or tolerably complete, regime—before you topple the regime, there's no such danger. You're ready to go. And you're also able to be proactive instead of waiting for some atrocity that happens to galvanize the anxiety and resistance of the public so you can choose your battle—you know, I want to build schools, and at some point the oppressive regime is going to tell me I can't do that. And that's where we're going to struggle with them, directly, so this way you're choosing your battles and quite importantly, you're taking the moral high ground. Because I can remember when communists were always involved in anti-racism work in this country, and they were the ones who were doing it. And other groups in the U.S. were not doing it, so that gave them a kind of moral high ground. They were doing the work we should have been doing. They were showing up the inadequacy of the regime and the general public by doing that.

I think there's a lot more that can be said about Constructive Program, but I think that would probably be enough for building the general scaffold, and we'll go on from there. Thanks.

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2. By empowering the positive force of nonviolence, constructive work balances the “noncooperation with evil” with “cooperation with good,” creating an unstoppable force.

MN: Anyone who’s dealt with nonviolence has encountered what I sometimes call “the mother of all misconceptions.” It’s partly built into the word itself: non-*dash*-violence, the idea that nonviolence is the absence of something else, whereas in reality, it’s violence that’s the absence of something else. It’s the absence of the creative force for good or love that is in the human soul and is the bottom of all reality, according to Gandhi.

So, for example, in Gandhi’s theory of history, which he lays out in *Hind Swaraj*, which we wrote in 1909, he says that history is a record of the interruption of the natural progress of soul force. We wait until there’s a breakdown in society, and we record the details about that breakdown, but we never—we don’t have newspapers that say, you know, a million families lived in peace with one another today. Not very newsworthy, and not very history-worthy either. So, when you undertake Constructive Program, you’re doing what we sometimes call propaganda of the deed, that term from George Lakey. You are acting out a deeply held belief among visionary nonviolent actors, like Mahatma Gandhi, that the positive reality, good, that you’re cooperating with is not only also there, along with the evil that you’re struggling against, but it is even, if I could use a kind of fancy term here from philosophy, it’s ontologically prior—it is the thing that really exists, and all the various forms of evil that we see all around us are really negative transformations of that positive consciousness, that positive energy.

In addition, if you show that you can do both, that you can cooperate with good and not cooperate with evil, it shows that you have a long-term goal in view, and you have not been caught up in animosity against the oppressor. I just can’t emphasize this enough. So many times when we see injustice, we get livid with anger, which as far as that goes, that’s fine, but then we turn that anger against the person doing the injustice, and that’s not so good—then you’re violating the basic principle of nonviolence, which is never to be against a person, never to be against the wellbeing of a human being, but only against their behavior. You know, to hate the sin but not the sinner.

So sometimes I think, or at least right at this very moment I’m thinking, this might be the most important aspect of cooperating with good—the most important aspect of Constructive Program, that you’re showing that you want things to be right, and you believe that they can be set right. And that’s going to protect you from a personal hatred

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of the opponent, and enable you to be really nonviolent in the core of your own heart, your own behavior.

3. By providing the people with basic needs through their own work, the lie of dependency is proven wrong, and the chains of oppression shattered.

MN: The lie of dependency –that's a very good expression, because again, it's a kind of propaganda of the deed, only in this case it's a propaganda of the misdeed. Not all violent situations are colonialist, but almost all of them involve an element of forced dependency. You're saying to your victim: you need me, in one way or another. That implies that you, the victim, are not sufficient, and this is a very deeply flawed image of human nature. One of the most important things we learn about human beings, from Gandhi's experiments, and the new science wisdom tradition, is that ultimately, everything that we need, all the resources of love and wisdom and what have you, are actually inside of ourselves. So you see that when Constructive Program says to an oppressor, "we don't need to you manufacture this basic good, we are sufficient as individuals and as a society, of creating and supplying all these needs ourselves," it's really almost a theological statement you're making, that the world has enough for everyone's need. And remember this is one of the cardinal points of Gandhian economics—there's enough in the world for everyone's need, there's not enough for everyone's greed.

Notice also that we stated this point providing people with basic needs. Not all good, useful humanitarian acts should be considered Constructive Program. I think they're only Constructive Program properly speaking when, directly or indirectly, they attack the pillars that are supporting the oppressive regime. And one of those pillars will inevitably be the dependency of the colonized or victimized population on the oppressor for basic goods. So if you can say—I'm constantly thinking of the Indian example here, and British Raj—if you can say to the British, “we don't need your cloth because we can spin it ourselves,” that's much more powerful than saying “take your cloth away, you know, we'll figure something out.” That's a classic example of how Constructive Program works. Build it yourself and then you can tell the oppressor that you don't need it. And that is only going to have a powerful effect if it's a basic need that you're talking about, and it also shows how Constructive Program will go on to build the scaffolding of a new society—you're not doing that on iphones and wristwatches and things like that. What you have to have in place are food, clothing, shelter and needs. And you'll notice the

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two big campaigns that Gandhi carried on in India, the really dramatic things were about cloth and salt—food and clothing.

So we're reaffirming our independence as people, our ability to enter freely into relationships of interdependence, without dependency, and we're picking on what we like to call around here a keystone issue, something that, if you can gain material success in this area, it will really weaken the hold of the regime. And you have British officials who actually said “it's by controlling salt that we have a stranglehold on the Indian people.” When they made their own salt, they gently pried that hand off their throat and it was a very good example of taking away the pillars of support from an oppressive regime. But doing it in the best way possible—not just knocking the pillars out from under the regime, but building your pillar. Thank you.

4. It unifies diversity by creating work in which everyone can participate in. Such work is ongoing, proactive, and builds community.

MN: Some years ago, Ivan Illich, the well-known social critic, wrote a stunning article called De-Linking Peace and Development. And in that article, he basically pointed out that for some reason, oppression and oppressive regimes always drive towards uniformity. They always crush diversity, and reasserting diversity is an important element of winning, regaining your nonviolent freedom, regaining a nonviolent situation, winning your freedom nonviolently. So, good Constructive Program, again, is not just a question of doing good works that happen to be constructive, but things are really going to rebuild the vitality of a society based on the vitality of individuals within it. So they will try to find a kind of work that awakens the creative capacity of the individual and restores indigenous resources of people or a culture so it's a direct approach to cultural violence in that way.

When one culture says, you know, “your ways and means don't work, you've got to imitate us and do everything our way...” So a good Constructive Program would allow people to discover their individual capacities and contribute into the work of rebuilding the society. And what it's really doing then, ultimately, is returning control to the people themselves.

I want to emphasize that because so often we, in protest movements and movements that arouse a lot of anger, there is quite legitimately a feeling that control has been taken away from us in the form of our votes, or what have you, direct infringements of freedom. So because people are so deeply and quite correctly identified with the work

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that they do, allowing people to have constructive work is a powerful way of giving them back their dignity, and their use, their meaning as people.

It always comes to my mind that right after 9/11, here in the U.S., then-President Bush said "take the kids to Disneyland, go shopping, we'll take care of this. You can't defend yourself. You can't build a country that will be strong from within." So this is the lie of oppression and dependency. Constructive Program is a direct, visible way of counteracting that line, substituting the truth of independence and creativity. Gandhi went so far as to say, again in *Hind Swaraj* in 1909, that the British did not take India, we gave her to Britain. They gave the country up because they were seduced by the glitter of western civilization and cowed by the apparently overwhelming power of British military organization and technology. And so what he was doing 200 years later was giving people back, encouraging people to take back, what they had given away. I think sociologists know that, for example, in situations where groups have been divided against one another and you want to reconcile them, joint entertainment, joint meals, all those things help a little. But the thing that does it much more powerfully, and much more directly, is working on a project together, because of the deep sense in which we feel that we that we are defined by our work, and our value is defined is by what we can contribute. So you can see what a powerful, restorative mechanism this is for people who've been convinced that they're helpless, and they're no good. They've also been subjected to a kind of uniformity that inevitably follows with oppression, and they're reasserting both their meaning, their value on the one hand, and their appropriate diversity on the other hand.

5. Constructive Program trains people to live a nonviolent life. Just as training for violent revolt means the use of military weapons, training for Satyagraha means constructive program.

MN: Nonviolence is not just something that you can put on and off as the occasion requires. Almost everyone who recognizes that there's a difference between just carrying on to accomplish one particular thing, and having it be really a part of a paradigm shift, is this idea that it has to pervade your life. It has to become something you do every day.

And you certainly can't fight your whole life. But you can build your whole life. So learning to carry on those constructive activities day by day, in between outbreaks of

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struggle, is a key contribution that Constructive Program is making, not just to the revolution but to you as a human being.

I'd like to fall back here on an Indian theory that there are three energy states called *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattva*—*tamas* being, roughly speaking, lethargy, darkness, inactivity; *rajas* being aggressive action; and *sattva* being that pure balance of creative energy. In many ways, this informs Gandhi's whole concept of how nonviolence works, what the dynamic is. He said that he can make a satyagrahi, a nonviolent warrior if you will, out of a violent person, but he cannot do that out of a coward because cowardice is associated with paralysis and fear. So if you're *tamasic*, if you're in a state of lethargy, you're going to be useless for a freedom struggle, rebuilding your society in any other way. So you have to be roused from that lethargy, but the question is how. Are you going to be roused directly into a violent outburst, or are you going to be roused into constructive energy? Gandhi said that he had learned to conserve his anger and it was the most powerful force in the world. Martin Luther King was asked, “didn't you rouse a lot of outbursts of anger?” He said “we did not rouse outbursts of anger, we expressed anger under discipline for maximum effect.” I guess I would have to say that this is pretty much the key to nonviolent struggle. That's where the energy comes from and that's the pathway along which that energy has to travel. And what better training can there possibly be than rousing people out of their lethargy by giving them constructive work to do? It also hangs together with our concept of who we are. Gandhi went so far as to say that if you don't till the land, you will never know who you are. In other words, if you're not involved in what he called bread labor, which is an important aspect of Constructive Program—it means creating the real basics of life, food, clothing and shelter—then you really don't know who you are. And it's impossible to get to that image where everyone has a contribution to make, because if you create an industrial society which manufactures what people need and treats them as passive consumers, they will never find out who they are. It's that deep a damage to the human spirit. So in a well-run constructive program, you are allowing people to rediscover themselves through constructive work.

E.F. Schumacher, the author of *Small Is Beautiful*, which was quite a revolutionary book when it came out, went on to write another book on good work, and he said that there are three functions of work: there of course it's supposed to bring in some kind of income so you can live, but you're supposed to be providing people goods and services and rubbing off the angles and corners of your own egotism through constructive interaction with others. So in good Constructive Program you might be involved in tilling your own garden. But where are the seeds going to come from and what are you going

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to do with the produce? Where are you going to learn how to do gardening? It involves you in creative, constructive work with others, and learning how to work with others is a very good way of overcoming your individual egotism.

Finally, I'm not sure how much we can make of this, but Gandhi actually said that the calm, steady rhythm of the spinning wheel, which you're plying in a sacrificial spirit, is almost the equivalent of meditation. Well, I don't think a spinning wheel is quite the equivalent of meditation, but I know for a lot of people who might be very restless and get involved in destructive activities...

And let's look at this example of what happened in the first Intifada in Palestine. You had Palestinian youth in the West Bank who were involved in drug abuse. The minute the Intifada started and they had something to do, some way of expressing their resistance to Israeli occupation, they stopped taking drugs, practically overnight. So that shows you how powerful a mechanism that can be for awakening and empowering the individual. And in the end, at the end of the day when all is said and done, if a movement does not awaken and empower individuals, it is not going to have a long-lasting revolutionary effect.

STRATEGIES TO MAKE CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAM SUCCESSFUL

1. Be concrete and constructive. Although programs can, and often do have symbolic resonance, ideally they should not be merely symbolic. (Gandhi's spinning wheel was an ideal combination.)

MICHAEL NAGLER: This is correct. The wheel had very powerful symbolic significance in India. At the same time, you weren't just spinning the wheel, you weren't just looking at a picture of the spinning wheel which the Indian flag has, you were actually creating a physical thing that people needed to bring themselves out of poverty and to break the hold of the British regime.

The trouble with being merely symbolic, which incidentally is a very big misconception and a very big strategic mistake, I think, that people often make... For example, right now there's a march going on in India and people are calling it a Gandhian march. And the issue is quite real. The grievance is very real. But people are just marching from one place to another to do what they call, to show by their effort that they care about this thing. They're not putting any real pressure on the government which is the target of the march in this case. And the trouble is when you do that, you are kind of demonstrating your powerlessness. You're kind of demonstrating that you need to appeal to the other, to the opponent. You're demonstrating that you do not have the capacity to solve the problem yourself.

And another difficulty with symbolism in nonviolence, as anywhere, is that symbols can be misconstrued. I remember during the Cold War there was a big anti-draft feeling and activities in the U.S., and people were going and spilling blood on draft files, rendering them useless. The rendering the useless part was not symbolic; it was real. But they were doing it with blood because that symbolized what the draft operation really was. So their interpretation was “we're showing what you're doing is destructive.” But actually, if you look deep into the history of rituals, to sprinkle something with blood was to bless it. In fact, the word *bless* in English comes from a Gothic word, *bloedsian*, which means “to sprinkle blood on.” So you can't always control the interpretation people are going to give to a symbol. But I would come back to my first objection to symbolism, and that is that it is a demonstration of powerlessness, that the only way you're going to solve this problem is appealing to the other person to solve it for you. But what you ideally want to do in nonviolence is to show them that you can solve it yourself. And if you need their

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cooperation, you are going to do something so compelling they will be drawn into wanting to cooperate with you. But this cannot often be done by just symbolizing a need. It can only be done by concrete action.

2. Try to find “stealth” issues whose significance will be underestimated by the opposition—until it's too late.

MN: This may sound a little sneaky, and I'm going to try a little bit more clearly what we mean by a “stealth” issue...

The classic example for me was the salt satyagraha in March of 1930. Gandhi did not conceal the fact that he intended to break the salt laws. In fact, he was famous for advertising this. He wrote a telegram to the Viceroy, even giving him the names of the satyagrahis from the ashram who were setting out with him. He explained exactly what he was going to do, and he said “my hope is to break the salt law.” But what he didn't say was that this will break the stranglehold of the British Raj on India, because, you know, maybe it wouldn't. But the fact is, what was stealthy about it was that Gandhi understood the dynamic better than the Raj itself did. So the Viceroy of India, I think was Lord Irwin at the time, actually said “I'm not going to lose any sleep over the salt campaign.” He didn't lose any sleep over it, but he lost a whole empire over it. So a stealth issue is not one where you're sneaky, but one where you're using your deeper knowledge of the situation, your better insight into the dynamics of the society to advantage.

And then stealth becomes something that's kind of natural in nonviolence, because after all, the whole point in nonviolence is not to be confrontational, or at least not to be confrontational until the time comes. There has got to be what we call in this field a nonviolent moment. In any really major campaign, where two entrenched parties are in opposition to one another, what you're trying to do is maneuver the other party into a situation where you have, for example, what sometimes is called the dilemma action. If they let you do it, it makes them look bad. They lose control. If they try to stop you from doing it, it makes them look bad because you're just going about your business doing something perfectly natural the people need, or because they're going to have to use so much violence to stop you that it will really reveal the violent nature of the oppression, whatever it is. It's like a homeopathic treatment—you're teasing out the true violence of the regime you're opposed to.

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So, clearly you can destroy yourself, if you do this too early. And more importantly, you can set up a wrong attitude if all you do is confront the regime. What it means is your enemy is the regime, the people in it, whereas your real enemy is injustice, and you're ready to cooperate with the regime wherever they're smart enough to cooperate with you.

So “stealth” is a word that, of course, we've borrowed from military terminology. But it doesn't mean you're sneaking up on people in quite the way it means that in military contexts. It means you are exploiting the advantage of your superior knowledge of the situation to do something that will not rouse an immediate reaction, it will enable you to build strength through your common activity, mutual sacrificing, creating strong bonds and practising all your nonviolent techniques.

And until the confrontation has to come—when it comes, then you are in a strong position and you've created what we call a nonviolent moment, where the real nature of your nonviolence meets the real nature of their violence. And in those situations, you will always prevail. Maybe not immediately, maybe not without cost, but inevitably, if you can really pitch clear obvious nonviolence against violence, nonviolence will always succeed. So that's where we don't go out to say “let's do this and it will annoy the hell out of them,” but you say “let's do this because it will strengthen our position and they won't notice how significant it is until we're so strong that they won't be able to do anything about it.” And again, the salt campaign of 1930 was a perfect example of that, but almost all Constructive Program has potentially at least that characteristic—that it doesn't seem as threatening as obstructive action does. But in reality, you who understand nonviolence and understand the positive nature of reality, you know that you are gaining strength and advancing your position all the time through your constructive program.

3. Most importantly, tackle “keystone” issues that could weaken the whole system if successful; in other words, actions that significantly undermine the oppressive power's “pillars of support.”

MN: It's said that one of the most potent characteristics of Gandhi as a strategist was he was able to discriminate very clearly between negotiable items and principles. And he was able to compromise to an extraordinary degree on the former, to such a degree, in fact, that very often his closest followers thought he was giving away the whole store.

But the power came from the fact that the more he was able to compromise on less significant items, the more powerfully he was able to cling to principles and set up a

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good relationship between him and the opposition—“I’m not against you, I’m just for these principles.” So you can see a very strong parallel where the choice of issues that someone operating Constructive Program should have in mind.

Partly, of course, it’s just a practical matter—why should you waste your effort and your energy doing things that really won’t get you anywhere? If you want to change a system, you have to break those eggs in order to make that omelet. You have to do things that really matter. Sometimes these are not the ones that are most obvious. In our own situation here in the United States, I often think that if we could change education and get rid of advertising, the battle would be more than half over. We’d be on our way to a new regime, a new paradigm of peace and justice. So as I say, it’s partly just a matter of saving your energy, because usually resisters don’t have the kinds of resources and capacities that the opposition has because it’s entrenched. But partly it’s a deeper issue than that; it’s being able to discriminate between what isn’t so significant and what is. It relies upon your deeper understanding of the situation and its dynamics. And in a way, you can see a parallel here between the relative weaknesses we see of actions that are merely symbolic, as opposed to concrete actions that may or may not have a symbolic resonance—and it’s ideal when they do. Because if you just go after something and force a regime to do something that doesn’t really matter—that doesn’t really change the nature of your relationship with them—what you’re doing is just symbolic and that can lead to the understanding or the interpretation that you just don’t like them and you’re trying to oppose them wherever you possibly can. So it’s really important to be able to sit back and choose the point at which you should operate, move against the regime by constructive and then, if necessary, by more obstructive actions.

Very often, in fact, the basic principles of nonviolence will have both this practical, strategic element and a deeper principle that’s involved. And this is one of the characteristics of really deep thinkers like Emmanuel Kant and Mahatma Gandhi—that they did not see any difference between the morally right thing to do, and the most pragmatic, effective thing to do. So for all of those reasons, it’s a good idea not to just reach out at something that you can’t change, but to reach out for something that you can change and will really make a difference. And again, these are not necessarily obvious. For example, right now in the U.S. I think the move to amend, to change the Constitution so that we can get off the idea forever that a corporation is a person, that would be a key issue, because the key difficulty, the dilemma that we’re facing, the oppression it’s building is around this idea of dehumanization. So any way that we can stand up and say no, we are human beings, we are not machines, we are not systems,

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machines and systems are not living persons—it really goes to the core of the oppressive system.

4. Be constructive whenever possible, and resistant when necessary.

MN: I want to say a little thing about both clauses in that sentence.

Be constructive whenever possible: I would add, it is very rare that you have a situation where constructive action is not possible, because remember, constructive action doesn't depend on the other. That's one of the whole points of Constructive Program, that you have the capacity to do it yourself and there's always something you can do that they can't prevent you from doing.

And then about being resistant when necessary: sometimes, people go into Constructive Program but they don't think ahead to how they're going to push against the inevitable opposition when it comes. And one example of this, for me, is one of the greatest social movements of our time. It's the Landless Workers' Movement in Brazil, which is like a textbook case of how to do Constructive Program. But there have been many occasions when landowners have attacked the settlers who were doing something that ultimately is perfectly legal. They've come in with police, with paramilitary, and attacked them. And as far as I know, the settlers had the people who were occupying the land, legally though it doesn't yet technically belong to them—they haven't had a way of defending themselves against those attacks. Now partly if you take this formula as a whole, what you're doing is basically reversing the violent approach to conflict. In a violent approach, you're against the person and you're resisting them for the sake of resisting them. You want them to feel bad. You believe that their suffering is your benefit. This is totally false to a nonviolent person. What you're doing is offering loving opposition to separate them from their bad behavior, so of course, first of all you have to be separated in your mind. You know if a parent says to a child who has just misbehaved, “there you go again,” that has a devastating effect, as opposed to “how could YOU do such a thing?!” which has a restorative, reforming effect. So we want to be resistant only when necessary, but it's equally important to be ready to be resistant when it is necessary. Otherwise, you're rioting for a fall.

I can remember a tragic example that set me very much during the Kosovar resistance in the 1990s, in what is now Kosovo. The Serbian regime, which was very oppressive, had besieged a town the city of Drenica, and women from neighboring towns decided they were going to break bread and bring it to the citizens of Drenica and break the

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siege. Very constructive thing to do, dealing with basic life force that has revolutionary potential. Right down the line, it was exactly the right thing to do. But they got to the perimeters of Drenica and the Serbian police confronted them. The women stood there for a while and then went back home. They were not prepared to face the brutal attacks that would have come from those police—and who would be? I mean, I'm not blaming them for not wanting to confront that kind of violence. But given that they weren't ready to do it, the absolutely correct thing to do in this situation is not to have gone there in the first place. So I say this not by any kind of criticism, but to illustrate that we have to think our way through. Once we have chosen a constructive act around a basic need, which is going to restore agency and control to ourselves, we must be mentally ready for opposition because at some point, no matter how stealthy we are, the opponent is going to realize what's going on. At that point they're going to try to break us up. And at that point we need to have prepared in advance how to resist.

5. Form a strategic overview that balances constructive and obstructive measures; shifting to one or the other as appropriate.

MN: Very helpful strategic point here. There were so many occasions when, for one reason or another, opposition—direct confrontation—is inadvisable or impossible. Famously in Gandhi's case—and I keep relying on his freedom struggle as our paradigm of classic examples—getting toward the end, suddenly WWII broke out. The British declared India to be at war with Germany—that was another issue—but Gandhi had a principle that he felt very strongly about called “non-embarrassment”—that nonviolence is like a conversation. And continuing to push ahead, regardless of what the opponent is doing, is like a conversation where the other person isn't listening. They can't give you your attention. Worse than that, to tackle the opponent when he or she is down shows a) that you're weak and b) that you don't care for their welfare. Whereas it's much more... in other words, that degenerates into a power struggle. When you can pull back from oppositional actions at will, it shows that you have power, and that you are trying to work towards a commonly agreed upon truth with the opponent, not just trying to push them out of the picture. So you're going to end up in a good relationship with them—the way that the British have very good relationships with India now, as opposed to the terrific struggle that went on between France and Algeria, where their freedom struggle was carried out violently. But we like to use this model of an ideal, complete campaign; it's like a bird with two wings, one being Constructive Program and the other being what we call obstructive program or Satyagraha or direct action, and latterly we've taken to saying you need a bird with two wings and a brain. In other words, somebody has to decide “now is the time for constructive program, now is the time for obstructive

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program.” They have to have that sense and they have to have enough relationship with the people who are following them that when they make a determination like that, others will go along with it.

So, okay, back to our examples, 1940, 1941—the war has broken out, Gandhi was dead set on winning independence, and it had to happen soon. He had declared “do or die.” This is now time for Purna Swaraj, complete independence, and we're not stopping until we get it. But suddenly civil disobedience becomes a very inconsiderate thing to do, and sets up a different kind of relationship with the Raj. It just makes them someone you want to defeat rather than someone whom you wish to join with you in seeing a higher vision of the truth. So here's the dilemma—he can't stop, but he can't carry on civil disobedience anymore. So someone came to him, some young man, and said “what is it really going to take to get the British off our backs now?” And he [Gandhi] said “phenomenal progress in spinning.” And he said, “okay everybody, get on your spinning wheels, do your boycotts, do your village uplift, picket the liquor stores, do new education,” all of that stuff, to build up their strength so that at the end of the war they were able to move very quickly and efficiently into independence.

He had already practised this, incidentally, in South Africa toward the end of the eight-year satyagraha there. Suddenly there was a strike by the European railroad workers, and it was an ideal opportunity to “kick the guy when he's down.” The government was weakened, a lot of his followers were saying, “sock him, sock him, this is the time to do it.” And he said, “no, this is not the time to do it.” But he didn't also want people to just go back home—lose the continuity, break the community—so he said, “now let's go back and really work on Constructive Program,” though that wasn't as developed in 1917, 1916, as it was later on in 1940.

So if you have the strategic overview and you can move back and forth with some facility between constructive and obstructive approaches, I think the whole is much greater than the sum of those two parts. I think you get a tremendous amount of capacity and power out of having that flexibility. It also shows—and this is one of the most important lessons I think a lot of us have to learn—it shows that you're not stuck on the technique. You're not stuck on the tactic. You're not, for example, shouting out your disapproval because it makes you feel good. Rather, you're choosing actions which will make a difference in the situation. So this one choice of having those two dimensions, those two wings ready, and being ready to shift from one to another, even though you're a large-scale movement—frankly I think when we see that kind of movement again, and we have not really seen it since the freedom struggle in India, though we were partly there with the civil rights movement in America—if we could

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make that kind of combination happen, personally I don't think anything could stop us from bringing about the kind of revolution that we want. Thank you very much for listening to these.