

## ***To the Depths of Nonviolence***

(for *The Nonviolent Activist*, January, 1999)

“Nonviolence is not a garment to be put on and off at will,” Gandhi wrote. “Its seat is in the heart, and it must be an inseparable part of our very being.”

Given the horrendous violence in today’s world, I think we need to continue to explore nonviolence within us, as the first step on the road to peace. We have to examine the roots of war and injustice inside us, disarm our hearts of violence, and cultivate peace within and around us, so that we radiate personally the peace we seek politically.

From this inner journey of nonviolence, we can build more peaceful friendships and relationships with one another, and create communities of active nonviolence to support one another on the journey. Our culture is so all-consuming that if we do not help one another on the road of peace, we will not remain long in the struggle.

And more than ever, we need people committed for life to the struggle for disarmament and justice. One of the great dangers which Gandhi warned against is the culture’s demand for success and results. To remain faithful to the work of peace and justice for the rest of our lives, we can’t give in to despair, but instead simply trust in the truth and goodness of our active nonviolence, even if we fail. To do stay in the struggle, we need each other. We need to be part of a community of nonviolence.

The future demands too that we deepen the connections between grassroots justice groups and disarmament groups, so that we forge new coalitions to resist the Pentagon, the warmaking system, and racial and economic injustice.

Nonviolence requires creativity. We need to keep experimenting with nonviolence at every level, including our ongoing solidarity with the disenfranchised and our public campaigns of civil

disobedience.

My own journey has taken me in recent years from a “plowshares” anti-nuclear action and 8 months in jail, to serving a community center for disenfranchised women and children in Richmond, Virginia, for two years, to working in Northern Ireland for a year, to becoming the director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the oldest interfaith peace organization in the country. With all of you, I want to keep plumbing the depths of nonviolence.

These experiences give me the chance to work with people of all different faiths who are grappling with nonviolence. This exciting interfaith peace and justice work encourages us to resist the culture’s false image of God, the false gods of war, violence and injustice. Instead, as the great pioneers of nonviolence like Gandhi, Dr. King, and Dorothy Day taught, we try to envision God as the God of nonviolence, the God of peace, the God of justice. Indeed, future peace work needs to be interfaith peacemaking. We need to find the common ground of nonviolence that all the religions share. Then, we will sow the seeds for a future of peace.

If we take time to let our nonviolent God lead us, and walk in the spirit of nonviolence, whatever our tradition, we can trust that our lives will bear good fruit because we walk with the God of peace. We will become, as St. Francis prayed, true instruments of peace.

“My optimism rests on my belief in the infinite possibilities of the individual to develop nonviolence,” Gandhi concluded. “The more you develop it in your own being, the more infectious it becomes till it overwhelms your surroundings and by and by might oversweep the world.

As we walk together into the future, may we sow the seeds of nonviolence and reap a harvest of peace with justice.

\* \* \* \* \*