

Nonviolence Education:

Rajni Bakshi's May 28, 2021 YouTube Interview with Charles Collyer

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RB: Namaste. Welcome, Charles, namaste.

CC: Good to be here, Rajni.

RB: Thank you.

CC: Very good.

RB: So, what is your earliest recollection or memory from childhood of either the concept or the experience of ahimsa?

CC: Well, I think I must have been a student. It was around the time that Martin Luther King was very active, and I was interested in him. I knew that he had a nonviolent approach, and I saw somewhere that at one time he had learned about Gandhi, and his response was to go out and buy several of Gandhi's books, and to read them. And so that's what I did. I went and learned about Gandhi; I read his Autobiography, and I try to re-read that Autobiography every 4 or 5 years.

RB: How old would you have been at that time? (1:41)

CC: I would have been about 18 or 19 years old. And then I started studying Psychology, and I was a little bit politically active in 1967, 68. And then when Dr. King was assassinated, and shortly thereafter Robert Kennedy was assassinated, it shook me up. It really ... It made me decide to take a year off from the university. At that time, I had done two years at McMaster University in Canada; that was in my hometown. I took a year off and I travelled to Montreal. And I just worked for a year; I was a technician at McGill University, which is another great school in Canada. Then I came back, and I pursued my Psychology career. And I kept a liking and a kind of an identification with nonviolence in the back of my mind, but

it was not what I did every day. I spent some time in the 1990s as the Chair of my department at the University of Rhode Island.

I had become Chair and I was talking with a friend of mine whose name is Abu Bakr. He was the university's lead trainer, kind of an in-house consultant. We decided that the university needed a center for conflict resolution to help people like me who was a new Chair to deal with "people problems" that we had never received any formal training in. Abu discovered, in the course of our conversations, that a man named Bernard LaFayette was coming to Providence, Rhode Island, where we both lived, to do a training for the Providence Police Department. (4:19) And we asked the city to allow us to join the training. So, in the summer of '97, Abu and I went through a long training-of-trainers. It began in April, and it didn't end until sometime in August. And we decided in the course of that, that our new center would have the word "Nonviolence" in the title. And so, we hung out a shingle and we said the University now has a Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies. A year or so later, we had a chance to hire Bernard LaFayette to be the director of the Center. He came to the University for about nine years, and he was a very charismatic director. (5:10) That Center is still going strong. After Bernard left, my colleague Paul Bueno de Mesquita became the Director. He had great interest in Tibetan Buddhism, and he started taking students to Nepal. They've taken a number of trips to Nepal. The University, the Center, hosts an annual training-of-trainers, and they have students come from Nigeria, other parts of Africa, South America, and all over the United States. It's very successful.

In the meantime, I relocated to Maryland, and for quite a few years I commuted back and forth between Maryland and Rhode Island. In Maryland was a man named Ira Zepp. He and I started working together around the year 2000. (6:27) We wrote a book, which you know, and I'm very happy that you know that book. I began using that book in teaching. It's called *Nonviolence: Origins and Outcomes*; it's a book that I wrote – my parts of it, anyway – for myself as a new trainer, as a person who was trying to train others and teach them about nonviolence. (7:08) I wanted a book that a new trainer could read and get a greater understanding of the breadth of nonviolence. And also, the intellectual depth of nonviolence.

Ira was a retired Methodist minister, a very progressive minister. He had gone to Selma in 1965 because Dr. King called for clergy to come to Selma to help with the voting rights movement. And Ira was one of those clergy. He had a deep

appreciation for the American Civil Rights movement, but also an understanding of things like liberation theology. I thought that his thinking, coming from a religious perspective, complemented my thinking as a psychologist – and so the book contains both perspectives. We tried to write it so that it is, from a religious point of view, an ecumenical book. It is not sectarian. It contains some elements of Christianity, especially when it talks about *agape* as one of the roots of nonviolence as we understand it. It also contains some of the tradition from the Indian subcontinent when it talks about *ahimsa*. Those are the two roots of nonviolence we put forward for discussion.

RB: That's right.

CC: As to outcomes, which is the other word in the title – Nonviolence: Origins and Outcomes – I'm interested in the impact that nonviolence education has on a person. And I'm interested in how people learn nonviolence. I've found that that is just an endlessly fascinating topic. It keeps me teaching, because with every new workshop or class, I get a new group of individuals, and they all have different personalities, and they all respond to ideas about nonviolence in their own way. I keep learning things from that. I frankly enjoy that very much. (10:10) There's no big sacrifice involved when I teach nonviolence – I just enjoy it too much.

RB: You have mentioned in your book that you in a sense began by noticing how little students in America know about nonviolence. For example, they know about Martin Luther King Jr., but they don't know about how central nonviolence was to his life and work. I think that's one of the reasons why you have pursued this path. Am I correct?

CC: Yes, that's quite true. Students know about Dr. King only in a very superficial way. I very often say that they recognize his name, they know there is a holiday for him, and they know that he had a Dream. That's about it. But the idea that his work involved a really serious commitment to nonviolence, and that nonviolence is not something you can adopt in an instant – it's something that has to be learned – that is not widely known. It needs to be taught, and a person can have a lot of fun learning about nonviolence. Because it's like the discovery of a whole lot of new things that you immediately recognize are very important to you – they're very close to the heart. But in the next instant it makes you wonder “Why haven't I ever heard these things before? Why didn't my teachers tell me this stuff when I was in school, years ago?”

RB: This reminds me of something you say in your book about how nonviolence is probably as scary as violence because, you say that nonviolence makes people feel, or people suspect that they will end up feeling, more vulnerable. Can you elaborate on that, please?

CC: Yes. That's a very unfortunate misconception because, first of all, any data that we have comparing violent approaches with nonviolent approaches suggests that – get ready for this – violent approaches are more dangerous. Yet people are afraid of nonviolence because they are afraid that somehow that makes them more vulnerable. In my way of thinking about nonviolence, that's very much not true. Nonviolence gives you a new repertoire to add to the repertoire of skills and behavior and things that you know that you already have. It certainly doesn't take away your capacity for violence. If you are afraid that someone's going to prevent you from being violent, well, nobody can really do that. You can be as violent as you want, and it's your choice. But I think when a person learns nonviolence, they learn that choosing violence is like choosing to fail. There are always better options, especially if we make good use of time, and if we are proactive, and set up conditions in which violence is probably not going to threaten us.

People's usual conception of nonviolence again is very superficial, it's very shallow. (14:30) And I think people believe that the word nonviolence somehow explains itself, which it doesn't. If you just look at the word, it seems to mean “no violence” – can't do that -- something you can't do. My friend Rachel MacNair, who has written a book about the psychology of peace, says that when a person becomes a vegetarian, it's not just about “not eating meat” anymore. It's about beginning to think about all the things you can do with vegetables. And almost always it opens up new possibilities because closing off one option forces you to look at a broader domain of things that you could possibly eat.

Nonviolence is like that too. If you make a decision that you're not going to contribute to violence, because violence represents failure - and you don't want to go there - then you start to think about other ways to solve problems. I think if you pursue that further into the future, what I imagine is a world or a community in which people are focused on doing interesting things, helping each other, having fun, taking time to express themselves, enjoying each other's company. In this community, which is thriving in a healthy way and people are solving problems cooperatively -- by the way, it's not violent. But the non-violence is a byproduct of the fact that everyone is living well and prospering and having fun. Whether you

think of nonviolence as a byproduct or as something that you have to pursue as one of the causes of a society like that -- I don't think that is a choice you have to make. I think nonviolence is both cause and effect. (17:18)

But we are weak on the cause side -- because we are not teaching people nonviolence in school. Think about how different this year (i.e. 2021) would be if everyone had been vaccinated against the coronavirus five years ago.

RB: Yeah.

CC: We would not have an epidemic. Teaching nonviolence is a little like vaccinating people or inoculating them against the future violence that people might be involved in. (17:59) I think when I and other teachers of nonviolence, and related disciplines that come under different names, are teaching, we are inoculating. We are vaccinating our students, hopefully, against future violence. And like other kinds of prevention, it's very difficult to measure the effects of that.

RB: Yeah. I wanted to ask to what extent you are able to draw from your discipline, the one that you actually teach, psychology. How much basis is there in human psychology for what you now know is true and possible through nonviolence? There is a huge debate on what is the essential nature of a human being Is it to be violent or is it to be nonviolent?

CC: Yeah. Like Dr. King said, we have the potential for both. (19:06) Like many of the traditions around the world will teach us, we have that potential for both, and it depends on which side of yourself you feed which will become the strongest and which will become predominant.

I may have lost the thread of your question.

RB: In human psychology, we know that in our evolutionary journey both violence and nonviolence are a part of what has made us what we are today, as homo sapiens.

CC: Yes, that's almost necessarily true.

RB: That's right. So, in this context, is violence more natural to us than nonviolence? That is the question that many people ask.

CC: Well, violence has an advantage, because it is aided by impulse. And impulse is very fast. It's one of the types of thinking that my colleague Daniel Kahneman has written about in his book *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. He says that in human

cognition there are two systems; but one is faster than the other. In some ways, they perform complementary functions. Nonviolence needs the depth and the complexity of the slow system, and nonviolence education has to work there. Eventually it will produce quicker nonviolent responses to compete with impulsive violent responses, but that takes time. (21:09) In the book, I use the metaphor of swimming to explain why it takes time, why you can't just decide that you will be a swimmer and by snapping your fingers you suddenly are an accomplished swimmer. It doesn't work that way. Swimming takes practice. It takes instruction at the beginning, and then it takes lots of practice. And nonviolence is the same thing. (21:44) So, in our courses and workshops it's like we're giving swimming lessons. We're helping people to get started. But if it's going to be really a change in a person's life, it's something they will have to continue to practice. Hopefully, we get across the need to do that, too.

RB: Great. So, in your book you have a whole chapter called Agape, Ahimsa, and the Third Way. So, for those listening to this program, can you firstly explain the concept of Agape, because most people are not familiar with that. And also, what Ahimsa means to you, and what is the Third Way?

CC: Well, this is Ira's part of the book, so I can't claim to be an expert here. But to me Agape is an important word in the Christian tradition. It's a Greek word that means love, and there are several words in Greek that mean love, but they are distinguished from one another. *Eros* means romantic love or infatuation – falling in love, and so on. *Philia* has a couple of meanings. It could mean brotherly love, like the love that brothers and sisters have for each other; it could also mean the love that friends have for each other. Agape is more of an unconditional love that you have for other people simply because they are fellow human beings. In order to have Agape and to cultivate it, I think you have to first believe that other people are cool – that other people are worth identifying with. And so, in some of the book and certainly in some of the trainings we do, we do a little work on showing there is a positive common ground that almost all people share with each other. And that's why Agape makes sense. (24:21) Once a person has that good will toward others, many other things become possible. We have a saying a little further along that, you know, all of your skills will work better if you actually like people.

RB: (Laughter)

CC: If that liking is as deep as Agape the way we are talking about it, then you will be fine in dealing with other people. You'll be able to enlist their cooperation and

many other good things will happen. Getting into nonviolence, viewed in this broad way, was very helpful for me when I was a university administrator, when I was chair of a big department. It gave me a perspective that was just so helpful when things were frustrating and when my colleagues would be driving me up the wall. I really recommend a good education in nonviolence for anyone who is going to be in a leadership position. Once again, I know that my students are going to be future leaders, and I know that leadership and power can corrupt people. So, I'm trying to inoculate against that corruption as well. (25:57) I think that's very important for all teachers to do if they can. But it's really part of my intention when I teach a new group of students. I don't want them to end up being like some of the leaders we have seen in this time, who seem to represent both ignorance and excesses of pride and self-congratulation for things that are not worthy of congratulation. And I don't want to be led by people like that.

RB: In what way is there both a complementarity and yet some difference in the tradition from which Agape comes and the tradition from which Ahimsa comes? Do you feel comfortable in dealing with that? I just want to know what your intuitive response is.

CC: Yeah, and I feel comfortable holding them side by side, and not trying to, in a logical way, reconcile them or say that one can be reduced to the other. I'm influenced here by an author that I used to read all the time, the paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould. He pointed out that sometimes the best explanations of why things are the way they are, are historical. They're not logical, they're not theoretical, they're not something you can figure out in the absence of historical knowledge. Things came to be the way they are out of cultural traditions, and in his case out of species that had a particular form and that had a particular niche in the world. I think that's a tremendously important insight. It helps me to think about Agape and Ahimsa as each having their own integrity and each bringing with them a cultural tradition that does not need to be mashed (together). Some people would say maybe these are the same concept. Well, historically they came from different cultures; they're not the same in that sense. Perhaps a lexicographer making up a dictionary might produce very similar definitions. But that's lexicography, that's a human, artificial thing. To me they're ideas that are sources of energy, and sources of inspiration.

RB: Yeah.

CC: I think leaving them in their own cultural context and just learning about them with the cultural stuff attached is the best way to go.

RB: Excellent. Yes, that's my feeling too. Maybe one way to explore this is through the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. Because we know, and you have said this in detail in your own book, that he is repeatedly urging us not to resist evil in a way that the evil itself dictates, on the terms that are set by the evil.

CC: Right.

RB: So maybe if you could elaborate on that - in particular because you have written about this – how this directed his response to the Ku Klux Klan.

CC: OK. I'll tell you a story about one of Dr. King's friends, James Lawson. James Lawson had travelled to India to study the work of Gandhi. That would have been in the late 1940s and 1950s; it was after the Mahatma had passed. Lawson became a teacher of nonviolence to many of the young people who became the soldiers of the Civil Rights Movement. (30:47) There was a demonstration one Saturday night in Nashville, Tennessee. And my friend Bernard LaFayette was part of this demonstration. The students were actually marching home after having spent most of the day sitting-in at lunch counters and holding signs, you know, opposing segregation. And the line of marchers started to be harassed by a gang of young white guys. They were wearing motorcycle jackets and they appeared to be a gang. They started beating up one of the student demonstrators, a young man named Solomon Gort. Bernard saw this attack and he used one of the skills that he had learned in his workshops, which was he threw his own body over Solomon Gort to prevent him from receiving any more blows. And so, Bernard started to receive the blows. Well, Rev. Lawson saw this happening and he walked up to the leader of the gang, and he said, "I see that you're wearing a jacket, seems to be a motorcycle jacket. Do you have a motorcycle?" And the white guy spat at him, spat in his face. And Rev. Lawson said, "Do you have a handkerchief?" The guy was startled again, but he gave Jim a handkerchief. And then Jim said, "You know, I have a motorcycle too." And they got into this conversation about motorcycles, partly because Jim had just broken the script. He had changed the direction of what was going on. The other members of the motorcycle gang gathered around, and they got into this conversation. And Jim just talked to them very respectfully as another person who rode motorcycles. But in the process of doing that, the beating stopped. And the students were able to get up and go on their way. Eventually, Jim was on good enough terms with the leader of this gang that he also said, "Well, I've got to

go now, but man, I really liked talking with you about motorcycles.” I think that was exactly the skill set Martin Luther King wanted Jim Lawson to bring to the South, to educate people in the practice of nonviolence in a way that would really stick. With Bernard LaFayette, it really stuck, because he made a career of nonviolence education. He certainly changed the direction of my career about halfway through. (34:30)

RB: So, what ... sorry, go ahead.

CC: No, the last thing I was going to say is that there are little examples of impact like that, all over.

RB: Yes.

CC: And they don't draw attention to themselves in the same way that violence does. So, we don't hear about them in the newspaper.

RB: That's right.

CC: But I think in the long run, they are more important than the acts of violence that occur in the newspaper.

RB: Don't they also show that actually it is hate that is more fragile?

CC: Ah, yes. And ... people are so afraid. It prevents them from poking hate and watching it fall down.

RB: Yeah.

CC: But yeah. We just need to be smarter in the way we raise kids to know about these skills. Again, it's a little like vaccinating people, because if you vaccinate enough people, if you get enough kids who know what they're doing around nonviolence, then suddenly they are supporting each other, and no one kid has to do it all by themselves. And when an incident of violence occurs, a crowd of kids who are knowledgeable about nonviolence will surround the incident and make it stop. That's where we need to go.

RB: So, in this context it must be particularly painful for you to see the continuing episodes of shootings in America, where completely innocent people are being gunned down in schools and in other public places. How do you deal with that? As a person, how do you deal with that? (36:43)

CC: It's very frustrating, especially when we have the knowledge, to know where this comes from. First of all, the knowledge is not very widespread, and second of all, the will to change it seems to be very weak in this generation. But in cognitive psychology (and again I'll refer to Daniel Kahneman - in his work with Amos Tversky), one of the principles of thought that he explored is called availability, which is that our thoughts are driven by the information that is most available. And our actions also are driven by what our environment affords to us. Now, in the United States guns are widely available. There are more guns than people in the United States. Guns are "ready to hand" in many instances in which disputes occur and people get angry. Guns are at hand when a depressed person considers suicide. Guns are at hand when a disgruntled employee or a disgruntled student wants to go back to the place where they had such a difficult time and kill people. In the United States so many of these forms of violence are facilitated by the ready availability of guns. On top of that there is a widespread ideology that this is a right that American citizens have, and many people who emphasize that right seem to behave as if it's also a responsibility. And that's just insane. That is not sane behavior; it's not sane thought. It fails to recognize simple things about human factors engineering. Many people's ownership of guns is driven by a fantasy about how they're going to use them successfully if they are ever attacked by an enemy. I often point out to people who bring that up that in order for you to use a gun successfully and to play out the fantasy in your mind, about twenty things have to go in your favor within a few seconds, without any mistakes, and without you hurting yourself in the process. That's very unlikely to happen; it's like flipping a coin and getting 20 heads in a row. The frequency of self-inflicted gunshot accidental wounds is very high in the United States, but we don't know exactly how high because there is a federal law against doing research on gun violence. And that has really hampered our ability to learn in detail about all of these different kinds of violence that occur. (40:41) Again, it's insane. That's my perspective on it, and I do find it very frustrating.

RB: Naturally. Shifting toward a somewhat different domain, in what way is nonviolence featuring in the current Black Lives Matter movement? I know that it's a very different universe from what Martin Luther King was working on, and yet there is a link, it's historically part of the same impulse for justice, for dignity, for equal rights. So, do you find any strands of the nonviolent impulse in this moment?

CC: Oh, yes. Yes, I do. And first of all, the Black Lives Matter movement is very diverse, and very widespread in the United States. I think demonstrations have occurred in over 400 communities, and the information I have is that it's overwhelmingly peaceful. In any demonstration, some of the violence that may occur is often opportunistic violence by people who have nothing to do with the movement. So, that's a little difficult to tease out as well; you know, that's for master's thesis and doctoral dissertation work in the future. But I think there is a very good awareness that nonviolence is the way to go among the vast majority of people who are involved in the movement. Because they have absorbed the idea that this is how you maintain the high road, this is the way you protect yourself from criticism. And you're going to be criticized anyway. In the United States the reactionary side of our political spectrum will criticize anything the progressive side is doing. But one of the ideas that Martin Luther King was very aware of I think has been passed down and has penetrated quite well, which is that you don't want to give your opponent the weapons with which to beat you up. If you slip off the high road, if you become guilty of violence yourself, that's what you're doing. I teach students at Baltimore City Community College, so I know hundreds of students who are African American. The college is located just down the road from the place where the Freddy King (Gray*) death at the hands of the police took place - that's one of our local tragedies. But I'm in the middle of that when I'm teaching in Baltimore, and I feel that to the extent that I know these young people, they are really good young people, and they get it, they get a lot of what we are talking about. Now, they don't have the benefit of hearing workshops from me all the time but, you know, not very many people do.

RB: (Laughs) (44:32)

CC: They don't need it, that much. There is a lot of really good understanding and knowledge going on. Bernard LaFayette sometimes cautions us not to sell young people short. Because, he said, that is ageism. We often talk about ageism where it's the elderly who are the victims; but old people are guilty of minimizing the importance of the young and the talents of the young too. Bernard goes on further and says, "You know, it's all childism." Racism, sexism, it's all inappropriately treating other people as if they were children - and applying your nasty ageism to another group. You know, I am frustrated, Rajni, but you can't help but see some of this as funny.

RB: It is, it is. But, drawing on these experiences with young people, what advice would you give – because this is kind of the closing question I ask everybody: Here in India, I meet a lot of young people who are instinctively drawn to nonviolence, and yet they do feel daunted; they don't know if in practical terms it can be done, and it is very natural for them to feel a reaction when they are, in a sense, assaulted by the politics of hatred. It's very natural for them to feel repulsed by it, they want to respond in a nonviolent way, but they don't know how. So, what are some of: one, the inner strengths they can cultivate, and two, outward methodologies. What would you recommend to them?

CC: Well, again, I think a good thing to say to almost all young people is, you know, you're a good person, and you're already doing a lot of things right. But if you want to identify with nonviolence, then really study it. You should be reading something by the Mahatma or Dr. King or by other people who have done a lot of thinking in this field, probably every day. (47:19) It's like learning to play a musical instrument, you know; you practice every day. And in responding to something – you know, if you've been assaulted – don't respond right away. Don't use Kahneman's system 1, impulsive thinking; it's probably not a complete solution. These impulsive responses that seem so necessary somehow, they are usually incomplete, and they are most often wrong as an approach to the problem. So, think about it. You have this problem; perhaps there's this person in your life that is a problem. You have to see them every day, but they insult you and they are mean to you, and they make your life miserable. What can you do about that?

My wife and I had a young friend, (48:35) the son of another couple that we know, and he was being bullied when he was in high school. He was an artistic kid. He was big, but he didn't want to use his size and strength to hurt other people. But he was teased and insulted and bullied all the time. So, his parents told him to come and talk to us, and we talked with him. First of all, we had a great conversation with him, because he's a wonderful young man. But when we got around to the bullying, I can't remember if it was Pam or me who asked him, "Andrew, what does this bully like to do? What's he up to?" And our young friend Andrew said, "I don't know... he's always got headphones in his ears, he's always listening to music." And I said, "Look, you've been to music camp with us, and you know some music too. Why don't you ask him some questions about the music that he likes?" That was almost a throw-away suggestion, but it comes from this place where, you know, you try to figure out what is the common ground that you have with the other person. But anyway, Andrew went and did that, and he eventually

became friends with this kid. It's not guaranteed to work out that way every time. But if you don't try strategies like that, of course it will never work. It's this principle that if you don't try, you take yourself out of the game.

So, the real question is "what kind of trying should we do?" I think we should be trying in the domain of *good things*. And if we do that, other people may pick up some of the good things that are relatable to them, that they find personally meaningful. And then you can develop a bond. I think that's a good approach to teaching in general. Many teachers burn out because they are trying to control what happens in the classroom, and they are trying to control what their students learn. And that's a fool's errand if you push it too far, because you can't control what another person's mind will find interesting, or will notice, or will pick up and make their own.

I gave a talk just a few days ago to the American Psychiatric Association convention, and I talked about using nonviolence to combat racism. (51:56) One of the problems we have, especially in our political climate in the United States is that if you talk to somebody with the aim of reducing their racism, they become very defensive: "I'm not a racist!" And they'll stop listening to you if they feel that is your intention. But one of the things I've noticed in teaching nonviolence is that it changes some of the racial attitudes of my students, without any direct instruction on my part. It was something that the student found in my course, and they drew a conclusion about their own racism from it. And because it was them that drew the conclusion, they owned it; they took possession of the insight. They didn't have to be defending against me, because I wasn't pushing anything about racism on them. (53:09)

That illustrates, I think, the task for teachers, which is tricky. Some instruction does need to be direct; you need to teach some things that you want the student to pick up, and for the student to learn what was taught. But a lot of what students learn is just happening all the time; it's like a firehose of life experience causing them to learn things all the time. It has nothing to do with teachers. What a teacher can do is learn to put a few things in the student's path that they might pick up. It's the teacher's responsibility that those be good things, so that if the student does pick them up, it will be of value, and it will help the student to become a more nonviolent person, or a more aware and sensitive person – a stronger person.

RB: So, in closing: You've been doing this for several decades. What is the secret to your having so much confidence about it? I mean, you have explained a lot, but

if I may still ask you to address the cynicism or the skepticism of a lot of people out there who think, “Oh, nonviolence is such a lovely idea, but it’s not possible in this hard, ugly world. So, in closing, what would you say to that?”

CC: Well, I think we have to surround people with information that’s not so hard and ugly. First of all, students are hungry for stories about problems being solved nonviolently, and there are many. If we just forget and not pay so much attention to the word nonviolence, people are solving problems successfully all day long – little problems, and occasionally big problems – problems in the family, problems with friends. Those are all examples of nonviolence, even if the label doesn’t get applied. But we should be studying the successes that we want to have and including them in what we understand nonviolence to be. So, I’m confident about nonviolence partly because I have filled myself up with lots of stories about successful problem solving, and also stories about individual insights.

For example, people in prison who have had an insight about what they might do with their life that’s different, and they’ve turned themselves around. There are lots of stories like that. If we feed ourselves with examples that build our skills in nonviolence, then we’ll gain a lot of confidence from that.

Do I think just by calling what I do nonviolence, I’m going to be successful? No. You can try a nonviolent solution and it may fail on you. Violence is almost sure to fail, but nonviolence can fail too. And we can’t totally avoid violence, either. The way Ira and I put it in our book is that we want to raise the threshold for the use of violence so high that maybe violence never occurs. (57:17) Because we don’t think violence is necessary, except in very very rare instances. And I think Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. King would acknowledge that too. In their writings they say yes, there are some circumstances where if the choice is between being passive and being violent, well at least violence is active, and you really should do something.

But those examples... You know, everybody wants to reserve the right to be violent, to themselves. It’s one of those things that’s sort of silly, because nobody can take away the right to be violent from a person. I can’t do that. The Mahatma can’t do that. We have this logical conundrum. I think everybody in the world wants everybody else to be nonviolent. But if there’s still a lot of violence, what does that mean? It means that there are some people who are really holding on to it. We’ve got to attack that through our educational systems as being a silly and unproductive and destructive thing that’s only going to make the person unhappy.

The most unhappy sufferers of PTSD (the posttraumatic distress syndrome), according to my friend Rachel MacNair, the worst cases of PTSD, are among soldiers who have killed. A veteran who comes back from a war with the knowledge that they have killed other people -- they will suffer terribly because of that. James Gilligan, who is a psychiatrist I deeply respect, says something very similar. People who have been immersed in violence are lacking in respect, and they feel that they have not been respected themselves. The knowledge that they have committed violent crimes eats away at them psychologically. So, violence does terrible damage, first and foremost to the person who is violent. That's one of the strongest reasons to teach people how not to engage in it.

RB: Thank you so much.

CC: It's been a pleasure. (1:00:31)

Note:

- [I probably said Freddy King instead of Freddy Gray because I was reminded of the Rodney King beating in 1991 by police in Los Angeles – CC]