

Position Paper: Nonviolence

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I. Introduction

Presently, violence is considered to be a leading factor in the destruction of people, particularly African American males, families, children, relationships, and the nation as a whole. However, while we continue to look for more complex ways to dissect and understand the complexities of violent behavior, we are moving farther away from arriving at a solution. If we are going to bring peace to the people of this nation, and the world, we must first examine how violence has been misunderstood and misrepresented as the means to an honorable end.

Historically, Americans have instituted violence, in the form of war, as a necessary tool to establish justice and defend democracy. However, without a clear understanding of what words, such as war, really mean or what they represent, nations will continue to wage war as a perception of peace and people will continue to mistake hate for love. The violent culture we live in today is the result of the misuse and misrepresentation of these words. War is not a means of achieving peace, but an attempt to submit people to the beliefs of others through acts of violence. Love is to advocate for the health, interest, rights and needs of all people without exception or condition. The only form of war that actually promotes democracy, justice, truth, and selfhood

must be based on the application of scientific principles toward an honorable outcome for all people without the need of terror, intimidation, murder, and exploitation.

We have declared war on gangs, drugs, crime, and homelessness, but if our means and methods in any way depend on the application of terror, intimidation, murder and exploitation, we could only hope to secure a just outcome for some at the expense of others, which is not justice at all. Any solution that is not rooted in the principles of democracy, justice, truth, and selfhood cannot serve the health, interest, rights, and needs of all people or a nation. This is why the violent energy that is destroying our people and the nation has not been eliminated, but continues to escalate to epidemic proportions such as we see today.

Our government's response to violence within the inner city is to build more jails, arm police with better weapons, call in the National Guard and limit gun sales on the street. These kinds of war tactics are not solutions to the problem of violence but in fact, set the conditions for the problem to continue by creating an increasingly violent culture. More jails, more guns in the hands of police, the military force of the National Guard, and government regulations on gun sales will only perpetuate the need for terror, intimidation, murder and exploitation to control the violence. It is only through the application of nonviolence, which is known and can be proven to bring about a just and equitable outcome, that we can eliminate violence.

II. History

Our history tells us that America was built on the application of violence to secure the rights of people during the Revolutionary War. After the Revolutionary War was won, another act of violence, called slavery, was instituted into the framework of our constitution. Even with the intention to endow people with rights, America inadvertently violated the rights of some while

trying to secure the rights of others. Our history then denotes that another war, the Civil War, broke out to end the debate and eliminate slavery as a law and practice. This war was fought and won only to produce segregation. So, once again, we see violence used as an attempt to secure the rights of some at the expense of others.

These wars and those still being fought all over the world are thought to be in the interest of democracy, justice, truth, and selfhood. However, the imposition and viciousness of violent war destroys the possibility of securing the health, interest, rights, and needs of a people. So here we are still war-torn, battered, victimized, abused, and misunderstood.

III. Definition

Yet, even in the midst of the problem there are solutions. In our efforts to address violence, we must first develop working definitions as a guide to gauge our effectiveness. Now let's define violence: Violence is the act of serving one's perversities, privileges, preferences and pleasures rather than the health, interest, rights and needs of all people. Violence is uttering statements that are not true, thinking, speaking, and acting without being motivated by creative goodwill and compassion. Violence is the intent to destroy or injure the spirit, mind, emotion, body, relationships or properties of others.

In order to know the cause of violence you must first acknowledge whether you are violent. So the question is, are you violent? And how do you overcome being violent? Do you put your perversities, privileges, preferences, and pleasures over the health, interest, rights, and needs of others at any time? How we answer these questions as an individual, a people, and a nation will determine if we have the integrity to eliminate violence as a way of life. Anything that is not just and equitable for all people is a violation against others and ourselves. To serve

the health, interest, rights, and needs of others is to benefit from the establishment of democracy, justice, truth, and selfhood. However, if we continue to put others at a disadvantage we will also be putting ourselves at a disadvantage by trying to secure that which we want, rather than which we need and, subsequently, we perpetuate violence.

The cause of violence is simple: To be unaware of or disregard a person's God-given definition, nature, and purpose. This is the first violation of man unto the self. Lack of knowledge about your existence and total disregard for other people is the beginning of violence and can only be addressed by acknowledging that all people are God's creation. Our definition, nature, and purpose is to be Man, male and female, created in the image and likeness of God and to have dominion (not domination) over the earth. There is no other basis for justice and equity, peace and love to exist.

There are only three possible reasons for violence to exist. To oppress, repress, and suppress people. Oppression is to conquer the will of people. Repression is to suffocate people's feelings and ideas. Suppression is to deny people access to information and prevent the development of their intelligence. When people are allowed to develop as human beings, exercising their will, expressing their feelings and ideas, and benefiting from access to information and intelligence, it brings out the truth in any situation. The truth can only be known when we are engaging in or giving correct information, communication, explanation, clarification, formulation and education. When violence occurs, either in our interpersonal relationships with spouses and children or the international relations of nations, there is some level of truth that we do not want to be known or revealed. Yet, acknowledging this truth is what opens up discussion, dialogue, and debate in the situation and sets the conditions for cooperation,

participation, and negotiation to take place. Only a person that understands the truth of their own existence, definition, nature, and purpose can serve the health, interest, rights and needs of others and themselves without compromising or violating anyone. This truth is the only reality that allows peace, freedom and justice to prevail in your interest and in the interest of all people.

IV. Civil Rights/The 60s Movement

A hundred years passed after the implementation of segregation before a group of people came forth who refused to compromise their citizenship. Knowledge of themselves as American citizens meant that they too were included in the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. The statement “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, among these rights are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” was not only true for the founding fathers, but for all people, male and female, black and white, who agreed with that understanding.

During the era of the 1960’s, this same group of people agreed that as inheritors of this truth and being the co-creators of Man, they also had the responsibility to incorporate this knowledge through the institution of government. They recognized that the history of the nation, from the Revolutionary War to the Civil War, was inadequate and inappropriate in establishing justice. An alternative was needed that would address the question of how to secure rights without violating others, establish justice without killing people, maintain rights without suffering from wrongdoing, and free all people from the injustice of not knowing that they are God’s creation. The alternative introduced to address these questions was a clearly defined scientific principle called nonviolence.

Solutions to the problem of violence come out of applying principles of reasoning, principles of thought, and principles of the heart. These principles can be found in what has worked historically to liberate a people. The movement of the 1960's is one of the greatest events in recent history. It was more than a group of people complaining and demonstrating, it was a movement of people implementing a living principle in an unjust situation. The violence of the 1960's was blatant whether it was in the form of lynchings and killings by the Ku Klux Klan or laws enforced by institutions to work in the interest of some and against others. As people began to realize that segregated lunch counters, movie theaters, housing, and the Vietnam War were violations against them and did not work in their interest, they formed a movement based on the principle of nonviolence.

In the midst of the violations suffered, some people came forth with the understanding that, if you are violated by someone, you cannot use the same violent means and methods against them and claim that it is justice. If violence is incorrect in one situation, when used against you, it is incorrect in any situation. You cannot fight fire with fire; instead, you must apply an equal and opposite force, which is to put water on the fire. In principle, the application of nonviolence in the face of violence works the same as diminishing or putting out the fire.

Nonviolence is used not as a strategy but as a tool and a way of life. It is a way to live like a civil human being in light of adversity and controversy. However, presently the young people in the inner cities of America are being misled. They are being misled to believe that the people of the Civil Rights Movement gained the right to vote and live as equal citizens, with open housing, and desegregated living conditions as a result of some happenstance situations involving angry black folks or sympathetic white folks. It was not enough to react to the violence

and injustice of the 1960's; rather, nonviolence had to be correctly understood and applied to bring about justice and equity.

As a result of the Civil Rights Movement, we now live within a structure that allows us to give leadership to and be the catalyst for change as our fore fathers and mothers did when they applied certain principles and laws despite the threat of violence. Today, we again find ourselves living under the threat of violence and, living with it, not realizing that this is the same predicament we overcame in the 1960's. Therefore, it is crucial that people gain an understanding of the value and importance of nonviolence as a principle to live by.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Rev. James Bevel and the people of the 1960's were not just angry or sympathetic, they were not just Uncle Toms trying to integrate people, they were in fact trying to liberate people from a psychology that kept them bound by their own ignorance. They knew that if you are far more integrous and intelligent than who you say is bothering you, then that is enough energy and force to conquer your problem. Presently, we do not look at integrity and intelligence as a source of a solution. Instead, this absence allows us to compromise, buy into wrongdoing and sell out that which we know is right. Our lack of respect for integrity and intelligence is what perpetuates our problems and sets the preconditions for violence to continue.

We have to understand that when you do not have an outlet to change that which is not in your interest or discuss due process as a means of justice, then nonviolence and civil unrest, applied correctly, is the alternative. However, when you do not use your own integrity and intelligence to understand the constitutional, civil, and human rights that work in your interest, your only outlet is to burn down cities and abuse others and yourself with drugs and violence to kill the pain of not being able to correct the problem. Solutions come from having the

intelligence to determine that you are being violated and the integrity to bring about change in the interest of all people.

Nonviolence is not what will happen if you step on my foot one more time. Nonviolence is the science of government that addresses violations through the democratic process of discussion, dialogue, and debate. Acquiring justice for all and not just for some can be seen in the fact that African Americans, not having the legal right to vote, were put them at a disadvantage; however, gaining the legal right to vote did not put white Americans or anyone else at a disadvantage.

V. Steps of Nonviolence

Nonviolence addresses the oppression of people, the repression of their feelings and ideas and the suppression of information and intelligence that keeps the truth of a problem, its origin, dynamics, purpose, cause, source and history from being known. To understand the truth behind a problem and implement a solution within the construct of nonviolence there are eight steps that have to be understood.

The first step is observation. Lack of accuracy and insight in giving a true observation of a problem is often times part of our dilemma. Getting a clear account of a problem means we have to be disciplined enough not to side step the issue or compromise our own intelligence by getting distracted from the issue.

The second step is investigation. Investigation is to research the truth behind a problem, its origin, dynamics, purpose, cause, source and history to understand the present conditions and future ramifications of the problem if not addressed. The problem or violation must be thoroughly understood so that people do not react to conditions out of emotions or in the interest

of personal preferences, privileges, perversities and pleasure but on the basis of a constitutional, civil or human violation that affects all people.

The third step is purification. To ask “Why is it that we want to correct the problem?” will determine if we are serving the health, interest, rights and needs of all people or if we have some other ill motive. Are we trying to get even or pursue justice? Are we just trying to get by or are we in fact after freedom? Are we trying to retaliate or are we after peace? If your motivation puts others at a disadvantage or you find benefits in addressing the problem that are not appropriate or needed, then you cannot solve the problem. There is nothing to pursue except justice, freedom and peace, anything less than that is a compromise or a violation.

The fourth step is to give a recommendation. A recommendation is not based on your opinion, emotions or interpretation of misinformation. It is a clear observation, accurate investigation and honest purification process that produces thoughts and ideas that are appropriate and needed to address a problem and implement a solution.

The fifth step is to educate. Every recommendation requires education to get other people to understand what has been observed, what truth has come out of investigating the problem, what is appropriate and needed to be the driving force to a solution and what is being proposed. Once people have been well informed of the issues, educated on the cause, effect, and conditions of the problem, and knowledgeable of alternatives, they can begin to articulate the problem as responsible citizens individually and collectively.

The sixth step is demonstration. Only after observation, investigation, purification, education, and recommendation is a demonstration effective. When a violation is being imposed upon a people that is going against their interest, it is not enough to carry placards, posters and

billboards hoping to get a break or hoping to get a chance to be heard. There must be a core group or army of people being mobilized that can articulate to the masses the profundity and extend to which a problem exists. A demonstration is not just walking around a building; it is giving clarification to the population and getting other people involved in the correction of a problem.

The seventh step is confrontation. Only if upon implementing a demonstration, the problem is not recognized, addressed, rectified or corrected is a confrontation necessary. Confrontation is not an act of violence, but an act of civil disobedience. It is taking the position of not participating in that which is the problem; therefore, you will not ride segregated buses and you will not patronize stores that benefit from putting you at a disadvantage. To say that we will not go along with injustice any longer is to stop being a victim participating and contributing to the problem; instead, we must confront the problem with our lives and go without to get what we know is absolutely needed.

The eighth and last step is reconciliation. All people involved in this process should be clear on the intent. This process is not for personal gain, getting even or getting by, it is for people who are honestly working on the solution to a problem and for the establishment of democracy. From this understanding we can now come together seeing opportunities for growth and development because we have reconciled our differences and acknowledge each other as being part of the family of Mankind.

VI. Conclusion

One of the biggest problems within our culture as well as within our nation is that people are not engaging in the right discussions, hence cannot give definitive answers to relevant and

important questions. Our indifference or inability to ask the right questions and therefore respond correctly to them has put us in the predicament we are in. It makes us incapable or unwilling to take a position on anything. Some people really feel that truth cannot be known and that there are things that cannot be comprehended. Yet, if something cannot be comprehended it also cannot be manifested. We generally relate from this basis of uncertainty, retreating to claims that things are “not known” or “cannot be achieved.” We demand future ideal conditions in order to bring them to reality. Instead, our charge is to implement the truth and live by the principles that make change take place. So we have to start coming forth talking about what is, what should be done and what can be done instead of what cannot be done. We must be serious and committed to finding and implementing real solutions and not perpetuate the problem by reaching without applying our own integrity and intelligence. So, my prayer is that we can inspire others to work on that which is needed: a fully understood and implemented commitment to equality and social justice.