

February 20 Day 22

"If I had no sense of humor, I would long ago have committed suicide." M.K. Gandhi

There is an old saying, "Of course God has a sense of humor. It created us." Humans are a sadly comical race. We behave violently, like children, when we most need to act like adults. We act like serious, pompous adults when we most need to act like children and laugh at our silliness.

Sometimes, we become so serious that we forget to see the humor in everything around us, especially in our own behavior. We only become serious when we have become attached to the outcome of our work. Attachment to outcome is a guarantee of "suicidal tendencies", because we can never control or predict all the outcomes of any actions dealing with human beings. All we can say for sure is that actions have consequences, including unintended ones. Under the circumstances, we have only two choices; take everything seriously and personally, forgetting that the Divine is always present or take nothing seriously and personally, remembering that the Divine is always present working perfectly through all experiences, all people and all relationships.

When we approach each and every interaction with no expectations, except that there is a Infinite Presence and Universal Law operating through all, attachments fall away and we see the quirky, and often sad, humor of human existence. Humans so often act as if the world will obey if only they use enough power, enough violence, and then they are victims when they world acts through perfect Cause and Effect. Until we come to recognize this truth, frustration, anger, disappointment and feelings of failure will haunt us. When we come to this realization, we can laugh at ourselves, instead of having others laugh at us.

Affirmative Practice

Today, in every interaction I have, I will look for the humor that lies beneath the apparent drama, not laughing at others, but at my own expectations that anyone will do it "my way". This is the path to nonviolence.

February 21 Day 23

"If one does not practice nonviolence in one's personal relations with others and hopes to use it in bigger affairs, one is vastly mistaken....You have to practice it towards those who act violently towards you; and the law must apply to nations as to individuals. If the conviction is there, the rest will follow." M.K. Gandhi

nonviolence begins within. But even when we begin practicing it in the world, it must first begin "close to home". There is an old saying that says, "*I love humanity, it's people I can't stand.*" Often we see people whose personal lives reflect emotional violence, yet claim for themselves the mantle of nonviolence in the larger world. Ultimately, they will always fail, because nonviolence must begin with those closest to us, our family and acquaintances. Ironically, it is these people who are the most difficult for most of us to be nonviolent with, because they are the ones who know us best. They are, therefore, our greatest teachers. Knowing us so well, they know our flaws. Knowing our flaws, they know all of our weakest places, the places that drive us to our own version of violence.

Nonviolence must "begin at home". It isn't an altruistic, theoretical practice. If it is not practiced with those closest to us, it isn't being practiced at all all. Those we profess to love as family must come first. Love without nonviolence, in every sense, physical, emotional, and mental, is not love, and not nonviolence. It is violence wrapped in ego, covered by denial, shrouded by self-delusion... in short, it is a lie. One that is obvious to everyone but ourselves.

Affirmative Practice

"Today, I will meditate on my closest relationships, looking for those places where I have been violent to those I am closest to. Today, I will "How can I be more loving, less violent and more truthful in my relationships with family and friends. This is the path to nonviolence.

February 22 Day 24

"Don't listen to friends when the Friend inside you says "Do this!" M. K. Gandhi

Those closest to us always have the most influence over us. Our parents, our spouses or partners, our friends, our children all influence us. For most of us, that influence limits us. Well meaning people often counsel us to take safe and easy paths. Caring about us, they fear we might fail if we take “the path less traveled by”. All too often we take their counsel as our own because we fear their criticism and their judgment. When we do, we are permitting violence to be done to us.

There is a voice within us urging us to take our own path. That, Gandhi says, is the true “Friend”, the still small voice within us that will always lead us to the thing we were born to do. When that Friend within us calls us to “Do this!”, bowing to social pressures from any source is the coward's path. What we are called to do may not be grand and earth shaking, but it is ours. No one else is called to do whatever it we are called to do, not in the same way.

The work we are called to do begins with one small step on our path. Each step we take leads us closer to our calling and further from the limits our friends and family place upon us. There is no need for us to respond with violence to their restraints on us. Instead, we release them with love and we take the next step, the next and then the one after that. When we do this, we discover that one kind of courage is simply taking the next step in front of us on our path.

Affirmative Practice

Today, I will meditate on how I have let others limit me. Today, I will release their expectations and opinions with love. Today I will listen for the voice of my “Friend” and begin to take action on the path it sets before me. This is the path of nonviolence.

February 23 Day 25

“The wife is not the husband's bonds slave but his companion and his help-mate and equal partner in all his joys and sorrows - as free as the husband to choose her own path.” M.K. Gandhi

Coming from the Indian culture of the early 20th Century, Gandhi's marriage was arranged. They married when he was 13 and she was 14. In that system, women were seen as subservient to their husbands in all things. It was very rare for any man to grant equality to his wife in any way. Through long effort, Gandhi, in some ways led by his wife, Kasturba, came to recognize that she was his equal in every way.

This is an important lesson, not because of the implications for all marriages, but for all relationships. In the 21st Century, this should be obvious, given the status of the rights of women. But the lesson isn't really about women. It's about our partner. Who is our partner? Whoever I have any relationship with, no matter how causal or brief. In all our relationships, our partner is as free as we to choose their own path. Whether it is the most intimate of relationships, or the most casual, our partners are always at choice. If there were “Laws of nonviolence”, this would be one of the most important: “In every situation and every interaction, our partner is always at choice.” To deny this right, is to deny free will. To deny free will is to commit violence against our partner, for truly we are demanding they become our “bonds slave”.

Often we assume that our partners believe all the same things and accept the same view of reality. The truth is never that simple. Each of us has different beliefs about and relationship with the Divine. In the same way, each of us has different beliefs and relationships with our relationship, and with the world in general.

Even worse, we assume that our partners know what we want and then become angry when they don't do what we expect. Anger is always a form of violence. Even worse, it denies free will to our partner. Our anger says to them, “You have the right to do whatever you choose, as long as it's what I want.” Recognizing our partners' right of choice is an important step toward nonviolence.

Affirmative Practice

Today, I will meditate on the Law of Choice, recognizing where I deny it to others and where I have allowed others to deny it to me. Today, in all my affairs, I will recognize that the Law of Choice is always in operation. This is the path of nonviolence.

February 24 Day 26

“Freedom is not worth having if it does not connote freedom to err.” M.K. Gandhi

In all our relationships, it's important to remember the Law of Choice. It's equally important to remember this corollary to the Law: “We are free to choose everything except the consequences of our choices.” We get to choose everything except the natural Cause and Effect outcomes of those choices. Whatever our choices, they will always have consequences. In Gandhi's nonviolent struggles, he always accepted that there would be consequences for himself as well as those he opposed. He accepted those consequences with no sense of victimhood, only a recognition of the logical consequences of his actions.

For each of us, free will implies the ability to make mistakes. Whatever lofty purpose we believe our choices arise from, we must be prepared to accept ALL the consequences of those choices. Frequently our choices will manifest in results we never expected. This is another corollary to the Law of Choice, the Law of Unexpected Outcomes: “Every choice will result in outcomes we cannot anticipate.” When they do, accepting them as part of the Cause and Effect of our actions with grace and equanimity is the nonviolent path.

It's especially important to remember this freedom to err with those we most care about. Just as it's important to lovingly allow them free choice, it's also important to allow them to experience the consequences of those choices. While it may sometimes feel cruel to allow them to suffer from their own choices, to rescue them from the consequences of those choices is the real cruelty. We prevent them from learning important life lessons about choices and consequences and encourage them to make the same erroneous choices in the future. In its way, this is the more violent path.

Affirmative Practice

Today, I will meditate on free will, choices and their consequences. Today, I will recognize that every choice has consequences and make my choices with conscious thought. Today, I will love others in their choices and their consequences. This is the path of nonviolence.

February 25 Day 27

“Differences of opinion should never mean hostility. If they did, my wife and I should be sworn enemies of one another...” M. K. Gandhi

Disagreement is a daily fact of life for all of us. Each of us have different life experiences and different beliefs because of those experiences. Thus, each of us comes to any interaction with a different “reality” than anyone else. This is even true in the most intimate of family relationships. Sometimes we hear someone say of a sibling, “*I can't believe we grew up in the same family.*” Well, of course, they didn't. Each of us, because of our placement in sibling order, the age of our parents when we're children, changing health, financial situations and other factors, grow up in unique circumstances. They may be similar to our siblings' experiences, but they are not the same. Because of that, even in these close family relationships, individual experience, belief and, therefore, reality is different.

It is out of these differences that individual “*truths*” arise. But these are not Truth in the absolute sense. They are, rather, opinion. Because they are based on unique individual experiences and beliefs, they are unique opinions. Each of us has our own unique opinion. This is very important to understand. Each of us has our own unique opinion, based on beliefs arising out of personal experience. They are NOT Universal Truth.

All this being true, hostility over differences of opinion is not only wrong, it defeats the very purpose of any conversation. When we are interacting with those we disagree with, our disagreement is based upon opinions formed by a lifetime's experience. There is no right or wrong, there is only different. nonviolence asks us to recognize that it's that, different, not right or wrong, and find common ground.

The problem is that so many of us have our personal identities, our egos, so invested in the “truth” of our opinions, that we are unable to acknowledge that “different” does not mean wrong. Unfortunately, it seems that the closer the relationship, the more we have invested in our “stories” and opinions. Thus, we see people treating their family members with more hostility and violence than they would ever dream of doing “out in the world”. Nothing could be more destructive. Accepting “different, not wrong” and loving “because of”,

not “in spite of differences” is the key to nonviolence in all our relationships. Learning the lessons of nonviolence in family can prepare for the larger work of nonviolence in the world. It’s one of the gifts family brings us.

Affirmative Practice

Today, I will remember that my “truths” are merely opinions, and I will listen, with an open heart and mind, to the opinions of others, without hostility, but with a consciousness of “different, not wrong”.

February 26 Day 28

“The real love is to love those who hate you, to love your neighbor even though you distrust him.”
M. K. Gandhi

How easy it is to love those who love us, who agree with us, who walk the same path we do. How much more difficult to love those who hate us, who disagree with us and whose paths are completely different from ours. Hating those who hate us may seem natural, but loving them is exactly what we are called to do. Doing so is the only path to nonviolent resolution of any disagreement. As the Buddha said, *“For hatred does not cease by hatred at any time: hatred ceases by love....”* Hatred, when allowed to continue, never resolves the disagreement and never heals. When we allow this to be our reality, nothing can ever change and both people in the disagreement lose.

Gandhi refers to “the real love”. What is the real love? The real love is the love that recognizes that those who hate us are afraid. Hatred and anger are always the result of fear. When we recognize this, another’s hatred ceases to be about us and becomes, rightly, about them. When we love another, despite their hatred of us, their hatred may continue, but we have eliminated the possibility of conflict. Even though we may not be able to trust that they will not continue to attack us, when we love them, the effect of their attacks withers away. This does not mean that we become “doormats” for their hatred. We take the necessary precautions to protect ourselves, but we do it with love and compassion, knowing that if they could do better, they would.

If we love only those who love us, does that prove that we are really able to love? No, it only proves that we can love when it’s convenient. It proves nothing about our real capacity for love. If it proves nothing about our real capacity for love, it also proves nothing about our capacity for nonviolence. nonviolence can only come when we love. Like love, nonviolence only counts when we are faced with the violence of those who hate us.

Affirmative Practice

Today, I will meditate on love. Today, I will practice loving those who hate me, with compassion for their fear and inability to love.