

Day 50

“Man becomes great exactly in the degree in which he works for the welfare of his fellow-men. The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”

M. K. Gandhi

Most of us work for our own benefit. The result is always the same. We may become financially successful through that work, perhaps even gaining accolades and honors. Yet there is always a feeling of emptiness and longing behind it. We see this in those whose lives are driven by the quest for wealth and fame. It is never enough. We always seek the bigger house, the bigger auto, latest fashions, etc. Having served only ourselves, we have lost ourselves and thus seek to fill the hole left by it.

Yet those who are happiest are those who have given themselves to a cause which serves all of humanity, not simply themselves or even one group. They find fulfillment, recognition and a different kind of wealth. In serving others, they have found themselves, and the hole is once again filled. Think of those in history who have given themselves to service of humanity. Their legacy and greatness live on long after they have left this earth plane.

Does this mean that we sacrifice possessions and personal goals for the sake of a cause? No, it means that true greatness and personal joy comes when we serve. There is nothing so black and white in Gandhi's words. As many famous individuals have shown, it is possible to acquire wealth and possessions and also serve humanity. The service is in the quality of the gift, not in the quantity of the service. Our greatness, in the eyes of others as well as our own, comes through service to life, and through no other way. That is Gandhi's point. Whatever else we may do or be, if we truly seek that sense of self, the only way to find it is to reach out and serve.

Affirmative Practice

Today, I will meditate on my service to the world. Is it for my gratification, or is it in service to life? Today I will seek one new way in which I can serve humanity and all life.

Day 51

“All my actions have their source in my inalienable love of humankind.” M. K. Gandhi

We think of the power of nonviolence as being the demonstration of non-cooperation with that which suppresses people or just causes. But the true power of nonviolence lies in this statement of Gandhi. Love is, in every case the power behind nonviolence. Gandhi was not talking about defeating or overthrowing anyone! He did not seek to injure the British authorities in his homeland to aid his cause. nonviolence was NOT a way for one group to seize what it wanted at the expense of any other cause or group. Gandhi saw no ethnic conflict, class war or any other us vs them conflict. What he saw was a nation divided by injustice. This is the lesson of Gandhi's struggle for all of us. When true nonviolence is successful, EVERYONE wins.

Gandhi saw that, if love is to triumph, we must serve all life through our every action. This can only occur when we begin where we are, in our own homes, and cultivate the unconditional love necessary to love every person in our lives, not despite their actions, but because of them. Having done so in our own homes, we reach out further and further, at each step finding love for all those around us. The key here, as it was for Gandhi, is that we love them because of all they do which we oppose, not in spite of those things.

Understanding, that when they act selfishly or harmfully, they act only out of their own fears and needs. The behavior we most oppose is the very best they can do. When we fully understand the limits of their ability to feel safe enough to care about all humankind, all of life, we are able to feel compassion for them. In that compassion we are able to love them because of their actions, not in spite of them. In loving them, we begin to see how to serve all life. Only in this way can everyone win. This should always be our goal if we truly seek to walk the path of nonviolence.

Affirmative Practice

Today, I will meditate on the healing power of love in every action I take. Today, I will look behind the actions of those I oppose to the reasons for them. Today, I will begin the work of loving those I oppose because of their actions, not in spite of them. Today, I will do the work of healing them, as well as those I agree with. This is the path of nonviolence.

Day 52

“The golden way is to be friends with the world and to regard the whole human family as one. He who distinguishes between the votaries of one’s own religion and those of another miseducates the members of his own and opens the way for discord and irrelegion.” M. K. Gandhi

This message seems especially appropriate in today's world. We live in a time when religion has once again become the most divisive issue in our world. Otherwise intelligent, and even apparently spiritual, people demonize other religions. The tenor of the current religious discourse, like that of the political, makes it impossible for religion and spirituality to serve its true function, utilizing peace and love as path to Oneness. It can, and should be, a calming balm for an injured and heartsick world.

Instead, those who serve fear, anger and violence seize upon the words of the Koran to prove malevolent intent on the part of, or to induce violence in, all Muslims, ignoring the love poems of the Sufi movement. In the same way, the words of the Old Testament of the Christian Bible are used to justify “an eye for an eye”, ignoring the words of peace and forgiveness taught by the central figure in that religion, Jesus. At the same time, those who deny the validity of any spiritual path, point to all this as proof that religion is the problem, not the answer. The result is a religious environment that is truly the path to violence - not nonviolence.

Gandhi is urging us all, no matter where we fall on the religious spectrum, to accept that we are all on the same path. Only the love, compassion and tolerance inherent in any true connection with the Divine can bring the healing the world desperately needs. Once we see that we are all, in our way, on a spiritual path to our Oneness, only then can we truly walk the path of nonviolence. Whether we seek it through a connection with God, or a connection with life, is irrelevant, for this is the golden way to nonviolence.

Affirmative Practice

Today, I will meditate on how I live the “golden way”. Today, I will see how my spiritual path, whatever it may be, can contribute to love, peace and nonviolence in the world. This is the path to nonviolence.

Day 53

“One man cannot do right in one department of life whilst he is occupied in doing wrong in another department. Life is an indivisible whole.” M. K. Gandhi

If we are human, we fall far short of perfection, and we do wrong. True dishonesty is in our failure to admit it. Twelve Step Programs have an expression, “*cash register honesty*”. It refers to the our propensity for maintaining that we are honest because we've never stolen money or goods from someone else. Dishonesty, however, comes in many forms, both active and passive, or as Christian theology says, “*sins of commission and omission*.” We all have areas of dishonesty in our lives, too numerous to mention.

“The way you do one thing is the way you do everything.” We cannot claim to be engaged in a virtuous work of any kind as long as we are dishonest in any area of our lives. Seeking to change the world for the better, while continuing to be dishonest, no matter how slightly, in some other area, will ultimately corrupt the work we're doing. It's unavoidable. We try to compartmentalize our lives, personal relationships, careers, etc, pigeonholed, keeping each safe from connection to the other. The flaws in this approach to life are obvious, we may live many different lives, but it is “we” who live them. Whatever our values, ethics and morals may be in one area, will always be the same one ones that rule us in all areas, because they are our values, ethics and morals. It is where we live from.

As long as we have physical bodies, there will be some area of dishonesty in our lives and we will continue to do wrong. It is part of our humanness and part of our evolution. If we have truly committed ourselves to a worthy goal, the only way we can truly serve that goal is to become completely “*honest about our dishonesty*”. It doesn't matter whether it's parenthood, career paths, loving partnerships, spiritual paths, a humanistic crusades in the world.... Nothing will have lasting value, or even succeed, if we have not admitted and begun dealing with our personal dishonesty in all areas of our lives and learned to do right, no matter what.

Affirmative Practice

Today, I will meditate on “What is honesty to me?” Today, I will review my life and admit where I have been wrong, no matter what the reasons. Today, I will make amends for my dishonesty. This is the path to nonviolence.

Day 54

“The method of passive resistance is the clearest and safest, because, if the cause is true, it is the resisters, and they alone who suffer.”

M. K. Gandhi

Those of us who are truly introspective often ask ourselves, “How do I know if what I am doing is right? Is it really nonviolent, or does my non-cooperation hurt others?” Here, Gandhi gives us the measuring device for all work of changing the world. In a truly nonviolent struggle, waged through passive resistance and non-cooperation, no one but those passively resisting are hurt.

Why then, would we engage in such a nonviolent struggle? If we know in advance that we, and we alone, might suffer through this struggle, why engage in the first place? These questions only have meaning if our goal is self-serving. If our goal is serving everyone, and we are committed to the path of nonviolence, then we must be willing to suffer, if necessary for the good of all, without inflicting harm on anyone else.

Gandhi also give us a measurement for determining whether our goal is self-serving or unjust, or in any other way, “untrue”. If in the course of our work, others are hurt, then our cause is NOT true. The true path of nonviolence always protects all who are unwilling or unable join in passive resistance to the apparent evil. In all cases, only those with the courage and commitment to passively resist, through non-cooperation, are put in harm's way.

None of us, if we are normal, welcomes pain. The knowledge, however, that we act for a worthy and true cause, idealistic as that may sound, is a goal we can all aspire to. With Gandhi's measuring device showing the way, we can hope to find such a nonviolent goal and non-resistant path.

Affirmative Practice

Today, I will meditate on the cause I serve, measuring it for its justice and truth. Today, I will be aware of the effects of my resistance.

Day 55

“Self-respect and honor cannot be protected by others. They are for each individual himself or herself to guard.”

M.K. Gandhi

We can never expect others to protect our self-respect or honor us, if we do not respect and honor ourselves. Regardless of the conditions under which we labor, we can find self-respect and honor only within ourselves. It is possible to do, even under the most trying circumstances. Certainly, we cannot expect others to guard self-respect and honor we have proven to the world we do not have. Once we have learned to respect and honor ourselves and guard it ourselves, the respect and honor that comes from others becomes less important. Ironically, they also come to us more easily.

When we continue to suffer injustice, we are not respecting or honoring ourselves. Passive acceptance of wrong can never be worthy of respect and honor, whether from the self or from outside. When we do not respect or honor ourselves enough to resist injustice, we cannot expect it others to do so. Thus, when we experience injustice, always the hallmark of violence, it is our responsibility to address it and resist it. It is not the job of the system that engages in injustice to self-correct. It is not the responsibility of any other individual or group to come to our aid. In an ideal world, those things might happen but this is not an ideal world. It is simply the world - where we have choices, and those choices bring consequences.

Thus when we experience injustice, it is our responsibility to take action, in whatever form we are able to act. The individual being harassed at work, for example, has choices. They can choose to be victims and continue the pattern of abuse, or they can choose to take some action. Choosing to take action, we are, again, at choice. Do we act violently, by attacking back, or do we do so nonviolently. nonviolence is always the first and best option and will look different in every case. Violence is always the action of one who lacks self-respect and honor, whatever he or she may say, because such action always arises out of fear, and always looks like attacking back.. So we first work within ourselves to overcome our fear, our feelings of impotence and smallness and we learn to respect and honor ourselves. As we respect and honor ourselves, we can stand in our truth and begin to see our choices more clearly. Then we can begin the work of non-co-operation and passive resistance against those who treat us with injustice.

Affirmative Practice

Today, I will meditate on this question, “Do I respect and honor myself?” Today, in everything I do, I will ask myself, “Do I respect this about myself? Can I honor this in myself?” If the answer is “No”, I will ask, “What action do I need to take to respect and honor myself?” This is the path of nonviolence.

Day 56

“Before embarking on the Civil Disobedience and taking the risk I have dreaded to take all these years, I would fain (gladly) approach you and find a way out.”

M.K. Gandhi

When we think of men and women like Gandhi and King, we tend to see them at their most courageous, in the midst of their struggle. What we miss in this picture is all that went before. We miss the years of fear and turmoil, knowing the upheaval and distress it would cause themselves, their families and their countries. We miss the moments of doubt and indecision, the long prayerful hours and days, seeking some, any other way out. We miss the final, fateful moment of courage when, the decision clear, the steps toward confrontation with injustice began. Because we miss those moments, we put individuals like these on pedestals, missing the truth of who they were, ordinary men and women. WWII US Navy Admiral William F. Halsey said, *“There are no great men, only great challenges that ordinary men are forced by circumstances to meet.”*

In our lives, we all face injustice, whether globally, nationally, locally or personally. Being ordinary men and women, we fear to take action. For the most part, we try to tolerate it, hoping that somehow it will go away, praying that someone else will be the brave one, or that some answer will be found to create an easy way out for everyone. Most of the time that will happen. Sometimes, though, we ARE the ones who must will finally be “tired of giving in” and take action.

Before we do, as Gandhi infers, we must spend the time necessary to do everything possible, including the deep soul searching and prayerful meditation that will lead us to the right decision. Even then, as Gandhi says, we have to sincerely and gladly approach those inflicting the injustice to seek one last opportunity to reach a peaceful resolution. Then, and only then, can we justify non-cooperation and nonviolent resistance. And justify it we must, to ourselves, to the world and to the Divine.

Affirmative Practice

Today I will meditate on all those places in my life where I tolerate injustice, even in small personal matters. Today, I will ask, “Is this the injustice that needs addressing? Is now the time it needs to be addressed? Am I the one that is called to address it?”

Day 57

“The virtues of mercy, nonviolence, love and truth in any man can be truly tested only when they are pitted against ruthlessness, violence, hate and untruth.”

M.K. Gandhi

It's easy for us to allow ourselves to take pride in our ability to feel and practice mercy, nonviolence, love and truth when we face no challenge. All of us are able to practice nonviolence with those who agree with us and who are “good” people. The true test of our commitment to a compassionate life, to nonviolence in all our relationships, is when we are challenged.

In the world, there will always be those who are ruthless and violent, whose inability to love creates hate in their hearts. These people think nothing of lying or injuring others in a variety of ways, if it suits their needs. These are exactly the kind of people who engage in violence and injustice toward those over whom they have some perceived authority or control. We may find ourselves in conflict with such individuals. Only then can we know whether we have truly learned the lessons of nonviolence.

We may be shocked by our own reactions under the circumstances. We may find ourselves becoming angry and reacting with verbal and emotional violence. When this happens, our natural reaction may be self-recrimination and self-loathing. All we've proven, though, is that we are still on the path to nonviolence and haven't yet reached the goal. Instead of self-recrimination, we should simply recognize our humanity. We have proven what Gandhi knew, that the path of nonviolence is a lifetime journey.

Affirmative Practice

Today, I will meditate on my ability to practice mercy, nonviolence, love and truth. Today, I will measure myself, not against ordinary interactions but against those which represent the opposite of mercy, nonviolence, love and truth and I will forgive myself when I fall short. This is the path of nonviolence.