

Nonviolence in a Violent World

This is a difficult subject, I ask in my interior for inspiration to envelop these words and our understanding.

What is the problem? If I am attacked, if I am criticized, and if I am subjected to any form of aggression, how can I defend myself without violence? How can I restrain a force if I do not oppose it with a similar force? If a power wants to abuse me or my group, and also defames me in the mass media, what am I left with in order to somehow restrain the violence? What can the weak do when faced with the violence of the strong?

Nobody wants violence, but as violence is exercised over oneself, its use is always justified. Violence that is used to restrain violence has the smell of legitimacy. "Nonviolence is fine when we are around civilized people, but while we have brutes in front of us; be quiet nonviolent person and let us put order to this disorder," they say. I believe this is more or less the subject in question. How to be nonviolent in the midst of a violent world?

Violence is not something in our way of life that we can just put aside as easy as that. It is a form of social action that comes from far back in human history; it is a reaction to fear and the environment which is quite natural and quite animal. Violence has deep roots in us and it is not something that can be eradicated by decree. Social organization is based on violence; violence monopolized by the state, and ultimately by armies. When society panics, armies react. When fear seizes a person, violence also seizes them. We can say about ourselves that we are good and peaceful people; but if suddenly something endangers something of mine, something which gives me stability; if anyone enters furtively to snatch it from me, violence emerges from the tectonic layers of my consciousness and a violent simian takes control of me and occupies my body and it will react soon. If what attacks me is very powerful, then I contain my violence which, transformed into resentment and hatred, will seek revenge. There the culturally nested revenge waits to satisfy itself when the opportunity appears.

Perhaps someone, who lives immersed in a violent society, can say that they are free of it. Maybe we don't exercise violence.

In the origins of Nonviolence, one Mr. Mahavira, a contemporary of Buddha, decided to take not exercising violence to its ultimate consequences. So he could not walk, in order to not step on the ants that might be in his way, and then after 30 years of hardly feeding himself or moving, he obtained illumination. Today some Jains, heirs to the teachings of Mahavira, sweep the ground in front of where they walk before treading.

In order not to exert violence in the midst of a violent system, we should not pay or receive salaries; we should leave all state regulations aside, we should not pay taxes because with those taxes States arm themselves to the teeth, etc. So, we would have to totally isolate ourselves from society and surely instead of calling us mystics, they would lock us up in their mental institutions.

Violence is everywhere. Exploitation, manipulation, and discrimination are also forms of violence that accumulate in those that suffer until they physically explode. The rate of interest for health care, for education and for housing is also a form of violence. When the riots happen in the football stands, in China with religious ethnic groups or in the Peruvian

Amazon, we are surprised because we do not see the accumulation of those other forms of violence that these populations are subjected to. The opposite side is always the violent one, while the side you are on is just, and obliged to use violence.

This is not easy to change; it is a belief that is deeply ingrained. Our intuition tells us that violence does not correspond with what is human, although we suspect that it is something that is dragged from our hominid ancestors, we do not see a possibility of getting away from it. And, what would be the reason for leaving it behind? Like it or not, humanity has got to this point and it has not been necessary to eradicate it. It has been possible to control it, to direct the violent impulses, and a justice system has been established that can use violence with certain rationality. Some die when violence gets out of control, but we will all die someday, for one reason or another. There must be a very powerful reason in order to change this direction of the consciousness.

Sometimes that mantle of suffering and pain that covers our life is crossed by rays that illuminate spaces of liberty, of friendship, of love, of solidarity, of you; you who matters a lot, at times, much more than a lot.

Sometimes a new world appears before my eyes, and I see myself and I do not recognize myself, it seems that I am not me, but happiness invades me and that makes me think that not everything is fear, not everything is suffering, not everything is violence. If only this ray that crosses me at times could widen the hole in the mantle that traps me and that traps us; if that were possible, everything would be very different. If that were possible, life would have a meaning to be lived.

We are speaking of the fundamental themes of human life. The reflection of violence confronts us with the non-meaning of life and if my life does not have meaning and if everything ends in death, there will not be sufficient energy to attempt a human leap.

Silo, who is very important in the present formulation of this problem, started his message in 1969, explaining that a violent cloak has extended itself over humanity and that there is no way to get away from it. He explained that violence is in one's own consciousness, that its root is suffering and that one suffers from the fear of solitude, the fear of disease and the fear of death. We try to resolve this fear through our desires, our illusions and hopes, and while our desires become more disproportionate, the more our suffering and our violence increases. Thus Silo started his teachings and later he would present the parable of the cart of desire, with its wheels called pleasure and pain and a horse called Necessity. When the cart of desire was over loaded, the horse became exhausted. Over the years, these ideas have found extensive development in a philosophy, a psychology and in a mysticism.

The fear of nothingness and death are what give substance to violence, it comes from what is done. But it is not fear that is fundamental to the human being. It is not death which gives meaning, but rather the necessity of immortality and transcendence. If the spark of immortality were kept in the depths of the human heart, like a sleeping ember that needs a breath of air to be ignited, and if that breath ignited it suddenly, it would want to go out of its distant world to colour the human world.

If all actions have equal value, why is it that certain actions ignite the internal fire and others extinguish it? If the human being were the tinder in which nestles the divine spark and human action were the flint that ignited it, and if that inner fire were so intense it

could illuminate the whole world I see; if everything were bathed in a fire of essence and meaning and if this filled me to overflowing from my head to my toes, I would never want to put it out. An act is moral because it ignites the divine spark in the interior of the human being.

Nonviolence is a life style, a search for the sacred, and the manifestation of what is truly human. It is not simply a political act, it is above all a moral act, a search for a new human being, it is the presence of the future, it is the encounter with a being which is still not there. Nonviolence is the force that will transform the world because I will transform myself in order to not become like those with whom I struggle.

It is increasingly difficult for me to explain this theme. What can I say that is sincere? I cannot give a class, I don't know how I would act if I were placed in a situation of violence. It is not a dogma either, I cannot demand another to act as I see fit, I can only decide my own form of action.

Every day I feel obliged and pressured to take sides, to take positions that I do not like; each decision, each action is a reference for someone who is near me, and for those who observe me, my decisions are important. I cannot judge what others do, I am not sure at all if I'm right, nor what is better for others and for society. I look for something else, there is something more and I want that something to express itself in my action. I do not want to exercise violence, I do not want to be part of factions that exert it and I try to find the way, although I often find myself trapped in a faction. I want something new, something different and the best feelings to be expressed in my actions. I do not want to collaborate with knowledge that leads to destruction, I want to jump over my resentment and I want the most beautiful feelings to be expressed when I am with others.

I do not want to impose my truths, but I want to feel free to be able to act in accordance with them. In the pressure situation in which I live daily, I want to find the internal freedom to act like a human being, to recognize the human being in others, and through my action to call to it, to make it appear, and if it is not possible to make it appear in the present, to leave the trace of an action that could be recognized in the future, an action which says that it is possible for the human to be expressed.

But I cannot choose for you, just as you cannot choose for me. So just as I cannot choose for you, I also cannot judge you, but do not ask me to accompany you, do not ask that I endorse your choice, I will make my choice and I will create a void to power, I will improve myself so that I lose interest, I will surpass my desires for power, I will learn to step back and I will try that my actions show something that still does not exist, but that will exist in the future. My action will announce the world to come, the human being of the future.

I hear the quiet steps of The World March for Peace and Nonviolence, they are gentle, and do not resound like military drums, they are soldiers that no one will defeat, but there I recognize the echo of what has been searched for, something longed for, something that makes life worth while.

Thank you my friends,
Dario Ergas,
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The Laura Rodriguez Foundation