An Excerpt From

The Nonviolence Handbook
A Guide for Practical Action

by Michael N. Nagler
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Author of the American Book Award-Winning *Search for a Nonviolent Future*

THE NONVIOLENCE HANDBOOK

A Guide for Practical Action

Foreword by ANN WRIGHT, Col., US Army (ret)
Recipient, State Department Award for Heroism

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For all those who have the faith that humanity can be redeemed by nonviolence and the courage to prove it.

"Nonviolence is the greatest power humankind has been endowed with."

—Mahatma Gandhi

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Foreword

I was honored when Professor Nagler approached me to write a foreword for this excellent book, both because of the book's timeliness—there is an urgent need for nonviolence in every possible application today—and because he is so eminently qualified to write it.

Over the past twelve years, we have seen the United States take military action to attempt to resolve political issues in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen. The disastrous results of those military actions underscore the value of a different approach to conflict resolution both nationally and internationally. Michael Nagler's manual on nonviolence is a healthy reminder that there are alternatives to violence.

I'm writing this foreword to *The Nonviolence Handbook* while on a trip in Northeast Asia. In two of the countries I've visited, citizens are using nonviolent tactics to challenge actions of their governments—the very situation on which Professor Nagler primarily focuses (though many others come under review). For instance, in Japan, where the war article of the Japanese constitution is under attack, Japanese citizens have formed Article 9 defense committees in every village and every suburb to rally support for the constitution that has successfully kept them out of wars and military actions since World War II.

In South Korea, Jeju Island is the site of a remarkable nonviolent struggle against the building of a naval base for South Korean and American Aegis ballistic missile defense systems. Here, for the past seven years, the citizens of Gangjeong village have challenged their government's destruction of a pristine marine area and a mammoth, ancient lava rock formation for the construction of the naval base. They have used a variety of tactics, including building peace camps on the remarkable rock formation called Gurumbei, forming human blockades at base entrances, boarding barges transporting huge concrete blocks intended for a breakwater on unique coral heads, climbing and occupying huge construction cranes, and forming human chains of thousands of people around the base.

So far, these herculean nonviolent efforts have not succeeded in stopping the construction of the naval base. On the other hand, on the island of Okinawa, where for the past twenty years citizens have challenged U.S. and Japanese government use of the island for 75 percent of America's Japanese military presence, their long protest has finally resulted in the process of removing ten thousand U.S. military personnel from the island.

Citizens around the world are looking for ways to challenge harmful government policies and to address many other forms of injustice. *The Nonviolence Handbook* points us toward those ways. Anyone who can give us some pointers on practicing nonviolence more safely and effectively is doing humankind a ser-

vice. But Professor Nagler is not just "anyone" in this field. His unusual expertise enables him to clearly explain the compelling, inspiring theory of nonviolence, its higher vision of humanity, and selected key episodes from its dramatic history. In the end we have, exactly as the subtitle suggests, a guide to the kind of action that the world so urgently needs.

I know courage when I see it, and I have seen more courage in the brave, determined citizens cited in Professor Nagler's examples—as well as those I myself have witnessed—than in the heavily armed forces arrayed against them. That courage, complemented by the knowledge of the skillful use of nonviolence, as provided in this handbook, is a recipe for a world of peace and justice. I hope that many people will use this book to help us build that world.

Ann Wright
Col. U.S. Army (Ret.)
Recipient, State Department Award for Heroism

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An Introduction to Nonviolence

The twentieth century left us a double legacy. On the one hand, it was a time of great cruelty and violence; on the other hand, and perhaps from that very crucible of violence, we saw manifestations of a new kind of power—or rather, new uses of an age—old power—that can lead humanity to a far better future. In the years since Mahatma Gandhi demonstrated the power of nonviolence to free India from colonial rule and Martin Luther King Jr. employed it to liberate people of color from some of their oppression in the United States, countless peoples around the world—from Manila to Moscow, Cape Town to Cairo, and in the Occupy movements worldwide—have had vary-

ing degrees of success using one or another aspect of nonviolence to loosen the bonds of exploitation and oppression.

The practice of nonviolence touches on something fundamental about human nature, about who we wish to be as individuals or as a people. Gandhi stated simply, "Nonviolence is the law of our species."[1] Dr. Vandana Shiva, a renowned leader of rural resistance in India, said in a recent lecture that if we do not adopt nonviolence we risk compromising our humanity. Likewise, Iraqi Kurdish activist Aram Jamal Sabir said that although nonviolence may be harder and may require greater sacrifice than violence, "at least you don't lose your humanity in the process."[2]

We might contrast this with the appallingly high rates of depression, substance abuse, and suicide among today's American servicemen and women. As one of them told a documentary filmmaker, "I no longer like who I am. I lost my soul in Iraq." Another told a friend of mine, who was on his way to the Middle East as part of a Christian Peacemaker team, "I am still haunted by the things we did . . . I would give anything to be able to go back and undo some of the things we did. But I can't. But at least I can thank you with all my heart for doing what you do." Through these words, which are a testimony to human nature, we glimpse both the costs of violating that aspect of our nature and the path toward its redemption.

It is not surprising, therefore, that here and there the significance of nonviolence has begun to be recog-

nized by people looking for a new story of human nature and human destiny, who find themselves searching for a badly needed higher image of humanity. Frankly, our present worldview and the institutions based on that worldview take violence as a norm, and shifting that basis could lead to a leap forward in cultural evolution. It could resolve or show us how to resolve our economic, environmental, personal, and international problems. In short, the full recognition of nonviolence could rewrite the story of human destiny.

However, at this time most people do not understand the dynamics of nonviolence fully, if at all. Few people know its potential or exactly how to use it to liberate themselves and all of us from greed, tyranny, and injustice. Nonviolence may be embedded in our nature, as Gandhi said, but it cannot emerge into our lives and institutions until it is much better understood. Episodes of nonviolence are constantly cropping up, but to use it safely and effectively—and certainly to use it for lasting change—requires knowledge and planning.

Fight, Flight, and the Third Way

Nonviolence seems to be rare, even the exception, and its potential—perhaps even its mere possibility—is rigorously ignored by policy makers. Violence, or deliberate harm to another's person or basic dignity, is so common as to seem ubiquitous, especially when we include, as we should, structural violence—

the exploitation or dominance built into a system. But the seeming ubiquity of violence and rarity of nonviolence turns out to have more to do with the way we see the world than with the way the world really is. The way we practiced science until the twentieth century, for instance, tended to emphasize materialism, separateness, and competition, leading to the image of "nature red in tooth and claw." It is only recently that science has undergone a remarkable shift toward a more balanced vision not only of human nature but also of nature and evolution in general. This development has the greatest significance for nonviolence but has yet to make its way into the prevailing worldview.[3]

Another reason we are not more aware of instances of nonviolence, and the reason it all too often seems ineffectual or to end up with a disappointing sequel, as in Egypt and Syria, is that modern culture does not prepare us very well to understand a positive, nonmaterial force. Indeed, the word *nonviolence* itself is part of the problem. *Non*-violence implies that the real something, the default condition, is violence, and that nonviolence is just its absence—in the same way that many people still think of peace as merely the absence of war. They are turning truth on its head, and artificially limiting our options.

If we are unaware of nonviolence, we will tend to believe that our only response to an attack is to give in or to fight back—the fight-or-flight response. From the perspective of nonviolence, this is really no choice

at all. Either approach—passively allowing violence to be used against us (or, for that matter, someone else) or reacting in kind—will only serve to increase the violence. Our real choice is not between these two expressions of violence; instead, it's the choice that opens when we don't want to take either approach. Then we want to confront violence with an alternative, with what Andrew Young, citing an old spiritual, called a "way out of no way."[4]

Nonviolence offers us a viable, natural third way out of the fight-or-flight conundrum. The twentieth-century discoveries of relativity and quantum reality showed us that nothing is as separate as it seems. Similarly, there is now a good deal of evidence that empathy and cooperation are in fact the dominant forces in evolution, that human beings and other primates are equipped with "mirror neurons" that enable us to share what another is feeling, that self-sacrifice can produce intense rewards in the nervous system—and, of course, that nonviolence is an extremely effective tool for social change.[5]

Natural as nonviolence may be, however, there is no denying that empathy and care for the well-being of someone who's against us do not come easily. It can be quite a struggle, but it's encouraging to remember that this very struggle is the source of nonviolent power. As King put it, "The phrase 'passive resistance' often gives the false impression that this is a sort of 'do-nothing method' in which the resister quietly and passively accepts evil. But nothing is further from the

truth. For while the nonviolent resister is passive in the sense that he is not physically aggressive toward his opponent, his mind and emotions are always active, constantly seeking to persuade his opponent that he is wrong."[6]

To be angry at injustice and to fear harm are natural human responses. The point is not whether we have the "right" to be frightened or outraged but how we can use that fear or outrage to change a situation most effectively. As a preeminent nonviolence scholar, Gene Sharp, has pointed out, the first thing an oppressed people must do is to overcome the paralyzing fear that has kept them down.[7] In Chile, for instance, constitutional means were enough to bring down Augusto Pinochet in 1989 and to end the nation's long nightmare of military rule, but first they had to overcome their fear, which gave them the creative power for action.

No doubt we will have to undergo this personal struggle against our "natural" feelings many times, but it does eventually become a habit. And when we can express our fear or anger as creative energy, the creative power of nonviolence is in our hands. Emotionally, we are neither running away in fear nor attacking in anger; we are resisting in love. In terms of our conscious intention, we are neither looking to "win" nor afraid of losing; our aim is to grow, if possible, even along with those opposing us.

The Uses of Nonviolence

We have all used nonviolent energy countless times in countless interactions, without naming it as such. We catch ourselves on the point of making a sharp criticism of someone and think, "Well, I guess I've done that too, sometimes," and say something kind instead. We swallow our impatience when the guy in front of us in line takes too much time. A friend of mine, to escalate our examples, shook hands with a would-be carjacker, asked the startled young man if he needed some money, and sent him on his way.

Nonviolence, as a fundamental energy, is quietly operating at all times, like gravity. We tend to use the term *nonviolence* only when some kind of conflict erupts, especially between a people and their government, but the thing itself is working unnoticed in many other areas and can be used in any situation, from national revolutions to personal interactions. Therefore, although my examples in this book mainly focus on people who find themselves in an insurrectionary movement, all of us can benefit from understanding the dynamics of this force. Anyone who is confronted by one of the many forms of violence in our world (whether this is outright force or an inequity built into a system) and feels called upon to assert his or her human dignity against that violence can benefit from taking a nonviolent stance toward all living things. My hope is that this book, in conjunction with the various resources listed in the back, can help activists understand the main principles

underlying the dynamics of nonviolent action, but with a little imagination anyone can use these principles in their daily life. They can become our way of life.

Such a turn toward nonviolence first requires that we outgrow our present image of ourselves as separate, physical, and competitive. Imagine if we were to seek out a third way in international relations, in deplorable situations such as Rwanda or Syria, for instance, when the international community thinks its only options are to bomb someone (fight) or to do nothing (flight). A whole array of very different options would open up if enlightened state actors understood what nonviolence really is: international law, good offices and diplomacy, reconciliation commissions, and so forth. Nonstate or civil society actors could do even more—such as third-party nonviolent interventions—and they are beginning to realize this.

There is no quick and easy way to become nonviolent. It calls for constant effort and becomes a lifelong challenge. Learning about it is very helpful, but this is only a beginning. Learning *along with practice* is much more effective.

Fortunately, nonviolence offers many ways to create permanent, long-term positive changes that would enable us to rebuild social institutions on a more humane and sustainable basis. Not all of those approaches need to be confrontational, as we will see. Each of us, whatever our station in life or relation to activism, can carry out this grand "experiment with truth," to paraphrase Gandhi, according to our own capacities and the situations we confront.

Because the principle or energy of nonviolence can be applied in different ways by different practitioners and in so many different situations, I have concentrated here on the principle or energy itself, without trying to spell out very often just how it can best be applied. With a good infrastructure and a little imagination we can adapt the principle to any given situation, and of course work out best practices of our own, when the basic principles are assimilated.[8]

Satyagraha: A New Term for an Eternal Principle

Reading "history" might give you the impression that life unfolds in an endless series of competitions, conflicts, and wars. But as far back as 1909, Gandhi pointed out that history as we have practiced it is "a record of every interruption of the even working of the force of love or the soul. . . . Soul-force, being natural, is not noted in history."[9] Note that Gandhi does not use the word *nonviolence* here, which had not yet become current (as a translation of *ahimsa*), and he had rejected the misleading term "passive resistance." Around this period he had to invent another term, *satyagraha* (pronounced sat-YAH-gra-ha), which literally means "clinging to truth." Satyagraha is sometimes used to mean nonviolence in general, as in this quote, but sometimes it means nonviolence in the form of active, resistant struggle.

By coining the term *satyagraha*, based on the Sanskrit word *sat*, which means "truth" or "reality" (as well as "the good"), Gandhi made it quite clear that he saw nonviolence as the positive reality of which violence is the shadow or negation. Consequently, nonviolence was bound to prevail in the long run: "The world rests upon the bedrock of *satya* or truth. *Asatya*, meaning untruth, also means nonexistent, and *satya* or truth also means that which is. If untruth does not so much as exist, its victory is out of the question. And truth being that which is, can never be destroyed. This is the doctrine of satyagraha in a nutshell."[10]

Though *satyagraha* literally means "clinging to truth," it is often translated, not inappropriately, as "soul force." We all have that force within us, and under the right circumstances it can come forth from anyone, with amazing results. This can best be seen in what's called a *nonviolent moment*, when the "unstoppable force" of one party's nonviolence confronts the apparently immoveable commitment to violence of another. This moment will always lead to success, sometimes evidently and immediately, sometimes further down the road.

For instance, in 1963 in Birmingham, Alabama, black marchers, inspired by the intention to "win our freedom, and as we do it . . . set our white brothers free," in the words of one of their leaders, found themselves unexpectedly blocked by a line of police and firemen with dogs and hoses. The marchers knelt to pray. After a while they became "spiritually intoxicated," as

David Dellinger recounts. They got up off their knees as though someone had given a signal and steadily marched toward the police and firemen. Once they got within earshot, some of them said, "We're not turning back. We haven't done anything wrong. All we want is our freedom. How do you feel doing these things?"[11] Even though the police commissioner, a notorious segregationist, repeatedly shouted, "Turn on the hoses!" the firemen found their hands frozen. The marchers walked steadily on, passing right through the lines of the police and firemen. Some of these men were seen to be crying.

Gandhi, who had seen this working time and again, gave a beautiful explanation of how this transformation takes place: "What satyagraha does in these cases is not to suppress reason but to free it from inertia and to establish its sovereignty over prejudice, hatred, and other baser passions. In other words, if one may paradoxically put it, it does not enslave, it compels reason to be free." What he calls "reason" here is better described as the innate awareness that we are all connected and that nonviolence is "the law of our species." As we've noted, this is an awareness latent in everyone, a natural human state, however temporarily obscured it may be by the fog of hatred. In principle, we should be able to awaken this awareness in virtually anyone, given enough time and know-how. Once awake, such awareness automatically takes precedence over the "baser passions."

That human beings have the potential to be nonviolent—and to respond to nonviolence when it's

offered—implies a much higher image of the human being than we are presented with in the mass media and throughout our present culture, but because of that very culture, we can't expect our nonviolent potential to manifest by itself. To bring it to fruition we must first try to understand it better and get into the habit of using it creatively in our relationships, our institutions, and our culture. Then, to use it in situations of intense conflict such as Birmingham, there are two basic ingredients that make the nonviolent magic work:

1. We approach our situation with right intention. We are not and do not need to be against the well-being of any person.
2. We employ right means. Wrong means such as violence can never, in the long run, bring about right ends.

The source of our empowerment and strength in satyagraha lies in our having right intention and using right means. If we operate from anger or envy or ignorance, then no matter how good the cause, we are not approaching it correctly. Note that the Birmingham marchers asked, "How do you feel doing this?" In other words, they credited the opponent with some moral awareness and thereby helped to awaken that awareness—for the opponent's own benefit.

Likewise, obviously, if we give in to violence, we are not employing right means. Let's look into each of these guidelines in turn.

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