

Video 16

The Power of Non-Violence

The first thing to know about non-violence is that it works.

Non-violence is not passive. It is *active*, in many different, creative ways. Before you can use it, you need to be educated about what it is and how it works. Non-violence requires learning a broad range of strategies. And it requires hours of training—such as role playing—so that whether you are confronted by the police or a potentially violent opposition group, you know exactly how to respond.

The second thing to know about non-violence is that the moment you become violent, you lose the respect of the people who are watching. And thus you lose their support. The moment you throw a rock, the moment you fire a gun, you become just like all the other bloody brutes who have fought and killed each other for thousands of years. But if you retain your dignity, and quietly but clearly state your intelligent demands, those who are watching—even from a distance—will both respect you, and to some degree support you.

When the members of a non-violent organization work together—when you train together, when you discuss methods and goals, when you develop an efficient communications system, when you share your food and your songs—you create a team that becomes stronger and stronger. You are constantly learning new tricks.

And your vision of the kind of world you want to build becomes increasingly powerful.

Violence always leads to further violence, for it never sees beyond the old failed ways of resolving conflicts. Generation after generation, the old hatreds prevail.

But non-violence enables us to discover new possibilities of action. Maintaining absolute peacefulness in all that we do enables us to discover new talents within ourselves.

Most important, non-violence does not merely tear down the old. From the very beginning, living within a peaceful way of thinking enables us to design and build an entirely new world, with new laws, new economic systems, and (in our case today) new energy systems.

Violence shuts all the doors toward a different kind of future. Non-violence opens a hundred doors, every day.

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But why are we talking about violence and non-violence? A group of young people gathered on the street, holding up signs that say “School Strike for Climate”, are not threatening anyone. Nor is there any reason for the police to attack them.

Two reasons. First, you can never predict what may happen when groups of people confront each other with not only different intellectual attitudes, but deeply rooted emotions toward an issue that is vitally important to both sides.

When the marchers in the American Civil Rights Movement stepped out from the doors of their churches wearing their Sunday best, then marched through the streets of American cities, before they returned to their churches, they were well trained, well organized, and very brave.

Second, when you stand in the street with a sign that says, “We want a healthy Earth”, or “We want to breathe clean air”, you are confronting a system that is inherently violent.

When an industry produces so much pollution over the years that a growing number of children must keep an asthma spray in their pockets . . . that is a form of violence against the children.

When an industry produces so much pollution over the years that wildfires are burning from California to Siberia, killing great numbers of animals, killing people as well, destroying both forests and homes, and polluting the air even more with black smoke . . . that is a form of violence.

When an industry produces so much pollution over the years that our atmosphere is warming, our oceans are warming, and thus hurricanes—which draw their energy from the warming oceans—grow ever more powerful, able to destroy entire cities on the coast . . . that is a form of violence.

When an industry produces so much pollution over the years that glaciers in the mountains are melting, thus threatening the supply of water to vital rivers; that the huge glacier atop Greenland is melting, thus threatening coastlines around the world with a rise in sea level; that the Arctic ice cap—our heat shield—is melting, changing the fundamental nature of the planet itself . . . that is a form of violence.

But we cannot blame it all on the fossil fuel industries, nor on the politicians who support them. We ourselves burn that oil in our cars, in our homes, in our factories, *knowing* that we are contributing to the devastating pollution. Yes, we too are a source of violence, against ourselves, against all of life on our planet.

If our demonstrations, if our marching feet, are going to take us toward a true Renaissance in the 21st century, then we must confront the violence within ourselves. Our violence against our own children, as well as future generations. Our massive and brutal violence against the other creatures with whom we share this planet, from the whales which we hunted nearly to extinction, to the elephants which we continue to slaughter today, to the animals which we raise in hideous factories before we kill and eat them.

We must confront as well our blind violence against the Earth itself: against her living forests, her living seas, her coral reefs, her tundra, her grassy plains where the hooves of a million buffalo once thundered.

We need an eleventh commandment: Thou shalt not plunder.

Young People of the World, you have a big job. Many people in our world today do not want you to bother yourselves about such serious things. They give you an endless supply of entertainment: action movies, funny movies, non-stop television, so many apps that you yourself become an app—an appendage—to your telephone.

Last summer in Norway—when the stretch of hot days set heat records, when drought parched the farmland and turned the fields brown, when streams flowing into the lakes dried up and became silent, and when fires were burning in forests in many regions of the country—the big film in movie theaters was about an earthquake. Posters advertising the film were everywhere in Oslo; one of the food chains advertised “Earthquake burgers”. Every family had to see this blockbuster film!

Was there a film about the melting of the Arctic ice cap? Was there a film about methane bubbling up from the thawing permafrost? Was there a film about rivers of water pouring from the edges of the vast ice cap on Greenland into the sea? Was there a film about wildfires raging in countries around the world? Was there a film about politicians meeting with oil executives as they planned new drilling for oil in the Arctic?

No. Instead we had a film about an earthquake, so that we do not think about the real threats. The politicians know: Give the people bread and circuses. Keep them fat, dumb and happy.

How many schools spent the first day of class in August discussing the record-breaking heat and the drought of the summer of 2018? How many companies spent a full day in September, when everyone was back from vacation, discussing the major climate changes which will affect everything from local health care to the global marketplace?

Or did we all just carry on as if nothing unusual was happening?

Young People of the World, we need you. *Urgently*, we need you.

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John Slade