

To What Extent is Non-violence a Solution in Creating a Durable World Peace?

War spans the human memory across time where disputes ranging from religion, ideology, wealth, politics, power and territory are resolved through killing other human beings. The 20th century is viewed as the most destructive on record, 250 wars and 109 million humans have been killed and not a day passes without a war reported in the media.¹ Whilst wars are horrific as a means to an ends, the advent of the atomic bomb moved the world to the precipice of mutually assured destruction. The world now has a choice nuclear annihilation or a golden age of peace.² Mahatma Gandhi on hearing the news about Hiroshima in 1945, did not move a muscle, he was clear, ‘unless now the world adopts nonviolence it will spell certain suicide for mankind’.³

This paper will explore nonviolence from its origins through its many transformations of mysticism, pacifism, gandhian *satyagraha* and pragmatic nonviolence. The lamp of nonviolence will illuminate the question of how effective is nonviolence in creating a lasting world peace and how the future could manifest out of a commitment to nonviolence.

The Origins of Non-Violence

Gene Sharp observed that practical applications of nonviolence were derived in the West however the philosophical and religious thinking began in the East, resurfacing repeatedly over time.⁴ The mystics, masters and philosophers of antiquity spent their lives teaching the virtues of nonviolence which have spawned religions and movements around these ideas. Most notable were: the Jains (pre recorded history), Lao Tsu (end 7th century BCE), Buddha (6th century BCE), and Jesus of Nazareth (1st century AD).

Jainism predates recorded history and is the oldest philosophy of nonviolence. Nonviolence is revered as the highest ideal and the means to moksa (liberation). Features of Jainism are: detachment from worldly things, the soul to become infinite, love and sympathy for all human beings, service, self-sacrifice and simplicity. The purpose of life is to up lift humanity.

The basic rules for ascetics are contained with the five vows are 1) non-violence (ahimsa) 2) truth (satya) 3) non-stealing 4) celibacy 5) non-possession.⁵ Conversely they believe mental violence constitutes anger, lust, jealousy, greed, pride and lying. Thus, nonviolence extends to thought and speech and to all aspects of life.⁶

The name Lao Tsu translates into the 'Old One', he was viewed as a mysterious figure where little is known about him. Apparently he held the office of archivist at the Imperial Court in Henan and later, when political conditions deteriorated he left China. The legend describes Lao Tsu riding an Ox and reaching a provincial boarder at the pass of Xian Gu. The border official Vin Xi asked him to leave some writing, he then wrote the Dao De Jing (the way and the life) and gave it to a border official.⁷ Lao Tsu taught that the senses (sensation) should be emptied so that the outside world is not desired, the source of illusion diminishes and the truth can be penetrated. Lao Tsu sought inner enlightenment.⁸ He believed in action, that a virtuous person should not sit back whilst the world is in bloodshed. He should expose the truth and show the way for the evolution of humanity. He taught that undeveloped humanity can destroy itself through ignorance and that it is the responsibility of one who can see, to tell a blind horseman on a blind horse that he is riding toward an abyss.⁹ He proclaims the Way as the power of meekness to conquer and the nobility of good for evil. He clearly enunciates a doctrine of non-resistance.¹⁰ After his departure from China the legend is that he went to India and met with Buddha.¹¹

Buddha similar to Lao Tsu shared the mystical thought of repudiating desire. Buddha's journey was one where he turned away from the sheltered luxury of his father's Court and went into the world. Horrified at the misery, he fled into the wilderness and meditated beneath the Bodhi-tree and eventually became enlightened. Buddhism espouses the expansion of the mind and heart and the belief of love towards all people. He uttered 'blissful is freedom from malice', this blissful state was free from lust and pride that originates with 'I am'. In this deep truth he connected with peace-loving, peace-giving, non-resistance on one hand and the enlargement of

the soul on the other. His ways were the ways of peace.¹² Similar to Lao Tsu he stated 'if a man foolishly does me wrong, I will return...love'.

The philosophy can be illustrated by the story of a soldier. The soldier questioned the Buddha about punishment of a criminal, the concept of submission to evil and why warfare is forbidden. The Buddha responded by indicating that the criminal is punished through his own evil. He goes further to say that all warfare is lamentable and defines the successful general, as a person who has no hatred and uplifts the downtrodden foe offering him peace and brotherhood. He teaches the surrender of Self but not to surrender to powers of evil and advises him to be a soldier of truth.¹³ Buddhism teaches that peace can only be achieved when not attached to a view and freedom from fanaticism.¹⁴ Buddhism's rudiments are of social psychology and passive resistance.¹⁵

Jesus of Nazareth demonstrated the conquering power of passive resistance. Jesus shares with striking similarity to Lao Tsu and Buddha, the concept of returning good for evil. Jesus teaching of non-resistance incorporated the idea of passive suffering as a means of moral and social construction. Jesus was part of a communistic sect called the Essenes who held some non-resistance principles.¹⁶ Jesus taught people not to seek revenge but to adopt a loving attitude of forgiveness embodied in the transformative spirit of peace on earth and goodwill towards men.¹⁷ During this period Christians refused to go to war and there is no evidence that they used force against persecutors. Jesus taught 'all who take the sword will perish by the sword' and he spoke of no retaliation '...anyone strike you on the right cheek, turn to him the other...'.¹⁸ Under Nero, Christians were persecuted mercilessly, they were torn by dogs, nailed to crosses and lit as human torches. Christians shared the martyrdom of Jesus and their suffering prompted conversions. K.S. Latourette, a leading historian stated that 'never in so short a time had any other religious faith...achieved so commanding a position'.¹⁹

Jesus taught that conquering was through love, courage and self sacrifice. However, the Emperor Constantine had a dream where he saw a cross with an inscription 'conquer by this', he

misinterpreted it to mean conquer by violence. This became the prelude to centuries of unprecedented cruelty and killing in the name of Christianity. Thus the departure from non-resistance to the justification of a 'just war'.²⁰

Pacifism

Early pacifists ideas were framed by medieval theologians and bourgeoisie theorists representing the antithesis of the concept of a just war.²¹ Other sources included: Greek and Chinese philosophers, utilitarians and anarchists.²² Many of Christianity's founding principles emphasised pacifism as found in the New Testament such as turning the other cheek and love thy neighbour. Peace churches such as the Quakers, Mennonites, Church of Brethren were adherents in differing degrees to the pacifist doctrine.²³ Early Christians enunciated passive concepts of peace.²⁴

Critiques of pacifism focus on the fact that pacifists avoided war and did not delve into the causes of war, thus disassociating themselves with the symptoms and not dealing with the disease.²⁵ The Live Aid concert organised by Bob Geldof, aimed to feed the world, illustrates the ineffectiveness of not addressing underlying needs and causes. The concert raised 70 million which inadvertently helped the corrupt African regime of Colonel Mengistu. Other massive expressions such as Hands Across America in 1986 didn't reduce poverty.²⁶ Paradoxically, some pacifist groups (Christianity, Islam) have defended terrorism in the name of liberation wars.²⁷ Under the veil of pacifism negative, angry feelings can degenerate into fanaticism, with undercurrents of anarchism in the absence of a guiding philosophy. Gene Sharp referred to the non-violence of the strong and pacifism of the weak.²⁸

The World Peace Movement (WPM) has been described as representing the middle class, comprised of left wing university students and essentially euro-centric with no representation in the third world.²⁹ Moreover, the WPM is perceived as one-sided, confused, fearful, preoccupied with nuclear weapons, reactive rather than investigative of the causes. The movement has not

dealt with issues of terrorism and religious fundamentalism.³⁰ Some have characterised the attitude of the WPM as an ostrich world view.³¹

Gandhian Satyagraha

Mahatma Gandhi was known for his successful campaign of non-violence to break the bondage of British hegemony in India and eventually herald independence of India. He could see his philosophy as universal and of benefit to the world.³² In his early days he regarded himself a pacifist but came to realise that passive resistance was a misnomer and ineffective.³³ He considered war repugnant and indefensible and rejected the use of violence.³⁴ However, unlike the pacifists he did not envisage the abolishment of war and accepted that under exceptional circumstances it could profit humankind.³⁵ Gandhi viewed the international system as one based on violence caused by exploitation and untruth.³⁶ The primary cause of wars were regarded as an inhuman race for exploitation by powerful nations over the weaker nations of the world.³⁷ Other significant forces were attributed to imperialism, nationalism and tyranny.³⁸ His vision extended past the horizon of eliminating wars, and concerned the evolving social order.³⁹

Mahatma Gandhi's ultimate goal was the promotion and realisation of peace.⁴⁰ Gandhi was considered the greatest theoretician and practitioner of peace, embodying the mysticism of Lao Tzu, Buddha, Jesus, Hindu Bhagavad Gita and the influence of Tolstoy.⁴¹ The *Gita* was particularly influential in its teachings of non-cooperation between darkness and light within the arena of the heart, to live deliberately without fear and in harmony with the real Self.⁴² He viewed his life as a spiritual journey in communion with God, his living faith essential for establishing a permanent peace.⁴³ The secret of his political action was truth and non-violence which effectively raised politics to a level of religion.⁴⁴ His spiritual principles of *satyagraha* (holding onto truth)⁴⁵ and *ahimsa* (nonviolent love) are the core of his philosophy.⁴⁶ *Ahimsa* or soul force is an eternal energy of love, the full force pitted against the tyrant.⁴⁷ This form of nonviolence never uses force or coercion but relies on self suffering as a mirror to the opponent's actions and a catalyst for the real conversion of the opponent.⁴⁸ Gandhi employed nonviolent techniques of non-cooperation, civil disobedience, non-violent resistance and when combined

with the spiritual force of *satyagraha*, become highly efficacious. Where violence is destructive *satyagraha* is constructive and calls for strength, high moral fibre, promotion of inner strength, resolve and enrichment of life.⁴⁹ Peace secured through nonviolent resistance removes inner conflict, promotes energies flowing in the same direction and in harmony. Thus the outer condition reflects the inner condition which produces enduring peace.⁵⁰

In selecting his strategies the means were the most important, the goal in direct proportion to the purity of the means.⁵¹ Conversely, the approach to war focuses on the ends by any means as exemplified by Lenin's proclamation 'to achieve our ends we will unite even with the Devil'.⁵² Gandhi regarded himself as a soldier of peace and truth, self suffering the superior weapon, bravery the honour of receiving blows rather than inflicting harm.⁵³ The problem in his view was not war but concern for human dignity in every respect.⁵⁴ For Gandhi truth and *ahimsa* provided the foundation for world unity.⁵⁵ Nonviolence was considered the greatest force available to the world.⁵⁶

Non-violent Action

Gene Sharp developed a classification of nine types of modern nonviolence: nonresistance, active reconciliation, moral resistance, selective nonviolence, passive resistance, peaceful resistance, nonviolent direct action, *satyagraha* and nonviolent revolution.⁵⁷ Similar to gandhian philosophy non-violent action is not pacifism, submission or cowardice, it values positive action and fearlessness. It relies on mobilising large numbers of disciplined people with the recognition that potential power is located in the withdrawal of cooperation.⁵⁸ It applies methods of non-violent protest, non-cooperation and non-violent intervention whereby people refuse to do certain things without violence.⁵⁹ Modern non-violent action differentiates from the Gandhian perspective, by viewing as unnecessary, any need for spiritual cultivation, self suffering or strict adherence to truth and love.⁶⁰ Moreover, the practitioner does not attempt to convert the opponent and may involve acts of omission.⁶¹ Coercion is considered effective in the exercise of power or influence to achieve objectives, thus the focus on the ends justifying the means.⁶² Nonviolent action is considered to have more in common with military struggle than

attempts at arbitration or conciliation. Nonviolent techniques of civilian based defence are considered a substitute for military defence and rely on an extreme strategy of indirect approach.⁶³ Practitioners analyse power and study techniques to mobilise power against the aggressor.⁶⁴ This approach ensures the opponent is not ready or attempts to dislocate the enemy, exploit opportunities of insecurity, nullify opposition, paralyse power of opponent to force an error.⁶⁵ Ultimately mass non-cooperation makes the cost of occupation so high that the invasion is called off.⁶⁶ Gene Sharp argues that if people are trained in nonviolence, war will be discarded as a national policy.⁶⁷ However, the effectiveness of training will depend on whether it is a specific technique aimed at a grievance or overthrow of a dictator or whether it translates into a broader vision of reaching the deeper values and institutions of society in order to create a better world.⁶⁸

Is Peace Possible?

Lao Tsu, Buddha and Gandhi within the frame of different life experiences, shared the lense of spiritual insight warning the mythical blind horseman of the abyss. It is evident today that war does not create lasting peace and does not resolve disputes at their root.⁶⁹ The abyss of the 21st century is likely to represent the Armageddon scenario of destruction through nuclear weapons. The option between violence and nonviolence is an option between the danger of extinction and dignified survival.⁷⁰ Whilst there has been an enforced peace through military superiority, it does not represent lasting peace.⁷¹ International bodies such as UNESCO recognise that peace cannot be founded on the back of injustice and human rights violations, and peace does not exist in the absence of war.⁷² Peace is described as an absolutely positive value - moral, fulfilling, enduring and dynamic. Real peace is based on equality, freedom of all peoples and nations.⁷³ The causes of war are exploitation and the spirit of violence which must be removed through nonviolence.⁷⁴ Gandhi states that truthfulness is more important than peacefulness and that the world can be saved through *satyagraha*, as it is uniquely efficient and an instrument of constructiveness, dynamism and peace.⁷⁵ The abolition of war will occur when the law of love elevates the consciousness of humanity.⁷⁶

The lamp of nonviolence casts its light of truth on the Self, the family, the community, the nation and ultimately manifests in the world community. Gandhi and the mystics remind us that the root of violence is self ignorance.⁷⁷ Violence permeates the life of people at a personal level disguised under the cloak of respectability. We witness and become desensitised through watching violence in sports, angry players and hooliganism at matches.⁷⁸ Moreover, the gender stereotype of boys who must come out on top, reinforces superiority through stronger force.⁷⁹ The international popularisation of violence through the media, exposes people to intensely violent, sexual, sadistic, pro-war images which provide an insidious devaluation of human life.⁸⁰ Some testimonials of returned US soldiers from Vietnam revealed that their desire to join up was shaped by the stereotypical images of the cowboy John Wayne. However, the reality of dying friends and booby traps turned the perception of normal people into despised enemies.⁸¹ Therefore, renunciation of violence and the adoption of non-violence requires a radical shift in the way people live and see themselves within a new climate in the world.⁸²

To create a global democratic civil society would require a commitment to nonviolence and a determination to reconstruct society, culture, consciousness, challenging practices, beliefs and world views.⁸³ A fundamental restructuring of the socio-economic order entails a revolution against consumerism, technology and the general thrust of human motivations. The development of the human personality in social, cultural, political and economic spheres.⁸⁴ Educating the oppressed in constructive self empowering processes. Ushering in non-exploitative, decentralised economic and political institutions with a focus on self-sufficiency, self discipline and self restraint.⁸⁵ Creating peace among individuals, groups, nations and the world.⁸⁶

The question is whether humanity really wants a positive peace and whether it has the will to ban nuclear weapons, enforce disarmament and abolish war.⁸⁷ Methods to-date have failed because real sincerity has been lacking. Notwithstanding, Gandhi believed wholeheartedly in the possibility of peace because of the godliness of human nature.⁸⁸ Peacemakers can be trained to work for a nonviolent peaceful order in thought, word and deed so that they can guide and provide inspiration to the masses.⁸⁹ Gandhi asserts that humanity must adopt a more spiritual

brotherhood.⁹⁰ An essential component of a nonviolent philosophy is to create a sense of oneness or unity, to build community with a sense of loving concern for one other. To develop a new concept of human relations which approaches conflict through intuitive faith or pragmatic test.⁹¹

Intergovernmental organisations such as the United Nations and its predecessor the League of Nations are products of war and clearly do not have the power to preserve global peace.⁹² Gandhi advocated the setting up of a World Government or federation based on nonviolence. This idea was based on the premise that nations must eventually unite and a friendly federation could facilitate unity. The federation would recognise the freedom and equality of all nations, founded on respect for truth and *ahimsa*. Moreover, there must be an acceptance of the law of the family in international affairs. He envisaged the nation state without an army and acknowledged that this takes a higher degree of courage and purity. The Defence Department could be changed from a focus on destruction to constructiveness and renamed the Peace Department to foster positive links between countries.⁹³ Additionally, all nations in this system would renounce exploitation and reliance on force and comply with universal disarmament as a safeguard for peace.⁹⁴ The alternative is to maintain a faith in violence and terror, degrading material progress, the environment and suffer the consequences of bloody revolution or a 3rd world war. International use of *satyagraha* will require a new relevance in the nuclear age and can deliver the world from total extermination.⁹⁵

Conclusion

If the test of time is an indication of the imperishability of truth then the ancient seers have within their teachings and life experiences, the solution to world peace. Core to these philosophies is adherence to truth, returning good for evil, nonviolence, purity in thought word and deed, non-possession, love of Self and others, self sacrifice and simplicity. Mahatma Gandhi perhaps more than anyone has wholeheartedly embraced the spirit of these messages and manifested them into a practical force for creating the change. Moreover, other movements with no shortage of caring and compassion, have not consciously integrated nonviolent strategies and

faith (peace) in order to produce the change they seek. Many have attempted to create change through various manifestations of force, admonitions of guilt or injustice. Force whether violent or not creates opposition and has prevented progress to the peaceful world we all seek. *Satyagraha* as compared to modern nonviolent techniques encapsulates deep transformation of the Self and the opponent or society, the vehicle of self suffering reaches into the heart of humanity and generates fundamental change rather than submission. Clearly the approach is centered on truth and motivated by love. This contrasts with non-violent action approaches which envisage a military style operation seeking to overthrow or force a change to the opponent thus not addressing underlying resentment or anger. As was clearly pointed out ignorance and fear are at the heart of violence and only through removing violence in all its forms through *satyagraha* and creating a centrifugal spiritual renaissance, will we witness the recombination of humanity into oneness and unity. Thus, now we have the tools what will be our choice nuclear annihilation or the golden age? In truth there is no choice.

NOTES

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- ¹ Kegley, *World Politics*, pp346-347
 - ² Friends of Peace Pilgrim, *Peace Pilgrim*, p96
 - ³ Sudha Puri, *Gandhi on War and Peace*, p159
 - ⁴ Holmes, *Nonviolence in Theory and Practice* p8
 - ⁵ *Ibid.*, p10-12
 - ⁶ Prof. Lin, *Jain Cosmology*
 - ⁷ Wilhelm, *Tao Te Ching* pp1-3
 - ⁸ *Ibid.*, p16
 - ⁹ Hua Ching Ni, *The Later Teachings of Lao Tzu*, p33
 - ¹⁰ Case, *Non-Violent Coercion*, p20
 - ¹¹ Wilhelm, *op.cit.*, p3
 - ¹² Case, *op. cit.*, p22-23
 - ¹³ Case, *Ibid.*, p29
 - ¹⁴ Barash, *Approaches to Peace* p206-207
 - ¹⁵ Case, *op. cit.*, p26
 - ¹⁶ Case, *Ibid.*, pp42-44
 - ¹⁷ Case, *Ibid.*, p46
 - ¹⁸ Holmes, *op. cit.*, p28
 - ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p27
 - ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p28
 - ²¹ Sethi, *Gandhian Critiques of Western Peace Movements*, p52
 - ²² *Ibid.*, p58
 - ²³ Barash, *op. cit.*, p213
 - ²⁴ Sudha Puri *op. cit.*, p24
 - ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p84
 - ²⁶ Sethi, *op. cit.*, p56
 - ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p69
 - ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p71-72
 - ²⁹ *Ibid.*, p79-82
 - ³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp99-100
 - ³¹ *Ibid.*, p9
 - ³² Sudha Puri, *op. cit.*, pp179-180
 - ³³ Sethi *op. cit.*, p49
 - ³⁴ Sudha Puri, *op. cit.*, p20
 - ³⁵ *Ibid.*, p59
 - ³⁶ Sethi, *op. cit.*, p7
 - ³⁷ Sudha Puri *op. cit.*, p85
 - ³⁸ *Ibid.*, p102
 - ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p15
 - ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p80
 - ⁴¹ Sethi, *op. cit.*, v
 - ⁴² Holmes, *op. cit.*, pp16-17
 - ⁴³ Sudha Puri, *op. cit.*, p23
 - ⁴⁴ Misra, *Gandhian Model of Development and World Peace*, p10
 - ⁴⁵ Gregg, *The Power of Nonviolence* p53
 - ⁴⁶ Barash, *op. cit.*, p167
 - ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p184
 - ⁴⁸ Sudha Puri, *op. cit.*, p21
 - ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p179

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- ⁵⁰ Kool, *Perspectives on Nonviolence* p206
⁵¹ Sudha Puri, *op. cit.*, p167
⁵² Barash, *op. cit.*, p168
⁵³ Sudha Puri, *op. cit.*, p56
⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p74
⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p208
⁵⁶ Barash, *op. cit.*, p185
⁵⁷ Burrows, *The Strategy of Nonviolent Defence*, p98
⁵⁸ Holmes, *op. cit.*, p143
⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p151
⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p142
⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p149
⁶² Sethi, *op. cit.*, p62
⁶³ Barash, *op. cit.*, p194
⁶⁴ Holmes, *op. cit.*, p143
⁶⁵ Barash, *op. cit.*, p194
⁶⁶ Kool, *op. cit.*, p144
⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p144
⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p145
⁶⁹ Misra, *op. cit.*, p10
⁷⁰ Haring, *the Healing Power of Peace and Nonviolence*, p81
⁷¹ Quakers, *Speak Truth to Power*, p51
⁷² Sethi, *op. cit.*, p8
⁷³ Sudha Puri *op. cit.*, p168
⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p165
⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p179
⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p219
⁷⁷ Misra, *op. cit.*, p33
⁷⁸ Sethi, *op. cit.*, p25
⁷⁹ Gun Control Australia, *Weapons & Violence in Australia*, pp9-10
⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p16
⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp9-10
⁸² Quakers, *op. cit.*, pp51-52
⁸³ Barash, *op. cit.*, p246
⁸⁴ *Gandhi Marg*, p218
⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p220
⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p218
⁸⁷ Misra, *op. cit.*, p34
⁸⁸ Sudha Puri, *op. cit.*, p196
⁸⁹ *Gandhi Marg*, p221
⁹⁰ Sudha Puri, *op. cit.*, p173
⁹¹ Quakers, *op. cit.*, p40
⁹² Sudha Puri, *op. cit.*, p173
⁹³ Friends of Peace Pilgrim, p98
⁹⁴ Sudha Puri *op. cit.*, pp208-211
⁹⁵ Choudhary, *Gandhi Marg*, pp479-480

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