

Reflections for Nonviolent Community



a book of readings
the oak ridge environmental peace alliance
april - may 2023

Saturday, April 1

1983 :: 14 MILE HUMAN CHAIN SURROUNDS GREENHAM COMMON IN NUCLEAR PROTEST

I would like to step out of my heart and go walking beneath the enormous sky...surely of all the stars that perished long ago, one still exists. I think that I know which one it is - which one, at the end of its beam in the sky, stands like a white city.

~ Ranier Maria Rilke

Sunday, April 2

We have turned our face to the pearl lying on the ocean floor. So why then should we worry if this wobbly old boat keeps going or not?

~ Rumi

Monday, April 3

I die with each wave each day. I die with each day in each wave. But the day does not die. Not ever. And the wave? It does not die.

~ Pablo Neruda

Tuesday, April 4

1968 :: MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR ASSASSINATED, MEMPHIS, TN

Out of knowing / and Sacrifice / we come / bearing our wonders / our wounds/ and our giftss

~Alice Walker

Wednesday, April 5

It was a morning in early summer. A silver haze shimmered and trembled over the lime trees. The air was laden with their fragrance. The temperature was like a caress. I remember - I need not recall - that I climbed up a tree stump and felt suddenly immersed in ltness. I did not call it by that name. I had no need for words. It and I were one.

~ Bernard Berenson

Thursday, April 6
Marjory and Jeffrey Donn

The first clue, lesson number one from human history on the subject of nonviolence, is that there is no word for it. The concept has been praised by every major religion. Throughout history there have been practitioners of nonviolence. Yet, while every major language has a word for violence, there is no word to express the idea of nonviolence except that it is not another idea, it is not violence. In Sanskrit, the word for violence is himsa, harm, and the negation of himsa, just as nonviolence is the negation of violence, is ahimsa—not doing harm. But if ahimsa is “not doing harm,” what is it doing? The only possible explanation for the absence of a proactive word to express nonviolence is that not only the political establishments but the cultural and intellectual establishments of all societies have viewed nonviolence as a marginal point of view, a fanciful rejection of one of society’s key components, a repudiation of something important but not a serious force in itself. It is not an authentic concept but simply the abnegation of something else. It has been marginalized because it is one of the rare truly revolutionary ideas, an idea that seeks to completely change the nature of society, a threat to the established order. And it has always been treated as something profoundly dangerous.

~ Mark Kurlansky

Friday, April 7

Nature abhors a vacuum, and if I can only walk with sufficient carelessness I am sure to be filled.

~ David Thoreau

Saturday, April 8

570 : BIRTH OF THE BUDDHA CELEBRATED

Smiling is very important. If we are not able to smile, then the world will not have peace. It is not by going out for a demonstration against nuclear missiles that we can bring about peace. It is with our capacity of smiling, breathing, and being peace that we can make peace.

~ Thich Nhat Hanh

Sunday, April 9

1898 :: PAUL ROBESON BORN

You do not have to sit outside in the dark. If, however, you want to look at the stars, you will find that darkness is necessary. But the stars neither require nor demand it.

~ Annie Dillard

Monday, April 10

1930 :: DOLORES HUERTA BORN

1988 :: NORTHERN IRELAND PEACE AGREEMENT SIGNED

I believe a blade of grass is no less than the journeywork of the stars.

~ Walt Whitman

Tuesday, April 11

MAWLID AL-NABI, MUHAMMAD'S BIRTHDAY

1996 :: AFRICAN NATIONS BAN NUCLEAR WEAPONS

1963 :: *PACEM IN TERRIS*, JOHN XXIII ENCYCLICAL OPPOSES NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Morning mists / On the road / an Elephant / He knows / his rights

~ Alice Walker

Wednesday, April 12

There are only two ways to live your life: as though nothing is a miracle, or as though everything is a miracle.

~Albert Einstein

Thursday, April 13 Chuck Booker-Hirsch

1919 :: EUGENE DEBS IMPRISONED FOR WAR OPPOSITION

Advocates of nonviolence—dangerous people—have been there throughout history, questioning the greatness of Caesar and Napoleon and the Founding Fathers and Roosevelt and Churchill. For every Crusade and Revolution and Civil War there have always been those who argued, with great clarity, that violence not only was immoral but that it was even a less effective means of achieving laudable goals. The case can be made that it was not the American Revolution that secured independence from Britain; it was not the Civil War that freed the slaves; and World War II did not save the Jews. But this possibility has rarely been considered, because the Caesars and Napoleons of history have always used their power to muffle the voices of those who would challenge the necessity of war—and it is these Caesars, as Napoleon observed, who get to write history. And so the ones who have killed become the ones who are revered. But there is another history that manages to survive.

~ Mark Kurlansky

Friday, April 14

1986 :: US BOMBS LIBYA

Gandhi once declared that it was his wife who unwittingly taught him the effectiveness of nonviolence. Who better than women should know that battles can be won without resort to physical strength? Who better than we should know all the power that resides in noncooperation?

~ Barbara Deming

Saturday, April 15

1889 :: A PHILIP RANDOLPH BORN

Without a direct action expression of it, nonviolence, to my mind, is meaningless.

~ Mahatma Gandhi

Sunday, April 16

The first thing to be disturbed by our commitment to nonviolence will not be the system but our own lives.

~ James Douglass

Monday, April 17

1960 :: STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOUNDED, GREENSBORO, NC

1961 :: US INVADES CUBA (BAY OF PIGS)

If you are going to hold someone down you're going to have to hold onto the other end of the chain. You are confined by your own repression.

~ Toni Morrison

Tuesday, April 18

In some cases nonviolence requires more militancy than violence.

~ Cesar Chavez

Wednesday, April 19

1948 :: COSTA RICA ABOLISHES ARMY

Education is a vaccine for violence.

~ Edward James Olmos

Thursday, April 20
Arthur Milholland

Nonviolence is not the same thing as pacifism, for which there are many words. Pacifism is treated almost as a psychological condition. It is a state of mind. Pacifism is passive; but nonviolence is active. Pacifism is harmless and therefore easier to accept than nonviolence, which is dangerous. When Jesus Christ said that a victim should turn the other cheek, he was preaching pacifism. But when he said that an enemy should be won over through the power of love, he was preaching nonviolence. Nonviolence, exactly like violence, is a means of persuasion, a technique for political activism, a recipe for prevailing. It requires a great deal more imagination to devise nonviolent means—boycotts, sit-ins, strikes, street theater, demonstrations—than to use force. And there is not always agreement on what constitutes violence. Some advocates of nonviolence believe that boycotts and embargoes that cause hunger and deprivation are a form of violence. Some believe that using less lethal means of force, rock throwing or rubber bullets, is a form of nonviolence. But the central belief is that forms of persuasion that do not use physical force, do not cause suffering, are more effective; and while there is often a moral argument for nonviolence, the core of the belief is political: that nonviolence is more effective than violence, that violence does not work.

~ Mark Kurlansky

Friday, April 21

The heron, unseen for weeks, came flying widewinged toward me, settled just offshore on his post, took up his vigil. If you ask why this cleared a fog from my spirit, I have no answer.

~ Denise Levertov

Saturday, April 22

EARTH DAY

You do not have to sit outside in the dark. If, however, you want to look at the stars, you will find that darkness is necessary. But the stars neither require nor demand it.

~ Annie Dillard

Sunday, April 23

I put it around my neck...it became a string of lovely pearls, each with a moon inside. My room then was full of moonlight as if the full moon had found its way in through the open window.

~ Mirabai

Monday, April 24

1965 :: US INVADES DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

To build a house / One needs mud/ and sisal / and friendly /
Neighbors

~ Alice Walker

Tuesday, April 25

It is the acid test of nonviolence that in a nonviolent conflict there is no rancor left behind, and in the end the enemies are converted into friends.

~ Mahatma Gandhi

Wednesday, April 26

Nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political and moral questions of our time; the need for mankind to overcome oppression and violence without resorting to oppression and violence.

~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

Thursday, April 27
Kim Williams

All religions discuss the power of nonviolence and the evil of violence. Hinduism, which claims to be the oldest religion, though its founding date is unknown, as is its founder, does not take a clear stand on nonviolence. This ambiguity is not surprising for an ancient religion that has no central belief or official priests and has a plethora of scriptures, gods, mythologies, and cults. Hindus often repeat the aphorism "Ahimsa paramo dharmah," nonviolence is the highest law, but this is not an unshakable principle of the religion. Violence is permissible in the Hindu religion, and Indra is a warlike Hindu god. But there are also many writings of Hindu wise men against violence, especially in a book known as the Mahabharata. Hindu sages tended to see nonviolence as an unattainable ideal. Perfect nonviolence would mean not harming any living thing. The sages encouraged vegetarianism to avoid harming animals. The Jainists, followers of a religion admired by Gandhi, keep their mouths masked to insure that they do not accidentally inhale a tiny insect. But Hinduism recognizes that even the strictest vegetarians harm plants, killing them in order to live. A saint, it is said, would live on air, but Hinduism recognizes that this is impossible. Complete ahimsa is not attainable. Gandhi wrote, "Nonviolence is a perfect stage. It is a goal towards which all mankind moves naturally, though unconsciously." He believed human beings were working toward perfection. Violence was a barbaric retrogressive trait that had not yet been shed. The human being who achieved complete nonviolence, according to Gandhi, would not be a saint. "He only becomes truly a man," he said.

~ Mark Kurlansky

Friday, April 28

1967 :: MUHAMMAD ALI REFUSES INDUCTION INTO US ARMY

1977 :: FIRST DEMONSTRATION OF MOTHERS OF THE DISAPPEARED, BUENOS AIRES

The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you. Don't go back to sleep. You must ask for what you really want. Don't go back to sleep. People are going back and forth across the doorsill where the two worlds touch. The door is round and open. Don't go back to sleep.

~ Rumi

Saturday, April 29

1915 :: WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR PEACE AND FREEDOM FOUNDED

There is no need for / Sadness / After the dying boy/ There is the living girl / Who throws you a / kiss

~ Alice Walker

Sunday, April 30

The point of nonviolence is to build a floor, a strong new floor, beneath which we can no longer sink. A platform which stands a few feet above napalm, torture, exploitation, poison gas, A and H bombs, the works. Give man a decent place to stand.

~ John Baez

Monday, May 1

1830 :: MOTHER JONES BIRTH CELEBRATED

Believe me, nothing moves me so deeply as the incredible, unprecedented miraculousness of my existence, which from the beginning followed such an impossible plot and yet has progressed from deliverance to deliverance.

~ Rainer Maria Rilke

Tuesday, May 2

No, what raised eyebrows was the fact that the astronomers only figured in the color of the universe as it would seem to human eyes - an awfully anthropocentric way to look at things: me, me, me. The universe would look quite different to a snake or a cat or a bee or a bat.

~ K.C. Cole

Wednesday, May 3

1919 :: PETE SEEGER BORN

The Navaho have that wonderful image of what they call the pollen path. Pollen is the life source. The pollen path is the path to the center. The Navaho say, "Oh, beauty before me, beauty behind me, beauty to the right of me, beauty to the left of me, beauty above me, beauty below me, I'm on the pollen path."

~ Joseph Campbell



On January 22, as part of the Ban Treaty anniversary, OREPA hung flags of the countries that have ratified the treaty on the gate outside the Y-12 Weapons Complex in Oak Ridge.

Thursday, May 4 **Mary Ann Harwell**

1970 :: NATIONAL GUARDSMEN KILL FOUR STUDENTS AT KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

Nonviolent campaigns have a participation advantage over violent insurgencies, which is an important factor in determining campaign outcomes. The moral, physical, informational, and commitment barriers to participation are much lower for nonviolent resistance than for violent insurgency. Higher levels of participation contribute to a number of mechanisms necessary for success, including enhanced resilience, higher probabilities of tactical innovation, expanded civic disruption (thereby raising the costs to the regime of maintaining the status quo), and loyalty shifts involving the opponent's erstwhile supporters, including members of the security forces. Mobilization among local supporters is a more reliable source of power than the support of external allies, which many violent campaigns must obtain to compensate for their lack of participants.

~ Erica Chenoweth

Friday, May 5

1991 :: LAST CRUISE MISSILES REMOVED FROM GREENHAM COMMON BASE IN UK

Looking up I see / a strong arm / raised / the Law /
Someone in America / is being / protected / (from me.)

~ Alice Walker

Saturday, May 6

If we wish to understand the nature of the Universe we
have an inner hidden advantage: we are ourselves little portions of
the universe and so carry the answer within us.

~ Jacques Boivin

Sunday, May 7

The greatest challenge of the day is: How to bring about
a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each
one of us.

~ Dorothy Day

Monday, May 8

It is one thing to be able to state the price the antagonist
paid, another to be able to count you own real gains.

~ Barbara Deming

Tuesday, May 9

Throughout my whole life during every minute of it, the
world has been gradually lighting up and blazing before my eyes
until it has come to surround me, entirely lit up from within.

~ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Wednesday, May 10

1994 :: SOUTH AFRICA INAUGURATES PRESIDENT NELSON MANDELA

The nonviolence I teach is active nonviolence of the
strongest. But the weakest can partake in it without becoming
weaker.

~ Mahatma Gandhi

Thursday, May 11
William White

1998 :: INDIA CONDUCTS 3 UNDERGROUND THERMONUCLEAR TESTS

It is nevertheless possible to characterize a campaign as principally nonviolent based on the primacy of nonviolent resistance methods and the nature of the participation in that form of resistance. Sharp defines nonviolent resistance as “a technique of socio-political action for applying power in a conflict without the use of violence.” The term resistance implies that the campaigns of interest are noninstitutional and generally confrontational in nature. In other words, these groups are using tactics that are outside the conventional political process (voting, interest-group organizing, or lobbying). Although institutional methods of political action often accompany nonviolent struggles...nonviolent action occurs outside the bounds of institutional political channels.

~ Erica Chenoweth

Friday, May 12

The key words of violent economics are urbanization, industrialization, centralization, efficiency, quantity, speed. . . . The problem of evolving a nonviolent way of economic life [in the West] and that of developing the underdeveloped countries may well turn out to be largely identical.

~ E.F. Schumacher

Saturday, May 13

Everything speaks: the flowing airstream and the sailing halcyon, the blade of grass, the flower, the bud, the element; did you imagine the universe to be otherwise?

~ Victor Hugo

Sunday, May 14

1970 :: TWO STUDENTS KILLED IN ANTI-WAR PROTESTS AT JACKSON STATE

But I say—/ if the / South / rises / again / It will not / do / so /
in my presence.

~ Alice Walker

Monday, May 15

1958 :: JAPANESE STUDENTS PROTEST PACIFIC TESTING OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

That's all nonviolence is – organized love.

~ John Baez

Tuesday, May 16

We inhale many hundreds of particles in each breath we take. Salt crystals from ocean whitecaps, dust scraped off distant mountains, micro bits of cooled magma blown from volcanoes and charred microfragments from tropical forest fires.

~ David Bodanis

Wednesday, May 17

1954 :: BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION RULING OUTLAWS SCHOOL SEGREGATION

1968 :: CATONSVILLE 9 BURN DRAFT RECORDS IN VIETNAM WAR PROTEST

You can no more win a war than you can win an earthquake.

~ Jeannette Rankin

Thursday, May 18
William Wing

1974 :: INDIA EXPLODES FIRST NUCLEAR WEAPON IN RAJASTHAN DESERT

In speaking of love at this point, we are not referring to some sentimental emotion. It would be nonsense to urge men to love their oppressors in an affectionate sense. "Love" in this connection means understanding good will. There are three words for love in the Greek New Testament.⁵ First, there is eros. In Platonic philosophy eros meant the yearning of the soul for the realm of the divine. It has come now to mean a sort of aesthetic or romantic love. Second, there is philia. It meant intimate affectionateness between friends. Philia denotes a sort of reciprocal love: the person loves because he is loved. When we speak of loving those who oppose us we refer to neither eros nor philia; we speak of a love which is expressed in the Greek word agape. Agape means nothing sentimental or basically affectionate; it means understanding, redeeming good will for all men, an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return. It is the love of God working in the lives of men. When we love on the agape level we love men not because we like them, not because their attitudes and ways appeal to us, but because God loves them. Here we rise to the position of loving the person who does the evil deed while hating the deed he does.

~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

Friday, May 19

1925 :: MALCOLM X BORN

The power of nonviolence is not circumstance-specific. It is as applicable to the problems that confront us now, as to problems that confronted generations in the past. It is not a medicine or a solution so much as a healing process. It is the active spiritual immune system of humanity.

~ Marianne Williamson

Saturday, May 20

The major advances in nonviolence have not come from people who have approached nonviolence as an end in itself, but from persons who were passionately striving to free themselves from social injustice.

~ Dave Dellinger

Sunday, May 21

My fear of burial / is all tied up with/ how used I am/ to the spring!

~ Alice Walker

Monday, May 22

1838 :: TRAIL OF TEARS FORCED MARCH OF CHEROKEES BEGINS; 4,000 WILL DIE

Action is the antidote to despair.

~ John Baez

Tuesday, May 23

They have as it were two hands upon him – the one calming him, making him ask questions, as the other makes him move.

~ Barbara Deming

Wednesday, May 24

Nonviolence is a powerful and just weapon . . . which cuts without wounding and ennobles the man who wields it. It is a sword that heals.

~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

Thursday, May 25
Ken Basarvraham

Hence the basic question which confronts the world's oppressed is: How is the struggle against the forces of injustice to be waged? There are two possible answers. One is resort to the all too prevalent method of physical violence and corroding hatred. The danger of this method is its futility. Violence solves no social problems; it merely creates new and more complicated ones. Through the vistas of time a voice still cries to every potential Peter, "Put up your sword!"⁴ The shores of history are white with the bleached bones of nations and communities that failed to follow this command. If the American Negro and other victims of oppression succumb to the temptation of using violence in the struggle for justice, unborn generations will live in a desolate night of bitterness, and their chief legacy will be an endless reign of chaos.

~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

Friday, May 26

Nonviolence is the constant awareness of the dignity and the humanity of oneself and others; it seeks truth and justice; it renounces violence both in method and in attitude; it is a courageous acceptance of active love and goodwill as the instrument with which to overcome evil and transform both oneself and to others. It is the willingness to undergo suffering rather than inflict it. It excludes retaliation and flight.

~ Wally Nelson



The MLK Community Conversation kicked off with a puppet skit orchestrated by Kevin Collins.

Saturday, May 27

What is the ultimate truth about ourselves? Various answers suggest themselves. We are a bit of stellar matter gone wrong. We are physical machinery - puppets that strut and talk and laugh and die as the hand of time pulls the strings beneath. But there is one elementary inescapable answer. We are that which asks the question.

~ Sir Arthur Eddington

Sunday, May 28

1961 :: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL FOUNDED

1998 :: PAKISTAN TESTS THERMONUCLEAR WEAPONS

Speaking of death / and decay/ It hardly matters / Which /
Since both are on the / way, maybe-/ to being daffodils.

~ Alice Walker

Monday, May 29

I think the only choice that will enable us to hold to our vision. . . is one that abandons the concept of naming enemies and adopts a concept familiar to the nonviolent tradition: naming behavior that is oppressive.

~ Barbara Deming

Tuesday, May 30

The criminal 'justice' system functions to alienate and isolate the accused individual, to destroy one's power and purposefulness and to weave a web of confusion and mystification around any legal proceedings.

~ The Blockade the Bombmakers Handbook

Wednesday, May 31

Every relationship of domination, of exploitation, of oppression is by definition violent, whether or not the violence is expressed by drastic means. In such a relationship, dominator and dominated alike are reduced to things- the former dehumanized by an excess of power, the latter by a lack of it. And things cannot love.

~ Paulo Freire