

Point 5: Nonviolence is a bridge

Michael: This is excellent. This shows us that we do not have to sacrifice our personal wellbeing in order to be effective socially, and vice versa. But if you've been doing the things that we've been mentioning in terms of developing your own person power and you now want to make a contribution to the world, and if you run out and trying to make that contribution in an aggressive, abusive confrontational way, you will dissipate everything that you've benefitted so far, by having a spiritual practice, getting good imagery into your head, and so forth.

But if you are developing spirituality, you cannot sit idle and cheat the world of the contribution that you can make. You must act. This is what the Bhagavad Gita is all about. So, how can you act without dissipating, without going backwards, without wasting the benefit, the peace, the deeper awareness of life that you've gained. You can only do that, and you must do that through nonviolence.

Nonviolence is much bigger than just going out and eschewing a physical violent act with somebody. It covers your attitude. It covers your planning. It covers the whole field of social action. So, what you want to do now is ask yourself quite honestly, "What are my strengths? What are my weaknesses? Where can I act in such a way that my strengths will be of benefit to the social system and will be a benefit to me spiritually? How can I work on some of those weaknesses while making myself available for social action?"

We have one friend, for example, who is terribly shy about crowds. So, what he did was put on a huge conference where he had to talk to hundreds of people. And that made him, as he said, very poignantly at one time in that process, "My dream is much stronger than my problem."

So, ask yourself – you're probably working on something already, ask yourself, "How does my project fit in to the whole shift?" As you're probably aware by now, we have created an image, a scheme, called, "Roadmap," here at the Metta Center which is designed to help people see where their project fits into the whole.

Ask yourself, is this potentially, at least, what we like to call a keystone project. That is if my project is successful, if I accomplish everything that I want to with this project, will it really make a dent in the war system? In the corporate rule system? Because there are some projects where you might – you get into a silo and you might only be cleaning up

one little problem and it will not have an impact on the really destructive systems that have gone so desperately out of control.

Now, any project can have such an impact if we also take the trouble to do what's called in the peace movement, "Interpretation." Let's say I'm just reforming one little piece of society, but if I also take the time to show that you see I've done this thing and it worked. It helped me. It makes hundreds of people feel better. This shows us that there must be a different model for human interaction.

So, any good project can be made to have an impact on the whole, but some will have much greater impact and we should think about where we can use our energies with the greatest leverage. Just looking at the Roadmap we have found that people immediately feel that they're less isolated from one another, that they're getting out of that silo, so that helps very much.

And we can share with you, I think, two other rules of thumb, two other guidelines that you might want to look at. One is it is always better to prioritize working on a constructive alternative over direct confrontation whenever that's possible. There are some things that simply cannot be allowed to go on. They've got to be addressed. But wherever possible, it's more powerful, it's more revolutionary in the long run to build the world that you want rather than ask other people to stop giving you the world that you don't want.

In fact, I think it was Buckminster Fuller who said, "You can never make a bad system go away by attacking it. The only way to really make it go away is to create a better system which renders it irrelevant." So, look around for a constructive way that will have revolutionary potential because if you carry through with it, there will come a point when opposition will definitely arouse itself. But at that point, you see, you will be in a position of advantage because you won't be only reacting to something negative, you will be proactive about something positive.

The other rule of thumb or principle that you might want to think about is Gandhi's wonderful concept of swadeshi which means – especially when you're going to serve the world, don't overlook your surrounding community. Don't overlook the people that are closest to you. You can usually be more effective with people who know you better. That's why Gandhi refused to leave India and carry his message to the United States personally. But he did say, "If I do my work well here, someone in the United States might will pick it up." And of course, Martin Luther King did exactly that.

So, if you find something that works for you because you know the community that you are in and they know you and they trust you because you know a certain field very well, and you get to work within that center within that circle, if you do your work well in that

circle you will inevitably find that its influence expands. I mean look at Gandhiji himself. He came back to India at the conclusion of his work in South Africa. And he started working on small local issues in Gujarat, his home state. And because of his successes there that radiated out to the rest of the country. And through his work in India, it radiated out to the rest of the world.

So, when you are undertaking this very creative process and looking at what is your best contribution to the world, bear those guidelines in mind and they might help you. Swadeshi, where is my personal circle, and how can I find a constructive program that will be my entre into joining with many other people and organizations to change the world to a place of peace and justice.