

5. Constructive program trains people to live a nonviolent life. Just as training for violent revolt means the use of military weapons; training for Satyagraha means constructive program.

Michael: Nonviolence is not just something that you can put on and off as the occasion requires. Almost everyone who recognizes that there's a difference between, you know, just carrying it on to accomplish one particular thing and having it be really a part of a paradigm shift is this idea that it has to pervade your life. It has to be something that you do everyday. And you certainly can't fight your whole life. But you can build your whole life.

So, learning to carry on those constructive activities day-by-day in between outbreaks of struggle is a key contribution that constructive program is making. Not just to the revolution, but to you as a human being.

I'd like to fall back here on an Indian theory that there are three energy states called, "Tamas, rajas, and satva." Tamas being, roughly speaking, lethargy, darkness, inactivity. Rajas being aggressive action. And satva being that pure balance of creative energy.

And in many ways this informs Gandhi's whole concept of how nonviolence works, what the dynamic is. He said that he can make a satyagrahi, a nonviolent warrior if you will, out of a violent person. But he cannot do that out of a coward. Because cowardice is associated with paralysis and fear.

So, if you're tamasic, if you're in a state of lethargy, you're going to be useless for a freedom struggle or rebuilding your society in any other way. So, you have to be roused from that lethargy. But the question is how? Are you going to be roused directly into a violent outburst? Or are you going to be roused into constructive energy?

And Gandhi said that he had learned to conserve his anger and it was the most powerful force in the world. Martin Luther King, he was asked, "Didn't you rouse a lot of outburst of anger?" He said, "We did not rouse outbursts of anger. We expressed anger under discipline for maximum effect."

I guess I would have to say that this is pretty much the key to nonviolent struggle. That's where the energy comes from and that's the pathway along which that energy has to travel. And what better training can there possibly be than rousing people out of their lethargy by giving them constructive work to do.

It also hangs together with our concept of who we are. Gandhi once went so far as to say that if you don't till the land you will never know who you are. In other words, if you're not involved in what he called, "Bread labor," which was an important aspect of

constructive program. It means creating the real basics of life, food, clothing, and shelter – then you really don't know who you are.

And it's impossible to get to that image where everyone has a contribution to make. Because if you create an industrial society which manufactures what people need and treats them as passive consumers, they will never find out who they are. It's that deep a damage to the human spirit.

So, in a well-run constructive program you are allowing people to rediscover themselves through constructive work. E.F. Schumacher, the author of "Small is Beautiful," which was quite a revolutionary book when it came out, went on to write another book on good work. And he said that there are three functions of work.

Of course, it's supposed to bring in some kind of income so you can live. But you're supposed to be providing needed goods and services and rubbing off the angles and corners of your own egotism through constructive interaction with others. So, in a good constructive program, you might be involved just, you know, tilling your own garden. But where are the seeds going to come from and what are you going to do with the produce? Where are you going to learn how to do gardening? It involves you in creative constructive work with others. And learning how to work with others is a very good way overcoming your individual egotism.

Finally, I'm not sure how much we can make out of this, but Gandhi actually said that the calm, steady rhythm of the spinning wheel which you're plying in a sacrificial spirit is almost the equivalent of meditation. Well, I don't think a spinning wheel is quite the equivalent of meditation, but I know for a lot of people who might be very restless and get involved in destructive activities.

And let's look at this example of what happened in the First Intifada in Palestine. You had Palestinian youth in the West Bank who were involved in drug abuse. The minute the intifada started, and they had something to do, some way of expressing their resistance to Israeli occupation, they stopped taking drugs practically overnight. So, that shows you how powerful a mechanism this can be for awakening and empowering the individual.

And in the end, at the end of the day, when all is said and done, if a movement does not awaken and empower individuals, it is not going to have a long-lasting revolutionary effect.