

NONVIOLENCE AND ACTIVE NONVIOLENCE

For many people the term 'nonviolence' means just 'not violent'. It's often interpreted as gentle, passive, harmless, non-confrontational. Others see nonviolence as 'people power', social and political movements which use demonstrations, non-cooperation or direct action to change a situation. For some nonviolence is a useful tactic, for others it is a principled choice.

Nonviolence - a positive calling

Nonviolence sounds negative, but the desire not to harm arises from a positive life-affirming force in our hearts. This spiritual vocation to justice and compassion leads to a commitment to challenge violence - that which damages and oppresses - at all levels: physical, psychological and structured into our society.

Becoming nonviolent people

From this basic commitment comes a need for us to develop the capacity to be nonviolent in our daily lives and relationships as well as in social and political action. Nonviolence involves respect and care for everyone as people - even opponents. It's about hating the deed, not the person; kicking the ball not the player. This, together with a willingness to bear any suffering that might arise, requires personal discipline, for example daily reflection and practice. Nonviolence is not something you can zip on after a training session or two. We need to develop and practice everyday skills of listening, affirmation, communication and assertion.

Active nonviolence

Active nonviolence is one approach to achieving justice and peace. It involves resistance to existing injustice together with action to build a constructive alternative, for example through sustainable and participatory development, and creative conflict resolution methods. Where there is imbalance of power between sides in a conflict, it's often necessary for the powerless side to take action to even up the power balance so that change can take place. The need may be as basic as demanding recognition from the powerful that they are fellow human beings, or to get them to acknowledge there is a problem. Or the situation may be one of such structural injustice that reform is not the answer, but has to be totally transformed. The aim is both dialogue and resistance - dialogue with the power-holders to persuade them, and resistance to the structures to compel change.

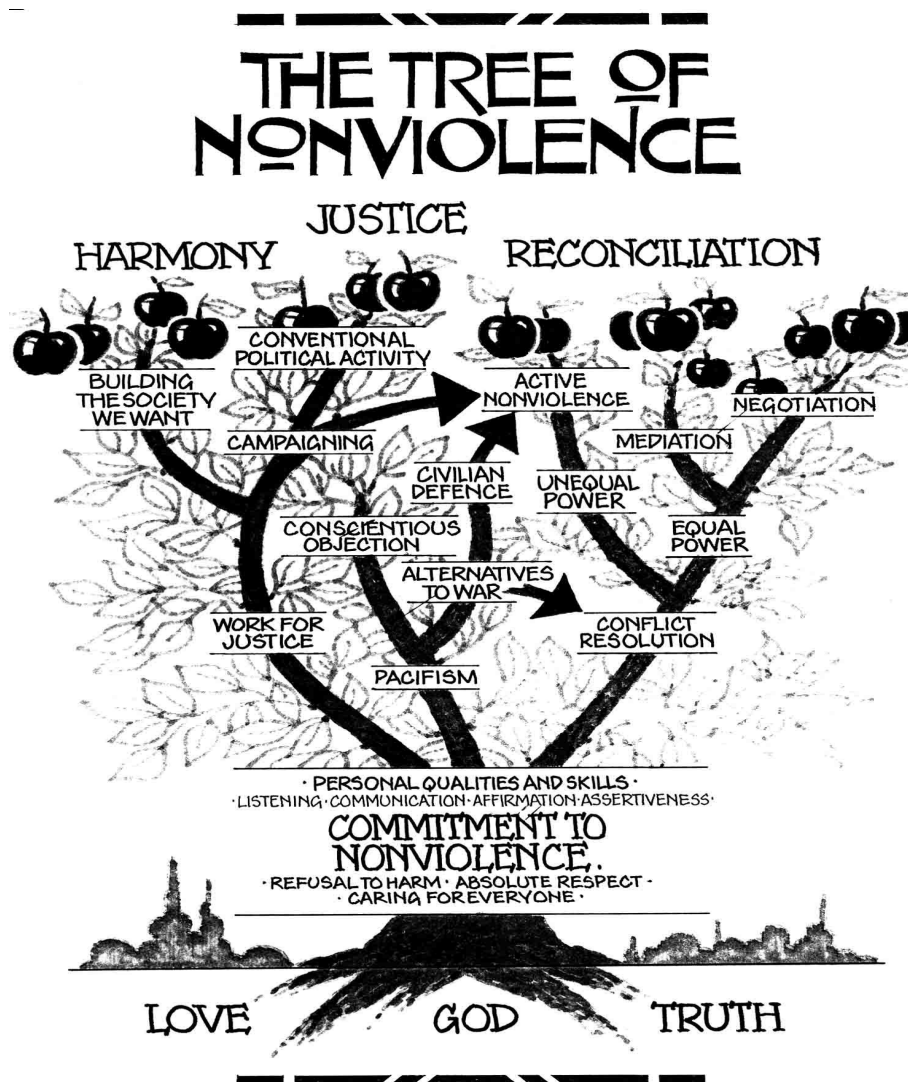
Methods of active nonviolence

Dramatising actions, usually symbolic, can be used to reveal the truth of an issue and to draw attention to it. For example, homelessness campaigners in Washington carried to city hall a coffin with the body of a pauper who froze to death, literally laying it at the door of those responsible. The 'creative disorder' of demonstrations, blockades, marches or invasions attract attention to an issue and can lead to change. Non-cooperation - strikes, boycotts, stay-aways, refusal to follow orders - can persuade reluctant opponents into dialogue. Intervention - blockades, sit-ins, direct action can create a crisis and compel necessary change when opponents are not persuaded. Creating alternative institutions builds the new in readiness for the change. Remember, part of a nonviolent approach is not to use a method which you would not want used against yourself!

Characteristics of a nonviolent campaign

The principles of nonviolence used as a basis for the Turning the Tide programme are:

- **respect and care** for everyone involved in a conflict, including the opponent
- **willingness to take action** for justice without giving into or mimicking violence
- **readiness to take inevitable suffering on yourself** rather than inflict it on others
- **refusal to harm**, damage or degrade people / living things / the earth
- **belief that everyone is capable of change** and no-one has a monopoly of the truth
- **the means used must be consistent with the goal** of peace and justice, since the means are the ends in the making
- **preparation and training**, so that our behaviour is nonviolent.



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