

The Power of Nonviolence: A Dialogue between Michael Nagler and Kerstin Deibert

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Kerstin Deibert

Okay, well, a warm welcome to all of you coming together today to explore this very timely and important topic. The power of nonviolence together with Michael Nagler, and maybe also how we might hold this human life with more peace. I'm Kirsten, and I will be hosting this conversation today for the Sati Center. And I'd like to thank the center, and in particular, Rob Hammond, who's done a lot of support in the background. And of course, also Gil Fronsdal, who is making so much possible through the Sati Center.

And then I'd like to welcome you, Michael. I'm so delighted that you are here and that you will be offering to us an opportunity, really, to learn from you. To learn together with you about peace and nonviolence.

Michael Nagler

Well, Kerstin, I'm grateful for the opportunity and very much looking forward to our interaction and with everyone who's joining us here.

Kerstin Deibert

That's right. And so I want to also say a few words about you, even though many people might have heard about you and know about your life. Before I do so, I just want to say that this conversation here is part of the Sati Center's exploration, really, of bringing together the fields of conflict transformation, peace building, and dharma. And starting in June there will be a new program. It will be an 18-month program, and it's called *The Buddhist Peace and Conflict Chaplaincy*. Gil will be teaching, and I will be coaching, co-teaching it together with him.

And so for those of you that are interested in this program, all information is on the center's website. We just wanted to contextualize our conversation in this way. Now, Michael, I want to formally introduce you and speak about your extraordinary life, knowing that it's pretty much impossible to adequately summarize everything that you have created in your life, really. And I have known you long before we met in person. That's more than 10 years ago.

And at the time, I was part of the peace movement in Germany, working for a small NGO called Workshop for Nonviolent Action. And my colleagues and I thought it would be a good idea to create a kind of directory for resources of nonviolence. And this is how I learned about you and the Metta Center for Nonviolence that you co-founded in 1981, which is amazing to me. And when I immersed myself in

the resources of the Metta Center, our directory was basically no longer needed because it was already there, everything. So the job was done.

And I remember sitting in my little office and listening to lectures from you and learning so much. So there's a lot you did through this center. And I just want to put the website in the chat for everyone to see.

Michael Nagler

Yeah.

Kerstin Deibert

And then we'll speak more about the resources available as well. But there's so much more that you did. You co-founded one of the first peace and conflict studies programs in the United States. You authored numerous books. One of them is *The Search for a Nonviolent Future*, which I can really highly recommend. I'm in the middle of reading it.

And through this book, Michael, you've done a great service to me, something that I've not thought was still possible. When I was reading this book, I actually felt that a more peaceful future is within the realm of possibilities, despite everything that's happening in this world. And so I'm very grateful for this book. You're the co-host of the Nonviolent Radio. People can sign up for trainings on your websites. There's a myriad of resources on this website.

You've directed and produced *The Third Harmony*, which is an award-winning documentary on non-violence. So much more. Basically, basically, you have dedicated your life to the exploration and the values of peace and non-violence. That is true, isn't it? And that is quite remarkable. So much more to say, but I want to ask you, is there anything that you would like to share with us?

Anything that you would like to add about yourself, in your life, that you'd like us to know?

Michael Nagler

Well, let's see. For two rather different things. One is I've had a meditation practice for a long time. And I find that while I was always kind of inclined towards peace, the meditation enabled me to understand it much more deeply and to be much more effective in promoting it. So that's a very big part of my life.

I also have, I'm lucky that though I was born in New York and I live in California, I have family out here now. So that's a great source of joy to have great grandchildren. So I know that's just kind of a personal thing. I know it doesn't have much to do with nonviolence, but it's a big part of my life right now.

Kerstin Deibert

It's a big part of your life, yeah.

Michael Nagler

And about 10 years ago, I met up with a graduate student in conflict resolution from Oregon, Stephanie

Van Hook, and she's now our executive director. She's not here just at the moment, but our office is in Petaluma, California. And so if people are in this area, in Northern California, they should get in touch with us. We used to have what we called hope tanks. A hope tank is like a think tank, but it's more hopeful.

But during the pandemic, we had to stop that. But I'm kind of hoping that we can institute them again at some point. But anyway, you know, here's where I work. This is the office. And we're just doing everything we can to get knowledge about non-violence into the general public.

And I'm sorry to keep—no please, yeah, yeah. I want to say that, you know, I've been in this business for a long time, and I have never, never seen so much interest in and activities around nonviolence. Gandhi said, like almost a hundred years ago, "Nonviolence has come. It will live." And I think we're really seeing it starting to come to life now.

Of course, we need it desperately. And maybe that's why it's so prominent now. But I've never seen—I mean, in our news report, for example, one of the things I try to do is tell people about new peace organizations, nonviolence organizations. And it used to be we would go for a couple, three weeks before something would appear on the horizon. And now I can't keep up.

Kerstin Deibert

Wow, because there's so much interest.

Michael Nagler

Yeah. It's really starting, Kirsten, to almost become part of the social fabric where it's not just something done by fringe outsiders. You know, we've had two very, very big protests, No Kings and Minnesota, and they're just very big in numbers. But what's more important to me, even than the numbers, is the people who are saying this is just the beginning. Protest is just the first step.

We really need to think now about how we are going to put our civilization on a new foundation. They may not be using exactly those terms, but in the past I used to have to say over and over again, I'm glad you marched, I'm glad you waved your sign, but it didn't change anything. Now what do we do? But I'm not the only one saying that anymore. I think there's the big opening now for expanding knowledge and action around nonviolence.

Kerstin Deibert

Knowledge and action. And this is one of the things I really appreciate about your work. There's always a focus on what can be done. And not only really on the front lines of activism, because that's not for everyone. But really for everyone, depending on their life circumstances and their particular inclinations.

In your book, you have a whole chapter that's called Action Guide. So maybe we can speak a little bit about that if you wish to, Michael. What can be done? Because you're speaking about this opening. Times are really challenging and scary and worry many people. And you speak about this growing

awareness and a kind of, I would call, maybe understanding that really the whole system needs to be transformed.

Michael Nagler

Yeah. Let me maybe talk about two models that we have on our website. But one of them is we call it the roadmap. And it's been around for quite a while now. And we have a big poster in the next room with a picture of it. And one day at the end of a retreat, I was taking a poster down off the wall. I put it on the floor. And we all looked at it and we said, oh, my gosh, it's a board game.

So we now have a board game too called *Cosmic Peace Force*. And that's a way for people to get together and learn together and inspire one another about the capacity that's latent in every one of us. Now, in Roadmap, it's three concentric circles. The inner circle is personal development, where we talk about, please try to eliminate the propaganda of the mass media that we are getting all the time. It really makes us very negative and alienated.

So, you know, I'm happy to say that in my entire adult life, which, as we know, has gone on for a while now, I have never owned a television set. So just eliminating that part. Then with the time that you save, learning about nonviolence, just the standard ways. Watching films, talking to people, taking courses. There are courses now available much more than there used to be.

Kerstin Deibert

And what we're doing right now.

Michael Nagler

What we're doing right now is a great example of it, yeah. So there's that inner circle of if you have a spiritual practice, that's wonderful. It can be very, very helpful. But then the next circle around that is called constructive program. And that's where we build things without necessarily being confrontational. And I still think that this was Gandhi's greatest discovery.

Because we all think that nonviolence means run out and disrupt something. And I call that obstructive program, and it has its place. But when we do that, we often are not very well aimed and not very strong. Unless we have had a background in building up the world that we want to see.

You know, Buckminster Fuller, the well-known architect and I guess public intellectual, he said the way to get rid of any institution is not to attack it, but to build a better one and make it obsolete. So what we really want to do is make violence obsolete wherever. You know, in the criminal justice system where we have alternatives now known as restorative justice.

And even in the international arena where we have—now there are something like, I think, 24 organizations that are doing what's called civilian-based defense. And what they do is they train people in nonviolence, send them into a conflict area, and create a buffer between the opponent and the victim. And see what else they can do to reduce the conflict and defuse it without violence. And this has been going on since the first such organization.

Well, it's been going on since Buddha. He did this a lot. But it's been institutionalized in the modern world since about 1981 with the founding of a group called Peace Brigades International. And they've gone into Central America. They've gone into Sri Lanka. They're still in Sri Lanka. And all the way up to Palestine. They're active in the West Bank.

And they have actually started making some tentative explorations about getting down into Gaza. And I'm very happy to say that in all the years that this has been done, and there are now about 200 people who've been trained and have practiced it in one place or another, in all that time, only 14 people have been injured. And I think only one or two fatalities. And compare that with what happens in the army where you have fatalities before you even get out of basic training.

So it's very helpful to overcome the biggest misunderstanding that people have about nonviolence, which is that it is passive and weak. So here are people doing direct interventions, saving lives. And this has been documented that conflicts have been reduced, lives have been saved, sometimes in dramatic numbers. And they now have a representation at the UN.

Kerstin Deibert

So I want to pick up on something that you just said. Nonviolence is not weak and it's not passive. And the way I understand this work, it's also about really looking at some of the misunderstandings. And in your book, for example, you speak about how the word nonviolence itself is kind of misleading because it reduces the approach to not choosing violence. So if it's not weak and not passive, and if it's much more than just a choice not to use violence, then what is it?

Because you also have suggested there's other terms like soul force from Gandhi or heart knowledge that are much more fitting. Can you describe it a bit?

Michael Nagler

Yeah, I mean, it's really a pity we've had to struggle with the vocabulary for so long. But terms that I think are reasonable substitutes would be love in action. In other words, arising from an awareness of unity and action in accordance with that awareness. So that automatically means that where you see injustice and people being injured, possibly yourself, you want to stop it. But you don't want to stop the people doing it.

I mean, yes, you want to stop them from what they're doing, but you don't want to injure them. That, I think, is the core principle of nonviolence. So if we had a word or phrase that captured that, I think it would be a substitute. But I wrestled with this problem for so long, I finally gave up. I said, okay, it's nonviolence.

But what we do say very often is, I coined the phrase when I was teaching my course, dehyphenated nonviolence. It's like decaffeinated coffee. So instead of just being non-violence, it's a positive thing called— And I'm very happy to learn and add and share with you all that in the last 20 or so years, science, I mean, you know, hard science, looking at animal behavior and things like that, has really

turned around. And we do talk about this in the film, from looking at the human being as being innately violent to understanding what Gandhi said, that nonviolence is what we are. It's the core of our nature.

We're put on this earth to serve one another and to realize the incredible power that is within us. So the science that I was taught in school way back then was all about Darwin and Freud and then Conrad Lorenz, who became an expert on aggression. And it was all upholding this very unfortunate image that we are fundamentally violent. And Gandhi was rootedly opposed to that because it was, in his case, it was a discovery that he made in his own person.

It was not something that he read in a book or studied in a course. That nonviolence actually brings us closer to our human nature. So, by contrast, we're now also paying attention to the fact that people who hurt others, who act violently, are injuring themselves. And the most recent interview we had on our radio program was with a neuroscientist from UCLA. And even that is kind of nonviolent, Kirsten, because I'm a Berkeley person. We don't talk to UCLA people.

Kerstin Deibert

Building bridges wherever you go.

Michael Nagler

Jokes aside, he's a wonderful guy. I interviewed him for the film, and he made this discovery that in our brains there is a set of motor neurons which exactly reflect the feelings and the gestures and the words that you observe in another person. So, you know, when I'm raising my hand like this, there are neurons that fire in your brain that say, raise your right hand. Then at the last minute, there's a set of neurons that says, no, no, no, that's Professor Nagler, that's not me. So we don't always actually do it.

But the important thing is you cannot inflict pain on another person without registering that pain in your own consciousness. And now we have a technical term for this. It's called moral injury. And it was just started to get observed formally, I think, around the Korean War. But now, you know, we have these appalling statistics of the number of people who come back from military service where they face all kinds of dangers and then they come home and commit suicide. They get, you know, PTSD.

And it's beginning to be understood now that there is—this is a scientific reality, not just some kind of moral queasiness that a person had. But we are so constituted. I mean, I said to Dr. Iacoboni in our interview, would you agree with the statement that we are wired for empathy? And he said, absolutely. It was one of his most exciting moments at the interview.

So, you know, we used to have a big problem with science and history. History was telling us that there's just been wars forever. You can't get away from it. One day in my peace and conflict studies course, I—you know, I have a mischievous streak. So I had gotten to know this person who was an

officer in military science department in the Air Force, in fact. I invited him in to talk to our class, which was kind of unfair because I knew our students would make short work of him.

But at one point he said, you know, there's been nothing but violence throughout history. And I calmly said, have you read Maria Gimbutas? Now, on a university campus, that's pretty challenging. You're supposed to know everybody in your field. To admit that you haven't read somebody is, you know, already a kind of weakness. But he was absolutely stunned when I told him that during most of what we call the Copper Age in Eastern Europe particularly, but also in the West, for 6,000 years, there was no sign of conflict.

People were buried in these. Later, a different group of Indo-Europeans, the Yamnaya culture and others, they kind of moved into the area and were much more aggressive. And you do start getting these warrior graves where the warrior is in the middle and his wife and children have been sent off with him to keep him company in the other world. And then you have all his weapons. And this is well known through Northern Europe.

But for thousands of years, as is also true in a part of North America, for thousands of years, there was no depiction of warriors on vases. And there were no weapons buried with warriors. So her name is Maria Gimbutas. Somebody is just asking that. G-I-M-B-U-T-A-S. Lithuanian name, I believe.

But since then, there's been much more work in that area. We're now kind of in between history and science. And there's a book by a Dutch scholar. His name is Rutger Bregman, B-R-E-G-M-A-N. And his book, I think, is called something like *Good Natured*. I always, for some reason, forget the title of his book. But it's a very important revision of a lot that we learned in my generation, and I think also in yours, about how violent people can be.

For example, we hear that there's a film called *The Titanic*. And in this film the men of the Titanic are extremely selfish and they run into the lifeboats and they keep the women—I haven't seen the film, but I heard that it really gives you a really bad impression of that episode, that tragedy. Now, on the east coast of the state of New Jersey, there's a bronze plaque which is dedicated to the men of the Titanic who went down to their deaths so that women could survive. So the reality is often much less grim, much less brutal than the stories that we've been telling ourselves.

Kerstin Deibert

And there's a lot of groundbreaking research coming out. I'm thinking, for example, of Erika Genoweth and Maria Stefan. Could you—

Michael Nagler

Speak to that as well? Oh, yeah. But you're going to have a hard time stopping me, I think. Yeah. I'll start by saying that Maria was just interviewed by Stephen Colbert. So we are now in the mainstream. You know, we're just—we're not outliers anymore.

But Erica and Maria met, and Erica was trained as a political scientist, meaning it was all war, war, war,

you know, and Max Weber and all of those people that war is an extension of politics by other means, unquote. And Maria Stefan was much more in the nonviolence area. She had worked with Gene Sharp at Harvard. And so she challenged Erica. And the two of them sat down and did a study of 290 cases of what they call insurrection, that is regime change, which is what is being attempted right now in Iran. And that one is not working very well, of course.

So they studied 300 cases of insurrectionary movements. Mind you, there's a lot more that you can do with nonviolence other than insurrectionary movements. But for sure, this is a dramatic application. So of those roughly 300 cases, the nonviolent ones succeeded twice as much as the violent ones. Surprisingly, this was a shock even to me, it took about one third the time.

It would take about—to mount a major insurrection, dislodge a government and install something else, usually takes close to 10 years. But to do it by nonviolence takes three years. And now here's the really significant finding. Insurrections are much more likely to lead to a democratic regime, even if they fail. So you try to dislodge some kind of dictator, you carry it out nonviolently, you know, constructive program and then direct resistance. You don't succeed.

We'll look at what happened—Czechoslovakia in 1968, 69, the Prague Spring. It was crushed by the Soviet regime. And yet later, when the Soviet regime began to weaken, Czechoslovakia was the first country to get its freedom. So, but the main point I was making—and let me get back to it—is if you dislodge an oppressive regime by oppressive means, you're not very likely to get to a democratic institution at the end.

Gandhi put it very simply. He said, violent revolution will bring violent *svarāj*. *Svarāj* meaning freedom or institution, I guess, or regime, let's say. So, if you attempt to dislodge a hated regime through nonviolence and it doesn't work, nonetheless, you have made an assertion about human nature, which prevails. And that actually leads to a democratic regime more often than when you pick up the gun.

Kerstin Deibert

I think it was also Gandhi who said means are ends in the making. In the making. Yeah. So I wonder about this, Michael. I'm sensing into my own heart and how this is landing. So the evidence is there. The suffering is there as well as evidence. And I'm thinking of one of the quotes from Gandhi that I read in one of your articles and that we put in the announcement, that nonviolence is really the most powerful force at the disposal of humanity.

So there is that. And I really sat with this running up to our conversation. And it's an interesting thing. I noticed how it's actually hard to take in. Spiritually and ethically, I have wholehearted faith in nonviolence. When I really feel into it, there are maybe subconscious voices of skepticism, and underneath that a sense of powerlessness, maybe hopelessness.

So I just want to name that because it seems as a species, for humanity, we're at such a crossroads. And so I wonder personally, how do you hold this in your heart? You know, I look at the world and the

trillions that are spent on military armament every year with numbers rising. I think of Germany and the right wing movement becoming stronger here.

And things like the Ministry of Education having contracts with the armed forces, inviting military personnel into schools to educate students, children, really, of so-called peace. And so I wonder really personally how to hold these two truths in one's heart. You know, the truth that this world is so shaken at the moment by violence. And we have this powerful force as human beings as well. I wonder how do you do that?

Michael Nagler

Wow. That is a question that probably is on the minds and hearts of every one of us. I've had a bit of a breakthrough recently that I would like to share. And that is, I think I understand a little bit why the world is in such a god awful state right now. And it's because we're at the end of an era. And the name that scientists have given to that era is reductive materialism, to believe that the body is all that there is.

The body creates consciousness in some mysterious way. And because we're all just a collection of atoms, we're completely separate. I mean, you're a collection of atoms about 8,000 miles away from my collection of atoms right now. Yeah, but on this level of heart-to-heart conversation, we are very much in connection. And on the spiritual level, in terms of our underlying consciousness, we are utterly inseparable. We are one.

How do we—So I think what's happening is since the Industrial Revolution, the dedication to materialism has been extreme. And now it has shown that it doesn't work. And therefore, the system that we have built, everything, I mean, judicial, educational, manufacturing, it's collapsing. Most people don't see an alternative. That creates a lot of fear. And where you have fear, you have violence. It's just inevitable.

So there were several movements attempting to make a better future visible, you know, to make it very vivid and present. So that has helped a little bit, Kirsten, to understand that people, they're not just crazy, they're not just animals. They're at the end of an era, and they don't understand what's happening to the world and where it's going from here. So the other part of your question, to reinforce my faith in nonviolence, is mainly by learning how to see it working.

I was once riding in a bus. This was years ago now. I was still teaching at Berkeley. And I took the bus over to San Francisco. And there were two young ladies sitting in front of me. And I'm not trying to eavesdrop, okay? I'm not actively listening. But they got kind of loud at one point, and one of them said, I don't know why things go better when I'm nice to the creep. They just do.

So if I were there today, I would tap them on the shoulder and say, you know, that's a law of existence. It's not that they just do. When we are nicer to people, it registers with them. And often enough, they're nicer to us. And I believe that even when they're not nicer to us there and then in the immediate circumstance, it has registered with them. And it'll come out later.

That's what we call in my book and on the website, work versus work. You try to do something non-violently. It doesn't seem to work, by golly. It didn't get me what I wanted. But if you look closely, you can see subtle changes in the social environment and the interaction between people. And when you've trained yourself to see them, you start really seeing them pretty much everywhere.

Kerstin Deibert

I also remember reading about what you call truth of relating, which is really intentionally repersonalizing interactions and humanizing our relationships. Because you sort of outline how really dehumanization and disconnection are root causes of violence. And so is a lack of meaning, which I thought is so interesting. One of the arguments you make is rather than speaking of a polycrisis, this is really a monocrisis. It's a crisis. It's a spiritual crisis that we are in. So it all ties in together for me in this way. Yeah. Yeah.

Michael Nagler

As far as that personalization is concerned, I'll tell you a little story anecdote on myself. I used to commute down to Berkeley and come back up here, and every now and then I would carpool with people. And I was carpooling with a fellow. He was driving and we got to the Richmond Bridge and he went to pay his toll. They didn't have any machines to do that in those days. There was a woman in the toll booth. He had to put the money in her hand.

And he said, hi, how are you this evening? Have you been on this shift very long? How is it going for you? And I'm fuming. I'm saying, Al, for Christ's sake, let's get out of here. We're in a hurry. Just give her the money and let's go. Later on, I realized he was right. And we have hundreds of opportunities every day to connect with people emotionally, intellectually. Little, little actions, which when we do that cumulatively, it changes the whole atmosphere, changes the whole ambiance.

So there you go. There's a power that we have. And another little thing I realized recently, I had been really kind of agonizing about not being able to change the world. And then I remembered something that Thomas Merton said. He said you don't have to go out and create something huge. What you have to do is do something that God can make something out of. So again it's more the means than the end. It's more the quality of the act than the concrete results.

And I felt a weight kind of being lifted off my shoulder. I'm not called upon to do something that I can't do. I'm just called upon to do what I can do as well as I can.

Kerstin Deibert

That's a beautiful thing. And that also opens the possibility of refreshing one's commitment and aspiration each day, each moment as we go. We know it matters. Yeah. Thank you, Michael. We want to open the space now to hear from some of you if you have any questions or would like to add to the conversation. And you can do so by raising your digital hand on the—below there's a react button, and when you click on that you see the little raise hand symbol there. This way I can see you.

Or if you don't want to speak directly, you can also type a question in the chat, and I'll try to pay attention to both spaces.

Michael Nagler

And also, Kirsten, if we don't get to questions they can mail them in to us. Info at metacenter.org, and we'll try to. And remember that Metta has two Ts.

Kerstin Deibert

That's right. There it is. Okay. I see Nicholas here. Nicholas, would you like to unmute yourself?

Questioner

Yes. Thank you. Yes, I'm Nicholas. Nicholas speaking. Thank you for this presentation and for introducing me to your organization. And I'm formulating this question as I'm speaking. So there's a lot of strands and parts to it. And I'm wondering about nonviolent communication in the midst of so much evil, like the one we're living now, where some of us have to really fight in order to keep ourselves alive.

You know, some of us have to go be so careful of even going outside, even though, you know, I'm a citizen and all of that. It's just a constant struggle. And what I see happening at a higher level, at the top, has also permeated so many of the institutions that are supposed to be servicing us. From, you know, cat rescue organizations to name one, to all kinds, these systems have permeated everything in society. And surviving, just surviving, not even thriving or not even—yeah, surviving takes quite a lot of skills and energy. So how do you see the role of nonviolent communication, communicating with what's happening now, which is over the top?

Michael Nagler

Yeah. Thank you, Nicholas. Yeah. Thank you, Nicholas. That's a really good question. First, I'd like to make a distinction between nonviolent communication, which is a specific organization founded by a social scientist from Detroit. Blanking on his name right now, Marshall Rosenberg. So that is a specific organization, not to be confused with nonviolence. Nonviolence is a force of nature. It's a fundamental element in nature at large and in human nature. So, okay, that being said, there is an article that was written by an Australian political scientist quite a while ago now.

His name was Ralph Summy, S-U-M-M-Y, I think. And it was called Nonviolence and the Case of the Extremely Ruthless Opponent. And he addressed the kind of classic misconception that people have about nonviolence, that since it's a weak force, you can only use it against a weak opponent. And then people will say, well, look at the British. They were such a pushover. You know, they were so just and fair and everything.

Well, ask someone in South Africa what the British did during the Mau Mau insurrection. They were as brutal as anybody. And they could be just as brutal in India as well. If you look at the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and so forth. So history shows that nonviolence does work even against powerful

opposition. And in a way, there's even a kind of jujitsu there where it works better against a more powerful opposition.

Look at what's just happened in Iran. The regime has just shown that it has utter callous disregard for its own people. It has displayed its weakness by the horrible violence that they've carried out against the protesters. And so if we really knew how to exploit that weakness, we could be more effective against a regime that doesn't try to disguise its brutality.

Kerstin Deibert

Thank you, Michael. There is a question in the chat that relates to that. And it's one of the really inspiring developments in the US, in my opinion, right now, which is the resistance that is forming around ICE. So I'll read the question in the chat. There are a few of us here from a rural rapid response team. Can you offer up any suggestions on how to protect our hearts and work from a peaceful place while we are chasing ICE and full of adrenaline?

Michael Nagler

Oh boy, that is going to be kind of difficult. I think at least, let's say, as soon as possible, as soon as the adrenaline subsides. Or I know I'm going to say even if you are in the very act, and I've experienced this in smaller ways, so I think the principle holds. Even when you're roused up against people, to just remind yourself that you're against what they stand for. You're not against them. You don't have any resentment or bitterness or hatred in your heart against that person.

And in fact, you're doing them a favor by resisting their behavior. There's a famous episode in one of the *hadīth* of the Prophet Muhammad where Muhammad says to his companions, let's see, you must always be kind even to an oppressor. And someone says, how can you be kind to an oppressor? And he says, by preventing him from his oppression. And Gandhi was keenly aware of that. He said, I'm doing the best thing for the British. I'm their best friend by getting them out of this artificial domineering situation.

So I think just constantly reminding ourselves. And you know, every time we see something beautiful to think of it as a mirror of the beauty that's within every one of us. That helps.

Kerstin Deibert

Thank you, Michael. I see Melody with a raised hand.

Michael Nagler

Yeah. Well, I wrote a book called *The Third Harmony*, so it should go right along with Melody's question.

Questioner Great, thank you. Well, you've said so many interesting things to me, but I've been a little disturbed in the last—just in the last week—people who I know who I'm close to are talking about having hate in their hearts for what's going on in this country. And it hurts me to hear them talk that way. And as you started to outline sort of the action guide and the two models and the roadmap,

the very first thing you said is eliminate the propaganda of mass media. And I think that's what's happening is all they see is the horrendous actions of our leader and what's happening with ICE. And so how do you guide people you care for and love to not go down that hate, that hate?

Michael Nagler

That is a—thank you, Melody—that is a very, very real question. And that is something that I do a lot. And what I find effective often is to point out to people that they are damaging themselves with that hatred. And they're actually allowing the opponent to win. I think the first act of resistance is to look an opponent in the face and say, I'm not going to hate you. Do your worst. I'm not going to hate you.

In the film, we talk about this model that Barbara Deming developed called the two hands of nonviolence, you know, where one hand says, I will not cooperate with your injustice. But the other hand says, but I'm still open to you as a human being. Beautiful. Yes. Yeah. So to recommend to people to just, you know, remind themselves that the hate is going to hurt them. It's going to give a win to the opposition, and it's going to render them much less effective. You can be much more effective when you act without hatred.

Kerstin Deibert

Which is something that Dr. Martin Luther King spoke a lot about. So I just want to name one comment in the chat, and then we can take one more question. It says here, I'm curious that there was no mention of the civil rights struggle in the U.S., which I understand is you use nonviolence as a grounding philosophy and political strategy. Could you comment on this?

Michael Nagler

Yeah, well, I think one thing that's not really well recognized about the civil rights struggle is that an impressive number of Black Americans went to India and learned from their freedom struggle. And a certain number of Indians came to the U.S. So there was a direct person-to-person exchange communicating the lesson of the freedom struggle in India to Black Americans in this country. And in fact, let's see, Gandhi said—Gandhi was visited in 1936, I think, by Howard Thurman, who was a well-known Black intellectual in Harlem, New York.

And after that interview Gandhi said it may well be that among the Negro people of America will be the next major episode of nonviolence in the world. That's not an exact quote. I'm missing some of the words, but that's the gist of it. And when he said that Martin Luther King was 8 years old. So I mean, the only reason I didn't talk about it, it's that Kirsten didn't ask me to.

Kerstin Deibert

I probably should have.

Michael Nagler

Couldn't talk about everything.

Kerstin Deibert

Rupert, you have your hand raised.

Questioner

Thanks. I'm wondering if violence is ever justified. I'm thinking about the Ukrainians right now defending themselves against Russia.

Michael Nagler

I tend to fudge a little bit on that question, Rupert. And I say that injurious force may be justified, but it's not really violent until and unless you hate the opponent and you're glad that they're suffering. Now, Gandhi called this the case of the madman with the sword. Suppose you're in your village and a demented person goes berserk and is going through the village causing great harm. What should you do as a nonviolent person? You should stop him. But you should, as far as possible, do it without hatred and without fear. As far as possible. You know, we all have to practice this and slowly grow with this capacity.

You should not make it into an object lesson that you should always carry weapons. And you should not complain too much if you get hurt in the process. This is the price we pay. So because—now here's what I take away from the Ukraine war. Because people were not ready to resist nonviolently, they had to do the next best thing, which is buy weapons from the U.S., fight Putin's soldiers who had nothing to do with it. They're drafted over there, drafted out of prisons and so forth.

So that was the—you know, they should say now, this has happened to us because we weren't prepared to resist nonviolently. And it's not that nonviolent resistance is unknown in that part of the world. That you had the Baltic republics have all resisted Soviet control nonviolently. And of course, you know, the example of Czechoslovakia. Yeah. So I guess that's what I was—it's a great question. If you can possibly—you know, you do what you have to do to stop the harm.

As Joanna Macy used to say, stop the worst of the damage. And to the best of your ability you try to do that without hatred, and then you learn a lesson. And you say, you know, this happened to me because I wasn't non-violent enough. I failed to silence my phone.

Kerstin Deibert

We didn't even hear it. Thank you, Michael, for all of this. We're nearing the end of our hour together, our time together. I wonder—I want to close actually with a passage from your book, the one that inspired me the most. But I wonder if there is anything else that you would like to say, Michael, before we close. And there's a number of comments in the chat. And yeah, really encouraging you to visit the Metta Center online and look at all these beautiful resources. But handing over to you, Michael, anything else that feels important to share?

Michael Nagler

Just to say that I'm really, really glad we had this opportunity. This is where the restoration of peace and justice is going to happen. By people networking, encouraging one another, and above all, learn-

ing from history and science how to mobilize this incredible capacity that's within every one of us. And let's not be demoralized when we're only a few. Actually, we've been a majority recently.

But as Gandhi pointed out, and even Thoreau said, one person with a completely pure heart will be able to stand up against the whole empire. That's basically what Gandhi did.

Kerstin Deibert

Well, thank you so much, Michael, for being here today. Thank you for your life's work. I have the utmost respect and admiration, actually, for the depth of commitment and determination that has guided your life and that has brought so much goodness to this world. Thank you so much.

Michael Nagler

This is so good to hear from, especially from someone like yourself. So let's all continue this great arc of learning, developing, discovering who we really are, and doing whatever little thing we can to set this world—

Kerstin Deibert

Right. God bless everyone. Thank you, Michael. And here is the passage from your book that has really brought actually peace to my soul. You say:

The war system seemingly ubiquitous in our culture, our budget, and our circumscribed vision of the possible is really nothing more than an endlessly propped up house of cards. Every time we try to solve a problem with the military, its counter-productiveness will become obvious and the alternatives will become more appealing. We who would help to make that alternative real should remember always that every human heart holds within it an unquenchable longing for peace.

So that's my wish that we all remember this unquenchable longing for peace in our own hearts and act from that place, individually and together. Thank you, Michael, and thank you for each one of you being part of this conversation today here, and joining us. Thank you so much.