

The Spiritual Power of Nonviolence

The Spiritual Power of Nonviolence: Interfaith Understanding for a Future without War

George W. Wolfe

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Author George Wolfe, former director of the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies at Ball State University, is among an elite group of professors accused in Donald Horowitz's "The Professors: The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America" of recruiting and indoctrinating students with a liberal anti-American political agenda. Along with scholars and activists such as Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn, he was deemed to be promoting agendas that were anti-military and friendly to terrorist enemies intent on destroying the United States of America. As the author states, this inaccurate and unfair portrayal of his work in nonviolent resistance or *satyagraha*, as Gandhi called it, was actually an invitation to an even deeper reflection on this, his life's great passion. This book, then, is the "enemy's gift," an opportunity that a conflict provides if a person is able to subdue anger and view the dispute in a positive framework.

At one level, *The Spiritual Power of Nonviolence* reads as an extended epiphany, an inspired collection of religious passages and related anecdotes about religion, war, and theories of nonviolence that are drawn from all major world religions and all parts of the globe. At another level, this book is the search for an antidote, intellectually speaking, to the horrors of war and the evils of extremism. Drawing from a vast body of learning, he encourages and guides us from an interfaith perspective along pathways of peace.

Wolfe is moved, at a fundamental level, by the struggle within us, and many wonderful examples highlight his call to nonviolent action. In the dualistic teachings of Zoroaster, for example, there are forces of good and evil in the world, and the earth is a battleground between them. The God of good, Ahura Mazda, requires humans to help him overcome evil through "good thoughts, good deeds, and good words." This same inner struggle is known as Jihad in the Islamic world, but is often misunderstood or misrepresented in the western public eye to refer to the violent overthrow of forces antagonistic to Islam. Jihad is first and foremost an inner struggle against one's own disobedient and ungodly inclinations and

temptations, but it can also refer to a struggle to eradicate injustice from society.

The author provides a stirring anecdote from the Cherokee to shed further light on his viewpoint. One evening an old Cherokee told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside all people, a battle between two wolves. One is evil. It is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, and similar anti-social qualities. The other is good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, truth, compassion and faith. The grandson reflected for a moment and then asked his grandfather: "Which wolf wins?" The old Cherokee replied "The one you feed." There are many astonishing passages celebrating nonviolence in this rich compendium and the message that comes through time and again is that we have to focus our energy on that inner struggle whereby we are freed from the destructive emotions that can give rise to religious intolerance and ethnic prejudice.

This book comes at a most critical juncture in human history with the rise of fundamentalism and intolerance on multiple fronts. The road of nonviolent resistance is a difficult one and the author does not shy away from the struggle that lies ahead. As Elie Wiesel reminds us in these pages, "If only we could celebrate peace as our various ancestors celebrated war; if only we could glorify peace as those before us, thirsting for adventure, glorified war."

At the heart of the author's prescription for a future without war is education on nonviolence. Peace education, he says, is best defined as the study of conflict resolution through nonviolent means. He draws upon numerous sources, for example Greek mythology and the story of Prometheus, to help to illustrate his principle point of the need for humankind to unveil truth, challenge injustice, and bring enlightenment. A prerequisite, he argues, is the removal of conflict from within us since disputes may be rooted in our own inner discord. In Hindu scripture, the words of Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita reinforce this point. "He attains peace into whom all desires flow as waters into the sea, which though ever being filled, is ever motionless, and not he who lusts after desires."

Inspired by the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, Wolfe encourages us to see beyond the binary formulation of negative peace and positive peace, as defined by peace studies pioneer Johan Galtung. The former refers to the absence of conflict and simple toleration of one another. The latter, on the other hand, is a social condition in which exploitation and overt and structural violence is minimized or eliminated. Wolfe introduces a further concept, that of "proactive peace." This requires that we anticipate future economic, environmental, and

political forces that could threaten to dismantle productive relations between social groups, communities, and nations; actively engage in peacebuilding to preserve cooperative working relationships; and strive to correct social injustice at its inception before it reaches a crisis point. Every action sets in motion a reaction and every choice made has a consequence. Violence is never the answer, he argues.

This book reads like an extended meditation on a subject that is both awe-inspiring and profound. George Wolfe adds a significant new dimension in the growing body of work in the important field of nonviolence scholarship. As Martin Luther King said, the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice. The publication of this book is another significant step in this universal quest for justice, healing and peace.

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