

NONVIOLENCE

Non-violence is a deliberate way of securing social change and of reaching others. It is active, not passive. It sometimes looks passive, when those who receive violence refuse to retaliate. Their refusal is a positive act of communication. They are saying to the other person that regardless of what he does, they believe that he is the temporary victim of an evil or negative force, but that but that if he wants to, he can, overcome that force. Their own refusal to retaliate encourages him to try, and shows him that it is possible.

Practicing non-violence requires discipline in order to keep control in the face of provocation. If we retaliate with violence, we convert our struggle into a test of physical strength. But our whole purpose is to make society behave in a more responsible - which means a more moral - way. Thus we exert moral force in order to bring about a moral response in others, and thus a more moral society. If we act irresponsible, we confirm the prejudices of those who want to deny our rights because they claim we are incapable of exercising them morally and responsibly. If we act responsibly, we do more than to repudiate that argument, and to persuade others that we do have the capacity to act justly and correctly. We also strengthen ourselves - we confirm by our actions, our belief in ourselves and our values, and our readiness to put our legitimate rights and privileges to proper use.

Non-violence is a way of speaking to others and to ourselves. We must continue to speak while we act, and never close the door to a dialogue with the rest of the community. Non-violence testifies to our readiness always to speak in a spirit of constructive conciliation and cooperation. There are six maxims of non-violent behavior.

1. Our attitude toward officials and others who may oppose us will be one of sympathetic understanding of the burdens and responsibilities they carry.
2. No matter what the circumstances or provocation, we will not respond with physical violence to acts directed against us.
3. We will not call names or make hostile remarks
4. We will adhere as closely as we are able to the letter and spirit of truth in our spoken and written statements.
5. We will always try to speak to the best in all men, rather than seeking to exploit their weaknesses to what we may believe is our advantage.
6. We will always attempt to interpret as clearly as possible to anyone with whom we are in contact -- and especially to those who may oppose us -- the purpose and meaning of our actions.