

SPEAKOUT

Creating a Culture of Peace

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By [Len Ellis](#), *SpeakOut* | Opinion

We live in a culture of violence. Violence is so prevalent, like the proverbial fish in the sea, we aren't even aware that it surrounds us, conditions us. We are so accustomed to violence that we mistakenly believe it is a natural state of being. Being submerged in violence has dulled and numbed our sensitivity to our own humanity; our concept of what it means to be human has been impaired. And like any other belief, until it is challenged, until we become aware to another way of being, until we awaken to what is our natural loving, nonviolent state, it continues. Recent tragedies in Connecticut and Colorado and Minnesota have at least raised our awareness to the issue, hopefully spurring deeper, lasting conversation resulting in action of how to change it.

Truth is, most people long for a state of peace, a deep desire to live without fear for our lives, without fear for our health, without fear for our emotional well-being. Yes, we need challenges to grow, but living with healthy challenges is far different than living in fear. But a culture of peace cannot be legislated or dictated, demanded or decreed; it will not manifest overnight. It requires the commitment of the whole of society and must emerge from the grass-roots level, seeding peace and nonviolence in the everyday dialogue and behavior of all people, which in turn, results in cultural action. By envisioning a cultural of peace and nonviolence, people develop values for a way of life that will guide individual actions. Such is the purpose of programs such as ***A Season For Nonviolence***.

Jan 30, 2013 begins the sixteenth annual ***A Season For Nonviolence***. This grassroots campaign was co-founded by Arun and Sunanda Gandhi of the M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence and a group of ten ministers forming the Leadership Council of The Association for Global New Thought, the organization that convenes ***A Season For Nonviolence*** on an annual basis. Its purpose is to focus educational and media attention on the philosophy of attaining peace through nonviolent action as demonstrated by Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Gandhi-King Season, with the theme of Compassionate Activism for Global Healing, offers a unique opportunity for people and communities around the world to take part in a participatory learning process. We learn how we can actively engage, with compassion, in a much-needed process of healing through personal involvement.

Framed by the anniversaries of the assassinations of Mohandas K. Gandhi and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 2008 saw the addition of the name of Cesar Chavez to the title. The Gandhi-King-Chavez Season For Nonviolence offers a ten week period to learn from the lives and teachings of these models. More importantly, it gives us the opportunity to translate what we learn into compassionate, nonviolent, dedicated activism in the spirit of Gandhi, King and Chavez. This international event not only honors, but promotes their vision for an empowered, nonviolent world. Participation in ASFN has grown with substantial activity in nearly 1,000 cities, in all 50 states, and 67 countries. Over fifty percent of our United States governors, and many mayors issued official proclamations for the 64 day period, and over 350 major Peace organizations, religious, business, arts, and learning institutions participate as official co-sponsors of the *A Season For Nonviolence* initiative.

There are people everywhere who want to help create a better world – people deeply concerned about widespread suffering, environmental destruction, escalating materialism and the loss of our sense of community. There is a deep and growing hunger for a wiser and more loving society. Gandhi and King and Chavez modeled the vision to create such a society, as well as showing us that the power for social change lies within individual consciousness. We really do want to create a nonviolent world, and to do so, we must first become nonviolent individuals. With a vision of a society governed by love and the common good, we have a powerful antidote to the violence, distrust and division of today's atmosphere of fear.

In practicing the relational principles of nonviolence we recover and renew ourselves and our families, violence and secrecy no longer shape our behavior. We realize that our lives, and those of our children, depend on transforming our culture of violence to one of nonviolence. Learning to be nonviolent is a new way of living, creating a healing process that begins with 'me' and ripples out into the larger world. As we heal our own relations we are demonstrating that people, organizations and governments can move the world pro-actively toward peace and wisdom. You are encouraged to enfold the principles outlined below, to participate in *A Season For Nonviolence*, and to sign and live by the Pledge of Nonviolence.

And while reading about and supporting *A Season For Nonviolence*, to bring about change in the world, we, each and

every one of us, must be active participants. We must speak out against violence and injustice wherever it shows up, we must raise our voices, we must BE the change we want to see in this world. Peace begins with ME.

Len Ellis

Board of Directors, Peacemakers Incorporated

Board of Directors, Dallas Peace Center

Board of Trustees, Unity of Arlington

Gandhi-King Principles of Nonviolence

“At the center of nonviolence is the principle of love”. - M. L. King Jr.

- Nonviolence means to honor the inherent worth of every human being. We naturally seek to understand each other, build friendship and community.

- Nonviolence means believing that our lives are linked together, that what we do impacts the lives of everyone we encounter, that we are accountable to one another. Nonviolence means we trust one another and work toward the common good.

- Nonviolence means dedicating ourselves to the fundamental rights of every human being (justice, equity, equality).

- Nonviolence is courageously choosing to practice compassion with our adversaries. We oppose injustice, not people.

- Nonviolence means recognizing love as the power of the human spirit to triumph over injustice, inequity, suffering, as we embark on a hero's journey of personal-social change.

Pledge of Nonviolence

Making peace must start with me. I commit myself to become a nonviolent and peaceable person.

To Respect Myself and Others

To respect myself, to affirm others and to avoid uncaring criticism, hateful words, physical attacks and self destructive behavior..

To Communicate Better

To share my feelings honestly, to look for safe ways to talk and act when I'm angry, and to work at solving problems peacefully.

To Listen

To listen carefully to one another, especially those who disagree with me, and to consider others' feelings and needs rather than insist on having my own way.

To Forgive

To apologize and make amends when I have hurt another, to forgive others, and to keep from holding grudges.

To Respect Nature

To treat the environment and all living things, including my pets, with respect and care.

To Play Creatively

To select entertainment and toys that support our family's values and to avoid entertainment that makes violence look exciting, funny or acceptable.

To Be Courageous

To challenge violence in all its forms whenever I encounter it, whether at home, at school, at work, or in the community, and to stand with others who are treated unfairly.

Eliminating violence, one person at a time, starting with me.

This article is a Truthout original.



LEN ELLIS

Len Ellis is founder of Peace and Justice Center-Arlington, designated an Ambassador For Peace by the International Federation for World Peace, and has been recognized and honored by the Foundation For Pluralism for his efforts in promoting peace.

He serves on the Board of Directors of the Dallas Peace Center, DFW International, Peacemakers Incorporated, as well as a Trustee at Unity of Arlington, and is an active member of Veterans For Peace. He writes a monthly column titled "Peace Begins With Me" and has an internet radio program of the same name.

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