**Four MLKJr. Quotes – excerpted from**

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**"The Social Organization of Nonviolence"**

"The Social Organization of Nonviolence," *Liberation* (October 1959) *in Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume IV.*

It is axiomatic in social life that frustrations leads to two kinds of reactions. One is the development of a wholesome social organization to resist with effective, firm measures any efforts to impede progress. The other is a confused, anger-motivated drive to strike back violently, to retaliate for wrongful suffering.

The current calls for violence have their roots in this latter tendency. Here one must be clear that there are three different views on the subject of violence. One is the approach of pure nonviolence, which cannot readily or easily attract large masses, for it requires extraordinary discipline and courage. The second is violence exercised in self-defense, which all societies, from the most primitive to the most cultured and civilized, accept as moral and legal. The principle of self-defense, even involving weapons and bloodshed, has never been condemned, even by Gandhi, who sanctioned it for those unable to master pure nonviolence. The third is the advocacy of violence as a tool of advancement, organized as in warfare, deliberately and consciously. There are incalculable perils in this approach. The greatest danger is that it will fail to attract Negroes to a real collective struggle. There are meaningful alternatives to violence. In the history of the movement for racial advancement, many creative forms have been developed—the mass boycott, sitdown protests and strikes, sit-ins, refusal to pay fines and bail for unjust arrests, mass marches, mass meetings, prayer pilgrimages, etc. There is more power in socially organized masses on the march than there is in guns in the hands of a few desperate men. Our enemies would prefer to deal with a small armed group rather than with a huge, unarmed but resolute mass of people. However, it is necessary that the mass-action method be persistent and unyielding. All history teaches us that like a turbulent ocean beating great cliffs into fragments of rock, the determined movement of people incessantly demanding their rights always disintegrates the old order. Our powerful weapons are the voices, the feet, and the bodies of dedicated, united people, moving without rest toward a just goal. Greater tyrants than Southern segregationists have been subdued and defeated by this form of struggle. It would be tragic if we spurn it because we have failed to perceive its dynamic strength and power.

I am reluctant to inject a personal defense against charges that I am inconsistent in my struggle against war and too weak-kneed to protest nuclear war. Merely to set the record straight, may I state that repeatedly, in public addresses and in my writings, I have unequivocally declared my hatred for this most colossal of all evils and I have condemned any organizer of war, regardless of his rank or nationality

**"Pilgrimage to Nonviolence."**"Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," *Christian Century*, April 13, 1960, in Clayborne Carson, Tenisha Armstrong, Susan Carson, Adrienne Clay, and Kerry Taylor, eds., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume V: Threshold of a New Decade, January 1959 - December 1960* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming).

Prior to reading Gandhi, I had about concluded that the ethics of Jesus were only effective in individual relationships. The "turn the other cheek" philosophy and the "love your enemies" philosophy were only valid, I felt, when individuals were in conflict with other individuals; when racial groups and nations were in conflict, a more realistic approach seemed necessary. But after reading Gandhi, I saw how utterly mistaken I was.

Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale. Love for Gandhi was a potent instrument for social and collective transformation. It was in this Gandhian emphasis on love and nonviolence that I discovered the method for social reform that I had been seeking.

I do not want to give the impression that nonviolence will work miracles overnight. When the underprivileged demand freedom, the privileged first react with bitterness and resistance. Even when the demands are couched in nonviolent terms, the initial response is the same. So the nonviolent approach does not immediately change the heart of the oppressor. It first does something to the hearts and souls of those committed to it. It gives them new self-respect; it calls up resources of strength and courage that they did not know they had. Finally, it reaches the opponent and so stirs his conscience that reconciliation becomes a reality.

I have come to see more and more the need for the method of nonviolence in international relations. While I was convinced during my student days of the power of nonviolence in group conflicts within nations, I was not yet convinced of its efficacy in conflicts between nations. I felt that while war could never be a positive or absolute good, it could serve as a negative good in the sense of preventing the spread and growth of an evil force. War, I felt, horrible as it is, might be preferable to surrender to a totalitarian system. But more and more I have come to the conclusion that the potential destructiveness of modern weapons of war totally rules out the possibility of war ever serving again as a negative good. If we assume that mankind has a right to survive then we must find an alternative to war and destruction. In a day when sputniks dash through outer space and guided ballistic missiles are carving highways of death through the stratosphere, nobody can win a war. The choice today is no longer between violence and nonviolence. It is either nonviolence or nonexistence.

I am no doctrinaire pacifist. I have tried to embrace a realistic pacifism. Moreover, I see the pacifist position not as sinless but as the lesser evil in the circumstances. Therefore I do not claim to be free from the moral dilemmas that the Christian nonpacifist confronts. But I am convinced that the church cannot remain silent while mankind faces the threat of being plunged into the abyss of nuclear annihilation. If the church is true to its mission it must call for an end to the arms race.

**"Nobel Peace Prize Lecture"**

Nobel Peace Prize Lecture, December 11, 1964, King Papers collection at King Library and Archive, Martin Luther King, Jr., Center, Atlanta.

I am not unmindful of the fact that violence often brings about momentary results. Nations have frequently won their independence in battle. But in spite of temporary victories, violence never brings permanent peace. It solves no social problems, it merely creates new and more complicated ones. Violence is impractical because it is a descending spiral ending in destruction for all. It is immoral because it seeks to humiliate the opponent rather than win his understanding. It seeks to annihilate rather than convert. It destroys community and makes brotherhood impossible. Violence ends up defeating itself. It creates bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers. Nonviolence is a powerful and just weapon. It was used in a magnificent way by Mohandas K. Gandhi to challenge the might of the British empire and free his people from the political domination and economic exploitation inflicted upon them for centuries. He struggled only with the weapon of truth, soul force. In the past ten years, unarmed gallant men and women of the United States have given living testimony to the moral power and efficacy of nonviolence. By the thousands, relentless young people, black and white, have temporarily left the ivory towers of learning to storm the barricades of bias. One day all of America will be proud of their achievements. I am still convinced that nonviolence is both the most practically sound and morally excellent way to grapple with the age-old problem of racial injustice.

A second evil which plagues the modern world is that of poverty. Almost two-thirds of the peoples of the world go to bed hungry at night. They are undernourished, ill-housed and shabbily clad. So it is obvious that if man is to redeem his spiritual and moral lag, he must go all-out to bridge the social and economic gulf between the haves and the have-nots of the world. Poverty is one of the most urgent items on the agenda of modern life. There is nothing new about poverty. What is new, however, is that we have the resources to get rid of it. Just as nonviolence exposed the ugliness of racial injustice, so must the infection and sickness of poverty be exposed and healed, not only its symptoms but its basic causes. The rich nations must use their vast resources of wealth to develop the undeveloped, school the unschooled, and feed the unfed. Ultimately a great nation is a compassionate nation; no individual or nation can be great if it does not have a concern for the least of these. In the final analysis, the rich must not ignore the poor, because both rich and poor are tied together in a single garment of destiny—for life is interrelated and all men are interdependent. The agony of the poor diminishes the rich, and the salvation of the poor enlarges the rich.

A third great evil confronting our world is that of war. Recent events have vividly reminded us that nations are not reducing, but rather increasing their arsenals of weapons of mass destruction. The proliferation of nuclear weapons has not been halted. The fact that most of the time human beings put the risk of the nuclear war out of their minds because it is too painful and therefore not acceptable does not alter the risk of such a war. So man's proneness to engage in war is still a fact, but wisdom born of experience should tell us that war is obsolete. No nation can claim victory in war. A so-called limited war will leave little more than a calamitous legacy of human suffering, political turmoil and political disillusionment. A world war, God forbid, would leave only smoldering ashes as a mute testimony to the human race whose folly led inexorably to ultimate death. And so if modern man continues to flirt unhesitatingly with war, he will transform his earthly habitat into an inferno such as even the mind of Dante could not imagine.

Therefore I venture to suggest, to all of you and all who hear and may eventually read these words, that the philosophy and strategy of nonviolence become immediately a subject for study and for serious experimentation in every field of human conflict, by no means excluding the relations between nations. It is, after all, nation states which have produced the weapons which threaten the survival of mankind and which are both genocidal and suicidal in character. It is as imperative and urgent to put an end to war and violence between nations as it is to put an end to racial injustice.

It is not enough to say we must not wage war. It is necessary to love peace and sacrifice for it. We must concentrate not merely on the negative expulsion of war, but on the positive affirmation of peace. In short, we must shift the arms race into the peace race. Some years ago a novelist died, among his papers was found a list of suggested plots for further stories, the most prominently underscored being this one: A widely separated family inherits a house in which they have to live together. This is a great new problem of mankind. We have inherited a big house, a great world house in which we have to live together, black men and white men, easterners and westerners, gentiles and Jews, Catholics and Protestants, Muslims and Hindus. A family unduly separated in ideas, culture, and interest, who, because we can never again live without each other, must learn somehow, in this one big world house, to live with each other.

And this is our great challenge. This means that more and more, our loyalties must become ecumenical rather than sectional. We must now give an overriding loyalty to mankind as a whole in order to preserve the best in our individual societies. This call for a worldwide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one's tribe, race, class and nation is in reality a call for an all-embracing, an unconditional love for all men. I'm not speaking of some sentimental and weak response which is little more than emotional bosh. I'm speaking of that force which all of the great religions have seen as a supreme unifying principle of life.

**"Address at SCLC Ministers Leadership Training Program."**

"To Charter Our Course for the Future," Address to SCLC staff, Frogmore, South Carolina, May 22, 1967, in Carson, ed., *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, p. 342-343.

I read Das Kapital and The Communist Manifesto, and many of the revolutionary movements in the world came into being as a result of what Marx talked about. The great tragedy is that Christianity failed to see that it had the revolutionary edge. You don't have to go to Karl Marx to learn how to be a revolutionary. I didn't get my inspiration from Karl Marx; I got it from a man named Jesus, a Galilean saint who said he was anointed to heal the broken-hearted. He was anointed to deal with the problems of the poor. And that is where we get our inspiration.

We have the power to change America and give a kind of new vitality to the religion of Jesus Christ. And we can get those young men and women who've lost faith in the church to see that Jesus was a serious man precisely because he was concerned about their problems. The greatest revolutionary that history has ever known.

[Pause] When I first took my position against the war in Vietnam, almost every newspaper in the country criticized me. It was a low period in my life. I could hardly open a newspaper. It wasn't only white people either.

I remember a newsman coming to me one day saying, "Dr. King, don't you think you're going to have to change your position now because so many people are criticizing you? And people who once had respect for you are going to lose respect for you. And you're going to hurt the budget, I understand, of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; people have cut off support. And don't you think that you have to move now more in line with the administration's policy?" That was a good question, because he was asking me the question of whether I was going to think about what happens to me or what happens to truth and justice in this situation.

On some positions, Cowardice asks the question, "Is it safe?" Expediency asks the question, "Is it politic?" And Vanity comes along and asks the question, "Is it popular?" But Conscience asks the question, "Is it right?" And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must do it because Conscience tells him it is right.

See also: <http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documentsentry/where_do_we_go_from_here_delivered_at_the_11th_annual_sclc_convention/>