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# Don't Give Up: Keep the Movement Moving

by John Dear

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One of the casualties of this culture of violence, injustice and war is the loss of our imagination. People across the country can not even imagine a world without war, poverty or nuclear weapons. But that is our job. We are like our ancestors, the Abolitionists, who came along and announced an astonishing, breathtaking new vision, a world without slavery, the equality of everyone on earth. We are their heirs, New Abolitionists, announcing a new world without war, poverty or nuclear weapons, a new world of nonviolence.

You may have heard the true story of some church activists who met in a church basement in East Berlin in the dismal days of the early 1980s around the ridiculous topic, "What Will It Be Like 1000 Years From Now When the Berlin Wall Finally Comes Down – And – What Do We Have To Do Now To Help That Great Day Happen?" They were dismissed as idealistic fools. But their meeting was exciting and energized them, so they decided to meet again, and more people showed up, and they kept meeting, and soon, people were meeting in church basements across East Germany, and within a few years, in November 1989, we watched in astonishment on TV as hundreds of thousands of people marched every day throughout East Germany and the unthinkable happened, the newly imaginable happened, the Berlin Wall came down peacefully.

Everyone thought it was a miracle, but the miracle was the grassroots movement that had been built and grew over time. My take on all this is that we have to do our thing down here, organizing and building a national, global, grassroots movement around such an impossible dream, envisioning the previously unimaginable and daring to announce it boldly, even give our lives for it. Meanwhile, God is doing Her thing up there, working to bring about some big changes that we can't quite imagine, such as, in this case, the emergence of Gorbachev and Perestroika. Gorbachev and Perestroika – and the God of peace – need us to be doing our thing down here, building that grassroots movement of nonviolence so that when that new sign of hope breaks through, there is a movement that moves to make the peaceful transformation a reality.

Recently, I attended a small luncheon in Santa Fe in honor of my friend historian Howard Zinn, and he said that every major movement for social change in the United States felt hopeless. I found this very consoling! He said, from the beginning, through the middle, and right up to the very end, they were all hopeless, hopeless, hopeless, and then, all of a sudden, there was an astonishing breakthrough. The

key to making it all happen, he said, was that people kept their vision alive. Ordinary people continued to do small acts for peace and justice every day, and over time, those little things added up into something big. They never gave up. He said that historically, the one thing those in power fear the most is a movement that won't go away. So our job is not to give up, not to go away. We have to keep on pursuing that vision of a new world of peace, justice and nonviolence, to be hopeful in our hopelessness and trust that the God of peace is doing her thing while we do ours.

For me, the key to such a hopeful movement, a new network of spiritual progressives, the end of the war on Iraq, the disarmament of the United States, the transformation of our world, even our journey to the God of peace is – nonviolence. Everything comes down to violence or nonviolence. I think violence is the great heresy, the great idolatry, the great mortal sin of our times which is destroying us as a people and a nation and a race.

Likewise, as Dr. King, Mahatma Gandhi and Dorothy Day instruct, nonviolence is the great hope of our times, the great wisdom of our various religious traditions, the ultimate message of the best spiritual teachers, literally, the only option left for the whole human race, not to mention our movements for peace and justice. So I say, we have to become people of active, creative nonviolence, everyone of us, everywhere, to become teachers and champions and heralds and apostles of creative nonviolence.

How do we keep building such a diverse, inclusive active movement for peace and justice? We have to keep reflecting on that question, learning from history, experimenting with nonviolent action, but here are some thoughts.

**First**, we have to practice nonviolence in every level of our personal lives. We need to be nonviolent to ourselves, our spouses, our children, our parents, our neighbors, everyone in our local communities, everyone in our religious communities, everyone everywhere. That means looking deep within to renounce every trace of violence within us, to pursue a deep, interior inner nonviolence.

**Second**, if we really are a spiritual movement for peace and justice, we need to really seek the God of peace and justice, regardless of whether others are pursuing God sincerely or not. We need to be single-minded in our search for the God of love, the God of peace, the God of compassion, the God of nonviolence. That means becoming contemplatives, mystics, a whole new generation of peace and justice saints, people who work to end war and

injustice and who take quality time in solitude every day for prayer, who develop an intimate relationship with the God of peace, so that we become more and more true servants of the God of peace and justice, so that our movements are truly led by a higher power for peace that will benefit all of creation.

**Third**, if we go deeper into nonviolence and the search for God, Gandhi says, we will come to a greater awareness of truth and discover the common ground of our shared humanity--that every human being on the planet is equal, that we are all children of the God of peace. And so we will treat everyone with respect and dignity. We will never hurt or kill anyone, much less remain silent while thousands die from hunger and war, and nuclear weapons, corporate greed and global warming threaten us all. From now on, we see every human being on the planet as our very sister and brother, regardless of race, gender, class, religion, age, sexual orientation, ability, nationality, language, height, weight or any other distinction.

**Fourth**, as people of nonviolence who uphold the unity of the human family, we practice universal love – an unconditional, all-inclusive, all-encompassing, non-retaliatory, sacrificial, welcoming, compassionate love toward everyone everywhere for the rest of our lives.

**Fifth**, because we seek God and practice nonviolent love, we respect all religious traditions. We are committed to listening and learning from one another about our common search for the God of peace so that we might become more nonviolent, more compassionate, more human. As Gandhi discovered, we recognize that nonviolence is the common ground of all religious traditions, and that we need every religious tradition to help us become a new people, a new nation, a new world of nonviolence. We need to keep on reaching out to one another across religious lines and build a new interfaith movement based on friendship, something which we have never really done before in our history.

**Sixth**, we take sides, just as the God of peace, justice and nonviolence takes side. We side with peace. We side with justice. We side with nonviolence. And because God sides with the poor and oppressed and disenfranchised in order to embrace and liberate us all, we too side with the poor and oppressed and disenfranchised. As the Latin American churches are teaching us, we make a preferential option for the poor and oppressed. Like Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker, we side with the poor, walk with the poor, march with the poor, serve the poor, befriend the poor, learn from the poor, defend the poor, and in our downward mobility, eventually become one with the poor. We try to break through class and racial lines, live sim-

ply, tithe our time and our treasure, and give ourselves more and more to their bottom line struggles. In the process, we will become more human, more compassionate, and recognize our need for the God of peace and justice.

As we keep breaking down these barriers, bridging these divides and reaching out to join hands with one another, we can stand up together and speak out together. We can denounce every form of violence and injustice and announce a great new vision of peace and justice.

Together we will be able to say unpopular things like: End the war and occupation on Iraq; bring the troops home now; make reparations to the people of Iraq; let the United Nations resolve the crisis nonviolently; end the occupation of Palestinians; support nonviolent Israeli and Palestinian peacemakers, the Jewish vision of shalom and human rights for Palestinians; end all U.S. military aid and warmaking in Colombia; stop all surveillance on peace and justice activists; close all U.S. terrorist training camps, beginning with Fort Benning's notorious "School of Assassins," and close the C.I.A., the N.S.A., the F.B.I., and the Pentagon – close them all!; leave the World Trade Organization; lift the entire Third World debt; distribute free medicine to everyone with HIV/AIDS; abolish the death penalty; welcome every immigrant and undocumented person; rebuild New Orleans and its levees and take care of its victims; house the homeless; grant universal healthcare; fund nonviolence education in every school on the planet; stop rigging our elections; undertake treaties for nuclear disarmament; join the World Court; obey international law; sign the Kyoto accord; fund alternatives to fossil fuels; stop global warming; end the Star Wars program; disarm Los Alamos; cut the entire military budget; abolish every one of our nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction; and then redirect those hundreds of billions of dollars toward the hard work for a lasting peace by feeding every starving child and refugee on the planet this week in a massive new Global Marshall Plan. Together, we can announce and welcome a new world of nonviolence, with peace and social justice for everyone on the planet. Amen!

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