



# AHIMSA CENTER

NONVIOLENCE IN THOUGHT AND ACTION

www.cpp.edu/ahimsacenter

2016-2017

NEWSLETTER

## FROM THE DIRECTOR

**GREETINGS** to the seekers and supporters of ahimsa! In this issue, I wish to draw your attention to

### A Civilizational Challenge of Diversity

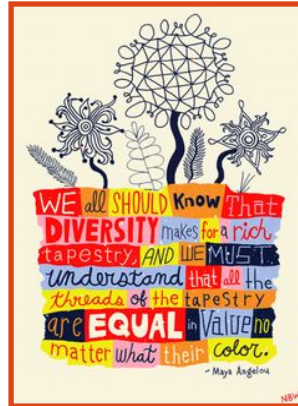
Diversity is a fundamental feature of human history. It includes dimensions of human identity such as race, ethnicity, age, gender, religion, citizenship, nationality, and socio-economic status. The discourse about diversity, however, gained widespread attention largely in the last half century or so. And, to an extent, this has promoted a broader vision of human society, openness to new ideas and new ways of living and thinking. Diversity has benefitted companies doing business with different regions of the world, has made schools, colleges, and workplaces demographically more inclusive, and has contributed to global interconnectedness.

Why then do we find that families and communities, schools and colleges, institutions and organizations, societies and nations appear as increasingly divided, often generating violence of all sorts? Such divisions are also defining the most diverse democracies in the world where some are considered more equal than others.

Embracing diversity is not simply a matter of discourse. It is a matter of embracing in thought and action different races, ethnicities, gender and sexual orientations, nationalities and cultures, having respect for different faiths and philosophies and tolerance for different views. However, the emphasis on differences and uniqueness of peoples, cultures, races and

ethnicities without a full recognition of the core commonalities characterizing human beings—their aspirations and fears, challenges and opportunities—has pulled them apart.

Dealing with diversity in all forms is an opportunity



to strengthen the human bond. And the key to this is ahimsa—an awareness of oneness or unity underlying all. This core sense of identity, of being “human,” needs to be remembered and

constantly cultivated with care and compassion, civility and empathy, forgiveness and trust—essential ethics of ahimsa.

Gandhi was convinced that “our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and test” of human civilization. According to him, “Civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to [hu]man[s] the path of duty. Performance of duty and observance of morality are convertible terms.” This may serve as a timely reminder of our civic responsibility for striving to create, nurture, and sustain a culture of civility and care, of empathy and trust, not only to counter the challenge of divisiveness around us but to celebrate and strengthen the very sacred bond of our common humanity.

In our collective effort to create a culture of ahimsa, I wish to thank all our sponsors for their kind and continued support for education about non-violence, our members for their engagement with the Center events, the contributors for sharing their ideas and wisdom, the guest editor, Dr. Danita Dodson, for her enthusiastic and creative effort in putting the newsletter together, and the readers for their sustained interest.

Finally, I invite all to a special conference of the Center, **India@Seventy: Building a More Inclusive Democracy**, November 3-5, 2017. (Details on Back Cover).

**Tara Sethia** is a professor of history and director of the Ahimsa Center. She coordinates the multidisciplinary Minor in Nonviolence Studies, directs the K-12 Institutes on Non-violence, organizes the Center conferences, and advises the Ahimsa Student Club. Her books include *Ahimsa, Anekanta and Jainism* (Motilal Banarsidass, 2004); *Gandhi: Pioneer of Nonviolent Social Change* (Pearson, 2012); and a co-ed.,



*The Living Gandhi* (Penguin, 2013). Currently, she is working on a project, *Vows and Social Change*. She teaches courses on history of India and South Asia, Nonviolence and Social Change.

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### Sponsorship Opportunities

Several sponsorship opportunities are available, including opportunities for naming a public lecture, a conference, and the Ahimsa Center. Center welcomes donations in any amount.

If you are interested in exploring how you can get involved with the Center or wish to donate to the Center, please contact the Director at (909) 869-3868 or email [tsethia@cpp.edu](mailto:tsethia@cpp.edu).



Executive Editor: **Tara Sethia**  
Guest Editor: **Danita Dodson**

# Ahimsa and Community

## Love Being

By John Viscount



**D**uring troubling, disempowering times, it is nice to know there is a safe haven to which we can retreat and where we can regain control over our lives. No matter what is happening in the world, our mind is always our best refuge because it is the one

place where we get to call all the shots. When we choose to exercise this fundamental control that we all possess, we begin to wield our greatest power: the power to choose our reaction to the world. As we learn to think independently of external circumstances, we transform our lives into a school. We can now utilize our experiences each day as teachers who allow us to practice being the love beings we were created to be. In this way our time on earth becomes a useful study period wherein we learn

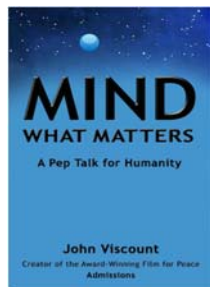
**The most powerful people of all are those who conquer their own minds, who put them in healing service to the greater good, and who get to graduate this world as love beings.**

which thought patterns lead to unity and peace and which ones lead to separation and suffering.

When we see ourselves as love beings in training, it becomes clear that our greatest teachers are those human beings whom we find hardest to love. They show us what we need to work on most in the wise curriculum we have chosen while living in our temporary dorm-called earth. People and their different points of view can now serve as study aids that allow us to learn what other kinds of thoughts and actions lead to, without having to think or act that way ourselves. This enables us to save lots of time while also receiving an invaluable schooling about our own state of mind.

A good example of this is when we are confronted with a bully. If we are in a weakened state and are not feeling compassion for all living beings, we will know by the way we let bullies have a negative effect on us. But if we are feeling strong and react with Gandhian loving kindness, then we have transformed the bully into a challenging mid-term exam that we just aced. We have also demonstrated mastery of the transcendent skills of a healer, life's most rewarding career. Luckily, when we open our hearts in this fashion, our vision improves, and the positive way forward becomes clear. We see that bullies suffer most of all because they are soaking in the negative energy that they put out into the world. What their victims experience periodically, bullies experience non-stop, which, consequently, places them in a perpetual state of pain and weakness. The best way to assist these bullies then is to operate independently of their low-vibration thought patterns and to give them a helping hand, like the love beings we truly are.

This is why, in the final analysis, the world's most powerful figures are not authoritarian heads of state or dictators who rule vast territories. The most powerful people of all are those who conquer their own minds, who put them in healing service to the greater good, and who get to graduate this world as love beings. Fortunately for us all, these inspiring folks are easy to identify. They are the



ones who love being alive.

*John Viscount is an author, screenwriter, playwright and Co-Founder of PeaceNow.com. He is the author of Mind: What Matters. A Pep Talk for Humanity. He is also the creator, "Pep Talk for Humanity" Peace Entertainment Program for schools and universities that includes a play with healing teachings on cyber bullying, and a short film about the power of forgiveness, the Admissions.*

## Seva: Compassion in Action

By Gopi Oni-Ali

**S**eva is a Sanskrit word that means "selfless service." It is a fundamental practice in all the world's great religions. While many today volunteer their time in a secular spirit, Seva connotes spiritual practice done with the intention of union with the Divine through service to humanity. It is the blood coursing through the veins of greats such as Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and so many unknowns throughout human history.

Seva taps into an important, universal aspect of the human experience: the heartfelt impulse to "help out." It is the reach from the heart, life force, breath, and hands that connects us to others physically and on a deeper, more subtle level. Quite simply, Seva is compassion in action.

In Seva, we experience a deep peace and sense of well-being, knowing that we are doing something good to help another without any expectation of praise. Seva is a path of action intended to alleviate the suffering of others while utilizing our skills, talents, and personality constructively and acting in harmony with our values. The practice becomes transformative.

My Guru, Sri Donato, emphasized that Seva is more important today than ever: as mobile devices have become permanent fixtures in our lives, we use our hands less and less to help others.

**"Our real happiness and health consisted in a proper use of our hands."  
—M. K. Gandhi**

Seva produces tangible results: decreases in stress hormones, blood pressure, cancer, depression, and anxiety; improved immune system; and happy, thriving, well-adjusted adults with respect for others and spiritual common sense.

Opportunities for Seva always present themselves; the key is to say yes!

**Gopi Ona-Ali** teaches yoga and meditation at an offline Lay-Monastery in Long Beach. She has been a monastic for several years offering seva to her community.





# Ahimsa and Higher Education

## Giving a Voice to English Language Learners and their Families

By Stephanie Seabolt



Teachers, by nature, are givers. We would do anything to help our students and their families. We are often involved in book, food and clothing drives to assist our students who are in need.

During my nineteen years as an English Language Learner teacher, I came to realize that the one area of giving that needed attention was to give our English Learners (ELs) and their families a voice. In a sense, because they may neither be proficient in the dominant language nor understand cultural nuances, they have been silenced. Quite often their background knowledge and prior experiences are not valued in the classroom because they differ from mainstream America. However, I urge you to take part in a paradigm shift and delve into the rich cultural knowledge that our EL students and their families bring into the classroom. Two ways to do this include tapping into family funds of knowledge and advocating for EL students.

*Funds of knowledge*, a concept developed by Luis Moll and his colleagues, include all of the cultural knowledge and cultural understandings of how the world works. They encompass family traditions, beliefs, values, activities, professions, and prior educational experiences. You might ask, "How can I learn this?" One way is to take part in home visits. I encourage all teachers to visit the homes of their students. In doing so, you learn about the daily lives of your students and their families. You can ask them to share their experiences, both in their native country and in the United States. You can learn about their work experiences, cultural traditions, daily activities, and beliefs. The key is to listen mindfully and without judgment, which in turn gives ELs and their families a voice. Another way to learn about your students' lives is to tour the neighborhood in which they live. What kinds of stores might they go to? What types of services are offered? What types of churches are located in their neighborhood? Once you gather this knowledge, you will have a better understanding of your students and their families.

When I taught ELs, I decided to do home visits and tour my students' neighborhoods with the inten-

tion of integrating their experiences and cultural understandings into my lessons. I gained a great deal of knowledge and understanding from visiting the home and from mindfully listening to the stories the families were willing to share. By touring the neighborhood, I discovered not only churches that offered services in Spanish and English but also Islamic temples and ashrams, tax and insurance companies that provided bilingual services, and hair salons and clothing stores that catered to Latino families. I also discovered ethnic grocery stores and restaurants, many of which were owned and operated by the parents of my students.

With this new knowledge in hand, I set out to create lessons that tapped into my students' funds of knowledge. I learned that the father of one of my students owned a grocery store, which led to the development of a multi-disciplinary unit on food. I took pictures of the food products sold in his store to use for reading, math, and speaking activities. My EL students were able to connect with the foods because they were familiar with them. They were able to talk to their peers about the types of foods they eat in their homes. In role-play scenarios, we worked in and purchased foods from a grocery store. The students calculated what they could purchase based on a specific amount of play money they had. We read recipes that used the products from the grocery store. As a final activity, I invited the mother of one of my students in to demonstrate how to make tamales and to share them with the class. She graciously accepted my invitation, and it was a wonderful experience for all. Integrating funds of knowledge into lessons supports the educational experiences of ELs and also supports an additive rather than deficit model of learning. All students benefit from this

Advocacy is another way of supporting EL students and their families to ensure they have a voice. First and foremost, inform EL parents of their rights. Talk to them about educational policies that affect their children, and let them know that they have a right to voice their opinions and concerns. Advocate for proper instruction in mainstream classes, ensure that ELs are properly identified, and assist content teachers in providing necessary instructional support. Lastly, advocate for placement of EL students in gifted programs, if applicable. Too often, ELs are overlooked for these programs simply as a result of a language barrier. In my experience, my EL students quite often were gifted, but their parents did not have

sufficient information about the program.

As a teacher, strive to give a voice to your EL students and their families. Their experiences should be acknowledged, embraced, and included in the curriculum. You can begin this journey by listening mindfully to their voices without judgment.

*Stephanie Sebolt is an Assistant Professor in the College of Education at Mary Baldwin University in Staunton, VA.*

## In Pursuit of Ahimsa in a Global Classroom: War and Peace in Literature

By Daan Pan

In traditional Indian culture, "the highest dharma is ahimsa, non-violence, universal love for all living creatures; for every kind of violence is a violation of dharma, the fundamental law of the unity of life" (Easwaran: 32).

As an interdisciplinary course integral to the Ahimsa mission, our class, ENG235 War and Peace in Literature, studies the literary representation of war and peace from cross-cultural and interdisciplinary perspectives. Examining war and peace in terms of sociocultural history and cultural values, this course cultivates a genuine understanding of the nature and roots of war as the ultimate manifestation of violence and explores how literary visions of peace and nonviolence may impact the relationship between individuals, groups, and nations. The holistic knowledge and critical thinking skills thus gained foster a global vision of ahimsa that transcends cultural borders.

This course encourages students to develop their own critical perspectives on war and peace by thinking outside the box. In reading *The Iliad*, for example, we analyze the cause for the Trojan War by exploring the implications of the word "rage," which begins this epic, and by examining the plausibility of the war prompted partly by Achilles's rageful impulse. We also explore Homer's authorial intention behind the graphic dramatization of combat violence in comparison with the ekphrastic juxtaposition of battlefield scenes and peaceful scenes of civilian life emblazoned on the shield of Achilles, particularly the scene showing the judges adjudicating a civil dispute.

In reading *The Bhagavad Gita*, we make sense of Arjuna's initial reservations about waging war by examining the cogency of his argument vis-a-vis Krishna's persuasion. We also analyze Arjuna's philosophy of war in terms of the traditional Chinese concept of

*Continued on following page*

Continued from page 4

martial spirit, in which a warrior's ability to prevent or to end a war is deemed true martial prowess. Furthermore, we compare Arjuna with Achilles in terms of their respective approaches to fighting a war and also with Dr. Robert Oppenheimer and his poignant invocation of *The Bhagavad Gita* (Chapter 11: 32; Easwaran 198) in terms of their Dharmic dilemma.

In reading *The Pianist*, we focus on the paradox of war, exploring the German officer's display of chivalry at the physical, emotional, and spiritual levels and its underlying spirit of peace and universal compassion. In reference to Pastor Martin Niemöller's famous lines written about the Holocaust, we propose a compelling premise that tolerance of violence constitutes a form of veiled violence in itself.

In reading *Hiroshima*, we focus on the ethics of war by engaging the controversies surrounding the publication of this book as well as its subject. "Does the nuclear bombing of the two Japanese cities constitute an act of violence or a legitimate yet violent act of stopping the violence of war?" Thought-provoking questions such as this are asked in class. Again, we refer to Dr. Oppenheimer's quote from *The Bhagavad Gita* when we explore the symbolism of Miss Sasaki being crushed and crippled by books in terms of the killing power of nuclear science.

In reading *Baghdad Burning*, we explore the emotional and psychological impact of war on Iraqi civilians, along with the sociocultural implications of their poignant responses to wartime violence and passionate longing for peace. Engaging the ongoing controversy about the legitimacy of the Iraqi war, we develop hypothetical scenarios in which Achilles and Arjuna make their respective decisions about whether to wage the war.

In this class, open-minded lectures and discussions are complemented with student-led workshops as a form of critical self-empowerment in a learning-centered environment. Such a heuristic ambience enables us to cultivate a sharpened awareness of the universal applicability of Ahimsa in our concerted advocacy of global peace and nonviolence.



**Dr. Da'an Pan** is Professor in the Department of English and Foreign Languages at Cal Poly Pomona. His field of research is Comparative Literature. Among other courses, he teaches a course on War and Peace in Literature as part of the Nonviolence Studies Minor.

## Forgiveness: An Approach to Improve the Quality of Life in the Academy



The broad mission of the academy at its best is truth-seeking. This mission requires long relationships with diverse people, opening oneself to criticism and offering criticism in turn. Frequently, the academy creates unfriendly com-

petition and hurtful criticism, and it places priorities in conflict. My paper relates the extensive scholarship addressing forgiveness in the academic workplace. I suggest that deliberately practicing forgiveness may help people to have more fruitful lives in the academy. Furthermore, I suggest that deliberately cultivating a forgiving climate via leadership choices can improve the entire academy.

Forgiveness, of course, does not mean that one silently tolerates injuries. Instead, the goal of forgiveness is overcoming internal turmoil to have a more satisfying life. The main strategy for responding forgivingly is to engage in compassionate reappraisal, a practiced habit of thought whereby positive rather than negative thoughts are emphasized,

**Forgiveness does not mean that one silently tolerates injuries. Instead, the goal of forgiveness is overcoming internal turmoil to have a more satisfying life.**

particularly acknowledging the offender as a fellow member of the community. The practices of compassionate reappraisal help us to see an offender not as evil and alien but, instead, to understand our shared, flawed humanity within the academic community.

Forgiveness carries risks, especially for people who are less powerful than the offender. Obviously, "forgiving" someone without holding him or her accountable may lead to further offenses and perpetuate injustices. Reconciliation without forgiveness often occurs when the offender is more powerful than the injured person. Finally, whatever benefits of personal peace it may provide, for-

giveness may not solve the actual problem leading to the offense. Therefore, forgiveness should be approached wisely.

Academic leaders create organizational climate. To encourage a forgiving climate, three main leadership actions stand out: developing one's own personal forgiveness skills, including compassion and temperance; documenting growth, instead of keeping a record of wrongs or not holding people accountable for problems; and emphasizing common identity rather than separation. Also, conflict resolution skills—such as remaining calm, listening actively, clarifying and reframing, eliciting multiple perspectives, etc.—are very relevant to leaders' enactment of a forgiving climate.

It is not my intention to make forgiveness sound easy or cheap, but to offer it as an idea to strengthen the academy. We all lose some of our ability to reach our true goals in the academy when we cannot construct peace in response to offenses. As Gandhi said, "The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is an attribute of the strong." The academy, increasingly vulnerable to external forces, needs its people to be strong.

\*Summary of a longer article under consideration of publication

**Dr. Victoria Bhavsar** is the Director of the Faculty Center for Professional Development and the eLearning team at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. She also teaches in the Plant Science Department in the College of Agriculture.

## Gender and Structural Violence

By Anjana Narayan

Peace researcher Johan Galtung formulated the concept of structural violence in his 1969 path-breaking essay titled "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research." He asserts that while direct violence is "the



type of violence where there is an actor that commits the violence as personal or direct" (5), structural violence is indirect, wherein "there may not be any person who directly harms another person in the

Higher Ed Section continued on page 11



## Center Hosts Darbari Seth Foundation Conference on Nonviolence GIVING AND FORGIVING

In November 2016 the Ahimsa Center hosted its seventh biannual conference on nonviolence, named after Darbari Seth Foundation, with a focus on the theme Giving and Forgiving. The university recognized the Foundation for its generous support of the Center.



Seen in the picture above (from the left) and holding the Proclamation are Mr. Rabin Lai and Mrs. Dolly Lai (Chairwoman of the Foundation and daughter of the late Mr. Seth); Dr. Coley, the University President; Dr. Hilles, the Dean of the College of Letter, Arts and Social Sciences; and Dr. Sethia, the Center Director.

This two and half-day conference drew upon distinguished speakers, selected panelists and experts from multiple disciplines and fields of knowledge, who shared their insights on the conference themes and topics. The conference was well attended by an academic and non-academic audience, including members of the larger community.

The first day of the conference began with three experts on giving and forgiving: James R. Doty, the founding Director of the Stanford Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and professor of neurosurgery at Stanford; Linda Biehl, the Co-Founder and Director of the Amy Biehl Foundation; and Gianfranco Zaccai, the Co-Founder of Continuum LLC Worldwide. In the afternoon an interdisciplinary panel featuring selected panelists from US and abroad discussed the ethics and methods of giving and forgiving.

The first day concluded with Dr. Jenny Phillips, Film Producer and Director, speaking about the impact and significance of giving and forgiving on the incarcerated. The screening of her latest film, *Beyond the Wall*, was followed by a vibrant dialogue with the audience.

Day two of the conference was inaugurated by Marina Cantacuzino, an award winning journalist from UK, and Nancy Scheper-Hughes, Chancellor's Professor of Medical Anthropology at University of California, Berkeley. They engaged the audience in their narratives of forgiveness and reconciliation.

This was followed by a session on "Healing the Past, Creating the Future," featuring Lyndon Harris, Tigg's Pond Retreat Center (NC), and John Viscount, Peace Now Com. The session concluded with the showing of a powerful and timely short film, *Admissions*.

The afternoon session featured diverse group panelists who deliberated on many aspects of forgiveness in the context of self, religion and culture. Day two concluded with *Forgive for Good* by the closing speaker, Dr. Fred Luskin, Stanford University Forgiveness Project. He discussed why forgiveness is good for the self and others and demonstrated it by a guiding practice.

Day three opened with Mrs. Triveni Acharya, President of the Rescue Foundation, who had powerful stories to share about the important work that she and her foundation does in rescuing young girls from sex trafficking and initiating their rehabilitation in society.

The session was followed by two teaching-centered panels featuring higher education and K-12 educators who powerfully connected teaching with giving and explored in multiple ways the role and impact of forgiveness in schools and colleges, on students and colleagues and, of course, on the self.

### ENGAGED AUDIENCE AT THE CONFERENCE



Center Hosts 2017 Ahimsa Public Lecture



**CAROLYN J. LUKENSMEYER**, the Executive Director of the [National Institute for Civil Discourse](#), is a leader in the field of deliberative democracy. As a Founder and President of America Speaks, she has engaged more than 165,000 people and has hosted events across all 50 states and throughout the world. Dr. Lukensmeyer was a Consultant to White House Chief of Staff (1993-94), and the Chief of Staff to Ohio Governor Richard F. Celeste from 1986-91, becoming the first woman to serve in this capacity. In her talk she underscored the need for civility in political discourse to facilitate the effective working of our democracy.



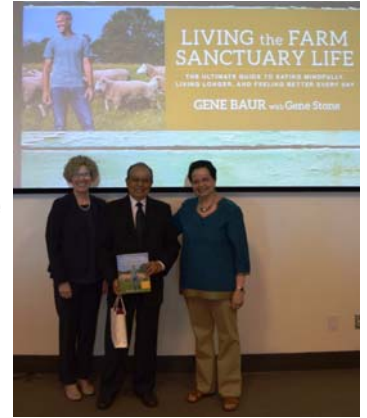
The audience in dialogue with speaker, Dr. Lukensmeyer



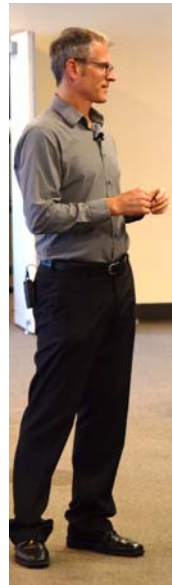
From right to left: Bipin Shah, Center Advisor & Sponsor; Carolyn Lukensmeyer, the speaker; Tara Sethia, the Center Director; Nirmal Sethia; and friends of the Center.

Girish and Datta Shah Ahimsa Public Lecture 2016

The Center's 2016 annual public lecture, named after Girish and Datta Shah, was delivered by Gene Baur on the topic "**Ahimsa for the Plate and the Planet,**" exploring the harmful impact of animal products on human health and the environment.



Dean Hilles (above) with Mr. Girish Shah & T Sethia



**GENE BAUR** is the Co-Founder and President of the Farm Sanctuary, America's leading farm animal protection organization. Hailed as "the conscience of the food movement" by *TIME* magazine, Baur has traveled extensively over the last 30 years, campaigning to raise awareness about the abuses of industrialized factory farming. He is the author of *Living the Farm Sanctuary Life: The Ultimate Guide to Eating Mindfully*, (Rodale, 2015). [www.farmsanctuary.org](http://www.farmsanctuary.org)

Below: Baur delivering the public lecture



Peace Concert Featuring Arohi Ensemble



This compelling peace concert on Saturday, November 19, 2017, featured five versatile artists: **Paul Z. Livingstone, Pedro Eustache, Peter Jacobson, Dave Lewis** and **Neal Agrawal**. For details about **The Soul Force** journey with the Arohi Ensemble, celebrating the redemptive power and relevance of nonviolence, visit: <http://www.soulforceproject.com/>



# Ahimsa and K-12 Education

## The Temper of the Times: Against Uncivil Disobedience

By Sam McHale



Goethe bemoaned his times, saying, “What kind of a time is this when one must envy the dead and buried!” Over a century later, Randall Jarrell pointed out that “the taste of the age is, al-

ways, a bitter one,” for even the people who live in a Golden Age spend much of their time complaining about how yellow everything is. And yet, Goethe’s age produced Goethe and thus could not have been all bad; Jarrell’s age produced Jarrell himself, a poet and critic of unusual circumspection and wisdom. What have our times begot?

If the majority of your news is filtered through the echo chamber of social media, then your answer to that question might well be, “nothing good.” The Internet of the political left unanimously declared 2016 the worst year ever, and despite meager attempts by the *New Yorker* to suggest that perhaps the year of the Black Death (1348) or the Spanish Influenza (1919) might have been worse, liberals seemed largely unswayed.

Although a surge in terror attacks, the threat of Zika, and the continued demise of Syria certainly contributed to this sentiment, it now appears that the swinging of the political pendulum is what tipped the scales for many. Brexit and the rise of nationalism in Europe signaled a departure from the politics of globalization and liberalization, while the election of Donald Trump in the United States seemed a tacit endorsement--if not a renaissance--of racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, and many of the other discredited but not yet discarded prejudices of the previous century.

I admit I am worried about the temper of our times and the fate of our country. I am worried about what the future holds for the millions of Americans who share the bounty of this land, and for the billions of people outside our borders who look to America to do its outsize part in keeping the world prosperous and safe. My concern, however, is not exclusively focused on the current occupant of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, for I believe that we all share

the responsibility to direct the course of local and global events. If we are now living in a dark age, it is only because we have accepted the invitation to turn off the light.

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The current movement to oppose President Trump, with its marches and protests, calls forth the optics of the Civil Rights Movement. In doing so, it implies a parallel with Dr. King and seeks to establish itself as the sole occupant of the moral high ground. However, the current movement lacks a little of the purpose and much of the purity of that earlier movement, and I am not convinced that Trump’s critics always comport themselves in a manner befitting those who claim the high ground. I am confident saying this because, as a critic of Donald Trump, I have been ashamed to find myself harboring some rather dark thoughts over the past few months. What if the president got caught doing something illegal and was impeached? What if he ruined the economy and made himself a one-term president? What if he just died--not violently, but naturally, in his sleep, of old age? I suspect I’m not alone in thinking such thoughts, especially if the signs at some of the recent rallies are any indication: “Flush this turd,” “Let’s punch this Nazi,” “F--- Trump,” and “Trump is scum,” to name a few.

In short, it seems our disobedience has become uncivil. It is difficult to imagine John Lewis or Diane Nash holding up signs that said “LBJ is Scum” or “F--- Governor Wallace.” The nonviolent movement of the 1960s was successful in large part because activists were able to separate unjust policies from the wayward souls who enacted and enforced them. The difference between Martin Luther King and many of Trump’s critics is that Dr. King had faith in the humanity of his oppressors, especially when those oppressors seemed most unworthy. That faith allowed him to show mercy to his opponents, converting them to his cause; it gave him the power to bestow upon them the gift of salvation and to hew out of a broken world a better future for all.

After all, it’s when mercy is least expected that it is “strong enough to break the cycle of victimization and victimhood, retribution and suffering,” as Bryan Stevenson says and as history confirms. In 1965, John Lewis and other activists began a march from Selma to Montgomery to demand federal legislation to protect the voting rights of African-Americans. As they crossed the Edmund Pettus

Bridge, they were met with the tear gas and nightsticks of Sheriff Jim Clark’s officers. The scars John Lewis received when his skull was fractured on that Bloody Sunday are still visible to this day. Undeterred, the marchers eventually reassembled and carried on. Buoyed by music, they sang the old freedom song “We Love Everybody” on the road to Montgomery. Beaten and bloodied, they still had the heart to ad-lib a few verses in the nonviolent tradition:

“We love Governor Wallace in our heart / we love the state troopers in our heart.” They did not sing “We Love Half of You,” or “We Love Our Friends and Hate Our Enemies,” but “We Love Everybody.” It is possible that President Trump is impervious to mercy and decency, but there is only one way to find out.

The current administration won’t make it easy. It revels in attention and thrives in campaign mode, where combativeness is a virtue. President Trump’s rhetoric and behavior are often fine-tuned to call forth our most base instincts by inviting us to descend into that dark arena where contempt replaces civility. Hillary Clinton found herself there when she called President Trump’s supporters a “basket of deplorables.” It is my hope that President Trump’s critics will take a wiser approach: praise any decency in the Administration (the President’s desire to halt Israeli settlements, for instance, or the Vice President’s efforts to help clean up the recently vandalized Jewish cemetery in St. Louis) and meet the worst actions of the Administration with disobedience that is truly civil.

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In dark times, I turn to Abraham Lincoln for light. “We are not enemies, but friends--we must not be enemies,” he wrote as war approached. Lincoln hoped to hear “the chorus of the union swell yet again” as the “better angels of our nature” prevailed. His plea went unheard in 1861, but I hope it does not today. Though the taste of our age may be acerbic, our age has produced not just Zika and Trump and Syria, but also us. So let’s make our disobedience civil and redirect the temper of our times. In the process, we may just make ourselves worthy of an age a little less bitter.

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## Ahimsa Healing and Critical Hope

By Maria Cristina Malo

Nine years ago, when teaching at Hoover High School, I received a staff e-mail from my principal just before heading home for the day. It mentioned an institute on Gandhi and ahimsa. The words that most caught my attention were "nonviolence in thought and action." There was immediately a call to action from deep within my soul. That night I sat at my computer to type a statement of purpose that was to be submitted the very next day, when the application was due. I wrote all night. And, some of the most painful memories in my life materialized into words.

Like the time I got in a fist fight with my mother. I was so angry at her. I wanted to show her that I was stronger than her—that even though I wasn't good enough to be loved, I could still stand up for myself. I raged against all the times she left for months at a time, and against all the men who had been in and out of her life because, like me, she was searching for love. We tossed and tumbled across the living room floor. She was my enemy. The next day I submitted my application and was soon awarded a chance to transform my life in ways I could have never imagined. The most powerful education about nonviolence for my students would have to begin with my own healing process.

The acceptance of my own pain also inspired the compassionate recognition of the pain of my students. Many urban youth of color grow up in debilitating, impoverished, and violent environments; they are twice more likely to suffer PTSD than soldiers returning from combat. Drawing analogies from Tupac Shakur's music and poetry, I see them as roses growing in concrete—despite the multiple negative stressors in their lives, they have the grit to rise toward the sun. Concrete is void of light and nutrients and full of toxins. By no biological measure should a rose be able to survive, let alone sprout, in such inhospitable conditions. The endurance of our children proves they are more than damaged petals.

Through ahimsa, I have come to believe in "critical hope," what Dr. Duncan-Andrade terms the cure for this toxic stress. Such hope takes various forms: material resources to provide our children's basic needs; the ways we model healing, grace, love and dignity; the action of travelling the painful path with our students; and our audacity to believe in them. I became a hope-dealer only when I found hope through my own healing and my own truth, encouraged by the Ahimsa Institute.

Now, I look for the courage to bring hope to

my students, despite their turbid lives, overwhelmed daily by violence, deception, and fear. On the surface, they look like ordinary teenagers walking the halls with over-exuberant personalities, secretive language codes, electronic gadgets, and mainstream-yet-unique clothing styles—all varnished with a thin coat of coolness. Underneath, however, they are untamed, with anger and resentment percolating, waiting for any trigger to set off an explosion. Many do not have anyone to help them deal with the unrest, nor with all of the residual baggage. Some resort to symptomatic behaviors such as gang and relationship violence, verbal disrespect, and self-mutilation, creating a web of destruction for themselves, their families, and their communities. However, students who are empowered by knowledge and skills, and who feel they have control of their lives and future, are more likely to act in positive, constructive ways.

I have a responsibility to show students how to use self-transformation to fight for social justice and to change their communities. Healing alone, however, is not enough to break through the concrete. As a result, I am constantly connecting my students to the work of activism and organizing in the community. I volunteer with Border Angels (focusing on immigration issues and human rights), with the Tariq Khamisa Foundation (teaching restorative practice, healing circles, and forgiveness workshops), and with the Alternative to Violence Project (helping prison inmates understand healing). Using the ethics of ahimsa, I engage students in healing practices and community work, inspiring them to be the next generation of change agents. As an English teacher, I allow them to choose literature that will both help them to master academic skills and to guide them to an elevated level of self-discovery and healing.

I am eternally thankful to Dr. Sethia for planting the seed of nonviolence in my heart through the Ahimsa Institute. When I accepted the fellowship, I was a deeply-wounded bird, searching for a reason bigger than myself to be. This journey of forgiveness, healing, and awakening has led me to discover great love within myself—a love that allows me to see that I am everything, and everything is in me.



### **Maria Cristina Malo**

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## Mindful Teaching and Receptivity

By Danita Dodson



In scientific terms, *receptivity* denotes the clarity of waves of light and sound dispatched from a sender to a receiver. A pristine reception is impacted both by the transmission and the

absorption of garnered signals. Analogously, great teachers move organically with the waves of communication, not only conveying ideas but also tuning in to myriad messages relayed by students. The poet Rumi has written, "If you wish for light, be ready to receive light." While giving and forgiving in great abundance, mindful teachers also receive in multifaceted ways.

Recently, I have found myself voicing a prayer each morning: "Let me *receive* today. Let me receive the smiles of others, their attention, their endeavors and offerings. Let me never grow too weary or busy to be blessed by these." But also, "Let me willingly receive the frowns, the inattention, the haphazard attempts, the corrupt words, the pain." Maybe this prayer has emerged from an increased understanding that teachers are vessels. Our minds are ampoules of knowledge, our hearts are conduits of emotions, and our bodies are intermediaries of the subtle violence of florescent lights and fatigue. Furthermore, because our classrooms mirror society, we receive the reality that our youth carry with them all the gritty tensions of their homes, their communities, and their nation.

Though educators are often expected to shape learners into homogenies that fall within a statistical range, we dehumanize the learning process if we fail to realize how redemptive pedagogy can transform humanity. If ever there was a time to make our classrooms the ground-zero of ahimsa, that time is now. Gandhi has shown us that such an education is not idealistic but practical, for it points the way to *swaraj*, or freedom. Providing an amenable space for exploration and expression, classrooms can become like reception banquets—venues for communing and experiencing the essential humanity of others.

In such classrooms, there exists an essential art to receiving. Comparable to a thanksgiving prayer that implores grace upon the food set before us, receptivity requires mindful acceptance of whatever is to come. Gratitude initiates the receiving process.

## Ahimsa & K-12 Education

When we are thankful for our jobs and use them to serve others graciously, we fully receive the blessing. Everything that is encountered—positive or negative, triumph or tragedy—seems thus an offering of each daily pedagogical task as a way to help heal our land.

Gandhi's *Talisman* is a vital tool for receiving with gratitude. Its words offer a bequest: "I will give you a talisman. . . . Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest . . . and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use." Empathy lies at the heart of receptivity, for giving and forgiving require recognition of need. To acknowledge the suffering face of a student or a colleague, to reach into unfathomable compassion, is to accept the visage as a blessing for the recipient too. As it humbly moves us beyond ego and expectation, this receptivity grants the ability to accept all others as fellow travelers on life's journey.

As kindred journeyers, receptive teachers benefit from what their learners impart. More than instances I recall when I *have* given or forgiven are moments when I *have been* given and forgiven. I have read essays and often cried because of the beauty of my students' spirits. I have been baptized in grace by confessions of wisdom, gratitude, and joy—and by trinkets, flowers, and cookies. But sometimes the gift is an allowance for *my* shortcomings. Because a teacher can sometimes carry personal pain into the learning circle, perhaps there are days / might even have been perceived as the "face of the poorest and the weakest."

Through such epiphanies, I have discovered that teachers have an amazing opportunity to guide their learners to be much more receptive to each other and to the world around them. Introducing students to service-learning and social-justice projects gives them chances to consider suffering and compassionate action. Another idea is to have them read and discuss literature with the themes of *giving* and *forgiving*—what they receive through narrative empathy can generate a bold discourse about these actions in their own lives. This lesson plan powerfully enhanced my own students' nonviolent communication skills as they returned to my classroom on November 9, 2016, with conflicting views about the election results.

As we receive together, we cultivate diversity, derived from the organic convergence within what Gandhi termed an "oceanic circle" of experience, where all "share the majesty . . . of which they are integral units." Connoting boundlessness, the ocean signifies flux, where everything belongs and where divisions dissipate. This inter-connectedness arises

from the receptivity generated by *satyagraha*, the truth force that creates an incalculable landscape of aptitudes and possibilities. In this communal space of multiplicity, where *all* children are accepted—where their differences are received—we emulate a unified vision, what Jonathan Lear terms the "radical hope" that can flow into their external communities.

Receptivity is rooted in an optimism that hope and healing will come like holy manna to famished souls. As Rabindranath Tagore said, "Everything comes to us that belongs to us if we create the capacity to receive it." When teachers receive on a daily basis, we foster reconciliation, diffusing the lessons of the microcosm out into the macrocosm.

*Danita Dodson, a 2015 Ahimsa Fellow, teaches high school Spanish and English in East Tennessee.*

### ***The Giving Tree: A Lesson in Kindness, Giving, and Forgiving*** By Mayra Aguilera



Each year I read Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree* to my kindergarten class. The story is time-

less: once there was a tree who loved a boy. They were inseparable in youth, but other interests took priority as he grew—romantic relationships, career, and family. The boy took from the tree, and the tree gave until she had nothing left to give and was ultimately reduced to a mere stump. Because the boy was the tree's life, she was the happiest when spending time with him; however, the tree was only a small part of the boy's life, and he only sought her when he was in need. This beautiful story, complex in meaning, offers a profound lesson in what I term *KFG* (kindness, forgiving, and giving).

*The Giving Tree* allows teachers an opportunity to ask many crucial questions and to lead students in a deeper meditation on ahimsa. Does the tree give just to make the boy happy, or in hopes of spending time with him? Is it love when someone only uses another person? Is the tree blinded by love? Or is she showing kindness—the ultimate form of giving and forgiveness? Has she already accepted an apology that she will never receive because she holds onto what is left of the old days of gathering leaves and playing king of the forest? Is any of that memory left in the boy? Do we

also hold onto pieces of our old selves even when those traits no longer define us? These questions can help guide young learners to reflect upon their own identities and to weigh self-knowledge in relation to others in their lives.

In a study of *The Giving Tree*, the teacher can explore with students how initial experiences define and create the norms by which we treat each other as our relationships transpire. Also implicit is the idea that we should treat each other in reaction to our ever-changing identities and present activities. In discussing the tree's blind optimism and love for the boy, and also the way her life is greatly impacted by his egocentrism, a teacher can lead students to contemplate whether becoming a stump is indeed the tree's fate. Are some of our destinies only to give ourselves for the benefit of others? Is this the final form of kindness, forgiving, and giving—when we give the shirts off our own backs? If one truly loves others, he or she will help them grow and become independent so they can reach their full potential; it is then that they are able to give the best of themselves to humanity. In this regard, *The Giving Tree* can introduce, early in life, complex yet beautiful lessons to help young children live more fully as they grow.

Teaching kindness, forgiving, and giving (KFG) in kindergarten involves a lot of modeling. Educators need to embody the kind of person they wish their students to be. Every day we are given a plethora of opportunities to personify KFG in our classrooms and daily lives. Those who react with anger, frustration, and violence do not know KFG and must learn from those who do. This takes much effort on the part of the teachers and needs to be rooted in a foundation of love that is created intentionally. You forgive your students because you know and believe in their potential, because you care about their spiritual and mental health, because you understand that they are products of their environments, and, ultimately, because you love them.

As educators, we must provide the environment for KFG to thrive. We must show KFG and intentionally seek out moments to highlight and celebrate our students when they also show KFG. In aspiring to create such an atmosphere, I find that, year after year, *The Giving Tree* challenges the way I look at kindness, forgiveness, and giving—not just because of my own reflections, but also because of the reflections of my students.

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structure. The violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances" (40). This distinction provides a useful framework to understand the global phenomenon of violence against women (VAW). The dominant discourse surrounding women's experiences of violence is consistently framed as a direct form of violence perpetrated by pathological individuals from "deviant" families and oppressive cultures who inflict physical and psychological harm on women. This conceptualization ignores a wider pattern of systemic inequality and marginalization that disadvantages women and constrains their agency.

Over the past few decades, VAW campaigns have focused on providing services to victims of direct forms of violence such as intimate partner violence, rape, female genital mutilation, etc. through awareness, legislation, advocacy, and psychological services. While such intervention is extremely important, it is increasingly viewed as symptomatic relief from the consequences of structural oppression. Rather than an exclusive emphasis on the personal and interpersonal solutions, there should be a simultaneous focus on challenging the existing social order that perpetuates inequality and oppression of women. According to UN estimates, one in three women are victims of gender-based violence. It is the largest cause of injury and death to women, higher than deaths due to cancer, malaria, and war. More than 75% of the world's illiterate adults are women. Every 90 seconds, a woman dies during pregnancy or childbirth. Women make up 80% of all refugees and displaced people. Women account for only 16% of legislators in national parliaments. Finally, women are rarely represented in formal processes that aim to end violence and initiate peace. Overall, women are structurally disadvantaged when it comes to access to education, income, health, power, and decision-making. This structural inequality causes and promotes the more direct forms of violence that women experience.

In order to address the paucity of structural perspectives in mainstream understandings of violence against women, it is important to highlight the important contributions by feminist scholars. First, feminist researchers have argued that it is important to understand that oppression has no hierarchy. There are few pure oppressors and pure victims (Collins 2000), and we all are complicit to some degree to the various forms of violence and oppression in our society. Second, violence experienced by women is systemic and institutional and takes the form of a whole range of injustices such as extreme poverty, sexism, racism, colonialism, and other inequities whose legacies and realities cause equal or more harm than direct forms of violence. Third, we need to raise awareness of the experiences of women from various backgrounds--such as women with disabilities, immigrant women, LGBTQ women, etc.--to legitimate that violence is experienced differently by different groups of women and that gender is not the only reason behind their marginalized status. In other words, the women's movement needs to move beyond a focus on women's issues and fight actively against all forms of oppression. Finally, feminists argue that all forms of violence are gendered, and they emphasize the need for all resistance and peace movements to incorporate more gender awareness into their actions and campaigns.

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- Anjana Narayan** is an Associate Professor of Sociology at California State Polytechnic University Pomona. Her areas of interest include race, gender, ethnicity, and migration. She is co-author of *Living Our Religions: Hindu and Muslims Asian American Women Narrate Their Experiences* (2009) and co-editor of *Research beyond Borders: Interdisciplinary Reflections* (2012); and *The Living Gandhi* (2013).

## Ahimsa Student Club hosts A Dialogue with Donna Hill Tolerance in a Segregated State

January 30, 2017



**Donna Hill** taught at the Cleveland Humanities Magnet High School for more than three decades where she developed and

taught social studies curriculum that introduced students to important global issues, nonviolence philosophy, and the culture and history of the United States through the lens of class, race, and gender. She was a ahimsa fellow in the 2005 inaugural Institute hosted by the Center for K-12 educators on the theme of nonviolence and social change.

### IN MEMORIAM



With much sadness we note the passing of **Mr. Pravin Mody** (1940–2016), one of the most enthusiastic and leading sponsors of the Ahimsa Center. He lived a great life, supporting many educational and humanitarian causes in U.S. and in India. His active engagement with ahimsa programs and initiatives will be sorely missed.

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## ABOUT THE AHIMSA CENTER

Established in 2003 in the College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, the Ahimsa Center is focused on interdisciplinary teaching and learning about nonviolence and its practical applications at personal, interpersonal, societal, national, and international levels. Educational and outreach initiatives of the Center facilitate an understanding of ahimsa as a positive force informing the ways of thinking as well as living.

The Center provides an institutional forum to innovatively serve and foster synergistic interactions among many important stakeholders in higher education, K-12 education, and the community at large.

Educational initiatives of the Center, such as the interdisciplinary Minor in Nonviolence Studies on our campus, help students understand nonviolence and nonviolent social change at intellectual and practical levels and in a global context.

To integrate in the K-12 curricula an interdisciplinary understanding of nonviolence and nonviolent social change, the Center has launched a fellowship program for the K-12 educators and offers summer institutions for them. Finally, for the benefits of the larger community, the Center organizes conferences, symposia, lectures, dialogues, workshops, and special events focusing on a deeper understanding of nonviolence as a way of life.

The Center is playing a pioneering role by fostering a vision in which each individual is an important player in the building and sustaining a culture of nonviolence. It is a vision for cooperation and collaboration among fellow human beings on the basis of mutual respect, trust, and self restraint. It is a vision where one sees that any violence inflicted on others is a violence inflicted on oneself.

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## India@Seventy International Conference Building a More Inclusive Democracy Cal Poly Pomona, November 3-5, 2017

Join us in the celebration and deliberation of India's seventy years as an independent nation. And there is much to celebrate—above all, India's democracy, the

world's largest and the most diverse, which not only remains solid and secure at the political level in spite of the challenges it has encountered since its inception, but has also ushered in substantial progress on many fronts. And yet, in what seems like a real paradox, serious concerns about the future of democracy in India are readily discernible. The goals of this conference are to:

- Confirmed Conference Speakers**
- **Amit Ahuja.** Associate Professor of Political Science, UCSB
  - **Rajni Bakshi.** Author & Gandhi Peace Fellow at the Gateway House, India.
  - **Rajmohan Gandhi.** Author, Peace-builder, and Grandson of the Mahatma.
  - **Akhil Gupta.** Director, Center for India & South Asia; Prof. of Anthropology, UCLA.
  - **John Harriss.** Professor, School of International Studies, Simon Fraser University.
  - **Niraja Jayal.** Professor, Centre for the Study of Law and Governance, JNU, India.
  - **Devesh Kapur.** Director Center for the Advanced Study of India (CASI) and the Madan Lal Sobti Professor of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania.
  - **Prakash Kashwan.** Assistant Professor, Political Science, University of Connecticut.
  - **Aishwary Kumar.** Assistant Professor of History, Stanford University.
  - **Vinay Lal.** Professor of History & Asian American Studies, UCLA.
  - **Vijay Mahajan.** Founder of BASIX Group for promoting the livelihood of the poor.
  - **Karuna Mantena.** Associate Professor, Political Science, Yale University.
  - **Eleanor Newbiggin.** Senior Lecturer in History, SOAS, University of London.
  - **Anastasia Piliavsky.** Fellow and Director of Studies in Social Anthropology at Girton College, Cambridge University.
  - **Aruna Roy.** Social and Political activist, Founder of the movement leading to the Right to Information Act in India.
  - **Ornit Shani,** Senior Lecturer, Modern Asian Studies, University of Haifa, Israel.
  - **Prerna Singh.** Mahatma Gandhi Assistant Prof of Political Science, Brown University.
  - **Mrinalini Sinha.** Alice Freeman Palmer Professor of History, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
  - **Ananya Vajpeyi.** Associate Professor, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi, India.

- Examine the dynamics of popular commitment to democracy and the roots of disillusionment with it;
- Explore the ways of strengthening democracy through radical innovations in the delivery of public goods;
- Identify strategies for actively engaging various stakeholders in the actual workings of democracy aimed at making it more inclusive in nature; and
- Deliberate on larger questions such as: Given the challenges democracy faces in today's world, what are the lessons *for* India? And given India's unique experiences as the world's largest and most diverse democracy, what are the lessons *from* India?

**A**round the world, democracy today faces a crisis of confidence. By properly marshalling the power of deliberation among its rich and extraordinary diverse population, India can build a truly inclusive democracy at home and also help resurrect faith in democracy abroad.

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