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Duluth versus Gandhi:

Anger Management and Acts of Nonviolence

A lot of court-ordered anger management follows the "Duluth model" presented in Michael Paymar's Violent No More. The Duluth model begins by questioning how we control family members. How do you get family to do something? The question opens eyes about how we are all potentially aggressive, controlling, or violent. Humans are aggressive. This approach demands participants to detail violent behaviors. The devil is in the details. Offenders have to write how they engage in each violent behavior. Written examples of every homework assignment serve to break through the denial so often a see-through dodge and self-defense of violent men and women. The Duluth Model was a godsend providing guidelines to the criminal justice system, preventing further victimization of the victims, while seeking full responsibility for violence on the part of the offender.

But one disturbing thing about the Duluth-model is the recidivism rate. According to family research, fifty percent of all who complete court-ordered Duluth-model anger management programs will be back in court for a similar offense within five years. I think the Duluth-model inadequately addresses family violence in three ways:

1. If not violent, then what? The intervention fails to clearly propose an alternative way of being family. It simply teaches violent men how to stop. There is another way to be family that is based on nonviolence, peace, and healthy family functioning. In four to six months we can learn to better regulate our aggressive impulses, promote better family functioning following the principles of Family System Theory, and discover ways of asserting who we are in peace.

2. Why are we violent? The Duluth-model fails to identify most sources of violent behavior, wrongly insisting that it only arises from sexist thought. Mr. Paymar insists that family violence arises when men become aggressive because they know they are bigger and more powerful than women and children. Truly, that is one source of family violence.

There are others: Substance abuse, trauma, religious fundamentalism and racism can ignite family violence. We need to know our own reasons we act violently when possessed by aggressive passions. Unless the offender owns his or her own aggressive behavior, he or she will never harness anger and act nonviolently.

3. The Duluth model is not a counseling model. The approach relies on nonprofessionals and fails to draw on effective existing counseling interventions addressing, family violence, anger, sexual inequality, assertiveness, anxiety, depression, trauma, alcoholism, substance abuse and other roots of violence. In the past 140 years of counseling, we have learned a lot about healing emotional problems by addressing thought and behavior. It is a shame not to put this to use to extend nonviolence into modern family system theory.

Gandhi's Nonviolence: Violence arises out of a brute force, a normal human process. The alternative to using brute force is what Gandhi called acts of soul-force (satyagraha). Acts of soul-force functionally lead all to the Truth. In families we are led to discover anew such Truths as children must obey and honor parents, parents must love children unconditionally, authority arises from service, freedom come with responsibility, spouses should love each other, and violent conflict is never healthy for parents and children. In this experiment in truth, we soon find we have no words to describe acts of soul-force.

Our language has no words to describe the opposite of violence (that is why we use "nonviolence"). We speak words like love and peace, but such words do not refer specifically to acts as pointedly as the word violence. Rather, love and peace are also feelings. Mahatma Gandhi attributed this absence of precise vocabulary to the fact that nonviolence is not newsworthy. If someone kills his mother that makes the paper. If a murderer loves his mother, we would hardly find that something to write about. Gandhi reminds us nonviolence and Truth have always been more powerful than violence. Violence cannot stop violence. Family and friends end violence. After war and outpourings of violence, humans go home to love their families and live in peace. Warriors listen to their mothers, children, and friends. Warriors give their hearts to love again.

The opposite of violence is nonviolence. For a family to function, all live fully recognizing that aggression and violence have no place at home. We intensify our reverence for family life. We act nonviolently in our families. If I juxtaposed these in a table it would look like this:

Violence	Nonviolence (Gandhi's "Ahimsa")
relies on brute force	relies on soul force or Truth
strikes fear or terror	kindles love
creates a winner and loser (a victim and perpetrator)	creates a change in heart for all (both sides find the Truth)
there is something in it for the "winner" (seeks personal gain);	there is nothing in it for the peacemaker (other than more Truth and love)

Nonviolence begins with this change of heart, a commitment to take creative control of our aggressive urges and the dedication to put these impulses to work to seek Truth. By turning the heart toward nonviolence (and away from violence), one learns to only act nonviolently when angry, frustrated, hurt, anxious, depressed, jealous, betrayed, needy, paranoid, or re-traumatized. This change in heart is commonly blurred by drunkenness and enhanced by sobriety.

We all have to learn that we have aggressive impulses and that these can turn into acts of violence. Such aggression and violence has no home in our families. The Duluth-model misses this point, when the authors insist that some violence is necessary in self-defense. Mahatma Gandhi argued violence is never necessary. I am less certain than Gandhi that there is no place for aggressive force in law enforcement, corrections, business, and war. But I concur with the Mahatma that there is no home for it among our families and friends. We draw arms around our love ones and friends and declare this zone "violent no more." Then we learn effective parenting strategies, nonviolent ways of relating, marital communication, fair fighting, true intimacy, and emotional regulation. We live out our change of heart by nonviolent words and deeds.

Telling a violent person that there are reasons to be violent, is like telling an alcoholic it is okay to drink socially. "Except in cases of self-defense, there are always alternatives to violence" (*Violent No More*, page 243). Contrast that with Gandhi "Nonviolence is a universal law acting under all circumstances. . . Nonviolence becomes meaningless if violence is permitted for self-defense. . . Nonviolence does not signify that [hu]man[kind] must not fight against the enemy, and by enemy is meant the evil which men do not the human beings themselves. . . Nonviolence is the eradication of the desire to injure or kill . . . Nonviolent life is an act of self-examination and self-purification, whether by the individual, group, or nation."

So if we are going to use parenting strategies, marital intimacies, and codes of conduct that are not violent, which ones do we use? Gandhi points out it is a good first step to stop being violent and refuse to cooperate with violence. But there is so much more to learn about acts of soul-force. He asked us to engage in acts of ahimsa, acts of peace that lead us to the truth. Such acts of soul-force (or satyagraha) are commonly thought of as passive-resistance, but there is nothing passive about it. Gandhi got the British to surrender control of India after 350 years of colonial rule. It took courage to resist the British and many died.

Acts of soul-force often involve self-sacrifice, but never abdication of one's sense of self. We cannot love fully, if we allow others to treat us like a door mat. We have to grow a strong sense of self to avoid codependency. When we create peace, we do not want to win over our opponent, rather we hope all will have a change in heart and follow the Truth. Thus, Gandhi's goal was not to vanquish the British from India, but rather have them accept the Truth about Indian self-rule. We do not make our children obey us because we are bigger, but because it is the right thing to do for loving children. Those engaged in

waging peace have nothing to gain (other than the Truth). You love for love's sake. Our children obey parenting strategies using soul-force because they love not because they fear. True love drives out fear.

So is there a place for aggressive urges? Most of us chose to channel and refine these urges through years of parenting, marriage, education, competing in sports, and political activism. Such use of force is mostly confined to enterprises like business, law, sports, government, and the military. We learn to graciously compete, to win, and to lose. We have legislators, lawyers, peace officers, judges, arbitrators, soldiers, spies, counselors, and mediators. We have developed elaborate ways of waging wars. Although we have civilized ways of aggressing, none of these should be used in our families. If we decide to divorce or fight crime or substance abuses in our families, we turn the matter over to the proper authority if it allows us to avoid forcing or controlling a love one.

Forgiveness is a big part of the change of heart. When we personally experience violence we long to be made whole. I am not certain whether anything more than this psychological act of self-forgiveness can occur unless the perpetrator is asking forgiveness. When no one is asking for forgiveness, violence has to be transcended. Each person learns to transcend the hold violence has on personal reactions, by accepting strong passions like our hatred, hurt, rage, and a thirst for vindication or revenge. We can accept these feelings and choose to engage in acts of nonviolence. In so doing, we act out our transcendence of violence. Our actions speak healing. Living well becomes the best revenge. Without this self-forgiveness the victim grants the perpetrator continued hold over the victim's soul, granting continued permission to dictate who the victim becomes and whether the victim can overcome the violence. The perpetrator of violence exerts continued control over victims who fail to transcend their reactions to being victimized. Through transcendence the forgiveness is given only to those who will accept the healing rather than the one too blind to see enough value to beg for this forgiveness.

On a personal level that means we have to know our selves, self-soothe, tolerate distress for growth, and practice being less reactive although fully intimate. These are the lessons of Dialectic Behavioral Therapy. We have to each own our rage and anxiety, fight and flight, and not simply be reactive to intense emotion in others. Using DBT we explore how to tolerate distress by getting active, contributing to others, comparing our lot to others, engaging in alternate emotions, pushing-off when overwhelmed and using thought techniques. We explore mindfulness, discovering how to be single minded, nonjudgmental, and how to be mindful of the best thing to do. To process and release intense emotions we learn to self-soothe by pleasing the five senses.

I have spent a great deal of time studying family processes over the last 27 years of family counseling, particularly nonviolence. I still find it helpful to read about nonviolence from Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, Malcolm X, Mother Teresa, and other lovers of peace. Gandhi spent more time on India's freedom than family life. So it helps to take nonviolence home, exploring what Dr. Murray Bowen's Family System Theory shows us about how to grow up and create good family peacefully.