

Peace From Within - Prof. Michael Nagler at Heartfulness Center Fremont

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Hostess: We are very grateful today to have with us Professor Michael Nagler to present on the topic of Peace From Within.

Professor Nagler has taught nonviolence and meditation among other topics at UC Berkeley for many years. He is the President of the Metta Center for Nonviolence, the co-host of Nonviolence Radio, and the Nonviolence Report. He's the author of several books on nonviolence, including the forthcoming, "The Third Harmony: Nonviolence and the New Story of Human Nature."

Professor Nagler has lived at the Ashram of the Blue Mountain Center for Meditation in Marin County since 1970. Now, Professor Nagler, before you come up and share with us today I wanted to share a little personal anecdote.

When I was in high school, when I was around 12th Grade, many years ago, I very distinctly remember that my dad would always have two books at his bedside table. And they would be the first things to go in his bag anytime he was packing for a trip. One was a book about Swami Vivekananda. And one was a book from the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation.

And he would sit, and when we were having dinner he would postulate and he would have these – this kind of fantasy, this dream of one day all us coming together and sharing about our learnings from meditation and how similar all of these paths are. So, it feels very serendipitous that on this occasion of Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary, we have you here with us today. So, thank you very much.

Michael: Good morning everyone. I'm so honored to be here with you today at the Ram Chandra Mission at this auspicious day. And since you were so kind to share a personal anecdote, I think I'd like to share one also.

One day when I was still teaching at Berkeley I decided to have kind of a spontaneous discussion with my class. It was a warm spring day. So, we went out on the lawn. We were sitting – and, you know, this is Berkeley. So, other people would drop in or drop out. And one year one woman came, and I don't remember what we were talking about at the time, but the question of the heart came up. And she shared this lovely image with us that I'd like to share with you this morning.

She said the heart contracts, sends blood all over the body. It expands and draws in blood from every part of the body. And then as a brief interlude before it contracts again. So, the question is what is happening during that interlude?

And she shared with us this image that during that brief space of time, the heart is listening to the blood which has messages coming from all parts of the body, and responds appropriately. And I'd like to think that that's what we're trying to do. We're trying to listen to the messages that are coming to us from all over the world and respond appropriately.

Now, this is Swami Vivekananda's birthday. And that reminds me that in almost exactly the same time that Swamiji came to the United States, which was April of 1893, to go to the center

of – the Conference of Religions in Chicago. In almost the same week, Mahatma Gandhi went to South Africa. So, it really seemed to me that this was the time that God wanted India to send her message to the world. Gandhi, with his message of nonviolence. Swamiji, with his message of spirituality and meditation.

And that's kind of the dual theme that I want to talk to you about today, of meditation in action.

And that message could be – thank you very much. From now on, I'll be much more coherent. That message was articulated very well by Vinoba Bhave, who was a close disciple of Mahatma Gandhi's. And largely considered his spiritual successor.

And Vinoba said that the age of power politics and parochial religion is coming to an end. And now we are seeing the dawn of the age of spirituality and science. And that is very much part of the message that I want to share with this morning.

My *sadna*, my own spiritual practice started in 1966 when I Sri Easwaran at the Berkeley campus. You know, that was the age when people were discovering meditation. And some of my students were going to New Mexico. Others were going to Nepal. All I had to do was go to the MLK Building, which was about a hundred yards from my office. So, I felt very blessed on that occasion.

And just last night with Yan and some other friends, we were watching a videotape of Sri Easwaran. When we moved to our ashram in 1970 we started taping him. And so, we have almost 1000 hours of these dharma talks that he gave. And we were watching a half-hour of it last night.

And again, sure enough, he struck on this theme of the combination of spirituality and action. And what he said was we can function beautifully in the outside world and also cultivate the love of God. But those two things are not in contradiction. In fact, they are mutually reinforcing and complementary.

And I think that this type of practice is – this combination is more needed than ever. In 2005 Rabbi Michael Lerner and I hosted a conference at the University of California at Berkeley called, "The First International Conference on Spirituality and Activism." And at that conference, one of the speakers said – it was Van Jones, actually, if you happen to know him. He said, "When activists get spiritual and spiritual folks take to action, watch out."

So, this is what we are watching out for right now. And I think you won't have a hard time believing me when I say that the times are more urgent than ever. We have, right now, going along with Swami Vivekananda's birthday, we have what seems to be, apparently, the largest social movement that has ever happened in the world, where 250 million people are protesting discriminatory legislation in India.

I was going to say it was like a 250 million man march, except it's mostly women. 250 mahila march that's happening in India. So, again, those two things are coming together. And not to close our eyes to the grim nature of the situation, I was reading an article recently about – talked about Napoleon. And it showed that way back then he had some of the same techniques that are practiced by demagogic leaders today.

He talked about – how did he put it? It's false - *nouvelles faux*. *Nouvelles faux* in French which stands for, "False news." Hitler's propaganda ministers had the same expression. [German]. And we have today the idea of fake news.

Now, what's happening is we are being inundated with false messages so we can't concentrate on the real messages. And things have gotten a lot serious – a lot more serious since Napoleon's time. In fact, I would say in my more pessimistic moments, and I promise we'll get past this part of the talk pretty quickly. But in my more pessimistic moments and realistic in a sense, we'd have to say that from Napoleon to Hitler was Dictatorship 1.0.

These were people who wanted to dominate the world. But it really – doesn't it look today as if we're in dictatorship 2.0, where leaders don't want to dominate the world. They want to destroy it by completely gutting all of our environmental regulations, inadequate as they were. They are actually putting us on a path to destruction. Don't ask me why.

But that does illustrate how grim the situation is and how necessary it is for us to engage our full spirituality in the renewal of the world. (How did you know I was going to need some water? Thank you very much.)

So, this is the Metta Center for Nonviolence which started in about 1981 when Sri Easwaran had a very bad night. He wasn't able to sleep. And he called us all together in the morning and said, "What are we going to do about this violence?" Now, I was still at the university at that time so I said, "Oh, we'll start an institute." That's how I thought you went about doing things.

And that institute became the Metta Center for Nonviolence, which is now not part anymore of the Blue Mountain Center for Meditation. Eventually, as the Blue Mountain Center got more and more active, we started publishing books and doing retreats, including a famous cookbook, called, "Laurel's Kitchen," which I bet your mom had on her bed table. That led to all the other people being siphoned off to do all these other things and I was left to carry forward with the Metta Center.

Then another critical junction for me came in 1989 during the Tiananmen Square Massacre. Because by that time, I had accumulated a certain amount of knowledge of nonviolence and how to do it. And the students in Beijing were making a couple of really bad mistakes. But I had no way to reach them. You know, we didn't have the Internet really going yet. And we had maybe fax machines.

So, I had to stand helplessly by, you know, biting my nails, wondering for the disaster, when the disaster was going to start. And sure enough, it was really a bad one.

So, because of that anguish and frustration of mine, what we've come up with is this motto, "We are helping people to practice nonviolence more safely and more effectively." That's what the Metta Center for Nonviolence really does. And we do this in various ways, some of which I'll be talking about in a second.

But one of the things that's made our job so difficult is that fake news has been supported, enhanced by practices of advertising. This is a billboard that I used to see on my way into work in Petaluma in the morning. And it's trying to sell you some real estate. And the message on the top, as you can see is, "Our pain is your gain."

Now, I was a student of literature when I was at Berkeley and I know something about messaging. Not anything that I can sell, but it enables me to understand that we talk about having a text and a subtext. The text is what's explicit on the surface. And the text of this billboard is, "Buy real estate now from us." The subtext is, "Our suffering benefits you." In other words, we are separate individuals and you can enjoy the unhappiness of another person for your own benefit.

Now, that is part of an old story. Let me back up here just a second. The Bhagavad Gita has a verse in Chapter 16, Verse 9, which I think is a perfect illustration of what is going wrong and gives us a very good clue as how to solve it. That first says, "People who hold wrong views become the destroyers of the world."

So, Dictatorship 2.0 is being run by people who simply hold the wrong view of what life is. And here's the wrong view right up here in a \$56 billion a year industry. So, that means that what we would have to do is promote the right view which would overcome the wrong. And that would be a powerful way of inculcating nonviolent change without confrontational disruptive action.

Now, what is this wrong view that the Gita is talking about? And what would be the right one? As I've said, nowadays, we have a bunch of people who are working on this idea of an old story. The old story, which is what I was taught in school is that the world consisted of material particles, that they bump into each other randomly.

And so, there's no purpose to life. Which would have put me out of business because I did a seminar on the purpose of life when I was teaching at Berkeley. And that we are helpless and separate fragments who are necessarily in competition for increasingly scarce resources. And this competition leads inevitably to violence.

So, when I started teaching at Berkeley in the 70s, some of my colleagues were beginning to realize this is not how the world works. You know, quantum theory tells us that we're not separate material particles. But what they didn't know yet was that the truth of this had been discovered in India thousands of years earlier.

In fact, one of India's energy ministers – I think it was Kothari, if I remember correctly, he said, "When this tremendous new discovery about how the world really is built, that not on material particles. Not on randomness. Only the Vedanta could withstand that discovery." Because in Vedanta it had been taught thousands of years ago that the world does not consist of material particles. It consists of consciousness. And that it is purposeful. And that therefore, each of us has a profound purpose.

So, the new story is built on these new discoveries. I'm going to show you one in detail in a little bit. About how science and spirituality fit together. But what I came to feel when I was developing the Metta Center for Easwaran is that nonviolence is the bridge between spiritual development and social change. Because if you aren't meditating, as we all have the great privilege to be doing, and you try to get active in the world if you get disruptive. If you get angry, that's going to ruin everything that you created in your meditation.

We work very hard in meditation to bring the mind to a standstill. You know, meditation, the classical definition is suppressing thought-waves in the mind. So, we work very hard for a half an hour in the morning. Maybe half an hour at night or whatever the period is. And then we go out and start hating people. That stirs up the mind and we've destroyed everything.

Furthermore, the only way to change people's view from what we consider wrong to what we have good reason to consider is much better as a right view, is through persuasion and not through coercion. So, this is where Gandhi's efforts really come in. And I would actually say that the new story, the story that we're trying to create now is the Vedanta, according to Gandhi, or you know, the Bhagavad Gita according to Gandhi.

And that has two dimensions, at least. One of them is this metaphysical dimension that I've been talking about. That the recognition, that the universe is created from consciousness, through energy, to matter. And that while it is almost impossible to say how exactly this comes about, in India, there was the best guess that we can possibly make in human language, I think, and that is this concept of maya. That the world consists of consciousness which creates an appearance of matter.

So, in a sketch, I guess, that's kind of the metaphysics of the new story. But in addition to the metaphysics is a very powerful theory of action which Gandhi implemented. And that theory has three basic components. We have to choose the right act. We have to carry it out in the right spirit. Which of course, is the spirit of nonviolence. And we have to be detached from the results.

And finding the right action is known, anciently in India, as swadharma. That is the idea that each of us has a particular contribution that he or she is ideally suited to make in the world. And then as St. Augustine said, you know, "God help me if I don't make the contribution that I'm ready to make."

And when I was talking about this in my classes at Berkeley, students would get very inspired by the idea that they have a contribution to make to the world. And the question then becomes how do you discover it? I think the best guess really is first of all to engage the self-knowledge that we gain in meditation.

So, we know we have certain capacities and not others. I'm not ideally suited for going out on protest marches and waving a sign. I get too emotional. And that doesn't help. But I've had this training as a teacher. In fact, my parents were teachers. And as far back as I can see, my family was all teachers.

And so, I have this capacity to assimilate something of what nonviolence is and how it works and make that available to carry out the mission statement of the Metta Center making – helping people to practice nonviolence and more safely and more effectively. So, there's another dimension to this action. And that is that we need to practice this with feedback.

In other words, we carry out an action, if it doesn't work, we recognize that we've made something of a mistake and correct course and go more successfully forward the next time.

So, let me describe to you know a little bit how the Metta Center is going about this and then finally talk about how each one of us can make this discovery, what is our swadharma and how to carry it out effectively in the society, as Easwaran said, "To function beautifully in the world while cultivating at the same time the love of God."

Let's see. That's – it's more Zen slides there. There we go. So, I'm happy to report that in 2020, despite the grimness of situation, or perhaps because of it, the nonviolence organizations that I'm in touch with and I'm aware of have responded with a great deal of energy, and a great deal of enthusiasm, and a great deal of ambition.

And I am happy to say that we're one of these. So, we're launching a huge project. Not that we actually planned it. We've never sort of really plan anything at the Metta Center. It just kind of happens. And it's called, "The Third Harmony Project." Let me explain a little bit what the title means. You know, Shankara, the great sage from the 8th century, 8th century of our era from Kerala.

He said that there is a *topa traya*. There are three sources of suffering in the world. We suffer from the environment. We suffer from other beings. Especially two-legged ones. And I'm not referring to birds here. And of course, we suffer from ourselves.

So, Sri Easwaran said, "Okay then, we have to establish a harmony that will balance each of these disharmonies. We have to establish harmony with the outside world, the environment. We have to establish harmony with one another. That's the second. And the third and most important is we need to establish harmony within ourselves," which is primarily done through meditation. Secondly done by expressing the knowledge and the love that we touch in meditation in the outside world.

So, our approach is to have created this project called, "The Third Harmony Project," which has four components. The first one is a book. Now there's other ways of illustrating this book, but I thought you might enjoy this picture of me in New Delhi back in August. There's me in the middle there. And sitting to the right is Nandita Das, a famous Bollywood star. That's why I'm so nervous up there.

But it was kind of fun to see the title of my forthcoming book, the cover of it on this 50-foot screen in New Delhi. Here's what – oops. Here's what it actually looks like close up. So, it's "The Third Harmony: Nonviolence and the New Story of Human Nature."

What I argue in the book is that in order to really complete this new story we have to focus within the Third Harmony. And when we do, we make an amazing discovery. And that is that the core of our human nature is nonviolence. The capacity that we have to offer nonviolence in the face of violence and the complimentary capacity that we all are born with, although we haven't necessarily developed it – the capacity that we have to respond to nonviolence when it's offered to us.

Just to drop in one anecdote. There's an elderly woman who finished her shopping. She was in a shopping center somewhere I think on the East Coast and got into her car. And a young man jumped into the car with a gun and said, "Give me all your money." She calmly said to him, "Young man, Jesus is always with me in this car. If you kill me, I go straight to heaven and you go straight to hell." And whereupon they started having a conversation.

At end of which, the guy was crying, put the gun away and went to get out of the car. She says, "Wait a minute young man." And gave him all the money that she had. She said, "I'm happy to help you, but I am not going to respond to your compulsion."

And you'll see in this trailer to the film that we'll be showing in a little while, this famous model we have now in nonviolence called, "The two hands of nonviolence." I will not put up with your injustice, but I am open to you as a human being.

And I was reminded of this when I read a statement by Arnold Toynbee the British historian who said about Gandhi, "He made it impossible to go on ruling India. But he made it possible for us to leave without ranker and without humiliation." So, the basic burden of this book is that in

order to have a new story, we have to add the component of nonviolence. Just as in order to have nonviolence, we have to have the new story because otherwise, there's no way to explain how nonviolence works.

Now the Yoga Sutras – this text of Patanjali which has this classic approach to meditation and analysis says – I believe this is 235. I'm not – I retired now so I don't have to remember exactly what chapter and what verse it is. But Patanjali said, "In a person in whom nonviolence is established, all hostility drops away."

So, that's exactly what we saw in that car and where we've seen hundred and hundreds of times in the world of nonviolence. And there used to be no explanation for this in the old science, but now we have this wonderful discovery of mirror neurons. It turns out that in our brain and in our nervous system there are neurons which precisely reflect the behaviours and the attitudes and the intentions of another person.

So, if somebody comes to me in a threatening mode, which I'm not suggesting that we try. And I respond in the way that Mrs. Jacoby responded in that parking lot which is to say, "I'm not going to do what you want me to do with your threat. But I'm not against you as a person." That actually produces a response in your brain, in your central nervous system which causes you or enables you to make that change in behavior. Okay?

So, this is Project Number 1, the book. And it's Number 1 because it has an actual publication date. It's coming out at the end of March. But you can order it on Amazon. You can make a pre-order on Amazon that will help us out. And Yan and I have been talking about maybe coming back here in March when it's actually available. So, that's Number 1.

Number 2 is a film. And this is the website for the film. And the film, again, is called, "The Third Harmony." And how many of you recognize this photograph? That is Gandhi Smriti. That is the path that Mahatma Gandhi took on the last day of his life in New Delhi, January 31st, 1948. I was there, but I didn't take that particular photograph.

So, that, on the top you see the website for the film. And I'm going to show you in a little while a ten-minute sampler of that film. And we hope to have it – we're having a big fundraiser in Oakland this afternoon, actually, because I have to stay – keeping me busy keeps me out of trouble. And this is a very successful day in that regard.

So, that's the second project. The third project is a board game for gamers called, "Cosmic Peaceforce. Mission Harmony Three." And that boardgame too is working its way very closely to completion. The fourth project is the least developed so far, and that is a social media campaign. It will take pieces of the interviews that we've had made for this film. We have 35 hours of interviews of nonviolent practitioners, experts, and put those out in a multi-year project to make little media spots. You know, one-minute, half-minute, something like that.

Okay, so that's the project. So, this is how Metta is approaching the question of how do we shift the world from wrong view to right view? From the old story to the right story? And here's what we suggest that everybody can do.

We have a scheme called the Road Map. And what it illustrates is Harmony Three is right in the middle – Person Power. These are the steps we need to take to empower ourselves to make that discovery of swadharma and have our greatest impact on the world. What we should do next when we feel we're ready to get into action is first of all look for constructive steps. This is

what Gandhi came to feel that if you did constructive program correctly, you would not have to go to satyagraha.

So, when you find ways of building the institutions that we want. For example, there's a lot of problems with fake news. And there's a lot, a lot of problems with standard news. You know, when I open the paper, which I'm still addicted to doing this every morning for a few minutes. I scan the headlines. And so, accident, crime. Accident, crime. Crime, accident, crime. Yeah, there's a lot of accidents that happen and there is crime in the world, but that's not what life consists of.

So, we're always encouraging people as you'll see in a second, to exercise extreme caution with using the mass media. But what are you going to do instead? Well, I'm happy to say that there's a regular industry now of alternative media, of nonviolent news, nonviolent entertainment.

You know, our radio shows at Metta – we have two. They're called community radio. They don't go very far, but they have been podcast and put out on all the regular channels. And every show we try to do at least half an hour of nonviolence news, which means news that you either won't hear in the mainstream media, because they're in the old story. They don't know how to even spot it when it happens.

Or if they hear it, they won't be able to interpret it. So, now back to that person power and what we recommend – oops. I don't know what I just did. Ah, okay. Thank you. Now, let's see. There. There's my most technological achievement is that slide.

So, we recommend five things that each one of us can carry out. And soon as I'm finished describing this, we'll take a look at the trailer and then I would like to have a more interactive conversation with you. So, the first is, as I said, is to avoid the mass media. Simple way of putting it, slightly more detailed way is to say, "Avoid the violence and the vulgarity in the mass media," but if you do that, there'll be very little left.

And instead, look at nonviolence news or come to our two radio programs. We're actually generating now a list of alternative and nonviolent news sources. We haven't published it yet. Partly because we've got so much else to do. Partly, because it's changing every day. People just seem to be producing more and more of these nonviolence resources.

And then with the time that you save from not watching the mainstream media, use that time to learn nonviolence. And so, Metta Center and associated organizations are there for you to help you do that. And we have courses. We have a very active website. We have five animations. And we have – actually, when I taught nonviolence in Berkeley, the whole class was webcast. So, we have 60 hours of me rapping about nonviolence – if you can possibly stand it, or however much of it you can stand.

So, anyway, enough said. There definitely are resources we can learn about nonviolence today. When you then want to do is take up a spiritual practice. Be it heartfulness meditation or we do passage meditation or maybe some other kind of spiritual practice. If haven't got one, it's a very good idea to try. Because even if you get all of the distortion and the propaganda of the mass media out of your mind, there still this is accumulated residue of violence and a sense of separateness that we carry around with us.

And the great benefits of meditation, as you all know very well are, first of all, that it increases our sense of unity. Our sense connectedness with other beings. So, we'll never again believe an

advertisement that says, “Our pain is your gain.” No. Your pain is my pain. That’s what the mirror neurons say. My gain is your gain.

And secondly, it enables us to overcome fear and to be active in the world, you need to be able to do that. And you overcome fear namely by reducing to some degree the amount of body consciousness that we've all been propagandized to have. Again, mainly by the advertising industry. Then also it gives us much deeper self-knowledge.

So, the one thing that I don’t have to do here today is tell you people about meditation. So, I will go on. When you’ve done all these three things, it’s a very good idea to try to overcome the separateness and the alienation that’s been imposed on us partly by the modern technology of our age. And so, just be more personal with everybody instead of sending an email, do a phone call. Instead of doing a phone call, take somebody out for a cup of chai.

It’s just a habit that we can cultivate and to overcome the breakdown of human relationships and get ourselves back to a more civil discourse.

And then finally, tell the story and we would recommend that people can do this in two ways. Getting active, finding a project that you feel you can contribute to successfully. And when you’re doing it, this is the value-added of the Metta approach, when you’re doing it, always be ready to explain why. You know, people say, “What? Save the whales? You know, you’re not a whale.” But then you should be able to explain that all life is an interconnected whole.

If we destroy part of it, we destroy the whole thing. You should be able to explain that when we hurt another being, we suffer. And if you don’t believe that, if you haven’t contacted that response in yourself, there’s a science. Mirror neurons. I mean why is it that American servicemen and women are committing suicide at a rate of almost 20 a day?

If you ask them, they’ll tell you, “You know, I feel like I lost my soul in Iraq or I forgot who I was. I no longer like who I am since I came back from Afghanistan.” It’s a terrible burden that we’ve imposed on people.

So, be prepared to say, “Look, no one has ever gotten PTSD by an act of love.” That’s a quote from a friend of mine who is a retired Army officer actually. So, if we’re ready to explain these things as we’re doing them, I think we have a double impact which is very effective. So, that is what I wanted to share with you by way of what Metta is doing and what I think that we all could be doing.

And now I would like to just give you a ten-minute preview of what our film is going to be about.

[Third Harmony trailer]

Hostess: Thank you so much, Professor Nagler. Before we move this session to the suite on the side, I’d like to invite Nathan to give a thank you note for Professor Nagler.

Nathan: Thank you, Professor Emeritus Nagler for your talk. It was, for me, personally, extremely inspiring. And I think you touched on so many wonderful messages in your talk, that each of them is truly an inspiration. I know you mentioned we didn’t have any easy questions for you. I think you presented such an elegant solution to what we see, the strife that is in the world, to the different steps that it was truly inspiring.

Especially, you know, you highlighting the principles from Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave and how – even though we see more power, politics in play, it's also that it is, as you reflect that through increased awareness, that is going to come to an end.

And this aspect of the combination of spirituality and activism is beautiful because that's where we need to be is within also, and how we can reflect that to out. And specifically, around social media, the subtext piece that you presented. That's really, you know, very important for us to be aware. It's always back to that because messages are going to come, but you have to understand why. We have to ask the question of why.

And this whole about nonviolence being the bridge between spiritual practice and social change is because that's where we can really get everyone to, you know, understand why all that's being done. Your three steps with swadharma – amazing.

And I loved about, you know, the two hands piece that you shared. You know, how we stop injustice, but also allow a part for, you know, peace and harmony. That balance is beautiful because that's where, you know, that comes and resonated with us.

In the end, you know, what we talked about, personal power, the five steps to personal power, all of those are concepts that each of us can engrain very effectively in our own – so we look forward to having you here in March. I'm really excited about that. And certainly, I look forward to reading your book when it's launched. Thank you so much for being here with us.