

Violence

**I bear witness to the reality of violence and abuse, in myself and in the world,
and aspire to practice non-violence in my thoughts, words and actions.**

We live surrounded by violence, it is part of the water in which we swim, the air we breathe. It is our karma, our inheritance from our elders, our bequest to our children. We live *as* violence, in our thoughts, our words, and our actions in this world. Is this down to Original Sin or some inner flaw in us? Killing and constraint are simply the fabric of our lives as embodied beings, *we* live by the death and suffering of others, as others live by *our* own suffering. Some of this is intentional, some negligent, some unavoidable. We crash, collide and consume, *because* we are alive. And yet, absolutely essential as it is to realise that we are all inevitably a part of the violence and the killing and that there is no final place of purity or moral high ground to lift us far above the down and dirty mess of embodied human life, that *nevertheless* in each moment there is the potential for amplifying or reducing this violence and the suffering that is a part of it. Hence all our study of the individual precepts is also the study of violence 'in myself and in the world'.

The Jungle

Whitepeople believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle. Swift unnavigable waters, swinging screaming baboons, sleeping snakes, red gums ready for their sweet white blood. In a way, he thought, they were right. The more coloured people spent their strength trying to convince them how gentle they were, how clever and loving, how human, the more they used themselves up to persuade whites of something Negroes believed could not be questioned, the deeper and more tangled the jungle grew inside. But it wasn't the jungle blacks brought with them to this place from the other (livable) place. It was the jungle white folks planted in them. And it grew. It spread. In, through and after life, it spread, until it invaded the whites who had made it. Touched them every one. Changed and altered them. Made them bloody, silly, worse than even they wanted to be, so scared were they of the jungle they had made. The screaming baboon lived under their own white skin; the red gums were their own... Meantime, the secret spread of this new kind of whitefolks' jungle was hidden, silent, except once in a while when you could hear its mumbling...

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, 234-235

Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* is set at the end of the slave era in the United States, but is in no way a novel of long ago and far away. Written in 1987, *Beloved* resonates just as strongly today because it brings together so many of the themes and experiences of oppression and resistance, not only that of being seen as and treated as *other* within a dominant culture, but also of the effect of that *othering* on the dominant culture itself. *Beloved* is a litany of violence, violence visible and literally carved into human skin, and visible too in the words, feelings and thoughts of all the actors in this drama — none are unaffected. It shows the psychological damage done by the exploitation of the enslaved, and that alongside the riches accrued by the whitefolks there was also yielded a 'surplus value' of cruelty, resentment, fear and despair.

Although Morrison's novel embodies the catastrophe of slavery, although it rubs the soil and sweat and blood of that era relentlessly and unforgettably in our faces and into the pores of our skin, its resonance goes far beyond any sense of 'race' as an isolated issue. *Beloved* describes the whole process of 'othering': of the making of human beings into 'others' in order to disregard and ignore them *as* human, and so to allow both the explicit and implicit violence of their physical, economic and emotional exploitation. For all of us, then as now, our relationship to violence helps define, shape and limit the possibilities of what it actually *is* to be me, to be you, to experience ourselves and to be seen by others as a *self*. This process is at once psychological, symbolic, political and physical: it is the formations of the 'walls of the mind' of which the Heart Sutra speaks, it is the line of demarcation between front and back of a segregated bus, it is the giant concrete and steel border wall of Israel/Palestine, or that proposed for the US and Mexico. This is a process I've seen first hand under the 'laboratory conditions' of the prison system with its own walls and labyrinthine rules and judgements by which we *other* not only those incarcerated, but also our (law-abiding) selves. To repeat Morrison's words: 'it wasn't the jungle blacks brought with them to this place from the other (livable) place. It was the jungle whitefolks planted in them. And it grew. It spread. In, through and after life, it spread, until it invaded the whites who had made it. Touched them every one.' In othering the other, we other ourselves also. We all suffer, though we do so in no way *equally*. And to hide the oppression and violence involved in this othering there is the fundamental and often repeated sleight of hand where the oppress-*or* labels the oppress-*ed* — the actual victim of their violence — as being *themselves* violent, as being the dangerous one. Not simply *labels*, but comes to *believe* and to *misperceive*, and to demand the assent and even belief of the oppressed themselves. Then both oppressor and oppressed are obliged to live within this dissociated and exactly inverted image of relationship, this *misrecognition*, *misrepresentation*. It's a deal with the devil...

Morrison brilliantly describes this in the case of slavery, but we see it in our own times as the strategy of the powerful to *mis*-label the powerless — the poor, the homeless, the displaced — as the source of the general social discontent that in reality is created by the actions of those same holders of power. We are each and all both the perpetrator and victim of violence, though we may not immediately recognise either in ourselves. We are also all the unintended and often unwitting beneficiaries of the violence of others, which may be still harder to understand and to deal with. Struggling with what we experience as our day-to-day difficulties of relationship, work, money and health it's perhaps difficult to see how our *own* lives are still intimately shaped by the violence that is our history, by the *collective* karma that we embody. What is *my* particular relationship to the violence of slavery and colonialism that made our societies what they are today, and to the social hierarchies of privilege and wealth that were established and are still maintained today? And to the continuing violence of our system of gender? Whoever and wherever I am, I am touched by all of these, and all the more so when I am least aware of it. How did this relationship of violence to hierarchy, domination and exploitation show up in my own family when I was a child? How does it remain with me in my day to day experience of family, of work? And what of the *inversion* that Morrison describes, whereby we come to see innocence as guilt, and the threat of violence as necessary to keep us safe?

The State of the Family

How does the jungle become seeded in us, and how does it grow? How do we come to see things so upside-down? If we are each and all both perpetrator and victim of the infinite different aspects of violence, then how do we begin to make sense of this? We all begin our lives in the absolute immediacy of Interbeing: in total interdependence with our environment. As we begin to become aware of the apparent will and intentions of others and their effect on us, so we come to find this will and intention in ourselves, which we then direct back towards them and towards our world in general. As infants we are entirely dependent on our carers, and as we develop an awareness of this condition it cannot help but be by turns both blissful and terrifying: our dependence on our caregivers is total, and we depend on them for our very life as physical and emotional beings. What we experience as their rejection of us, of our *not mattering* to them, we feel as being akin to death itself. Whether this rupture is repeatedly healed and relationship restored and deepened, or whether it hardens into a pattern of trauma that will shape our life going forward, none of us escape this form of developmental trauma entirely. Here at the beginning of life our vulnerability and mortality are intimately present to us, even if we cannot yet imagine what it would actually be to die or to be abandoned. As we grow into relative independence and move from the private sphere of the family out into the public world, we recognise that this first dependency is nested within a second one that is even more total: that the final possibility of our ability to lead both our public and private lives rests with the apparatus of the State of the country within whose jurisdiction we reside, and that this dependence extends to the matter of our life and death itself.

The State regulates and facilitates even where it does not directly organise or administer, and, like our parents in our early years, it also claims the right to punish. The State takes for itself the absolute and actual power of life and death that our parents only ever had in our wildest nightmares. In both imagination and reality the State holds for us the spectre of violence, the 'red gums' of the 'jungle'. We are told we must rely on the State to 'protect' us from foreign armies waiting to invade, from the 'terrorists' who want only to destroy our 'way of life', from criminals acting alone or as gangs to seize our property, from serial killers and paedophiles, from the junkies, the homeless, and the migrants who do not share 'our values'. It is the State that sometimes by design, sometimes by indifference, sometimes by accident or mismanagement, *constructs* the *otherings* of our society and also *arbitrates* on them: that between the citizen and the non-citizen, between legitimate and illegitimate ways of gaining and holding property, between entitlements and responsibilities, between *what counts as otherness and what does not*. We are told that we *must* consent to the State's right to respond to these perceived threats by any means it sees as appropriate. We all also live with the awareness — though we may drive it to the very back of our minds — that you or I may suddenly find that *we ourselves* have become that *other*. Ultimately, 'our' State reserves the right to commit any and every kind of violence against us: to have us put to death, to kill us, to order us to kill others or allow ourselves to be killed. This awareness, 'deterrence' as it is known, has always been a main rationale of the criminal justice system, but functions in so many areas of life to force us to toe the line, not to rock the boat, to keep our head down. Between the real and imagined bogeymen the State conjures for us, and the fear of finding *ourselves* placed among those others, the State

wields a power of violence, both potential and actual, far greater than any fantasised 'Father' of our childhood. The final violence of nuclear 'deterrence' perhaps shows our predicament most clearly: our governments state as unchallengeable truth that in order to protect and keep us safe, they must be both willing and able to bring about the death of *all* of us in global nuclear armageddon. If this omni-threat is aimed initially at those external others who represent to us the 'jungle' and its 'red gums', it turns swiftly back upon ourselves. We are told that we should all be *so* fearful of those *others*, that impoverishing our own society so that we are ourselves able to threaten the complete destruction of our shared human world — our shared home — is not just a bargain worth making, but one which is *essential* to our own survival. Global spending on our 'defence' is currently around \$2433 *billion* annually, of which nearly \$100 billion goes towards nuclear weapons. Quite separate from the inevitable violence that follows on the presence of such weapons, these vast sums would be enough to address inequalities of health, education and opportunity globally if redeployed to non-violent ends. So be afraid, be *very* afraid! Don't go outside, strangers are dangerous. Only here, only in complete obedience to the all powerful Father with his nuclear codes is it safe!

Beyond even this threat, both as real and as imagined, there is the always increasing and all-embracing violence of the reality of climate change. Violence not in the sense of 'the violence of natural forces' but of the very human causation of the climate crisis, as it becomes ever more evident both locally and globally. What is 'our' responsibility in all this, when climate change has been brought about not because 'there are just too many of us' or because we are all 'thoughtless' or 'greedy', but at the behest and in the personal and corporate interests of a very small group of people who are nevertheless able to wield enormous economic and political power? We, and our children and their children too, find ourselves both the modest beneficiaries and the inevitable victim of their actions. Like the prospect of nuclear war, this is something we dare not think too much about for fear of either being consumed by it or going mad, but which stalks us nevertheless, and grows only more dangerous the more thoroughgoing our denial. We are unable, we cannot begin to imagine the potential suffering that is almost upon us, and yet... However much we individually recycle our food-packaging or however low we set the thermostat, it is, at this point in history only our nation-states that have the collective authority to change the path on which we find ourselves, a power which they have been unwilling to use. The governments of our various nation-states find here, in their unwillingness to act against the financial interests of those very global corporations that have brought about this crisis, an all-too-real limit to their individual power over the world, an impotence that makes international affairs resemble more a playground squabble over a bag of sweets than a serious engagement in preventing global catastrophe. As Greta Thunberg said in her 2019 speech to the General Assembly of the United Nations: "how *dare* you?"

So who really determines the myriad decisions the State makes for me and all its other citizens? Who determines the 'rules' according to which I must play the game of life in exactly *this* way? If the State tells me that I must give up my life for the 'common good', then who actually gets to decide, and in whose interest? Who decides what the 'common good' *is*? 20% of the purchase price of my toothbrush will be added as tax to to pay for

services for the common good, and corporation tax is set at 25% to the same end, ... who decides? Politics is and always has been the playing out of sectional interests that are often little concerned with the actual welfare of the bulk of the population. Seen against even the short (at most 400 years) history of the nation-state, the 'social-democratic' turn of the period from 1930-1980 — of the New Deal, the Welfare State, and broad economic redistribution — is more anomaly than destiny. From the robber bands that coalesced into monarchies and aristocracies who entered into uneasy alliance with emerging Capital, to the pre-eminence of 'trade' and conquest, to the the manufacturers and financiers of the Industrial Revolution, and now to the great trans-national corporations and the Surveillance Capitalism of the new 'tech bro's' of Silicon Valley, the aspiration towards a genuine democracy has been contested and hard fought, its successes both limited and fragile. In this national and world order, coercion and the threat and reality of violence make possible multiple forms of domination, expropriation and exploitation, while these same forms of violence are nevertheless perversely proposed as essential to both our personal and collective safety. To 'know one's place' in such a world is to live as selves always in need of protection against the threat of an *other*. It is to live in permanent, if often disavowed, *fear* of the other, and even to fear ourselves in the possibility and reality of our *own* otherness.

Seeing and Speaking

In all forms of violence, *language* plays an essential part. In our misrecognising our world as one of *separate* things, our words freeze these things of the world and make them eternal. Our nouns — our naming words — shred the fullness of our experience into a series of separate chunks of identity: the 'things' we then use our adjectives to describe as having specific and permanent-seeming attributes. The infinite complexity of change and interaction is squeezed into the confines of our *action*-words — our verbs. Seen in this way all language works by endlessly cutting out figure from background, dividing and separating. As a limited tool of analysis this is fine, in fact it is essential, but we come to see and think of these divisions as corresponding to individual permanent *things* within a reality itself somehow *separate* from us, and then act according to this belief. If it is in one sense entirely 'natural' to us as language-animals to draw lines between things in this way, then we have to understand that both the consequences of *where* these lines are drawn, and *how* they come to be drawn in the way they are, are anything but random. Our speaking and thinking play a primary role in our attempts to establish our *selves* as separate and permanent. As our defence against the sometimes terrifying dependency and interdependency of 'life as it is', we attempt to cut out and fence off an idea of self as autonomous and enduring, an '*I*' that can say truly and absolutely of itself '*I AM!*' We need to come to see and think of all these dividing lines as at best 'conventional' and impermanent, and to understand insofar as we are able both the *causes* and *consequences* of their being drawn in particular ways. Important too to understand that our language itself is in actuality simply one more impermanent element of our lives: words change both their pronunciation and their meanings over time as they evolve and shift and are applied as metaphors or in new contexts. New words are coined, and old ones fall out of use: our repeated attempts at establishing some kind of permanence through language are themselves ever changing and open to the future.

Our language concerning the *ending* of life seems actually to aim to blunt this sharpness of our conceptual thinking. If our own death and the deaths of those we love are an inescapable reality — *the* inescapable reality — then the euphemistic ‘passed away’, ‘passed on’, or simply ‘passed’, are evasions of what we would rather not name, not face, an attempt to soften or evade the reality of death. The military have become *the* experts at euphemising killing of both intended and unintended ‘targets’: to describe the killing of civilians as being ‘collateral damage’ is perhaps only the most notorious example. Such language is partly for international public consumption, but is even more essential to keep the combatants themselves partially *dissociated* from experiencing the real human consequences of their actions, whether the sniper lying in wait, the artilleryman loading a depleted uranium shell that will still be killing and deforming children’s bodies in decades to come, or the engineer laying landmines with all-too-similar consequences.

There are also differences in how we might describe the *same* individual death that change the meaning and context of that death: the ‘elimination of a terrorist’ is not the ‘martyrdom of a freedom fighter’, the ‘execution of a criminal’ is not the same thing as a ‘judicial murder’, ‘assisted dying’ is not the same thing as ‘euthanasia’, the ‘murder of an unborn child’ is not the same thing as the ‘abortion of a foetus’, or simply ‘ending a pregnancy’. Our choice of language almost always brings with it an implicit or explicit judgement, predisposing us to adversarial conflict when we cannot immediately agree. Any attempt to broaden our response requires us to understand the ways in which the words our society uses to frame debate are both shaped by and shape in turn real-life resources and constraints, and so too the direct lived consequences for those involved. If we persist, for example, in seeing nuclear weapons as something to do with our ‘*defence*’ (Ministry of Defence, Defence spending...), rather than as historically unprecedented *offensive* weapons the use of which would almost certainly end all culture as we know it and conceivably all human life on this planet, we may well find ourselves *Defended to Death*, as Gwyn Prins’s 1983 book of that title argued.

So there is a grave paradox in our speaking and our thinking, one that creates for us the experiencing of ourselves as separate from a world outside us. On the one hand our language casts a net of black and white over our shared reality of infinitely differentiated greys, *posterising* and *pixellating* this reality in order to make it visible, thinkable. On the other hand our inevitable *mis*-representation of our world becomes a *missing* of reality as we massage, soothe and anaesthetise our awareness and empathy into quietude, or even invert it into misplaced fear and anger.

Ignore-ance

Few if any of our meetings with violence are as immediately horrific as life on the slave plantation. And yet, as victims and perpetrators and as heirs to victims and perpetrators of violence of all kinds, our relationship with violence similarly grows and tangles around us, only the more so when we deny it. We know but we do not know, we see but we do not see. We choose, and forget that we have chosen, or we are forbidden to look and then ourselves come to deny there was anything to see in the first place. This is the dissociation that underlies our *ignore-ance*, the not-knowing that is the opposite of the openness of our

beginners' mind. As we have begun to explore in previous commentaries, this is our active resistance to knowing: in our turning away, the turning of a blind eye, the failure to be open to what is here in front of me, or to what I keep myself from seeing. Ignore-ance is not just turning away *here and now*, but aggregates, solidifies, becomes structural. Ignore-ance is the gating of a community, and the spikes placed on every flat surface around its perimeter in order to prevent a homeless person finding refuge from the cold and rain or a place to rest. Ignore-ance comes to justify to us our own indifference and lack of empathy for even the most extreme and violent of *otherings*: as Norman Geras wrote in his *The Contract of Mutual Indifference* (1998), outside the ghettos of wartime Germany and Poland where Jews were being murdered by the thousand, bystanders simply ignored the continuing gunfire and carried on with their lives as if nothing unusual were happening. Here dissociation, as the none-of-my-business side of ignore-ance allows me a fatal *separation* from the other, and in the process to separate out from the part of *myself* that feels the suffering of another. Hence so too to separate myself from my own humanity. Who *counts*, who *matters* in any given situation? If Palestinian children are ' Hamas sympathisers ' are their deaths then ' acceptable ' ? In our own and other Western nations, are those who have failed to find sufficiently lucrative employment ' responsible ' for their own and their children's poverty, and if so do they (and their children) ' deserve ' it? Who *counts*, who *matters*, not just theoretically or legally, but in how liveable or unliveable they find their actual lives?

Our awareness of violence is perhaps both sharper and more distanced than that of previous generations. My mother, for example, grew up during the Second World War. She left school at sixteen, and got a job as a bank clerk. Each day she had to catch the bus from the suburbs to the centre of London, and on her way home she would listen to the air raid sirens, not knowing whether her house or family would still be there, or if she herself would make it back home alive. In fact an incendiary bomb did fall through the roof of her house but did not explode: the house was repaired, the family returned. What experience of mine can give me a sense of what this must have been like, of that years-long sense of the collective proximity of death both to ourselves and our loved ones? Yet on the other hand I have a potentially far *less* mediated, and far more extensive knowledge and experience than would have been possible only a few decades ago of — for example — the war on Palestine and the war in the Ukraine, as well as the many persecutions and struggles throughout the world that would previously have been known only through a few lines in a foreign correspondent's report. Now I can see and hear in a way previously unimaginable, and likely I or those I meet actually do have friends or family members in Israel or Palestine, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, or any of the myriad other scenes of conflict. Even though my own chances of perishing in war are trivial — as for that matter is the chance that I will ever be the victim of murder — I have a much wider and more detailed sense of the violence of this world than was possible in the past, and hopefully too of the complexity of the issues behind the conflict. Here too the play of *othering* and *ignore-ance* is always at work: who are ' our ' people in all this, where do our sympathies lie, whose cause is ' just ' and whose false, and why? If we are ' with ' Israel are we ' against ' the Palestinians, (or vice versa)? Or are they all, for ' us ' , just crazy foreigners, irredeemably enmeshed in

this current version of a conflict (*mis-*)represented to me as an 'ancient' enmity, that demonstrates once again (to our eyes) their total *otherness*?

And when we move beyond the human? We pamper (not always to their benefit) our cats and dogs, while we incarcerate, confine and control every aspect of the lives of those animals we eat as food — sentient beings we choose to regard as largely insentient. All other life forms we ignore or tolerate until they become exploitable, or until they cause annoyance to us at which point we attempt to eradicate them entirely. While not so very long ago we would without exception have had a fairly accurate experience of the actual lives and deaths of those domestic animals we share our world with, now we are likely only to encounter them as 'product' at point of sale, most probably already labelled and shrink wrapped. To be sure, there is dissociation involved both in knowing and not-knowing. Once upon a time it was *this* animal's body, *this* being whose eyes had met mine and whose smells and sounds I knew that was killed for me to eat, and *because they were other*, their death did not count as mine does, nor their suffering. We today are spared coming to terms with this reality. We have the luxury of not seeing, and of not (really) knowing what happens to the darling lamb we saw in the field, or how our milk or meat come to us: there is barely any effort required in separating ourselves from the violence done on our behalf. And we give even less awareness to our food plants: what of the 'massacre' of green saladings that Diane Rizzetto was brought to acknowledge her responsibility for? We know that plants too are in their way sentient, and that they also have their suffering. This is *all* impermanence, *all* emptiness, the conventions 'we' have more or less agreed as to who-eats-what in order to live. Somewhere between an extreme fruitarianism and actively rejoicing at the the death of the other beings whose bodies we incorporate into our own, we have to find, *here, now*, what is acceptable to us as individuals and communities. Even our 'best' options bring violence with them, as with for example our growing Western demand for non-animal protein that adds to the displacement of poor rural populations as traditional agriculture is replaced by cash crop monocultures. There is no simple answer, no quick fix. As we reduce the scale and complexity of the living beings we are considering (bacteria...viruses... and beyond), we do not even find any 'hard' line between the 'living' and the 'non-living'. Which absolutely does not erase the very important *relative* and *pragmatic* differences that exist. How do we understand the *relative* differences of a human, a horse, a carrot, a bacterium? How far can or should we assign 'rights' to animals (or even plants?), and to what extent would this be because they are 'like us' to some degree? Most arguments about how far animals should not be considered as simply as objects or resources — *means* to human *ends* — centre on how 'like us' they appear to *us* to be. The differences between human and non human we find significant at any point may be to do with our current ideas on what constitutes 'consciousness', or else on animals' ability to feel pain, to suffer. (It is not so long since 'lower races' and the 'lower orders' of our own society were generally held to feel little pain, or at least not to suffer in the way 'we' do, while the supposed complete lack of sensitivity of babies, 'lunatics' and 'idiots' own made them liable to any and every kind of mistreatment.) But are our current assumptions about animals and nature the *only* possible perspectives to take, or even in any way the *best*? The regime of Mastery we have looked at before has always been framed from the point of view of a political and economic elite,

and with the purpose of exploiting all of 'nature' to the benefit of (some) humans. Paradoxically, practising *non-separation* with other beings or modes of being will demand that we allow and consider the importance of those beings' *difference* from us. A wider consideration of ways to co-exist might lead us to change our own priorities...

There is no escaping this violence of sharing a world with others, of consuming at the cost of other lives. And equally no possibility of escaping our ignore-ance and dissociation, even if it may seem 'inevitable' or even 'necessary' to the living out of our own lives. Inevitability and necessity neither excuse nor justify this violence: there is no sense in which this 'doesn't matter', no way in which the 'emptiness of all things' negates any of the suffering of any being, including of course *this* being: *my* suffering and *yours* too. Choosing my dinner from the supermarket display, the decisions made in the boardrooms of climate destroying corporations, and the speeches of hate-mongering politicians: *all* these involve dissociation as ignore-ance, but there is in no sense any *equivalence* between them, and in fact the assertion of *false* equivalence is one of the standard strategies of delusive thought, and one often used by the powerful against the weak. Paradoxically it is actually only by questioning the assumed 'hard' boundaries between, say, humans and animals, or the 'personhood' of a global corporation and that of a mountain range, that we may gain the ability to think and act beyond the boxes created by the 'walls of our minds' that find form as the *status quo*, and so come to live less violently in a less violent world.

As we have seen before, dissociation leads us into strange territory, ambiguous and ambivalent. We call out the practicing of double standards, of 'one rule for them and another for us' as *hypocrisy*. In practice, dissociation as ignore-ance and self-justification help us to blur the line between *self-delusion* and conscious, cynical manipulation of the truth, and perhaps it's even impossible or at least inappropriate always to insist on the distinction. So can we become *better* aware of, and call out, our *own* hypocrisy — our own *knowing/not knowing, seeing/not seeing*? Call it out while simultaneously understanding that it is both inevitable and is itself part of this process of *coming to self-awareness*? That an important aspect of our responsibility to ourselves and to others is to become aware of this hypocrisy and the paths on which it leads us, whether that's as protective of our sanity(!), as a partially effective coping strategy for life, or as actively harming to ourselves or to others. If our relationship with violence inevitably brings with it a measure of hypocrisy, then our *awareness of*, our *managing* and *owning* this hypocrisy is actually a vital part of the process of *non-violence* itself. How far does *my* hypocrisy directly and indirectly allow the harming of other sentient beings, in both my voluntary and involuntary choices? How to best be at peace with these choices?

We each live somewhere between an infinite openness to the suffering of All Beings in their individual uniqueness, and the fearful and defended closure of a self fantasising that in separation from others lies its only safety. Our position on this continuum may shift over the course of our lifetime, and may indeed move moment by moment in reaction and response with those other beings with whom we Inter-are. That *infinite* openness to everything would be impractically vast, impossible for all but absolutely enlightened Buddhas, and the closer we get even to imagining 'All Beings' the more diffuse and

inconsequential our own empathy tends to become. But the closer we find ourselves to the self fantasised as universally threatened, then the greater violence and the greater harm we become capable of. Just as we argued that our *anger* is always traceable back at some level to fear, so too with both our intentional and our ignore-ant violence. We suggested that anger is a displacement of our fear: the substitution of physical action for the potentially paralysing effect of the experiencing of terror. The attempted *hard separation* of 'my' self from others also comes about through the displacement of fear: as an infant perhaps the fear of being abandoned or being consumed by the caregiver as *other*, but as an adult moving towards the displacement of a fearfulness of our dependency on the even greater paternal power and potential violence that the state represents both directly and as universal arbiter. Our dissociation from the *othered* in society, and from the elements of *ourselves* that we other, allows this displacement of our fear to find an *object*: it is now specifically '*they*' who are the danger we must face, if only we saw things rightly! I'll experience this as 'them' (or you) *making* me angry, when in reality it's my displacing my own fearfulness onto an anger that takes 'them' as an object, all so that I can come to experience myself as separate and autonomous! This version of our selfing allows us, if only in fantasy, to become a true *subject* in both senses: as an active and self-determining citizen simultaneously *subject to* the sovereignty of our State in its life or death power over us. This othering of *both* other and self is a fundamental violence, because the more we try to live out our fantasy of separate selfhood, the more we licence *any* ignore-ance towards the other, whenever or whatever that is. This violent ignore-ance may take the form of our mere neglect or dismissal of the other, or of their active domination, exploitation and oppression by us. How is our selfhood and subjectivity experienced and expressed moment by moment? Is it defined *against* the other, or is it instead experienced as shared *with* them?

Non-Violence

Non-violence is not the simple *absence* of violence, nor even the *restraint from* violence. It is the conscious refusal of the belief in and practice of violence as a way to resolve disputes, including the righting of wrongs and ending of injustice, and it is also the refusal of allowing violence of any form to go unquestioned or unchallenged. Non-violence does not assume or imagine that violence can simply be wished away. Rather than passivity, it asks us to take steps, great or small, to create the conditions where violence becomes impossible or at least is seen as both unacceptable and counter-productive. Non-violence is non-separation in action.

So non-violence has to address the conditions that bring about and maintain violence. This is actually the precise territory we have been mapping with our study of the precepts to date. Whether it is a question of physical, psychological or more structural forms of violence, non-violence is always specific in its point of application, but wholistic in its understanding and approach. It embraces how I speak to my children, my partner and my neighbour, and extends to how I respond to local and global inequality and exploitation, to climate collapse, to militarism and to the ongoing struggle for genuine democracy. Hence non-violence cannot help but be concerned with the criminal justice system, labour relations, the international arms trade, energy and agribusiness companies, the

surveillance capitalism of silicon valley corporations, and the reality or lack of freedoms and human rights both in my own back yard and across the world...

While in one sense non-violence has existed alongside violence in all times and all places — in every not-separate and caring thought, word and action — non-violence also has a long history as a self-aware and intentional ethics. *Ahimsa*, the Sanskrit term literally meaning 'non-violence', has helped shape Indian thought and ethics for at least four thousand years, and finds its place in Buddhism in the form of this (traditionally the First) Precept. We associate non-violence with the struggle for Indian independence led by Mohandas Gandhi, with the Civil Rights Movement and Martin Luther King Jr., and with practices like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of post-Apartheid South Africa chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. What all of these share is the determination not to be *divided* from the other, not to think of oneself as *separate*, no matter what the injustice or violence suffered. That it is exactly the *othering* to which one's people have been subject that has *made possible* the injustice, the mistreatment, by those others. And that if in return *we* other that other then we invite a reciprocal violence as our retribution on them, whether we do it in the name of justice or of simple revenge. Violence stops with us, stops here. This was the hardest and most vital part of the training of those active in the Civil Rights Movement, those getting into 'good trouble', as John Lewis put it. Not simply not to react, not to fight back, but not to hate, not to harbour within oneself the othering, the sense of separation that enabled oppression itself. That the transition from apartheid to majority rule in South Africa was largely without retributive violence relied on Nelson Mandela and other ANC leaders finding a mirror of this central principle of non-violence in the traditional African concept of *Ubuntu*: that self and other are always relational.

What is non-violence for Zen? In my own understanding non-violence *is* our Zen practice and what follows from the awareness and recognition of all things as not-separate. But as always we need to be aware that it has not always been seen in this way: we've previously noted the complicity and even active collaboration of senior Zen teachers and clerics with the aggressively nationalist government of interwar Japan, and of course Zen's traditional association with the samurai — overtly and explicitly *not* non-violent! In terms of causes and conditions, it should not surprise us that fascist times produce fascist Zen, just as Neo-liberal America has tended to produce an individualistic and quietist Zen alongside more radical elements.

And as *practice*? Non-violence begins for us in our zazen, both on the cushion and as 'life as it is'. Non-violence is our zazen as non-separation, and also our zazen as awareness of our self-othering, and of the constant moment to moment movement between these two. Non-violence is our returning to awareness and to our cushion, and is our practice with the precepts, both consciously and in our lived reactions and responses of each moment. Non-violence is in all of what we have elsewhere described as *care*. Non-violence is a look, a glance, a smile, the touching of hands or an affirming handshake. Non-violence is the practice of living relationship and of living in relationship. Non-violence is our living out of the Atonement Gatha in our zazen and in our actions, the *at-one-ment* gatha that holds all things as not-separate.