



# T r u True Powerw e r



Sharif M. Abdullah

By SHARIF M. ABDULLAH

There's a picture on my desk, a picture of myself and a woman in front of a modern glass and steel building. I took that picture last year, during a visit to Colombo, Sri Lanka. The interesting thing about that picture is that two days after I took the picture, that building was blown up by terrorists.

I was in the Hilton and the adjoining World Trade Center, taking a brief respite from my two weeks of strategic planning and staff devel-

opment work with the Sarvodaya movement, an organization practicing nonviolence and Gandhian-style economic and social development in over 2,000 villages. Had the bomb attack happened while I was eating, you wouldn't be reading this.

In Sri Lanka, the World Trade Center and its adjoining Hilton hotel complex were the latest victims in a civil/ethnic war that won't go away. Ethnic wars cannot be "won"; they will go on as long as Sinhalese and Tamils are having babies. War is an obsolete method to resolve con-

flict — it's just that those with guns and bombs haven't figured that out yet.

What was the goal of the dozen Tamil Tigers who carried out the bombing? At the bottom line, it was a pitiful attempt at projecting power into a powerless situation. It is pitiful in that the display cannot ever achieve the aims of the young terrorists.

The futility of their behavior is evident once one understands what

power is (and is not). True power is the ability to manifest one's intentions. It involves the will to move forward to accomplish one's objectives.

With this definition, it becomes obvious that the disaffected young people in the various militarized groups throughout the world cannot wield true power. Like boats without paddles or rudders, they drift toward the chasm, knowing something is wrong but not knowing what to do about it. There is an emptiness within, and destroying such a blatant symbol of Western arrogance does not fill it. Rambo teaches us that an assault rifle puts one in a position of power. This is a lie, but unfortunately, we are not learning that lesson quickly.

What is the answer? What is the answer to those who feel so disaffected that violence is not only a solution but the only solution? What is the answer to those committing the slow suicide of drugs and casual violence, those for whom prison or execution is no deterrent, since it is not worse than the life in which they find themselves? (Remember this: "senseless" acts of violence make all the sense in the world to those who perpetrate them.)

The answer is inclusivity. The answer lies in adopting a simple but profound statement as a way of life: all of life forms one seamless, interrelated web. Therefore, anything

I do to anyone I am doing to myself. With inclusivity, I choose to resolve all conflicts through negotiation rather than violent confrontation. A person who is whole does not have the need for violence: they see other alternatives.

If we ask the IRA or Saddam Hussein or the Crips or the Bloods to renounce violence, we must be prepared to set an example and renounce violence FIRST. If violence is wrong for Tamil Tigers, it is

wrong for the Sri Lankan government. Anything less is asking an adversary to hold still while you beat him up.

Ending the violence of powerlessness means ending military support. To all sides. Period. It means being committed to "win-win" situations. It means recognizing that parties can differ without killing one another. It means being committed to creating a world which works for all.

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## The Power of Peacemakers



Paul Von Ward

By PAUL VON WARD

"Most people do not understand the complicated machinery of the government. They do not realize every citizen silently but none the less certainly sustains the government of the day in ways of which he has no knowledge. Every citizen therefore renders himself responsible for every act of his government. And it is quite proper to support it so long as the actions of the government are bearable. But when they hurt him and his nation it becomes his duty to withdraw his support." Gandhi

People who wish to bring out peaceful change or correct injustice promote the techniques of nonviolence by explaining that it: (1) creates guilt by setting a higher moral example for the oppressors, (2) indicates a mode of noncooperation, particularly in terms of spending votes or dollars, (3) follows the precepts of this or that religion, invoking the intervention of its own "god," and (4) elicits the support of the uncommitted.

But the primary reason for its success lies in having truly benevolent intentions, clearly and strongly expressed by a few individuals, sending a powerful wave of positive energy.

This is why a minority, or even a significant majority, cannot continually impose negative forces on those profoundly committed to the ideal of peace and justice. The challenge is to be truly committed to the good of all, avoiding the desire to overthrow one particular regime by another. Counterrevolutions end up laying the foundations for their own demise.

Look at the cases of Russia, Nicaragua, Iran, and other examples of violent overthrows of existing regimes.

The United States has avoided this troublesome outcome longer than any other nation because its birth was based more on constructive ideals than military might. However, the seeds of its own negative forces have survived and are rearing their ugly sprouts, feeding American government institutions that suppress individual rights. To avoid the full flowering of their oppressive tendencies, the institutions must now be transformed through a nonviolent, altruistic set of conscious intentions. What is required is not a frontal assault on currently regressive leaders and their staffs, but an effort to redefine the inalienable nature of the rights of conscious beings.

If the crime rate can be reduced to its lowest level in 25 years by a significant shift of the public's mindset in favor of "we are all responsible" in lieu of "it's someone else's problem," as I believe it has, then political institutions will be reformed when enough people favor the concept of "we govern ourselves best" in contrast to that of "government is by elites, whether elected or appointed." When citizens' charge such ideas of self responsibility with emotion, it leads to behavioral changes. A perceptible repositioning along these lines by aspiring leaders is already underway. Traditionalists pushing for more autocratic government control will not find the energetic support necessary for long term success.

They can have only the control ceded to them by individuals; one can lead only when others consciously decide to follow. The number of people who give their mental and psychological support to officials is more important in a democracy than the mechanics of vote totals (a Newtonian procedure belied by consciousness in a quantum universe). When people withhold inner support from those in positions of power, through the process of disenfranchising, it will be impossible for authoritarians to perpetuate oppression and injustice.

### Martin Luther King's Six Step Process Toward Social Change

- Information Gathering
  - Education
- Personal Commitments
  - Negotiation
  - Direct Action
- Reconciliation and beginning the healing process

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