

WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN

It is better to die in battle than to emerge victorious. Is the victor not convinced that violence prevails? How seldom he perceives, until too late, that what he has gained at another's cost is nothing -- aye, and less than nothing. But he who dies in battle may have learned that nothingness. When he returns to earth for another existence, he may be wiser. He will at least be no more foolish. Whereas the victorious, convinced by violence, proceeds from one stupidity to worse.

*Talbot Mundy, from the novel
Tros of Samothrace*

Nonviolence says:

No, evil is not corrected or arrested by an equal evil, but doubled, and to have recourse to it is to become a link in the chain of evil.

No, the end does not justify the means. Evil means spoil the best causes. If the end is just, the means must be so too.

No, fear, compulsion, and force can never establish justice, any more than they can teach us truth. They can only twist conscience. The righting of conscience is what is called justice.

*Lanza del Vasto,
from Warriors of Peace (Knopf, 1974)*

We want happiness, but we forget that we live on a planet of teaching with a long chain of karma trailing us.

_____ *unattributed*

In the last chapter, we talked about the psychology of the child self and how inner disharmony might be approached within the meditations of a spiritually motivated individual. It is not uncommon for such discussions to lead to broader topics.

Specifically, how should one respond to evil *out there* in the so-called real world, and how should one deal with awful happenings? This chapter will approach those queries.

The first thing people ask when they discuss terrible experiences is *why?* Why should anyone have to endure a terrible happening? What good could possibly come from such an act? How could it possibly be seen, even cosmically, as a positive thing? The Eastern view we have been examining has some interesting things to say about this.

We have all heard about people who are genuinely fine, kind, good people whose life has seen one personal disaster after another. How could this be?

One possibility: If this Eastern view is a true and accurate reflection of the way things are, there will be individuals who have spent effort in previous lives trying to cultivate noble qualities like compassion and lovingness. Assuming that that be the case, it would not be surprising to find karma testing such an individual to see how completely that self had made those qualities a part of the self. Testing on this level can come in many forms. There can be many small stresses that cumulatively work to strip the superficial veneer from the self, leaving bare the individual *core beliefs* (or, at least, the uncensored beliefs the child-self has built into itself). Another possibility is that the testing could come as a specific, traumatic experience that violently pressures the self into exposure. Rape could be an example of the latter.

I happen to know a very wealthy, very elegant woman who was attacked and raped in her home a number of years ago. She did not enjoy the experience; I did not enjoy hearing about it. Rape is an awful thing to happen to anyone. Nevertheless, what surprised me about her story was that after the fact, unwittingly, she found herself motivated by the experience to become more involved in helping others. "If someone had come to me before the experience," she said, "and told me that my social conscience was asleep, that I was a slug when it came to thinking beyond my own small self, I'd have probably looked at them blankly and thought to myself *what's your problem?* With the rape and the counseling that followed, I realized that I have a common *bond of pain* with others: with women of the ghetto, with abused women, with women from all walks of life. And it dawned on me that all of those individuals needed help, help that I might be able to give them."

In short, she told me that the experience had been horrible, but that if it hadn't happened, the high point of her week would have still been *bridge on Tuesday* and *lunch*

out with the girls on Thursday. Now she spends most of her time being useful in ways she never would have considered before the attack.

Does the fact that the experience helped the woman wake up make it an OK thing to have happened? Not as far as the personal self is concerned! Rape is still a horrendous thing to have to endure. Yet without that experience, by her own admission, that woman would still be sleepwalking past the misery and despair others feel on a daily basis. From the East's perspective, it took something very bad to illicit from the inner self of that woman something very good.

Such an experience might even be directed at a chela. If a wisp of anger hides behind that Being's facade of compassionate doings, being raped will bring it out. If there is a shadow of a tendency to take revenge when crossed, rape will bring it out (think about all the rape victims who would opt for the death penalty for their rapist if caught). If there is violence anywhere within the self, rape will bring it out.

Nobody in his or her right mind would blame a rape survivor for feeling any of those emotions. But if you happen to be a Being who is attempting to move *beyond the stream of humanity in a spiritual sense*, who is trying to follow in the footsteps of the Christs and the Buddhas, then identifying even the smallest bit of negativity within the self is important (you cannot change negative qualities if you don't see that they are there). As terrible as rape is, and as severe a test as it is, and as little as the child-self would want to endure it (or have anyone else endure it), there are Beings for whom such an experience can bring enlightenment.

On the other hand, what about the individual who has for many lives acted solely to satisfy the desires of its own child-self. Maybe the individual has come to enjoy the exercise of power over others, often being arrogantly thoughtless about the psychological pain they have inflicted in doing so. If these patterns are deeply rooted in the child, it should not be surprising to find karma sooner or later drawing that individual into vivid experience--harsh experience, even--in which the child finds itself in the position of the oppressed (reminds me of the *Biblical* quote, "And those who would be first will some day be last . . .").

Selfishly, maliciously exercising power over people is a penetration of their psyche, a violence done against them, a removal of their freedom, their dignity, their peace. In short, all the things that rape does to an individual in a physical sense, the exercise of selfishness can do to its victims in an inner sense. For a person who has strongly formed patterns of selfishness around themselves, the experience of rape might

force the personal self into a wider perception of the kind of pain it has created for others. It is a harsh experience, but in the long run it may be the only chance karma has to shock a myopic, in-turned self out of its self-involved doldrums and into a less mired state.

I have just presented two possible reasons why someone might be drawn into a severe experience like rape. Are there others?

There are as many as there are survivors.

So how does one deal with the topic of rape? When talking to a rape survivor, you are talking to someone who is probably in a considerable amount of inner turmoil. They don't need armchair philosophizing; they need love and support. It is not up to you or me to try to psyche out the karmic root-cause of their awful experience. We haven't the information required to do so (we have no idea where the individual has been or what they have done during most of this life, much less in their past twenty-five lives), and it is none of our business anyway.

On the other hand, if you are the person who has endured rape (or any terrible experience), asking *why* is a perfectly legitimate question. If, in doing so, you can see what the experience is urging you to see about *yourself*, you can come away from the experience with an understanding that not only changes the emotional quality of the happening but also that changes the tenor of your life.

In short, if the East is right, experience in the world is not the consequence of random chance, blind chaos, or a cruel or capricious God. It is karma providing opportunities for awakening.

It is interesting how this perspective tilts one's view of the world. At one point in my education, I spent a year taking graduate level classes in preparation for entrance into a Ph.D. program in western philosophy. During that time, I took an ethics class from a young Harvard educated professor who was quite brilliant and completely dedicated to the task of showing us philosophic illiterates how little we knew.

He began one session with the following query: The Bible says "Thou shalt not kill." Is killing ever justified?

Most of the people in the class answered *no*.

The professor then laid out the following scenario.

It is the late 1700's. A plantation in the deep south has an angry, violent overseer who treats the plantation's slaves mercilessly. The men-slaves are regularly beaten; the women-slaves are treated no better. In short, life for the slaves is a horror.

Through a series of unplanned occurrences, the slaves stumble into a situation in which they can arm themselves and escape. Seizing the opportunity, they make their way through the countryside until they come to a bridge that must be crossed if they are to gain safety. Unfortunately, standing on the bridge is the overseer with a gun.

The slaves huddle together to talk. They know that if they try to rush the overseer, some will be killed. They also know that if they are recaptured, their punishment will be severe . . . possibly death. They conclude that the only way to insure that *everyone* reaches safety is to *kill the overseer* before crossing.

Are the slaves justified if they do so?

That was the scenario our good professor dropped on us, and that was the question we spent the rest of the period discussing. I made a few remarks about western versus eastern perspectives and the possibility of questionable assumptions inherently buried within the presentation, but the professor essentially ignored the comments and proceeded merrily on his western-ethics way. By the end of the period, almost everyone who had originally said that killing was never acceptable had changed their minds.

It is interesting that nearly every recognized spiritual teacher, from the Buddha and Christ on down, have maintained that killing is not something one ought to do. Yet there are all sorts of circumstances in real life when the apparent injustice of a situation leads good Buddhists and Christians alike to sanction killing (killing is OK, for instance, when done on behalf of one's country or in defense of one's family). We say we revere our spiritual teachers, but our willingness to embrace killing under certain circumstances clearly flags a rift between their teachings and our gut-level feeling about how one should deal with personally threatening situations.

This obviously perplexing situation needs a closer look.

In evaluating the scenario, the first thing to be noticed is that there are really two questions being asked. The first is, "Given the horrendous life they have been made to endure, would you *blame* the slaves if they killed the overseer to reach safety?"¹

Basically decent human beings don't like to see other human beings suffer, and suffer the slaves obviously did. So with the terrible injustice of the situation, most people (myself included) would answer that question with a *hell no*.

The second question is considerably more tricky. It asks, "If, as a wise individual sitting next to the bridge, you had the ability to clearly see all of the events that led up to the slaves' predicament and all of the consequences that would follow if the slaves killed the overseer, what would you advise the slaves to do if they asked for your advice?"

Approaching a question like this from a *you only have one life to live* perspective, most Westerners respond with a predicable, "Gain freedom at all costs." On the other hand, if one doesn't believe that human experience is limited to a mere eighty-or-so years, then what? How might things look from a typically Eastern perspective?

To answer that, we must think back to an even more elementary question, "What is the purpose of human existence?"

The East suggests that you are not really your body but rather an energy-form of sorts that is alternately referred to as *a Being* or *an Aware-ness*, that is attempting to learn through experience how to act while clothed in matter. As far as this view is concerned, a fully enlightened human Being is an entity whose child-self can work in the physical world without leaving a trail of disharmony in its wake. Put poetically, a perfected Being is one that *raises no dust* (in a metaphoric sense) as a consequence of its passing. Given the self-oriented nature of most child-selves at this point in our evolution, very few have attained this level of purity. Nevertheless, that is the direction in which karma and our *impulse to grow* is believed to be pointing us.

From this perspective, it would be easy to say that killing is definitely a *raising of dust* along one's life-path and, hence, such action is not in accordance with the idea of

¹ For anyone who empathizes with the slave's situation, an alternate question might be, "If *you* had been taken from your village after seeing your friends and family killed by raiding slave-traders, if you had been chained into a tiny ship crammed full of hundreds of other black unfortunates, taken to a strange land where you were sold into bondage and where you are subsequently mistreated by a miserable, no-good overseer, would *you* feel bad about killing the bullying son-of-a-bitch to gain your own freedom?"

moving through life harmoniously. Unfortunately, as is the case with everything on this level of duality, it isn't that simple.

Why? Because inherent within most situations in which relatively good people are moved to kill, there is a certain amount of apparent injustice wrapped up in the situation. The slave scenario, for example, simply screamed *injustice* from the beginning. Yet, were *all* the injustices tied to that situation revealed in the presentation? If the East is right, the answer is *no*. To see this, consider an expanded version of the slave's story, Eastern style:

The year is 1025. The country is China. There lives a noble woman who has great wealth, social position and power. What she doesn't have is the slightest inclination to be associated with anyone who is not amongst the socially elite. As such, she can be charming to her friends while being absolutely beastly of any underling who fails to meet with her severe standards. For example, when the husband of one of her servants dies and the girl goes into a depression, the woman terminates the girl's employment because the girl is no longer performing her duties up to expectation. In another instance, a merchant promises the woman goods that are then delayed when the merchant's ships sink. Because the delay inconveniences her, the infuriated woman bitterly complains to her social acquaintances about the man's incompetence, subsequently ruining his reputation. In short, although the woman is not inherently evil, her arrogance has so set her apart from others that she has lost all concept of what it means to be a normal human being trying to deal with the pressures, pain and suffering that comes with life.

The woman (for future reference, I will refer to this Being as *tCn*, standing for *thoughtless Chinese noblewoman*) lives long and dies with nobody mourning her passing. In *tCn's* next incarnation, that Being is born into slavery as a female in the south of the United States in the late 1700's.

The year is 1189. The country is England. A Jewish girl (not the reincarnation of the *thoughtless Chinese woman*) finds herself in the middle of racial tensions between Christians and Jews under Richard I. During her short life, she absorbs her father's deep frustration, anger, and mistrust

of the Christians. As a consequence, the child builds into herself a *mistrust of others not of her kind*. She dies in a massacre of Jews at a young age (for future reference, I will refer to this Being as *mJc*, standing for *mistrusting Jewish child*). In *mJc's* next incarnation, that Being is born into a white, plantation owning family as a male in the south of the United States in the late 1700's.

The year is 1380. The country is Turkey. There lives a man (*not* the reincarnation of anyone above) whose hard work has earned him a position in which he heads a wealthy man's household. Being insecure at heart (the man very much loved his parents who were killed when he was young--and he was raised in an orphanage, which left him psychological scarred), he uses his position to inflate his own self worth. Actively dictatorial, he heartlessly bullies the man-servants while additionally making unwanted sexual advances toward the maids, all the while threatening dismissal if resisted. Because he treats his underlings like property, he is much feared and hated. In fact, nobody can understand why God would allow so miserable a man to prosper without any noticeable, adverse consequence coming to him in his life.

He lives long and dies an angry, unloved man (for future reference, I will refer to this Being as *nT*, standing for *nasty Turk*). In *nT's* next incarnation, that Being is born into slavery as a male in the south of the United States in the late 1700's.

The year is 1607. The country is Spain. There is a man (*not* the reincarnation of anyone above) who is of noble birth. Due to his wealth and position, he has an easy life. What makes him different is that he also has a *truly kind heart*. In fact, his main inner focus is to become as kind and compassionate an individual as possible.

He lives long and dies a contented, loved man (for future reference, I will refer to this Being as *kS*, standing for *kindly Spaniard*). In *kS's* next

incarnation, that Being is born into slavery as a male in the south of the United States in the late 1700's.

The year is 1790. The country is America.

kS is now an adult. Aside from being a slave, he has endured one terrible experience after another during this life. His little girl dies because the owners discount the need for proper medical attention after she is struck by a carriage. His family is split up and sold when the plantation they belonged to is dissolved. On the new plantation where he finds himself, his efforts to help the other slaves earn him the animosity of a mean-spirited overseer.² Even so, two months after arriving, *kS* saves the plantation-owner's small daughter from drowning. The overseer takes credit for the act. When *kS* is asked by the other slaves why he doesn't demand credit, he says, "I didn't do it for credit. I did it because I couldn't bear to see a child die needlessly . . . even the child of a family whose beliefs have caused me and my family so much misery." In short, he lives a life in which he has every reason to be angry and vengeful, yet he holds to the kindness that seems to be so fully a part of his inner self.³

The way *kS* lives his life affects many on the plantation including the eldest son of the plantation owner. The boy's last incarnation was that of the mistrusting Jewish girl-child (*mJc*) in England in 1189. Being a white male in southern society, *mJc* has always mistrusted blacks. After all, they are different from himself. Differences frighten him. All that begins to change when the boy sees *kS* save his sister from drowning (we know nothing of the sister's karma--she is a non-essential character added solely for flavor). The plantation's overseer (the boy's mean-spirited uncle) takes credit for saving the girl, but the boy knows better. Afterwards, he watches *kS*. He marvels at how kind and gentle the slave is even when his uncle is harassing him. It changes the boy. He stops looking at people as *us* and

² Although we are given no specifics, let us assume the overseer is a Being who has had many opportunities in many lives to act benevolently while in a position of power, and has consistently chosen to exercise that power ruthlessly.

³ No, he is not a complete saint. He does feel anger sometimes, but the anger comes only in the most intense of situations. He does not allow it to color his overall life--his general tone remains centered on kindness and compassion.

them and begins seeing people as individuals who are either good and honorable like the slave, or not-so-good and unpleasant like his uncle. It is quite a revelation for the boy.

tCn (the *thoughtless Chinese noblewoman*) has also been born of black parents and is a slave on the plantation. She has lived there from birth. She is petite and strong willed, imperious some would say. Her fellow slaves call her *the princess*, which isn't surprising given her Chinese life. It angers her to see the opulence of the plantation owner's home in comparison to the squalor in which she is forced to live. The white women wear beautiful clothes while she wears rags; the owners eat wonderful food while she eats tasteless muck. "How thoughtless they must be," she thinks, "to lead such mindlessly happy lives while I am so miserable."

nT (the *nasty Turk*) has also been born of slave parents and is a slave on the plantation.⁴ His demeanor is outwardly meek, having long since realized that the best way to survive is to kowtow. Inside, however, he is raging with anger at his situation. He wants to be free to do whatever he pleases. He chafes terribly at his need to be subservient. He hates to be viewed and treated like property while being completely unaware that he, himself, had treated people in much the same way in his previous life.⁵

Through a series of unplanned occurrences, the slaves find themselves in a situation in which they can arm themselves and escape. Seizing the opportunity, they make their way through the countryside until they come to a bridge that must be crossed if they are to gain safety. Unfortunately, standing on the bridge is the overseer with a gun.

The slaves huddle together to talk. They know that if they try to rush the overseer, some of them will be killed. On the other hand, if they allow themselves to be captured, their punishment will be severe. They decide

⁴ It is interesting that those who knew *nT's* in his mean-spirited Turkish days would have undoubtedly said, "YES, justice prevails" if told that his next life was to be as a slave. As emotionally satisfying as it may be for those who are into *just desserts*, that delight signals a misunderstanding of the idea behind karma.

⁵ Although it certainly is not the only way to do so, one of the more effective ways karma has to nudge a *thoughtless* individual like *tCn* (or a *selfish* individual like *nT*) into the realization that so acting is not a very harmonious way to be, is to place them in contact with individuals who animate those same qualities.

that the only way to insure that *everyone* reach safety is to *kill the overseer* before crossing the bridge.

kS says he can not bring himself to kill, even if it means his own freedom. Led by *nT*, the rest of the slaves disagree and choose to go forward. *kS* leaves the group and returns to the plantation.

When *kS* reaches the plantation, the first person he meets is the eldest son (*mJc*). *kS* explains what has happened. When the plantation owner arrives, the boy tries to defend *kS* but is unable to convince the infuriated owner to be lenient. *kS* is hanged as an example to others.

The eldest son is horrified by the barbarity of the act. It reinforces in him the newfound belief that being a worthwhile person has nothing to do with race or *being family*. For *kS*, the experience is terrifying . . . at least until his body dies and he moves across the line into the inner worlds. With death, the pain and pressures vanish. While in his period of introspection, he sees how the fire of his perversely difficult previous-life has tested his resolve to act in compassion, even in the most awful of circumstances. He stays in the inner worlds for a time before being drawn back into a body. This time he is born into a Hindu family in India. The family is poor, but his life is wonderful because he comes into contact with one of the real Teachers there. Through his actions, karma has presented him with the opportunity to become a chela.⁶

Meanwhile, back in 1790: Having killed the overseer,⁷ the slaves are now free in the north. Petite *tCn* falls in love with a black preacher in

⁶ It was easy for *kS* to be benevolent while living a life of ease in an idyllic setting (i.e., his Spanish life as a nobleman), but how would that self act under extreme pressure? Would compassion still be a palpable presence within that self after his biological child had needlessly died, or after his family had been split away from him, or while he was being beaten for trying to ease the suffering of his fellow slaves? A normal child-self would burn in this fire; a highly evolved Being would be tempered. In the case of the ex-Spaniard, the latter was the case.

⁷ Interesting point: If the overseer was a Being who had had a number of lives earmarked by intensely selfish choices, there will come a time in the evolution of that Being when karma gives the self *one last chance*--one last testing life. If that life is a failure in a spiritual sense, the Being will be drawn into the great sleep that comes to those who have solidified selfishness around themselves so completely that not even the severest of karmic repercussions can blast them loose. As long as there is life, there is always a chance that some kind act might help such a Being begin to see how badly It has failed as a human and, just maybe, to motivate that Being to *try* to turn around. In killing the overseer, the slaves have linked themselves karmically to the ending of that sad Being's *last chance* until another long sweep of life picks that self up again in an appropriate setting for its evolution.

Boston and they marry. Although she still has an imperious way about her, her experience on the plantation has unconsciously motivated her to become more sympathetic to the plight of the downtrodden (this is particularly good as *indifference to the needs of others* was her problem in the Chinese life). As a consequence, she convinces her husband to open a kind of halfway house for the unfortunate. As for her participation in the killing of the overseer, there are no apparent consequences for that act . . . at least not in this lifetime.

Upon gaining his freedom, *nT* has a choice to make. Being intelligent and young, some of his newfound friends encourage him to educate himself. A fine life awaits him if he does so. Unfortunately, freedom has allowed him to exercise his anger in ways previously unavailable to him, and he chooses instead to do just that. He begins by taking advantage of his friends in little ways. When he is caught and chastised, his anger explodes out into the world. Estranged from his friends, he hooks up with another former slave who is also angry and violent. They go on a thieving binge, completely oblivious to the fact that the whites they rob are themselves against slavery and the injustices that institution condones. After doing a considerable amount of harm to a considerable number of people, *nT* and his partner are caught in the act of theft and murder and are hanged. *nT* enters the inner worlds in a terrible state, having built anger and violence into his nature enough so that he cannot set those thought-forms aside. As such, he finds himself drawn away from devachan and into the lower astral where he stays for a fair portion of his time in the inner worlds. Only toward the end are some of the workers able to help him temporarily pull loose from those patterns.

In the best interest of *nT's* spiritual evolution, a respite is needed during which time that Being might be relieved of the terrible anger the self has accumulated around itself--a period of time during which gentler qualities might be allowed to grow. Only in that way can *nT* have any chance of dealing with the lives that will undoubtedly come in the future. As such, the skandas (i.e., the tendencies a Being brings into a life from previous times) of insecurity (the main cause of its problems in the Turkish

life) and anger (the main cause of the problems in the American life) do not manifest in *nT*'s next life.

Karma draws *nT* into the body of a white girl born into a frontier family in Australia.⁸ *nT*'s parents in this life are the same Beings that were his parents in the Turkish life (the parents he loved so much but who died when he was young). With that loving support, *nT* as a girl has a relatively pressureless life that is marred solely by one seemingly mindless act of violence in which one of her brothers is killed by the town bully. She is deeply haunted by the loss and cannot understand how anyone could possibly be so mean-spirited and uncaring about the lives of others. "If I were a man, I would never do such a thing," she tells her mother. In so saying, *nT* begins to confront a question--is violence ever justified--that will present itself again and again to that Being for many lives to come.

As for having to deal with any direct consequences of her part in killing the overseer in the previous life, there are no easily identifiable ones in this life . . . though there will certainly be repercussions down the line.

That is our scenario, Eastern style. It is a very simple, linear depiction of what undoubtedly would have been a very complex set of situations if the individuals depicted had been real, historical figures (and let's face it, any one of the individuals involved *could* have taken a different path than stated—we are doing a lot of supposing here). But given all that, we can make a number of important observations.

1.) The first is a side-point: I should state at the outset that I can't imagine any thoughtful, caring person ever trying to convince anyone that slavery was good. It wasn't. It was a barbaric practice driven by greed, arrogance, and a rank disrespect for the dignity and self-worth of others. Nevertheless, *child-selves-run-amuck* did put slavery into motion. In doing so, those selves inadvertently gave karma a place to inject

⁸ Notice how the whole matter of slavery becomes less a question of race (*nT* was first a Turk, then an African American, then a white) and more a question of one set of child-selves (the Beings who comprised the white landowner group) exercising temporary control over another set of child-selves (the Beings who comprised the black slave group). This is characteristic of most group struggles (even the question of male versus female rights can be viewed from this perspective). Agreeing with this doesn't make slavery any less repulsive, but it does put it in a more understandable light. This is important. Trying to effectively combat an evil without understanding its underlying whys and wherefores is almost impossible.

Beings who, for whatever reason, needed a severe, pressurized situation through which they could temporarily experience.⁹

It is possible that this de-racializing of the atrocity of slavery may irritate those whose biological ancestors experienced the indignity. This is understandable. It is not unusual for people to identify with the plight of their ancestors, taking strength from the fact that their ancestors overcame such a horror and, in some cases, being angry that their ancestors *had* to overcome such a horror. What is important is that that indignation not cloud one's understanding of the idea of karma.

For those who would subjugate, on the other hand, using karma as a justification for the mistreatment of others is a big mistake.

2.) If this scenario reflects reality, a child-self that kills to extricate itself from an uncomfortable experience does nothing to heal the inner disharmony that drew the experience in the first place. Although karma responds very strongly to motive, the act of killing usually provides nothing more than a short reprieve. *Unless that self comes into an understanding on its own*, karma will sooner or later have to bring to that self similarly severe experience in some form or other. What's more, by killing to escape a bad situation, a Being creates a karmic knot between itself and the victim that additionally must be dealt with in time.

That is what the great Teachers were trying to say when they admonished their followers to abstain from killing. They weren't setting down law in stone. They were making an observation. They were trying to tell humanity that *when all is said and done, killing is never the best way to go*--that when the child-self uses violence to get what it wants, it just makes things all the worse in the long run.

3.) Because, as the Buddha put it, we are ignorant of the reality of this place, we consistently misunderstand situations in life. We look at a small child and think, "How innocent," not realizing that within that new body resides a Being that has done

⁹ A titillating tale along this line: I heard an interested though unverified story about the mathematician, mystic, and highly evolved spiritual teacher the west knows as Pythagoras. It is said that he was once asked by a guest what he had been in his last life.

"A slave," was his response.

"Was it a difficult life?" queried the incredulous guest.

"Oh, yes," Pythagoras said. "I was used for the sexual pleasure of my master."

"How awful," said the guest. "Why were you drawn into such a terrible situation?"

Pythagoras replied, "Because I had to learn to dance in chains."

innumerable things both good and bad over a long period of existence spanning many lifetimes. There are no innocents on this level of existence. There are only experiencing Beings. (This brings me back to the quote at the beginning of the chapter. “*We want happiness, but we forget that we live on a planet of teaching with a long chain of karma trailing us.*”

4.) So if killing and violence is not the way to step away from a situation in which individual rights are being stepped upon, how do bad situations ever change for an individual?

There are myriad ways an individual might disengage from the slave situation. For those who had *spent their karma*, so to speak, *death* could easily have relieved them of the situation allowing them at the same time to move cleanly into a new circumstance (this was what happened to *kS*). We don't normally think of death as an entrance into a *rest-state between lives*, and for good reason. People having trouble dealing with life might mistakenly believe that death was a way out of their misery (a big mistake!). Nevertheless, death is what relieved *kS* in the scenario, and having succeeded with the severe tests presented in that previous life, that Being went on to a situation that was considerably better (at least from the personal self's point of view). The problem comes when a Being like *nT* decides to shorten a needed experience by forcing its end through violence.

What makes this view difficult to encompass is its intricacy. *tCn* gained her freedom by following *nT* across the bridge after *nT* killed the overseer. Does that mean it was karmically corrected for *tCn* to be relieved from the experience? Probably. But does that, in turn, mean that *nT* had to kill the overseer in order to make *tCn's* release possible? No! Things are never so linear. For example, the slaves could have spared the overseer and rushed him instead (being a single individual, he surely could not have stopped them all). A few slaves might have been killed, sending them on to other more appropriate situations, but if it was karmically correct, she would not have been one of them. She would have made it to freedom.

There are all sorts of possibilities, but the point is that the interaction between individuals, karma, and events is always complicated. The fact that the slaves appeared to act as a group was significant, but not as significant as the fact that each was brought to that situation as a consequence of their particular spiritual necessity. Motive was all

important. The motives that underlay each individual's actions were what laid the groundwork for what would come karmically in their future.

You are your own parent, as well as your own child.

5.) Paradoxically, part of what makes this view so difficult is that it cannot be pigeon-holed into a nice, concise set of ethical rules one should live by. Only a fool, for instance, would demand that a woman about to be raped adhere to the doctrine of non-violence if she didn't have a true, inner conviction that was motivating her to do so. Rape is a severe experience. Armchair philosophizing about it helps nobody.

In a little different light, a sudden, psychologically pressure-filled experience is designed specifically to give the self *no time to intellectualize* about what should or should not be done. It requires one to act, or react, at a gut level. Resisting a rape or any other violent, personal assault can result in death. Not resisting can also result in death. Which path to take? It depends. The individual in the experience must decide. If the individual's best sense of the situation is to fight, then fight she should. I would never want to be accused of talking someone into acting non-violently in such a situation if the individual did not feel down deep that such an action was in her (or his) best interest. Besides, it may be that resisting *was* the most appropriate response. Maybe karma was pushing the individual to be more assertive. *Maybe there was no necessity for the attacker to succeed.* In that case, not fighting back would have been the wrong course of action.

The great Teachers have said that in the long run, depending upon violence to get by in life is not the way to build an immortal soul. But those same Teachers have understood the human condition. They knew that if an individual acts in the best way he or she knows, even if those actions are not truly wise in a cosmic sense, karma will work gently and lovingly to bring that individual out from ignorance and onto the path that leads to skillful living in matter. That is the beauty of this place. It is totally geared to teaching.

There is a great need for the child-self in each of us to think about violence because the child is so often prone to use violence to get what it wants. So far, we have looked at relatively violent situations as they affect individuals. How is violence to be viewed on a global scale. This last section is devoted to that question.

In discussing the psychology of the child self, we have observed that the child does not like to see mirrored in other people its own shortcomings. Very few people are free from acting in ways that are selfish. As such, very few people are willing to stomach a selfish kid, or a selfish friend, or an auto driver who mindlessly acts with only his or her interests in mind (like the person who cuts you off on the freeway).

As far as this view is concerned, whenever you respond to *emotional friction* in your life, the root-cause of the response can be found within the shortcomings of *your own self*. What is interesting is that there are Beings who, having moved ahead of the stream of humanity, have very little within them that is grossly disharmonious. When they see the atrocities of the world, very little is mirrored back at them. When they move to help, they are not hamstrung with the kind of high emotion you or I might feel. Not being fogged by the personal self's battery of knee-jerk reactions, they see situations more clearly. And with their insight, they react to life with a purity that is beyond the norm. One such individual was an Indian named Mohandas Gandhi.

It needs to be made clear from the outset that Gandhi was not perfect. He was probably a chela (this can be attested to by noting that he was horrified when his countrymen called him *mahatma*, or great soul--one of the names traditionally used for a *master* in India--because he knew he was not). As is often the case with Beings at that level, his personal self was in full, arrogant cry in his earlier years before he came into control of himself (it is interesting that he credited his wife's non-cooperation in response to his *imperious behavior* as having helped him to see how powerful non-violence could be).

When he did awaken, he presented to the world an approach for dealing with other people that was, in practice, quite foreign to the majority within the so-called civilized world. He did not take credit for inventing the approach, but he did fully animate in his everyday life the practice of non-violence.

Gandhian non-violence (ahimsa) is predicated on the assumption that within the self, above and beyond all else, there is a higher Being. When Gandhi worked with people, he touched that Higher Self. They may have reverted back to their old, selfish ways later--they still had the *freedom of will* to do so--but when Gandhi worked with people, he was able to temporarily bring out the humanness within them.

Gandhian non-violence is not an easy technique to follow. It requires the willingness to put one's own child-self on hold, so to speak, and to put the good of one's

adversary ahead of your own. Even if you have to absorb abuse or physical violence, the whole thrust of the approach is to help the offender see that his or her actions are not as they should be.¹⁰

The movie *Gandhi* showed an excellent example of the technique in practice when thousands of Indians lined up, four abreast, to walk peacefully into a salt-producing plant. The guards were not at all bashful about clubbing the men as they approached. As the advancing men were hit and went down, women came in to help the wounded stagger away so that the next four could step forward. So it continued, new men replacing their fallen comrades . . . for hours.

I don't care how cynical, angry, or hate-filled an individual is, after clubbing basically harmless people for a number of hours, even the most insensitive human is going to at least *begin* to question his actions.

That was exactly the idea: to animate the conscience, helping the offenders to touch their humanness and, subsequently, to aid the offenders in seeing beyond the veil of ignorance through which they peered.¹¹

¹⁰ Another reason Gandhian non-violence is difficult to follow is the fact that an individual using it must constantly be checking his or her *own* motives and actions to be sure that *they* are not the problem.

¹¹ There have been many stories of individuals who have taken this path to the amazement of all. I remember one about a Hindu priest during the opening days of India's independence from the British. A Moslem mob approached the temple with mayhem in mind. The priests in the temple wanted to board themselves inside for fear of the mob. All, that is, except one very fine, benevolent old fellow. Though his comrades pleaded with him not to do it, he walked out of the temple into the crowd. A surprise even to the Moslems, he wasn't attacked. Why? Because he loved so deeply that his presence changed the crowd. He moved amongst them, asking about their families, seeing some hurt and helping to bandage them. He was sincerely interested in their well-being, and because when he looked into the eyes of those people he saw what they really were--Buddhas-to-be--his complete benevolence made them for one fleeting instant fully human. That was all that was needed.

But, you say, how do you do that when you are being beaten?

Lanza del Vasto, a Frenchman, was a follower of Gandhi. During the period in which France was *going nuclear*, his people used non-violence to influence the French people against nuclear arms. During one confrontation with the police, a particularly surly cop selected one of the del Vasto's group for a beating. The officer hit the man repeatedly with a night stick until the man lay motionless on the ground. But when the cop retreated, the man came to life, lifted his head, and said to the officer, "Sir, you've dropped your wallet."

In fact, during the beating the cop's wallet had flipped out of his pocket. It would have been lost to him if the beaten man had not exercised kindness and informed him of his loss.

The cop never beat another anti-nuclear member again. In fact, he counseled his compatriots to treat the dissidents better. The beaten man had, through his suffering and kindness, made a friend of one who would otherwise have been an ardent enemy.

This is characteristic of Gandhian non-violence when exercised correctly. It also helps to explain why so few people are willing or able to use it well.

Gandhi treated the British that way. He acted like a good parent who was dealing with a child who just didn't understand that his actions were wrong. Gandhi was disciplined; he was firm; but he was loving. When the British left, they did not leave as enemies.

One of the more unfortunate reactions to Gandhian non-violence comes from people who really don't want to give up the use of violence as long as it provides them with an avenue through which they might get what they want. People in this boat--which is to say a fair portion of the world's population--use all sorts of arguments against the approach. One of the most popular is *Gandhi was able to get the British to leave India, but he wouldn't have stood a chance against the Nazis of World War II Germany.*

I say this is unfortunate because it signals a complete misunderstanding of the philosophic tenets upon which Gandhi's approach was based.

If the East is correct in its view of the world, there are no accidents. People make choices, which bring consequences, which bring new choices. As such, an individual is constantly shaping his or her karmic future right up to the moment.

What does that mean? The Beings who were in bodies during WWII were there *because it was karmically appropriate for them to be there.* Whether it be the German man who was confronted with Hitler's fanaticism and had to choose whether he would be swept up by it or not (Einstein, for one, chose not . . . and would have done so even if he had not been a Jew), or the American who had to decide whether to use the A-bomb to destroy an island off the coast of Japan or to use it to destroy a densely populated area on the mainland (Truman chose the populated area), those specific Beings were there because it was karmically correct for them to make those specific choices.

Asking questions like, "How would Gandhi have fared in Nazi Germany," is nonsensical because it obviously wasn't karmically correct for the individuals involved in that conflict (either on the Allied or Axis side) to have to deal with a highly evolved human Being (i.e., a Gandhi-type) who was primed to PUBLICLY face apparent injustice in a *spiritually peaceful way.* The presence of such a Being would have undoubtedly

affected the choices of the millions of Beings who *were* involved in the war. That, evidently, was not karmically appropriate.^{12, 13}

Put another way, if there are lines of karma that draw individuals to particular situations, you can't just plop a stray *somebody* into the middle of a historical situation and expect the individual's presence to make any sense within the context of the times and choices being made. Playing *what if* with history, as far as this view is concerned, is completely meaningless.

But unfortunately (again), people demand the right to do just that. So, for the sake of argument, let's oblige by examining three different scenarios:

Scenario #1: On Germany's side, assume there are some normal, basically good men and women who are proud of their country and do not wish to see it come to harm (i.e., people who feel about Germany the same way American's feel about the U.S.). Add to them some competent military men, some military men who could easily let power go to their heads, and some soulless individuals holding the reins of power in Germany. Combine that with a feeling within the country that Germany had been treated very badly at the end of WWI (in fact, Germany had been vengefully humiliated and impoverished

¹² DO NOT MISUNDERSTAND. This is not to say there weren't evolved individuals in Germany or on the Allied side who had to make very difficult choices as to how they would deal with the war. It means that they had to make those choices without the support of a Gandhi-type backing them up.

Example: I have a German friend who was a medical student when the war broke out. Having read about the Eastern philosophies when he was young (he was especially attracted to Tibetan Buddhism), he believed in reincarnation and karma. His readings also led him to vow that he would never take a human life. When the war broke out, German authorities gave him an ultimatum: either join the army or his family would be killed (he remembers that at that point, he wondered why karma had ever put him in so awful a position). He joined, but he did so determined never to kill. He was sent to the Russian front; at one point he engaged in hand-to-hand combat; but at all times he kept it in his mind that he would kill no one, and he succeeded.

The man vowed non-violence and stuck to it. He did not kill even when engaged in close-quarters combat, yet he survived. His choices were his alone, made in a hostile environment, adhered to solely through his own spiritual tenacity. Yet history knows nothing of his actions. In short, we have no idea how many men and women made spiritually sane choices throughout the war. It simply isn't something in which history is interested.

¹³ This is not to denigrate those who found themselves in that war and chose to kill in defense of their country and loved ones. Fighting is a very typical, noble, normal response to the kind of threat Germany and Japan posed. War is not good, but in war it is possible that some individuals might become even more acutely aware of the sanctity of life than would have otherwise been the case (I know a number of men who killed in war and have been haunted by it ever since). What is important to know is that karma responds to motivation more than anything else. If an individual's motive is relatively pure, if the individual acts from the best that is evident to that self, karma's response will never be harsh.

by the Allies at the end of that war) and a superiority complex characteristic of a people who are basically insecure--and you have Germany's situation. In this scenario, Germany is a totalitarian state and is clearly the aggressor.

On the Allied side, assume there are some normal, basically good individuals--people like you and me. Add to that some competent military men, some military people who could easily let power go to their heads (General George Patton somehow comes to mind), and an international group of leaders who are trying to save their countries from being over-run by a clear evil. In this scenario, this is the Allied situation.

In other words, let's assume the situation is, to a good approximation, as it actually was, with one exception. Assume there are no *people of peace* on either side in this scenario: no peaceniks, no Germans who opposed war and militarism, no Gandhi-types.

How do things proceed?

The fighting is bitter with all hell breaking loose for five or six years. Allied casualties (this includes civilians and the military, both the wounded and dead) come to approximately 34,000,000 people (the Soviet Union alone sustains 22,500,000 *deaths*). Casualties in the Axis countries (i.e., Germany, Japan, and Italy) come to approximately 18,000,000. In addition, the Germans kill between 6,000,000 and 7,000,000 gypsies, Slavs, Roman Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, mentally disabled, political prisoners, and Jews (mostly Jews) in what will become known as *the holocaust*.

The Germans lose. On both sides, men and women act valiantly in sacrificing their lives for the ideals they believe in, but on the whole just about anyone who is personally touched by the tragedy and blasted dreams leaves the war deeply scarred. As there really are no peace-makers, only warriors, heroes, war criminals and ordinary folk, the general attitude on the planet during the fifty years following the war can generally be characterized as *me before all others*. Terrible things are done in the name of selfishness, in the name of *me first, me alone*. Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge kill 1,000,000 of his Cambodian countryman in the early 1980's in the name of *political expediency*. The Hutus in central Africa kill over 100,000 Tutsi in one year at the beginning of the 1990's in the name of *tribalism*. Serbian nationalists attempt a genocide on Bosnians in the name of *ethnic cleansing*. Financial institutions all over the globe go for the jugular whenever possible.

In short, the world is not a very pleasant place in which to live. It is as though there is a blanket over the social conscience of the population, and there doesn't seem to be much chance of a let-up in sight. So goes the world in *Scenario #1*, and so goes the

world without individuals who are willing to think of the other guy's good before thinking of themselves.

Scenario #2: Both German and the Allies are as outlined above, with one big exception. Scattered amongst the *normal* people are peace-makers--individuals who try to deal with conflicts peacefully.

The war rages much as outlined above. The Allies win; the casualties are, again, as outlined above. During the fifty years that follow, there is still selfishness, anger, hatred and violence. Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge still perform their atrocities, as do the Hutus and the Serbs. What is different is that there are individuals who adhere to a moral code that is not expedient, but that is spiritually sane. Some of the previously killed Gandhi-types from WWII reincarnate to help this process along, along with other evolved Beings who come into bodies because it is appropriate for them to do so. The world is not perfect, but there are at least some individuals with a moral compass that has not been completely warped by the selfishnesses of the child self. Life is lighter than it might have otherwise been; there is a tone of hope even in the midst of suffering.

Scenario #3: The German side of the story is much the same as outlined at the beginning of the first scenario (and the second). The difference is that they do not face an armed Allied force but rather a nation of Gandhis (we could have made this a group of nations, but for the sake of simplicity let's assume just one very large country is involved).¹⁴

When the Germans choose to invade, there are no armies waiting to repel them. They are welcomed into the country by kindly people who seem perfectly unmoved by their presence. Within a very short period of time, the Germans begin their *final solution*, attempting to round up all Jews, Slavs, etc., for extermination. What they meet is a nation of individuals who view death as a simple, natural transition from one state to another. As a consequence, these people are not in the least bit afraid of dying. The population is more than happy to cooperate whenever possible, but they are *not* willing to aid the Germans in any form of violence whatsoever. This infuriates the German commanders

¹⁴ As was mentioned above, there are people who rather perversely maintain that Gandhi (a single man) was able to deal with the English but he never would have stood a chance against Hitler. If you think about it, the argument is moderately amusing. It took 34,000,000 Allied casualties to beat Hitler and company using military means, yet for non-violence to prove itself, critics (bright souls that they are) would demand that Gandhi accomplish the task *alone*.

who begin a campaign of reprisals for the non-cooperation. 400,000 citizens are killed. Despite the carnage, the hundreds of millions of citizens left are busy acting in a kindly, benevolent way to all they come in contact with. The saner Germans in the armed forces begin to realize that what they are doing is wrong. They attempt to lighten up on the civilian population. Orders from the top demand a purge; there is rebellion in the ranks as more and more Germans come to realize that these people are not victims but rather very special people.

Even the insane Germans, after the emotional high of killing begins to wear off, start to wilt under the goodness of these people.

Germany's youth, so quick to pick up the banner of nationalism and Nazism, so willing to have their hatreds and angers energized by leaders who are truly dark, find themselves in the company of individuals who are filled with Light. Touching a Being like that is like touching God. All Germans are not changed by the experience--there are always the soulless--but enough come into a state of sanity to change the tone and attitudes of the German people. With that change, Hitler's reign ends.

Casualties on the Gandhian side come to, maybe, 800,000. Casualties on the German side are insignificant. Fifty years following the war-that-was-not, a large number of Germans have been integrated into the invaded country (in fact, the Germans never leave). During that time, there is a considerable alteration in the way people deal with one another. Many of the Gandhi-types killed during the confrontation reincarnate as Germans and find themselves on the other side of the fence, so to speak. They help build within the German psyche qualities that make for a great, kindly people, and they do it *as Germans*. There are still atrocities being committed in the world, but the tone that permeates human activity is definitely more thoughtful, compassionate, lighter and kinder. There is great hope in the world . . .

Stepping away from our scenarios, World War II was a terrible conflict in which millions of people died (the statistics quoted in Scenario I were actual numbers from WWII). Allied non-violence on the order suggested in Scenario III would have required the presence of an enormous number of dedicated, knowledgeable people. It would most probably have culminated in Germans taking over the nation-of-peace only to find themselves engulfed and assimilated into the benevolence of that country. People would have died in the conflict; governments would have been re-arranged; for a short time there would have been hardship for the personal selves involved in the situation. But when all

was said and done, Hitler would have stood *no chance at all* in succeeding against that nation dedicated to Gandhian non-violence.¹⁵ To believe otherwise is to be ignorant of the power wielded by spiritually evolved human Beings. The problem we face today--the problem we faced during World War II--is that there are very few humans in which Light of this order is in evidence.

Then again, that shouldn't be surprising. This is a time of choosing, both for us and for WW II Germans. This is the Kaliyuga . . .

In general, the last thing to be mentioned about Gandhi has to do with his motives. It is true that the energies (for want of a better word) projected by a dedicated, non-violent person can *potentially* affect a belligerent adversary so as to make the antagonist more reasonable.¹⁶ It is also true that the path of non-violence is a powerful tool when political action is desirable amongst people who otherwise have no power. But what most people don't realize is that neither of those truths were behind Gandhi's use of the approach. Gandhi followed a path of non-violence because it was the only way he felt comfortable treating other human Beings.

If you use non-violence as a means to an end, not because you have a real commitment to non-violence as a way of life but because it can get you something you want, the tone of your actions will carry at least some dissonance within it. The power of non-violence resides in one human Being dealing with another human Being in a caring, compassionate way. Anything short of that may get results, but the results will additionally bring unexpected, probably unwanted repercussions.

In short, if this view is correct, *ends do not justify means* no matter how much the child-self would like to believe otherwise.

¹⁵ Interesting thought: If there had been a nation of Gandhis during WWI, there would have been no fertile field within 1930's Germany from which a Hitler *could* have grown.

¹⁶ I can just hear cynics saying, "Jesus was generally non-violent (he was called *the Prince of Peace*), and he didn't seem to be able to make adversaries more reasonable." The problem with this observation is that the presence of Christ on this earth was not a normal situation. Gandhi was most probably a chela. A chela is an individual who has, to some degree, moved ahead of the stream of humanity in a spiritual sense, but who is not yet a perfected Being. Christ was an avatar. As was said in an earlier chapter, avatars "hold in one hand the power to change all things, and in the other hand the power to quite literally make the world a mist." An avatar is not like a chela--someone who is doing the best they can, given their limited facility to act in wisdom--an avatar is a perfected Being. They sense the consequences of their actions . . . completely. The very quality of the purity and benevolence of a Being on this level could swamp humankind making everything just wonderful for a time, but that would only waylay people from coming into their own enlightenments through their own efforts. Avatars do not come to make everything right. They come to remind humankind of what it will someday be.