

“SOUL FORCE” AND THE OCCUPY MOVEMENT

By: George Wolfe

Images on television of police abusing nonviolent protestors at the University of California at Davis brought back vivid memories of the civil rights era. Only instead of authorities delivering water from high-powered fire hoses, it was police-grade pepper spray.

What these students in California and in other states are engaging in through the Occupy Movement is what Mahatma Gandhi referred to as *satyagraha*. *Satyagraha* (lit. “clinging to the truth”) is experienced as a spiritual strength and is often translated as “soul force.” Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. made use of the phrase “soul force” in his famous *I have a dream* speech.

According to Gandhi, *satyagraha* consists of sacrificial action and a willingness to suffer for a just cause by openly allowing oneself to become a sacrificial victim of an injustice. Even as a Hindu, Gandhi saw it as an imitation of Christ’s sacrifice. The practice is intended to call public attention to injustice through nonviolent direct action without seeking revenge. Proactively, *satyagraha* initiates struggle and seeks to keep opponents off balance by doing the unexpected. According to peace educator Michael Nagler, *satyagraha* requires “a kind of strength that does not come from numbers or from weapons.” Rosa Parks was publicly arrested and taken to jail when she refused to give up her seat in the front of a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. In doing so, she performed an act of *satyagraha*. Her sacrifice triggered the Montgomery bus boycott and helped expose the rampant racism the South. Through her quiet courage and civil disobedience, she exemplified what Henry David Thoreau referred to in his essay *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience* as “a majority of one.”

In Gandhi’s view, nonviolence applied in the pursuit of social justice is not passive, nor is it submissive or complacent. *Satyagraha* involves strategies that challenge and disrupt the status quo. It is actually a form of fighting using nonviolent tactics (e.g., marches, sit-ins, boycotts, strikes, and forms of civil disobedience). One can best characterize it as *assertive nonviolent action that is free from hostile intention*. From the peace studies perspective, violence is a form of weakness, while ethical nonviolent perseverance is a form of strength. You know *satyagraha* is working when the aggression taken against it by authorities increases public support for the protesters and makes them even more committed to their cause.

Satyagraha has its greatest impact if we choose an injustice that a majority of the public perceives as beyond compromise. Banks that helped create the housing crisis getting a government bailout while homeowners undergo bank foreclosure is an example of such an injustice. In response, protesters in some cities have begun to occupy properties threatened with foreclosure. For the Occupy Movement, *satyagraha* means taking direct action against self-centered out of control capitalism, corporate mismanagement, an unfair tax code, right to work legislation, and political leaders who seek to undo the hard-won protections against exploitation won by labor unions during the past century.

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SCHEDULE OF EVENTS— ON CAMPUS

Thursday, January 19

- *Social Justice League Meeting*

5:00PM at the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies (310 N. McKinley Ave.) For more Information, contact SJL@bsu.edu.

- *Mini Meditation Class Introduction*

George Wolfe will be teaching a new meditation mini-course beginning on Saturday, January 21st. The dates and times for each of the 4 classes are as follows:

January 19: Introductory presentation (optional - for those needing more information or who have questions)

January 21: Small group instruction, class times by appointment

January 22: 7:30 PM

January 24: 7:30 PM

January 29: 7:30 PM

For more information, contact wmwolfe@bsu.edu.

- *Unity Week—Unity Feud*

6:00PM in AR 217

Saturday, January 21

- *2012 Unity Pageant—A Timeless Journey*

6:00PM at Pruis Hall. Doors open at 5:30PM.

Monday, January 23

- *OXFAM America Meeting*

6:00PM in WB 139. For more information, contact oxfambsu@gmail.com.

Tuesday, January 24

- *Free the Slaves Meeting*

9:00PM in Bracken Library 404. For more information, contact freetheslaves@gmail.com.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS— OFF CAMPUS

Thursday, January 19

[Indianapolis] Fast for Gaza will meet at 12 noon at in the cafeteria at Christian Theological Seminary, 1000 W. 42. For more info, contact Lew Weiss at ljweiss@clarian.org or 962-8580.

[Indianapolis] There will be an Anti-death Penalty Witness, 12:30-1:30 pm, at the east steps of the State House, Capitol Ave. and Market, sponsored by The Indiana Information Center on the Abolition of Capital Punishment (IICACP). Bring a sign or use one of ours; come for any part of the hour. For more info, phone 466-7128

[Indianapolis] Christians for Peace & Justice in the Middle East will meet at 6 pm at the home of Dottie Gerner. Bring a sandwich. For more info or directions, phone Dottie Gerner at 283-7175.

Friday, January 20

[Indianapolis] The weekly vigil protesting warfare will take place, 4:30-5:30 pm, in front of the Federal Building, North and Pennsylvania, sponsored by the Indianapolis Peace and Justice Center. Bring an appropriate sign or have one provided. For more info, phone Gilbert Kuhn at 926-3068 or email Ron Haldeman at ronjane@igc.org

Saturday, January 21

[Indianapolis] Bread for the World will hold a monthly meeting at 10 am in the board room in the A Wing of the Main Building at Robin Run Village, 5354 W. 62. For more info, phone Marjorie Hill at 291-7150 before attending.

[Indianapolis] Two overlapping free events will occur at Earth House, 237 N. East, with good food for free or as much as you can pay, 2-4 pm, and a Really, Really Free Market, 2:30-5:30 pm. For more info, contact Ed Stites at 965-2466 or stitesed@gmail.com

[Nashville] There will be a Peace Vigil on the theme "War Is Not The Answer!" at 6 pm at Brown County Courthouse, Main and Van Buren Streets sponsored by Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (Brown County branch). For more info, contact Tom Hougham at 878-4210 or annntom@hotmail.com

Sunday, January 22

[Indianapolis] Isaac Beachy of the Fellowship of Reconciliation will share his real life experiences from working on projects in Colombia, South America., at 12:30 pm at First Mennonite Church, 4601 Knollton Road (free lunch). For more info, email Jeff Matheus at jeffmatheus@hotmail.com

[Indianapolis] Slow Food Indy will hold its Annual Meeting and Pitch-in at 2 pm at Wheeler Arts Community in Fountain Square. For more info, contact Ed Stites at 965-2466 or stitesed@gmail.com

FEATURED BLOG

Showcased below is a blog from the Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies class [ID 301]. This course provides students with an overview of the Peace and Conflict Studies discipline, including key concepts and related theories. The course is designed to familiarize students with the historical background of various peace movements, to analyze principles used to resolve conflict, and to provide a view of how peace and conflict resolution are being pursued today. A blog from this class will be featured each week in the newsletter. This week's blog is written by **Robert Moran**.

The Ethical Treatment of Land

Human interaction with the land has been modified as humans have created smarter tools and methods of land alteration. Land and animals are now considered only valuable if they can be related to the human economy, meaning if the survival of an organism cannot help advance human life that organism becomes disposable. With the demand for different foods and products of nature, much of what was once natural has either become extinct or unnaturally mass produced. The central concept of the reading placed the human ethic in one of two areas, either understanding of a philosophical need for the natural progression of organisms and agricultural conservation mindset or, a mindset that would except a world made of synthetic goods where land is solely used to grow food or as scenery and conservation is not thought of.

One of the main arguments states simply that humans are not educated on how their choices can and will impact the world. The finite amount of resources we have, many of which are not reusable, will run out if human kind does not decide to stop overproduction, land destruction and pollution. Why must an animal become vital to our economy before we value it as a part of nature? Humans have taken the conqueror role in the animal kingdom and as the reading pointed out, we do not know what is worthless or of worth, yet we decide to exterminate entire species by our poor decisions. This irresponsible decision making by human kind has developed the need for agricultural scientists whom correct human error by protecting species from invasive species supplanted by human error or from extinction by pollution or other human error.

It is obvious that a land pyramid exists and as intelligent beings we should be inclined to protect the intricacies that keep species alive. A land pyramid exists where a very broad base of soil supports plants, which in turn supports insects, which in turn support animals and animals narrow all the way to the top. So killing an insect could have an impact on the livelihood of so many animals. Recent cases of human error have threatened to eliminate biodiversity in many environments. The jumping Asian Carp was brought to America unnaturally, will eat all of the fish in the great lakes if they reach the lakes through Midwestern waterways. The Emerald Ash Borer is threatening ash trees in the Midwest, by killing trees after being brought here from Asia on factory skids. In the documentary King Corn we see how corn production in Iowa is affecting the fish of the Gulf Coast because water runoff containing pesticides and loose soil is making water running down the Mississippi purely inhabitable. Furthermore, corn production is becoming unnatural, chemicals are used to significantly increase yields, that surplus of corn is affecting our diets because it is broken down into almost all of our food and fed to the animals we eat. This reading can apply to choices that I make, it is important to be informed of the impact of each of our decisions. For example, if it is know that a company is polluting a waterway, it is up to me to make the choice to not purchase their product. As a consumer it is important to realize each and every purchase we make is much like casting a vote for that product to remain in production. Finally, this reading gives me more reason to value nature as I already had, and share information that I know about recycling and the like with others.



Happy New Year!!!!

January 23rd, 2012 ushers in the Lunar Year of the Dragon. In Vietnam, one of 12 animals of the zodiac represents each year. In many Asian cultures, including Vietnam, the Year of the Dragon is considered to be the most desirable year to be born in, as the dragon brings luck, strength, independence, nobility, wisdom, and a promising future. It is believed that the Year of the Dragon brings good fortune to people, including wealth, health, good marriages, and new children.

The Vietnamese people regard Tet as their most important holiday. Food preparation for Tet is very time consuming and often requires days of cooking and, prior to the celebrations, people clean, paint, and decorate their homes. People avoid cleaning during Tet so that good luck will not be “swept away.”

If you would like for your events to be included in this newsletter, please contact Mary Conley meconley@bsu.edu.

DISCLAIMER: The events described in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies.