Chapter 4
Transforming Violence to Nonviolence: 
An Approach, Lessons Learned, and an Inspiration – A Positive from the Negative of the Charleston Church Shooting

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ABSTRACT
America can be a violent place. This country has a diverse population with a plethora of social problems including a significant level of violence that occurs in families, schools, churches, and other elements of society. Violence results in significant costs to family relationships, crime, health care, social services, education, race, religion and public policy. There have been many high-profile cases of violence especially mass shootings. On June 17, 2015 Dylan Roof, a young white male, fatally wounded 9 people at a church in Charleston, South Carolina. What causes such violent acts? Are males more violent than females? What can be done to address the problem of violence? Violence often leads to more violence. Can a violent act, such as the Charleston shooting result in a transformative experience and outcome where the response offers lessons for a vision for nonviolence?

Nonviolence is a powerful and just weapon. Which cuts without wounding and ennobles the man who wields it. It is a sword that heals. – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

INTRODUCTION
We live in very violent society. While we as Americans promote the ideals of a civilized democracy, we continue to accept the human, social, economic, psychological, and societal costs resulting from very public violent behavior primarily mass shootings. These senseless acts have no boundaries regarding

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time, location in the country, and result in life-changing physical, spiritual, and emotional damage to persons without regard for the race, gender, age, or socio-economic status of the surviving victims. These are the fortunate ones. The story always starts with the number of individuals who were killed as the news breaks of the latest incident. Unfortunately, as a society we seem to have become less shocked and more inured to the continuance of these nefarious events in our country. However, violence is as old as America itself. The country’s history is replete with examples of violence. We answer violence with violence. Have we not learned from the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. that violence begets violence?

The Charleston shooting, also referred to as the Charleston massacre, that occurred on the evening of June 17, 2015 is such an event. Dylann Roof, a twenty-one-year-old, young white man, sat calmly for over an hour, with 13 members of the historic Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church of Charleston South Carolina, during their weekly Bible study, before extracting a large caliber handgun from his backpack and shooting ten people; only one survived. Roof immediately fled the church and the state of South Carolina. After being arrested the next day in Shelby, North Carolina, Roof indicated his actions were done in hopes of instigating a race war. (The Daily Beast, 2015; Time, 2015)

Regrettably, violence is often met with violence. However, there are other responses to violence. However, we do not see them used often. These are the elements of self-control, critical thinking, forgiveness, mediation, and nonviolence. It begs the question of why? Can these ideals be taught? Are there examples where the outcome of a violent act resulted in a nonviolence response that helped with the healing process and also provided lessons of humanity in action?

Dylann Roof did not get what he wanted. His actions some would have envisioned as the right catalyst to ignite civil unrest, disturbances, protests, with accompanying discord between persons of different races, religions, and political beliefs. What we now know occurred was just the opposite. The question is why and what can be done to replicate this nonviolence response to deathly violence.

The first task is to define what is meant by violence. This is not as simple as it may seem. While all words have meanings, it is our personal interpretation that really impacts our understanding and relationship with words. Interpretation is impacted by factors including when an event occurs and the values of the people of that period.

**WHAT IS VIOLENCE?**

Violence for all its negativity, destructiveness, pain, and anguish is a complicated enigma to define. It is similar to listening to two people provide their individual interpretation of what is beauty or what is art. The problem is what I define as beautiful or artistic, you may see as ugly or totally lacking in artistic quality. The same is true for violence. What one person views as an act of violence, another may say is an outcome of a disagreement that while troubling does not rise to that which they define as violence. What then is violence?

The most basic definition of violence can be found in any dictionary. The American Heritage Dictionary defines violence as “physical force exerted for the purpose of violating, damaging or abusing…. the abusive or unjust exercise of power…. vehemence of feeling or expression.” The problem here is with the broadness of the definition along with the fact no reference is made to the recipient of the violence, which begs the question does this have to be a person. In other words, can an act of violence be committed against an animal? What about an inanimate object such as building?
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