

Session 1:
The First Step

SESSION 1: **The First Step**

OBJECTIVES:

- To become familiar with the goals and methods of the *Engage* Study Program
- To begin to explore the meaning and dimensions of active nonviolence
- To begin getting to know each other

AGENDA:

- Welcome [2 min.]
- Opening [20 min.]
- Sharing Our Names [20 min.]
- Sharing Our Passion [10 min.]
- Introducing the *Engage* Study Program [5 min.]
- Making Agreements [10 min.]
- Beginning to Explore Nonviolence [20 min.]
- Break [10 min.]
- Nonviolence Partners [15 min.]
- Conclusion [30 min.]
 - Nonviolence Journal
 - Nonviolent Action
 - Next Session's Reading
 - Evaluation
 - Closing

READINGS:

- Reading #1: Usman Farman, "Brother, if you don't mind, there is a cloud of glass coming at us. Grab my hand, let's get the hell out of here!"
- Reading #2: Sue Monk Kidd, "That's How I Like to See a Woman"
- Reading #3: Jerry Large, "The Costs of a Violent Society"

NOTES FOR THE FACILITATOR

PREPARATION: TWO WEEKS BEFORE

- Review the Facilitation Guidelines found in Part Four.
- Review the entire session in depth. Role-play or practice setting up and facilitating exercises beforehand. Wherever possible, put material into your own words. Feel free to make notes for this purpose on 3x5 cards or in the book next to the written instructions.
- Always attempt to put the material into your own words.
- Find a site for the study program, or at least Sessions 1 & 2. Make sure the site is accessible if that is a concern of one or more of the participants. Provide the participants with directions to the meeting site.
- Establish a meeting time that will work for everyone. Arrange carpools or rides if necessary. Consider providing (or organizing) refreshments.
- Gather everyone's contact information. Make sure that everyone has yours.
- If possible, send copies of the Starting Points and the Commitments (found in Session 1) to the participants. These can be downloaded from our website.

NOTES FOR THE FACILITATOR

PREPARATION: ON THE DAY OF THE SESSION

- Write the following items (found in Session 1) on separate pieces of easel paper:
 - The Goals of the program
 - The Agreements
 - The Description of Nonviolence
 - The three questions under the *Nonviolence Partners* exercise
- Arrange the chairs, including yours, in a circle, with a small table in the center. Place candle, holder, and matches on table.
- As people arrive, ask them to sign in with their contact information.
- Play some appropriate background music on a CD player as people enter. Play music at a low volume during the Sharing of Names exercise.
- For a variation on the Opening, see www.paceebene.org
- Make sure everyone has the *Engage* Study Program Book.
- *Needed Materials:* Name badges; felt pens for writing names; compact disk or audiotape player; recorded music; small table; a candle, candleholder or plate, and matches; easel; easel paper pads (also known as “flip chart” paper); a bell; art supplies (this could include crayons, color markers, pastels, white 8 1/2 X 11” paper, colored construction paper, clay, wire, aluminum foil, etc).

SESSION 1: **The First Step**

WELCOME — 2 MIN.

Review the Facilitation Guidelines (found in Part Four) ahead of time as you prepare to begin Engage.

After people have arrived and have settled in, present the following in your own words:

Welcome to the first session of the *Engage* Study Program. *Engage* is an exploration of the power and potential of nonviolence in our lives and in the world. My name is _____ and I will be facilitating this program.

In this opening session, we will begin to explore the power of active nonviolence, and we will also be introduced to the goals and process of *Engage*.

OPENING — 20 MIN.

Convey the following in your own words:

As a way to start our process, I invite you to come to the table one at a time and light a candle in honor of a person who has been an example of peace for you. Maybe this is someone you know personally. Or maybe this is someone you've heard or read about.

Feel free to share this person's name out loud if you feel comfortable doing so, and to say a sentence or two about how she or he has influenced you.

Model this by going first. After the last person has finished, offer the following in your own words:

Let's take a moment of silence to honor and thank the spirit of all those who, in the past or the present, have worked to make the world a better place. May their work support and encourage us on our journey to explore and experiment with the power of nonviolence for personal and social change. Thank you!

Before we start looking at the material, let me share a few housekeeping items.

Share any necessary housekeeping or logistical information.

A human being is a part of the whole that we call the universe, a part limited in time and space. [We] experience [our]selves, [our] thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest — a kind of optical illusion of [our] consciousness. This illusion is a prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for only the few people nearest us. Our task must be to ... widen our circle of compassion to embrace all living beings and all of nature.

— ALBERT EINSTEIN

SHARING OUR NAMES — 20 MIN.

The following exercise uses an easel, easel paper and non-toxic felt markers. If an easel is not available, distribute a sheet of paper to each person to write his or her full name on. Distribute felt markers for this purpose. To introduce this exercise, put the following into your own words:

As we begin this study program, let's take a moment to get better acquainted. I'd

like to invite each of you, one at a time, to write your name on the easel. This can include middle names, nicknames, or names you (or your family) no longer use.

Then take a minute or less to share with the group something about your names. (This could include where they come from; why your parents named you what they did; what your names mean; or anything else you'd like to share about them.) I'll begin.

Model this process by going first. As you are about to finish, share with the group the name you prefer to be called. When you are finished, ask the person to your right to go. When she or he is finished, ask the person what she or he prefers to be called. Welcome the person using her or his name and clapping. Then invite the next person to the right. Continue this process around the circle until everyone has shared. Then share in your own words the following sentiment:

Sharing our names, and where they come from, can help call to mind the web of relationships that has made us who we are: our families, our ancestors, our cultures, and the societies we have emerged from. This study program explores the importance of relationship and the ways we are connected to one another. Relationship and connectedness are at the heart of active nonviolence.

FOUR STARTING POINTS OF THE STUDY PROGRAM

- *We begin by acknowledging the roots of nonviolence.* The Engage Study Program acknowledges the many rich sources of active nonviolence, especially movements of poor people, communities of color, and all who have faced fierce oppression and who have long histories of nonviolent struggle.
- *Nonviolence does not mean perfection!* Alain Richard, a former Peace e Bene staff member who has been engaged in nonviolent activities for much of his life, often says, "Just because I talk about nonviolence doesn't mean that *I am* nonviolent. I will probably not be really nonviolent until fifteen minutes after I am dead!" Nonviolence is not a state of idealistic perfection. It is something we construct and grow into. As Gandhi stressed, nonviolence is a continual series of "experiments with truth" through which we gradually learn how to be nonviolent.
- *Nonviolence does not assume that the world is nonviolent.* Sometimes we think that for nonviolence to be effective, the whole world has to somehow become nonviolent. Active nonviolence does not hold to this illusion. In fact, it assumes that the world is often violent and unjust. But it also recognizes that there is a path that can heal.
Nonviolence does not attempt to create a world where there is no conflict. It recognizes that we face conflict all through our lives. This program explores the ways in which nonviolence is a more effective means of addressing and resolving conflict than violence.
- *The Engage Study Program is only a first step.* The path of nonviolence is a lifelong journey. Much experimentation, learning, and action are needed. Therefore, we are modest about this twelve-part study program. Typically, one will not fully understand, much less integrate, the power of nonviolence in such a short time. Nevertheless, this process has an important goal: to offer an orientation to nonviolent living and to begin the process of grounding oneself in that life. Engage introduces a vision and a toolbox of methods and techniques for nonviolent living.

SHARING OUR PASSION — 10 MIN.

Share the following in your own words:

Before introducing the goals of the program, I invite you to take a moment to think about an issue that you are passionate about, and interested in taking action on. As you shall see nonviolence is not a passive venture, but an active engagement in the world around us. What is it that you hope to address with nonviolence?

After a minute or two of silence invite the participants to share, at whatever level they feel comfortable, the issue that they are interested in taking action on. Ensure that they know that it is OK not to share. After all have spoken who want to, thank them for their sharing and conclude in your own words:

The *Engage* study program includes learning about nonviolence, and applying it by taking nonviolent action to transform injustices we are concerned about. Allow the issue you identified to serve as an anchor and a reference point for you as you continue through the weeks of this program. In the last several sessions we will plan and take a nonviolent action together.

INTRODUCING THE *ENGAGE* STUDY PROGRAM — 5 MIN.

Share the following in your own words:

Now, let's take a look at the goals of the *Engage* Program.
These goals include:

- To explore and experiment with nonviolence as a way of life.
- To examine our current beliefs and practices with regard to violence and nonviolence.
- To obtain practical skills for responding to violence.
- To connect with a community of people which supports, encourages, and challenges our practice of nonviolence.
- To take nonviolence action together as a group.

MAKING AGREEMENTS — 10 MIN.

Present the following in your own words:

Engage depends on creating safe space for sharing and learning. Safe space helps create an environment where we are free to reflect deeply on our own experience of violence and nonviolence. Based on past experience and the work of other groups, we invite the group to agree to use the following four guidelines. A fuller version of each of these agreements is found in the nearby sidebar.

I invite a participant to read these four agreements aloud to the group.

Ask for a volunteer to read the following:

During our time together:

- I agree to share and participate at whatever level feels safe and comfortable.
- I agree to maintain confidentiality about personal stories or experiences shared in my small group or in the large group, unless I have been given permission to share them with others.
- I agree to listen with my full and complete attention, and to wait until a person has completed his or her thoughts before I speak.
- I will strive to appreciate and honor our differences.

Then ask:

- Are there any questions?
- Are there any modifications or additions?

GROUP AGREEMENTS

I agree to share and participate at whatever level feels safe and comfortable.

- I will share what I want to share. If I choose not to share, that's fine. If I want to share a little, that's fine. If I want to share more, that's fine. Together we will create an environment where our feelings and thoughts are respected.
- While I have the opportunity to always share at whatever level I feel safe and comfortable, I may be open to voluntarily take opportunities as they arise to feel uncomfortable when that might aid my growth. In every case, this is up to me.
- The facilitators are not acting in the capacity of professional psychotherapists or counselors. They are ordinary people helping us explore alternatives to the violence in our lives and the larger world. If something comes up for me during our time together I know I am encouraged to seek assistance from an appropriate health professional.

I agree to maintain confidentiality about personal stories or experiences shared in my small group or in the large group, unless I have been given permission to share them with others.

- In the Engage process we work in small and large groups. I will not share a story or experience that someone else has shared in either small or large groups unless she or he has given their permission. When in doubt I will err on the side of caution and not share the story or experience. I will feel free, however, to share any insights that this story or experience may have stimulated.

I agree to listen with my full and complete attention, and to wait until a person has completed his or her thoughts before I speak.

During our time together I will strive to appreciate and honor our differences.

- Diversity is an opportunity for me to grow and learn in a new way. I will try to be open to and celebrate persons, approaches, and ways of being that are different from mine.
- As part of this, I recognize that there are power dynamics in every group, including this one. I will do my best to be sensitive to the use of power based on race, gender, ability, sexual orientation, money, or class. If someone uses power over someone else in this group (for example, if someone discounts another person's experience), I will try to respond to this situation in a clear and loving way.

- Do we agree to use these guidelines during this program?

When agreement is reached, post the list on a nearby wall for this and all subsequent sessions. Explain that, since the convener may not always notice if one of these agreements has been broken, all participants should feel empowered to interrupt the process if they notice this has happened and ask that the situation be addressed.

BEGINNING TO EXPLORE NONVIOLENCE — 20 MIN.

Brainstorm and write on the easel (in a column down the left side of the paper) responses to the following question:

What are some typical beliefs, societal views or stereotypes about nonviolence?
What might be some of your own concerns about nonviolence?

Some of the examples may include: Nonviolence is passive, ineffective, utopian; nonviolent people are wimpy, unpatriotic, unemployed, unrealistic, doormats. Develop a long list. Then reflect with the group on this list. For example, ask people to reflect on “passivity” – what does this mean? Why do they think people draw this conclusion? Explore several of these terms and help the participants explore the reasoning behind these views and attitudes. Then ask:

What are some of the “actual” qualities or attributes of people who practice nonviolence?

Write down the words people suggest in a column on the right side of the easel paper (opposite the list of “typical beliefs”).

This list may include qualities like courage, creativity, spiritual centeredness, passion, a disarming spirit, compassion, and determination. Reflect with the group on this list. Then ask:

When we contrast these two lists, what do we see?

Then ask participants:

Where do you think the “typical beliefs” about nonviolence come from? Do we hold some of these beliefs? What impact do we think they have?

After the group reflects on this, share the following in your own words:

It is crucial that we explore the typical beliefs – what we might call “stereotypes” -- of nonviolence.

This is important because many people in our society hold these views. This is also important because it is quite possible that *we ourselves* hold these views. Our views about nonviolence can sometimes reinforce the rationale for “acceptable violence.” This rationale can sound like this:

If nonviolence is ineffective, then the only recourse must be violence. When these attitudes and assumptions lead people to dismiss nonviolence, they prevent us from claiming and making use of one of the most important forms of power at our disposal.

This study program will be an opportunity to explore this power and see if it offers ways to create alternatives in our lives and in the world. As we begin our nonviolent journey, we are all invited to test these “stereotypes” and “qualities and attributes” of nonviolence throughout our time together.

I also invite you to explore and test the following understanding of nonviolence that we will be using:

Tape the definition of nonviolence to the wall, then read it aloud:

Nonviolence is a creative power for justice and the well-being of all that uses neither passivity nor violence.

BREAK — 10 MIN.

If the group is ahead of time after the break, consider inviting the participants to read the story “Shine On in Montana” aloud as an example of nonviolence.

NONVIOLENCE PARTNERS — 10 MIN.

Please convey the following in your own words:

In this program we invite each participant to form a “nonviolence partnership” with one other member. A nonviolence partner is someone you can reflect with about the issues and material of this program on an ongoing basis. This partnership will offer one another mutual support and encouragement in the nonviolence journey.

Specifically, at the beginning of each session we will check in with our nonviolence partner on our “homework” and on what has come up for us in the intervening time. If partners wish, they can also check in between sessions.

To form our “nonviolence partnerships,” I invite everyone to get up from your seats and to come out into the center of the room.

Pretend that we are in New York City during the 5 p.m. rush hour on a Friday afternoon. It is crowded on the street, and everyone is walking every direction to the subway, the bus, and the parking garages.

We are part of this rush of commuters, going in every direction.

“If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds and it were necessary to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his [or her] own heart?”

— ALEKSANDR SOLZHENITSYN
1970 NOBEL LAUREATE

Direct people to start moving in circles, and zigzagging through the crowd, encouraging them to get into the spirit of rush hour. After a minute, call out “Stop!” and have them pair up with the person nearest them. Ensure everyone has someone. If there is an odd number, ask three people to form the final group.

Shine On in Montana

by Jo Clare Hartsig

In the early 1990's a spate of hate crimes were perpetrated in five states in the Northwest region of the United States by an organization, known as the Aryan Nation, against Jews, people of color, and gays and lesbians, among others. Here is how the community of Billings, Montana, responded.

On December 2, 1993, a brick was thrown through the window of five-year-old Isaac Schnitzer's bedroom window. The brick and shards of glass were strewn all over the child's bed. The reason? A menorah and other symbols of Jewish faith were stenciled on the glass as part of the family's Hanukkah celebration. The account of the incident in the *Billings Gazette* the next day described Isaac's mother, Tammie Schnitzer, as being troubled by the advice she got from the investigating officer. He suggested she remove the symbols. How would she explain this to her son?

Another mother in Billings was deeply touched by that question. She tried to imagine explaining to her children that they couldn't have a Christmas tree in the window or a wreath on the door because it wasn't safe. She remembered what happened when Hitler ordered the king of Denmark to force all Danish Jews to wear Stars of David. The order was never carried out because the king himself and many other Danes chose to wear the yellow stars. The Nazis lost the ability to find their "enemies."

There are several dozen Jewish families in Billings. This kind of [solidarity] tactic could effectively deter violence if enough people got involved. So Margaret McDonald phoned her pastor, Rev. Keith Torney of First Congregational United Church of Christ, and asked what he thought of having Sunday School children make paper cut-out menorahs for their own windows. He got on the phone with his clergy colleagues around town, and the following week hundreds of menorahs appeared in the windows of Christian homes. When asked about the danger of this action, Police Chief Wayne Inman told callers, "There's greater risk in not doing it."

Five days after the brick was thrown at the Schnitzer home, the local newspaper, the *Gazette*, published a full-page drawing of a

menorah, along with a general invitation for people to put it up in their windows. By the end of the week at least six thousand homes (some accounts estimated up to ten thousand) were decorated with menorahs.

A sporting-goods store got involved by displaying "Not in Our Town! No Hate. No Violence. Peace on Earth" on its large billboard. Someone shot at it. Townspeople organized a vigil outside the synagogue during Sabbath services. That same night bricks and bullets shattered windows at Central Catholic High School, where an electric marquee read "Happy Hanukkah to our Jewish Friends." The cat of a family with a menorah was killed with an arrow. A United Methodist Church had windows broken because of its menorah display. Six non-Jewish families had their car and house windows shattered. One car had a note that said "Jew lover."

Eventually these incidents waned, but people continued in their efforts to support one another against hate crimes. After being visited at home and threatened by one of the local skinhead leaders, Tammie Schnitzer is now always accompanied by friends when she goes on her morning run. During the Passover holiday last spring, 250 Christians joined their Jewish brothers and sisters in a traditional Seder meal. New friendships have formed, new traditions have started, and greater mutual understanding and respect have been achieved.

This winter families all over Billings took out their menorahs to reaffirm their commitment to peace and religious tolerance. The light they shared in their community must be continuously rekindled until hatred has been overcome.

Although there is no historical evidence to support the story of the Danish king, it continues to inspire countless number of people to risk their well-being for the sake of others.

Share the following in your own words:

Please turn to the person you are with and meet your Nonviolence Partner for this study program. I invite you to pull two chairs together, reintroduce yourselves, and reflect together on the following questions, with each person taking one minute for each question:

Post the questions for partners to discuss.

- “Some wishes I have for this study program are...”
- “Some fears or reservations I have about this study program are...”
- “Some support I could use might be...”

After four minutes, sound the bell and invite the other person to share on the questions. Then, after the pairs have finished sharing, state the following:

“Nonviolence is not primarily a tactic. It is a way of living and being and expressing the truth of your soul in the world.”

— DANIEL BERRIGAN

As we travel together, do not hesitate to talk over your experiences with each other. And if you have questions, bring them in. They are often the most intriguing part of this path.

CONCLUSION — 10 MIN.

State the following in your own way:

At the end of each session, we will conclude by offering suggestions for reflection and action between now and the next session. This includes ideas and questions for nonviolent journaling; nonviolent action; readings for the next session; what this program calls “The Wall of Learning and Growing”; and evaluating this session. This is then followed by a closing.

Present the following components one at a time:

☉ **Nonviolence Journal**

Please use the page entitled “Nonviolence Journal” following this section to describe any feelings, thoughts, images, or issues sparked by this session, and during the week as you reflect back or as you complete your homework and readings. These journals are confidential. It is up to you if you would like to share from it with your partner or in the larger group.

Suggested Topic or Questions:

- 1) What do you want to learn in the next 11 sessions? Is there a particular skill you want to improve by the end of the course?
- 2) What is one thing that was said in class that surprised you, or seemed unusual to your way of thinking? What was your initial reaction to it?

☉ **Nonviolent Action**

Take one or more of the following actions between now and the next session:

- 1) Ask one or two people what they think of when they hear the word: “nonviolence;”

- 2) Ask one or two people what they think of when they hear the words: “nonviolent power”;
- 3) Take some time to reflect on specific people who have modeled what might be considered nonviolent living. Pick one or two of these people and express your gratitude for their presence in your life and how they have influenced you. Then, on the second blank page, write down any reflections you have after completing one or more of these actions.

⊙ **Questionnaire**

Please fill out the first questionnaire at the back of the book and hand it in at next session.

Please assign a number to each of the participants at this time so that their questionnaires will be confidential. Ask them to put the number on both copies of the questionnaire. Please collect them at the beginning of the second session.

⊙ **Next Session’s Reading**

To prepare for the next session, please read the readings found at the end of this session between now and the next gathering and write any thoughts or insights that come from the readings on the blank page entitled “Reading Reflections.” (Please do *not* read the material in the *body* of Session 2, except the sidebars and quotes, because some of the exercises are better experienced than read.)

⊙ **Commitments**

Review the commitments found in the box on the next page with participants. Ask if there are any questions or concerns.

⊙ **Evaluation**

What were the positive things from this session – what worked for you? (*List these items on easel paper.*) What could be improved? (*List them on easel paper.*)

CLOSING — 15 MIN.

Sharing Our Hopes and Goals

As our closing, I’d like to ask for a moment of silence for each of us to consider what our hopes are in learning about nonviolence for ourselves, our community, and our planet. If you want, feel free to open your book and write them in the space provided.

My hope or goal for this process: _____

Invite the participants to close their books and join in a circle holding hands.

ENGAGE STUDY PROGRAM COMMITMENTS

Weekly components of the *Engage: Exploring Nonviolent Living* program include:

- Attending each session
 - Journaling (at least one page)
 - Nonviolent action (as described at the end of each session)
 - Reading the 2 or 3 readings of each session
 - Reflecting with a Nonviolence Partner
- The Engage Program also includes planning and participating in a nonviolent action of the group's choosing (Sessions 9-11).

Please indicate your willingness to participate fully in this program by making the commitment to yourself **before the beginning of the third session**. You are invited to symbolize your commitment by signing below. If you can't attend a particular session, please let the facilitator know.

Understanding that the more I put into something, the more I get out of it,
I commit myself to completing each of the components of the *Engage Study Program*.

Signature _____

I invite each person, one at a time, to again share your name, where you are from, and, at whatever level you feel comfortable, a hope or goal for your participation in this process.

After everyone is finished ask people to take a moment of silence, then convey:

Let us affirm and embrace both the hopes and dreams that have been shared and those that still remain deep within our hearts. (Pause) In closing I would like to read the following poem by Mzwakhe Mbuli, a South African performance artist and activist:

*Now is the time
To climb up the mountain
And reason against habit.
Now is the time.*

*Now is the time
To renew the barren soil of nature
Ruined by the winds of tyranny.
Now is the time.*

*Now is the time
To commence the litany of hope.
Now is the time.*

*Now is the time
To give me roses, not to keep them
For my grave to come.*

*Give them to me while my heart beats,
Give them today
While my heart yearns for jubilee.
Now is the time...*

Close the session by thanking the participants for attending this first gathering of Engage.

KEY ORGANIZATIONS: NONVIOLENCE TRAINING

Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service. www.paceebene.org; Engage: www.EngageNonviolence.org; 1420 W. Bartlett Ave., Las Vegas, NV 89106; 702-648-2281; paceebene@paceebene.org.

Launched in 1989, Pace e Bene cultivates nonviolent living and the emergence of nonviolent cultures through training, publishing, advocacy, and spiritual practice.

Pace e Bene has led hundreds of nonviolence trainings, workshops, retreats and classes for thousands of people throughout the world.

Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP/USA). www.avpusa.org; 1050 Selby Ave., St. Paul, MN 55104; 877-926-8287; avp@avpusa.org. AVP empowers people to lead nonviolent lives through affirmation, respect for all, community building, cooperation, and trust. AVP/USA is an association of community-based groups and prison-based groups offering experiential workshops in personal growth and creative conflict management. The national organization provides support for the work of these local groups.

Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR/USA). www.forusa.org; 521 N. Broadway, Nyack, NY 10960; 845-358-4601. FOR seeks to replace violence, war, racism, and economic injustice with nonviolence, peace, and justice. It is an interfaith organization committed to active nonviolence as a transforming way of life and as a means of radical change. They educate, train, build coalitions, and engage in nonviolent and compassionate actions locally, nationally, and globally.

Training for Change, 1501 Cherry St., Philadelphia, PA 19102; 215-241-7035; peacelearn@igc.org; www.trainingforchange.org. Training for Change offers workshops teaching skills and tools to individuals and groups working for nonviolent social change.

HOMEWORK

NONVIOLENCE JOURNAL

Suggested Topic or Question:

- 1) What do you want to learn or get out of the next 11 sessions? Is there a particular skill you want to improve by the end of the course?
- 2) What is one thing that was said in class that surprised you, or seemed unusual to your way of thinking? What was your initial reaction to it?

HOMework

NONVIOLENT ACTION

Take one or more of the following actions between now and the next session:

- 1) Ask one or two people what they think of when they hear the word: “nonviolence;”
- 2) Ask one or two people what they think of when they hear the words: “nonviolent power”;
- 3) Take some time to reflect on specific people who have modeled what might be considered nonviolent living. Pick one or two of these people and express your gratitude for their presence in your life and how they have influenced you.

Write down any reflections you have after completing one or more of these actions.

SESSION 2: READING 1

“Brother, if you don’t mind, there is a cloud
of glass coming at us. Grab my hand,
let’s get the hell out of here!”

by *Usman Farman*

*The following is an excerpt from a speech delivered two weeks
after the attack on the World Trade Center in September 2001.*

My name is Usman Farman and I graduated from Bentley with a Finance degree last May. I am 21 years old, turning 22 in October; I am Pakistani, and I am Muslim. Until September 11th, 2001, I used to work at the World Trade Center in building #7. I had friends and acquaintances who worked in tower #1 right across from me. Some made it out, and some are still unaccounted for. I survived this horrible event.

I’d like to share with you what I went through that awful day, with the hopes that we can all stay strong together through this tragedy of yet untold proportions. As I found out, regardless of who we are, and where we come from, we only have each other.

I commute into the city every morning on the train from New Jersey. Rather, I used to. I still can’t believe what is happening. That morning I woke up and crawled out of bed. I was thinking about flaking out on the train and catching the late one, I remember telling myself that I just had to get to work on time. I ended up catching the 7:48 train, which put me in Hoboken at 8:20 a.m. When I got there I thought about getting something to eat; I decided against it and took the PATH train to the World Trade Center.

I arrived at the World Trade Center at 8:40 in the morning. I walked into the lobby of building 7 at 8:45 — that’s when the first plane hit. Had I taken the late train, or gotten a bite to eat, I would have been 5 minutes late and walking over the crosswalk. Had that

happened, I would have been caught under a rain of fire and debris, I wouldn’t be here talking to you. I’d be dead. I was in the lobby, and I heard the first explosion; it didn’t register.

They were doing construction outside and I thought some scaffolding had fallen. I took the elevators up to my office on the 27th floor. When I walked in, the whole place was empty. There were no alarms, no sprinklers, nothing. Our offices are, or rather, were, on the south side of building seven. We were close enough to the North and South Towers, that I could literally throw a stone from my window and hit the North tower with it. My phone rang and I spoke with my mother and told her that I was leaving. At that moment I saw an explosion rip out of the second building. I called my friend in Boston, waking her up, and told her to tell everyone I’m okay, and that I was leaving. I looked down one last time and saw that the square and fountain that I eat lunch in was covered in smoldering debris.

Apparently, I was one of the last to leave my building. When I was on the way up in the elevator, my coworkers from the office were in the stairwells coming down. When I evacuated, there was no panic. People were calm and helping each other; a pregnant woman was being carried down the stairwell.

I’ll spare the more gruesome details of what I saw — those are things that no one should ever have to see, and beyond human decency to describe. Those are things that will haunt me for the rest of my life; my heart

goes out to everyone who lost their lives that day, and those who survived with the painful reminders of what once was. Acquaintances of mine who made it out of the towers only did so because 1000 people formed a human chain to find their way out of the smoke. Everyone was a hero that day.

We were evacuated to the north side of building 7, still only 1 block from the towers. The security people told us to go north and not to look back. Five city blocks later I stopped and turned around to watch. With a thousand people staring, we saw in shock as the first tower collapsed. No one could believe it was happening; it is still all too surreal to imagine. The next thing I remember is that a dark cloud of glass and debris about 50 stories high came tumbling towards us. I turned around and ran as fast as possible.

I didn't realize until yesterday that the reason I'm still feeling so sore was that I fell down trying to get away. What happened next is why I came here to give this speech.

I was on my back, facing this massive cloud that was approaching. It must have been 600 feet high; everything was already dark. I normally wear a pendant around my neck, inscribed with an Arabic prayer for safety, similar to the cross. A Hasidic Jewish man came up to me and held the pendant in his hand, and looked at it. He read the Arabic out loud. What he said next, I will never forget. With a deep Brooklyn accent he said, "Brother, if you don't mind, there is a cloud of glass coming at us. Grab my hand, let's get the hell out of here!" He helped me stand up, and we ran for what seemed like forever without looking back. He was the last person I would ever have thought who would help me. If it weren't for him, I probably would have been engulfed in shattered glass and debris.

I finally stopped about 20 blocks away, and looked in horror as tower #2 came crashing

down. Fear came over me as I realized that some people were evacuated to the streets below the towers. Like I said before, no one could have thought those buildings could collapse. We turned around and in shock and disbelief, began the trek to midtown. It took me 3 hours to get to my sister's office at 3rd Avenue and 47th Street. Some streets were completely deserted, completely quiet, no cars, no nothing — just the distant wail of sirens. I managed to

call home and say I was okay, and get in touch with coworkers and friends whom I feared were lost.

We managed to get a ride to New Jersey. Looking back as I crossed the George Washington Bridge, I could not see the towers. It had really happened.

As the world continues to reel from this tragedy, people in the streets are

lashing out. Not far from my home, a Pakistani woman was run over on purpose as she was crossing the parking lot to put groceries in her car. Her only fault? That she had her head covered and was wearing the traditional clothing of my homeland. I am afraid for my family's well-being within our community. My older sister is too scared to take the subway into work now. My 8-year-old sister's school is under lockdown and armed watch by police.

Violence only begets violence, and by lashing out at each other in fear and hatred, we will become no better than the faceless cowards who committed this atrocity. If it weren't for that man who helped me get up, I would most likely be in the hospital right now, if not dead. Help came from the least expected place, and it goes only to show that we are all in this together regardless of race, religion, or ethnicity. Those are principles that this country was founded on.

Please take a moment to look at the people sitting around you. Friends or strangers, in a time of crisis, you would want the nearest person to help you if you needed it. My help came from a man who I would never have thought would normally even speak to me. ...

He helped me stand up, and we ran for what seemed like forever without looking back. He was the last person I would ever have thought who would help me. If it weren't for him, I probably would have been engulfed in shattered glass and debris.

The one thing that won't help, is if we fight amongst ourselves, because it is then that we are doing exactly what they want us to do, and I know that nobody here wants to do that. Again, my name is Usman Farman and I graduated from Bentley with a Finance degree last May. I am 21 years old, turning 22 in

October; I am Pakistani, and I am Muslim, and I too have been victimized by this awful tragedy. The next time you feel angry about this, and perhaps want to retaliate in your own way, please remember these words: "Brother, if you don't mind, there is a cloud of glass coming at us. Grab my hand, let's get the hell out of here."

SESSION 2: READING 2

That's How I Like To See a Woman

by Sue Monk Kidd

It was autumn, and everything was turning loose. I was running errands that afternoon. Rain had fallen earlier, but now the sun was out, shining on the tiny beads of water that clung to trees and sidewalks. The whole world seemed red and yellow and rinsed with light. I parked in front of the drugstore where my daughter, Ann, fourteen, had an after-school job. Leaping a puddle, I went inside.

I spotted her right away kneeling on the floor in the toothpaste section, stocking a bottom shelf. I was about to walk over and say hello when I noticed two middle-aged men walking along the aisle toward her. They looked like everybody's father. They had moussed hair, and they wore knit sportshirts the color of Easter eggs, the kind of shirts with tiny alligators sewn at the chest. It was a detail I would remember later as having ironic symbolism.

My daughter did not see them coming. Kneeling on the floor, she was intent on getting the boxes of Crest lined up evenly. The men stopped, peering down at her. One man nudged the other. He said, "Now that's how I like to see a woman—on her knees."

The other man laughed.

Standing in the next aisle, I froze. I watched the expression that crept into my daughter's eyes as she looked up. I watched her chin drop and her hair fall across her face.

Seeing her kneel at these men's feet while they laughed at her subordinate posture pierced me through.

For the previous couple of years I had been in the midst of a tumultuous awakening. I had been struggling to come to terms with my life as a woman—in my culture, my marriage, my faith, my church, and deep inside myself. It was a process not unlike the experience of conception and labor. There had been a moment, many moments really, when truth seized me and I "conceived" myself as woman. Or maybe I reconceived myself. At any rate, it had been extraordinary and surprising to find myself—a conventionally religious woman in my late thirties—suddenly struck pregnant with a new consciousness, with an unfolding new awareness of what it means to be a woman and what it means to be spiritual *as a woman*.

Hard labor had followed. For months I'd inched along, but lately I'd been stuck. I'd awakened enough to know that I couldn't go back to my old way of being a woman, but the fear of going forward was paralyzing. So I'd plodded along, trying to make room for the new consciousness that was unfolding in my life but without really risking change.

I have a friend, a nurse on the obstetrical floor at a hospital, who says that sometimes a woman's labor simply stalls. The contractions grow weak, and the new life, now quite distressed, hangs precariously. The day I walked into the drugstore, I was experiencing something like that. A stalled awakening.

Who knows, I may have stalled interminably

if I had not seen my daughter on her knees before those laughing men. I cannot to this day explain why the sight of it hit me so forcibly. But to borrow Kafka's image, it came like an ice ax upon a frozen sea, and suddenly all my hesitancy was shattered. Just like that.

The men's laughter seemed to go on and on. I felt like a small animal in the road, blinded by the light of a truck, knowing some terrible collision is coming but unable to move. I stared at my daughter on her knees before these men and could not look away. Somehow she seemed more than my daughter; she was my mother, my grandmother, and myself. She was every woman ever born, bent and contained in a small, ageless cameo that bore the truth about "a woman's place."

In the profile of my daughter I saw the suffering of women, the confining of the feminine to places of inferiority, and I experienced a collision of love and pain so great I had to reach for the counter to brace myself.

This posture will not perpetuate itself in her life, I thought.

Still, I didn't know what to do. When I was growing up, if my mother had told me once, she'd told me a thousand times, "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all." I'd heard this from nearly everybody. It was the kind of thing that got cross-stitched and hung in kitchens all over my native South.

I'd grown up to be a soft-voiced, sweet-mouthed woman who, no matter how assailing the behavior before me or how much I disagreed with it, responded nicely or else zip-locked my mouth shut. I had swallowed enough defiant, disputatious words in my life to fill a shelf of books.

But it occurred to me that if I abandoned my daughter at that moment, if I simply walked away and was silent, the feminine spirit unfolding inside her might also become crouched and silent. Perhaps she would learn the *internal* posture of being on her knees.

It occurred to me that if I abandoned my daughter at that moment, if I simply walked away and was silent, the feminine spirit unfolding inside her might also become crouched and silent. Perhaps she would learn the internal posture of being on her knees.

The men with their blithe joke had no idea they had tapped a reservoir of pain and defiance in me. It was rising now, unstoppable by any earthly force.

I walked toward them. "I have something to say to you, and I want you to hear it," I said. They stopped laughing. Ann looked up.

"This is my daughter," I said, pointing to her, my finger shaking with anger. "You may like to see her and other women on their knees, but we don't belong there. *We don't belong there.*"

Ann rose to her feet. She glanced sideways at me, sheer amazement spread over her face, then turned and faced the men. I could hear

her breath rise and fall with her chest as we stood there shoulder to shoulder, staring at their faces.

"Women," one of them said. They walked away, leaving Ann and me staring at each other among

the toothpaste and dental floss.

I smiled at her. She smiled back. And though we didn't say a word, more was spoken between us in that moment than perhaps in our whole lives.

I left the drugstore that day so internally jolted by the experience that everything in me began to shift. I sat in the car feeling like a newborn, dangled upside down and slapped.

Throughout my awakening, I'd grown increasingly aware of certain attitudes that existed in our culture, a culture long dominated by men. The men in the drugstore had mirrored one attitude in particular, that of seeking power over another, of staying up by keeping others down.

Sitting in my car replaying my statement back to those men—that women did not belong on their knees—I knew I had uttered my declaration of intent.

That night Ann came to my room. I was sitting in bed reading. She climbed up beside me and said, "Mama, about this afternoon in the drugstore..."

"Yeah?"

"I just wanted to say, thanks."

SESSION 2: READING 3

The Costs of a Violent Society

by Jerry Large

If someone punched you in the nose and took your money, we could all agree that you'd been the victim of violence.

But what if someone polluted the air you breathe, or denied you health insurance? Would that constitute violence? What if the schools near your home offered a lower-quality education than those just a few miles away in a wealthier neighborhood — would that hurt as much as that punch? Would it cost your family as much as a robbery?

Neil Wollman thinks so.

Wollman is a professor of psychology at Manchester College in Indiana and a senior fellow in the Peace Studies Institute there. He thinks that while we are worried about individual violence, many more people are being hurt by institutional and structural harm.

“We are a society that talks about equality and the value of equality,” he says, “but our institutions and social structures don't always serve that ideal. Sometimes they do the opposite.”

A few years ago he and some other professors and students started combing through census data and other studies to get a sense of how much harm is done by the way our society is organized.

“We were trying to look at violence in a more comprehensive way. Hunger, homelessness. It's a little different way of looking at harm.”

All of the data they collected are reported elsewhere, but they wanted to draw the statistics together and see whether it told them something about the nature of our society.

They looked at data beginning in 1995 and found that rates of most kinds of face-to-face, interpersonal violence have declined. Rates for murders, sexual offenses, and robbery were down.

But many structural problems, what Wollman calls “social negligence,” worsened.

Emergency food requests rose 20-fold from 1984 to 2002, including a 17 percent rise from 2002 to 2003.

In 2003, a record 84 percent of cities turned people away from overflowing homeless shelters.

In 2002, 43.6 million Americans lacked health insurance, a 5.7 percent increase from 2001.

The school dropout rate has gone down a bit but is still troubling, as are disparities in educational outcome between some minority groups and white students.

What if someone polluted the air you breathe, or denied you health insurance? Would that constitute violence? What if the schools near your home offered a lower-quality education than those just a few miles away in a wealthier neighborhood — would that hurt as much as that punch? Would it cost your family as much as a robbery?

In a summary of the report, Wollman says, “Given the basic nature of these long unfulfilled needs — and the fact that a number of other countries see fit to provide (assistance) in these areas — we may need to look more closely at ourselves and our self-image of being a compassionate people.”

But, wait a minute, aren't we the most advanced country on the planet? We have it pretty darned good. And some things are getting better.

In fact, Wollman called me because he'd read a column I wrote about the status of black Americans. He wanted me to see his group's analysis of census data on the poverty gap, which shows a narrowing of the gap between white Americans and other groups of Americans.

The gap closed by 19 percent over the past seven years. Of course, people who aren't

white are still 162 percent more likely to be below the poverty line than white people, but the narrowing gap is good news.

However, even as some gaps are closing, one troubling gap widened. The income gap between the top 5 percent of the population and the bottom 10 percent grew, and is the widest it has been since the government started tracking it in 1967.

“These income gaps are not good for a society (that) holds equality as a primary value,” Wollman said.

Other studies have shown a significant correlation between economic gaps and health.

We may be ahead of most nations in wealth and achievement, but we are also

ahead in stress. People measure themselves not against other societies, but against their fellow citizens.

Americans struggle to rise up the ladder or to stay at the top. People up and down the food chain are stressed.

The Population Health Forum lists the United States in 26th place for life expectancy among developed nations and says life expectancy rates match economic inequality. The higher the inequality in a society, the worse everyone’s health is.

A burglar may hurt one family at a time, but a system that supports inequality damages millions of lives at once and ultimately harms everyone.

HOMEWORK

REFLECTIONS ON THE READING