

Types of Resistance

By Bruce Andrews

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

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Frankly, when people hear the word resistance, they often think of the negative aspects of it which do exist. Of course, there are consequences for pushing back against those circumstances that need significant push back. In addition, I think there is importance in standing up and speaking out regarding the values or principles that a person believes and uses to guide their actions. Also, some forms of resistance may open a path to greater good for a greater number.

Stating your perspective without expecting another to change or even agree with you is a very difficult task, even if you really hope they will agree with you. Proselytizing can seriously degrade the other person's ability to hear your position on an issue. Avoiding proselytizing can actually be considered a service to the other on your part because you are more likely to be heard as being non-judgmental. The service to you is that you can live with yourself knowing you have acted according to your values. That type of action is a part of the foundation for your character.

Most of us don't expect to impact the people of world like Mahatma Gandhi or Martin Luther King or Mother Teresa. At the same time, there is much that many of us can do that will make an impact that is no less important a resistance on a smaller scale in each of our worlds. I am reminded of the old song "Little Things Mean a Lot". I know that is in reference to a love song. In this context, think of this as a reference to love for others. Sometimes little things can have a greater impact than we might imagine.

Today I will note a number of actions of resistance that I've taken in my life. This is not an exhaustive list and I only have time to further explain a few of them. I also want to note acts and statements of resistance by some other people.

There are two things I want to say about this selection process. First, I don't want it to be taken as an exercise in self-aggrandizement. Second, I truly do believe that anyone in this room could make a list of their own that may be similar or totally different from my list. The items on their list could be just as impactful as those on my list. The important part is that they occur, not because we're keeping score.

Here are a few types of resistance, individual and group, that I've been part of in civilian life.

1. During one of the protests in front of the east side of our courthouse I carried an American flag. There were a number of hecklers on the other side of street and one of them came over to hassle a couple of young ladies. I walked up with my flag and said nothing except to drop my flag between him and the young ladies.
2. No Kings rally
3. When students were killed about 1970 at KENT State, my dad and I marched together from Old Main to the football field with a group of others in protest.
4. More recently I developed a flag that has three horizontal stripes in equal thirds. The top one is solid white indicating peace above all. The middle one is solid yellow meaning "bring the military home no matter where they are", last one is black to say, "never forget the service and sacrifice".
5. I demonstrated with a group of people when Sen. Barrasso came to Bighorn a while back and I had the stars upside down to indicate that I believed our country was in danger. I still feel the same way only more so.
6. During the Vietnam War I joined a group called "Individuals against the Crime of Silence". We signed our names on a petition that is maintained in the Office of the Secretary General of the United Nations. This was to stand up and be counted as against the war should there ever be anything like the Nuremberg trials regarding Vietnam.

7. I did draft counseling to help young people be fully aware of what the draft law required and the possible consequences legally and otherwise for complying with the draft or not.

8. This following one may not affect much of anybody. Still I get certain satisfaction about buying American flag stamps and putting them on my letters upside down.

9. Once I was on call late at night as a counselor and I was called to the emergency room at the hospital. A young person committed suicide, and the family was at the emergency room. The sibling of this person was present and drunk. This person was becoming belligerently engaged with a physician and the physician was moving in that direction. I stepped between them and told the physician I would take care of the matter and he left.

10. I have written letters to the editor regarding the use of COVID masks and AR15 combat weapons in civilian hands. I've also had conversations with our Sheriff and our Chief of Police regarding these weapons.

11. Sometimes protests have unexpected results not just nationally but also internationally. When I visited Vietnam for the second time in 2023 I had a chance to have a conversation with a former North Vietnamese soldier. One of the things that he noted was that many Vietnamese of that era saw our protesters as heroes. This was because they believed that our protesters help to bring an end to the war sooner than might have been otherwise.

12. Another hero in Vietnam was the monk who protested by self-immolation. There are memorial statues in Vietnam today for him.

13. I need to make clear that I never supported or took part in violent protests such as the bombings by the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).

In the Army I had a reasonable number of chances to resist. Here are few.

1. I wanted nothing to do with ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corp). So I withdrew at the end of the mandated two-year attendance.

2. I reentered ROTC because several thousand or more troops were being drafted for service in Vietnam. I felt I would have a better chance of affecting my path in the military if I were an officer rather than a private.

3. I was assigned by the Army to Armor and then I requested and received a transfer from Armor to Medical Service Corps.
4. I applied for and received status as an in-service conscientious objector.
5. Although I could have stayed stateside, I volunteered for service in Vietnam.
6. I was the Defense Counsel on several courts-martials. I had one of my clients transferred into my battalion to protect my him from harassment in his battalion and I entered into the court record comments regarding the unnecessarily harsh treatment of my client.
7. At one point, I was paying some of my medics in the field. Their West Point Lieut. Infantry platoon leader told me that he wanted me to assign all the best new medics to his platoon. He indicated he thought he was of higher rank than I was although he wasn't. Frankly, I told him what he could do with his West Point stuff. I had the responsibility of assigning medics to effect the best coverage for all the companies in the battalion. I firmly told him we could take it further up the chain of command if he so desired. I never heard from him again.
8. On another occasion I was given an unlawful order by a Lt. Col. to carry a weapon. The full Col., the battalion commander, told the Lt. Col. to take the weapon and turn into the quartermaster.

As I have prepared this message and messages before this, I am always impressed with the fact that whatever I have done and reported on has been done and reported on by others in history. This doesn't mean I'm plagiarizing the experiences and messages delivered by others. To me this means it's part of the human condition. The important part is that people carry forward messages about such experiences. Such messages clarify the fact that each generation can and, indeed, must do something to deal with the difficult or dark times. I have often said that I have visited the dark places, but I refuse to live there. That means that I also choose to live in the places of light like the song "I Believe". This helps me to stay above water emotionally and otherwise, steer a more steady, stable course, and to help and serve others as well along the way.

Here's what Gandhi had to say about resistance, “Civil disobedience becomes a duty when the government becomes lawless or corrupt”. It certainly is imperative that you clearly articulate what you are resisting. Why? Those who disagree with you will inevitably misrepresent your efforts. Also, you will be able to carry out your actions in a more effective manner.

I have said quite a bit about resisting something outside of ourselves. Resistance also includes resisting our own impulses verbally and behaviorally.

On one occasion I was seeing our casualties in the 3rd Field Hospital located at the side of the Tan Son Nhut airport runway near Saigon. I was standing on an elevated set of steps at an entrance to the hospital next to the emergency receiving area. A casualty was rolled in on a gurney from a three-quarter ambulance. A nurse came running by me who had blood on her uniform and was headed to help with the casualty. She and three or four other people worked feverishly to keep this young person alive. He died anyway. I was almost overwhelmed by my desire to race to help in the process. However, I managed to remember that they were a well-oiled team who had handled many situations like this and I would've just been in the way. Believe me it was hard to stay back. Still, it was the right thing to do.

On another occasion, a higher-ranking officer disrespectfully chewed me out in front of my platoon members. I can assure you that I had some choice words I wanted to say to him in return. Fortunately, I had the wherewithal to hold my tongue. Nothing good would have come of giving my mind to him in the manner I wanted to.

The above types of incidents and others in civilian life have led me to say often, “When the emotional temperature goes up, thinking goes down, and problem-solving goes out the window.” Another saying that has helped me to curb my impulses is written on a sign

you all know as the yellow traffic caution sign, but with the following revised wording, “Caution! Be sure brain is engaged before putting mouth or behaviors in gear.” If I don’t keep these types of things in mind, I usually end up embarrassing myself or messing things up in some other way.

Resisting can be a heavy burden at times. In 1966, Pres. John F. Kennedy and Cesar Chavez went to South Africa together. They were speaking of the difficulties of this burden. JFK said, “everyone has the obligation to push back on the temptation to despair.”

There is a quote from a movie that has to do with problem-solving. “Whatever the problem, there are some people who are not interested in solving it. These people are interested in two things, making you afraid of it and telling you who’s to blame for it. That’s how these people try to keep you from asking relevant questions.” I think we are all familiar with deflection of this nature.

Frederick Douglas said the following about the struggle of resistance:

“Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet deprecate agitation, are people who want crops without plowing up the ground.

They want rain without thunder and lightning; they want the ocean without the awful roar of its waters.

This struggle may be a moral one; or maybe both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle.

Power concedes nothing without a demand; it never did and it never will.

Find out what people will submit to, and you have found out the exact amount of injustice which will be imposed upon them.

The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.”

Adlai Stevenson addressed the process of resistance by defining The Power of the Liberal Way as follows:

“Here lies the power of the liberal way: not in making the whole world liberal, but in helping ourselves and others to see some of the possibilities inherent in viewpoints other than one’s own; and encouraging the free interchange of ideas; and welcoming fresh approaches to the problems of life; and urging the fullest, most vigorous use of critical self- examination.”

Rabbi Hillel when asked about ignoring injustice said these words:
“If not me, who? If not now, when?”

Remember you can and must do only your part and others can and must do their parts. As Margaret Mead said, “Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, that is all it ever has.”

Resist by standing up; not standing down. In doing so, shine a light into the dark places.

Work hard, have fun, be kind.

Never give up.

May it be so.