Martial Arts as a Model for Nonviolence: Resisting Interpersonal Violence with Assertive Force

Steve Thomas

"What would you do if someone attacked you or a loved one?" Not simply a rhetorical challenge, our community in Goshen, Indiana faced this question in 2011 when James Miller was brutally murdered two blocks away from Goshen College, where he taught as a biology professor. A beloved husband and father, this gentle man intervened to stop an intruder armed with a knife attacking his wife, Linda, in their home. While she escaped, James died of fatal injuries from the attack. Deeply disturbed by such a senseless act of predatory violence, we wonder how people committed to nonviolence can respond in situations like this. Supporting strong, protective action like that of James Miller, this article proposes a model for using assertive, nonviolent force to resist interpersonal violence.[1] Responding to the "What would you do?" question, we can move beyond common answers of being either submissive or aggressive to a third way—one that upholds the way of peace—of being assertive, even forceful, to stop violence.[2]

As defined in this article, "force" is the use of any form of power, whether psychological, social, or physical, to make something happen. Force is not inherently negative or positive; it depends on one's intent and its impact. The definition of "violence" that will be used comes from the World Health Organization: "The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in

[1] This article is adapted from an address given on International Peace Day (September 21, 2012) at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ontario.

[2] Central to this case is differentiating *protective* force from *violent* force. Walter Wink provides important distinctions: force is "a legitimate, socially authorized, and morally defensible use of restraint to prevent harm from being done," whereas violence is "the morally illegitimate or excessive use of force." See his *Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999), 158. Self-defense and physical interventions to stop interpersonal violence are generally seen as morally legitimate and socially authorized by law as long as they are not excessive. While such actions are acceptable in society, this article questions whether the use of physical, protective force is appropriate in following the way of nonviolence.

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injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation."[3]

Discovering Martial Arts

What does nonviolent, assertive force look like in practice? Martial arts offer an example. Using these arts in peacemaking may seem odd. It seemed so to me when I first heard the suggestion, thinking that it amounted to violence against violence. In a seminary class on nonviolence, John Howard Yoder suggested that Mennonites learn martial arts as a potentially nonviolent way of stopping attackers without harming them.[4] This was a significant step away from nonresistance to nonviolent resistance, advocating nonlethal coercive force, if necessary, to protect people from harm.[5]

Following Yoder's suggestion, I have trained in a martial art, and along with three others in our Mennonite congregation formed a mission group to make peace with martial arts.[6] This initiative led to the formation of Peacemakers, a community-based organization seeking to empower youth and adults with skills to prevent violence and transform conflict. In contrast to the blood sport of Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), we promote Mennonite Martial Arts, mixing traditional martial arts with conflict transformation skills as a form of embodied peacemaking. We refer to our way as "the other

[3] *World Report on Violence and Health*. (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2002), 5.

[4] See, for example, John Howard Yoder, *What Would You Do? A Serious Answer to a Standard Question* (Scottdale, PA; Kitchener, ON: Herald Press, 1983), 28. I refer to Yoder's reflections on violence in this article but refrain from doing so in our organization's work with women.

[5] Note the shift from the nonresistance of Guy F. Hershberger in *War, Peace, and Nonresistance* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1944) to granting the use of nonlethal coercive force in the nonviolence of Ron Sider in *Christ and Violence* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1979), 46; Duane Friesen in *Christian Peacemaking and International Conflict: A Realist Pacifist Perspective* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1986), 152-54; and Yoder in *What Would You Do?*, 26-42. Mennonites and others with peace convictions who wonder if it is appropriate to use physical force at all should recognize it is employed in Mennonite mental health centers. Out-of-control individuals can threaten the safety of others or themselves. Verbal intervention is usually ineffective, because such persons are not in a rational state. Nonviolent physical intervention is necessary to control violence and restore safety. This method involves five trained people to take down and restrain the person safely (see *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention* (Milwaukee, WI: Crisis Prevention Institute, 2004). What can be done in the absence of five trained people? This is where training in martial arts can apply.

[6] The involvements of Wes and Karen Higginbotham, Phil Thomas, and Walnut Hill Mennonite Church (Goshen, Indiana) were essential in this initiative.

MMA." Learning physical skills, sparring, participating in problem-solving exercises, and role playing help develop the capacity to engage conflict and violence.

This new way was applied when someone attacked my wife, also named Linda. To stop an extended family member high on cocaine from harming her, I used physical force. I took the person down to the floor and held her in a control hold until the police (another form of force) arrived and took her away. I used coercive, physical force to prevent violence in a way which harmed no one. The next day when we were able to visit this person, we did so to be reconciled with her. One day we used the hand of protective force; the next day we extended the other hand of loving care.

Assertive Nonviolence

It is commonplace in ethical theory, legal practice, and social custom that defense against violence is a basic human right.[7] At the same time, there is a moral presumption against harming others, including those who commit violence. Based on a reverence for life, most religious traditions hold these two principles together—the right to protect and the duty to respect life.[8] These principles are often separated when addressing the "what would you do?" question. Many people simply assume either aggression or submission is their only option. Those who believe that the right to protect others and oneself trumps respect for perpetrators usually opt for counter-aggression and often permit lethal force. Those who are committed to nonresistance with an overriding respect for the aggressor often relinquish the use of protective force and call for submission.[9]

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[7] Richard B. Miller. "Killing, Self-defense, and Bad Luck," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37, no. 1 (2009): 131. Jeff MacMahan, "Self-Defense and the Problem of the Innocent Attacker," *Ethics* 104 (January 1994): 252.

[8] For a brief survey of different religious traditions on this matter, see *Nonviolence in Theory and Practice*, ed. Robert L. Holmes and Barry L. Gan (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2005), 4-39.

[9] When director for Women's Concerns of Mennonite Central Committee US, Beth Graybill asserted that the tradition of nonresistance "has helped contribute to violence against women by implicitly encouraging women to accept abuse as Christ-like suffering, rather than to resist." As a survivor of a sexual assault, she asked "How does peace theology look different when we put it in the context of violence against Anabaptist women? What does it mean to do theological work experientially, in our bodies?" See "Toward a New Theology: Pacifism

Uncomfortable with either of these options, Lucille, a woman from South Africa, recently sent me an e-mail. She is a survivor of assault and works with others who suffer violence. As a conscientious Christian, she conveys the acute tension between being compelled to protect others while being committed to respect perpetrators as persons too.

> Our women and children are constant targets of predators. Surely we must protect them but also show some level of empathy for the lost souls who attack us . . . they too have their story. What are our options?. . . I do not believe that fighting violence with more violence works. But I do not believe Christ expects us to sit back while our women and children are beaten to death or raped. However we must not live by the sword. This is such a hard thing for me to resolve and why I am also attracted to your approach with Peacemakers. . . . Normal self-defense courses can make you paranoid and unsympathetic to the attacker. I don't want to be someone who has seriously harmed or killed my attacker but rather to defend myself in a situation if an extreme one arises with a level of empathy for the person who wants to harm me. I don't know if that is possible but I would like to think it is.

There is a way of holding these concerns together; between submission and aggression there is a wide range of other responses. (See Figure 1.) Rather than being either submissive or aggressive, we can be assertive in a variety of ways. Along with Lucille, I believe that Jesus teaches that we must neither retaliate nor capitulate to violence. He commends assertive, creative action. In *Engaging the Powers,* Walter Wink relates Jesus' teaching about turning the other cheek to real world violence. Far from being passive, Wink explains "the third way" of Jesus in these imperative terms:

- Assert your own humanity and dignity as a person
- Stand your ground and exercise your own power
- Break the cycle of violence with a creative alternative
- Surprise others with actions for which they're unprepared

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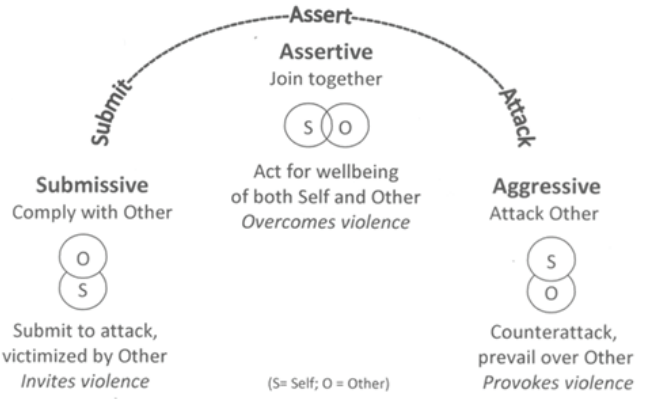
and Women's Resistance," in *MCC Women's Concerns Report*, November-December 2002, 3.

- Deprive the other of responses where force is effective
- Cause the other see you in a new light
- Seek the other's transformation and wellbeing.[10]

Figure 1

RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE



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When submissive, we allow ourselves to be victimized. When aggressive, we counter attack, seeking to prevail over and against the other. When assertive—its Latin root *asserere* means "to join"—we seek to join the aggressor and act for his or her well-being and that of everyone involved in violence.[11] While being submissive can invite violence and being aggressive can provoke greater violence, being assertive is more likely to overcome violence as it demonstrates a respect for each person involved.[12] Assertive

[10] Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 175-93.

[11] Latin *assertus,* past participle of *asserere,* from *ad-* + *serere,* "to join."

[12] One study concludes that "Violence breeds more violence, so the general solution to violence is a refusal to return it but to respond nonviolently instead." Experience shows that "an open, accepting, loving response to an aggressor [disarms] in precisely the way the theory of nonviolence suggests. The opposite, violent response is precisely the kind of action that is liable to produce an escalation of violence." See Peter Macky, *Violence: Right or Wrong?* (Waco, TX: Word, 1973), 113-14, 205-206.

action can include the use of force—psychological, social, or physical—to stop violence and protect all involved, including aggressors.[13]

The Two Hands of Nonviolence

This third way takes two hands, the "two hands of nonviolence," as peace activist Barbara Deming describes it. As I picture it, with one hand—palm out, gesturing to stop—we say, "Stop what you are doing," and with the other hand—extended palm up—we say, "I respect you as a person." With one hand we are saying "I will not cooperate but will resist your violence." With the other we are saying "I join you as another human being." As Deming puts it, when we act in this way we have two hands upon the aggressor. One hand calms him, making him ask questions; the other makes him stop.[14] By tending to the safety of the aggressor along with protecting others, the two-hands approach limits the level of violence and breaks the action-reaction cycle of escalating violence. The disciplined spirit of acting with both hands is powerful. Violence provokes resentment and the desire for revenge; transforming this tendency, assertive nonviolence communicates respect and thereby reduces the desire for retaliation.[15]

Most aggressors need their target to act like a victim. Both hostile aggression and helpless submission reinforce the attacker's expectation and sense of power. But we can help change the play by not acting in expected ways. Being firm and respectful, while showing courage rather than fear and self-control rather than anger, is unexpected. Acting in this fashion can create a sense of wonder in the attacker and an opening for a nonviolent way out of aggression.[16]

Sociologist Randall Collins describes what it takes for violence to

[13] Recall the definition of "force" offered at the beginning of this article.

[14] With Deming, I use a masculine pronoun here, recognizing that it is most often males being violent in such cases.

[15] David Cortright, *Peace: A History of Movements and Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008), 224-25.

[16] On how nonviolence works, see Angie O'Gorman,"Defense through Disarmament: Nonviolence and Personal Assault," in *The Universe Bends Toward Justice: A Reader on Christian Nonviolence in the U.S.,* Angie O'Gorman, ed. (Philadelphia: New Society, 2000), 241-47. Also see Laura Slattery, Ken Butigan, Veronica Pelicarie, and Ken Preston-Pile, *Engage: Exploring Nonviolent Living* (Long Beach, CA: Pace e Bene, 2005), 278.

occur. An aggressor must circumvent the emotional field of "confrontational tension and fear" inherent in an antagonistic interaction, and establish emotional dominance over the target. Collins contends it is so difficult for aggressors to turn "emotional tension" into "emotional energy" (strength) that violence is less likely to occur than commonly assumed. Given the nature of violence, he claims that "it is hard to perform" and "most people are not good at it."[17] Targeted people make it more difficult for aggressors when they express strong "emotional energy" that communicates they are not weak and easily dominated. Recognizing that this interaction is more emotional than physical, people have more power in a situation than they often realize, and they can learn how not to be victims.[18]

Responding with the two hands of nonviolence is a form of "moral ju-jitsu."[19] In ju-jitsu the violent actions of aggressors don't work and cause them to lose control. Meanwhile, the resister maintains safety, balance, and the moral high ground. This can prompt a process of wonder, questioning, and reappraisal in the aggressor's mind. In our safety training we tell stories of how the two hands of nonviolence have stopped physical violence with a strong presence and verbal resistance. For example, a powerful testimony is that of Angie O'Gorman, who faced a sexual assault in her home. She stopped the man who came against her with words alone. Her reflections on the disarming power of nonviolence are instructive.[20]

While many accounts show that the transforming power of word and spirit can create a humanizing encounter and prevent violence, there are situations when words don't stop violence and the two hands of nonviolence become physical. We tell these stories, too, in safety trainings to illustrate how individuals have overcome violence. Some examples from our area include the following:

- Goshen College students who physically resisted and escaped

[17] Randall Collins, *Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2008), 8-24.
[18] Ibid., 465-66.
[19] Term coined by Richard Gregg in *The Power of Nonviolence* (Philadelphia: J.P. Lippincott, 1934). For more on how moral ju-jitsu works, see Gene Sharp, *Waging Nonviolent Struggle* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 2005), 404-406.
[20] O'Gorman, "Defense through Disarmament," 241-47.

attempted rapes

- A woman from a Mennonite home who forcefully repelled a rapist after nine previous women submitted to the attacker and were raped[21]

- One of our instructors who intervened in a fight at the school where she worked to restrain the aggressor until the security officer arrived.

Consider the case of Beth Graybill when assaulted in her home. A man with a knife broke in and attempted to rape her. Seeking to protect herself and respect him in order to redirect his action, she first engaged him verbally. When her words didn't work and he forced himself upon her, she physically resisted and was able to wrest the knife from his hand. Rather than using it against him, she slid it under the refrigerator. At that point the man ran from the house and she escaped. He was eventually caught and convicted for his violent assault. After she was safe, Beth visited him in jail in a process of restoration. To strengthen her one hand, she reports how empowering it was to do training in physical defense. Her story demonstrates the two hands of nonviolence in action.[22]

What would Jesus do if assaulted? Without examples of interpersonal, predatory violence against him in the gospels, we don't know what he would do.[23] But consider the witness of two devout followers of his way: Mahatma

[21] Studies indicate that training in martial arts or physical defense can help reduce the risk of assault, equip individuals to resist violence, and add therapeutic value in recovering from violence. See Leanne R. Brecklin, "Evaluation Outcomes of Self-Defense Training for Women: A Review," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 13, no. 1 (2008): 60-76, and S. Margarete Heyden, Billie Anger, Tiel Jackson, and Todd Ellner, "Fighting Back Works: The Case For Advocating And Teaching Self-Defense Against Rape," *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance* 70, no. 5 (May/June 1999): 31-34.

[22] View her story in "*Thermostat: How Can We Turn Toward Peace in Time of Fear?*" (Mennonite Central Committee, 2005, videodisk). This videodisk also features the story of Blake, a student in the Peacemakers program who resisted bullying with words alone.

[23] The social, political, and spiritual aspects of Jesus' death make the crucifixion much more than "an act of personal violence." When struck in the face, Jesus didn't turn his other cheek but asserted himself, demanding an explanation for the soldier's aggressive behavior (John 19:20-23).

Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. Upholding the way of nonviolence, how did they answer the "What would you do" question? Both allowed the use of physical force to stop interpersonal violence. While committed to nonviolence, Gandhi spoke about opposing evil and protecting others from violence. He even corrected followers who thought they were honoring his way when they allowed their wives and children to be beaten at home.[24]

> My creed of nonviolence is an extremely active force. It has no room for cowardice or even weakness. There is hope for a violent [person] to be some day non-violent, but there is none for a coward. I have, therefore, said more than once . . . that, if we do not know how to defend ourselves, our women and our places of worship by the force of suffering, i.e., nonviolence, we must . . . be at least able to defend all these by fighting. . . . [Those] who can do neither of the two [are] a burden. . . . [They] must either hide [themselves], or must rest content to live forever in helplessness and be prepared to crawl like a worm at the bidding of a bully.[25]

Gandhi demonstrated his response one day when a man ran into their kitchen and attacked his wife, Kasturba, with a burning stick. What did the master of nonviolence do? He physically grabbed hold of the attacker's wrist and took the stick away. In the process the perpetrator soiled his robe. Gandhi insisted on washing it for him.[26] Gandhi illustrated how the two hands of nonviolence work together: with one hand he used force to take away the weapon, and with the other he cared for the attacker.

Like Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr. distinguished between nonviolence in the cause of social demonstrations and force used to resist interpersonal violence. Committed as he was to *agape,* King said that ethical appeals "must be undergirded by some form of constructive coercive power." Power and love are not polar opposites as often thought, where "love is identified with a resignation of power and power with a denial of love." Instead, "what is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless

[24] From a conversation with Belden Lane, Professor of Theological Studies at Saint Louis University, on August 17, 2012.
[25] www.mkgandhi.org/nonviolence/phil8.htm, accessed September 1, 2012.
[26] Ved Mehta, *Mahatma Gandhi and His Apostles* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1993), 13.

and abusive and that love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice."[27] King added that resisting violence can prompt respect, claiming that when people use force in self-defense they do not forfeit support but even win it "by the courage and self-respect it reflects."[28]

Martial Arts as a Model

Consider martial arts as a model for using assertive force to resist violence. Holding together the right to protect and the duty to respect life, martial arts promote the use of protective force to stop violence and secure a safe outcome for all involved, including aggressors. Contrary to what is usually depicted in movies, martial artists who are violent, take the offensive, or use excessive force fail to uphold the way of martial arts. As Sensei Funakoshi, founder of modern karate, has said, "The essence of karate is nonviolence. To subdue an attacker without fighting is the highest skill." The best traditions of martial arts teach a way of peace with physical skills for counteracting violence.[29]As well, these arts have been shown to reduce aggression, increase self-control, and form respect for others.[30]

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[27] Quoted in Cortright, *Peace: A History of Movements and Ideas*, 218-22.

[28] "Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Social Organization of Nonviolence" (1959), mlk-pp01.stanford.edu/primarydocuments/Vol5/Oct1959_TheSocialOrganizationofNonviolence, accessed September 7, 2012. Note also King's speech "Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom" (May 4, 1966), www.thekingcenter.org/archive/theme/419.

[29] Peter Payne, *Martial Arts: The Spiritual Dimension* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), 35-36; Fay Goodman, *The Ultimate Book of Martial Arts* (London: Anness Publishing Ltd., 1999), 6-7; Gerald S. Diment, "Training for Nonviolence" in *Martial Arts Training* (March 1993), 68-69; John Stevens trans., *The Art of Peace: Teachings of the Founder of Aikido* (Boston: Shambala Publications, 2007); Terrence Webster-Doyle, *One Encounter, One Chance: The Essence of the Art of Karate* (Boston: Weatherhill, 1996); Scott Shaw, *The Warrior is Silent: Martial Arts and the Spiritual Path* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1998), 35-38; Thomas Crum, *The Magic of Conflict* (New York: Simon and Schuster/Touchstone, 1987), 31-49; Terry Dobson, *Aikido in Everyday Life* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1993), 38-50; A. Westbrook and O. Ratti, *Aikido and the Dynamic Sphere* (North Clarendon, VT: Charles Tuttle, 1999), 20, 362.

[30] Dobson, *Aikido in Everyday Life*, 251; Crum, *The Magic of Conflict;* Richard Strozzi-Heckler, *In Search of the Warrior Spirit* (Berkeley: Blue Snake Books, 2007), 351, 360, 367. For clinical evidence on this claim, see Stuart Twemlow, "The Application of Traditional Martial Arts Practice and Theory to the Treatment of Violent Adolescents," in *Adolescence*

Training in martial arts can help us face threat with awareness, courage, and self-control. This can circumvent primitive "fight or flight" reactions, enabling us to respond constructively to transform hostile aggression that feeds on fear and anger. We can then employ verbal methods to stop violence before it starts. That is, because we cannot think effectively when our fists are clenched, martial arts can enable us to calm down, gain control, and open our hands so we can use our heads to respond. A less-anxious presence alone may have a disarming effect on hostility. If physical resistance is required, martial arts teach a range of techniques to stop violence.

When John Howard Yoder came upon Aikido, a martial art, in a Fellowship of Reconciliation article, he was impressed with it as a nonviolent response to attack.[31] Affirming the use of nonlethal force, Yoder said, "I am more likely to find [another way out] creatively if I have already forbidden myself the easy violent answer. I am still more likely to find it if I have disciplined my impulsiveness and fostered my creativity by the study and practice of a nonviolent lifestyle, or of Aikido."[32]

My colleague Tim Peebles, a Ph.D. candidate in theology and ethics at the University of Chicago, is another oxymoron as a Mennonite martial artist. He has extended the study of peace in the university to the practice of peace on the street. In searching for a way to engage violence in his urban Chicago context he too has come to martial arts. He writes:

> While Mennonite Anabaptism has had a "word" of peace and reconciliation in response to predatory violence, we have lacked sufficient deeds—powerful and empowering deeds—to go with

33, no. 131 (Fall 1998): 505ff, and Christine Steerman, "Conflict Resolution/Aikido Program Plan" (unpublished paper provided to the author). On how engaging with martial arts has a therapeutic effect of empowering people, see "Aikido as an Aid in the Psychotherapy of Trauma" in Paul Linden, *Winning is Healing: Body Awareness and Empowerment for Abuse Survivors,* www.being-in-movement.com/sites/default/files/wih_sample.pdf. On integrating Aikido as a kinesthetic pathway for learning responses to conflict, see the work of Donald N. Levine: www.donlevine.com. For a claim that martial arts has contributed to forming a culture of nonviolence in Japan, see Bruce Haines, *Karate's History and Traditions* (North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle Publishing, 1995), 168, 172.

[31] Unpublished memo in possession of J. R. Burkholder, "Aikido and nonviolent effectiveness," April 9, 1979.

[32] Yoder, *What Would You Do?*, 28.

> those words. My own search for a deeded word in response to predatory violence and gang conflict has led me to an odd partnership with traditional martial arts. . . . I am using martial arts to give individuals and groups physical competence and emotional confidence for making peace with urban conflicts. Such competence and confidence not only reduces the tendency toward violence (in potential perpetrators) but also increases the capacity to engage violence (for victims and bystanders).[33]

Peebles frames the work of making peace with martial arts in terms of shalom, justice, and power. He places assertive resistance to violence in the larger frame of comprehensive *shalom*; that is, shalom at all levels of human life. At each level shalom involves at least two interconnected aspects: the prevention or healing of injury and the establishment of right relationships. To speak of "right relationships" is to speak of justice. In Peebles's view, justice is more than legalistic notions of following the law and retaliatory notions of retribution. To heal broken relationships and establish right relationships requires tending various kinds of power and power imbalances. It is to move toward, and perhaps participate in, "power equalization."

> So when we talk, as Mennonite martial artists, of assertiveness, in contrast to submissiveness, on the one hand, and aggressiveness, on the other, we are talking about an attempt to promote just relationships between a self and other in conflict, a relationship that can neither accept the imbalance of power claimed by an Other (submission) or reverses the imbalance by gaining overwhelming power by the self (counter-aggression) but rather attempts to create a "safe place" for both self and other. It is interesting, in this regard, that the word "safety," most often used in the sense of physical and emotional protection, security, and well-being, comes from the same root as "salvation." What we Mennonite martial artists are seeking, then, are moments of interpersonal salvation—physical and emotional safety and justice—between self and other in conflict.[34]

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[33] From e-mail correspondence with Tim Peebles, September 18, 2012.
[34] Ibid.

We draw from the teachings of Sensei Ueshiba (1883-1969), founder of Aikido, which he called the Art of Peace. The following statements are quotations from his teachings.

> We train in hopes of . . . bringing peace to people around the world. The aim of the warrior is the restoration of harmony, the preservation of peace, and the nurturing of all beings. . . . The art of peace does not rely on weapons or brute force to succeed. . . . The true meaning of samurai is one who serves and adheres to the power of love. Protect the attacker. . . . To injure an opponent is to injure yourself. To control aggression without injury is the art of peace. . . .The art of peace is based on four great virtues: courage, wisdom, love, and friendship.

When threatened with harm, Aikido master Terry Dobson suggests several options: (1) negotiate a reasonable way out; (2) take a solid, centered stance to defuse aggression; (3) deceive by diversion or deflection; or (4) withdraw when all else fails and an escape is open.[35] Aikido suggests non-lethal physical force *only* after all other options have failed and it is *necessary* to stop violence when an escape is not open.[36] In this case Aikido then seeks, following its principles of restoration, reconciliation, and harmony, to neutralize aggression, not aggressors.[37] The rule is to use minimum effective force to prevent violence, to avoid harm to both the aggressor and the target, and to join the attacker in a way to create safety and, ideally, restore right relationships.

Our martial art has a code of conduct to control the use of protective force to stop violence. It states: "(1) Avoid rather than block; (2) block rather

[35] Dobson, *Aikido in Everyday Life*, 38-50.

[36] Is it wise to physically resist in an assault? Research has shown that physical self-defense during a sexual assault reduces the chance of a completed rape. For a review of studies, see "Self-Defense Training: A Brief Review," National Violence Against Women Prevention Research Center, Medical University of South Carolina (no date), www.musc.edu/vawprevention/research/self-defense.html. Also Heyden, Jackson, Anger, and Ellner, "Fighting Back Works" (see note 21). Gavin De Becker suggests that people should generally trust their intuition to respond to violence in *The Gift of Fear and Other Survival Signals that Protect Us from Violence* (New York: Dell, 1997).

[37] Westbrook and Ratti, *Aikido and the Dynamic Sphere*, 20, 362.

than strike; (3) strike rather than maim; (4) maim rather than kill, for life is precious, nor can any be replaced."[38] The last clause is the basis for the code: all life, even that of an aggressor, is precious and to be respected. This code "guides our hands," so to speak: with one hand we protect; with the other we respect.[39] In keeping with this code, we seek to respect even those who mean to harm others or us. This requires us to avoid physical engagement and to use verbal defense as much as possible. If physical defense is necessary as a last resort, we call for assertive force that respects the attacker's ultimate well-being as well as that of those we are protecting. Without such a code or respect for aggressors, most self-defense training is counter-aggression. What we call for is not simply following a high-sounding ideal, but for something that makes practical sense, because an aggressor is less likely to react with more violence if treated with respect.

A Continuum of Force

Moving from principles to practice, Peebles and I locate a range of techniques along a continuum of force. Different situations call for different responses with varying intents and outcomes. We distinguish between hurt and harm. By *hurt* we mean something that involves some pain—as with a pinch, pressure point, or control hold—but causes no physical injury. By *harm* we mean something that involves physical injury. For less threatening situations, we teach techniques that *hurt* but don't *harm*. For more violent situations requiring more force, we teach techniques that hurt and can harm, such as a strike to the groin, rib, or foot to stun or immobilize an attacker. Some arts, like judo, teach chokes that constrict the carotid arteries and cause an aggressor to lose consciousness but do not hurt or harm.[40] The aggressor is then laid on the ground without being hurt or harmed while help is secured.

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[38] Adapted from Edward B. and Brenda J. Sell, *Forces of Tae Kwon Do: A Martial Arts Training Manual for Men and Women* (Ann Arbor, MI: Rainmaker Publications, 1979), 109. Regarding physical defense, the authors state that ancient masters of martial arts would seek peace and avoid violence, believing it was more important to find ways to preserve than to destroy.

[39] Apart from higher ethical considerations, even a court of law holds people responsible and liable for use of excessive force causing unnecessary injury or death.

[40] If correctly administered. To test this notion, I had someone do this to me, and I can testify that it doesn't hurt or harm. But due to risks if done improperly, law enforcement officers no longer use this technique.

Figure 2
CONTINUUM OF FORCE

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Type	Submission	Strong Presence	Verbal Resistance	Redirective Touch	Physical Restraint	Minimal Stuns	Moderate Strikes	Maximal Attack
Technique		eye contact, body language, demeanor	tone, intensity, content	hands on shoulder, arms, back	floor pins, joint locks, blood chokes	blows to rib, groin, foot, solar plexus	blows to face, limbs, joints; body throws	blows to head, eyes, spine; use of knife or gun
Intent		redirect	redirect	redirect	redirect restrain	redirect restrain escape	escape	escape kill
Outcome		halt	halt	halt	halt hold hurt	halt hold hurt harm	halt hold hurt harm	halt hold hurt harm maiming death
Degree	Submissive	Assertive				(Aggressive)		Violent

Table created by Tim Peebles and the author.

As shown above, our responses are not limited either to do nothing or to kill the assailant, as sometimes assumed. There are multiple options. While I draw the line for myself between columns 6 and 7 for the limited use of nonlethal protective force, I admit that the lines in columns 5 to 7 between assertive, aggressive, and violent force are fuzzy.[41] Noting "stuns" and "strikes" in columns 5 and 6, we may ask if this model advocates the use of violence to stop violence. Isn't striking an attacker in the groin violent? It depends on how we define violence. If we define it as the intentional use of physical force or power resulting in harm or injury, then this action is violent.[42] But if we consider severity of harm along with one's intention and

[41] For a comprehensive discussion of techniques, see Rory Miller and Lawrence A. Kane, *Scaling Force: Dynamic Decision Making Under Threat of Violence* (Miranda, CA: YMAA Publication Center, 2012). While this work lacks a basis in peace and nonviolence, it offers a practical approach to our question.

[42] Recall the World Health Organization's definition of violence as stated at the beginning of this article, with its reference to "injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or

volition in the definition, then it is not necessarily violent. It may simply be assertive force.

Motives and outcomes matter, and they distinguish kinds of force from violence. The long-standing distinction made by some psychologists between aggression and violence is helpful here. Aggression is behavior directed toward another individual with the intent to cause *some harm*, whereas violence is aggression that intends *more serious harm*.[43] Aggressive force and violent force differ interms of intent and severity of harm. Along with intent and outcome, another important factor is desire or volition—what John Howard Yoder calls "ill will."[44] One may perform a physical action with the intent, but with no ill will, to stun or immobilize an attacker in his or her violence. In the Table above, force under columns 5 and 6 moves from being assertive to aggressive, in that some harm may result. But as described, such force is not violent, in that it does not *desire* harm.

With these distinctions, a groin strike to escape a sexual assault can be assertive, aggressive, or violent, depending on one's intent and desire and on the severity of harm:

- *Assertive*: A hand strike to the groin done with the intent to stun but does not injure
- *Aggressive*: A kick to the groin done with the intent to immobilize an attacker with some injury but no desire to cause harm
- *Violent*: A severe blow with a bat to the groin done with hostile intent and desire to punish a perpetrator with major harm.[45]

Along with these factors, consider the use of force in the bigger

deprivation."

[43] Craig A. Anderson and Brad J. Bushman, "Human Aggression," in *Annual Review of Psychology* 53 (2002): 27–51, www.psychology.iastate.edu/faculty/caa/abstracts/2000-2004/02ab.pdf, accessed September 10, 2012. Also see Russell G. Geen, *Human Aggression*, 2nd ed. (Buckingham, UK: Open Univ. Press, 2001), 2-19.

[44] Unpublished memo in possession of J. R. Burkholder, April 9, 1979.

[45] Gandhi taught that if physical force was used it was important to say "I'm not attacking you, I'm protecting others" to communicate one's intent and desire. From a conversation with Belden Lane, Professor of Theological Studies, Saint Louis University, August 17, 2012.

picture. Even if one would call any kind of strike to the groin violent, weigh this action against the greater harm of a completed assault. Consider the traumatic impact of violence: serious injury, lasting fear, unwanted pregnancy, social isolation, substance abuse, impaired relationships, damaged esteem, depression, counter violence, or death. Violence impacts not only targeted victims and their communities but perpetrators, too. All who are involved become its victims.[46]

While the ends don't necessarily justify the means, here again we must weigh the long-term consequences. In the larger scheme of things, how does a bruised testicle, broken rib, or even a crippled knee compare to a completed rape or murder and the consequences of it for not only the victim and community, but also the perpetrator? Motive, means, and ends must all be held together in determining a response to violence. The ethical value of allowing harm to be done by not resisting violence is uncertain. John Howard Yoder questioned whether an ethic of nonviolence means "letting evil happen without opposing it at all, or whether there are ways of opposing evil if it can be done without harm or ill will." With concern both for would-be victims of violence and for the perpetrator who is morally its victim, Yoder claimed that some kinds of physical resistance are appropriate.[47]

As I have been suggesting, resisting violence can be an intervention not just for oneself and others but for perpetrators, since it recognizes how those who are violent harm themselves too. By not resisting violence we fail, in a certain sense, to care for others involved in the moment or in the future. For this reason, I call what we teach not "self-defense"—with the focus on self—but "physical assertiveness" with concern for all involved. Believing that resistance is a form of compassion, Bill Leicht, a Quaker martial artist and co-founder of Peace Dojos International, says that it is best called "social defense" with a duty to restore broken relationships.[48]

Pressing for a Realistic Response

Earlier I described my use of force (Figure 2, Type 4) to restrain a known

[46] On trauma from violence, see Carolyn Yoder, *Trauma Healing: When Violence Strikes and Community Security is Threatened* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2005).
[47] Unpublished memo in possession of J. R. Burkholder, April 9, 1979.
[48] From personal conversation and e-mail exchange, September 26, 2012.

person from attacking my wife Linda. Suppose this person had used a knife. What then? In response to this question Linda, who is gentle and committed to the way of peace, said, out of a loving care for this person, that she would want me to go so far as to break the attacker's wrist (Type 6) if that's what it would take to the attack. Not just for her own safety, she explained, but for the attacker, who was on parole. Had she completed her assault with a deadly weapon, she would have gone to prison and suffered serious consequences.

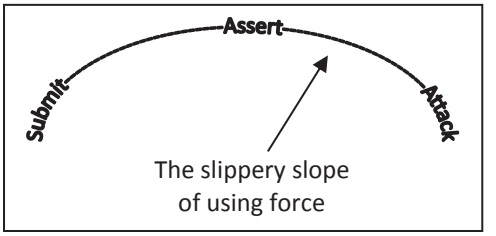
What if I were in the situation James Miller faced—with a violent stranger attacking my partner with a knife? How far would I be willing to go? I think I *should* follow our code of conduct and training in knife defense to remove the weapon and stop the attacker, and I'd like to think I would use assertive force only to protect Linda and respect the attacker. However, I can't say what I would actually do. While in abstract thought it is easy to make ethical distinctions, in actual situations they can become blurred. We may make claims about our likely behavior in a classroom or sanctuary, but on the street or in our home they can collapse. This is where we must be realistic in understanding defense against violence. While we may be skilled in physical defense, we cannot be fully prepared for much of real world violence, which happens in ways that often overwhelm even people with extensive training. As well, those so committed to nonviolence that they claim they wouldn't hit anyone can react violently in the heat of the moment. We all have the capacity to become violent, cave in to fear, or simply freeze when overwhelmed with violence that adrenalizes us with powerful instinctive "fight-or-flight" reactions that impair rational responses.

Violence triggers instinctive physiological reactions that impair our ability to think. Rooted in fear or anger and intensified by pain, these reactions prompt us to flee or fight. When fear and anger are sufficiently aroused, the forebrain of higher cognitive functioning shuts down and the aggressive instincts of our animal midbrain take over, adrenalizing our bodies with a powerful chemical cocktail to do what we need to do to survive. When this happens, we may not be able to think straight or be too stunned to think at all.[49] Being realistic about our natural defense mechanisms calls us to be

[49] The fight-or-flight response is an integrated physiological reaction in the body controlled by the hypothalamus of the brain. When confronted by a threat—physical or emotional, real or imagined—the hypothalamus causes the sympathetic nervous system to release epinephrine

humble about making absolute claims, to understand those who under- or overreact when engaged in overwhelming violence, and to be aware of the slippery slope from forceful assertiveness to violent aggression. If we are engaged in physical assertiveness, pumped up with adrenaline, we can easily slide into attack mode with violence. Because of this, it is important to have a code of conduct to control the use of force as proposed in the model.

Figure 3



Graphic created by author.

Conclusion

The way of nonviolence is not just a matter of choosing not to be violent. It also requires preparation to develop the skills and capacities to be nonviolent. Archilochos, an ancient Greek soldier and poet, asserted that "We don't rise to the level of our expectations; we fall to the level of our training." Just as soldiers prepare to counteract violence, we would do well as peacemakers

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and norepinephrine (also called adrenaline and noradrenaline) and other related hormones to cope with the threat. When rapidly released, these powerful messengers propel us into a state of arousal where metabolism, heart rate, blood pressure, breathing rate, muscle tension, sensory awareness, and pain tolerance all increase. See Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette, *The Warrior Within: Accessing the Knight in the Male Psyche* (New York: William Morrow, 1992), 34-36; Herbert Benson and Eileen Stuart, *The Wellness Book* (New York: Scribner, 1992), 34; Mark Mattson, ed., *Neurobiology of Aggression: Understanding and Preventing Violence* (Totowa, NJ: Humana Press, 2003). On conditioned responses for aggression, see David Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1996). A short form of Grossman's work appears in "Trained to Kill," *Christianity Today* August 10, 1998, 2-3. For an extended discussion on how complex and overwhelming violence is, see Rory Miller, *Meditations on Violence: A Comparison of Martial Arts Training & Real World Violence* (Miranda, CA: YMAA Publication Center, 2008), 57-71.

to obtain training to transform violence.[50] For further work, I offer a few suggestions:

- Explore approaches that use martial arts to make peace with interpersonal violence. Discover what we can learn from other embodied practices, such as those in Peace Dojos International, to inform peace studies and to develop programs on the ground.[51]

- Engage people with differing perspectives about violence using the model of martial arts as a bridge to show that the way of nonviolence is not passive but assertive, even forceful. This model may help turn heads and start discussion about the way of peace for responding to violence.

- Develop community-based programs to train children, youth, and adults in transforming violence (Peacemakers Academy in Goshen, Indiana is an example), and freely share the curriculum with those wanting to create programs in their contexts.[52]

Interpersonal violence and our range of responses to it are complex and require additional examination. I hope that the model of assertive resistance drawing on martial arts which I have outlined provides a practical answer to the "what would you do?" question, and that it will prompt further work on the problem of interpersonal violence.

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[50] Physical training in nonviolence also needs teaching for a spirituality of peace. From my faith perspective, I teach students that Jesus is our master in the way of peace, that the Spirit is the source of our power, and that "God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but the Spirit who makes us strong, loving and wise" (2 Tim. 1:7).

[51] For Peace Dojos International and its projects around the world, visit www.aiki-extensions.org.

[52] Visit peacemakertraining.org for a description of Peacemakers Academy, or e-mail steveforpeace@gmail.com to request the free *emPower* curriculum.