How Can We Live Freer?
The Will to Accept Sacred Freedom to Choose

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WE, IN THE U.S., live in the relative warmth of freedom in our constitutional republic based on democratic principles. Yet in 2023, public education lies beneath (within) a heavy weight, characterized by a time in which teachers grapple for their own self-worth like never before, while proving to critics they are worthy of a salary and that teaching is a profession, rather than a technical, formulaic spot that anyone can achieve. In addition, there is constant governmental pressure to privatize what was once thought of as a public space. That space, now, seems anti-educational and undemocratic, and teachers who witness these disturbing developments are fearful. These times and occurrences can clearly be thought of as a shadowy, metaphorically dark time for teachers, at least for public educators. The existence of such difficult times requires responses that bring light to everyday practices of education. This paper serves to support our continued need to think and examine ourselves as we navigate living and teaching spaces and practice acting in conscious ways, informed by theory in lived experience

Because of his stark precedent, I begin with the words and theory of Viktor Frankl, a psychologist and who survived being a prisoner in a Holocaust concentration camp and use his words to demonstrate the possibility of living in the second shadow, even while facing the first. While a prisoner, he realized he had the power to refuse surrendering his humanity. He argues this is the only thing that cannot be taken from a person, when everything else has been stripped away (Frankl, 1946/2006, p. 66). Examples such as his are worthy of inspection as he offers us consideration for internal development and preservation of the existence of choice, not merely inevitability. Afterward, I explain the possibility of abiding better in the second shadow in the following sections: The Will to Meaning; The Will to Examine; and The Will To Tarry. These sections all start with the will because this relates to our will, our choice to engage with and to do or implement within our lives and practices. I weave together a place from which to encourage teachers and educators to see themselves as key to their own creative processes to remain relevant in our present realities, alive with possibility, and encouraged through nonviolent everyday practice. I think it is significant to first acknowledge that the first, negative shadow or situation exists. While chaotic and perspicuously horrible for anyone implementing teaching, it underscores the importance for each to find the nonviolent habitation of the second shadow.

I employ the metaphors of shadow and define and refer to two types: the first is a result of audit culture and blaming we are experiencing; however, the second refers to a Jungian type (Mayes, 2005, p.174), which refers to our subconscious and the creative possibility we don't yet

realize. I use the words, the second shadow, to illustrate the space referred to in the paper, but I do not discuss Jungian theory. The first type of shadow is described in the following statements: more and more states propose regulations and policies that seek to further blame, minimize their ability to implement learning, and thereby occupy and monopolize the knowing spaces of our children and ourselves (Taubman, 2009, p. 45). While this type of pressure is not new, the continued long shadow of that difficulty translates into increasingly trauma-inducing times for educators as testing replaces altogether the art of teaching. Trauma is manifest in the constant exposure to the harsh light of hyper-surveillance and bullying tactics, further splintering ourselves in "fear that perhaps our endeavors are meaningless" yet intense measures of surveillance and control continue to amplify our uncertainties (Taubman, 2009, p. 129). Surveillance and bullying are evidenced in regulatory measures introducing confining, minimizing definitions state leaders use as reasons for regulations that further make teachers the other—within their own profession—creating doubt and confusion. The current testing culture serves not necessarily as individual development, but is now the way to "responsibilise students and teachers for the outcomes of education with assessment and examinations providing the quintessential vehicle for individualizing and responsibilising success and failure in relation to achievement and social mobility" (Torrance, 2015, p. 83). These actions from outside or within the teaching profession make teachers strangers to themselves, disconnected from ourselves by changing the culture of care and development to that of punishment and a poor use of accountability.

In the state in which I live, the state superintendent of education has adopted a questionable curriculum. It is questionable because it prohibits certain science-based teaching (i.e., evolution) and proposes banning books, and he has called teachers indoctrinators and labeled us as a problem (Slanchik, 2023). Sadly, this is not an isolated incident, as there are other states that rally against the word *critical* and the ideas of social emotional learning as unnecessary or such to be outlawed (Matt Papaycik & Saunders, 2022). The ideas of neoliberalist thought have so permeated society and thinking that educators must actively think about or cancel our own metacognition in order to preserve employment and out of fear because even those who are titled within education may be actively anti-educational. By this, I mean to say within school administration there are players who are not necessarily educators, who seek to minimize education as the means to educational decisions and lean rather on administrative strategies claiming to know better than the teachers they are tasked to lead.

I suggest that there is a potential within the notions of contour and *shadow* within our lives and experience. I refer to the place of creative possibility as the second shadow. I use the description of shadow because our decision making is internal, perhaps subconscious. As we interact with what we may not completely understand and embrace what scholars have written concerning spirituality and love within education (Aoki, 2005; hooks, 2001; Huebner, 1999), we can also learn how to hold on in times of distress (Britzman, 1998; Fowler, 2006; Wang, 2014) through nonviolence to sustain our growth. Our cognizance grows and increases our actions in our conscious lives, influencing our teaching and our students.

Choices that are positive are our nonviolent everyday actions, albeit these choices are not always easily made. In other words, while there is dark shadow, there exists, for teachers, the possibility of positive discoveries. We can learn to be within ourselves and with ourselves regardless of external pressure and pain, choosing to preserve ourselves and others, despite the imposed new mandates and realities of super surveillance that offend our humanity. Activism is predicated on thinking in nonviolent ways, because personal internal preservation and dealing with the self is necessary to effect external action.

Like the knowledge of the sun in Plato's (ca. 380 B.C.E./2009) "Allegory of the Cave," the second shadow is the dawning of possibility. There comes a questioning—much like the prisoners who are chained to the cave, unable to see the entrance. They only understand the projection on the back wall of the cave from a fire lit inside. It is only after one of the prisoners is able to turn around that he discovers the real source of light, the sun shining through an opening past the flame casting a reflection inside the cave. Likewise, not one visualized scene is solely reality. What was once thought of as the only possibility is enlightened. We may fearfully see the projection, when in truth, there are other parts of the entire scene. While faced with violence in behavior and rhetoric, we can have another existence. We begin to reposition ourselves by choosing to accept the nonviolent practice of keeping spaces open within our everyday lives; our awareness changes and shifts, transforming us. There are those who propose only one measured possibility; therefore, we who believe otherwise must hold open or occupy a space for the other possibilities, or only the dark shadow is recognized. We can do this work when we are more aware of what we think. The possibility of thinking differently grows inside of us, occupying more internal capacity to make additional choices that are nonviolent. The second space, the second shadow as I refer to it, is creative, aesthetic, internal to us as humans, and not possible to quantify, but we can know that it is growing as our thoughts, decisions, actions, and students begin to change. I will also deal further with nonviolence in other sections of this paper.

Viktor Frankl's Theory and Education

Similar to many European Jews, citizens for centuries, Viktor Frankl was made a foreigner by the Nazi government. He was diminished by governmental actions designed to make his human existence impossible. Born in Vienna, Austria, he did not escape to safety when allowed to emigrate because he was concerned about leaving his elderly parents, who would not be allowed to leave with him and, therefore, was subject to persecution and imprisonment in Auschwitz for three years. Already a medical doctor in psychology, he observed camp life and prisoners and formed the basis of his theories of Logotherapy. He endured great personal loss as well; while imprisoned, his wife, father, mother, and brother were murdered in concentration camps.

The Origins and Development of the Notion of Meaning Despite Suffering

Referencing the first part of his book, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Frankl, 1946/2006), I focus on his process of uncovering meaning, but I do not reference the second portion of the book on Logotherapy. I base my initial statements upon Frankl's (1946/2006) original notions discovered within the most extreme of human existence. During Frankl's time as a prisoner, he took great note of the daily human examples and developed his ideas on meaning, love as human spirituality, independence, and actualization. He observed power and identity in people dependent upon those with power, as weakened by those choices. "The prisoners saw themselves completely dependent on the moods of the Guards—playthings of fate—and this made them even less human than the circumstances warranted" (Frankl, 1946/2006, p. 53).

Frankl (1946/2006) recognized that external power structures within the concentration camp system forced prisoners to succumb not only physically, but mentally and emotionally to destructive power systems. In the worst of human experiences, Frankl (1946/2006) posits that

human choice is viable, when only spiritual choice is left. Prisoners were like lambs to the slaughterhouse, guarded and imprisoned until their usefulness expired through extermination. The old and very young were of no use as laborers and, in many instances, upon their arrival were immediately burned in gas chambers. The others who were at least 14 years old and appeared able-bodied were kept within the camp system, slowly being killed through starvation and disease, used and labeled like chattel. Yet, Frankl (1946/2006) states, "In Auschwitz, I had laid down a rule for myself which proved to be a good one" (Frankl, 1946/2006, p. 53). That rule included the desire to be alone with himself and his thoughts because camp life was crowded. He recognized that the "degraded majority (prisoners) and the promoted (prisoners who acted as guards) minority came into conflict … the results were explosive" (p. 63), and it took self-control to do otherwise and not be involved in violent recourse and hatred. If not, Frankl posits under violence, man is no more than a product. He questions, "Does man have no choice of action in the face of such circumstances? (p. 65); he believes differently. Believing the opposite to be true, Frankl (1946/2006) makes the case for personal agency and choice in situations where choice seems illusive. He emphasized hope rather than futility, choice in spite of despair. Frankl's discoveries are in no way justification for the violence that occurred in Nazi Germany, but showcase his discipline in thinking even when suffering, disease, and starvation were normal everyday occurrences.

Suffering Does Not Define Our Entire Existence

Frankl (1946/2006) teaches that suffering is not the enemy of an actualized person, but a tool of development. In no way does this justify murder and genocide. He posits that the aversion to the lessons of suffering and the desire for a life of ease works against us in unsuspecting ways, making us suspicious of difficulty because our thoughts do not encompass the idea of suffering as essentially incorporated to our lived existence. Therefore, it may be possible to accept that our suffering is part of a galvanizing process, never a justification for suffering, lest we become hardened to others' misery.

Frankl (1946/2006) posits, "Man can preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, of independence of mind, even in such terrible conditions of psychic and physical stress" (p. 66). He observed, "some walked through huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread" (p. 66). He states that these acts of humanity were a result of making difficult choices to choose dignity rather than being molded into the form of the typical inmate (p. 66). "The type of person the prisoner became was the result of an inner decision and not the result of camp influences alone" (p. 66).

Realizing Choice is Important to Being

At first, I found myself struggling to accept that in the midst of one's darkest experiences, one can still make choices. I would rather sink into self-pity. However, Frankl's notion of choice is applicable to educators who are participants in the space of education within a democratic society, yet full of powerful systems that strip us of our will to make choices. His ideas are metaphysical and spiritual and applicable to humans as we grapple in the same spaces. I suggest that part of surviving our current age of hyper-testing, labeling, and narrowed thinking is

recognizing our ability to remain separate. To see oneself as a part of a system, and yet without it, is significant.

Part of our personal journey as educators and humans is to remember our sacred freedom to choose (Frankl, 1946/2006). Within each of us is an expansive capacity to exist if we do not minimize ourselves and most importantly what we do (teach). We (teachers) are and exist beyond our jobs inside or outside a classroom with positions and titles. This way of being exists outside the bureaucracy of operations and is not reliant upon it. This is to say, we have a path of being that is outside the system of what I have referred to as the first shadow, characterized by over-surveillance that minimizes our work as educators. Frankl (1946/2006) expresses that we can own freedom as agency, locate this within the self, maintained by humans, unfettered to forces outside the self. It is recommended and desirable to occupy more of or exist further in the positive second shadow where possibility thrives.

During his captivity, Frankl observed that survival was the most important concept and that it seemed to him as episodic: the period after admission to camp, when camp life becomes routine, and then following release. Returning home to loved ones and preserving friendships surpassed the fear of the brutal Capos (the prison guards who were themselves prisoners). Sometimes, in the everyday mundaneness of starvation and overwork, he was subject to continual grief and fear, even while practicing the daily choice to be more present in the second shadow. The second shadow can be a place of quiet and rest, away from the searing heat; it does not deny that the negative exists, rather, we must acknowledge it.

How can our practice and existence as teachers and educators be "freer"? I acknowledge that our present lives and times as teachers in the U.S. are surrounded by difficulty. Many teachers succumb under the pressures of the first shadow, sickened by continual bullying. They leave the profession or stall in their own development, becoming discouraged and feeling further isolated and adrift. So, there is always that choice of remaining hidden in the first shadow. Alternatively, Maxine Greene (1995) posits that we can inspect the interstices to investigate how "beginnings have to do with freedom, how much disruption has to do with consciousness and the awareness of possibility that has so much to do with teaching other human beings" (p. 109). We must stir ourselves to begin again, having the courage to look within, utilizing the complexity of thinking and being to see ourselves as separate from the system while still teaching within it. From this point, I will focus on the second shadow as a place of the yet unknown, full of possibility and encouragement.

Similar to Frankl's dealing with spirituality, Dwayne Huebner (1999) states, "To speak of the 'spirit' and the 'spiritual' is not to speak of something 'other' than humankind merely 'more' than humankind as it is lived and known" (p. 343). He goes on to say that the language of the spiritual should be "'mined for the educator' because they (the language) contain centuries of experience and the possibility of experiencing of the supra-sensory, the qualitative, the transcendent-experiences that are stored in histories, stories, myths, and poems" (p. 344).

In the following sections, I bring awareness to the consequences of the second shadow as a place of interconnection that confronts the fracturing effect of the first shadow, for example, the blaming and dehumanizing language used to define teachers and teaching. Because knowing and learning are first and foremost spiritual, it is constantly under attack by those who seek to monopolize what it means to know, and it is significant for teachers and educators to revisit, reacquaint themselves with, and realize their own right to choose, which allows for room for growth and change, and that spiritual partnership engages our mental and physical selves. This choice requires risk because it does not provide complete safety. We are still feeling humans, yet

our individual actions are our own. We can choose to regain strength to continue to build ourselves apart from labels. We are enriched, and our existence expands in understanding, even while the first shadow exists. We can invest in our imagination to create a new space for ourselves so that we move back from trauma and expand our capabilities: personally, historically, and professionally.

Connection in Scholarship

Preserving our teacher selves is our personal responsibility (hooks, 2001) by committing to owning our internal work. Internal ownership is foundational and precedes activism, which is an outward display of an internal belief. Understanding that and exploring different ways of living in the world with ourselves can add to our love of teaching and learning. Preserving teaching as an art begins within the soul of every person (hooks, 2001) and is a buffer against powers that mobilize to make us invisible, presenting our work as unnecessary. Understanding the aesthetics of teaching is an internal process that begins with accepting that some of our processes are hidden or remain unknown, yet essential to keep us awake and alive. This is to say that our development is perhaps in unmeasurable increments, without clear pathways or buildouts. Cultivating that understanding is a nonviolent practice made in the moment of the everyday.

Greene (1995) states that accepting aesthetic parts of human development, of which teaching is part, is risky because aesthetics open our thinking to possibilities that do not have clearly defined roadmaps and that sometimes feel shaky and uncertain. We can see the multiplicity of human lives and experiences, making our understanding more intense or at least more complicated. Seeking definite answers is not simple, and finding the one right answer evades us. Dewey (as quoted in Greene, 1995) posits, “It is this kind of realization that renders experience conscious and aware of itself” (p. 21). Consciousness has an imaginative phase; it breaks through the “inertia of habit’” (Dewey, as cited in Greene, 1995, p. 21). We have been fed the lie repeatedly that teaching is technical and can be scripted. We may shrink back from moving forward with fully occupying our teaching roles because the aesthetic process is the antithesis of the definite and knowledge as finite measurement. Teaching is not solely or always scripted, and each of us must develop our own understanding of becoming more alive and freer.

Additionally, teachers are made to think their development pales in comparison to the manufactured bottom line of student test scores, while teachers also grapple with many things far beyond our control. Greene (1995) cautions against the simple fantasy of the one right answer to intractable situations. For example:

> the disappearance of joblessness, homelessness, fatherlessness, and disease are the obvious solutions to community difficulties that influence our students and therefore our schools. That futile type of dreaming leads to the inability to conceive a better order of things (and can give) rises to a resignation that paralyzes and prevents people from acting to bring about change.(p. 18)

The issues discussed here are complex and difficult ungovernable societal issues, and therefore, we must heed what Greene (1995) reminds—that as educators we can expand our imaginative capacity as it relates to our spiritual call to teach, to “look at things as if they could be otherwise“ (p. 19). “That same person may become freed to glimpse what might be, to form notions of what

should be and what is not yet " (p. 19). This is to say that it is possible to hold in tension the "fixed" sense of (the teacher) self while in process of "creating a self, an identity" (Greene, 1995, p. 19). Seeing our present individual realities and engaging the possibility of change and positive transformation is meaningful work and creates added dimension to our inner lives as teachers and humans. Greene (1995) challenges us to "keep the pain awake" (p. 113). To live in a place of not yet (Greene, 1995), perhaps described as the in-between places, requires the courage to do so. Uncertainty, feeling isolated, and all the negative emotions is not negated even as we attempt to abide in the second shadow. We can expect this as it is the price of pathos required by all who engage with learning; the teacher is one who can willingly search for meaning, practice love, and grow through nonviolence. Possibly, the teacher feels a sense of the not yet as constantly searching and never finding; however, we can also accept that this understanding is the point of creating new meanings within our lives. The new ways of being and creating meaning within our world are self-created and unusual.

We experience violence when accepting being told there is only one outcome or one right answer. Nonviolence practitioners use their internal discipline to know what one thinks and feels rather than accepting the told or dictated answer. It is the personal practice of rejecting what is damaging and hate-filled and instead delving into oneself through reflective practice. Nonviolent personal practice is sometimes a quiet, internally intense, and thought filled discipline. Nonviolent practice says of oneself that I will not hate, but rather act with compassion toward myself and others in the everyday practice to remain open, flexible within oneself even though I (myself) may be pulled to want to hide from hurt and disappointment. Acknowledging the hurt places is not to live in denial, rather it is to remain alive, in spite of the violence felt in the moment.

The Will to Meaning

I have alluded to the important notion Frankl (1946/2006) refers to as "the will to meaning" (p. 99). I suppose one can think of this phrase as the will or the purpose to find meaning that is deeply valuable to human experience. Frankl (1946/2006) posits that a rich inner life full of aesthetic understanding facilitates survival and provides us with momentary relief from suffering. He acknowledges that not everyone can or will embrace this type of "inner triumph" (p. 72). The will to meaning is his concept situated within a human endeavor or a personal journey of mental health. He cites a statistical survey of 7,948 students at 48 colleges, conducted by social scientists at Johns Hopkins University and sponsored by the National Institute of Mental Health. When asked, 76 percent of those surveyed selected to "find purpose and meaning" as their primary life goal (p. 99); making money and finding a good job was a distant second. Each of us, he states, can undertake the responsibility of the will to meaning.

Frankl discovered through his own survival journey that a person's greatest task is finding meaning, which may be found in three sources: one can find it through work, through love, and "in courage during difficult times" (Kushner, 2006, p. 10). He speaks of those sources as the fount of purpose-building everyone must have, and he cautions against finding meaning in work as that can easily be replaced by unemployment, which, for some, results in the loss of purpose. Teachers have all three sources from which to draw meaning. Frankl (1946/2006) speaks of love as a connection to the inner world, an aesthetic space, as the place to begin to find meaning, he first understood as a concentration camp prisoner. We can understand that nonviolent practice is love as courage, evidenced by standing alone even when unpopular with internal commitment to one's

core beliefs about love in action. This commitment to purpose is discovery that happens over time. Nonviolence preserves us while we wait, and in some cases, waiting with an open heart is the practice. Having an open heart, from a nonviolence lens is not carelessness or codependency; it is a purposed and focused decision.

> Thought transfixed me: for the first time in my life, I saw the truth as it is set into song by so many poets, proclaimed as the final wisdom by so many thinkers: The truth—that love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire. Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: The salvation of man is through love and in love … in the position of utter desolation, when man cannot express himself in positive action, when his only achievement consists in enduring his sufferings in the right way—an honorable way—in such a position man can, through loving contemplation of the image he carries of his beloved, achieve fulfilment. For the first time in my life, I was able to understand the meaning of the words, "the angels are lost in perpetual contemplation of an infinite glory." (Frankl, 1946/2006, p. 38)

Frankl (1946/2006) highlights several areas of consideration: the ideas of love, tension, and suffering. I discuss first the notion of love, explained through examples from Fowler (2006) and hooks (2001).

The Will to Examine and Redefine Love in Our Human Experiences

Fowler (2006) uses what she calls the *internarrative* (p. 23) as a type of writing schema. The internarrative brings to view our human experience in a way that allows us to observe in addition to what we already know and think. She claims in her book, *A Curriculum of Difficulty* (Fowler 2006), that we have additional interpretive spaces within ourselves—we demonstrate these metaphoric spaces by strategically writing additional stories between the chapters. She includes additional stories to communicate specific understandings within the general ideas of each chapter. I use Fowler's writing style to underscore that there are in-between spaces even within well-crafted stories.

Some of what is within us is what Wang (2019, citing Jung) refers to as our shadow—the second type of shadow addressed in this paper (p. 382). For Wang (2019), shadow is described as knowing and experiences not yet fully understood. It is part of our own selves that exists along with what we know, yet remains unknown; therefore, we are always partly in shadow. Not everything we experience is fully illuminated immediately. Practicing the passage of time, contemplation, and sitting with what we do not yet understand is a type of nonviolent action as we resist the urge to dismiss what is difficult in lieu of an easy answer. The easy answer may be apparent but not how we might fully understand something. Waiting and tarrying with the uncomfortableness of any situation requires discipline.

We may accept that there are unknown parts of ourselves coming into view while remaining open to that possibility. Why? Because we are learning daily. Additionally, our capacity to cogitate and embrace what is yet to be discovered, explored, unveiled, and known is expanding continually. That such a shadow holds additional power allows the possibility of opening ourselves more fully to incorporate the parts we are beginning to see as they are coming into view. hooks (2001) posits that reflection and a willingness to think about one's experience is significant to

transformative change. If we can listen less to the negative voices within that devalue us, we can commit to the difficult work of love necessary to sustain internal change. Notice that love is not just a feeling or a motivation; it is action and will. It requires us to take a stern position with regard to what we truly believe about others, ourselves, and education.

hooks (2001) explains that commitment to love begins with self-love, not selfishness. This type of love is an understanding that it is impossible to love another without loving oneself. She posits it is choice and action, not eros (physical) or even phileo (friendship). Humans are socialized to not engage with love for oneself because we are taught to trust the judgment of others over our own. We, as educators and teachers, are also susceptible to this kind of outside judgement, something that Taubman (2009) titles audit culture (see also hooks, 2001). "If we succeed without confronting and changing our shaky foundations of low self-esteem rooted in contempt and hatred, we will falter along the way" (hooks, 2001, p. 61). Living with purpose becomes more authentic and sustainable because we have dealt with our internal issues that prevent us from truly loving (i.e., ourselves, our neighbor, our students, our teachers, strangers, and life in general).

Then, as we revisit the site of the narratives we tell ourselves and examine them honestly, we encounter the additional understanding and can choose to integrate it through listening to what is coming into view from a once blind side, much like Fowler's (2006) internarratives. One may interpret the work of integration as one of interconnection, incorporation of what is not understood, so that our human experience becomes full of deeper understanding, less fragmented, with integrated capacity to share, care, and communicate. We shift into different spaces and become more relatable to those situations and persons with whom we appear to share no common ground. This work is not without sacrifice, pain, and disappointment. We may at first be surprised by new understandings and revelations because they may show us which parts are ready to be transformed. Those areas appear ugly or disappointing. Our own transformative experience may not be supported by traditionally pro-teacher agency, and we find ourselves feeling alone. hooks (2001) shares an example of love in action.

> But, we can all enhance our capacity to live purposely by learning how to experience satisfaction in whatever work we do. We find that satisfaction by giving any job total commitment. When I had a teaching job, I hated (the kind of job where you long to be sick so you have an excuse for not going to work), the only way I could ease the severity of the pain was to give my absolute best. This strategy enabled me to live purposely. (p. 62)

Using her experience as an example, love is action, alive, involving strength and sacrifice. It is not weak or emotive; it is affirming, sustaining within and throughout human existence.

This type of love can be illustrated through a story of pain and transformation. Smythe (2015) writes of his experience as a college adviser to international students presenting to faculty on the subject of working with international students. After delivering a lecture that he thinks is well thought through, another faculty member reveals that an international professor thinks Smythe's presentation is a racist one. Smythe is stunned, upset, and defensive.

> But once I moved past those feelings, I was even more stunned that I thought I could explain what American culture and all other cultures were in highly simplistic, stereotypical categories that pitted the U.S. against the rest of the world. (Smythe, 2015, p. 225)

He pivots his thoughts to change his actions and constructively questions his technique, and delivery. “How could I possibly be responsible for telling the faculty and students what other cultures were like or how to predict student/faculty behavior based on cultural labels without knowing the people themselves?” (Smythe, 2015, p. 226). Pondering without dismissing is an important step to learn, to tarry with what is in the moment surprising, uncomfortable, and hurtful to our egos. To begin to dwell with nonviolence is being empowered to linger until the possibility of enlightenment and then to care and love ourselves while keeping self- condemnation at bay.

The Will to Tarry and Adopt Nonviolence Within

Our nonviolent practice in everyday living leads us to the tolerance to withstand the urge to quit or shortcut important healing processes because of pain and negative beliefs. Nagler (2004) states that the term, *Ahimsa*, can be interpreted as the negative or opposite of *to harm*. Because English does not adequately define this Sanskrit word, he teaches that *Ahimsa* as a “kind of double negative actually stands for something so original that we cannot quite capture it with our weak words” (p. 45). Wang (2014) states that “nonviolence is a positive force that holds the solution to most of our major personal, social, and global problems” (p. 45).

Aoki (2005) encourages his readers to linger. “Indeed, a sublime moment tarrying with nothing at the center, tarrying with the negative” (p. 404). He relates the story of Slavoj Žižek, the Slovenian thinker observing political upheaval in Romania. Žižek (as cited in Aoki, 2005) recalls that rebels were waving the national flag, but due to destruction, there was no longer any symbol on it, so they were celebrating the absence of what was once upon it. Žižek wondered about observing and understanding the negative space before it was quickly filled by other symbols, meaning: That which is in the unoccupied space is something of importance. Aoki (2005) likens this story to his concept of “tarrying with ‘nothing’ at the center, (tarrying with the negative)” (p. 404). In his example, the emphasis is not that there is negative, rather there is something important to be learned from the place that one cannot clearly define. When the viewer is not tempted to fill it immediately, but to sit alongside it, organic understanding flows forth. That process takes patience as meaning making must be waited upon and observed, lived with, if you will. He states that two things occupy that space—what is not and what is “growing in the ambiguity” (p. 407) for this is important to the human condition. Wang (2014) posits that a “zero-space of nonviolence” is essential to initially understand what we are capable of. Our present western facilitated thought privileges experience as a false sense of what we can depend on as unmovable. That is to say we rely on numbers, test scores, and believe validity in a scientific way confirms our personhood. We lack the integration of a deeper intention to remain open, since the numbers say what must be. Within her own life experience, Wang (2004) began to sense a churning, an unsettling, which led her to the possibility of something different, her notion of nonviolence.

Nonviolence

An Example of Nonviolent Reflection Emerging from Broken Relationship

I returned in 2018 to the state in which I was born, after being away many years. I was flooded with the excitement of visiting familiar places and experiencing the places of my youth.

The visual scene was so different; it seemed almost foreign and could not have been further from my childhood experiences and memories. We used our global positioning system to find landmarks that were so reconfigured I could not recognize them. It was bewildering, and I was disappointed. The places where I had expected to revisit only now existed in my memory. Additionally, people traveling with me on the trip had ongoing personal conflicts. We were not experiencing a community building activity, rather, the opposite. One family member told me how much she hated going and by extension how much she hated me. I was viscerally responsive to the verbal violence. I was shocked; I apologized several times, and this worked to further alienate me.

After returning home from the trip, my own friends heard about the situation over and over. They knew I was struggling but could do little to mend it. After two years of struggling and attempting to rebuild my thoughts and mend the relationship with the family member, the relationship seemed to deteriorate further. I felt like I was continually being bruised and that my relationship with the family member was lost forever. I realized I needed to fully release the relationship.

After some years, we began talking again. Very gently, a new relationship emerged—one that did not enslave me to being the procurable self. During that time, other relationships and opportunities caused me less angst and those began to flourish. I felt less shame ,and soon I could accept that the way I acted before was without appropriate boundaries. I learned that my overreactions were violent or at least allowed violence to myself. Accepting this part of me was painful because I did not want to see that I felt weak and that I allowed other's realities to supersede my own. I wanted to be seen as the one with good intention, yet I had never learned to speak my own truth without constantly apologizing or self-deprecating.

After adjusting my damaging behavior and no longer feeling wounded, I did not hold the other person responsible for my pain. Letting go was easier and less anxiety ridden. I was freer, different, not happier at first, but as I occupied a different place, I realized I did not have to return to old habits. I was able to be different, think more independently, and this learned navigation became a place of hope and personal freedom, growth and new understanding. I also realized that if I did not have that family member's approval or reconnection, I would survive. If I lost the personal connection again, I would be able to weather it because I had gained a better approval within myself. Out of options and forced to sit with the pain, I chose to hold a new sense, one of hope and new discoveries including repositioning my thoughts to encompass what was a newer discovery and being willing for a short time to accept my strangeness to self. Discovering a more open stance was surprising to me and allowed me to process a new sense of joy and increased my willingness to interact differently and gain perspective. Forgiveness came as I fully released myself from my family member, even though they did not forgive me. The change seemed little, because it is internal, measured by myself; however, it affected all my thoughts and actions going forward, affecting how I saw myself as a teacher and as a person. I am different because of that nonviolent interaction engaged within the everyday, that took some time to fully understand.

Wang (2014) relays similar understanding:

> For several months, I was re-experiencing the past in places I used to know but no longer recognized, in a journey of letting go my previous attachments while integrating the cross-cultural fragments inside of me, a journey of listening to the whisper of that little girl who longed for nonviolence and peace as she grew up and moved from place to place, finally landing in the American South for her doctoral studies. The whisper was subsumed under the noise of the relentless pursuit of "progress" in China (or worldwide) … . I worked,

> listening to my participants' voices, reflecting on my own disillusionment first with the Chinese socialist idea. And then the American ideal of democracy, the voice of nonviolence finally broke through the surface and rang like a bell in my ear. (p. 3)

I interpret the struggle to locate a different place to be as metaphor. It is painful because the path to discovery is not sure, creating an insecure, uncomfortable process. Wang relates this process to relationality—the interplay between human beings and their experience.

A Classroom Example of Pausing in Nonviolent Reflection

Once in my Pre-AP Language Arts classroom, I was drilling my students on poetry analysis. I was set on making sure they could analyze the acrostic to analyze poetry quickly for a test. Students were coming up with different theme statements, and they were off the topic, so I thought. One student finally said, "Why do we have to come up with the exact statement if I can defend my answer?" There was silence as I tried to process the surprise I felt at the realization of her statement. The truth is that, in my effort to make sure students landed on the right answer, I eliminated their ability to think and defend their own thoughts. This was never my intention, and thankfully, I stopped long enough to heed my own discomfort and sit with the stillness, which allowed me to choose a different path, one that was more invitational and generative, open to students' possibilities. That example is only offered as a way to think, rather than to develop a formulaic answer to the how to remain open as a solution to our present problems of and within American schooling. What other ways do we as educators act in violent manners toward our students? Without a change, we do a great deal of damage. How can I really listen to students without superimposing my reality over theirs? Without a change, we do not. I told myself I did not intend to hurt and push the lesson in such as a way, as a way to excuse myself. The deeper meaning came through practicing nonviolent tarrying. I understood that my method and implementation were damaging and that course correction meant I would have to change and treat students differently. I would treat students with respect and learn to listen differently. This was a type of professional development significant to my teacher self and my teaching practice changed to one of reflective practice based on what those students needed.

"Stillness speaks its own language (Tolle, as quoted in Wang, 2014, p. 3), and we can learn to listen to it through openness to possibilities. What has dawned for me is my own realization that this uncomfortable "working through intensity" (p. 3) is the work with which we must constantly engage. It is then that "generative stillness" comes forth; it is the ongoing process of birth, life, death, and rebirth" (p. 3). This tension of remaining open and holding at bay every onslaught to our spirits is also important. Just because one is open does not mean one should be abused. The practice of keeping ourselves open protects our minds and spirits from being decimated.

Nonviolence as Apparatus of Teacher Reflection

Nonviolence is one of "transformation of relationships," beginning with the relationship held with ourselves (Wang, 2014, p.163), one focused on "personal cultivation and growth" (p. 164). This cultivation affects our well-being, our mental health, and our way of moving and operating within our individual settings (Wang, 2014, p. 164).

Teaching the whole person involves integrating intellect and promoting students' physical, intellectual, emotional, aesthetic, moral, and spiritual growth. In other words, teaching is for "deep learning" (Grauerholz, as quoted in Wang, 2014, p. 165). Additionally, we can learn that "engagement without attachment to pre-determined goal(s) is difficult to imagine in today's accountability age, but I think it is important for educators" (Wang, 2014, p. 170). Learning is letting go of the controls and releasing to find another way of living and learning in a greater way. This does not mean that teachers and educators should not start with goals and objectives when planning taught curriculum. Rather, our teaching must be considerate of the possibilities that we will find other ways of relating, not originally planned. We must choose to be freer in ways that do not further fetter us.

Conclusion: Fighting the Urge to Console Ourselves

How can we live freer? That question was posed at the beginning of this paper. And it is a large, all-encompassing, never-ending dialogue to which we commit when calling ourselves educators. Britzman (1998) posits, "Education is always lived as an argument, precisely because the repressed must return" (p. 55) She reminds us that we do "render the uncertainties of the lived" and cautions us by asking: "What actually is occurring when education represses uncertainty and trauma if the very project of reading and of love requires risking the self?" (Britzman, 1998, p. 55). Therefore, uncertainty and living in the interconnected space of the inner self and the outer world is one we negotiate to remain more alive, without a sense of closure.

> You must understand that in the attempt to correct so many generations of bad faith and cruelty, when it is operating not only in the classroom but in society, you will meet the most fantastic, the most brutal, and the most determined resistance. There is no point in pretending that this won't happen. (Baldwin, 1963/2008, p. 1)

Although James Baldwin (1963/2008) addressed educators and specifically the education of "the Negro child" (p. 1), his words ring true for all of us within education. We must understand that we will face opposition as we contemplate our own sense of education and live in such a way that we are those who examine "society and try to change it and to fight it" (Baldwin, 1963/2008, p. 1). I am simply reminding us that our difficult examinations emanate from within.

I encourage my co-teachers and co-laborers in the field of education to recall what scholars have taught us and place an emphasis upon their discoveries, for we journey through uncertainties. As we renew our commitment to philosophy and theory, we embrace the integration of practice, bridging thought, agency, and action. While teaching in public school for more than 36 years, I experienced various educational movements and requirements during those years, changing almost as fast as they arrived. Therefore, our ability to exercise nonviolence in an environment of constant change will likely aid in preserving the spiritual, intellectual, and love for our chosen profession. I suggest that scholars recognize the exquisite and intricate and often painful conditions that make keeping awake possible. Teachers are told that we must be flexible and of service to our students; however, very little focus is aimed on various types of teacher development. Our preservation is an act of our will, a part of our own purpose and nonviolent practice.

The planting of our teacher- and student-selves into the sacred space of the second shadow affords us firmer positioning, which integrates ourselves. Standing firmer through nonviolence

transcends the present turmoil and transcends the norm, connecting rather than dissolving, creating a healthier whole, more aware of what is actually thought about and what one actually thinks regardless of other oppressive thoughts. Integrating ourselves with scholarship is firmer ground upon which to claim our own inner freedom, enabling us to form different relationships within ourselves and with others. A great many teachers and adept students know what we value, what we think, and what are possible connections despite the loud drum beat of the anti-educational. Teaching and, therefore, classroom-based education is more than following a script and scoring well on an evaluation. Our shared human experiences continue to be intense as we grapple with difficult situations such as the war in the middle east, the recent COVID-19 pandemic, and the return to in-person learning to name a few. In education most recently, some states have demonized Critical Race Theory and banned any reference to race as wrong and to be outlawed. The drumbeat to confine education and redefine and minimize teaching continues. Now more than ever teachers must practice the caring for ourselves through nonviolence, as we set new courses to learn how to love. One of my friends, a professor, meets with another professor weekly to discuss ideas of scholarship, teaching, and becoming. This action is not a part of the institution, rather, these commitments are his personal choice to keep himself alive, preserve his practice as his own, and they are his acts of nonviolence. Basing one's own personal daily practice on scholarship enforces Frankl's mandate that, despite the worst of human experiences, we remain thinking beings in order to remain free. Applying this during this time deeply connects the practitioner to philosophy, bridging the space between what is thought of as out of reach and unapplicable—to the daily life of teaching and learning and becoming. It is such a time as this when we are most in need of this relevant bond.

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