

# Implementing Inclusive Social Action

## SES Board of Directors

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Our first White Paper, *Inclusive Social Action*, addressed our responsibility to stop others who actively intend harm. We underscored the fact that providing those who willfully intend harm with loving energy only adds fuel to their harmful actions. Our second White Paper, *Preparing for Inclusive Social Action*, examined how we can best ready ourselves to act in situations where others clearly intend harm and to do so in a manner that does not result in our becoming what we are fighting against.

Now we turn to the steps we can take to call out or push back against the violence that is being perpetrated. Inaction makes us complicit in what is happening. This paper does not pretend that it is possible to take action in all circumstances where harm is being done. Even with social media, we cannot be aware of everything going on around the world. Simply trying personally to prevent all violence against women and girls (the number one global human rights violation) would be impossible given that up to 70 percent of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence; worldwide a woman is raped every two minutes, and in India a bride is burned in a dowry death every minute.<sup>1</sup> In Yemen, a child is dying from starvation every ten minutes due to the armed conflict,<sup>2</sup> and the list goes on. Fortunately, for those of us wanting to maintain some awareness of the range of violence being perpetrated, there are resources online like [www.avaaz.org](http://www.avaaz.org) or [www.change.org](http://www.change.org).

Standing against violence is an issue of both attitude and preparedness. As Albert Einstein said, “The significant problems we have cannot be solved at the same level of thinking with which we created them.” We must shift to a perspective that asserts, with compassion, no tolerance for violence in any of its myriad forms – nasty remarks, cruel jokes, intentional lies, prejudicial generalities, hate speech, dismissiveness, objectification, physical battery, and so on. It takes practice to make our first and best response to always call out and stand against violence. Our responsibility is to sensitize ourselves to the many forms of violence and ensure that our reflexive response to them is, “This is not ok.”

### **Recognizing Situations of Harm That Require Action**

It is not always easy to recognize when action is required. First, we live in a world filled with violence and frankly have no shared experience of living harmlessly. So there are almost certainly going to be times when we accept harmful actions as “just the way things are” because they are so familiar. Second, the degree of harm occurs along a continuum. We have only to compare the thoughtless disregard involved in not offering a seat to a person with a disability to the near-fatal beating (or murder) of a journalist to know that all situations of harm are not alike. Where along the continuum will we draw the line and say that an action is unacceptable? Third, harm occurs by both commission and omission, with the first generally being easier to spot. But remaining silent (or even laughing) while a group of people are being called “animals” is as harmful as doing the name calling ourselves.

Our spiritual commitment is to express the goodwill that will bring about right relations and remind ourselves and others that we are indeed all part of the One Life. We are told that separativeness, or acting in a manner that belies that oneness, is the Great Heresy. So to identify harmful or separative actions, we can be alert for one or more of the following motivations and subsequent actions (or inactions) that display an indifference to the plight of others:

- Membership in, or condoning of, a hate group – i.e., a group whose primary purpose is to promote animosity, hostility, and malice against those who belong to a different group. Such groups and their activities are steeped in an ideology that is antithetical to the One Life.

- On a less formal basis, an espousal of an “us-them” ideology that rejects the basic premise of commonality (“they are not us”). This is often accompanied by negative stereotyping and fear mongering.
- Self-focus rather than the self-forgetfulness that we are called to in the Mantra of the New Group of World Servers. This includes actions rooted in narcissism that are focused on self-interest and self-aggrandizement at the expense of others.
- An “ends justify the means” philosophy that results in people being willing to say or do anything, including lying and bending or breaking the law, in order to advance their own interests.
- Acting in a divisive rather than a collaborative manner. Counteracting this approach does not mean that we all have to agree with each other. It does mean that we listen to others’ perspectives with respect and an attempt at understanding the underlying issues.
- A related attitude of “my way or the highway” that assumes only one right way (mine) rather than trying to seek common ground or a compromise that will work for all.

One of the challenging concept for many to accept is that there are individuals and groups that are truly evil – i.e., that are profoundly wicked or immoral, without a moral compass. Such individuals or groups may appear glamorous or persuasive, and so it may be difficult to recognize that their intentions are morally corrupt. Such persons will face the karmic consequences of their own actions eventually. Our job is to limit and reverse the damage that they seek to do, not to try to save them from themselves with loving kindness. As Edmund Burke wrote, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

### **Addressing Language Used**

Speech gives form to thought and makes our thoughts available to others. If we take seriously that “energy follows thought,” then the thoughts that we voice are what shape our universe and our shared experience. Another perspective is that the physical universe, as a vibrational field, expresses as light in one spectrum and as sound in another. In analyzing speech (whether our own or that of others), an old Sufi tradition advises us to speak only after the words have passed through four gates or questions: Are they true? Are they necessary? Are they kind? Do they enhance the silence (is it the right time)?

We have seen during the Trump presidency in the United States the power of language to humiliate, to confuse, and (through repeated lies) to numb us to the reality of what is happening. While it becomes exhausting to do so, it is vital to push back and sound the truth. Otherwise, the falsehoods remain and pile up until we can no longer sense what is ethical or moral.

As one example, *Quartz* ran an article in November 2018 on the importance of correctly naming asylum seekers rather than calling them “migrants” (without a right of entry) or even worse “illegal aliens.”<sup>3</sup> What the terms “migrant” or “illegal alien” obscure is that Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.” This right is further elaborated in other international laws to which the U.S. is a signatory: the Refugee Convention of 1951, and the Refugee Protocol of 1967. U.S. law also clearly states that individuals may apply for asylum either at a port of entry or within one year of entering the U.S. (however that is done). Both President Trump’s policies and his rhetoric mask this legal framework from the public.

Another type of language that can undermine goodwill and focus on the common good is nationalistic rhetoric that differentiates between “us” and “them.” While theoretically the “us” in a nationalistic speech would refer to all residents of a country, in reality there is usually the unspoken “people like you and me.” Sometimes the hatred in such rhetoric is obvious, as in the white nationalist chant, “Jews will not replace us.” Sometimes the references are in coded language that holds special meaning for the target audience and will incite to violence or at least discrimination.

At a more mundane end of the spectrum, we have the jokes and passing references that belittle and demean others. We need to not only be careful regarding the language we use, but we also need to be

prepared to call out harmful language. Without preparation, a sexist or racist or ageist joke can catch us off guard. Indeed we may find ourselves, to our horror, laughing because others are laughing. To respond effectively, we need practice in order to have at hand the response we want to give. How we respond will depend both on the circumstances and on our particular style. Here are some options to consider: “What did you mean? I’m confused.” “Do you really think that...” “I’m not sure that’s actually true.” There is no one “right” way to respond; rather, it is a matter of being ready to indicate clearly that what has been said is not o.k. with you.

### **Countering Actions Planned or Taken**

In the earlier versions of the Great Invocation, there is the phrase “Construct a great defending wall.”<sup>4</sup> The Tibetan explains that it is meant to express “Thus far and no further. The limit of effectiveness of the evil expression and of the power of the aggressors has been reached if the disciples and the people of goodwill actually now play their proper part. Symbolically, they can put up an impregnable wall of spiritual light that will utterly confound the enemy of humanity. It will be a wall of energy – vibrating, protective, and at the same time of such power that it can repulse those who seek to pass in their pursuit of evil and wicked objectives.”<sup>5</sup>

While energetic barriers are important, practical physical action is also critical. Our challenge is to find those “thus far and no further” expressions that protect potential victims while not inappropriately harming the perpetrators. One example of such an action occurred after the October 2018 Pittsburgh synagogue massacre. Members of a range of religious faiths stood shoulder to shoulder in a “Ring of Peace” around a Toronto synagogue to ensure the safety of those inside. Similar examples exist of creating a human defending wall by physically being with vulnerable groups, such as those seeking asylum at the southern border of the U.S.

Sometimes the violence has already occurred and it is too late to intervene, or any intervention would be too dangerous. In that case, we can at least bear witness. In this era of cell phones, we may be able to record what is transpiring so that there is a record. At other times, all we can do is to experience what has happened rather than turning away. An example of that “turning away” is White House national security adviser John Bolton’s statement that he did not need to listen to the recording of journalist Khashoggi’s murder in the Saudi Embassy “because I don’t speak Arabic.” Simply reading a transcript allowed Bolton to dismiss the terror and pain clearly audible on the recording.

We hope that this trilogy of White Papers on inclusive social actions has stimulated thought and discussion both of the urgency of “constructing a great defending wall” with our actions and of the possibilities for action that we can consider. To address harm without inducing more harm takes practice. Please share with the School your suggestions for how we can call out or push back against violence.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>

<sup>2</sup> Declan Walsh, “Yemen girl who turned world’s eyes to famine is dead.” *The New York Times* (1 November 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/01/world/middleeast/yemen-starvation-amal-hussain.html>

<sup>3</sup> Annalisa Merelli, “The case for calling the people fleeing Central America asylum seekers, not migrants,” *Quartz*, 27 November 2018. <https://qz.com/1472421/stop-calling-asylum-seekers-at-the-southern-border-migrants>

<sup>4</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *The Externalisation of the Hierarchy* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1957), 249.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.