
YESTERDAY, TODAY & **TOMORROW**

AN OVERVIEW OF GENTLE TEACHING AND A CULTURE OF GENTLENESS



YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW:

**An Overview of Gentle Teaching
and a Culture of Gentleness, a
presentation by John McGee for
the Gentle Teaching International
(GTI) Conference held in Solund,
Denmark (2012)**

FOREWORD

We are pleased to share with you **Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: An Overview of Gentle Teaching and a Culture of Gentleness.**

In the weeks prior to the passing of our dear friend and mentor, Dr. John J. McGee, we were fortunate to have him spend time with us here in Saskatchewan. It was during this visit John shared with us a presentation he did not have the opportunity to deliver at the 2012 Gentle Teaching International Conference in Denmark. His request to us was simple: "Please take my presentation and turn it into a booklet to share with the Gentle Teaching Community around the world."

This book is in honor of John -- a beloved friend and mentor to so many people in all corners of the globe. He will be forever cherished in our hearts and memories.

As we move forward in our journey to cultivate cultures of gentleness, we are privileged to have the support of the Gentle Teaching community to carry on with the work established by our dear friend. We hope our efforts will honor his passion to ensure others always feel **safe, loved, loving**, and **engaged**.

TIM JONES & MICHAEL LAVIS

**We must find joy in the
midst of sorrow. In the most
difficult encounters it can
only be found in our hope.**

JOHN J. MCGEE



MY FIRST VIVID MEMORY

To: Staff

From: John Joseph McGee

06-01-1971

From this time hence there will no longer be any grabbing, making fun of people, putting anyone in the furnace room, using derogatory names, taking anyone down, pushing or pulling people, punishing, or anything else that devalues anyone.

THE ORIGINS OF GENTLE TEACHING



Gentle Teaching is about the memories that we help create in our encounters and relationships. The first dimension of learning in our life is to learn to feel safe and loved with a small circle of kind and warm people. With a baby it is the family; with adults whose hearts are broken it is often a caring community. This dimension of learning is central and vital.

I do not pretend to have any quick or easy solutions. The only thing I really know is that when we come face to face with suffering we have an obligation to stop if even for a few moments. We have to exit our offices, cubicles, and nurses stations, put away the text books and the psychiatric books, and simply enter into situations shrouded in suffering—the man crying, the women biting or cutting her arms, the child running around non-stop, the man beating his face to a pulp, the woman obsessed with perfection, the man or woman whose minds have been invaded wrapped by horrible, nightmarish voices, or the adolescent running away to the city to sell his/her body and enter into a contorted and despairing life.



YOU TOLD US
WHAT NOT
TO DO – NOT
WHAT TO DO.

My first job taught me a life-lesson at the very start. I wrote the note to the left, was very proud of it, and made a copy for all the caregivers for whom I had responsibility. I thought that it was as clear as a bell and extremely insightful. But, this was not the case. A young caregiver walked up to me with my note in her hand. I assumed that she was going to thank me for such a fine

note. Such was not the case. She said, “What the heck is this?” I answered, “It is a pretty good note, Isn’t it?” Her face did not look content. So, I asked her, “What’s wrong with it?” She said, “You told us what not to do, but you didn’t mention what we should do.” I recall vividly thinking that I did not have the slightest idea of what to do. I then asked, “What do you think I should do?” Her answer was, “Get out here and work with us.” I thought what a good idea. So, I left my office and have spent many years doing just that and trying to figure out how we might support marginalized individuals.

ANOTHER VIVID MEMORY

MEMORIES OF A PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL, 1972

Judy is so very empty-eyed

Her face and body scabbed,

Her screams almost constant.

Her biting herself leaving deep
marks on her arms.

Her eyes piercingly empty...

Judy along with forty four toothless,
voiceless ones.

Fingers flicking and grabbing nonexistent
laces of affection...

And then comes the possibility of
feeling safe and loved.

JOHN J. MCGEE



Gentle Teaching is not about anyone's behaviors; it is about our values and our moral imaginations—what do we see as decent and good and what are our basic values. I believe that is why I agreed with the young caregiver when she told me to go out and work hands-on with the people.

Another old memory that sticks in my heart involved my first visit to a psychiatric hospital. All of us have heavy sad memories intermingled with joyful ones. In our own lives the weighty ones often encompass feelings such as separation, death, divorce, abuse, neglect, addictions, obsessions, and on and on. These old memories are counterbalanced by others that lift us up and give us hope such as the birth of a child, a grandchild, a relationship in which love nurtures, words of encouragement and praise, and on and on. In my own life I vividly recall a few sorrowful memories, but also meaningful new memories as well. My grandma telling me, "Johnny, always help the poorest of the poor..." The teacher who said, "John, whatever you do love your neighbor..." Such memories form our moral development and guide us in our life-journey. Marginalized and alienated individuals are weighed down with the shackles of heavy, burdensome, and grinding down old memories. These are hard to ignore or escape from. Some need help in forming new memories that re-orient a life-purpose.

ANOTHER VIVID MEMORY

A small bowed man enters

Legs and hands manacled

Hands clasped, as if in prayer

But to a seemingly deaf god

But words fell from his black quivering lips,

'I want to go home...go home...go home'

And each sound was like a tear rolling
down his face,

The minutes passed by.

As I left, he stood, head bowed,
eyes wet, feet bound, the shadow of the death
chamber casting itself onto both of us,

But I went home...

JOHN J. MCGEE



The third memory that I recall was the impending death of a young man on death row in Angola, Louisiana. He had done horrible things—including murdering two people. I went to visit him to see if I could write a report on mitigating circumstances surrounding his two murders. The words written above are about my visit. I do not pretend to be a problem-solver, but Henry taught me how we all want to go home. He spent most of the time simply mumbling to me, "... want to go home." This too is what Gentle Teaching is about, a sense of being at home and a hunger to always go home.

At such a terrifying moment the simplicity of wanting to go home summarizes succinctly our human hunger to be with those whom we love. I found it so miraculous that this young man, at the worst moment of his life, simply wanted to be at home with his mother. Even though he had done two horrible wrongs, his mind and heart wanted to fly back to the tender arms of his mother.

I left the small green room where we had sat amazed at our civilization so willing and ready to take his life. A life for a life does not seem to be an act of justice and a way to help the least among us and to set a nonviolent example for our children.

STOP AND THINK



WHAT BROUGHT US TO THE DOORWAY OF THE HUMAN HEART?

We are about...

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

FOCUSING ON SAFE
AND LOVED

GIVING

PATIENCE

HOPE

BEING IN THE MOMENT

TEACHING A SENSE
OF COMPANIONSHIP

FORMING COMMUNITY



BEFORE STARTING OUR JOURNEY, STOP AND THINK WHO WE ARE, RIGHT NOW, IN THIS VERY MOMENT...

Those words are so easy to put down on paper, but so very hard to live by. We are often taught to not be subjective, but to be more objective and scientific. Yet, this plea for science is often a façade for the continuation of the same old approaches of the last century. Reports are written on the glory of time out, seclusion, physical management, and aversive punishments. Data is gathered; administrators appear happy. Articles are published, but, if we stop and look at the ark of a child or adult's life, the old behaviors outlast the scientific articles that have announced the particular approach's success.

Gentle Teaching is a subjective act that asks us to reflect on our own heart and being; it asks us to look at how authentic and deep our own unconditional love is. It asks us to analyze human suffering and to find ways to enter into a suffering person's space and give the gifts of safe and loved, that eventually evolve into a sense of companionship. It is also a political act in that we have a calling to set a strong, justice-based example to be kind to strangers and to be equally kind and loving to those who, perhaps, many are not so kind or loving.

STOP AND THINK



What brought us to the exploration of our inner being?

- Knowing we are all whole beings: mind, body, spirit
- Burdensome old memories and our capacity to teach joyful and dignifying new ones
- The healing power of companionship-based relationships and community-making



Life is about a hunger for love and a fear of loss...

We have to feel the depth of our own humanness and our deeper memories of sorrow and joy so that we can develop a strong empathy for those whom we serve. This requires an acceptance of our spiritual nature—that aspect of our existence that is at the center of our bodily and intellectual being. We are mind, body, and spirit and our task as caregivers is to tap into our own spiritual being and that of those whom we serve. This exploration into our own being also needs to be a significant exploration of those whom we serve.



WE WILL NEVER
KNOW WHAT
ANOTHER PERSON
IS FEELING, BUT WE
MUST KNOW THAT
THEY ARE FEELING.

We will never know what another person is feeling, but we must know that they ARE feeling. These will often lead to old memories, sometimes forgotten, that swirl around deep feelings of meaninglessness, aloneness, choiceless-ness, loss, and oppression. If we cannot discover these old memories, we still should assume that they exist and drive the person. Our task is not to get rid

of these old memories, but to create new and joyful ones that take on more life than the old ones. There seems to be an on-going struggle between the old memories and the new ones and between feelings of despair, hopelessness, and profound sorrow and hope, joy, and self-worth. Our task is to help plant the seedlings of these new memories through our dialog with the person and exceedingly strong example. Our dialog should acknowledge the sorrow without dwelling on it, and help the person reflect on their goodness, the seeds of hope, and the eventual feeling of self-worth and self-esteem.

STOP AND THINK



STOP AND THINK WHO WE ARE, RIGHT NOW, IN THIS VERY MOMENT...

Carrying the heavy burden of old memories eats away at our heart that hungers for joyful new ones.

We can develop empathy for “the other” by recognizing our own buried memories that gnaw away at our own moral development.



WE CANNOT KNOW WHO THE “OTHER” IS UNLESS
WE HAVE SOME INSIGHT INTO WHO WE ARE.

Gentle Teaching is grounded in the whole person and who the person is. A key assumption, especially when supporting those who are extremely violent toward others or harmful to themselves, is the understanding that behaviors have their origin in moral development—how human beings throughout their lives are in the process of learning how to interact with others and how each of us sees ourself and others. This moral development is inside of us and encompasses the memories that have been formed from the first moments of life to the present moment.

Moral memories are how we spiritually interact with the world. When these memories are sad and disorienting, they reside like haunting ghosts in the hidden corners of our being; in a sense, they whisper to us what clinicians will later call behaviors. Behaviors are the visible part of toxic weeds; memories are the roots. They are deep, often not known, and not intellectual, but moral memories. The use of behavioral techniques is like pulling weeds from the surface, but leaving the roots intact. Gentle Teaching goes for the creation of new moral memories that lead the person to feel safe and loved and then “behaviors” begin to fade away.



**Our roots influence our past
and present & foreshadow our
future moral development.**

**Gentle Teaching is about a view of
the connected self:**

- A response to others on their terms
- A concern for the good of others
- The act of care giving is grounded in connectedness and interdependence

CAROL GILLIGAN



WHO WE ARE IS ROOTED IN OUR PERSONALITY, UPBRINGING, LIFE STORY, AND CULTURE.

Our relationship with others, our connectedness with others, is what determines the possibility of healing a broken heart; starting out with facilitating the individual's capacity to feel safe and loved with us and a circle of friends. We have to see "behaviors" as relationship-driven rather than consequence-driven. By helping to create new memories, the person's violence, isolation, confusion, or even psychosis slowly begin to heal and new memories emerge.

Sometimes the fear and even generalized hatred in a person is so deep that caregivers have to start with just a series of encounters throughout the day entering the very edge of the person's space and then leaving after a few seconds—teaching the person that we do not wish to be burdensome, in a sense asking the person or letting him/her know that we are not going to demand much of anything, just our momentary presence, and then we will disappear. These moments start with just our physical presence followed by a quick goodbye and the a return a few minutes later; each return lasts longer and longer. Then a moment comes in which the person is waiting for us and wanting our nearness. We make sure that our mere presence is not seen as a demand. This then extends into longer periods of time until the person learns that our mere presence is good.

The main point of this process is that we enter the person's space on his/her terms rather than yanking the individual into our space. We realize that the central aspect of all learning is this acceptance and, indeed, longing for human contact. From these early fleeting contacts the process evolves into connectedness.

“

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes...
Should I see salvation: we do pray for mercy;
And that same prayer doth teach us all to
render the deeds of mercy.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

“

Violence as a way of achieving justice is both impractical and immoral. It is impractical because it is a descending spiral ending in destruction for all. It is immoral because it seeks to humiliate the opponent rather than win his understanding; it seeks to annihilate rather than to convert...

MARTIN LUTHER KING



A culture of gentleness is very much an integral part of who we are. It is often learned through a person's faith beliefs; it is also learned through the general belief systems in those who surround us. Our cultures oral tradition or written stories reflect our duty to love our neighbor, our forgiveness to those who wrong us, our helping strangers and those in need. These types of values are woven in a culture's literature as well as faith beliefs.

Faith systems do not have meaning to everyone, but most of us have an innate sense of "doing good" based on natural law. The world often reflects the same approach and duty to reach out to those who suffer and to even help strangers and enemies. Shakespeare begged us to have mercy for those who do wrong and shower others with mercy. He asked us "to render the deeds of mercy."

If we do not shower mercy and opt to achieve justice through violence, Martin Luther King's conclusion was this would lead to "a descending spiral ending in destruction for all. He went on to consul us that any non-violent approach needs to seek a transformation in the "other" though our potent example and vibrant words. In either way we are reminded to be merciful, forgiving, tolerant, and hopeful.

Gentle Teaching seeks to follow these words by being tolerant and forgiving, seeing the individual as our brother-sister, being tenderly in the moment with the violent person, and focused on sharing the gifts of feeling safe with us and loved by us.

OF MICE AND MEN



Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don't belong no place... With us it ain't like that. We got a future. We got somebody to talk to that gives a damn about us. We don't have to sit in no bar room blowin' in our jack jus' because we got no place else to go.

[LAST LINES]

George: We're gonna get a little place.

Lennie: Okay, yeah, we're gonna get a little place and we're gonna...

George: We gonna...

Lennie: ...have...

George: We're gonna have a cow, and some pigs, and we're gonna have, maybe-maybe, a chicken. Down in the flat, we'll have a little field of...

Lennie: ...field of alfalfa for the rabbits.

George: ...for the rabbits.

Lennie: And I get to tend the rab—

[GEORGE SHOOTS LENNIE TO DEATH IN THE HEAD AND GRIEVES OVER HIM]

J. STEINBECK

**EXAMPLES OF OUR ROOTS MEETING OUR PAST AND
PRESENT & FORESHADOWING OUR FUTURE**



The idea of companionship and community are woven in literature as well. George and Lennie are like us and the “marginalized other.” We are walking with our Lennie and giving the crucial sense of being safe and loved. This story is a metaphor of what human companionship means. The first quotation is from the mouth of Lennie, a simple man whom George watched over sharing a strong and enduring sense of companionship. Lennie reminds

George that “guys like us” will tolerate even imprisonment because they have each other. The two of them have developed a deep memory over time that they are connected in a companionship-based relationship and that will get them through tough times, no matter what.

GOOD MEMORIES GUIDE OUR LIVES

The second quotation is from the end of the same story when George shoots Lennie out of a deep need to protect him to stop an angry mob from hanging him after he had accidentally killed the farmer’s wife. This shooting, as horrible as it is, was also a sign of their love that allowed Lennie to die with their memory of the hereafter as a place of beauty. They shared this final memory over the years and its meaning was clear to Lennie, “...We’re gonna have a cow and some pigs, and we’re gonna have, maybe-maybe a chicken...” Our relations have to be based on tremendously good memories that have powerful meanings.

AN ENCOUNTER OF THE I AND THOU:



- “An atheist looking from his attic window is often nearer to god than the believer caught up in his own false image of god.”
- When two people relate to each other authentically and humanly, god is the electricity that surges between them.
- The world is not comprehensible, but it is embraceable: through the embracing of one of its beings.

MARTIN BUBER



The center of all caregiving (mothering, fathering, grand parenting, teaching, psychiatry, psychology, all clinical supports, managers, and all hands-on care giving) is our encounter with marginalized others. The caregiver is the “I” who comes into contact with the “Thou” in a process of emerging interdependence. If “I” feel safe and loved on this earth and we come together, then that encounter will eventually lead to a sense of the other person feeling safe and loved. At the start, it might consist of a coming together for brief and fleeting seconds that rapidly turn into longer periods of time. Some of these encounters are simply in the flow of the day, and in a sense, are accidental encounters; others are scheduled in small blocks of time and are very intentional and have the purpose of directly teaching the person to feel safe and loved. These encounters create a new energy, grace, and an electricity.

If the most marginalized are to be well served in inclusive settings with a full spectrum of human and legal rights, new assumptions must be asserted along with those of the past. These are philosophical in nature and call for an evolving, collective embrace.

A nonviolent and justice-based view of the world requires a move away from an interpretation of marginalized persons as “machines” and toward one of sentient beings who require a focus on interior healing rather than behavioral control. It is from this healing process that behaviors ameliorate rather than vice versa. Gentle Teaching’s primary concern is to create a healing alliance that starts with a sense of connectedness and evolves into community-making.

EXISTENTIALISM



Never cease loving a person, and never give up hope for him, for even the prodigal son who had fallen most low, could still be saved; your bitterest enemy and also he who was your friend could again be your friend; love that has grown cold can kindle.

SOREN KIERKEGAARD



Love and hope are recurring themes in literature and many writers emphasize that love and hope are for the most marginalized—those who we tend to give up helping, the very violent, the horribly sick, prostitutes, gang members, and the list goes on of those “fallen most low.” This central human need swirls around our relationships with others and this includes our abiding love for our most wasteful children, our bitterest enemies, and even our lost loves that have become bitterly cold and frozen. Whether it be religious or philosophical thinkers, history reveals an on-going quest for connectedness, forgiveness, and unconditional love. Yet, in recent decades, university study programs and “feel good” religions continue to urge us to base our lives on individualism, our pursuit of rewards, especially those found in material things, and life based on “the self.”

Gentle Teaching asks us to return to the teachings of old and focus our lives on others, our children, spouses, partners, extended family, and the surrounding community in an experience of re-kindling loves lost. In Gentle Teaching we urge caregivers to always have hope, never give up, and find thousands of way to express unconditional love for the “lowest” among us. If we can kindle love for those who are filled with fear, loneliness, and meaninglessness, its warmth will penetrate the most closed of tormented hearts.

Hope is an essential variable in a culture of gentleness. We have to cultivate seeds of hope and regenerate it as much as we can. Much of this regeneration can come from those we feel safe with, including our community of caring.

EVEN THE POOREST OF THE POOR HAVE THESE GIFTS TO GIVE:



The physical gift... to offer service of one's labor...

The spiritual gift... to offer a warm and
compassionate heart...

The gift of the eyes... to offer a warm glance...

The gift of countenance... to offer a soft face and smile...

The gift of words... to offer kind and warm words...

The gift of the seat... to offer one's seat to others...

The gift of shelter... to let others spend the night
at one's home...

TEACHINGS OF BUDDHA



These teachings are universal. They are quite similar to many others, including what we call “our tools” in Gentle Teaching—our presence to bring a sense of feeling safe and loved, our words to uplift, our eyes to show warmth, and our hands to offer an embrace. These admonitions could be a person-centered plan for those whom we serve and support.

The world has given life to many belief systems. Many are based on faith-beliefs that reflect particular cultures; others are based on simpler patterns of life, and serve as general guides for decision-making. Over the years we have encountered a myriad of approaches to life, and there appears to be a number of common threads that weave together a whole cloth that unites us rather than divides us. The threads in this cloth are many. Some of the most critical ones are unconditional love, warmth, forgiveness, tolerance, and patience.

This teaching urges us to give freely of the gifts that we have that include our labor, a compassionate heart, a warm glance, a smile, kind words, hospitality even to strangers, and shelter. These reminders are, in a way, a good and clear job description. We must be calm and open-hearted to respect our own and others’ basic beliefs.

For example, in the following pages we can detect a common embrace of foundational ethical criteria such as:

- Love of our neighbor, even our enemies and strangers;
- Forgiveness; and
- Unconditional love

HINDU TRADITION



For those who set their hearts on me,
the way of love leads sure and swift to me.

BHAGAVAD-GITA, CHAPTER XII. 48



Find and follow the good path and
be ruled by compassion. For if the
various ways are examined, compassion
will prove the means to liberation.

TIRUKKURAL 25: 241-242



The way of love is repeated over and over again, and is an obvious universal principal that guides us in our life-experiences. Gentle Teaching has embraced this value as a transcendental belief that dwells at the heart of the human condition and is the foundation for belief systems. As we are involved in the ongoing definition of this value, we are in the moment-to-moment process of defining its meaning.

This can be a sweet challenge, since many of us have been raised in individualistic cultures that almost force us to only render that which is deserved. This makes giving unconditional love quite difficult. Yet, we are saying that love cannot be contingent; it must be unconditional. This is perhaps Gentle Teaching's most difficult challenge, especially for those of us who have grown up in the industrialized world in which everything has to be earned and in which behaviorism has quite successfully packaged a world based on "If you do this, you receive this." Gentle Teaching is not a world of contingency; it is a world of the possibility of love and its healing power.

“THE UNIVERSE IS
BUILT ON KINDNESS...
FOREVER IS MERCY BUILT...

PSALM 89: 2,3



The Jewish tradition, like other belief systems, contributes much to our cultural understanding of ourselves, others, and our role in the world. Gentle Teaching points out the on-going need for kindness and doing good to others. Buber emphasized and analyzed the key role of human connectedness and the basic need to see and be with "the other". The early interpretation of the Torah points out this need in its repeated admonitions to "desire for others what we desire for ourselves." It asks us to look at the stranger or even our enemies as if we are looking at ourselves and through this looking measure what the stranger or enemy should receive from us. The answer is found in doing good to others.

Allaah also ordains kindness. He ordains that the parents, the relatives, the neighbors, the poor, the weak, the distressed, the orphans and others should all be treated with kindness:

“ O’ my child, make yourself the measure (for dealings) between you and others. Thus, you should desire for others what you desire for yourself and hate for others what you hate for yourself. Do not oppress as you do not like to be oppressed. Do good to others as you would like good to be done to you.

NAHJUL BALAGHA, LETTER 31, 53

“ Do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans,
the poor, the neighbour who is near of kin,

The neighbor who is a stranger,

The companion by your side,

The wayfarer (you meet), and...

Verily, Allaah does not like such as are
proud and boastful.

RABEE'UL-AWWAL 8, 14–24



These mandates are quite similar to ones that we have already mentioned in other faith traditions. The Islamic faith is a major belief system that espouses unconditional love and kindness, even to enemies like other major faiths. Today, many would scream that Islam, or any other faith system is based on unconditional love because their leaders often espouse war and other forms of violence. Yet, all great books are a search for love, life-meaning, and a constant search for “doing good” to everyone around us. The error of our human nature seems to twist every faith-system where bombing, torturing, and killing are done in the name of love. This absolute and abject contradiction has been woven into all religions in the course of time. In Gentle Teaching we must always recognize that our values must be well safeguarded to avoid any corruption. We must especially safeguard our central value, unconditional love.

Our culture of gentleness has to push against the formidable illogic of hatred, defined sometimes as love, consumerism defined as what we deserve, war waged as peace-keeping, and torturing defined as a quest for truth. Each of the world’s religions and humanism itself asks us to do good to friends and foes alike.

Our world of helping others has a similar struggle—to avoid punishing and diminishing those who are seen as the least among us and, indeed, giving unconditional love. A central part of our culture of gentleness is to give love to those who do not seem to deserve it. It is our ability to give to those who are marginalized that is central to Gentle Teaching. It is our hearts that need to be transformed; it is not about changing someone else’s behaviors.

CHRISTIAN TRADITION



Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

I was hungry and you gave me food

I was thirsty and you gave me drink

I was a stranger and you welcomed me,

I was naked and you clothed me,

I was sick and you visited me,

I was in prison and you came to me...

MATTHEW 25: 34–35




"I was hungry and you gave me food" does not stop to ask whether the person deserves food; the mandate is to give it. Today, for us in our world, it might be seeing someone lonely, scared, or even terrified in a house, and then spending time with the person. Gentle Teaching asks us to give and give unconditionally. It asks us to become engaged with those who are most marginalized and to give ourselves, as much as we can, to those who are starving, imprisoned, naked, ill, strangers, and the thirsty. There are no questions asked. Perhaps this person is screaming. Our central duty is not to quiet the screaming, but to be with the person.

In industrialized nations we have been taught and certified to only give when someone deserves or has earned the gift. This is a banker's view of the human condition—If you do this, you will earn that. Gentle Teaching has moved away from behaviorism's punishment-based approach to those who do wrong and its reward based approach to those who do right. In our culture of gentleness we reject the enslaving consequence of punishment and the mechanistic consequence of reward. Our culture of gentleness, like all of the faith roots mentioned so far, the literature of the past and the philosophical studies of great thinkers, all call on us to give love and kindness, to share all that we have, and, in a sense, the miracle of the human condition is not what we might think; it is simply our encounter with the suffering of the earth.



The original Gentle Teaching Book (1987) was behavior modification minus punishment. What is now called ‘positive behavioral support’

- Gentle Teaching, as weak as it was, opened a period of critically questioning the rule of behaviorism
- Concern about reward and punishment as the transcending values as if humans were machines



MY PAST AS PART OF A GENTLE PEOPLE (1970- 1990) CLASHES WITH TIME-OUT, TUBES, TOKENS, CATTLE PRODS, AND OTHER FORMS OF VIOLENCE.

(GENTLE TEACHING, 1987)

My own personal experiences in the last four decades have been extremely insightful—entering hellish places and spaces in my country and others, rich and poor, and watching in amazement people being shocked with cattle prods, tied to beds, dumped into seclusion rooms, water squirted in the face, locked in filth, putrid jail-like cells, and wrestled to the ground by three, four, five guard-like caretakers. Yet, I have also been amazed at the goodness and courage of caregivers who dedicate their lives to helping others, seek non-violent alternatives, and often create loving relationships with those whom they serve.

Gentle Teaching has moved away from a behavioral approach to an introspective one in which our role as caregivers has changed to a teaching process based on four pedagogical purposes—to teach marginalized persons individuals to feel safe and loved as well as to become loving toward others and engaged as much as possible in his/her own life-project. These four intentions are central to the human condition and its development. They are at the center of all development and all other purposes emanate from them.

The vast majority of today's interventions are based on behavioral change rather than a healing process. A nonviolent approach calls on families, clinicians, caregivers, the legal system, and policy-makers to understand that a focus on teaching marginalized children and adults to feel safe and loved is a healing process that rids each person of hateful actions and interactions and moves individuals toward pro-social actions and interactions. The infrastructure of Gentle Teaching has evolved into a different focus—the essential role of unconditional love as central to the human condition.

THE PRESENT:

**Starting with the
most broken
hearted individuals
and moving toward a
Culture of Gentleness**

**TIED
CAGED
DISAPPEARED
SURRENDERED
BEATEN**



The woman squatted in the hallway of a psychiatric ward with her head covered, her hands securing her masked aloneness, makes us wonder what we are about. The young man with his hands strapped to his waist will likely never embrace. The tiny man beneath the white sheet has surrendered hope. Those who are caged are likely confined forever.

Gentle Teaching's intention is to serve and support individuals with such needs, not to reject them or dump them. Hope is an essential aspect in a culture of gentleness. There are no miracles, but there can be healing.

A hallmark of Gentle Teaching is to ally ourselves with the most alienated, marginalized, and the downtrodden. We find our joy in making companionship and forming community with those who no one else wants to serve. It is a joyful process to give the gifts of feeling safe and loved to those who have only known confinement, punishment, and despair.

THE PRESENT:

**OUR APPROACH IS
ABOUT “I AND THOU”** (Buber)



Our giving. Our patience. Our tenderness. Our loving encounters during good moments & bad. Being in the moment. Creating a memory beneath a memory. A merger of me and you: companionship. A merger of us: eventual community-making



It might be helpful to know some of the factors that have influenced me in these years and what has propelled me to keep defining and re-defining Gentle Teaching. The roots of Gentle Teaching were shaped by coming from a large family, going to Brazil when I was a late adolescent and young adult, living with and among the poorest of the poor, working with prostitutes, drug addicts, and street children in a garbage dump, multiple memories of seeing brutal suffering and mountains of joy, singing beneath the nighttime skies with its stars and moon of the Northeastern desert., sleeping beneath a full desert moon, amazement at the kindness of those who were hungry and starving, living for years in a house made of mud in a small village with neighbors who shared all that they had, and learning that to share did not mean giving a hungry person half of your loaf, but the entire loaf. I cannot say that I did anything very worthwhile, but many years after leaving Brazil it began to dawn on me that I had learned a lot about feeling safe and loved, the meaning of human interdependence, being alive in the moment, seeing the poorest of the poor sharing food and water to those who had less, and people in mud shacks giving love and shelter to those without a roof. I would dare to say that these children, men, and women taught me about gentleness and unconditional love. These are good memories that float over me like a cloud in a gentle breeze and inform everything that I do. We all have to conjure up our good moral memories, open our hearts to their grace, and let them move us toward the goodness of others. Buber's list of virtues makes sense to serve each person with love and kindness, especially the poorest of the poor.

THE PRESENT:

(1990-2010)

MENDING BROKEN HEARTS

(1992)

- A complete move away from behaviorism
- Moving from a focus on the individual alone to collective and cultural change
- Unconditional love as the central pedagogical strategy
- Analysis of moral or internal development as central
- Companionship and community as our transcending purposes
- Expanding our understanding of gentle teaching to all around us



Rather than a behavioral approach, Gentle Teaching has evolved into a process of seeing others and ourselves as morally connected. When we or others are suffering it is our role to heal the person's connectedness, promoting the welfare of others as a means of preventing harm, and maintaining these healthy relationships grounded in interdependence. Gentle Teaching has evolved into a philosophical psychology with a pragmatic set of teaching techniques.

This asks us to understand the developmental and moral nature of ourselves and those around us. We are all in the midst of a process of becoming that started in our mother's womb and only ends upon death's beckoning. This process is a winding road with many detours, ups and downs, and unknown futures. Yet, at the center of everything is a hunger and thirst for each of us to feel safe and loved and form these feelings that ground us we then become loving and engaged in our particular life-projects.

In the first dimension of our existence we seek companionship and community. Without these we are rudderless ships in a tempestuous sea. Safe and loved are at the very center of the human condition and their lack is at the center of marginalization—the extremely poor, the mentally ill, the neglected, the abused, the intellectually disabled, the enslaved, prostitutes, street children, children in gangs, the institutionalized in buildings big and small, addicts, the chronically ill, and an endless list of the suffering of the earth.

THE PRESENT:

Gentle teaching is about a process
forming a personal and collective
identity— born with no name...

We become named...



I have no name
I am but two days old. —
What shall I call thee?
I happy am.
Joy is my name, —
Sweet joy befall thee!

Pretty joy!
Sweet joy but two days old,
Sweet joy I call thee.
Thou dost smile.
I sing the while,
Sweet joy befall thee.

WILLIAM BLAKE, 1787

All children come into the world nameless and our first task is to name them. The poet above gave a name to an infant who had no name, Sweet Joy. Babies are born pure and have only distant and cloudy memories of being in the womb. Yet, they had already sensed the world outside the womb: love and hate, peace and turmoil, a tender touch to the mother's womb or a strong and spiteful kick, and, then, they are born and the conversation becomes intense—our words, sounds, screams and shouts or tender songs. At this point we scarcely need to explain unconditional love.

We teach our babies that our touch is good, our eyes sparkle with love, and our movements are tending and kind. This naming process is connected to the bonds that unite us and the vital feelings of being safe and loved. In a way this same process occurs with broken hearted adults. As caregivers we are nameless and just one of a long line of caretakers. We are just number 188, just another caretaker who will come and then leave and be just like all the others. Our relationship has to be much more personal and our name takes on a profound importance because we want the person to create a good memory about us, one in which there is trust and a deep sense of companionship.

Often in the beginning we have to conjure up our own suffering images gathered in our life experiences in order to have an inkling of empathy. This then slowly transforms itself into a real, reality based name. The person's name and our name take on a meaning of dignity and connectedness.

THE PRESENT:

GENTLE TEACHING IS ABOUT CREATING NEW MEMORIES BENEATH OLD ONES



A learning theory and philosophy focused on inner development, creating a new moral memory and learning by stories and example based on the hunger for love and the fear of loss...



The process of self-identification and self-esteem is foundational. Our sense of feeling connected with someone is based on a burgeoning realization that we might be able to feel safe with the other that then gradually becomes stronger and stronger; it also begins to spread outwardly into a growing community of caring.

Since Gentle Teaching deals with moral development rather than behavioral change, we have to find new healing instruments and approaches. This also calls on us to put aside many of our care-giving biases, such as the need for and the power of reward and punishment and the shallow objectivity demanded in the change process. Gentle Teaching calls on us to slowly and tenderly enter the other's space without provoking any violence and giving a sense of comfort that eventually turns into a deep feeling of being safe and loved. This process calls on our ability to express unconditional love during good moments and violent ones—a quite difficult thing for caregivers to do given the past decades emphasis on “earned reward.” Our expression of love is not contingent; it is given without any strings attached. We teach these new memories through our daily accidental encounters, as well as planned encounters that are structured and in which the intention is to deepen and broaden the person's sense of feeling safe and loved. This helps to create a new moral memory that will eventually involve a sense of trust and grow into a feeling of companionship.

THE PRESENT:

**Gentle Teaching
is about confronting
existential questions**

MEANINGLESSNESS

ALONENESS

CHOICELESSNESS

DEATH

OPPRESSION



Gentle Teaching is an existential process in which our challenge in the beginning is to simply be in the moment with the alienated person and express unconditional love. This presence must be non-burdensome, almost invisible. It is literally just being with or even near the person while gradually and slowly entering the person's space. When a marginalized person see us, he/she does not actually see us, but rather "sees" an amalgamation of a long line of past caregivers with images, not of our real self. We become the images of past memories: abandonment, rape, molestation, grabbing, cursing, mocking, ridiculing, torture, refugee camps, asylums, seclusion rooms, physical management, token economies, confining group homes, dozens of foster homes, and incarcerations. These past traumatic experiences swirl in the person's heart and rip it apart. We have to slowly and tenderly bring new meanings to each person's life through an extremely strong example and the development of an evolving narrative regarding the person's goodness. When a person lacks a sense of connectedness, life swirls downward into a deep hole of loneliness, withdrawal from others, aggression toward others, cutting oneself, or any number of other alienating deeds.

Many pass through life enveloped in a sense of death, a robot-like or distancing machine-like attitude that increases our own loneliness, lowers our self-esteem, and leads to a profound sense of emptiness. Oppression is an inner heaviness that many bear, a sense of being under someone's thumb, incapability of having self-worth, and bitter coldness that leads to self-destruction or wanton aggression.

THE PRESENT:

MOVING TOWARD THE MOST EXCLUDED IN THE WORLD... THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH...

- ALL CHILDREN
- ALL FAMILIES
- ALL OF US
- REFUGEES
- THE POOR
- THE STARVING
- THE FORGOTTEN
- THE ABUSED
- THE BEATEN
- THE ILL
- THE DISABLED
- THE TORTURE



Gentle Teaching is primarily for us—you and me. It is for us in that the change that is desired falls on our own self-transformation and the recognition that our central gift is to express unconditional love. It has to bring us to a point at which we reflect on our own change as well as the slow transformation of the other through our own ability to increasingly give or express unconditional love. The other will not feel a connectedness until we discover our own connectedness. We need to accept the person as is, enter his/her space, and initially teach the person it is good to be with you because you are good. Most importantly, Gentle Teaching asks us to reach out to those whom we “should” love—our spouses, partners, children, aging parents, and extended family. In our vocation we are called to serve those who are most abandoned, forgotten, spiteful, mean-spirited, aggressive, and harming themselves and others. The first step is not to try to change anyone with these needs, but to simply be with him/her and discover in ourselves how we might enter more deeply into an alienated person’s space without provoking violence and share a sense of being safe and loved. Gentle Teaching knows no bounds in terms of whom we serve. First, it is for us and those whom we are closest to, it then spins outwardly to the poorest of the poor and all those rejected and marginalized elsewhere.

THE PRESENT:

THE 1st DIMENSION IS BASED ON A SENSE OF CONNECTEDNESS...

This 17 year old young man in the psychiatric hospitals cell returned home after 15 years of incarceration. He had spent most of his time naked in this filthy jail cell, sleeping on a concrete slab, urinating and defecating in a hole on the same concrete slab, and his arms and hands covered with wounds and fecal matter. The hospital had told the child's poverty stricken parents to leave him in the hospital because he had autism.

OLD MEMORIES
(PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL)





NEW MEMORIES (AT HOME)

After years in this dehumanizing reality, his family decided to take him home. They were extremely poor and had an income of \$600.00 per year. Gold and silver they had not, but what they had they gave to their son, unconditional love. This gift was sufficient to re-kindle his sense of being safe and loved. He now sleeps in a humble but clean bedroom and lives in a culture of gentleness with the loving embrace of his sister and parents. His bed is not made of concrete now, but of a straw mattress on the floor of his family's shack. His floor is not caked with feces, nor are his mother and father and sister scared of him. They have an innate love for him and a precious desire to give him love. Old memories can quickly fade when unconditional love prevails.

... NOT BEHAVIOR-CHANGING, BUT MEMORY-MAKING

THE PRESENT:

“LOVE IS PATIENT. LOVE IS KIND. IT DOES NOT
ENVY. IT DOES NOT BOAST. IT IS NOT PROUD.
IT DOES NOT DISHONOR OTHERS. IT IS NOT
SELF-SEEKING. IT IS NOT EASILY ANGERED.
IT KEEPS NO RECORD OF WRONGS. LOVE DOES
NOT DELIGHT IN EVIL BUT REJOICES WITH THE
TRUTH. IT ALWAYS PROTECTS, ALWAYS TRUSTS,
ALWAYS HOPES, AND ALWAYS PERSEVERES.”

1 CORINTHIANS 13: 4-7



What is love? Other dimensions to love...

BROTHERLY-SISTERLY LOVE IS NOT TO BE FEARED... THE WORD ELEVATES; IT DOES NOT SUBJUGATE.

Love is simple. It is non-contingent. It is unconditional. It is given. It is healing. It honors and respects. It is hopeful and graceful. It is many things:

- Patient
- Kind
- Humility
- Honoring
- Truthful
- Protective
- Trusting
- Hopeful

Persevering these virtues envelop the word 'love' and when we understand it, they glimmer and shine like the sun's light and warmth casting itself on each of these aspects of love.

These words give us a broad range of options that we might adopt and discuss. Across time, the caring community should evolve its own word for unconditional love and its own definition. This should eventually become the central part of the caring community. You have to imagine expressing love at the worst moments when the person is a stranger and not related to us and even engages in repugnant acts. To express unconditional love in such moments is the true test of our ability to express it.

THE PRESENT:

AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION IS WORTH A POUND OF CURE



- Prevent any and all forms of violence
- Have a discreet structure to the day so it becomes predictable: safe-making
- Give win-win choices
- Make each encounter with the person exceedingly loving, warm, and undemanding
- Keep the focus on your encounter with the person, not on an activity



Our first encounters with a marginalized person are often the most challenging because our mere presence can signal fear and terror, not because we are bad, but because we are simply one more caretaker in a long line of others. We are nothing more than someone just like all the rest—someone who bosses and orders around, grabs and pushes, ridicules and mocks, punishes and forbids, and where meanness replaces warmth.

It is ironic, but those who are violent are very emotionally fragile. We have a duty to protect a person with a life story of violence. It is crucial to prevent problems, even by avoiding failure. When a person has lost his/her self-esteem, the person feels slammed to the floor and this further sucks out any confidence and the possibility of becoming grounded and connected with others. So, subtle protection is an important factor in the beginning of the process—even doing tasks for the person or with the person, preventing any degree of frustration, and giving answers to questions and then repeating the question.

Many cultures are so independence-oriented that any form of protection from harm is frowned upon. In a culture of gentleness we must keep our focus on nurturing and in the beginning this involves preventing just about any form of frustration and protecting the person from any physical or emotional harm.

THE PRESENT:

4 pedagogical instruments to communicate safe and loved, especially our presence, words, gaze, and hands

- **PRESENCE**: conjure up an image of the person with whom you are interacting
- **WORDS**: story telling about the person's goodness, acknowledging the sorrow, and defining joy
- **GAZE** (eyes): expressing love and warmth with your eyes and searching for the person's very soul
- **HANDS**: touching tenderly, warmly, respectfully to express our connectedness



How we come into contact with the most challenging individuals requires our total communication. For example, a man with schizophrenia who hears a wretched voice is like someone having a frequent nightmare while wide awake. This makes it harder to teach a person how to feel safe and loved, but it also makes it more important that this be our central intention. His caregivers have to enter his space—softly, slowly, almost invisibly, with no rush and no pressure. The caregivers' presence has to be tranquil and warm with no sense of any demand, not even a slight one. Indeed, the initial demand is our mere presence. Caregivers have to figure out their own way to present themselves without any pushiness. The caregiver's words initially have to be whispered, sweet, and empathic—recognizing his sorrow, promising everything will be good, and ensuring him that no one is going to make him do anything. Our mere presence can be frightening enough. In time, our narrative of the person's goodness grows and each momentary experience becomes longer and longer. The caregiver's gaze should also be slow, carefully given, and momentarily looking into his eyes as if seeking to give warmth to his soul. Each gaze should be filled with love and empathy. In the beginning a caregiver's touch might be the weakest of all the care giving tools since it could likely produce a deep fear and remembrance of years of physical management, restraint, and bossiness. When we feel safe, we might touch the top of his hand or his shoulder as a sign of love. These touches will then eventually grow into an embrace.

THE PRESENT:

We just ask: a minute or two a day can help old memories go away

- A series of encounters that unfold in each day
- Many in the natural flow; some intentionally structured
- 2, 5, 10, 20 minutes, for each caregiver whatever each can do, repeated 2, 3, 4, 5 times per day
- It involves a change of heart that transforms the caring community



As caregivers advocating for a culture of gentleness we need to simplify the culture in which we work. The "modern" business approach might be to look at the high cost of 1:1 staffing for the most challenging children and adults. At times an agency might place paper work and bureaucratic chores as more vital than the act of care giving. Our cultural intention and simplification of caregiving should be to talk about the need for human connectedness and to show how a sense of companionship reduce costs through decreased turnover rates, the need for repeated staff recruitment and education, the lowering of insurance costs as harm decreases, and significantly increased good outcomes. As caregivers we need to look at our personal and collective encounters and how we might maximize these as brief structured opportunities to teach companionship and community. We should also find ways to structure more intentional time for face-to-face encounters of longer duration.

Most interactions in a culture of gentleness cost nothing. They are momentary such as a smile, a name enunciated, a touch on the shoulder, a kiss thrown, an occasional embrace, stopping for a moment to console the sorrowful or withdrawn, and any number of other acts of love. These create a sense of peace, self-esteem, community, and are at the heart of who we are and who we must be. A culture of gentleness is dozens upon dozens of simply accidental encounters during the day. A few need enriched staffing; however, everyone can be nurtured by these chance encounters interspersed with frequent and intentional longer encounters that are more focused on safe and loved.



THE FUTURE:

**FROM GENTLE TEACHING
TO A CULTURE OF
GENTLENESS... FROM
COMPANIONSHIP
TO COMMUNITY...**

A PEDAGOGY AND PSYCHOLOGY
OF BEING AND BECOMING



If the most marginalized children and adults are to be well-served in loving settings with a full spectrum of human rights, new assumptions must be asserted. These are philosophical in nature and call for an evolving collective embrace that highlights unconditional love as the central care giving and cultural phenomenon in serving others; a movement away from individualism and toward the creation of companionship and community as initial caregiving purposes; and, movement away from independence and toward interdependence.

These involve:

- A focus on inner healing rather than behavioral change;
- A focus on the total acceptance of each person and forgiveness;
- Teaching each person and helping each to feel safe and loved;
- Helping persons learn to reach out lovingly, respectfully, and in a dignified manner toward others
- Helping others become as active a participant as possible in their own lives
- Entering into the person's space without the provocation of fear and with the evocation of a sense of peace;
- Prevention of physical, developmental, and emotional harm; and,
- Creating a sense of companionship and community.

THE FUTURE:

MAKING NEW MEMORIES IN THE ENCOUNTER



Memories:

- Not intellectual, but internal, spiritual, moral, heart felt... moral meanings or representations... an inner guide... a map...

Through being in the moment:

- Chains of interactions and encounters that accmulate & make “moral” memories



Here is what we have to ask of the caring community. What would a brief encounter with a challenging behavior look and feel like, as in the case of a young man with a life story filled with violence and abuse? How long might these momentary encounters last? How do we give them meaning? How do we create memories that become stronger and more meaningful than the old ones. This starts with the caregivers.

The meaning and deepening of new memories arises from our frequent encounters, a sharp focus on prevention, a flexible structure, a consistent strong and loving example, and on-going support to the caregivers.

Our example and focus on teaching memories of being safe and loved have to be intentional. The creation of a culture of gentleness requires our strong intention to do this and the more formal moments in which we spend time with the person have to be equally intentional. Our intention must not be to change anyone's behaviors but to create these new memories.

THE FUTURE:

**4 pedagogical instruments to
communicate safe and loved:
our presence, words, touch,
and gaze...**

**The power of the word:
emphasis on entering into a
dialog about goodness**

-
- PRESENCE: Our presence bringing peace
 - GAZE: Our eyes touching the heart
 - DIALOG: Our words embracing
 - TOUCH: Our hands speaking kindly



How do we use our skills to let a person know that he/she is safe, and slowly and almost invisibly create a loving memory? What should we talk about? Should we touch? Look into his/her eyes? How close should we get? Should our conversations just focus on him/her or both of us. What should our tone and rhythm be? What do we do if he/she always stands in a corner with head bowed and eyes covered?

In a culture of gentleness there are some starting points in our planned encounters that might be helpful:

- In the caring community, figure out the length of time that any given caregiver should be engaged with a particular person before the encounter becomes difficult for the person to bear;
- Be in no hurry to get the person "to do" anything. The first goal is to teach the person that it is good to be with us;
- Make sure that you see the person as your brother or sister, not theoretically, but actually;
- Talk softly, warmly, and lovingly about his/her goodness and giving reassurance that you will not make him/her do anything;
- Touch the person's hand ever so softly for just for a second as often as you can
- If fear is about to emerge, change your tactic and avoid being demanding; and,
- Be aware, we are not about "doing" Gentle Teaching, but about being gentle.

THE FUTURE:

UNCOVERING NEW MEMORIES— PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE



Memories under memories.

Not just me and you, but us... community making

A mapping of who “we” and “others” are

Moral representations that become internalized
and generalized



It is our central role to come into contact peacefully with the broken-hearted person in his/her space. The magic of an encounter is that each interaction can be like a grace that showers its mist over a person's broken heart. These encounters form memories that eventually guide or orient the person to a life based on one's own goodness. This cultivates a groundedness that will point the person in a loving direction throughout life. There is no quick fix, no miracle, no obvious transformation; there is a slow deepening of the roots of feeling safe and loved. Instead of running from us, the person will run toward us with outstretched arms and a smile on the face. Instead of hitting or biting, the person will embrace us. Instead of refusing to do things with us, the person will do things for us and others. The head will be held high instead of bowed. The eyes will have a sparkle instead of a deathly gaze. The miracle is not any change, but the mere encounter, the coming together.

The strong caregiver example and his/her encounter form a moral map, a moral outline, a representation of safe, loved, loving, and human engagement. These are not intellectual memories, but more like an outline of life filled with companionship, and supported by a caring community. They are deeper moral memories that point to the right direction in human interactions, give self-esteem, and make us open to friendships and community. The first seedlings involve learning to feel safe and loved and in time, these feelings evolve into loving others and growing each person's ability to become engaged in his/her life-project.



THE FUTURE:

THE DEVELOPMENTAL MODEL

Developmental Dimensions In Young And Old

FOCUSED ON THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE GROUP

1. Broken hearted & lonely
2. Safe & loved
3. Self-centeredness
4. Loving others
5. Engagement



Whether in the early childhood years or in broken-hearted adults, we actually need to focus on teaching or re-teaching that it is simply good to be together, then this leads to us doing things together, and finally teaching, after a time, or re-teaching the child or adult that it is good to do things with and for others—the highest moral dimensions. At this point, an ensuing sense of connectedness and companionship turns into the capacity to love others and to increasingly have a broader and deeper life-project and a sense of human engagement. These moral dimensions then evolve into a sense of community.

We teach 'safe' by placing almost no demands on the person except for being with the person with a sense of just "being." At the same time, we need to engage in nurturing and finding relevant ways to express unconditional love. This might seem weird, but the person will learn to feel safe if we lower our demands, but increase our goodness, kindness, and expression of love.

The dimension that is perhaps hardest to understand involves the emergence of self-centeredness after a time of intense nurturing. We want the person to be other-centered and this requires a stretching process, always reminding the person that he/she is safe and loved while asking a slight degree more—waiting a moment, taking turns, sharing, and other virtues.

THE FUTURE:

Assessing or “seeing” sad old memories... dealing with broken hearts instead of “behaviors”

- Seen in the tightness & destruction of the body
- Seen in the emptiness & coldness of the eyes
- Heard in screams, moans, and complaints
- Felt in the fists that swing & hurt
- Felt in running away to nowhere
- Drugs that cover sorrow



The heaviest sorrowful memories can actually be seen in most people. The head is bowed and the eyes are closed in a slave-like posture, hunched over, eyes, watching fearfully, face taught, feet shuffling back from us. Eyes take on a deep emptiness as if looking at the living dead or dart back and forth ready to fight or flee from caregivers, indicating sad memories and a sense of despair. The person's face and body are tightly bound and almost robot-like. There are often screams in the middle of the night and often the horrifying visions and sounds of hallucinations. Scars up and down arms, legs, breasts, and face are seen like haunting road maps to Hell. This leads to self-harm or flying fists towards us, but we are not us. We are just mixed into a cauldron of boiling and bubbling memories.

One of our tasks, as we teach the person to feel safe with us and loved by us, is to help the person feel spiritually comfortable with us—giving the person's favorite drink or sweet, playing a favorite game with the person, looking into the person's eyes as if looking at an angel, not pressuring or causing any anxiety. We need to approach the person and always come in peace—slowly, quietly, and with arms outstretched as a sign of peace, moving as close as possible, but not too close. We should reassure the person that we are not going to make him/her do anything. You just want to be near and then rest. As this goes on, the caregiver needs to sense when he/she can move closer.

THE FUTURE:

THE CARE GIVING MOMENT



The here and now becomes the future

Right now... this moment... is the future

It is the moment, even the moment within the moment
that makes an encounter...



Whether a mother, father, grandparent, friend, or a person that we are supporting, the most important variable is the moment; not the future, a projected plan with outcomes, or a behavioral change. No, it is our being present in this very moment and all the person sees, hears, touches, and feels in the mutual coming together. It is the tiniest amount of time, perhaps two or three seconds. These are linked together with other moments and it is this moment after moment and the evolving chain of other moments that create our moral memory as well as the 'others'.

In the evolution of Gentle Teaching from a non-aversive behavioral approach to the present introspective approach which centers on the creation of new moral memories, one question is invariably asked, "How do we deal with people who hit, bite, kick, cut oneself, run away, steal, curse, beat her/his head to a pulp, obsess, hear voices, or do not like to be touched?" Adequate responses and clear example-setting will always be needed. Yet the present and the future ask that we go beyond this. It presents us with the challenge to create a culture of gentleness, not just focused on the person with challenges, but on the caring community, all directly involved in the person's life. The only important thing is to be in the present moment with two gifts—"you are safe" and "you are loved".

THE FUTURE:





**BEING IN THE MOMENT...
THE NOW RATHER THAN A YEAR
FROM NOW. NOT A MOMENT
BEFORE. NOT A MOMENT AFTER.**

JUST IN THE NOW.

Today's business management approach has thrown up many barriers to care giving. This is not to imply that money and accountability are not important, but that accountants are servants to marginalized people just as we are. In many of today's agencies, those "served" are merely seen as cost lines and money management takes precedence over helping persons to feel safe and loved.

We need to simplify and by simplifying we will find the truth. Care giving simplification involves:

- Teaching caregivers to be in the moment;
- In bad moments this equates with forgiveness;
- In all the good moments, this involves a series of accidental and intentional encounters throughout the day, focused on safe and loved;
- The accidental encounters are merely brief moments of passing by and encompass a wave, a wink, a smile, a name, a thumbs up, maybe a hug if there is time, a whispering of "You are so good."
- The intentional encounters are a bit more planned in the sense that the caregiver takes a chunk of time—a minute or two or a half hour or more. The time depends. It should be structured in the day with the only purpose being to give a memory that the person is safe when with us.
- The key is to stay in the moment. Joy is found in the moment

THE FUTURE:

The most powerful moments are in the caring community

- Not put in words, but in feelings— becoming a collective memory
- Seeping into our feelings--an awareness of this moment's goodness connecting with other good moments and with each in the group
- In this chain, each moment is short, intense, and punctuated with momentary silence, then followed by an other loving moment, and another...



The caring community involves a series of collective moments that can be transformed into personal and collective experiences to further define or strengthen the nature of the community. When individuals feel safe and loved there is a strengthening of the entire group that potentiates the collective sense of community, and this makes the caring community deeper and broader. When a single person feels safe and loved, we can describe this as a sense of companionship; when this occurs to the entire group it is a sense of community.

This sense of community can be made more intentional when there are various tools throughout the day that bring individuals together—sharing, engaged in activities together, playing games together, involvement in a community garden, a daily coming together and entering into a dialog.

THE FUTURE:



All of our loving moments in our caring community

- Start to add up as big “chunks” in a new moral memory
- These are like the building blocks of a new memory that give the caring community a new moral identity: “we are good because you have taught us to feel safe and loved. I am good because you say that I am good. We are good because you have taught us that we are good.”



In the flow of the day there hundreds of opportunities in the moment to moment unfolding of life. These are made up of smiles, winks, waves, embraces, touching a shoulder, thumbs up, singing, stories, names said, and many other brief moments. These memories, at first, might roll off the person's or group's heart as meaningless. Yet, in time, these accumulate like the threads in a quilt and begin to form individual and collective memories that grace us with increasing self-esteem and other-esteem.

Many of today's business management practices cannot conceive of the value of these moments. They want goals and objectives, outcomes and data, cubicles and bursts of paperwork. In a care giving model we want softness and kindness, tenderness and whispers, laughter and warm gazes, and hope before the measurement of outcomes. In a sense, today's person-centered plans need to be designed by those who carry out the service rather than cubicle people. Our task is to be in the moment and our leaders must help us do just that.

As we move from individuals to the group, the process is similar, but more complicated. A culture of gentleness asks for a collective feeling of safe and loved. So, our attention also needs to include:

- Accidental encounters that recognize everyone present and their goodness;
- Two or three intentional group gatherings in which some will actively participate, and others, in the beginning will be more passive.

THE FUTURE:

In a world when not feeling safe & loved is the ruling moral memory... we have to teach a new individual and collective memory

1. It is good to be with the caring community
2. It is good to do things with the caring community
3. It is good to do things for the caring community
4. It is good to do things for others

Those who need to feel safe and loved the most and become part of a caring community are those labeled with a borderline personality. Psychiatry has created a description that seems to doom a large group of these marginalized people to an eternal hell of segregation, confinement, homelessness, incarcerations, drugs designed to snuff and turn living beings into robot-like creatures. The broad antiseptic diagnosis ends up being an almost hopeless one with a bleak prognosis. Their life stories are a litany of sorrow—abuse, neglect, molestation, rape, beatings, spousal fights, segregation and eventual dismissal from school, incarceration, promiscuity, self-harm, and then the continuation of their adult lives in a manner similar to what the very person had gone through in their childhood. The two hallmarks of Gentle Teaching are sharply tested in this regard. The diagnosis is dire, but the need to feel safe and loved, therefore, makes it even more vital to teach.

Their stories make it very hard for them to learn the meaning of safe and loved, but they need it much more than most. It is a process of creating multiple opportunities that focus on:

- “I am safe... We are safe”
- The focus continues to shine on each person, but also the group;
- The purpose is to create a caring community in which each and all feel safe and loved and reach out to one another.



THE FUTURE:

**A NEW FORM OF LEADERSHIP
BASED ON MUTUAL CHANGE
AND DEMOCRACY**



Leaders...

- Work with the people
- Establish democratic management systems
- Policies related to companionship and community
- Policies that end the use of seclusion, physical management or punishment
- Put fiscal management subservient to the process of care giving

The role of a servant leader is primarily to have clear, non-violent and justice-based values and standards, to set a strong example in every aspect of her/his leadership, and to enter into an ongoing dialog with the entire caring community. Of course, there is a myriad of other tasks, not the least of which is the fiduciary obligation of leadership. Yet, the latter tasks are at the center of leadership.

Today this role is increasingly important. There is a strong trend to employ a business model to human endeavors. This does not mean that we are against the business aspect of supportive service agencies. It is clear that we are all Good Shepherds and must watch over our resources. However, our more central duty is to provide support based on companionship and community-making. The role of advocates and caregivers is to make sure that this happens and that agencies do not devolve into mere money management and subservience to sometimes irrelevant or destructive rules and regulations. The fact is that a culture of gentleness cuts down on costly staff turnover, decreases bodily harm, and produces significant and meaningful outcomes.

This culture calls for the abolition of physical management, thereby reducing injuries and related liability costs. It calls for an increase in caregiver education and hands-on training and support, thereby reducing costly staff turnover. It calls for more personalization in the here-and-now planning, thereby increasing constructive outcomes.

Leaders should be frequently present with caregivers and with those whom they serve, setting a strong example of unconditional love.

THE FUTURE:

How we dialog with each other...

To meet is to understand...

- Questions related to safe and loved, companionship, and community
- Feelings of fear, loneliness, meaninglessness, death, and oppression
- Planning for the moment
- Helping caregivers to be in the moment expressing unconditional love
- Those who are directly involved must actively participate in the planning



Meetings can be a bland obligation or a terrific opportunity for dialog and deepening of shared values. Often, today's agencies are swept up in meeting after meeting that all too often have little to directly to do with non-violence and peace-making.

A culture of gentleness calls for a transformation of an agency's focus and values. At the continuous center of our dialog, we need to put supportive management chores secondary to the very life and meaning of the service system. Again, money and resources are needed to carry out the work into the future. There is no question. We must place our values at the center. The way discussions go now-a-days is to spend our time placing leadership energy on the "things" of running a system; while there is importance to this, it is not central to the life of the system.

We must move away from a culture of cubicles, daily dances with data, and planning the life of others without touching them.

This does not mean that we must eliminate these endeavors; it means that we need to introduce a degree of moderation and re-orient agencies to focus on real people with real needs. It means meetings and planning that focuses on how the caring community can make this particular person or group feel more safe, loved, loving, and engaged. If the meeting just centers itself on "behaviors", the precious time is wasted. We need to focus on what we want the person to become rather than what we want to get rid of.

THE FUTURE:

A NEW FORM OF RESEARCH BASED ON GENTLE TEACHING AND A CULTURE OF GENTLENESS



Research based on:

- The process of caregiving
- Studies on mutual change
- Analysis of ways to form companionship and community
- Studies in various marginalized groups
- Qualitative analysis
- Studies looking at the tools of caregiving



Research in nonviolent approaches also has a role to play. Today's research journals in general have been based on the behavioral research model. This adherence to antecedents, behaviors, and consequences has prevailed for over half a century. Libraries are filled with this type of research and the effects have been slight and short-lived.

We need to evolve a new research thrust based on success stories related to nonviolent approaches, the key role of the caregiver and the caring community, the role of motivation instead of consequences, and, most importantly, the nature of the inner world of human beings and moral development. Research also needs to re-orient itself in the area of mental illness recognizing the value of appropriate diagnoses and analyzing them from the perspective of how psychiatric symptoms make it harder to teach a person to feel safe and loved, but also how this makes it more important. Research should also focus on the positive role of medications if based on actual symptoms and utilized as an entrée for teaching a person to feel safe and loved rather than the current non-diagnostic approach and the attitude of just drugging them until behaviors disappear in the dark. This is not an anti-drug statement; it is an anti-snow-them statement. It also points out the dire need for psychiatry to base medications on real diagnoses as opposed to behavioral control.

THE FUTURE:

Becoming active beings... having a life-project...

Teach that it is good:

- To be with the caring community
- To do things with the caring community
- To do things for the caring community
- To do things for others outside of the caring community



As the future unfolds, Gentle Teaching should also signify more than community inclusion, but a whole cloth made up of thousands of threads, each with equal value and beauty. Those whom we serve becoming leaders for non-violence and justice. Non-violence is a tough word. In many ways I am part of a culture that thrives on guns and bullets, drones and dynamite, the electric chair and death by injection. I am also part of a world that seeks liberation and the serving of the poorest of the poor and a world that searches for a good and loving God.

In this pursuit we have found our work, our vocation, our calling to do good. We are fortunate for this and must keep our hearts open. There is a lot to do and it is what we should do. Here is our outline, reflect on it, and follow it if it fits your values:

- To be with the caring community: Organize in your locale and reflect on your cultural ways to be kind, loving, and gentle;
- To do things with the caring community: Have your get-togethers to focus on what and who you are becoming;
- To do things for the caring community: Write stories about your experiences with individuals and groups and share them;
- To do things for others outside of the caring community: Most importantly, serve others and bring your spirit to others and other groups so that others also might open their hearts to unconditional love.

THE FUTURE:



Policy Statement

“THAT ALL PROGRAMS, SERVICES, AND SUPPORTIVE INTERVENTIONS REFLECT NONVIOLENCE AND A SPIRIT OF GENTLENESS IN THEIR PURPOSES AND MEANS, ENSURE EACH PERSON A DEEP SENSE OF COMPANIONSHIP AND COMMUNITY, SUPPORT EACH PERSON IN THE SEARCH FOR COMMUNITY INCLUSION, AND SERVE AS THE FOUNDATION FOR A CULTURE OF LIFE.”

POLICIES AND PRACTICES SUPPORTIVE OF GENTLENESS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

"That all programs, services, and supportive interventions reflect nonviolence and a spirit of gentleness in their purposes and means, ensure each person a deep sense of companionship and community, support each person in the search for community inclusion, and serve as the foundation for a culture of life." This suggestion could take on various wordings. The important question is that we all actively participate, no matter our title or role, in the establishment of non-violence and gentleness as central factors.

This policy would include factors such as:

- Increased pre-service and ongoing caregiver training in a culture of gentleness;
- Increased hands-on mentoring of caregivers;
- The presence of mentors within the organization;
- Improved pay as an act of justice;
- Staff turnover reduced to less than 15% per year;
- Everyone in the organization trained in a culture of gentleness;
- Management's presence in all services and supports;
- Elimination of the use of and training in physical management;
- Planning processes based on a culture of gentleness;
- All clinical and supportive services based on a culture of gentleness, and,
- Intentionally posting feeling safe, loved, loving and engaged as the pillars of the agency and the expression of unconditional love as the core strategy.



THE FUTURE:

FRAMEWORK FOR A MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE MODEL

- Moving away from the business management model
- Measuring money and cost reduction as a primary value with little relevance or connection to social well-being
- “Discharging” anyone who will detract from independence-oriented or cost reduction outcomes



Within a culture of gentleness management has to take care to develop a servant leadership style of care giving and supportive services. This involves putting those served at the center of all management decisions. At times this will require strong advocacy that might contradict and require substantive changes in what government or funders might require.

The servant leadership has to take prudent risks and persevere in needed systemic change that includes:

- The need to adopt a “community making” management model,
- Based on companionship and community,
- Stewardship of resources centered on each person’s need for lifespan support and community inclusion, and
- A clear and unequivocal policy statement(s) on the elimination of all forms of punishment, physical management, isolation, seclusion, police intervention, and
- Well trained and supported direct caregivers.

THE FUTURE:

A MECHANISM TO SHARE WORLDWIDE EXPERIENCES IN A CULTURE OF GENTLENESS...

Gentle Teaching International (GTI) **information dissemination**

- A source for a global description of national and local experiences... not a control, but a fountain of information
- National and regional feeders: each doing its own thing
- Information based on successes and new attempts



Gentle Teaching has had fruitful outcomes because we have honored and respected each place and its particular culture. Gentle Teaching International and its web page has been a strong influence in sharing a general direction across the world and our many projects from Japan to Belgium, Holland to Puerto Rico, Portugal to Canada, and so on. We do not want any external control anywhere; yet, it would be helpful if each culture were to report and share its uniqueness and how each culture operationalizes its movement on helping strangers and enemies, the poor and forgotten, and the disabled and enabled. This is not to control. It is not to place any one nation over another. Its intent and purpose would be to share.

Gentle Teaching International is a simple way of bringing us together and disseminating and sharing information. This needs to be strengthened and broadened. We must set a strong example through ongoing dialog that requires respect and patience. We should encourage national and local Gentle Teaching movements with similar direction-setting, never implying that one way is better than the other. I would encourage each local or national entity to develop an information sharing approach and also utilize GTI as an international information gathering point.

THE FUTURE:

SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE

The fading away of:

- Behaviorism
- Applied behavioral analysis
- Positive behavioral support
- Physical management, restraint, punishment, and any approaches based on control and manipulation

The creation of:

- Intentional communities
- A culture of gentleness throughout all sectors
- The practice of gentleness in families and supportive settings



Finally, we must also look at Gentle Teaching's long term impact, not through any sort of long term planning, but as a way of sharing our collective open-heartedness. Gentle Teaching now has varying degrees of direct involvement in over 26 nations. We must attempt to ensure that we are sharing our world—wide experiences and materials. In this generation behaviorism will continue to loose its sway. Its use and popularity is waning. It has latched onto autism as its last stand. This too will pass.

In this generation we must make sure that:

- We are bringing a culture of gentleness to all nations and all who are suffering;
- We focus on a culture of gentleness in families across the world;
- Wherever we are, we focus on the creation of caring communities within a culture of gentleness.

Gentle Teaching has spread to many nations and towns—from villages in developing countries to provinces and states in many nations. This has been accomplished by having an open heart, not a business plan with goals and objectives. That is the way that seems to only make sense to me. It has been fruitful.

ENDING IN THIS MOMENT.

**A story of hope that starts with sorrow.
Knowing joy because we know sorrow.**

A young woman suffering from neglect and abuse that has left her:

- Naked
- Beating her right eye to blindness
- Beating her ears to a pulp
- Confined in a garage

Then hope entered and mutual change comes about. Our hope, our beliefs, and our unconditional love.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. John J. McGee was the Founder and Director of Gentle Teaching International and the primary author of, "Gentle Teaching," "Being with Others," "Beyond Gentle Teaching," and "Mending Broken Hearts." For more than three decades, Dr. McGee focused his efforts on writing articles and teaching about this non-punitive approach to serving children and adults with severe behavioral and emotional challenges. He lectured throughout the United States, Canada, Mexico, Japan, Brazil, Portugal, Holland and Denmark. Dr. McGee was intimately involved in the design and implementation of Gentle Teaching initiatives in schools, institutions and community programs throughout the world. Dr. McGee provided ongoing support and guidance to these programs/centers to ensure that a culture of gentleness was established and sustained.

Dr. McGee completed a Bachelor's degree in Philosophy from St. Columban's College in Milton, Massachusetts and a Master's degree in Counseling Psychology from Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. He completed a Ph.D. in Education from Kansas University in Lawrence, Kansas. Dr. McGee passed away peacefully at his family home in November 2012. He will be forever missed by the hearts he has touched around the world.

GENTLE TEACHING TRAINING IN SASKATCHEWAN

LEVEL 1

An Introduction to Gentle Teaching (6HRS)

The primary purpose of this training is to provide an introductory overview of Gentle Teaching; it's founder, history, and philosophical foundations. Additionally, the facilitator will teach both the central purpose and basic principles of Gentle Teaching, including: the Four Pillars: to feel safe, to feel valued (loved), to become more loving and to become more engaged. Within this training the learner will be introduced to the Four Tools of Gentle Teaching: our hands, our eyes, our words and our presence.

KEY MESSAGES:

- Establishing the perspective that a caregivers/teachers role is critical and requires a deep commitment to personal and social change.
- Gentle Teaching must begin with us: we must be intentional with our warmth toward others, our willingness to give without any expectation of receiving anything in return, and our intense desire to form feelings of companionship and community with those who are pushed to the edge of society

NOTE: A three-hour (3hr) brief introductory session to Gentle Teaching is also offered, highlighting the key aspects of Gentle Teaching.

LEVEL 2

Working With People (14HRS)

The principles of this training are to further explore the Pillars and Tools of Gentle Teaching at a deeper level; coupled with the practical application as so learners understand how to apply the information learned into their everyday lives. The training seeks to better equip those who have successfully completed the Gentle Teaching Introduction, with hands on tools and case studies. In doing so, participants will strengthen their knowledge of Gentle Teaching and how they relate to the people they interact with.

KEY MESSAGES:

- To equip support personnel, educators, social workers and others who have already completed the Gentle Teaching Introduction with further knowledge and practical application of the Pillars and Tools.
- To train those interested in furthering their understanding of Gentle Teaching with hands on tools: that will challenge their ability to think creatively, self-analyze and begin to develop an understanding of other peoples' (person served) perspectives.

LEVEL 3

Leading in a Culture of Gentleness (12HRS)

Eight (8) 1 ½ hour modules that are to be completed independent of one another during Team Meetings, Leadership Meetings or Professional Development Days. Modules include: Structure, Lowering Demands, Transitions, Positive Interactions (Relationship Building), Stretching, Gentle Language, Creative Planning (Developing gentle goals and outcomes) and Leadership/Mentoring Skills (how to) in a Culture of Gentleness.

Training on Gentle Teaching is delivered in Saskatchewan by Creative Options Regina (COR) and Saskatchewan Alternative Initiatives (SAI) in both Saskatoon and Regina. For information on upcoming training sessions, or to speak to a Gentle Teaching Mentor, contact:



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www.creativeoptionsregina.ca

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Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

written by: John J. McGee, PhD

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