

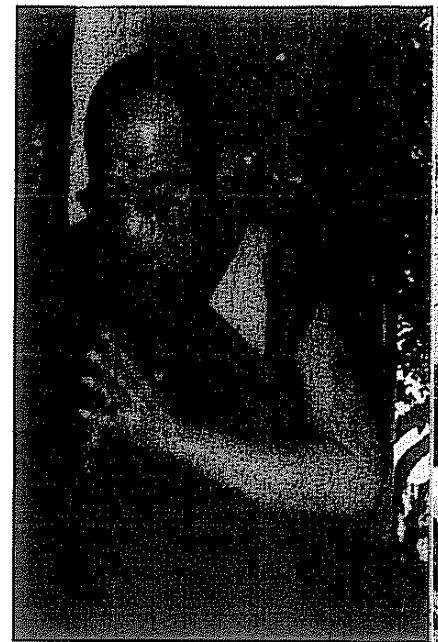
*Teaching Shalom in*

Pilgrimage  
to Lhasa, the  
Tibetan capital.

BY MARY AND EVERETT  
GENDLER

"WHY ARE YOU TALKING TO US ABOUT NONVIOLENCE?" WE WERE ASKED AGAIN AND AGAIN BY THE BRIGHT, EAGER, INCREDIBLY PATIENT TIBETAN YOUNGSTERS seated on the hard floor of their unheated assembly hall in Dharamsala. They had kept us there for hours, plying us with questions about the efficacy of nonviolent struggle, to which they gave lip service because of their reverence for their beloved Dalai Lama, but about which they had grave doubts. "Isn't it clear nonviolence doesn't work? Shouldn't we turn to other means?" they asked. And, again, "Why are you here? Why do you want to help us?"

Why, indeed, had we come to this former British hill-station, seat of the Tibetan government in exile and temporary home of the Dalai Lama, which, at 6,000 feet, becomes bone-chilling in winter? "We're here because we're Jewish," we replied without hesitation. Then, realizing that



*On a bone-chilling  
Himalayan mountain,  
the temporary  
home of the Dalai  
Lama (above),  
we offered young  
Tibetans a Jewish  
perspective on  
nonviolent resistance.*

# *the* Shadow of Tibet

these Buddhist young people, tucked away in a remote corner of the Himalayas in northern India, might not understand what we meant—indeed, might not even know who Jews are—we explained:

"For thousands of years our people have been persecuted and oppressed. Only 50 years ago we suffered a terrible genocide when the Nazis murdered six million Jews. And yet we have survived. Our religion has instructed us to 'hate evil and love what is good' and to work for justice. It

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARY GENDLER



Nuns at Dolma Ling monastery listening to the authors' talk on nonviolence.

## *In the long run,*

Rabbah 19:16: "The Torah does not order you to run after or pursue the commandments, but only to fulfill them when the appropriate occasion comes....But peace: you must 'seek peace' in your own place and 'pursue it' to another."

Today, memories of the Holocaust make it hard for us to place our trust in anything but weapons for our defense, even though we know that in the long run "a king is not saved by his great army; the war horse is a vain hope for victory" (Psalm 33:16-17).

But in a moment of crisis, who can think of the long run?

The assembled Tibetan students politely awaited our response. "Yes, certainly, I can understand why it looks that way to you," said Everett. "But let me assure you that nonviolence does not mean simply being passive and not fighting; it doesn't mean that you are not brave; and it does not mean that you cannot win. Active, strategic non-violent resistance takes much more courage than you think, and it is often far more effective than violence. The Indians whose heads were cracked by the British during the salt march were certainly brave; they were also effective. Keep in mind that the British never recovered their self-respect after that event, and their hold on India was quietly but permanently weakened. Consider the dramatic overthrow of the Marcos regime in the Philippines in 1986 and the success of the Latvian independence struggle against the USSR in 1989. Also, the man who stood in front of the Chinese tank in Tienenman Square displayed enormous courage. Perhaps if you knew more about the various strategies and the power of active nonviolent struggle, you would feel differently."

"Yes, you are right," the ever-polite Tibetan boy responded, "but I think the Chinese are different. The man who stood in front of the tank was brave, but look what they did to their own people, their own students. That proves nonviolence will not work with them."

has also taught us: 'You shall not stand idle while your neighbor bleeds.' What the Chinese are doing to the Tibetans is evil and unjust. Your people are being injured; they are suffering. We admire the Dalai Lama's determination to save your people and your culture by nonviolent means. We would like to help by talking to you about how to make non-violent struggle even more effective."

A shy but determined Tibetan boy of about 16 remained doubtful. "People say the Tibetans and Jews are alike. I have read *O Jerusalem* and I don't think we are alike at all."

"Why do you think that we are not alike?" Everett asked.

"Because the Jews were brave and fought for their country. We Tibetans are not brave. We do not fight. And look what the Chinese are doing to Tibet."

Here it was. The BIG QUESTION. Inevitable, even welcome, but still a

challenge. After all, had we not discussed these same issues a thousand times at home with friends? Were there alternatives to violence in the final stages of the struggle for Israel? What if the efforts to regain the land had been attempted through nonviolent means? Would independence have taken longer? Almost certainly, but might not the terrible situation today, the enmity between two peoples and the persistent bloodshed, been avoided? Where does our own community stand in relation to the insistent teachings of *shalom*, of nonviolence, of swords into plowshares, which are clearly present as a powerful, if sometimes ignored, dictum of our tradition?

The Reform movement has played a important role in increasing the visibility of our commitment to peaceful conflict resolution. The founders and earliest leaders of the Jewish Peace Fellowship back in the 1930s included Rabbi Abraham Cronbach of the Hebrew Union College and Jane Evans of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, both of whom encouraged us to affirm Psalm 34:15: "Seek peace and pursue it." As it says in Numbers

*Dr. Mary Gendler, is a psychologist, photographer, and world traveler. Rabbi Everett Gendler has served for the past twenty-five years as spiritual leader of Temple Emanuel, Lowell, MA and is Jewish chaplain at Phillips Academy, Andover, MA.*

# "a king is not saved by his great army."

"It is true that the Chinese authorities can be brutal and ruthless. Yet, even in such situations there can be surprises. As you know, it was the policy of Nazi Germany to exterminate all Jews. But something amazing happened in 1943. The Gestapo arrested several hundred Jewish husbands of non-Jewish German wives. The wives descended upon Gestapo headquarters. Facing Nazi machine guns, they refused to leave. Day after day they confronted the German authorities without violence, and within a week they had obtained their husbands' release. Most of these Jewish men survived the war, living with their non-Jewish wives in Berlin, Hitler's capital! Let's keep this episode in mind before we decide that nonviolence can never work against murderous regimes. Maybe the powerful are not as all-powerful as we fear, and nonviolence is more powerful than we might imagine."

"Doesn't violence get more attention?" another student asked. "We've been trying nonviolence for a long time and no one notices. Perhaps if we did something violent the world would listen." "Actually, I don't think you realize how much you have gained by following the nonviolent path," responded Mary. "If you abandon this way, you might get attention for a few days, but you will become just one more violent struggle, and no one would really care. By following the Dalai Lama, your people have gained the sympathy and support of many peoples, even if the governments are not responding the way they should. This soul force which Gandhi spoke of is more powerful than you think. What you need to learn now is how to use it more effectively."

"But we can't even get the Chinese to listen to us," another youngster protested. "They do and take what they want. They don't need to talk because they're so much stronger. We have nothing and can do nothing."

"Here's where active, nonviolent struggle comes in," said Mary. "Of course the Chinese are not going to

give you anything so long as they feel they have all the power. But they do not have all the power. You also have power, more than you realize."

"But we don't have time for nonviolence. We've been trying for 37 years already and nothing has happened. Our people and our culture are being destroyed. You've gotten back your homeland, and we haven't!" We could hear the pain and anguish in the voice of this young teacher who could barely speak through her tears.

"It is true that our people have recovered our homeland," we conceded, "but our wait lasted a lot longer." Many of the students nodded in acknowledgment of their impatience.

In addition, Everett said, although a military struggle helped effect our return to Zion, it had been preceded by centuries of spiritual resistance and renewal. "About 2,000 years ago, the Jews revolted against the Roman occupation, taking up arms, preventing all Jews from leaving the city, and insisting that everyone fight the Romans, although many Jews warned that armed struggle would surely lead to disaster. Disagreeing with the zealots, a rabbi named Yochanan ben Zakkai made a daring escape from the besieged city of Jerusalem and negotiated an agreement with the Roman enemy: he would continue to oppose the armed rebellion if the Romans would allow him to set up a school in the town of Javneh. Some Jews called Rabbi Yochanan a coward; others accused him of treason. The Romans crushed the Jewish fighters, slaughtered or exiled the remaining Jews, and destroyed the Temple. Had Yochanan not es-

tablished the school at Javneh, our people might have disappeared. Thanks to that school, we learned how to live in exile, and, as you can see, we are still here. Does any of this remind you of someone?"

Smiles of recognition abounded. The parallel between Yochanan ben Zakkai and the Dalai Lama was obvious to all.

But there are also obvious differences. In recent decades, the scientific study of nonviolence has become a recognized academic discipline as well as a practical strategy for achieving social change. As committed as the Dalai Lama is to imparting the traditional Buddhist teaching of *ahimsa* (non-harm), he is equally and eagerly open to learning about its active, practical, political application as a tool for liberation from the Chinese.

There have already been efforts to share the methods of nonviolent resistance with Tibetan leaders. Thirty highly placed Tibetans recently completed a seminar on

strategic, active nonviolence taught by Dr. Gene Sharp of the Albert Einstein Institution in Cambridge, MA and Colonel (Ret.) Robert Helvey, a former instructor at Fort Benning, GA who has become intrigued with the possibilities of nonviolence as an effective alternative to violent struggle. Helvey put the Tibetans through demanding strategic analyses of their situation. He explained that nonviolent and military strategic planning begin the same way—with an assessment of strengths and weaknesses on each side. In the case of Tibet, the Chinese military presence is the

*continued on page 48*



Portrait of Dalai Lama displayed inside the Sera Monastery, October 1995. Such displays of the Tibetan leader have since been outlawed. Those who have defied this decree as an act of nonviolent resistance have been arrested and tortured.

up of one mind ...to settle under the wings of God...in Tiberias," they wrote to Don Joseph.

But the euphoria was short-lived. By the second half of the sixteenth century, a decline in Ottoman power strengthened the Bedouin raiders, who terrorized the settlers, and pirates captured incoming refugees by the boatload, holding them for ransom or selling them into slavery.

To Christian leaders, the Tiberias project was a brazen move too outrageous to tolerate. Propaganda mills went into high gear to discredit the settlement. The French ambassador in Istanbul insisted it was a shabby plot concocted so that Don Joseph could declare himself "King of the Jews." Bonifacio Stano, head of a Franciscan order of monks in Jerusalem, complained to the sultan that this was the first stage of a Jewish plot to control the Holy Land; he feared that his church would be converted into a synagogue. Lurid cartoons started appearing in Istanbul designed to defame the Nasi family by suggesting Don Joseph was actually his aunt's lover.

Doña Gracia died nine years after launching the Tiberias project. Soon the settlement fell into disrepair. Don Joseph had never demonstrated the same enthusiasm for the idea as his aunt, and the commercial enterprises never managed to become profitable in a way that would have allowed them to sustain themselves without Nasi help.

Don Joseph was never forgiven for his alleged princely pretensions or for the influence he had wielded for a while at the sultan's court. The writer Christopher Marlowe immortalized him as the infamous Jew of Malta—all of which finally cast Don Joseph as the most evil Jew of the sixteenth century. This, in turn, may have accelerated the desire to forget Doña Gracia too, particularly as her activist approach was not popular in an era when Jews were more comfortable with appeasement than confrontation. Though the great rabbis of the time acknowledged her passing with lavish eulogies, the memory soon dimmed. Fortunately, new research is giving Doña Gracia the credit she deserves for her courage, accomplishments, and vision as a heroine of Israel. □

## Teaching Shalom

*continued from page 29*

occupying force's main pillar of support. As an occupying rather than combat force, it is subject to special vulnerabilities. Stationed far from home in inhospitable surroundings, soldiers frequently suffer problems of morale due to the radical change of climate and the perceived hostility of the occupied population. Often they are recruits from disadvantaged sectors of their own society who harbor latent resentment toward their superior officers and their entire government apparatus, and who may recognize that they, like their Tibetan subjects, are themselves victims of an exploitative regime. Effective interactions may lead to soldiers' deliberately overlooking prohibited Tibetan activities, reluctantly and haphazardly obeying instructions, and, in the end, perhaps even refusing to follow orders. Strategically speaking, this is equivalent to disabling a unit through armed combat; in both cases the unit needs to be replaced.

Another area of vulnerability, Helvey noted, is the local civil administration of the Chinese occupying forces, which, with proper handling, might be induced to compromise the accuracy of Chinese records and impair the transmission of directives, procedures, and policies. In addition, a more self-confident and aware local Tibetan populace could be developed through a classic Constructive Works Program similar to the one so effectively devised by Gandhi in the Indian independence struggle. Tibetans who have studied in India and returned could serve as teachers in a literacy campaign; others trained in simple paramedical techniques might improve the health and consequently the energy of the local Tibetans; others with some business training could help Tibetans organize their own local enterprises and extend marketing operations. All of these activities would strengthen a people and increase its possibilities for carrying on a persistent and ultimately effective struggle for self-determination.

And so the discussions continued. During the three months we spent in Dharamsala, we spoke to more than 3,000

students, teachers, youth leaders, administrators, monks, and nuns. Were these inquisitive and skeptical listeners immediately convinced by our arguments and illustrations? Although the energy, excitement, and hope generated by our talks and the Sharp-Helvey seminar were palpable, we know well that the effort to educate and convince people of the moral superiority and efficacy of nonviolent struggle is neither quick nor easy. We have no illusions that a few hours of talking with each group resulted in instant conversion or ongoing commitment. After all, they, like all of us in the world today, are surrounded by a popular culture which offers a thousand exciting Rambo-style images of violence for a single Gandhi-like image of effective nonviolence. And if we in the Jewish community, despite our centuries-long tradition of *shalom*, have more trust in a military rather than a nonviolent approach to struggle and security, it is not surprising that the Tibetans are hesitant to put their full trust in nonviolence. The searching questions of the Tibetan students give voice to that skepticism and doubt felt by many. At the same time, they are open to learning how nonviolent struggle can be successful.

Is there any hope for the success of this approach? With odds of one billion to six million against them, the Tibetans have a tough struggle no matter what means they choose. On the other hand, the "soul force" about which Gandhi spoke is real, and once mobilized and combined with hard-headed strategies, it becomes a formidable power. We have only to remember the astonishing recent transformations in the Philippines, Eastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union, where nonviolence played a much larger role than violence against these brutal regimes.

Many thoughtful observers of Tibet's struggle for survival believe that the Prophet Zechariah's vision—"Not by might, not by power, but by My spirit, says the Lord of Hosts"—is the best path to liberation. If they are right, and the Tibetans recommit themselves to active nonviolence, perhaps our biblical teachings will have come full circle, and we Jews will learn anew from our Tibetan brothers and sisters about the power of *shalom*. □