

# Core Nonviolence Commitments

Credit to Miki Kashtan

<https://thefearlessheart.org/resources/core-commitments/>

*Nonviolence is a way of being and living that orients, in thought, word, and deed, towards integrating love, truth, and courage in individual and collective action aimed at preserving what serves life and at challenging what doesn't to transform itself so the human family can realign with life.*

*Even in extreme circumstances, responding nonviolently emerges from inner resolve, systemic and historical awareness, and a vision of a future Beloved Community within the family of life. In practice, such responses rest on the commitment to transmute reaction into the willingness to include all of life in our circle of care; to uncover and speak the fullness of what we witness; to take action based on our vision and values, ranging from dialogue to civil disobedience; and to face the consequences of our choices and engage with impacts on ourselves, others, and life as a whole.*

I have not found a word that captures the exact meaning that I am looking for. Commitment may be a bit too rigid, as it tends to connote “should,” invoking the non-choiceful energy of obligation and duty. “Intention” is not strong enough, in my mind, to carry the unwavering force of staying the course even when the going gets hard. Somewhere I also want to capture the unpredictability of life. These commitments are not a promise, which none of us can give. I understand how challenging life is and imagine that, no matter how strong the choice, every single one of us at some point or another will not find sufficient inner resources to follow through on these.

In order to soften the intensity of “commitment” without losing the strength, I am choosing to use the word “aim” rather than “commit” in the actual wording of the commitments. I want the words to remind any of us who makes the choice to follow this path of the overarching clarity that this is what we want and aim for, that we have no in-principle objection to living life in this way, no matter what anyone else is doing, no matter what the structures of the world look like, no matter what the circumstances are.

This is a tall order. This, to me, is a mobilized life. The commitments serve as a compass, a reminder, a scaffolding that can hold us in living by choice in a world that is not of our choosing. Such an individual commitment to nonviolence, within a patriarchal world, means finding ways to transcend and transmute the legacy of scarcity, separation, and powerlessness. This means encountering and committing to transform the implicit ways we participate in responding to life according to the patriarchal frameworks we have all been exposed to. Each of the commitments, in one form or another, engages with and offers an alternative or antidote to one or more of the central mechanisms of patriarchy: controlling people and life, applying right/wrong frameworks to making sense of the world, seeing reality through an either/or lens, blaming and shaming self and others in response to whatever doesn't work, and engaging in domination and submission as elemental forms of relationship.

Instead, these commitments provide a framework based on the pillars of nonviolence: courage, truth, and love, and offer a comprehensive approach to life within ourselves, with others, and within the larger systems that still shape our lives even as we aim to change them and their effects. Part of this framework is a continual leaning into trust even when we don't know and can't know. One of the ways that I understand patriarchy is as a response to traumatic events that led to loss of trust in life. As trust in life may still be missing, the commitment to "Natural Abundance" explicitly invites us back into that trust, which may feel awkward. I still welcome the reminder when I come across it as I look through the commitments.

While the choice to extend ourselves to life fully, without conditions, is ours to make, most often we will encounter a gap between our capacity and our commitment. To bridge that gap, to be able to continue facing reality – external and internal – and focus on what matters to us most, we need each other. This is why each of these commitments includes a reference to seeking support. Patriarchal structures provide both implicit and overt support for behavior that aligns with the status quo. This means that community is essential for embarking on and sustaining the journey of embracing nonviolence fully. We live in a world that is not designed to meet human needs. Because of that, no matter how far we are on the path, sustaining where we are and meeting the world where it is continues to be a journey. This is why I call on all of us to welcome and seek support for staying on track with these commitments.

# The Commitments

## Relating to Myself

1. **Openness to Myself:** Even when I act in ways I really don't like, I aim to keep my heart open to myself. If I find myself in self-judgment and unable to connect with needs, I aim to seek support to reconnect with myself and hold with compassion the needs motivating my actions.
2. **Openness to the Full Emotional Range:** Even when my feelings are uncomfortable for me, I aim to stay present with myself and keep my heart open to the fullness of my emotional experience. If I find myself contracting away from my experience, numb, or shut down, I aim to seek support to release defendedness, bring tenderness to past experiences that may have created my reaction, and open to what is.
3. **Risking my Significance:** Even when I am full of doubt, I aim to offer myself in full to the world. If I find myself thinking that I am not important or that my actions are of no significance, I aim to seek support to bring my presence and gifts to life and choose to engage in a co-creative manner.
4. **Responsibility:** Even when overwhelmed with obstacles or difficult emotions, I aim to take full responsibility, within an interdependent context, for my feelings, my thoughts, my needs, my actions, and my life. If I find myself giving my power away to other people, larger forces, habits, or analytic categories such as my past or any labels I put on myself, I aim to seek support to find the core source of choice within me, to attend consistently to my needs and my goals, and to ask for what I want along the way.
5. **Care for My Life:** Even when I am stressed, overwhelmed, or in disconnection, I aim to maintain my commitments to my well-being, and to take actions that nourish my life in community with others. If I find myself letting go of strategies that I know contribute to my life, or retreating from connection to attend to my needs, I aim to seek support to ground myself in the preciousness of including my own life in my interdependent circle of care.
6. **Tenderness towards Limits:** Even when I am drawn to overstretching myself (including towards any of these commitments), I aim to remain attentive to the limits of my capacity in any given moment. If I find myself pushing beyond my capacity, I aim to seek support to honor the natural wisdom of my organism and to stretch only within my current limits as I grow my capacity over time.

## Orienting towards Others

7. **Loving No Matter What:** Even when my needs are seriously unmet, I aim to keep my heart open. If I find myself beset with judgments, anger, or other strong reactions, I aim to seek support to learn from and transform my judgments and meet others with love.
8. **Assumption of Innocence:** Even when others' actions or words make no sense to me, frighten me, or have a harmful impact, I aim to assume a need-based human intention behind them. If I find myself attributing ulterior motives, assigning labels, or analyzing others' actions, I aim to seek support to ground myself in the premise that regardless of how far from serving life someone's action appears to be, and even if I choose to use force for protection, ultimately their action is an attempt to meet needs no different from my own.
9. **Empathic Presence:** Even when others are in pain, disconnected from themselves, expressing intensity, or in judgment, I aim to maintain a relaxed presence with their experience. If I find myself attempting to fix, offering unsolicited advice, listening or speaking without heart connection, or turning my attention elsewhere, I aim to seek support to regain my faith in the transformative power and the gift of just being with another.
10. **Generosity:** Even when I am afraid or low-resourced, I aim to keep reaching out to offer myself to others and to respond to requests to share resources on the basis of needs. If I find myself contracting in fear or unwilling to give, I aim to seek support to release any thoughts of scarcity and embrace opportunities to participate in the flow of resources to where they are most needed.
11. **Receptivity:** Even when I am disconnected from my needs, I aim to make myself available to receive unconditionally what others and life offer me. If I find myself believing that I am less than or don't deserve to have resources given to me, or resisting receiving in some other way, I aim to seek support to open to the flow of resources attending to my needs without expecting myself to give anything back.
12. **Discernment and Courage:** Even when I am aware of a potential cost of my actions, I aim to make my choices based on the strongest possible alignment with my purpose and values within a clear assessment of available data, resources, and information about short and long term effects, rather than based on fear. If I find myself hiding, justifying non-action, protecting myself based on habit, or rebelling without discernment, I aim to seek support to restore my capacity to live in integrity, persist in moving towards purpose, and accept the full range of results that then emerges.

## Interacting with Others

13. **Authenticity and Vulnerability:** Even when I feel scared and unsure of myself, I aim to share the truth that lives in me with others while maintaining care and compassion for all. If I find myself hiding or protecting, I aim to seek support to embrace the opportunity to expand my sense of self and engage even if I may still experience shame or fear.



14.

15. *The commitments used in an activity to open an NVC weekend in Spain, 2016.*

*See explanation below.*

16. **Availability for Feedback:** Even when I want to be accepted and seen for my intentions, I aim to make myself available to receive feedback from others about the impact of my choices in order to learn and grow. If I find myself defensive or slipping into self-judgments, I aim to seek support to find the beauty and gift in what is being shared with me.
17. **Offering Feedback:** Even when I am afraid of potential conflict, I aim to create opportunities to offer honest, purposeful, and caring feedback to others as information to consider about the impact of their actions on me, others, and life. If I find myself withholding information that might benefit a relationship or a shared purpose, I aim to seek support to ground myself in the power of mindful feedback to increase capacity and connection.
18. **Openness to Dialogue:** Even when I am very attached to a particular outcome, I aim to remain open to shifting through dialogue. If I find myself defending a position or arguing someone else out of their position, I aim to seek support to release the attachment, connect with my needs and the needs of others, and reach for mutually beneficial strategies to emerge out of connection with needs.

19. **Engaging with Conflict:** Even when I have inner or outer obstacles to connecting with someone, I aim to move towards working out issues between us with assistance from others when needed and in a manner that cares for everyone's physical and emotional well-being. If I find myself retreating from engagement, I aim to seek support to restore my willingness to seek healing, reconciliation, or learning through facing conflict, using the full range of available strategies, including mourning the current limits of any relationship.
20. **Using Force with Care:** Even when pathways of dialogue are closed and I come to believe that the only option for preventing imminent harm or damage is using force, I aim to remain steadfast with the choice to use the least amount of force possible with the most amount of love possible and to mourn the impossibility of a fully nonviolent response within a violent culture. If I find myself wishing to hurt or harm or closing my heart while using force, I aim to seek support to bring my intention back to maintaining love and care for the humanity and dignity of everyone and using force only for the purpose of protecting life and finding solutions that work for all.

## Relating to Life

19. **Interdependence:** Even when I experience separation or deep isolation, I aim to open my heart to the fullness of the interconnectedness of all life and to my place within it. If I find myself retreating into self-sufficiency, separation, or mistrust in my own gifts or those of others, I aim to seek support to remember the beauty and relief of resting in interdependence, including the many ways each of our lives depends on and is affected by the entire web of life, including the gifts, actions, and efforts of others.
20. **Natural Abundance:** Even when in the grip of fear of scarcity, I aim to reach towards life to take what I need, no less and no more, in support of regeneration and sufficiency for all now and into the future. If I find myself accumulating or denying myself the basics, I aim to seek support to trust the ancient wisdom that life flows when we share the fruits of nature and our labor based on needs.
21. **Integration:** Even when facing significant challenges, I aim to integrate seeming opposites such as process and results, autonomy and interdependence, or power and love, into paradoxical tension rather than experiencing them as opposed to each other. If I find myself thinking in binary ways or identifying with one side of such a pair or framing things as tradeoffs, I aim to seek support to go

beyond either/or to realign myself with the wholeness of life and embody multiple sides of any seeming opposition.

22. **Accepting What Is:** Even when things fall apart, people don't come through, or calamities take place in the world, I aim to remain open to life without having to like it. If I find myself contracting away from life, drawn to ideas about what should happen, or wishing to control other people's behavior, I aim to seek support to face reality, mourn, find a sense of peace with unmet needs, and choose responses and actions from clarity about how I want to interact with life.
23. **Celebrating Life:** Even when I am faced with major difficulties (personal, interpersonal, or global), I aim to maintain an attitude of appreciation and gratitude for what life brings me. If I find myself becoming cynical or experiencing only pain and despair, I aim to seek support to connect my heart with the beauty and wonder that exist in life even in the most dire circumstances.
24. **Mourning:** Even when it might be easier to turn away from the gap between my vision and the reality around me, I aim to sustain the practice of mourning, including in community, to learn and to regenerate my capacity to creatively respond with integrity to difficult situations. If I find myself acting against something rather than towards vision or shutting down altogether, I aim to seek support to remember the precious gift of tears to fill the gap with mourning, softening the tendency to either suppress my wanting or force the world to conform, and reducing the chances I'll resort to violence in thought, word, or action.
25. **Humility:** Even when I have vast experience and knowledge, I aim to stay present to how little I truly know and how much I am simply part of the unfolding of life. If I find myself trying to control a situation or relying on my authority to avoid engaging with differences, I aim to seek support to release attachment to outcome, embrace complexity and uncertainty, listen to multiple perspectives, and surrender to the awe and mystery of life in its capacity to adapt, transform, and regenerate.

## Engaging with the World

26. **Leadership:** Even when I have no formal authority, when attached to outcome, when others are polarizing, or when I don't fully trust my own power to influence outcomes, I aim to take responsibility to unilaterally choose to care for the whole in interdependent relationships with others. If I find myself choosing a narrower

focus or acting without full agency, I aim to seek support to remember that, regardless of others' choices, I am free to act fully in line with my biggest vision and highest values.

27. **Vision:** Even when consumed with horror about the way things are, I aim to generate the most detailed vision that my imagination can conjure of how things can be, at all levels, based on principles of care for all life, needs-based resource flow, and contributions based on willingness. If I find myself joining with others in acting from anger at what's not working without clear vision of what we would do if we happen to succeed, I aim to seek support to ground myself in the inspiring power of vision to mobilize action based on love of the possible.
28. **Multilevel Perspective:** Even when an individual, interpersonal, or systemic lens appears compelling on its own, I aim to maintain my capacity to view and engage with reality from all three perspectives for full choice about contributing to change and attending to more needs. If I find myself consistently overlooking any of these layers, I aim to seek support to refocus my attention on the interconnection of all aspects of life to discern how to respond in each moment.
29. **Social Self-Reflection:** Even when I don't see how the larger social circumstances into which I was born shape my behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs, I aim to seek to understand the patterned differences that arise between those socialized into different social locations, and to choose to act with others across power differences to make it possible for all to partake in shaping our collective future. If I find myself defending, blaming, sinking into shame, giving up my power, or otherwise retreating from engagement, I aim to seek support to act with care for self and others based on compassionate understanding of the social context of our individual choices.
30. **Transparency:** Even when I feel protective of information or concerned about potential misinterpretations, I aim to transparently reveal to others decisions, including ones I regret, and the circumstances and reasoning that led to those decisions, financial data, and other information relevant to personal and organizational function. If I find myself safeguarding information, I aim to seek support to recognize the extraordinary power of open communication to restore trust and increase wisdom within a system.
31. **Collaboration:** Even when pressed for time or when trust is low, I aim for engaging with others in mutual influencing to find solutions that work for everyone. If I find myself exercising power over others or abdicating my own power to participate, I aim to seek support to restore my capacity to open to the



wisdom, creativity, and renewed energy that are unleashed when power is used effectively with others with the intent of attending to needs, relationships, and shared purpose.

32. **Collective Capacity:** Even when groups I am part of are beset with challenges and divisions, I aim to continue to engage with others to co-create systems that increase our capacity to work towards our shared purpose, in line with our values, and in service to our collective well-being, including mindful use of resources and discerning limits to engagement. If I find myself imposing systems or reluctant to set them up, I aim to seek support to recommit to making conscious agreements, grounded in the vision and values of what we want to create, about who makes which decisions, how resources are generated and shared, how information flows amongst us, how we will provide, receive, and attend to feedback, how we engage with conflict, and how we support each other to maintain our commitments.
33. **Appealing to Others' Humanity:** Even when seeking to create high-stakes change across significant gaps between preferred strategies, I aim to support others to find their creativity, generosity, and integrity rather than attempting to coerce a solution that attends to what's important to me. If I find myself losing faith or patience, I aim to seek support to restore my capacity to act with integrity and to offer loving action as a way to generate shifts in strategies and perspectives.
34. **Collective Action and Strategy:** Even when there is potential cost to me, I aim to participate in nonviolent collective efforts that are either exposing and interfering with the functioning of the dominant culture or creating alternatives to it, so as to transform social structures in service to a world that embraces the needs of all life. If I find myself retreating into the comfort of my personal life, succumbing to hopelessness, or developing hatred towards those whose actions I want to influence, I aim to seek support to bring my intention back to the transformative power of a focused minority working for change while grounded in love and care for the humanity and dignity of everyone.

## Engaging with the Commitments

Whenever we make a decision, we are drawing an arc between the moment of deciding and the moment of completion. We are always faced with the choice: which of any number of active arcs in our lives are we going to prioritize in this moment?

It is particularly challenging to honor the longest arcs, those that extend to the end of our lives, those that come from adopting core values and commitments. This is why practice is needed: it creates shorter arcs that sustain us in upholding the longer arcs.

The more we engage with these commitments, the more they are woven into the fabric of who we become, anchors of the grand experiment of nonviolence, of responding to everything that happens with love, courage, truth telling, and care for everyone.

### Embracing the Path of Nonviolence

One way that the commitments can be useful is as an approach to walking towards living more and more nonviolently. This invites us to engage with the paradox of the seriousness of commitment without creating internal demands and with openness to humor and lightness. The commitments also offer a method for identifying and leaning on inner strengths and for naming, mourning, compensating for, and transcending inner obstacles. In this way, and also directly, they remind us about finding ways to seek support every step of the way.

### Reflection Tools

Some people have put the commitments on display and review them daily; some have made small cards they carry in their wallets; some have done journaling about each of the commitments as another way to anchor them internally. Some have also used one or more of the commitments as the focus of meditation. As one example: Where does your being open in delight to the challenge and where is there tension, doubt, confusion?

Some people use specific commitments as inspiration, others choose one commitment as the focus of an ongoing path, and others move through the commitments one at a time as daily reflections.

Which way appeals to you?