

in response to Iskah's essay

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Iskah E. Shirah of booksie wrote an essay on civil disobedience. she asked me to comment on it. i couldn't. another essay was the best that i could do. i hope you find it interesting.

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^ ^ ^ ^ This essay is in response to Iskah E. Shirah's wonderful piece, "Justifying Civil Disobedience in the Modern Context," where she makes the case that in today's America, there often isn't sufficiently severe enough injustices to warrant the use of civil disobedience. ^ I agree with her that, overall, the worst injustices are now occurring outside the U. S. ^ However, I feel it is important to point out that what is a minor injustice to one person, could very well be a major, horrific injustice to someone else. ^ Although the severity of the injustice is a very important consideration, I think it is equally important, when considering whether to use civil disobedience, to gage the potential of its effectiveness. ^ It seems to me, from what I remember from its use in history, to be most effective when used as part of a movement already in progress. ^ As an example, I think it is clear that the peaceful demonstrations by African Americans against racial injustice during the early sixties was most effective as a part of a movement, and was hard to ignore, since it drew attention to the worthwhile cause in a peaceful and proper way. ^ But, if we imagine an isolated African American attempting to protest in exactly the same way back in the 1930's of the deep south, I think the ineffectiveness would soon become apparent, and he might even have been beaten for his efforts. ^ In both cases, the feeling of morally doing the right thing may be the same, but I think the individual would have been better served by organizing awareness of the injustice, possibly through writing or speaking against it.

^ ^ ^ ^ In Iskah's conclusion, she introduces another dimension into her pondering; the teachings of Christ. ^ She wonders, since she is a Christian, and Christ was a man of peace very much opposed to striking back, whether she should turn the other cheek when faced with injustice. ^ She states that perhaps context would help her decide her proper course of action.

^ ^ ^ ^ As some people on Booksie may already know, I am not a Christian. ^ In fact, I am an atheist; but I have often thought about the principals that Jesus taught. ^ No, I don't think of him as the son of God, but rather as an extremely charismatic man trying to affect change against injustices in very terrible circumstances. ^ I don't know if my thoughts of Jesus' teachings will be of any help to decide whether to use civil disobedience in today's world, but I do find them interesting, and I would like to share them if I may.

^ ^ ^ ^ The more I think about Jesus' teachings, the more I suspect they need to be considered in the context of the time and circumstances in which he lived. ^ He was a Jew, and back then, when compared to the vast, brutal, and enormously powerful Roman Empire, the Jews were a very small group. ^ They were also enslaved, and subjected to horrible injustices. ^ More and more I'm beginning to suspect that not only was Jesus a great teacher, but he was also a revolutionary rebel as well. ^ What better way to inspire the enthusiasm of your followers, than to be preaching the right and moral way of doing things, right in the face of that great bully of the day, the Romans? ^ The Romans were conquerors, and dealt out their justice harshly. ^ And, here was Jesus telling his followers that they should "turn the other cheek," and "do onto others as you would have them do onto you." ^ I'm beginning to suspect that when he spoke, he spoke fully realizing that his small and powerless people would be far better served to survive, by using peaceful methods of protest. ^ I'm also beginning to think that he was hoping to gather followers that were already disenchanted with the brutality of the Romans, by preaching philosophies diametrically opposed to the Roman way of doing things. ^ A kind of "in your face" type of teaching that, for his followers, not only felt morally better, but also was exciting, because they would be making a statement against their oppressors. ^ As his following grew and was noticed more and more by the Romans, I fear any tolerance that there might have been for his upstart teachings rapidly faded.

^ ^ ^ ^ Jesus' teachings lived on, although, in my opinion, they became shrouded in mysticism. ^ The Roman empire collapsed, not because of Jesus, but because it over extended, and there was increasing pressure from the "uncivilized" hordes outside of its borders. ^ And yet it was the Christians who were the

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best prepared to step in and seize control of what remained.Â To be honest, I have no idea if that was accomplished in a peaceful manner or not.Â If I'm any judge of humanity, I'm guessing it wasn't.

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