Week #412: Many traditions teach peace and nonviolence. Does this mean using lethal force to defend yourself isn’t approved by your tradition?

(Due 8 a.m. Monday, Nov. 23. Prints Nov. 28.)

Self-defense is likely pre-programmed into our DNA. Psychologists say we either “flee or fight.” The decision to fight must not be simply an automatic violent response that leads to killing or being killed. When faced with a threat, we are bound by our consciences to seek a way to decrease the danger and defuse the situation. Today, our violence-packed video games and movies seem to espouse lethal force as the only resort. The recent spate of shootings by police officers has also alarmed us, especially if the victim did not seem to be life threatening. We see too much violence as the answer to problems with anger dominating the situation. And finally, we can see the inclination to flee is a far wiser alternative. Jesus said, turn the other cheek. I think I’d want to do that only from a distance.

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