

From Religious Books:

*The Exploration*¹
By Shri Surendra Bothara

In this article, the scholarly thinker, Shri Surendra Bothara, presents an insightful analysis of the evolution of some aspects of life, which has led to a considerable increase in the needs of living beings. Evidently, under such circumstances, one has to be perceptive and explore how one can lead a nonviolent lifestyle.

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The disposition of taking care that no harm comes to self or others, while exploring and using anything, forms another important part of the nonviolent (AHIMSAK) conduct. Traditionally this has been limited in scope to cover only eatables. Pondering a little deeper into the basics reveals that this predilection covers a much wider range of activities. In fact, it covers each and every thing that can be acquired and used by an individual or a group.

With the instinct for survival and procreation came desire, and with desire came dependence on the outside world. The first need was the need for food demanded by the body for survival and sustenance. Once this was fulfilled came the need for shelter in order to be safe from the free flowing natural forces as well as intrusion from other beings. As life progressed and evolved, the number of influencing factors increased, and so did the needs.

The needs of a simple form of being are modest and few. As the species evolved the life forms became complicated and their needs also grew. With the coming of individual consciousness the requirements increased further and came to the point of explosion with the advent of man, who has the capacity to think, imagine and plan.

Need inspires one to explore for things and then acquire them. In nature there is an abundance of things that could be acquired, but at the same time there are numerous diverse forces, which may or may not impede while one is exploring or acquiring. Another factor that may come

¹ Adapted from 'AHIMSA - The Science of Peace' by Surendra Bothara, published by Prakrit Bharati Academy, Jaipur, second edition, 2004.

into play is the threat from and to others who may also be in the process of exploring and acquiring the same thing.

The moment one goes out to explore, he transgresses the territories of others and becomes a threat. As a reaction the others start the process of protecting their territories and become a threat to the explorer. This is the beginning of a chain reaction, which continues to grow till it reaches a natural pulsating balance. In nature, survival does not necessarily mean the total annihilation of the opposing factors, because in that eventuality the means of survival too will be wiped out. A balanced behavior and capacity to coexist is what nature endows each and every individual component.

The yucca flower and moth provide a simple and inspiring example of such coexistence in nature.² The female yucca moth is equipped with a tiny, needle sharp tube (ovipositor) for laying eggs. The moth thrusts it through the wall of the ovary in the yucca flower and lays the eggs inside. During this process, she collects yucca pollen and pollinates the stigma, thereby ensuring that her larvae will have enough seeds to feed on while they develop. As there are many more seeds than the larvae can consume, the plant is not harmed. This symbiotic interplay ensures the survival of both, plant and insect. Without each other both species would die out.

The principle of nonviolence incorporates within itself this natural balance and harmony of coexistence. While acquiring anything, generally the first thing that comes to mind is its usefulness to the individual. But according to the principle of nonviolence, many long-term and short-term factors are involved. Almost all these factors are covered by the edict that minimum harm should be caused in anyway to others as well as self while exploring, acquiring and using a thing.

As the materials useful to man increase, the import of the term 'harm to others' varies in significance and scope. The first and foremost need of living beings is food. It is extremely vital and important. The second need of living beings is dwelling. While exploring, the prime considerations

² In TATTVAARTH SUTRA, Acharya Umasvati states:
PARASPAROPAGRAHO JEEVAANAAM [5-21]

The function of souls is to assist each other.

Thus all living beings are interdependent on one another.

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are safety and habitability. The next consideration in this context is displacement of others, blockage of passage of other beings and impact on the environment, animate as well as inanimate.

With the capacity to invent and organize, the humans gradually formed society. The social systems evolved and with the improvements in travel and communications, distances started shrinking. Interactions between human beings increased and consequently the social problems became complex. The foundations of the simple and fundamental principles based on inbred discipline were shaken. So the rules and laws were established, which had to be enforced by the administrative bodies. These laws prevent the infringement of activities of an individual or a group of individuals on the activities of others. They cover a wide range of human endeavor, including transportation, trade and commerce, tools and implements, and all means of luxury and comfort.

Instead of enforcing the rules and laws to maintain order in society, the nonviolent approach lies in practicing self-discipline – limiting one's desires and possessions. In such a case, the rules and laws of the society are automatically implemented without any external pressure. This leads to freedom and peace of mind.

Originally acquisition was according to need, but as man became used to convenience and material comfort, needless acquisition also started. Then ambition and competition, selfishness and bloated ego, and hoarding and waste resulted because of lack of self-discipline and non-possessiveness. Evidently, to keep ourselves from transgressing on the realm of others, it is imperative that we adopt a mindful exploration that is focused on nonviolence. At social level this attitude will breed harmony as well as reduce the abuse of available resources.

In all our activities related to food, clothing, furnishing our homes, business and industry, we should make sure that the endeavor is not harmful to self or others, and it has a minimal impact on the environment. Further, we should bear in mind that law enforcement alone is never efficient enough to bring about harmony in society. It is observed that people invent ingenious methods to circumvent the legal system. Therefore self-discipline is obviously the better way of maintaining order in society. This is the nonviolent (AHIMSAK) approach for solving social problems.