

From Religious Books:

The Paradox Of Compassion And Nonviolence

Based on excerpts from the Foreword by D. R. Mehta to
'AHIMSA - The Science of Peace' by Surendra Bothara,
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Compassion vis-a-vis violence:

"We are living in a paradoxical situation. While on the one hand, modern civilization is characterized by a concern for fellow human beings, on the other, the foremost problem of our age is growing violence, both in thought and action. A child in Europe may have sympathy and extend help to one of his ilk in Africa who may not have adequate food to eat or medicine to save his body against disease. As never before, this spirit of compassion has permeated state policies and the result is that we have so many enlightened welfare states in the world in which the poor and the weak are taken care of at public expense. There are many international organizations as well that are equally concerned and are making significant contributions in arousing conscience as also directly alleviating human misery and suffering. But juxtaposed is the spread of violence at individual, national and international levels, on scales, which are unprecedented. The crime rate has increased manifold because of growing greed, intolerance, other undesirable and unchecked propensities, and ready availability of sophisticated weapons. Indeed, in some countries, holding firearms is a fundamental right of citizens. Terrorism is becoming common and respectable.

"At the international level, the situation is horrendous. The expenditure on arms and armaments has increased manifold because of hatred and intolerance of other countries and their ideologies. The most frightening situation is in the form of unabated development and stockpiling of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems. Two small rudimentary atom bombs used at Hiroshima and Nagasaki killed and maimed millions of people. Much bigger and more sophisticated fission and fusion weapons and multi-headed intercontinental ballistic missiles are now capable of destroying the entire life on this planet several times over. ...

Economics and politics:

... "(The) merchants of war are scared of peace. Besides, it is believed that war or cold war sustains economics. (However) more and more

people all over the world are realizing that the answer to present problem of violence is to be found in morality that replaces ravenous greed with contentment, hate with tolerance, and killing with reverence for life. ...

... "ACHAARAANG Sutra states, '... All things breathing, all things existing, all things living, all beings whatever, should not be slain or treated with violence, or insulted, or tortured, or driven away.' ...

... "Albert Schweitzer, while dealing with Jainism in his book Indian Thought and Its Development said, 'The laying down of the commandment not to kill and not to damage is one of the greatest events in the spiritual history of mankind. ... So far as we know it is for the first time clearly expressed by Jainism.' ...

"Violence (HIMSA) and possessiveness (PARIGRAH) are intimately connected. In fact, the biggest cause of violence is possession. Thus to achieve nonviolence (AHIMSA), physical possession and the spirit of possession would have to be restricted.

... "In the present day world, with religion getting separated from daily life and widespread commercialization, killing has increased many-fold and sensitivity to life, whether animal or human, has declined in proportion. ...

"As mentioned earlier, part of violence grows from acquisitiveness. Jainism does not subscribe to forced poverty but suggests that there should be no grabbing at any level. Many economic systems today are based only on promoting wants rather than curbing them. This is having disastrous results. One of them is that we are exhausting the non-replenishable resources of this world; another is that material goods and money are becoming the measures of man. Internationally, this spirit is leading to regional and world conflicts. Here again, the start would have to be made from the individual and his mind would have to be changed.

Extremism leads to intolerance:

"Another malady of our age is general intolerance. While science has been a great boon both in promoting material prosperity and rationalism, it has made our thinking, even in areas other than science, extremely definitive. We learn that two and two can only be four and tend to carry the same certitude in social matters, though they are of a different character. The result is that those who do not agree with us are treated as wrong. Earlier dogmatism was based on ignorance. Now it is caused by certitude arising from rational thinking. What is not being realized is that knowledge is relative. The faculties that we possess are limited. Even compared to small creatures, our senses are much less developed. For example, dog may have a far better sense of smell and an eagle may

have far more developed eyesight. Even in comparison with such creatures, when our senses are so poor, how can we claim absolute knowledge?"