

A Gem From January 1993 Issue:

A Few Glimpses Of Nonviolence

English adaptation of portions from

Siddhantacharya Kailash Chandra Shastri's book

"Bharatiya Dharm Aivam Ahimsa",

published by Shri Raj Krishna Jain Charitable Trust, New Delhi, 1983

Common Perception

Mahatma Gandhi, describing the perception of most people about nonviolence, writes:¹

"When the question of nonviolence arises, most people start talking either about killing or not killing a tiger, a wolf, a snake, a scorpion, bed bugs, lice and dogs or about consuming or not consuming potatoes and egg plants.

"By getting involved in the above argument on killing or not killing animals (other than human being), it seems that we neglect the aspect of religion, which is more important in our daily lives. We rarely have to face the situation of killing snakes and tigers. Further we do not have the courage to face them. We have not conquered the snakes of anger and other passions through love and compassion. Nevertheless, we deviate from the important aspects of religion by talking of snakes and tigers. We neither control our passions such as anger nor do we possess the ability to kill snakes and tigers. This is self-deception. Those who wish to practice the religion of nonviolence need to forget the questions about snakes and tigers. They do not have to feel sorry for lacking the determination of not killing them. Their first priority should be to imbibe the feeling of universal love and win the passions involving anger and aversion (DWESH)."

It should be noted that Mahatma Gandhi does not say that it is rightful to kill snakes, tigers and bugs. He only emphasizes that in our zeal for nonviolence, we should not lose sight of the violence of feelings of our fellow men. We should understand that controlling our passions such as anger, ego, jealousy, deceit and greed is important for the practice of nonviolence.

Jain Concept of Nonviolence

The Jain concept of nonviolence can be summarized in the following words:²

¹ Bharatiya Dharm Aivam Ahimsa, page 182.

² Bharatiya Dharm Aivam Ahimsa, pages 141-143.

1. Causing injury to the physical life processes (DRAVYA PRAAN) and feelings (BHAAV PRAAN, mental life processes) on account of passions constitutes violence.
2. Nonviolence consists of absence of attachment and aversion (RAAG DWESH) while attachment and aversion constitute violence.
3. An individual who conducts himself/herself conscientiously and who has no attachment and aversion does not commit any violence even when some injury is caused by him/her.
4. A person who is careless and indolent in his/her actions and who has attachment and aversion commits violence even without causing any injury.
5. A person who is indolent, who is careless and who thinks ill of others, first injures his/her own life processes. He/she may or may not hurt others' life processes.
6. Our thoughts and feelings determine violence and nonviolence. Thus a person may commit violence without causing any injury while another person may cause some injury but may not commit any violence.

Thus the concept of nonviolence is quite complicated, because, in Jainism, violence depends on the thoughts and feelings of the individual and not on the result of the individual's actions. Unscrupulous mental activity constitutes violence while absence of improper mental activity (attachment and aversion) is nonviolence.

The above concept of nonviolence is a unique contribution of the Jain religion because it eliminates the root cause of violence by purifying the thoughts and feelings of individuals and impels the society to adopt nonviolence.

Mahatma Gandhi's Teaching of Nonviolence

Mahatma Gandhi demonstrated the following features of nonviolence by adopting it at the national and international levels:³

1. Nonviolence is the supreme religion of man. It is immeasurably more august and worthy than physical (beastly) force.
2. Nonviolence promotes self-respect and equality of man though it does not guarantee the protection of material wealth. A truly nonviolent person can possibly protect material wealth better than well-equipped armed forces. Evidently, nonviolence cannot help in the protection of

³ Bharatiya Dharm Aivam Ahimsa, pages 154-155.

material wealth earned through unjust means. Nonviolence cannot condone unethical conduct.⁴

3. Nonviolence is the strength on which all young and old, men and women can depend. The only requirement is that they should believe in compassion and in humanity. If we adopt nonviolence as our principle, it should permeate our entire life. We cannot selectively adopt nonviolence sometimes and ignore it at other times.
4. Thinking that nonviolence is beneficial to individuals only is a big mistake. It is as much a religion for the nations as it is for individuals.
5. Those individuals and nations that wish to realize the strength of nonviolence should be prepared to sacrifice everything except their self-respect. Those who intend to exploit others and depend on arms for their defense cannot adopt this virtue.
6. The strength of nonviolence is tested when an individual remains nonviolent in thoughts, words and deeds in the face of extreme provocation. It is no big deal to remain nonviolent in dealing with decent and fair-minded individuals.
7. The question arises, "Should I destroy the obstacles that come in my way or face them?" A careful scrutiny reveals that if we destroy the obstacles, we do not move ahead. When we face the obstacles, we make progress and achieve nonviolence.
8. Nonviolence is not limited to avoiding physical injury. Each of us will meet death some day. We should understand that impure thoughts constitute violence, recklessness is violence, untruth is violence and wishing ill of others is violence. Monopoly over things that others need is violence.
9. Belief in nonviolence is based on the premise that man's nature is fundamentally the same and that amicable behavior has a profound impact on man.

Business, Industry and Nonviolence

An analysis of some relevant concepts regarding business and industry, based on the Jain scriptures, brings out the following facts:⁵

The householders constitute the backbone of a society, country or nation. They cannot survive without business and employment. Members of a group have to support themselves and their families. They have to

⁴ It should be pointed out that because of certain undesirable practices of the Jain community, the Jain institutions are not immune from physical and verbal attacks.

- D. C. J.

⁵ Bharatiya Dharm Aivam Ahimsa, pages 126-133.

make a living and provide necessary goods for themselves and their families. The welfare of all depends on individual enterprises. Livelihood depends on a cooperative effort. An individual alone cannot sustain his/her life without others' cooperation.

An individual's spouse is an equal partner in life. Thus he/she has to adopt a business, trade or profession (to support his/her family). A businessman or industrialist has to relate to his customers and other businessmen. Thus other individuals will definitely be affected by his/her business or industry and by his/her policies. Thus an individual who practices nonviolence is expected to be fair and just in earning his livelihood. Here are a few guidelines:

1. An individual should remain contented.
2. An individual should indulge in activities that are within one's means. It is improper to extend oneself beyond one's resources.
3. One should set a limit to one's material wealth in view of one's needs. Whenever possible, one should reduce such limit. One should not extend the limit on account of greed.
4. Even the necessary material goods should not be obtained through unfair means.
5. One should fulfill the needs of dependent workers first. One should not exploit them.
6. One should not circumvent the laws set by the state for acquiring money and materials.
7. One should not cheat the customers by using false weights and measures.
8. One should not adulterate goods and merchandise.
9. One should not employ counterfeit bills.

The above rules imply that an individual should adopt a business, industry or profession, which does not involve violence or promote violence. . . . The business or industry in which outward violence is not involved but where the owner's intention is to exploit the helpless and unsuspecting workers and customers is not nonviolent. A nonviolent person cannot imagine profiting from the constraining circumstances of others. . . .

As far as possible, a nonviolent person does not jeopardize the well being of others for earning his/own livelihood. Moreover, he/she cannot rest watching others suffer. Today, we who assert ourselves as followers of the religion of nonviolence have adopted a negative aspect of nonviolence. We have forgotten its positive aspect. We think that nonviolence is limited to not killing or hurting others. Consequently, we

do not kill. When dangerous animals such as snakes are captured, we have them released in jungles without killing them. We build shelters for old, disabled and sick animals. We pay hunters for liberating their game. We try to save even the lives of assassins. We help the poor and helpless by donating millions. In sum, we have the tendency of relieving the pain of other animals. However, we are not prepared to sacrifice our own material comforts to alleviate the suffering of our fellow men. We can donate generously but we cannot have the generosity of conducting our business in such a manner that others are not affected adversely by our actions. **Earning a lot of money through unfair means and then donating a portion of it is not nonviolence. Earning fair and just livelihood and not being in the position of making charitable contribution is definitely nonviolence.**

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From the article
'The Paradox of Compassion And Nonviolence'
published in the Jain Study Circular of July-October 2007:

... "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."