

### III-14. Social Influences of Non-violence

Man styles himself in the image of his gods. With such socially acceptable role models it is easy to see how some cultures have adopted judgmental, exploitative and vindictive code of conduct. Others have sustained and flourished with a concern for life rather than preoccupation with death. Humanist atheist and agnostic ideals are far more influential than any moral *a priori*.

Attributes and criteria of sustainability (Chapter I-13, I-14, II-3) are based on deeper understanding of interdependences for the survival needs. Survival is not encouraged by the mind-set that world was created for a chosen few. It has become increasingly clear that most animals do not resort to killing unless their own survival is threatened. Use of discourse backed by nonviolence has emerged as the preferred way to resolve conflicts. It requires plurality of thought to explore rational alternatives.

#### **Killer primate?**

In a set of experiments one 'Guard' was instructed by an authority figure to administer electric shock to a 'Prisoner.' The Guard did so repeatedly, even though the Prisoner reacted dramatically to the shock. Unknown to the Guard, the Prisoner was an actor in no danger because the button to administer the shock was not wired.

In another set of experiments with rhesus monkeys, an individual was trained to pull levers to obtain his food. When this monkey learnt that pulling lever caused pain to another monkey in an adjacent cage, the first monkey stopped pulling the lever and forfeited his daily meal.

Humans who believe that *they know better* or *are on the right side* are empowered to misuse power. Aggression and impulsive actions are integral and necessary part of nature. Such actions are generally used for defensive purposes. Most humans show such tendencies and most of our social interactions encourage it. Reconciliation and peace-making are integral part of normal primate behaviors. We may not necessarily be born to be good but through play children learn that it pays to be good, cooperative and conciliatory. It avoids conflict if exercised as defense. It may also avoid future conflicts if exercised after a conflict. Desire to avoid potential conflicts is also the basis for altruism. What is uncommon is the use of violence to resolve conflict. Conflicts may arise over the resources, but violent behaviors are encouraged by beliefs backed up by technologies. Violence of the 20th century encouraged the image of humans as *killer primate*. Violent behaviors of most primates do not come anywhere close which redeems other primates. Human primate may be taught to seek redemption through violence.

**Modern war cries.** The nonviolent world-views of most traditional societies, in particular in Ganga Valley, stands in contrast to the ideas of power and control that took hold father North-West of Mesopotamia (Volume II). These regions also developed ideas of dogmatic and judgmental divine. Doctrinal Truths often lead to violence because practice has to conform to support the theory. Inspiration from unquestionable and unknowable authority creates a model for unquestionable power and authority. Such empowerment is far too apparent from the practices of subjugation and exploitation through crusades, colonialism, imperialism, and globalization. Ideological war-cries for such encroachments include manifest-destiny, white-man's

burden, capitalism, privatization, demonization, humanization, flow of capital, Aid-Agency, World-Bank, International Monetary Fund, national interest, defense and security of *a way of life*. In all such cases the unsuspecting and weak pay the cost.

Devious means and nefarious motives may be widespread in the jungle. But in the trenches for the *progress* the cost is paid by those that are far away and sometimes in the future. Less ominous sounding terms are invented to make the agenda palatable for the changing times. Repackaging with increasing frequency diffuses the blame and makes accountability difficult. Even for culpability it is not easy to show specific cause and effect relationship. In some cases, remarkably convincing studies have come out decades later. But by that time as the older institutions are dismantled the perpetrators are no longer on the scene. Crooked political elite and fly-by-night institutions are neither democratic nor under democratic control. Such systems operate under the shadow but outside the control of our cherished institutions. With thinly veiled propaganda they promote concentration of power for resource grab while avoiding culpability often by legal and political maneuvering.

**Choking versus Bombing.** To appreciate long term consequences of certain actions consider death by choking versus bombing. Then think of other inventive ways for everything in-between (see III-15). No matter how we package the end result is irreversible. That is violence. The characterization applies not only to acts that threaten the immediate physical survival of people (murder and slaughter), but all acts that threaten survival of the entity as individual and group. According to the *Pajatta* criteria (Vol. 1) for sustainability food and safety are as important as the resources of environment, language and culture to preserve the web of life.

**Web of life.** An individual lives within the web of life.

Sustainable co-existence within such an interdependent web requires nonviolent means of conflict resolution that curtail irreversible actions. Umasvami in **Tatvarth Sutr** (ca. 300 CE) epitomized the idea of the public commons as:

*Parasparo-upa-graho jivanam*

*Living beings render service to one another.* Put another way, the good of one is in the good of all, and the good of all is in the good of one. Its tangibility is also holds for the converse, i.e. threat to one is a threat to all. It is not the conduct based on moral authority, but it is the conduct based on concerns to preserve *quality of life* with full recognition of the interdependences that sustain the web of life.

**Approach to reason.** About 100 years ago, Mahatma Gandhi and many others chose to challenge the fundamental unfairness of the British presence in India and elsewhere. The method of dialog and persuasion offered a rational alternative that even the British could understand. He moved forward the argument that their methods supported by their culture of violence at best postpones the day of reckoning. Probably the British were not as merciless as the French were in slaughtering the educated before leaving Algeria. However as a historical footnote for those who have a more charitable view of the Colonial British, none of the British ex-colonies have emerged as successful democracies.

As the powerful nations continue to exercise might as the right, there is increasing appreciation of appeal-to-reason for conflict resolution. For emphasizing nonviolent means for conflict resolution Mahatma Gandhi has been recognized by Time magazine as one of the three most influential persons of the twentieth century. Although Gandhi is not on the list of *The 100*

*Most Influential Persons* (John Hart, 1972) of all times in human history Mahaveer is recognized so. The truths of *live, let live and thrive* is rooted in biological survival instincts. Both Mahaveer and Gandhi also noted the futility of being possessed by possessions (*a-parigrah*). It is now the cornerstone of eco-preservation and sustainable consumption and life-style based on renewable resources. Violence against ideas and feelings requires respect for ideas and actions of others as a way to consider useful possibilities and explore alternatives for successful behavior.

Monks who came to his childhood home for food sensitized Mahatma Gandhi to such concerns. Also, after his return from South Africa, Raichand Mehta (1891-1892) reaffirmed Gandhi's faith in nonviolence with a more activist interpretation that struck a deeper chord. While people know that *violence begets violence*, it requires great insight to see that *an eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind*.

In the context of shared understanding by leaving lines of communication open, consider the vision of Berners-Lee, the inventor of www or the World-Wide Web: *Hope in life comes from the interconnections among all the people in the world. We believe that if all work for what we think individually is good, then we as a whole will achieve more power, more understanding, and more harmony as we continue the journey. We don't find the individual being subjugated by the whole. We don't find the needs of the whole being subjugated by the increasing power of an individual. But we might see more understanding in the struggles between these extremes. We don't expect the system to eventually become perfect. But we feel better and better about it. We find the journey more and more exciting, but we don't expect it to end. Should we then feel that we are getting smarter and smarter, and more and more in control of nature, as we evolve? Not really. Just better connected - connected into a better shape. The experience of seeing the*

*Web take off by the grassroots effort of thousands gives me tremendous hope that if we the individual will, we can collectively make of our world what we want.*

In closing, interdependences sustain the web of life just as suitably configured parts sustain the whole. The converse also holds: The whole may provide a particular identity to the parts, but the whole does not sustain the parts. Ideologies do neither. Plurality and individual diversity is necessary to find niches for survival and solutions for emerging challenges. Our more cherished institutions make more room for such expressions in virtually all areas of collective endeavors ranging from the political democracy to free flow of information and ideas. Resulting independence encourages expression of individual potential.

# Against Gods and Humbug

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