

NON-VIOLENCE IS A VIBRANT WAY OF LIFE

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When I think of non-violence, I do not see just a picture of calm and quiet situation prevailing at any given time and space as a necessary condition. Nor do I see a picture of members of a society keeping a vow of silence, or with a grim face showing emotional concerns or experiencing doubt about any issue. I see a situation where everything is abuzz with the sound of music and chatter, people gathered for a happy occasion, the air suffused with freedom, energy and honesty. I see nonviolence as a vibrant way of life.

It is true that violence can be seen and understood across different forms of life. In Buddhist *Vinaya* texts, hitting dead wood with a tiny grass is said to be a kind of violence. Any living beings could be subject to violence, cruelty to animals is a most obvious case. But as far as the agent is concerned, non-violence must be envisioned in relation with human society where the vision is a practical one.

First, non-violence is not just the lack of violence. It is a dynamic and positive quality. The source of violence can be traced to the thoughts of people who generate three H's: hatred, harming thought and hitting out. We all have a sense of like and dislike – to certain people or their actions. When there is hatred in the heart, it breeds thoughts of harming the object of hate. This thought leads to the act of violence be it by poisoning or causing physical injury through any means.

Killing is the most harmful of violent actions. It is a symbol of maximum violence because whether they are human beings or the tiniest of insects, there is nothing more cherished to each one than his life. Therefore, taking some one's life is the biggest crime.

Non-killing is the most meritorious quality. As such, non-killing must be adopted as a principle of life by everyone believing in non-violence. But, more than not killing, non-violence involves a conviction that life is precious combined with compassionate commitment to the non-killing. This is the most important and basic requirement for non-violence.

The second point is that violence is not limited to taking someone's life or causing physical injury to a living being. Attacking and hitting out verbally or by any other means of communication is a form of violence. Uttering lies, slanderous talk or insulting others is also violence. Being untruthful, betrayal, unfaithfulness are also violence. Faithfulness is one of the corner-stones of nonviolence.

Thirdly, in order to diminish hatred and harmful thoughts, a long-term strategy should be in place. That is to say, there is need for a culture of non-aggression that will replace the culture of an extremely aggressive nature in the human society today. We all know that whenever there is a chance to grab a mundane benefit people do not hesitate to leave others behind by jumping in the ring. This is also an illustration of aggression.

However, aggression can be over-come and eventually eliminated, for I believe there are seeds of good thoughts in the minds of every individual. As Shantideva said:

रात्रौ यथा मेघघनान्धकारे विद्युत्क्षनम् दर्शयति प्रकाशम् ।
बुद्धानुभावेन तथा कदाचिल्लोकस्य पुनयेषु मतिः क्षणं स्यात् ॥

Just as during a dark cloudy night, the lightning gives a flash of light for a moment, in the same manner, minds of people are drawn towards wholesome thoughts momentarily, due to the power of the Buddha.

Such reminders will add up to a more sustained way of thinking. Unless we develop this thought by frequently reminding ourselves of it, we cannot foster the nature of non-aggression which is the fundamental premise for nonviolence.