

**NONVIOLENCE EDUCATION AND  
TRAINING:  
A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK WITH  
PRACTICAL STEPS**

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**BY**

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# Nonviolence Education and Training: Conceptual Framework and Practical Steps

## Background

The last two decades have a special significance for all these who had been longing for the ushering in of an era of nonviolence (ahimsa) Nearly 2500 years after the advent of a galaxy of luminaries like Mahavira, Buddha, Jesus Christ, Confucius, Laotse and Socrates who led the human civilization to the path of ahimsa and taught that nonviolence was the basis of sustenance and survival for all living beings, we see a new wave of enthusiasm for ahimsa sweeping the globe. It is during this period that nonviolence has again attracted the attention of the people of the planet. They witnessed an unprecedented assault on its ecology, environment and above all the very sources of its sustenance. It was for the first time in the history of UN that the year 1985 was declared the International Year of Peace. UNESCO convened a conference of social scientists, physicists, anthropologists, sociologists and thinkers at Seville who deliberated over the view of some scientists that human brain was genetically and biologically so constructed that violence was inevitable. This myth was demolished by the statement released by these scientists who opined that both war and peace originate in the minds of men. The species who invented war can also invent peace. Acharya Mahapragya, the most celebrated nonviolence trainer of India, has stated in his message to this conference *that it is heartening to note that eminent thinkers are deliberating over the issues relating to peace. On the one hand violence is increasing and terror is spreading its tentacles, on the other hand efforts for universal peace are also increasing. The main reason for peacelessness is violence and its interlinks in the form of negative thoughts, negative outlook and negative thinking. What is astonishing and contradictory is that we want to establish peace without eradicating the causes that give rise to peacelessness and want to stop the tide of violence. Peacelessness is an activity and its cause is violence. Violence is also an activity which is generated by two distinct causes i.e. (i) emotion ( it is an intrinsic cause) and (ii) lack of the means of livelihood. The production of arms is one of the reasons of violence but it is not the main reason. There will always be a state of illusion till we associate peace and peacelessness with disarmament and armament.*

*The questions relating to peace and peacelessness or violence and nonviolence are linked with human mind and human consciousness. Hence it is not possible to solve the problem by mere thinking. It makes it imperative*

*for us to go in for the training of the mind and transformation of human consciousness. Both experiments and practice are required for the transformation of consciousness. In the course of our Ahimsa Yatra we attached utmost importance to imparting training in nonviolence. Our efforts yielded good results. In the system of nonviolence training the youths are trained in the techniques of transforming consciousness. It is in fact a sort of training in moral and spiritual values. Along with it the youths are also trained in the strategies to generate employment. There are reports of encouraging results. I wish that this conference may not end up in mere discussions. The delegates should also pay attention to the methods of training. I am sure this balanced approach will have an important place in the efforts to establish peace in the world.*

Acharya Mahapragya's message is soul-stirring. It makes it imperative for us to initiate steps for nonviolence education and training.

### **Dismal Scenario**

It is a matter of deep concern that the violence generated by political, religious, ethnic, economic problems and chauvinism is predominant in all parts of the world. As long as it continues, the process of the fragmentation of humanity will go on. Violence has taken the form of a monster on account of the increasing tendency among humans to establish political, religious and economic supremacy. Another important factor responsible for spurt in violence and threat to our survival is the direct or indirect human longing for nuclear armament. These flames of violence are burning families, states, nations and various sections of society. Humanity has seen many wars and atomic holocaust in just one century. The advent of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was marked by an unprecedented catastrophe of 9/11. This ghastly incident shook the whole world. It led USA and its allies to invade Afganistan and Iraq which took a heavy toll of innocent lives. Moreover terrorism has appeared in a new face. The involvement of an ordinary family in a recent bomb blast in Mumbai is an extremely dangerous phenomenon. The type of violence unleashed in Gujrat has sown the seeds of revenge in the minds of many Muslim youths. What worries us most is that while forces of violence are united, forces of nonviolence are in a state of disarray.

### **Tulsi Mahapragya Initiative**

It was in the eighties that the two most revered spiritual leaders launched a big initiative towards educating children in ahimsa. Acharya Mahapragya evolved a complete science of living for children which is

based on their theory that both science and spirituality need to be reconciled. If students are trained in such a way that they develop an outlook which is both scientific and spiritual, we can visualize a new society embedded in ahimsa. Jivan Vigyan was an endeavour to create a new world order consisting of people who will be spiritual but will also have a scientific temper. Acharya Tulsi and Acharya Mahapragya were not content with what they did. They wanted to share their vision with the world community. They first instructed their followers to organize a series of international conferences on peace and nonviolent action. From 1988 to 1997 when Acharya Tulsi left for his heavenly abode, three major international conferences were organized. The Second International Conference exclusively deliberated on nonviolence training. It was the first ever attempt to evolve a viable system to train and orient people in nonviolence. The most constructive outcome of the Second ICPNA was Rajsamand Declaration on Training in Nonviolence. I would like to reproduce excerpts from it for the benefit of the members of Nonviolence Commission.

### **Rajsamand Declaration on Training in Nonviolence**

#### **(i) Content of the Training in Nonviolence**

To train people in nonviolence, we must combine the aspects of both individual and community growth and build an integrated personality with appropriate training of hand, head and heart which will facilitate the structural and functional excellence of social development. The objective of this training is to enable all peoples to gain an insightful understanding of nonviolence and peace and the spiritual values on which they rest, equip them with skills for individual and mass nonviolent action, prepare them for democratic leadership in conflict resolution through nonviolence and help them develop attitudes for harmonious living.

#### **(ii) Strategies, tools and organization of Training in Nonviolence**

We seek participation of concerned young people from all over the world. Training in nonviolence has both its individual and social dimension. It should employ such methods as meditation to bring about a change of heart and attitude in the individuals, persuasion, personal example, willingness to suffer rather than injure another, moral uprightness, practice of sharing one's resources with the other, faith in the essential goodness of all humans and regard for the basic human rights of all. The other tools of

training may include regular classes, lectures, self-study, workshops, panel discussions, community living, games and sanitation. Training should encourage constructive programmes and social service. It should also take special care of developing the ability among the trainees to understand the pulse of the people, opinion, training in communications and in audio-visual programmes. Equally essential is the training in the organization and leadership of nonviolent action. It involves investigation of the problem, negotiation, conciliation, arbitration and other processes of conflict resolution such as mobilization of opinion, planning, preparation, use of different forms of nonviolent direct action including non-cooperation, civil disobedience and fasting etc.

### **International Dialogue on Nonviolence Education and Training**

Later in 1992 a dialogue on nonviolence education and training was organized at Ladnun. It was among others attended by Acharya Tulsi, Acharya Mahapragya, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Johan Galtung, Prof. Glenn D Paige, Ramlal Pareek and Bernard Laffayette. These eminent nonviolence experts came to the conclusion that there was unanimity that it was possible to create a universal system of educating human beings in nonviolence. The striking response of Prof. Parikh was, "It's not only possible, It's inevitable!" In answer to why it was possible, the Dalai Lama's optimism about human nature and global vision stood out. In his view, humans are "gentle and peaceful" by nature. All humans want peace. Furthermore, humanity as a whole is becoming "more mature." This is being brought about partly by instant global communications and is reflected in such things as growing global consciousness about the need to protect the environment and to avoid overpopulation. The dialogue was not a grim and cheerless experience. There was much smiling and laughter. All who know Acharya Tulsi and the Dalia Lama could expect that. An example came on the second day when Acharya Tulsi was asked to comment on the four presentations that had just been made "by three prisoners and a policemen." He burst out laughing and his infectious joyfulness lifted the spirits of everyone there.

### **Difference Between Western and Eastern Approach to Nonviolence Training**

During the last two decades many groups in US, UK and Europe are involved in nonviolence training. They organize large training camps which are attended by a sizable number of people too. But I see the difference of concepts of training among the western trainers and the eastern trainers. The

Indian trainers are more concerned about the training of attitudes. While the westerners consider nonviolence as a technique, we in India regard nonviolence as a way of life. It is an individual state of inner awakening. What is important is to synthesize the two different views.

In the west by nonviolence education they mean peace education. Any form of education that makes children peaceful and responsible citizens is what they call peace education. We believe that peace can prevail only through nonviolence and sustainable living. To learn a way of life one has to cultivate certain attitudes and form certain habits, and to learn certain techniques one has to acquire skills and master them with practice and perseverance. I would, therefore, include all these elements into my concept of nonviolence training and orientation. Nonviolence, of course, means the negation of violence. But it must be borne in mind that it is the renunciation of violence both in the method and the attitude. It applies both to the individual and society. Nonviolence means acceptance of love as an instrument to overcome evil. It is using love, rather than greed or fear, as a motivating force for change. Nonviolence is a dynamic force and effective tool of social change. It encompasses life as a whole.

### **Attitudinal Training**

Nonviolence volunteers will need courage, self-respect, patience, endurance, a sense of unity with one's own fellows, and the willingness to share with them. They will have to develop a presence of mind to cope with ever-changing situations. They must have a sense of humour which will enable them to laugh at themselves. They must be free from inhibitions and prejudices. These and many other virtues have got to be developed by a process of self-training and discipline. As most of our attitudes begin from early childhood, real education for nonviolence should begin from a very early age. But even those of us who have passed the age of childhood need not be discouraged ! There is hardly any attitude which cannot be changed or acquired by man's conscious efforts and training.

### **Training in Skills and Practical Work**

The greatest weapon in a nonviolent man's armoury is his own example. Through his deed he can obtain respect from his adversaries; he can reach the hearts of the unknown men. But the deeds may remain mere pious wishes if he is not trained adequately in constructive work. In times of relative peace a nonviolence soldier has to try to reach the hearts of various communities, especially those who are among the poorest and the lowliest.

The roots of violence lie hidden in the injustices and exploitation that are perpetrated on these sections of the community. During the time of tension or conflicts nonviolence volunteer has to be self-reliant, and self-confident. Training in skills and practical work may include a variety of activities. They will differ according to the circumstances. But, they should include the following :

- A. Activities that will lead him to self-reliance, such as ability to cook, clean, wash, sew, drive, swim etc.
- B. Any one activity that will enable him to serve the community with competence, e.g., medical practice, teaching, helping the invalids, agriculture, mechanical or industrial skills etc.
- C. Some creative activity that leads to self-expression and at the same time enables him to reach the hearts of others. Activities such as singing, painting, dramatizing, story-telling, cartoon-making etc.
- D. Manual work will give the participant an opportunity to develop his skills. Man develops his mind simultaneously with developing his hand. It will also give him a sense of feeling and touch which is so closely connected with human sympathy. It might also work as a corrective to his becoming merely sentimental about nonviolence or peace.

### **Gandhi's Views**

M.K. Gandhi was of the view that the education of the culture of heart or spirit is more important than literary education. At Tolstoy Farm in South Africa he made a series of experiments with students and strove hard to bring about a change in their attitudes. He was, however, not sure as to the tools of imparting education and training in the culture of heart. He began with recitation from the scriptures of different religions in the prayer assembly and singing of hymns. By training in nonviolence Gandhi meant the building of character.

### **'Manifesto 2000' for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence**

Realizing the gravity of the situation the Nobel Peace Laureates signed an appeal for the children of the world in 1997 and called for an international decade for peace. The UN General Assembly endorsed their appeal and passed resolutions (UN resolutions A/RES/52/13: Culture of Peace and A/RES/53/243: declaration and programme of action on a culture of peace) for peace and nonviolence to prevail on this earth.

To begin with, Nobel Peace Laureates formulated a six-point commitment which is being popularized as a MANIFESTO 2000 for a culture of peace and nonviolence. It asks the children of the world as well as their parents to pledge themselves to

**Respect all life** : *Respect the life and dignity of each human being without discrimination or prejudice;*

**Reject violence** : *Practise active nonviolence, rejecting violence in all its forms: physical, sexual, psychological, economical and social, in particular towards the most deprived and vulnerable such as children and adolescents;*

**Share with others** : *Share time and material resources in a spirit of generosity to put an end to exclusion, injustice and economic oppression;*

**Listen to understand** : *Defend freedom of expression and cultural diversity, giving preference always to dialogue and listening without engaging in fanaticism, defamation and the rejection of others;*

**Preserve the Planet** : *Promote consumer behaviour that is responsible and development practices that respect all form of life and preserve the balance of nature on the planet;*

**Rediscover solidarity** : *Contribute to the development of community, with the full participation of women and respect fro democratic principles, in order to create together new form of solidarity.*

### **Acharya Mahapragya's Course of Training in Nonviolence**

Acharya Mahapragya who is leading a six year long Ahimsa Yatra has embarked on a massive plan to train children and youths in nonviolence. A large number of training centers have mushroomed in all parts of the country and there are separate centers to train the trainers. His course consists of the following:

- (A) Training and orientation in the Conceptual Understanding of Ahimsa
  - (i) Change of heart : the Training of the Mind
  - (ii) Inculcation of cosmic values
  - (iii) Training in the Strategies for Good Health
  - (iv) Healthy Economy
  - (v) Transformation of Human Relationships



(vi) Components of training in Ahimsa

(B) Practical Training

- (i) Yogic Exercises
- (ii) Pranayam
- (iii) Meditation
- (iv) Contemplative Meditation
- (v) Kayotsarg
- (vi) Observance of Silence

(C) Training in Vocations and Employments Generation strategies

I conclude that nonviolence education is a great challenge which can be faced effectively only if we have a correct understanding of what ahimsa is and how its seeds can be sown in the minds of children. It is an imperative and we must initiate steps to train children in ahimsa to save the planet from ruination.