

Book Review

THE THIRD HARMONY: NON-VIOLENCE AND THE NEW STORY OF HUMAN NATURE

Michael N. Nagler. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Broadway, Oakland. 2020, ISBN 978-1-5230-8815-7. Paperback, pp.224,

Michael Nagler unveils Gandhiji's philosophy of non-violence and its significance in the 21st century. It helps us to contemplate what and who we are and brings out peace and harmony to a sustainable society. His knowledge of Gandhian non-violence presents the 'new story' that directs us from our personal and social development more towards assimilating the deep inner world (third harmony) for finding the peace with oneself, others and the whole society without any walls. This book is indispensable to a true passionate lover of life who wishes for social justice and a paradigm shift from inner and outer violence to more internal peace and social harmony. In the time of unprecedented and chaotic situations, this book gives hope to lead a fearless, optimistic and robust life. The objective of this book is to disseminate non-violence and practical ways to teach the values of peace.

Michael Nagler is an American academic, non-violent educator, mentor, mediator and peace activist. He is president and co-founder of the Metta Centre for Non-violence. He founded the Peace and Conflict Studies Programme and taught upper-division courses on non-violence, meditation and a seminar on the meaning of life.

The book begins with a quote of Mahatma Gandhi as "We have to grow wiser than we are today to find what beauties are hidden in human nature". Neither Gandhi nor the author agree that non-violence is non-cooperation or protest. The whole book portrays the true meaning and practice of non-violence which is inherent in human nature and calls out to take action in life through reconstruction for change. Modern education misses the components of meditation and non-violence in the educational curriculum and human beings are around the industrial revolution where the fittest survive. All of this brought out a misbelief that non-violence is not an innate quality of people. As the reader turns over the pages of this book, the conviction is mounted with strong thoughts on a meta-transformation essential for a sustainable, just and peaceful society with

hopefulness and helpfulness.

The book is divided into four parts and has seven chapters. The first part of the book includes the chapter that takes us to set the ground of harmony. On the one hand, in every sphere of life we are asked to obey the on going orders of the community to which we belong. On the other hand, maintaining calmness within and outside becomes inevitable for a sustainable, happy life. By portraying several short stories, the author enunciates that human potential could be more focused and developed to dispel the plague of violence. What we are today has a paramount role in our culture. Social, religious and educational cultures can either provide opportunities or restrict us from doing specific actions. To maintain the natural balance of the system we live in, certain traditional hegemonies and assumptions have to be challenged, discarded and replaced with useful, productive ones. We have to flip the culture and take steps to move from the underlying experiences of materialism, separateness and helpless resignation, to more towards spirituality, creativity and unity.

Nagler says that human beings' realisation of non-violence as the pervasive energy and fundamental principles that we are obliged to follow in life is not hard to respond to life situations. The self-awareness of what we do is wrong, makes us project our immoralities onto the universe by justifying them, which ultimately does not work (somewhere in our minds we know what we are doing) and makes the world to that extent a more demoralising place for everyone. There is a need for innovative practices of devotion rather than the act of destruction. We are called to the earth to do something higher than we are today. The great understanding that everyone has an equal opportunity to explore and live the fullest life can create a change in the human mind.

Chapter two asks the reader to raise the awareness level. It calls on the reader to take utmost care on the inner thoughts and external factors one is exposed to and to have more self-control on actions rather than someone else to regulate our thoughts and deeds. According to the author, this transition is already underway and the fast-changing culture rings a bell for that new world. A heart touching incident cited in chapter two, on a man getting angry to his friend and his friend's response to his yelling was, "do what you feel is right and I'll still try to love you" is an example of choosing our thoughts and external images controlled by ourselves.

Non-violence begins here. Non-violence does not mean surrendering one to the situation or trying to take away the opponent. It also does not

mean that letting things go their way is not to respond to it. A thoughtful response is demanded by non-violence. As soon as we begin to live in this new story, the faster the inner and outer conflicts can easily be avoided. Gandhi saw this as a requirement in the non-violent struggle and a foundational principle of democracy. Whenever authoritarianism peeps out, it results in unity in uniformity instead of unity in diversity, where democracy and personal freedom is absent. The author recommends that the trained person of non-violence has automatically become a reminder to another of his or her value of humanity. The road map model based on Gandhian principles described in chapter two helps one to know the usefulness of non-violence at a macro level such as peace, democracy, social justice, climate protection and a good living environment.

In addition, to cultivate inner peace and calm, five steps are depicted. Gandhi said that outward peace is difficult to develop if inner peace is a struggle. The five ladders to bring out inner peace proclaimed by the author is very practical and worthy to put into practice. Step one is to out with the old: avoid violence and vulgarity in the mass media. Mass media knowingly or unknowingly can control our inner mind and also hamper the innate creative sides. The mature use of mass media instigates inner peace. Step two is to learn all you can about non-violence. There is no bundle of techniques to practice non-violence; it only calls on us to have the ability to transform our anger into non-violent power. For any youth who are low in hope and low self-esteem towards chasing the dream of life, non-violence is the key secret to have sustainable success in life.

Step three is spiritual practices. Every major non-violent pioneer, especially Gandhi, followed meditation and related practices. Through meditation, one has to reroute the anger and fear of compassion and fairness. The daily meditation can heal the inner confronting thoughts and replenish joy and peace within so that it flows out to the rest of the people we come across. Step four is to prioritise personal relationships. In this modern, sophisticated, technologically driven world, face-to-face connections and relationships become less and less. It causes violence in society. The last and step five is be the new story. The author calls for us to understand the purpose of life (dharma) and strive for its achievement every day. The feeling of smugness is gained only when we feel that as each day passes, we get closer to our purpose. Life becomes meaningful and contributory to the world and thereby creates our story in this world.

Chapter three paints the vital role of the economy and related peace.

The author brings here charkha, Gandhi's project, which envisaged bread for poor people by building the cotton cloth industry. The credits available for small scale businesses can revitalise their financial security and revamp financial peace. The students are to be taught to experiment with meaningful and productive work, which will help them feel worthy and take away a set of skills for future accomplishments. The vital aspect of Gandhi's constructive programme was heart unity. Irrespective of one's religion, richer or poor spheres, heart unity means helping each other unitedly in all of its diversities. The author also quoted Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs where the pyramid with lower needs like food, clothing and shelter at the base and higher needs like dignity at the top. Economic theory says the unlimited wants of the people create economic problems and thereby violence. These should have to be reoriented as the meeting of inevitable needs can enhance inner peace and happiness. There are resources in the world to meet everyone's needs but not greed. Once the basic needs are met and taken care of, money and other worldly resources would not provide sustainable peace and happiness.

Part III of the book is what the change makers know. In this part, there are two chapters, chapters four and five. Chapter four echoes the examples of spiritual, historical incidents and their connection to maintain non-violence. Each of the events' presents an angle that proclaims the vital role of non-violence and peace. The author presents Saint Augustine's life and attempts to vocalise that human beings' endless search after material things never makes them peaceful and happy in life. Although it is the world of competition and violence all around us, few amongst us with a clear vision of life become role models by proclaiming that these are not an essential, incurable feature of human life. The world with mounting borders and increasing separations result in violence in the society, which are not elements for a long-lasting contented and peaceful life. The real power of non-violence relies on inner truth. Adherence to truth is the principle of all non-violent responses in any situation.

We all have the freedom to act in any situation in any way we want and therefore a responsible, thoughtful action only brings peace and joy. Thus, the mastery of thoughts is paramount in leading a harmonious life. When thoughts are voiced through words in a mature way the value of non-violence is practiced. Violence always backfires, but non-violence pulls us forward towards recognition and rewards. Gandhi's non-violent leadership paradigm demands from us to own the leadership capacity, which is deep-rooted in

non-violence.

A need for a disciplined mind unlocks the greater good in life and constant happiness forever, which cannot be brought by any other valuables. Thoughts come from the viewing of any particular action and the negative thoughts need to be controlled in our mind and the outward response to it must be mature and peace instigating. This needs daily meditation practices to transform the deep intensive negative thoughts into a pacifying response to the respective situations. The author suggests training for basic meditation to maintain peace and harmony in life. Nagler also takes the reader to a contemplative state asking a few significant questions.

According to the author, the first harmony is “we are stardust”, the second harmony is “we are animals” and the third harmony is “we are non-violent.” The essentials needed for non-violence rely on self-awareness and love which are the key to development.

Chapter five gives us a glimpse of how the tradition is consistent with science. The author argues that Gandhi always stood for India’s spiritual tradition and had a scientific philosophy. One way, science is telling the story of peace, said Nagler . In the mirror of science, we can see the same and control our destiny. The unused hidden resources within us are deeply connected and create a web of relationships which are essential for a foundation of society.

The final and Part IV presents chapters six and seven. Chapter six, *Finishing the Job*, began with Gandhi’s quote as “things of fundamental importance to the people are not secured by reason alone. If you want something significant to be done, you must not merely satisfy the reason, you must move the heart also”. As Gandhi said, non-violence can shake the world permanently, whereas anger and violence could not change anything permanently. The response to opponents should be more in the way of maintaining calmness as they are human beings. The integration of body, mind and spirit are the truly non-violent states where one gets control over the situation. The assumption stands that violence can create immediate long-lasting results. Ultimately it does not change the heart and minds but it hardens them. Authoritarianism develops violence, but non-violence triggers democracy, dignity and worth of human beings. Satyagraha is a non-violent act as, according to Gandhi, it does not suppress the mind with negative energy. The true understanding of non-violence is essential while we practice it in life. Non-violence does not call forth the opponent, but it channelises the negative thoughts and reinterprets them to maintain

a sustainable peace with the opponent. Non-violence tries to develop a balanced person who has control over the situations and inner thoughts.

According to the author, the main two reasons for non-violence as the central theme are that it completes the story and it is the right tool for the job. In our culture it is needed as an inevitable part to incorporate non-violence and only then does the life story become meaningful and long-lasting. The act of compassion and the concern of others and democracy are the qualities of non-violence which can stand as the right tools for the job. The learning of how to tackle anger is the most significant life skill to be gained to shine in any field by using natural creativity and innovation.

Chapter seven demands us reject revenge, aggression and hegemony towards more love, compassion and peace. When work is resistance, the development of skills to turn some of the negatives into one's advantage can surge non-violent behaviour. The future-oriented engagements always help one to be optimistic, hopeful and worthy. Three principles of effective action are finding out the real opponents needs without compromising your own. Never allow the heat of conflict to raise up and take charge of the situation, non-violence strategies can bring ultimate peace and effective action. Second, we must keep three things always in mind: the humanity of our opponent, the long term and the big picture. The long term view can shift the positive power and the big picture of conversation with the opponent results in not feeling threatened by the opponent in the environment anymore. Third, we need to makefull use of the training, strategic intelligence, discipline and everything else we have learned.

Non-violence is the only strategy to take towards the great and revolutionary change in the world view. Nagler refers to this as the "third harmony," which is the harmony within and among us to resolve the crisis of the people. The author could successfully take the reader from raising awareness of non-violence towards a convenient way to do action, making this book a unique one. There are problems and negativity in all the spheres and this book trains the reader with useful tips on how to become a productive human being by maintaining non-violence.

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