

Non-Violence in Today's World
With Lord Bhikhu Parekh, Sister Jayanti and Emily Buchanan with Arnold Desser
At Global Co-operation House, 7pm, 6th September 2018
Report

"At the centre of non-violence stands the principle of love". Swami Vivekananda.

"When there is patience there is peace, when there is peace there is love. This makes everything possible."
Dadi Janki

Over 100 people attended this event, with 120 logged on to the webcast. After a beautiful slide show of people over the ages associated with non-violence and their words on the topic, Arnold Desser welcomed everyone to the event and to the Brahma Kumaris. He shared how, *"Each time I meditate it contributes to my growth and development and sense of peace"* and how the BK's support non-violence through the deepest topic of peace. He commented how, as a child, his vision of non-violence was the *"hear no evil, speak no evil and see no evil"* phrase – *"and so I connected evil to the senses"*. Non-violence, he said, is a wonderful concept. Yet the more we investigate it, the more complex and paradoxical it appears. He hoped the speakers would make clear some of the ideas on this topic. He introduced them all: Lord Bhikhu Parekh, an eminent academic, political theorist, Emeritus Professor of University of Westminster and former Chair of the Committee on Multi-ethnic Britain; Sister Jayanti, European Director of the BK's and interviewing them former BBC journalist and presenter, Emily Buchanan.



Emily started by honouring Mahatma Gandhi who is often seen as representing non-violence. She asked Lord Parekh, who has written three books on Gandhi, why this was so important to him. Lord Parekh quickly clarified that Gandhiji was interested in *'Ahimsa'*, which he translated as: active love with the wish not to be a source of pain for anyone. This is very different from *'non-violence'*, which is *'abstaining from causing harm'*. Truth was what he was seeking and non-violence was the means to get there. This includes non-violent thinking and feeling. Judging others with haste could be thought of as violent thinking, for example. This was his *'religion'* and he had to live, eat, sleep, walk, dress at every moment according to this. Lord Parekh elucidated on how Gandhi thought of God as energy, power (shakti) and consciousness and his understanding how to plug into this: how to bring it into his life and let this energy work miracles.

Sister Jayanti brought everyone's attention to a contemporary of Gandhiji, Brahma Baba, who was working and living at the same time, and who, she observed, moved with the principle of truth and non-violence in all areas of his life. For him it was not a political tool, but a way to come to a state of total enlightenment and relationship with The Divine. She also told everyone how, between 1937 and 1951, the community of 300, led by Brahma Baba, became a living experiment. They showed the practical form of how to live a life based on non-violence and the spiritual understanding of each other as a soul. She shared how these people, mainly women, became spiritually empowered. They were then able to go out the length and breadth of India, sharing these spiritual teachings with ordinary people, in a simple and practical way.

Emily noted that the source of non-violence has often been traced to India and Lord Parekh commented that Gandhiji would have said that non-violence is a way to realise truth. Emily developed the conversation further, saying that non-violence is often seen as non-action. Lord Parekh made the point that the concept of non-violence is not new: "*Christ said 'Turn the other cheek'*". It was just that Gandhi made it politically effective and involved the whole community. Emily asked the speakers if they felt today's world could throw up another Gandhi figure; one who could impact this age of social technology and post truth news? Everyone agreed that this might not be possible and that they would probably be "nipped in the bud" by all the forces working today: Look what happened to Martin Luther King.

However, Sister Jayanti, with conviction, expressed that at this moment in time, "*it is not one individual who can bring about transformation. Yet with the enhanced systems of communication that are available at this time, a movement of people who truly wish inner peace and true non-violence could enable a global community of non-violence to develop; this could reach a critical mass which could tip the majority*". She shared how we are seeing this, with people turning away from all forms of violence towards animals, moving to a plant-based diet: people are becoming aware of the effects of climate change and making lifestyle changes, etc.

Emily remarked that this can seem threatening to governments. Sister Jayanti felt that if one's motive is to generate internal peace for the self and those around, then there is no political motive and this is not a force that threatens. Lord Parekh felt this movement requires minds who seek to understand. It requires both organisational skills and intellectual skills. It does not need political figures who play on people's insecurities, as we see happening today.

Sister Jayanti again brought up the example of Brahma Baba, who led the spiritual movement known as the Brahma Kumaris, until 1969. It now exists in over 110 countries and involves peoples from all backgrounds. This movement is based on re-developing, or a return to experiencing and expressing, the inherent value within the self. The message is every bit as relevant today as it was in the 1930's. "*It is a simple and serious message because, as we hold a vision of a better world then we need to come together, because each human being actually sits in the same boat here on this planet*". There is the recognition that goodness is the original quality of every human being. Through a practice of meditation and silent reflection, we can connect with this and nurture it. This vision has the power to motivate and generate energy within people when they feel this understanding resonates with their own inner world.

Emily brought everyone's attention back to the opposite reality we are seeing increasingly in the world today: wars and multiplying people without homes and on the move. The rise of the far right in many countries is ongoing - including now Germany - so how can this beautiful vision be big enough to create a different movement? Sister Jayanti affirmed that this movement has already started: with people across the planet taking up a meditation practice in some form or another, people interested in holistic living and their environment and what action they can take to transform the problems the world is facing. Many things are happening where the minority could become the tipping point and create the transformation. Yet, Lord Parekh commented that we also see an apathy in today's world. He mentioned how in the 1970's there was the Commission for Racial Equality and yet this has gone off the boil and a lot more needs to be done to

ensure these issues are addressed. Emily said that, *“There’s not a lot of fired-up leadership in the political environment”* today, so how do we give people hope, when systemically we are seeing cruelty - for example refugees not being allowed to work and then being criminalised? Lord Parekh said that there appeared to be no real desire for change as the middle classes are, as he called it, *“privatised”* - caught up in their own small problems; politicians are doing their jobs for their own means not for the good of the country, whilst many people are quietly suffering in society as they are struggling in a system that is deaf to their needs. He went on to say: *“Civil servants in today’s world are trained to be impersonal and at times brutal, which makes the whole system de-humanising - we saw this with the Windrush scandal, for example.”*

Sister Jayanti added that it is because human beings have lost contact with their internal value and that of others. *“We can create a different wave as we start allowing our conscience to speak to us. The state of helplessness paralyzes us and we feel as though we cannot do anything. Yet as soon as we realise our own power as an individual, we see possibility. This will have an impact, create a wave and give permission for others to do so as well. It is recognising our own greatness that allows us to shine and others too, as Nelson Mandela stated. There must be individuals who come to this awareness and are ready are to do something.”* It is the age of robots and human beings are treated like them. Yet we can come alive and take the step. Lord Parekh wondered how we combine the creativity of the individual with the capacity of the system. If I want to make a change, how can I help? Emily’s comment was: *Politicians say they will empower individuals yet we have ended up with systems which disempower’*. Sister Jayanti explained how true empowerment is understanding that we are the spark of divinity, the inner being, that can awaken and take up new possibilities.

Lord Parekh did ask if human beings were somehow genetically coded to violence, as every government has failed to halt the pandemic of violence that spins in the minds of the young and old alike and across the media. Sister Jayanti stated her belief that the original state of the human spirit is with what feels natural and comfortable: peace, love and goodness. She concluded that negativity arises from not understanding who I really am, from the amnesia that has grown from identifying with our skin (our bodies). *“The awareness of the feeling of peace within can start this journey to calm and contentment and this allows ‘Ahimsa’ - I want all beings to flourish”*.

Arnold beautifully summarised the conversation, extending thanks to all three speakers for such a riveting conversation for our times.

Sister Jayanti closed the evening with a meditation on treading a new path of truth, of non-violence, peace, love and respect; recognising that these qualities all lie deep within the self.

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