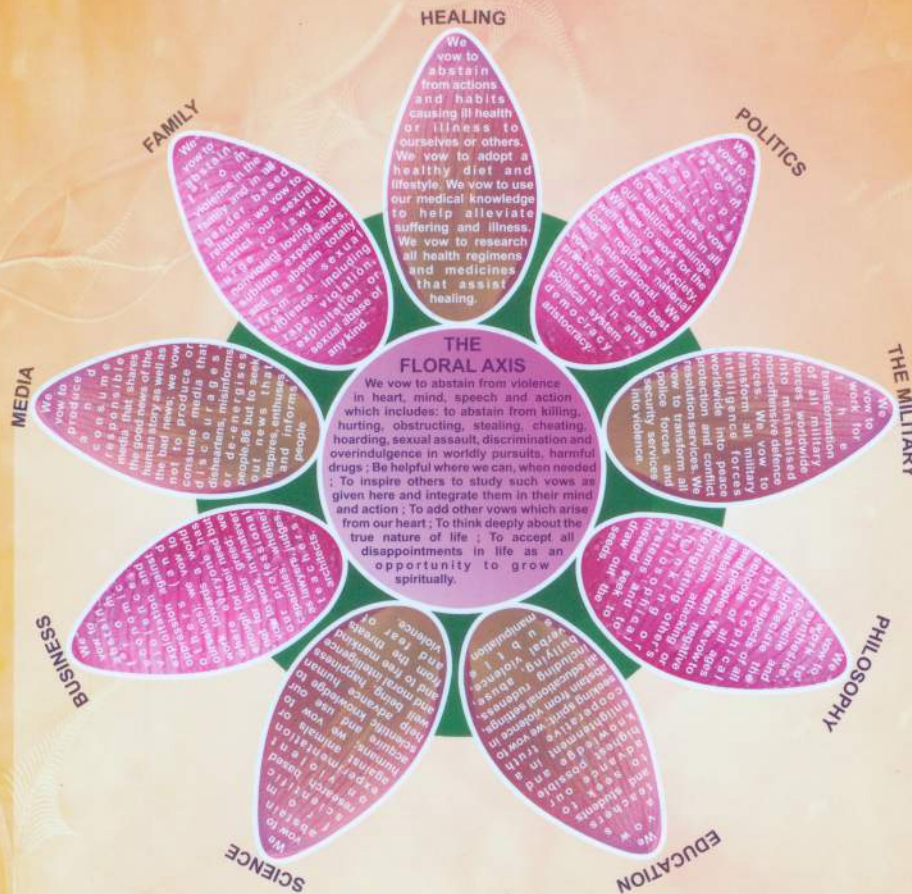


# Towards a Nonviolent Future

Seeking Realistic Models of Peaceful Co-existence and Sustainability



8<sup>th</sup> INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

ON

PEACE AND NONVIOLENT ACTION

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PROCEEDINGS AND PRESENTATIONS



ANUVIBHA

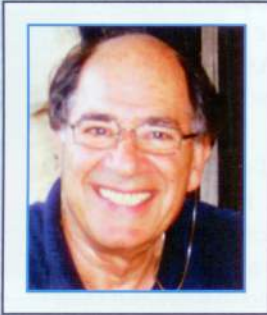
अणुव्रत विश्व भारती (अणुविभा)

ANUVRAT GLOBAL ORGANIZATION (ANUVIBHA)

Jaipur - Rajsamand (Raj.) INDIA

## Peace : Dream or Necessity?

Dr. Michael Ben-Eli



The world is full of strife. Everywhere one looks, it seems, violence reigns: in the news and entertainment media, in the streets, in relations between individuals, between nations and between religious and ethnic groups. As a whole, humanity inflicts alarming violence on the planet, its very home.

History itself is often taught as a never-ending sequence of conflicts, a constant struggle between groups, ambitious rulers and competing empires. From ancient epics to Homeric classics and to many current national icons, an ethos glorifying military might has been reinforced and passed on as an inspirational, rallying factor, thus perpetuating war mentality.

Yet, from the dawn of written record we find consistent evidence for humanity's deep yearning for peace. Throughout the ages, in all parts of the world and in all types of social groupings, humans have articulated powerful visions of peace. Some have come down to us as the most compelling, most poetic expressions of the human spirit. Isaiah's ancient verse still resonates most powerfully: "In that day the wolf and the lamb will live together, the leopard will lie down with the baby goat. The calf and the yearling will be safe with the lion, and a little child will lead them all."

Is peace then merely an idealistic fantasy or is it a realistic proposition? Is it forever a fleeting mirage or could it be established as an everlasting, possibility? The practical individual will tell you not to waste your time with childish dreams; the cynic will insist that it is fundamentally "human nature" which perpetually denies the possibility. Yet, new findings in the neurological sciences suggest that the human nervous system is more plastic than heretofore believed. It seems that the existing neural circuits conditioned by past experiences that are responsible for the familiar flight and fight behavior can be rewired to favor higher centers of the brain, those that regulate tolerance, compassion, empathy, and love.

These same findings suggest that spiritual practices, both physical and mental, as advanced by all wisdom traditions, offer the necessary formulae for training our nervous system to neutralize aggressive more primitive types of behavior and seek a higher ground. This is remarkably good news. It means that a complete conversion to enlightened conduct is in principle possible for all humans. Contrary to the conventional view which tends to discount the extent of human potential, enlightenment, regarded as an exceptional condition may still become the universal norm.

Either way, in the context of the broad sustainability challenges now confronting humanity, peace, as an underlying planetary condition, obtains a new and urgent significance. The specter of nine billion people employing old aggression-driven strategies in a desperate struggle over shrinking resources and in an increasingly compromised environment is an apocalyptic nightmare. We would be wise to make every effort to avoid this ominous scenario.

The challenge of establishing sustainability as the organizing principle of a new

planetary civilization and transforming world society to a peaceful sustainable basis is the most significant challenge of our time. This challenge is unprecedented in scope. It calls for a new vision accounting for the whole planet and all of human kind. It will require all Earthians to come together and to jointly reinvent and institute a working new world order that will guarantee the peace, tranquility and welfare of all.

In addressing this epochal global project the old dichotomy of right versus might, idealism or pragmatic realism, power or principle will have to give way to a fresh perspective. The extremes will have to converge combining moral rectitude with a viable underlying structure. Old geopolitical strategies, driven by competing self interests, with their secretive schemes and treacherous maneuverings will have to give way to new institutional arrangements, truly optimizing for the whole and for all.

A new world order establishing a planetary commonwealth with its underlying institutional

arrangements will need to be anchored by universal ethical principles. As a whole, a new organizational configuration supporting a peaceful planetary civilization will have to be designed to manifest a soaring collective vision. It will need to be based on ethics as distinct from an expedient foundation, and rely on individuals' self-discipline, and an effective, democratic, universal rule of law.

The sustainability principles I developed to underpin the work of The Sustainability Laboratory (see discussion elsewhere in this volume) offer a guiding framework for the necessary change and the fundamental tenets of the Anuvrat movement define the necessary steps, simple steps, that were each of us to take them, the promise of universal peace could be fulfilled.

Benjamin Franklin is said to have once shrewdly observed that there never was a good war or a bad peace. In our own time and at this juncture of our planet's evolution, peace can no longer be regarded as a distant promise. It is the most urgent, vital necessity.

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*Dr. Michael Ben Eli is the founder of the Sustainability Laboratory New York established in order to develop and demonstrate breakthrough approaches to sustainability practices. He is a pioneering researcher and thinker in the realm of sustainability and he lives in New York.*

*Acharya Shree Tulsi, together with his monks and nuns, is playing an important role in creating a climate of morality. This work of his is in keeping with the lofty traditions of Indian culture. Today we are in need of a strong society based on the principles of unity, morality and secularism. For this it is necessary for our young men and women to be people of character so that they may be able to fight the moral evils and eradicate them. Anuvrat is an elixir which can help everyone acquire the highest purity. It is a spiritual instrument for attaining samadhi (the state of total peace and cessation of consciousness). It is a pathway leading to the royal road. The work that has been done or is being done by the Anuvrat Movement is not only laudable but also a source of joy.*

**Indira Gandhi**

*Former Prime Minister of India*