

II-3. Live, Let Live, and Thrive

The lamb brought to alter for slaughter eats the leaf garland with which it is decorated. The frog caught in the mouth of the snake desired to swallow the fly flying near its mouth. The man condemned to die drinks milk and ghee. When they see serpent carved in stone they pour milk on it. If a real serpent comes they say, Kill, Kill. To the servant of the god who could eat if served they say, Go-away, Go-away. But to the image of god which can not eat they offer dishes of food. In such activities they revealed no uncertainty of their own correctness. Yet soon they ceased to listen to each other. Such is our life.

- An ancient poem

Reality-based approaches to improve human condition often encounter the impasse if contradictions are heeded and inconsistencies are not seen. Mahaveer and Buddha argued that the prudent course of action even under such conditions is to avoid irreversible actions, and then think. Violence against the living forms denies survival whereas wishful representations violate reality. Although intuitive, their approach stands alone among the traditions in asserting that (a) all humans can understand their world, and (b) all living beings deserve to live and thrive. This reality-based approach has deep secular basis for probing pithy issues of human condition.

A compassionate understanding of the living world is the basis for sustainability for all. Contrast *Live and let Live* against *Kill or Get-killed*. For harmony between self and non-self it is necessary to recognize survival instincts of all including their

needs, drives, desires, and aspirations for individual and social existence. It is the only acceptable end-point for conflict-resolution. As we know now, 600 years before Christ, Mahaveer (-599 to -527c) and Buddh (-550 to -480c) crystallized such secular ideas in the Ganga Valley.

Historical Digressions and Detours

1. Around 600 BCE about 4000 miles north-west of the Ganga valley, Thales a Phoenician started the Greek tradition of thought. He wrote nothing. Others mention that Thales proposed that new knowledge is developed from testable information, and not as wisdom or omniscience. For example, Thales noticed that the mast of ships going away from port is last to disappear from sight. As also noticed by many others the mast of the incoming ship is seen first. However, Thales was first to assert that this phenomenon is because the surface of the Earth is spherically curved. He went on to develop other ideas of astronomy and physics.

2. Information about the incoming ships is critical for businesses. Arrival of new merchandise was critical for the price fluctuations. In 1600 CE, a Dutch lens maker applied for a patent for telescope. A friar communicated the idea of a "tube with lenses" to Galileo (1564-1642). Based on this he ground his own lenses and designed a 30x telescope. The news of its potential use arrived at the Italian port. Galileo sold the device to the merchants. However, he himself tuned it to view moon and distant planets. He concluded that such heavenly bodies were not much different than the surface of the Earth.

3. In 640 CE the Arabian conqueror Amru burnt down the biggest library ever assembled after burning of the library in Alexandria a few centuries before. He did so at the following advice of his

spiritual leader Caliph Omar: "If the books contain anything of truth, we have received from God a better guide. If they contain falsehood, we are well rid of them." (According to Historian Ibn Khaldun).

4. History repeated itself when in 1605 Rosicrucians claimed that they have the book-of-all-books. Christian church went on unparalleled rampage after that. They later discovered that the book has been misplaced. Less violent modern believers of unification look for a single set of equations, based on Theory of Everything, from which all else springs. Meanwhile, other mortals keep on asking have they done it? Is the end in sight?

Mahaveer built his arguments with the insight that doubt (*syad*) is intrinsic in individual and social perceptions. It is reduced in stages through criteria-based search rooted in the reality-based (*sat*) practices and behaviors. Since *no man is an island*, we benefit if we rely on the continuity and plurality of thought that emerges from feed-back and interactions that overcome human limitations. The search is likely to succeed if it is not rooted in misperceptions and contradictions in convictions of faith or unsubstantiated beliefs based on un-tested assumptions.

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