

# Absence of Jealousy – The Test of Non-Violence

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This article appeared as the Editorial in the October, 2011 issue of [Vedanta Kesari](#).

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## Non-violence

Non-violence is the basis of all virtues. *Ahimsa paramo dharmah*—“Non-violence is the highest form of righteousness,” says the *Mahabharata*. Non-violence, or not harming anyone in thought, word and deed, is the highest value.

In terms of practice of non-violence, one finds, in the order of complexity, practice of non-violence in action somewhat easier. Further, practice of non-violence in our speech is more tedious and harder to practice. Harsh words, caustic remarks, pinching comments and sharp tongue, we all have our troubles with practicing non-violence in speech.

But the most difficult of all is the practice of non-violence in thoughts, and emotions. Not thinking of negative, non-violent thoughts and not harboring violent feelings towards others is indeed most challenging of all. It is so because as the things become subtler, they progressively become difficult to grasp and handle. Thoughts are not easily “visible” to us and hence we do not know what kind of thoughts (or motives and impulses) are goading us. We do not, hence, know what is happening in our *own* minds!

While we can talk of or write about nonviolence, thinking, feeling and “doing” nonviolence is not easy. It requires much understanding and courage to do so. Now, how do we know if we are really “thinking” nonviolence? The best way is to check if we are free from jealousy. Says Swami Vivekananda,

*The test of ahimsa is absence of jealousy. Any man may do a good deed or make a good gift on the spur of the moment or under the pressure of some superstition or priestcraft; but the real lover of mankind is he who is jealous of none. The so-called great men of the world may all be seen to become jealous of each other for a small name, for a little fame, and for a few bits of gold. So long as this jealousy exists in a heart, it is far away from the perfection of ahimsa. The cow does not eat meat, nor does the sheep. Are they great Yogis, great non-injurers (ahimsakas)? Any fool may abstain from eating this or that; surely that gives him no more distinction than to herbivorous animals. The man who will mercilessly cheat widows and orphans and do the vilest*

*deed for money is worse than any brute even if he lives entirely on grass. The man whose heart never cherishes even the thought of injury to anyone, who rejoices at the prosperity of even his greatest enemy, that man is the bhakta, he is the Yogi, he is the guru of all. . . . [Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, 3:67-68]*

This, then, is the highest and the most genuine way to know if we are truly seekers of spiritual life and are non-violent: freedom from jealousy and envy. In other words, we have to go deeper and reach the very core of our thoughts to know if we are truly practicing non-violence.

## Understanding Jealousy

The term jealousy comes from the Greek word *zelos*, connoting “to boil” or “to ferment.” In a positive sense, it could mean “emulation, zeal.” So, *zelos* can be used to mean either. Again, often the color green is associated with jealousy and envy, from which the expressions “green with envy,” and “green-eyed monster” are derived. When one is infected by the jealousy-bug, one is supposed to have been “bitten by the green-eyed monster.”

Jealousy is an emotion, intense and overwhelming, that is associated with the loss or possible loss of something. It can be, thus, seen or experienced in family circles, among siblings, at workplace, in inter-personal relationships and even between friends. It is, in a way, present all over our personal and collective lives.

Jealousy leads to rivalry. Family jealousy, for example, can affect all ages and different members of family. Jealousy can arise from lack of attention from a specific member in the family. More attention towards another member of the family can cause jealousy. Or there can be jealousy between colleagues holding similar job positions. If one worker receives positive opinion from the boss while the other employee feels like he deserved that, jealousy can arise. The attention received towards one employee, and not the other, may cause jealousy. The same holds good, in some measure or the other, in other areas of life such as workings of a group or in friendship.

Comparison and competition are two things that are at the core of jealousy. A jealous person invariably compares himself or his situation with someone whom he thinks is better placed or is being favored—and he feels it is unfair to him. He or she feels that he or she deserves a better deal. There is a feeling of lack, some kind of emptiness caused by the other person who, according to the victim of jealousy, has somehow usurped what was rightfully his or hers. Jealousy leads to violence, in some form or the other. For, the jealous person wishes to set right the matter or “square the account” and for that violence is the

means. Violence can be physical or verbal or by creating unfavorable circumstances. A jealous person justifies his stand and feels glad when the person being jealous of suffers a loss or is pained.

When a person is seized with a feeling of discontent or covetousness with regard to another's advantages, success, possessions, position and so on, his thinking becomes muddled and confused. In that state, one may feel anguish and resentment and develop grudge and ill-will. In a slight difference in shades of meaning between jealousy and envy, envy may be just a desire, a form of covetousness but jealousy generally leads to some form of violence. Envy may result from low self-image or self-esteem but jealousy is more active and goads one to "do something."

### Jealousy is Powerful

Obviously, jealousy is a negative emotion. While, at times, envy may make a person work harder to do better, it is surely a negative and debasing tendency making the mind restless and polluted. Some of the most tragic incidents of history owe their origin to this emotion. The Mahabharata, the mighty epic story of great war between Kauravas and Pandavas, is rooted in the envy and jealousy of Kauravas against their kin, the Pandavas. Such wars continue to be fought even today, in different settings and smaller scales, with different characters and roles being played!

Swami Vivekananda called jealousy to be the chief characteristic of slaves. He said, Jealousy is the root of all evil, and a most difficult thing to conquer. [CW, 4:6]

A slave is one who has been deprived freedom to act or think and feels helpless. He is beggarly and mean. Swamiji rightly said,

*That jealousy, that absence of conjoint action is the very nature of enslaved nations. But we must try to shake it off. The terrible jealousy is characteristic of us. . . . You will be convinced of this if you visit some other countries. Our fellows in this respect are the enfranchised negroes of this country—if but one amongst them rises to greatness, all the others would at once set themselves against him and try to level him down by making a common cause with the whites. . . .* [CW, 6:286]

It has been said, in a humorous manner, that slaves are like crabs. If you put crabs in an open basket, be assured that they will not be able to climb out. For the simple reason, that as soon as one of them rises up, the others pull it down. Hence, all crabs, despite their struggles to come out, remain where they are.

So are the men with jealous hearts. They do not want anyone to progress, and busy themselves with pulling down others!

## Overcoming Jealousy

Jealousy is characterized by a kind of mental burning which makes the jealous person uncomfortable. He feels weak and empty, comparing himself to someone who has something or is likely to have something that he himself wanted. In other words, it is desire, greed, endless greed, that is at the root of jealousy.

And it is jealousy that kills all the nobility and humanity in the heart of the sufferer.

Of course, one needs to introspect and learn to think in a larger perspective. In this context, the following counsel may be helpful:

*Most people are deeply scripted in what I call the Scarcity Mentality. They see life as having only so much, as though there were only one pie out there. And if someone were to get a big piece of the pie, it would be less for everybody else. The Scarcity Mentality is the zero-sum paradigm of life.*

*People with a Scarcity Mentality have a very difficult time sharing recognition and credit, power or profit—even with those who help in the production. They also have a very hard time being genuinely happy for the successes of other people—even, and sometimes especially, members of their own family or close friends and associates. It's almost as if something is being taken from them when someone else receives special recognition or windfall gain or has remarkable success or achievement.*

*Although they might verbally express happiness for others' success, inwardly they are eating their hearts out. Their sense of worth comes from being compared, and someone else's success, to some degree, means their failure. . . Often, people with Scarcity mentality harbor secret hopes that others might suffer misfortune—not terrible misfortune, but acceptable misfortune that would keep them "in their place." They're always comparing, always competing. They give their energies to possessing things or other people in order to increase their sense of worth. . . It's difficult for people with a Scarcity Mentality to be members of complementary team. They look on differences as signs of insubordination and disloyalty.*

*The Abundance Mentality, on the other hand, flows out of a deep inner sense of personal worth and security. It is the paradigm that there is plenty out there*

*and enough to spare for everybody. It results in sharing of prestige, of recognition, of profits, of decision making. It opens possibilities, options, alternatives, and creativity. The Abundance mentality takes the personal joy, satisfaction, and fulfillment . . . [and] recognizes the unlimited possibilities for positive interactive growth and development.*

*Public Victory does not mean victory over other people. It means success in effective interaction that brings mutually beneficial results to everyone involved. Public Victory means working together, communicating together, making things happen together, that even the same people couldn't make happen by working independently. And Public Victory is an outgrowth of the Abundance Mentality paradigm. [The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, Stephen Covey, Pp. 219-220]*

From the viewpoint of Vedanta, jealousy comes from identifying ourselves with our lower self. It comes from attachment to sensory enjoyments and desire for the fruits of actions. Jealousy is a trait of unfulfilled mind, an empty life and a lack of proper understanding.

Instead of thinking of what one does not have, one should learn to think of what one has. One should develop “an abundant mentality” instead of being consumed by “scarcity mentality.” One of the best ways is to practice generosity and desist from making any comparisons and uncharitable comments about others' progress.

Let us remember Swamiji's words,

*If all understand one day for one minute that one cannot become great by the mere wish, that he only rises whom He [God] raises, and he falls whom He brings down, then all trouble is at an end. But there is that egotism—hollow in itself, and without the power to move a finger: how ludicrous of it to say, “I won't let anyone rise!” That jealousy, that absence of conjoint action is the very nature of enslaved nations. But we must try to shake it off. [CW, 6:285]*

Deriving inspiration from others' progress and achievement is quite a helpful way of looking at them, but trying to pull down others only injures us in the long run. Jealousy is a sign of morally and spiritually sick mind. It bespeaks of immaturity and lack of understanding of our divine nature, the atman within, which is ever fulfilled and ever content. Whether one follows the path of devotion or self-analysis or meditation or selfless action, getting rid of jealousy is essential to living higher life.

Jealousy makes one narrow-minded and intolerant. One loses sight of the real purpose of human life, that of Self-realization. Just as a tree does not remain

green if in the hollow of its trunk fire is placed, so also there cannot be any joy and peace in life if the heart of a person is stung by the “green-eyed monster.” Peace means putting off the burning of blaze of jealousy with the cool waters of contentment and right understanding. No wonder, Patanjali has prescribed, among the five *niyamas*, *santosh*a or contentment as one of the requirements for the practice of meditation.

## Conclusion

Quoting the *Bhagavad Gita* (12th chapter) in explaining the state of mind of a perfectly matured mind, Swami Vivekananda said,

*He who hates none, who is the friend of all, who is merciful to all, who has nothing of his own, who is free from egoism, who is even-minded in pain and pleasure, who is forbearing, who is always satisfied, who works always in Yoga, whose self has become controlled, whose will is firm, whose mind and intellect are given up unto Me, such a one is My beloved Bhakta. From whom comes no disturbance, who cannot be disturbed by others, who is free from joy, anger, fear, and anxiety, such a one is My beloved. He who does not depend on anything, who is pure and active, who does not care whether good comes or evil, and never becomes miserable, who has given up all efforts for himself; who is the same in praise or in blame, with a silent, thoughtful mind, blessed with what little comes in his way, homeless, for the whole world is his home, and who is steady in his ideas, such a one is my beloved bhakta. [CW 1:193]*

This is the ideal of a man free from all jealousy, once and for all.