

Fever in the World of the Mind

Unique Dimensions of Human Conflict and Violence*

H. B. Danesh and R. P. Danesh

Introduction

In its 28 July 2000 edition, the prestigious journal *Science*¹ reviewed some of the most current and widely accepted theories and discourse on the causes and prevention of violence. The editorial, “Violence: A New Frontier for Scientific Research,” refers to the role of guns, drugs (particularly crack cocaine), and the state of economy as the main causes for the rise of interpersonal violence in the United States of America in the mid-1980s and its subsequent decline in the 1990s. The editorial also refers to the need for research in “the biological underpinnings of individual violent behavior,” “parenting styles,” community and environmental attitudes toward violence, and “situational dynamics” such as gun possession (545). The editorial by Alfred Blumstein, professor of public policy and management at Carnegie Mellon University, is an accurate reflection of the current perspectives on violence. It is at once broad but not comprehensive, informative but not helpful, and promising but not hopeful.

The introduction to the special section on violence begins with a statement that in our view fully reflects the most commonly accepted views on both the nature and causes of human violence. It reads: “From the neighborhood bully berating a meek classmate to the

*This paper is an edited version of a chapter in a forthcoming book on conflict resolution by H.B. Danesh and R.P. Danesh. Dr. H.B. Danesh is the rector of Landegg Academy, Switzerland, and professor of psychology and conflict resolution. He is the primary author of this chapter. Mr. Roshan Danesh is chairman of the Department of Conflict Resolution of Landegg Academy and a SJD candidate at Harvard University.

rhesus macaque screaming at a rival, displays of aggression are the weapon of choice throughout the animal kingdom for asserting dominance, challenging a higher ranking individual, or laying claim to food, water, and other resources” (569). This statement makes a number of assumptions as though they were proven facts. It assumes that human aggression has the same underlying factors, as does animal aggression. It sees aggression as a necessary and unavoidable dimension of human life. It asserts that the purpose of human aggression, like that of the rhesus macaque’s, is to establish dominance over others, to win victory over competitors, and to obtain the requisites for survival and pleasure. The statement also indirectly asserts that these issues—dominance, victory, survival, and pleasure—are the primary objectives of human life, just as they are for of all other living organisms.

As will be shown, this approach to understanding human aggression and violence ignores some important unique aspects of our humanness and as a result is at best an inadequate framework for understanding the nature and dynamics of human violence. We argue that although human violence has biological, psychological, and social dimensions, it is in fact a uniquely human response to the dynamics and processes of pathologic human development along the parameters of consciousness, self-awareness, purpose, and transcendence. In other words, human violence is an indicator of the spiritual as well as biological and psychosocial conditions of the individual and society alike. In fact, a close review of the main research findings about human violence point in the direction of spirituality—a dimension of human reality that has been forcefully and completely rejected by all dominant schools of psychology since the beginning of the twentieth century.

For the purposes of this paper, we will confine ourselves to the current research findings in the special edition of *Science* on violence. Among the most emphasized research studies on violence are those that endeavour to understand the biological roots of violence.

¹ *Science* 289, no.5479 (2000): 497–684. All subsequent parenthetical page references in the introduction are to this issue of *Science*.

This body of research deals with experiments on animals, study of the biochemistry and anatomy of the brain, and the effect of various drugs on the work of the brain as these relate to violence. The news-style article “Searching for the Mark of Cain” by Martin Enserink (575–79) begins with a report on various studies focused on the impact of alcohol on mice and the observation that 25% of inebriated mice become violent. The thinking behind such research, according to Klaus Miczek of Tufts University, is that such studies “are highly relevant to a society in which alcohol figures in two out of every three violent crimes” (575). However, the researcher does not take into consideration the underlying psychological, social, biological, moral, and spiritual causes of alcohol consumption. The article also refers to research performed on the relationship between violence and serotonin, the Y chromosome, and the hypothalamus respectively. Research has demonstrated that serotonin, a neurotransmitter, plays a significant role in the development of a number of conditions such as violence, depression, and eating disorders. The article points out that “[n]umerous studies have found that aggressive animals, including humans, on average have lower levels of a serotonin metabolite—which is thought to reflect lower serotonin levels in the brain—in their cerebrospinal fluid (CSF)” (578). However, it should be noted that the role of serotonin in violence is by no means proven.

Likewise, the results of research on the human brain, particularly the prefrontal cortex, have suggested certain possible anomalies in the brain of violent individuals. One such research study showed that the “amount of gray matter [in the brain of violent individuals] was 11% less than in controls” (579). However, these findings are not by any means conclusive. Even if there were clear evidence of a biological change in the brain of violent individuals, this fact alone would not be of much help in reducing the degree and scope of human violence.

Another news article by Elizabeth Pennisi in the same issue of *Science* makes the following interesting statement: “In the 1960s, the great German ethologist, Konrad Lorenz, made a case, extrapolating from his studies of birds and fish, that humans are an aggressive species and that a penchant for violence leads to clan and tribal warfare. But that dogma is beginning to fade, largely thanks to studies suggesting that aggressiveness is part of a repertoire of behaviors that has arisen to balance the need of the individual to look out for himself and still maintain good standing within the group” (576). Here, we are dealing with the ephemeral nature of scientific theoretical frameworks. One strength of the scientific method is its openness to change: Once new evidence proves the fallacy of previous notions about a given phenomenon, science is willing to abandon its previous explanations. However, while science is open to change, scientists, as human beings, are far more dependent on their worldviews and consequently are not easily open to new conceptual frameworks. Konrad Lorenz’s perspectives on human violence were based on an underlying assumption that humans and animals are subject to the same processes. While, on the one hand, this assumption is true in regard to the biological dimension, on the other hand, it is not true about human consciousness and its powers of knowledge (cognition), love (emotions), and will (choice). However, the view that humans are fundamentally the same as animals is probably one of the most universally accepted perspectives on human nature. This perspective is at the core of Darwin’s theory of evolution, and despite mounting evidence that this theory neither fully nor accurately describes the process of the appearance and evolution of human life, it is still almost universally used as the framework for understanding all human behaviour, including violence. The contributions by various authors to this special issue of *Science* are no exception in this regard.

In a review article, Frans B. M. de Waal puts forward the notion that aggression is not an antisocial instinct in primates; rather, it is “a tool of competition and negotiation.” The

article's main conclusion is that human "aggressive conflict is subject to the same constraints known of cooperative animal societies" (586).

In another article, Richard J. Davidson and colleagues "posit that impulsive aggression and violence arise as a consequence of faulty emotion regulation. . . . Individuals vulnerable to faulty regulation of negative emotion are at risk for violence and aggression." The authors then suggest that research on the neural circuitry of "emotion regulation" (591) may show the way for prevention of human violence.

There is no doubt that research, conducted within the parameters of the scientific method, is the most valuable and certain avenue for understanding the causes of human violence and its prevention. However, all research is conducted within the transcendent conceptual framework of the researcher. The human psyche does not function in a vacuum. It is an active, conscious, and searching entity that continuously interacts with its internal and external environment. The internal environment of the psyche is the enormously complex machinery of the human body, which functions in a state of complete unity with the psyche. The living human individual is a single reality in a state of full unity and harmony, not only among the various organs of the body but also between the body and the psyche. Materialistic science sees the human psyche to be a by-product of the body and not a reality in its own right. Thus, within the materialistic framework, all research on human psychological conditions focuses either on the biological conditions of the body or the evolutionary explanations that consider all human psychological and behavioural processes to be the automatic and thoughtless outcome of the interface of the organism with its environment. We consider this perspective to be incomplete and as such erroneous. Therefore, in this paper we will put forward an integrative framework for the study of human violence that will take into consideration the biological, as well as the psychosocial and spiritual factors contributing to the development of human violence.

Human violence has many expressions, the least significant of which is violence perpetrated by a small group of individuals who may suffer from some kind of anomaly in the biochemistry of the brain, the condition of their prefrontal cortex, or certain genetic anomalies such as in the Y chromosome. This perspective on violence ignores the universal presence of violence. It is not only the individual who kills another person with a handgun who is violent, so too are the owners of the companies that manufacture guns, the technicians and scientists who design such items, the society that encourages and glorifies the use of guns against humans, and the politicians who advocate freedom to possess guns in the name of freedom, democracy, and human rights. All these individuals are engaged in the complicated web of human violence. It is because of this ubiquitous presence of violence in our history and contemporary world that we need first to answer a fundamental question: Are humans by nature violent? An affirmative answer to this question would, of course, dramatically reduce the burden on us to find a solution for human destructive tendencies and violence. If we were indeed violent by nature, then the best we could do would be to find ways of dealing with violence and decreasing its destructive impact, while at the same time accepting violence as an unavoidable aspect of being human.

However, if our answer to the question, Are humans by nature violent? is negative, then we need to explain clearly the causes of our past and present violence. We need to offer convincing proofs that we humans can indeed free ourselves from those dynamics and processes that render us violent. We need to begin the task of creating violence-free environments—homes, communities, nations, and the world—and thus usher in the long-sought age of peace. The paradigm presented in this paper is a preliminary step in this direction.

The Many Faces of Human Violence

Human beings have always committed violence. The faces of violence are many, among them self-mutilation and suicide, injury to others and homicide, conflicts and wars, cruelty to animals, and destruction of nature. In recent times, however, both the extent and intensity of human violence have increased dramatically. The twentieth century has by far been the most violent period in human history. Two world wars, many extremely destructive regional wars, the Holocaust, the atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the political purges of the Stalin era, the Cultural Revolution in China, and religious, racial, and ethnic conflicts throughout the world are among the most widely acknowledged examples of violence during this century. There are, as well, other virulent forms of violence: violence against women, children, the poor, the minorities, and the underprivileged.

Violence is found in every culture and stratum of human society. To recount even a small representative sample of the statistics of violence and to be informed of “unusual” violence by the media, shocks us and forces us to begin to search for answers. However, not infrequently, we soon recover our equilibrium, forget the statistics and the events, and divert our attention to the “real” tasks of life such as our jobs, health, education, vacations, and recreational preoccupations. We do so because a very common response to violence is to deny its reality and forget about it, if possible. Usually, we focus on violence only when we are forced to do so, such as when we ourselves are victims of violence or live in the midst of a very violent environment. However, any thorough review of violence clearly shows how widespread and deeply rooted are the causes and consequences in any society. While there is considerable agreement about the existence of violence and its undesirability, there is far less consensus about what causes violence, and even dramatically less agreement about how to deal with violence. Finally, there seems to be little support for the notion that we can create a violence-free society. Our objective in this paper is to demonstrate that creating societies

considerably free from violence is within our powers, but to accomplish this task we need to alter dramatically our understanding of the nature, causes, and dynamics of violence.

Views on Violence

Most researchers and experts identify psychological, social, biological, and moral causes in the development of violence. The psychological and social causes of violence are directly implicated and have been extensively studied. The moral issues are considered to cause violence in a more indirect and less clear manner. The biological views on violence are relatively new, and there is even less agreement about them.

The psychological perspective on violence holds the view that under certain conditions it is understandable, acceptable, and even inevitable that people behave violently. Many psychological factors (such as early childhood traumas of neglect, abuse, abandonment, loss, rejection, and humiliation) have been implicated. Some researchers have emphasized such factors as having an explosive personality, poor impulse control, low frustration threshold, and unspecified brain dysfunction and lesions as the main causes of human violence. Still other researchers have identified alcohol and certain habit-forming agents and drugs that affect the nervous system as the main culprits in causing violence. Another very strongly held view is that violence is an innate aspect of human nature and that the best we can do is to learn how to decrease its frequency and destructiveness.

Central to all these theories, observations, and explanations is the idea that under certain conditions the individual either chooses to be violent, is forced to be violent, or has no control over behaving violently. Psychological theories tend to place much emphasis on forces and dynamics beyond the individual's control. As such, these theories tend to explain away the violence, removing much of the responsibility from the individual and placing it instead variously on factors that are rooted in the past, a part of human nature, an expression

of one's personality make-up, a self-protection mechanism created by the forces of evolution, an outcome of certain biological anomalies, or attributable to the controlling powers of alcohol and drugs.

Sociological theories consider human violence to be caused by adverse social conditions such as poverty, prejudice, injustice, racism, sexism, structural inequality, cultural factors, and gun availability. According to these views, when people live under conditions of hardship, they become violent. These theories of violence place the root causes of violence outside the person's reach and see the violent individual as a victim of an unjust society who, in turn, makes other innocent people the victims of his or her own fury. This vicious cycle gradually eats away both at the psyche of people and the soul of the society. People begin to lose hope; the perpetrators of violence become more violent; and the victims of violence become more fearful and also vengeful. Open conflict, war, and litigation become the main instruments for resolution of conflicts. Individuals choose to arm themselves, and governments become more militant and punitive. Calls for more police and prisons become ever louder, and the society finds itself divided. On one side are proponents of law and order who call for safer communities with less individual freedom, and on the other side are defenders of individual freedom who greatly fear the tyranny of force and government control. The same dynamics influence government policies regarding the level of their military budget and "defense" preparations. Armies are formed, ever more sophisticated and destructive instruments of war are created, and much of the society's intellectual and financial resources are devoted to how to deal with violence through the instrumentality of force. Such is the situation in our world today.

Biological theories of violence endeavour to explain violence and crime in genetic or physiological terms. However, many scientists caution that the likelihood of finding a single or a handful of genes for violence is very remote. The biological approaches to understanding

the causes of violence are based on observations that in some violent individuals there are certain genetic abnormalities or chemical aberrations of the brain, most notably the neurotransmitters.

Geneticists are actively searching for the “violence” gene, and neurobiologists are now enthusiastically searching for a chemical substance that could correct these brain anomalies, thus allowing us to treat violent individuals with genetic modification and/or specific medications. However, even the most optimistic promoters of biological theories admit that this is not the definitive answer to the problem of violence.

Finally, there is a large body of opinion that views violence as a moral issue and considers violent people to be morally defective individuals. Based on this perspective, proponents suggest that violent individuals should be punished severely enough to discourage them from repeating their negative behaviour. It is also argued such an approach will warn others that crime does not pay.

These four perspectives on violence all have certain valid explanations regarding the causes of violence and offer some solutions, which are, to a limited degree, effective. However, none of these perspectives on violence unequivocally identifies a definitive explanation as to what creates violence and what can be done about it. The psychological schools prescribe psychotherapy; the sociological theorists advocate social changes and improvements; biologists search for the magical drug and the defective gene; and moralists call for bigger jails, stiffer penalties, and the return to “a woman’s place is in the home” thinking.

These varied approaches to the problem of violence both separately and collectively fail to offer an effective solution to this serious problem. Some communities, particularly in the United States, have developed impressive programs of psychological intervention and training, social reform and community development, legislative innovations and enforcement

policies, and research activities and new scientific inquiries—all aimed at reducing the rate of violence and dealing with it once it has occurred. Recent statistics show some declines in certain cities and in certain types of violence. However, despite all these efforts and accomplishments, there is a broad body of agreement and evidence that the battle against violence is being lost. Why?

Why is Violence Winning?

To answer the question of why violence prevails, extensive efforts notwithstanding, we need to acknowledge a few painful but true facts about ourselves and the kind of societies we have created.

Individual Contributions

As individuals, we are active participants in and contributors to the present state of violence in our world. We contribute to the promotion of violence if we are prejudiced against other people; if we are silent in the face of injustice; if we feel superior to others by reason of our race, religion, sex, ethnic origin, social status, and material belongings; if we contribute to the industries of war and violence through our knowledge, expertise, and work; and if we consider violence to be solely the fault of others.

A Culture of Violence

Almost all societies in the contemporary world are, to varying degrees, violent. Some are openly violent toward foreigners; others are violent also toward segments of their own population. In some cultures, certain forms of violence, for example against women, are considered to be acceptable and even necessary. In other cultures aggressive, individualistic, and legalistically violent forms of behaviour are not only tolerated but also actively

encouraged. In some cultures, the number of guns in the hands of the citizens exceeds the entire population figure, and possession of a gun is justified in the name of freedom, democracy, and even justice.

Aside from these specific conditions, a world characterized by the extremes of wealth and poverty; widespread violence against women, children, the elderly, the handicapped, and the poor; and a general disregard for the fact that millions of children and adults die every year of malnutrition, poor hygiene, and preventable diseases, is a violent world indeed. Furthermore, the fascination of the media, the entertainment industry, and the general population with violence is an indication that our societies have an ambivalent and contradictory attitude toward violence. On the one hand, we seem to dread violence, and on the other hand, we are extremely fascinated by it.

Worldview

There are certain widely held ideologies that by their very nature promote and sanction violence. These ideological perspectives are in fact expressions of our views on human nature and the dynamics of our relationships. Although these views usually have no scientific or empirical valid base, nevertheless, they are strongly held because they have their roots in the tortuous process of development of human consciousness. Here are some examples:

- The idea that “might is right”;
- The idea that men are superior to, or more important than, women;
- The idea that some people are created “evil”;
- The idea that the purpose of justice is to punish;
- The idea that individual rights and freedoms take precedence over those of the society;
- The idea that the welfare of the society takes precedence over individual rights and freedoms;
- The idea that human values, moral standards, and ethical principles are all relative, and that there is no universal code of ethics which could be applied universally;
- The idea that human diversity begets violence;
- The idea that the best antidote to violence is violence;

- The idea that power and force create security and ensure survival;
- The idea that competition is essential for success;
- The idea that human reality is extinguished at death;
- The idea that God does not exist or is irrelevant to human actions.

A summary review of these ideologies reveals that the authoritarian mode of thinking is still very much present in our world, that self-interest and greed are major forces determining many people's behaviour, that the reality of the oneness of humanity is not yet fully grasped by the majority of humankind, and that materialism continues to dim the lights of morality and spirituality in people's hearts and minds.

This preliminary review of the causes of violence does not provide us with answers to the questions about prevention of violence and effective management once violence occurs. To address these questions adequately, we need to study closely the phenomenon of violence—its chronology and dynamics—and then review the causes of violence in light of such study.

A Definition of Violence

Violence is a process of conflict that begins with certain perceptions and ends in behaviour which causes suffering and/or injury to oneself, other human beings, the environment, animals, or damage to one's own or another's property. Violence is a destructive process expressed in words, attitudes, or actions. It can be intentional or accidental, that is, an act of commission or the result of an omission. Violence can be implicit or explicit in the manner in which it is committed and can be performed with either evil or good intentions. However, regardless of how and what kind of violence takes place, one fact remains constant—violence is destructive. Even when we have to commit a lesser degree of violence in order to prevent a greater measure of violence, we should, nevertheless, remember that even justified violence causes a certain measure of destruction. Because of this truth, the most effective approach to violence is always its prevention.

A Chronology of Violence

Violence is the final act in a series of conflicted developments within the individual who commits it. These developments take place in the mind of the individual and have emotional, intellectual (cognitive), interpersonal, and behavioural dimensions. We can identify five stages in the chronology of violence and will describe them in reverse order, beginning with the stage in which violence has, in fact, taken place. We have chosen this reverse order because of two reasons. First, in our world today, both governments and individuals tend to pay serious attention to violence only when it has already taken place and caused destruction. By starting from the last stage in the process of the development of violence, we aim to demonstrate graphically the futility and insincerity inherent in this approach. Second, we start with the discussion of violence in a reverse order—from outcome to cause, rather than cause to outcome—because people and governments take the outcome more seriously than the cause. As well, the outcome is far more certain than the cause.

Stage 5 occurs when *acts of violence* (with all their destructive consequences) have taken place; therefore, all we can do is to take care of the damage and learn from the experience to prevent its repeat. The decision to commit violence is dependent on a number of factors related both to the conditions of the violent person and the environment with which the person is interacting. These issues will be discussed in the coming sections.

Stage 4 comprises the immediate moments before violence is committed. The main characteristic of this stage is the presence of a strong *urge for violence* and a desire to fight. However, this is not the only urge that the person has. Under these circumstances, the individual also has a very strong urge to escape from the situation (flight). It is this choice that separates those who commit violence from those who do not. As such, understanding

how this choice is made and who is most likely to make one or the other choice is very important.

Stage 3 occurs when the *feelings of violence* are being developed. This is a period of time in which the person is filled with a mix of strong feelings of anger, fear, and anxiety. These three feelings are always together, usually with one of them in the forefront. These feelings, when very strong, indicate a heightened sense of vulnerability. They focus the mind of the person on the perceived dangers and create a condition in which violence is both dreaded and contemplated. In this phase, some individuals share their feelings with others and ask for assistance and assurance so that they could adequately deal with their inner turmoil. Others become so angry, fearful, and anxious that people in their environment become alarmed and take measures to help the person and defuse the situation. However, there is a third group that feeds on their feelings of anger, fear, and anxiety and proceeds to the next stage. Usually, when the feelings of anger are predominant, there is a greater likelihood of violence than if fear and/or anxiety were more predominant. However, this is not always the case. In fact, some of the most destructive acts of violence take place in the context of extreme fear on the part of the violent person.

Stage 2 is the phase in which the person has felt threatened by an event, thought, or experience. The natural response to threats is an apprehensive awareness of one's vulnerability. Under these conditions, the world is perceived to be more dangerous, and *thoughts of violence* begin to enter the consciousness of the person. At this early stage in the process of development of violence, these thoughts are not as much about committing violence, as they are about the fact that threats are endangering the security of the person. In the face of threats one responds with a combination of feelings of fear, anger, and anxiety. However, depending on the nature of the threat, its intensity, and the level of maturity and

capacity of the person, the individual may respond to these threats either constructively or destructively.

Stage 1 is the phase in which the *precursors of violence* are present both in the person and the environment in which the person lives. Research indicates that individuals who have not had the benefit of a healthy and enlightened upbringing and who are not endowed with adequate capacities tend to feel threatened easily and are more vulnerable to becoming violent. Also, it is a fact that the more unjust and violent a society is, the more threatening it is for its citizens. Therefore, in Stage 1, we encounter individual and societal conditions that are conflict-ridden and act as precursors to violence.

<i>Stage 1</i>	<i>Stage 2</i>	<i>Stage 3</i>	<i>Stage 4</i>	<i>Stage 5</i>	<i>New Stage 1</i>
Precursors of Violence	Thoughts of Violence	Feelings of Violence	Urge for Violence	Acts of Violence	New Cycle of Violence

Figure 1. The Vicious Cycle of Violence

The chronology of violence outlined above needs to be more fully described and understood. Toward this end, we first need to understand better the nature of threats and their crucial role in the development of violence.

Threats and Violence

There are five broad categories of threats, each taking place in respect to personal, interpersonal, and spiritual dimensions of life:

- 1.) **Threats to Individual Integrity:** Threats to individual integrity (existence) include life-threatening circumstances (personal threats), rejection by

loved ones (interpersonal threats), and loss of meaning and purpose for our lives (spiritual threats).

2.) **Threats to Our Sense of Personal Identity:** Threats to our sense of personal identity include such conditions as self-doubt and failure (personal threat), humiliation, manipulation, and loss of autonomy and freedom (interpersonal or societal threat), and loss of self-respect in the face of truly unethical conduct (spiritual threat).

3.) **Threats of Injustice:** All human beings have a sense of fairness and feel threatened when they face injustice directed toward themselves or even toward total strangers. Injustice against others reminds us that we ourselves could also become the victims of injustice. This is one reason that the quest for justice is a universal quest and the experience of injustice is universally experienced as a threat. Justice is, at once, a personal, interpersonal, social, ethical, and spiritual state, and its absence affects us deeply in all respects.

4.) **Threats of Frustration:** We human beings tend to have a sense of omnipotence and self-importance that plays a major role in the way we live our lives and pursue our objectives. However, these feelings of omnipotence and self-importance are constantly challenged by seemingly inconsequential but powerful events. We get caught in a traffic jam and are late for an important appointment. We feel foolish not being able to respond adequately to the needs of a three-year-old child. We find ourselves unable to open a can with a can opener. These and many other similar situations frustrate our sense of omnipotence and challenge our feelings of importance and self-worth, and by doing so threaten us in many respects. Not infrequently, acts of violence take place under these frustrating circumstances.

5.) Threats of Violence: Violence itself is a major source of threat. Therefore, it is not surprising that those who are victims of violence have a greater propensity to become violent themselves. This vicious cycle of violence is most dramatically observed in children who are reared in violent families, neighbourhoods, or societies. Another source of violence that promotes further violence is exposure to acts of violence against others, such as what is depicted on television and movie screens, and by the examples set by others in our homes, schools, and communities. It is interesting to note that those who commit violence make efforts to justify their actions, not only from a personal and interpersonal perspective but also from a moral and spiritual standpoint.

To summarize, we feel threatened when we perceive ourselves to be vulnerable in the face of threats. The threat can be actual or imagined and can have various degrees of severity. However, not all individuals perceive and respond similarly to the same threat. Our response to threats is determined by the level of our maturity, the nature of our life experiences, our perspectives on human nature and the purpose of human life, and our perception of the nature and source of the threat. Thus, one person feels at home in her neighbourhood, while another person from a different section of the city may feel threatened in the same surroundings. A person who belongs to a visible minority will feel safe in his or her own community and threatened in a foreign setting. There are places in which men feel secure but women feel threatened. Some people fear dogs while others feel more secure with dogs near them. These and other similar examples clearly demonstrate that the experience of a threat is determined both by the state of development and perception of the person, as well as by the conditions of the environment and its level of stability and safety or anarchy and danger.

These five responses to threats occur in the context of normal life circumstances. In these situations, threats take the form of such natural events as serious illness, rejection by

loved ones, failure and loss of face, unjust treatment by others, and witnessing or being a victim of an act of violence. However, when peoples and societies are subject to prolonged periods of conflict and violence, then in addition to these ordinary responses to threats, some extraordinary responses also take place. Central to these extraordinary responses to prolonged states of conflict and threat are glorification of violence and denial of its reality.

Glorification of violence occurs in the context of a mindset that embraces violence as a heroic quality and as a virtue. The violent person becomes a hero, and an extremely violent individual evolves into a legend whose tales of courage, foolhardiness, and naked aggression are recounted to the children and youth of each generation. Thus, a culture of violence begins to develop. In such a culture, poems, novels, songs, and plays pay homage to heroes and, occasionally heroines, of violence. In a violent culture, the science and technology of violence are accorded priority over other areas of life such as health, education, and community development. Also, the violent culture sets itself apart from other groups and designates other groups either as its enemies or friends. In doing so, the violent culture finds a powerful rationalization and justification for its continuous escalation of the scope and intensity of its preparation for and involvement in violence in the name of security and self-defense.

Through this dichotomous perception of the world, violent individuals and cultures perceive the world to be filled with dangerous and malevolent enemies who could attack and destroy them at any time. Therefore, it is only prudent that endangered nations or individuals always be on the alert and constantly add to their armaments of defense and attack. These preparations and precautions would only be reasonable if the perception of a world full of so-called enemies were not a delusion. The twentieth century witnessed dramatic examples of this process both before and during the First and Second World Wars as well as the Cold-War period between the superpowers. We also see the same process at the individual level in all

societies where individuals are arming themselves in the face of threats or perceived threats from their fellow citizens. The United States has been an active participant in both these processes. However, despite much evidence about the futility of this approach, the notion that we will be more secure with having more capacity to deal violently with violence continues to persist. This situation will endure as long as cultures of violence are with us.

The second, even more insidious response to persistent conflict and violence is the development of a mindset that considers the ultimate outcomes of violence—harm, injury, and death—as not being “real.” In other words, when people live in a violent milieu for a long time, they begin to deny the reality of death. Once the reality of death and its permanence are denied, then death becomes the stuff of movies, video games, entertainment, and fun. People watch movies and cheer for the heroes who kill. Parents buy video games depicting violence and death as gifts for their children’s birthdays and other special occasions. Children and youth begin to imitate the heroes of violence in deadly games that they play to the bitter end.

This review of the process of violence demonstrates that the actual act of violence is the final stage in a series of stages, each with its unique characteristics and dynamics. An analysis of these dynamics will help us to understand the phenomenon of violence better.

Dynamics of Violence

The process of violence and the nature of our responses to threats described above help us to identify the three main dimensions of the dynamics of violence: *apprehension* (intellectual), *passion* (emotional), and *action* (behavioural). *Apprehension* is an intellectual process with an emotional dimension. It consists of a state of mental perception and understanding mixed with anxious expectations. As such, the term *apprehension* clearly describes what is going on in the mind of the individual during the above-mentioned Stages 1 and 2 of violence. In Stage

1, the individual has a certain awareness of his or her level of capacity to deal with threats and is also aware of the presence or absence of a threat at that time. In Stage 2, the person has already felt threatened and consequently is apprehensive about his or her safety. This is a state of anxious understanding. The person is both aware of and apprehensive about the threatening conditions surrounding him or her.

This condition of *apprehension* of a threat is eventually compounded by a strong sense of *passion*, which implies the presence of intense and violent emotions. *Passion* is the main dimension of Stages 3 and 4 of violence. As described above, human response to a threat takes the form of the feelings of anger, fear, and anxiety. These feelings are always together. However, depending on circumstances, one or another of these feelings is more evident, signaling the presence of a range of emotional responses. Emotions felt in response to threats are usually very intense and extreme in nature. In Stage 4, the intensity of these feelings reaches such heights that the person is compelled to make a decision, either to fight or to choose the route of flight. However, not infrequently, the feelings of anger, fear, and anxiety are masked by a conscious decision to withdraw from the mainstream of life: either to isolate oneself from others or else to develop a plan for revenge. Not infrequently, the withdrawal phase is followed by acts of revenge. Once the decision for withdrawal and revenge is made, the outward manifestations of feelings of anger, anxiety, and fear become masked. However, within the mind of the individual(s) a feverish and passionate process is taking place. Plans for revenge are carefully and methodically drawn in the context of a vicarious and dangerous sense of omnipotence. These processes are readily found in the accounts of recent multiple killings in Colorado, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Chicago, and prior to that in several schools across the United States. The bombing of the government buildings in Oklahoma City and of the World Trade Center in New York also depict the same pattern. Likewise, the carefully planned preparations for violent criminal activities, guerrilla

movements, and waging war against neighbouring countries follow the same pattern of perception of threat at a collective rather than individual level.

It is in this apprehensive, passionate, and feverish condition, either masked or evident, that some individuals make the fateful decision to *act*. It is also in this final stage (Stage 5) that the intellectual (apprehension) and emotional (passion) dimensions of violence are translated into *actions* (behavioural). Once the act of violence has taken place, the violent person becomes more insecure, experiences more emotional intensity, and becomes more prone to committing other violent acts, including violence against self. Thus, a vicious cycle is created that feeds on itself, unless a way is found to break the cycle. If we consider the dynamics and chronology outlined above in Figure 1, we begin to see more clearly this multidimensional character of violence as depicted in Figure 2 below.

<i>Stage 1</i>	<i>Stage 2</i>	<i>Stage 3</i>	<i>Stage 4</i>	<i>Stage 5</i>	<i>New Stage 1</i>
Precursors of Violence	Thoughts of Violence	Feelings of Violence	Urge for Violence	Acts of Violence	New Cycle of Violence
<i>Phase of Apprehension</i>		<i>Phase of Passion</i>			<i>Phase of Action</i>

Figure 2. Chronology and Dynamics of Violence

Because every violent act has intellectual, emotional, and behavioural dimensions, it follows that the violent individual develops certain logic and formulates certain justification for committing the act of violence. This logic and justification is usually known to the individual and is often revealed to others. The manner of this revelation varies. Some individuals justify their acts of violence in political or ideological terms such as injustice, nationalism, patriotism, and defense of one's race or gender. Others explain their violence in

terms of love, either to assert their love or avenge the loss of their love. Still others explain their violent acts in terms of needs, wants, and self-interest. There are also other justifications such as self-defense, insanity, and loss of self-control. One main reason for attempts to justify violence is that violence is foreign to the true nature of humanness. In other words, the processes of humanization and civilization, by their very nature, are antithetical to acts of barbarism and violence. However, increasingly, we are encountering acts of horrendous and random violence committed in cold blood and with seemingly no rhyme or reason. A closer look at these and all other types of violence, however, points to a basic disorder in the violent individual's mind that we need to study further and understand better.

The Violent Psyche

The violent psyche is a conflicted, threatened, passionate, agitated, angry, and desperate psyche. In many ways, it mirrors the outward conditions of the life of the person. Likewise, the soul of a violent society is conflicted, agitated, desperate, and burdened with the diseases of injustice, inequality, prejudice, and indifference. Therefore, the prevalence of violence in a society indicates not only the presence of highly conflicted and violent individuals but also the prevalence (both in the life of individuals and the society) of ideas, sentiments, and practices that, by nature, are conflicted and violent themselves. As such, violence is the outward expression of a profound inner disorder both in the individual and society. Neither could or should be absolved of their respective responsibilities. Both require attention.

At the individual level, violence is one major outcome of the disorders of the human capacities of knowledge, love, and will.² These capacities are exclusive properties of the human psyche and are subject to the laws of growth, as are all aspects of human life. In other words, every human being has the capacity to know, love, and act. In fact, all aspects of

² For a detailed description of this concept, see H.B. Danesh, *The Psychology of Spirituality: From Divided Self to Integrated Self* (Wienacht, Switzerland: Landegg Academy Press, 1997).

human life are expressed through one or other of these universal human capacities. Therefore, when a child is deprived of proper education, is reared in threatening or uncaring circumstances, and is not helped to develop the inner strength to discipline the powerful instinctual and emotional forces that beset his or her life, then that child does not have the opportunity to develop powers of knowledge, love, and will properly and adequately. Consequently, a complex set of disorders of the psyche besets the individual and results in the development of various forms of destructive thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. Elsewhere, these destructive processes have been described as *disorders of knowledge, love, and will* respectively. Here we will refer to them more specifically in respect to the development of conflict and violence.

Disorders of Knowledge

Under healthy conditions the ultimate outcome of the human capacity to know is the discovery of truth. Truth here refers not only to scientific truth but also to truth in human relationships, expressed as truthfulness in its many forms such as honesty, fidelity, sincerity, frankness, and trustworthiness. Here, the boundaries between scientific and spiritual principles are removed. Truth, in its very essence, is both a scientific and spiritual reality, and truthfulness is the ethical expression of truth. Thus, truth and truthfulness are totally interrelated, and one without the other is not possible.

Disorders of knowledge develop when the individual is reared and lives in an environment that does not respect truth and where people are not truthful or trustworthy in their relationships. Among the most crucial of these relationships are those between husbands and wives, parents and their children, teachers and their students, management and labour, governments and citizens, and nations to nations. This list, by itself, points to the serious state of *disorders of knowledge* that exist in our world today, and the list is by no means

exhaustive. Dishonesty is one of the major social plagues of our time and is found not only in the context of relationships but also in our scientific, academic, religious, and social institutions and practices. In recent years, the sheer magnitude and openness of dishonest practices in all components of human life have reached such a degree that people no longer trust each other or the institutions and leaders of their society. In fact, one of the major crises of our time is the crisis of trust. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the profile of many violent individuals, both young and old, we come across their isolation from and suspicion of significant others.

Disorders of Love

The ultimate expression of the human capacity to love, under healthy conditions, is unity. Individuals who have received adequate and enlightened love become agents of unity in its broadest definition. Such individuals are caring and compassionate; they are able to both give and receive; and they have the ability to include others in their lives and to be a part of other people's lives under all circumstances. Furthermore, unity is by definition a constructive state and the very antithesis of conflict and violence, particularly when the scope of unity is universal and not limited to a certain group, place, or idea. Unity and truth are interrelated. Truth is one and unity is oneness. Therefore, if we wish to rear our children to be unifiers and not destroyers, we have to assist them to search for the truth and not allow themselves to become imitators who do not judge for themselves and are dangerously prone to becoming bigoted and prejudiced.

Disorders of love occur when children are loved inadequately and/or inappropriately. In adults, disorders of love also occur as the result of inadequate or inappropriate love but are expressed in a different manner. Inadequate love has many expressions. Abandonment, rejection, separation, and loss are among the most damaging forms of inadequate love.

However, ambivalent, guilt-ridden, and resentful love is also very destructive to the healthy development of children and of positive and creative relationships between adults. Inappropriate love refers to the generally held misconception that love and indulgence are basically the same and that love should not be painful. In reality, however, neither of these views about love is accurate.

Love is a force of attraction that brings two or more individuals together and helps them to create new entities such as marriage, family, friendship, and community. These new entities, which come into existence through the force of love are quite vulnerable in the early phase of their existence and need to grow and develop into strong institutions characterized by unity in diversity and by a give and take reciprocal relationship. This developmental process, like all growth processes, is painful. It requires not gratification, but postponement of gratification. It thrives on conditions of meaningful discipline and order, but not in the context of promiscuity and disorder. Love in its mature form is far less self-centred and much more focused on other people and the all-important task of creating unity.

Disorders of love, therefore, occur when children are neglected, abused, or indulged. When they grow up, such children act in an extremely self-centred manner, display fear of accepting love, show a tendency to mix love with aggression, and have a propensity to seek pleasure as a replacement for love. In all such conditions, these individuals are very angry and are often highly conflicted and prone to violence. They also have great difficulty expressing love in a healthy and growth-inducing manner.

Disorders of Will

Finally, healthy development of the human capacity of will also has an outcome that does not allow for the development of violent behaviour. Human will is the force behind human

behaviour. All our actions are performed in response to the commands of our will. The human will can be greatly abused, in which case, its main harvest is violence.

Disorders of will are due to authoritarian and indulgent modes³ of upbringing. In the authoritarian mode, power and force are used to impose one's will on others. Parents who use force and violence to "discipline" their children, in essence, are attempting to tame the will of the child and make it subject to their own will. This is the same strategy used by all authoritarian organs of the society, be they the government, the church, the workplace, the school, or the family. However, the move away from authoritarianism has generally resulted in people's adopting the indulgent response to the demands of the human will. Instead of trying to control the will of others through force, attempts are made to disarm it through indulgence.

In practice, however, usually the authoritarian and indulgent modes are often together. Thus the message, "If you are good, do not cause problems, or use your will to oppose us, then you will be rewarded," employs both the authoritarian and the indulgent modes in its ultimate objective to control the wills of others. The reward promised could be a toy, a treat, or praise in the case of children; a raise in salary and rank in dealing with employees; or promises of prosperity and security on the part of governments toward their citizens. However, neither the authoritarian nor the indulgent mode is effective because both modes demand the individual's freedom and create both intra- and interpersonal conflicts that could easily degenerate into violence.

However, human will can also be employed to search for truth and to create unity. At the individual level, the capacity and willingness to be of service to others is the final

³ For elaboration of these concepts, see Theodor Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper, 1950); Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Avon Books, 1969); Rollo May, *Power and Innocence: A Search for the Source of Violence* (New York: Delta Books, 1972); and Gordon W. Allport, *The Person in Psychology: Selected Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968).

outcome of the healthy development of one's will. Service is possible to the extent that we become less self-centred and more able to see the welfare of one as the welfare of all. At the level of society, however, the establishment of justice is the healthy expression of human will. In the absence of social justice, authoritarian forms of government demand conformity and blind obedience from their citizens, while liberal-minded leaders focus on gratification of the wishes of their people, hoping in return for a certain degree of approval and contentment on the part of their citizenry. However, neither form of government is viable. In fact, in the absence of social justice, both authoritarian and indulgent leaders eventually face conflict, rebellion, violence, and organized terrorism or random anarchy in their domains. These are among the main expressions of disorders of will in the context of individual and societal relationships.

Disorders of knowledge, love, and will are therefore destructive conditions that occur when opportunities for the healthy development of these powers of the human mind are unavailable to the individual as a result of neglect on the part of the individual and/or the society, including the family. Violence is an expected outcome when we, as individuals or societies, live lives of ignorance, untruthfulness, disunity, self-centredness, prejudice, and injustice. These conditions are quite prevalent in many families and societies and are aspects of many people's perspectives on human life and its purpose.

Therefore, not surprisingly, violence is constantly increasing, both in frequency and intensity. We also need not look very far to find the root causes of violence: It is rooted in our thoughts, sentiments, and day-to-day practices. Violence is the sick, but legitimate, child of our cultures. It will be with us as long as we try to eradicate it simply as if it were a foreign and pathogenic agent that has invaded our psyche and society. In fact, we human beings create both individual and societal violence as a result of the ways we think, deal with our feelings, and justify our actions.

Violence is a product of the human mind. When the mind is improperly developed—thereby focused on untruth and self-centred pursuits, and afflicted by prejudice, segregation, deprivation, and humiliation—such a mind becomes enmeshed in its own illusions and misperceptions. It begins to focus on all that is wrong with the world and gradually sets itself apart from the world. Eventually, it sees itself in opposition to the world, and a furious battle between self and the rest of the world begins in the world of the mind. Here, all the fury, heat, and destruction of the battlefield are present and afflict the mind making it feverish with violent thoughts, feelings, and aspirations. Thus, in almost all cases of violence much internal rehearsal has already taken place and the end result of the violence has already been determined in the world of the mind. The violent act is, therefore, the first performance, often followed by other such performances.

In the same manner, when the collective soul of a society becomes unhealthy and enfeebled, it develops ideologies, sentiments, and practices that are clearly destructive and violent. The ultimate outcome of this process is that the violent society, like the violent individual, becomes diseased and afflicted, and finds itself unable to change the nature of its actions even in the face of enormous evidence of their destructiveness. Consider the mindless adherence to racism in many parts of the world, the insane love affair with guns so prevalent in the United States, and the destructive materialism that has afflicted the whole of humanity. These conditions are all potent and obvious causes of both conflict and violence. Yet, they are defended by so many people with so much emotion, misguided logic, and such a degree of pathological self-interest, that people are willing to sacrifice their well-being and peace to maintain them. Here, with a few exceptions, we are not dealing with criminal or ignorant or malevolent peoples and cultures. Rather, we are facing individuals and communities whose very minds are afflicted by pervasive misconceptions and misunderstandings as to the nature

of human reality and the purpose of human life. Consequently, they defend their ideas with much sincerity, not realizing that they may be sincerely wrong!

Psychological and social conflicts, which afflict individuals and the society respectively, are the outward expressions of disorders of the human psyche. These conflicts are the breeding grounds of violence. However, because we do not realize that they are components of a process, we tend to focus on them in a disjointed, fragmented manner. To avoid this pitfall, it will be helpful to describe more fully the chronology and process of violence in the context of its prevention at all levels. However, before we do this, we need to develop further our formulation of the causes of violence in light of the more comprehensive and integrated framework we have attempted to present in this paper.

Causes of Violence: A Reappraisal

Any discourse on human nature must take into consideration the issue of the relationship between human consciousness (which we refer to as the psychological or metabiological dimension of human reality) and the human body (which is the biological dimension of the same reality). A human is by definition a conscious being with psychological powers of comprehension, integration, and intention—or put more generally, the capacities to know, love, and will. Human consciousness operates in harmony with the biological dimension of our reality, which is itself subject to a remarkably coherent, cohesive, and lawful process. These three qualities—coherence, cohesion, and lawfulness—are expressions of the qualities of comprehension (knowledge), integration (love), and intention (will). Biological and psychological processes never take place in isolation one from another. In our level of existence, the biological and psychological expressions of reality are always together, and they require each other to be expressed in life. In other words, in a living being consciousness and matter are subject to and operate in accordance with the all-encompassing law of unity.

When matter and consciousness come together in a state of unity, life comes to be, and certain specific biological and psychological processes are put into motion. When this unity is removed, death sets in, and both these processes cease to operate. Thus *unity is life*. The following schema depicts the operation of the law of unity through the integration of the biological and psychological dimensions of human life.

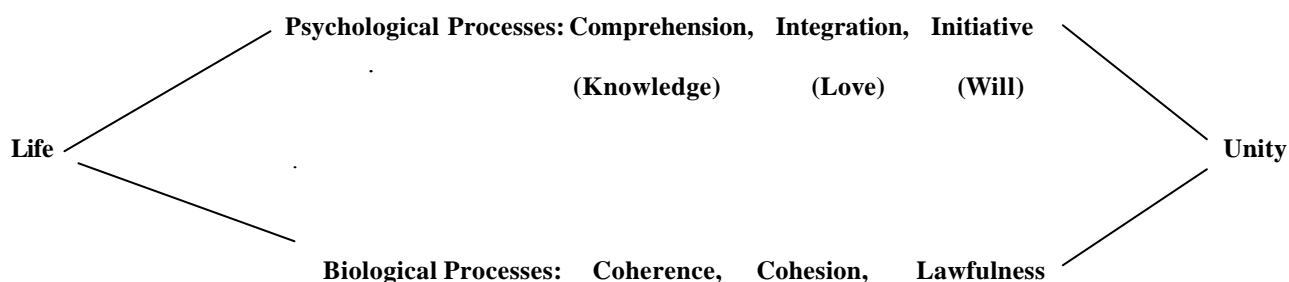


Figure 3. The Relationship between Life Processes and the Law of Unity

Implicit in this schema is the idea that the essence of being human is consciousness: the ability to know and understand, to love with full awareness and resolve, and to choose between right and wrong in the context of freedom. Life and consciousness are inseparable. Without life, there is no consciousness, and without consciousness there is no life. Life comes to be when consciousness (a non-material reality not composed of elements and not subject to the laws of decomposition and annihilation) is united with matter (a physical reality composed of elements and subject to the laws of decomposition). This primal unity is the beginning and the cause of life. However, life cannot continue unless its unity is maintained. This is a universal law and, therefore, whenever there is disunity, destruction, disorder, and death follow. We observe this process at the biological, psychosocial, and social levels of the life of humanity. Where there is disunity, there is conflict, violence, destruction, and death. Thus, *life is unity*.

We submit that this simple formulation—*unity is life and life is unity*—contains the metaphysics of conflict resolution. In other words, to develop a scientifically based and universally applicable conceptual framework for the discipline of conflict resolution, we will do well to begin with the concept of unity and its central, indispensable role in all aspects of life. Unity is the creative force of life, the power that brings opposites together to create new types and levels of life and existence. It is in the context of unity that diversity becomes a source of harmony and richness of relationships instead of becoming a cause of difference and discord. Also, it is in the framework of unity that seemingly irreconcilable demands of the biological, psychological, social, and moral forces of life are harmonized and integrated and that a conflict-free approach to life becomes feasible.

Many ideologies and practices current in all human societies are based on the dictates of the powerful and essential biological instincts of self-preservation and gratification. Living organisms possess a powerful native intelligence that automatically directs them to a behaviour, which ensures their survival both individually and as a species. Such universally observed behaviour, both in humans and animals, as that of self-interest, self-defense, aggression, procreation, pain avoidance, and pleasure seeking are in fact various expressions of the survival instinct, which is essential for the continuation and maintenance of life.

The psychological dimension of human life is far more complex than are the biological needs. Human psychological processes are expressed in our thoughts, feelings, and actions. These processes are the outcome of the unique human powers to know, to love, and to will. At their most elemental level, these psychological powers are focused on the fulfilment of biological needs for survival and gratification. At this level, humans function like very sophisticated, capable, and cunning animals—but animals, nevertheless.

These same psychological powers of knowledge, love, and will can also be used to develop, modify, and civilize the survival instincts. In the absence of the civilizing forces of

true education and peaceful environment, the individual becomes selfish, greedy, and highly competitive. In these circumstances human conflicts multiply, and their expressions become increasingly more conflicted and even destructive, until they descend to the level of barbarism. A major task of the discipline of conflict resolution, in our view, is to identify those essential educational concepts and practices that will elevate the level of psychological functioning of people with regard to conflict. Such an education will help every new generation to achieve a greater degree of ability to control and transcend the biological imperatives of survival and pleasure, thus preventing many conflicts and dealing with them more effectively when conflicts arise. By control and transcendence, we do not mean to imply that survival and gratification are not essential and important aspects of being human. Rather, we are making the point that true freedom is achieved when we human beings, by employing our unique powers of knowledge, love, and will, are able to control our instinctual and biological forces. This is the hallmark of both true liberty and progressive, peaceful civilization. It is the process in which conflicts are prevented and violence is disarmed.

Human psychological processes take place in the context of relationships and interpersonal social intercourse. It is neither possible, nor desirable to promote a life of solitariness and separation for humanity. It is in the context of relationships that we develop our truly human qualities, higher levels of understanding and insight, and powers of love as well as apply them in creative ways; that we display our innate striving for excellence and goodness; and that we create a culture of peace. Therefore, the more individualistic, isolated, and self-centred a society becomes, the more conflicted its population would become because in the context of excessive individualism, competition and power seeking become the dominant focus of people, and fertile grounds are created for the emergence of an increasing variety and severity of conflict. However, rejection of malignant individualism is not endorsement of its opposite, malignant totalitarianism or collectivism. Truly healthy

relationships are those that celebrate diversity, individuality, and uniqueness of both individuals and cultures in the context of unity, harmony, and cooperation. Relationships are the best educators of the human psychological powers and the best medium in which we are able to harvest the fruits of our knowledge, love, and good will. These conditions decrease the chances of conflict and promote unity.

In the same way that the biological, psychological, and social aspects of human nature cannot function in isolation from one another, likewise, none of these powers can operate adequately in the absence of the ethical principles that govern human life because ethics and morality, contrary to popular views, are not impositions from an outside source. Universal ethical values and moral principles are, in fact, guidelines for human activities drawn from the essential laws of life. The reason for the confusion about *universal ethics* is that they have been mistaken for or replaced with *limited ethics* of self-interest. In the forthcoming book of which this paper is a part, we will address the issues of ethics more fully and will demonstrate that true ethics are universal in nature and bestow true liberty on those who possess universal ethics. However, in the context of this discussion of the role of unity in life, it should be pointed out that the yardstick by which the universality of an ethical code can be measured is, once again, unity. If a given code of ethics promotes harmony and cooperation, creates conditions of fairness and justice, provides a framework for the free and creative expression of the individual members, while also maintaining the welfare of the whole, then we have identified a universal code of ethics based on the fundamental laws of life. Thus, *unity is ethical and ethics are unifying*.

It is within this all-encompassing unity paradigm that violence occurs as a by-product of three factors in the life of both the individual and the society. These factors are *developmental, psychosocial, and spiritual* in nature. It is important to note that all these

factors are subject to change and modification by us and point the way toward effective prevention of violence.

Developmental Causes of Conflict and Violence

Developmental causes of conflict and violence refer to the process of evolution of human consciousness and the level of maturity of the person or society. All development takes place on the axis of consciousness. Matter does not develop. It simply assumes ever more complex organization correspondent to the expansion of consciousness. If we were to apply the insights learned from the research in the field of developmental psychology to the development of human societies, we discover a remarkable parallel between the processes of maturation of individual and collective consciousness. Human societies and individuals develop along certain universally identifiable stages, beginning with infancy and childhood, followed by adolescence, adulthood, and maturity. At every level of development, certain types of behaviour are predominant. The direction of maturation for both individuals and societies is from a state of primitive consciousness and ignorance to a condition of enlightenment and knowledge, from self-centredness to universality, and from instinctual dominance to conscious freedom. These are variations on the theme of the development of the human powers of knowledge, love, and will described earlier. In essence, the less developed our consciousness, the less capable we are to understand the dynamics of our behaviour and, therefore, the more prone we are to be selfish and xenophobic, and the more likely to act impulsively and violently when our desires and expectations are not met. In other words, there is a direct relationship between the process of maturation and the occurrence of both conflict and violence.

Maturation is a conscious and willful process based on accumulated life experiences and expanded and deepened insights. As such, maturation takes place only in the realm of

consciousness within the parameters of knowledge, love, and will. Thus, maturity of our intellectual capacities results not only in the discovery of new facts and understanding of the laws of nature but also in the acquisition of insight and wisdom. Likewise, human emotional experiences, which at the earlier stages of life are primarily focussed on our personal needs, desires, and interests, gradually in the course of life and in light of greater understanding and wisdom, become the foundations for a transcendent and universal love.

The maturation of human will also has dramatic results. An immature and undisciplined will is devoid of freedom. It is at the mercy of biological, sociological, and natural processes. It uses all its powers to adapt in order to survive. However, once the human will is disciplined through life experience, is strengthened through acquisition of insight, is softened through applying the principles of compassion and love, and is enlightened through adoption of universal ethics and spiritual principles, it becomes the agent of true freedom. Thus, the forced and harsh willfulness of conflict and violence gives way to free and benevolent acts of reconciliation and harmony. True freedom is the outcome of an enlightened, universal, and unifying will. It is the very opposite of what is construed to be freedom in our current adolescent paradigm. It is this latter type of freedom that is inevitably conflict-ridden and violence-prone. The challenge before us is to move beyond our present state of collective adolescence through a scientifically and spiritually evolving consciousness.

Psychosocial Causes of Conflict and Violence

The psychosocial causes of conflict and violence are closely related to the developmental causes, especially with regard to the type of conflict and violence we witness in our world today. The current political and economic systems of the world are highly competitive, individualistic, and materialistic in orientation and revolve around the primacy of the presence and role of conflict in human affairs. This view of conflict and its offspring—

violence—is one of the main characteristics of an adolescent psychological state. It sees life as a continuous process of struggle against dangers and obstacles, creating in people burdensome feelings of fear, anxiety, and anger. Under these circumstances many people respond to their life circumstances with violence, and many societies become violent. This is particularly the case if there is no framework within which people are able to organize their lives and to understand their challenges.

When we, as individuals and societies, begin to replace the competitive, aggressive, individualistic, and self-centred qualities of the adolescent age with those of cooperation, tenderness, universality, and generosity of spirit, we accelerate the process of our growth toward maturity. This process dramatically decreases those conditions that create violence and that allow it to take roots. This transition is a most dramatic transition. No human society has been able to move beyond its collective adolescence in the past. We are currently witnessing the whole world of humanity in its adolescent phase. This is a new phenomenon in the history of humanity. It is the period of the coming of age of humanity—that unique, dramatic, and unparalleled period of transition and change. Everything is undergoing major transformation. Our ideas and modes of behaviour; social and political organizations; arts and sciences; and moral, ethical, and spiritual standards and beliefs are all undergoing profound change. No individual or society is exempt; all are involved.

Such a fundamental change is, by nature, both a destructive and constructive process. The previous ways of thinking and behaviour as well as the institutions created to serve them have to be destroyed. This destructive process is unavoidable. It is the chaos that inevitably comes before a new order is established. In the midst of this chaos, much insecurity develops; and if we are not careful, that insecurity could accelerate greatly causing an unimaginable degree of violence. This was the case at the height of the Cold War when the threat of a nuclear confrontation between the superpowers was considerable. Fortunately, that situation

has been somewhat ameliorated. However, the danger of a universal condition of violence is still unacceptably high. This is so not only because there always is a danger of the use of atomic warheads by some misguided groups but also because there appears to be no viable solution to the rising tides of violence and barbarism in our world. It is in this respect that the spiritual causes of violence assume their importance.

Spiritual Causes of Conflict and Violence

Spiritual causes of violence have their roots in our views on human nature and the purpose of human life. They provide a framework within which all our thoughts, feelings, and actions develop and are given legitimacy and relevance. We human beings live our lives according to a certain framework. Some have religious frameworks; others have humanistic materialism as their framework. Many live according to Marxist and socialist principles. Still others live their lives in the context of Western free enterprise and individualistic precepts. Finally, there are others who consider any framework to be an imposition on their freedom and consequently live their lives within the framework of rejecting all frameworks. As such, we all have an indubitable need for standards and points of reference to direct our powers of knowledge, love, and will, and to determine the nature of our life interests and pursuits.

When we are without a life framework, we become insecure, confused, agitated, frightened, and highly vulnerable. This state is similar to that of being lost in a dense, dark, and wild jungle, or in a violent, foreign, and uncaring country. Under these conditions we feel very threatened, and our proclivity to respond with violence to difficult circumstances is greatly increased. These dynamics are most clearly observed during childhood and adolescence. Children and young people have a profound need for a clear framework, an unambiguous and reasonable list of acceptable and unacceptable forms of behaviour,

consistent and inspiring models and heroes, ethical and mature mentors, and ongoing enlightened guidance as they face the chances and choices of life.

One of the tragedies of the contemporary world is that most of children of the world are reared either without an adequate framework for life or with extremely faulty perspectives and guidelines about human nature and the purpose of human life. Some obvious examples are children reared in the materialistic, competitive, individualistic, and violent framework offered them in such parts of the world as North America, Western Europe, and a few other countries. Another devastating example is the harsh, suspicious, amoral, and materialistic conditions under which generations of children were reared in the former Soviet Union and some other societies influenced by Marxist doctrines. Still a third example are the millions of children reared according to the manifestly flawed religious, racial, and ethnic doctrines as found in many parts of the world such as the Middle East, Sub-Continent of India, war-ravaged regions of the Balkans, conflict-ridden regions of Africa, and sorely tested areas of South and Central America. This list is by no means exhaustive. However, it not only demonstrates the extent of the problem but also clearly identifies the undeniable link that exists between these approaches to rearing children and youth and the prevalence of conflict and violence in these same regions.

Historically, the main and primary sources of frameworks and blueprints for life have always been the major religions of the world such as Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and some of the most influential moral and philosophical teachings, such as those of Confucius and other Chinese philosophers. All past civilizations are based on the teachings of the major religions of the past. Even when the documented source of such life frameworks lies in philosophy rather than religion, the fundamental spiritual perspectives of those philosophies are indistinguishable from the essential moral and ethical teachings of these world religions. It is, therefore, not surprising that as religions lost their initial spiritual

authenticity and power, modern humanity began to reject religion, and along with it, the absolutely essential life frameworks that it provided.

The rejection of the life frameworks provided by religion has created a major vacuum in the life of contemporary humanity. To fill this vacuum, many thoughtful and well-meaning individuals have formulated new life frameworks that are now guiding people in their lives. Some examples are life frameworks based on Social Darwinism, Marxism, Capitalism, Humanistic Relativism, and religious fundamentalism, all of which are adhered to by multitudes of people. However, there is mounting evidence that these frameworks are deeply flawed and have wreaked (and continue to wreak) havoc with the lives of all peoples and nations. They are bankrupt ideologies, and their pernicious impact on human lives is being increasingly demonstrated in the conflicts and violence that characterize the contemporary world. It is in this light that the burgeoning interest in spiritual matters assumes its significance. The ever-increasing call for a spiritual renaissance is indeed the clarion call of this age.

Because violence has developmental, psychosocial, and spiritual causes, any effective program for its prevention requires consideration of all three factors. Of these three, psychosocial factors have received the greatest attention and enjoy the most acceptance. Developmental factors, we feel, will also be accepted once the concept is better understood and its validity confirmed through research and analysis. However, the greatest stumbling block will be in respect to acknowledging the spiritual causes of violence. This skepticism is not without justification. Acceptance of the spiritual causes of violence is very difficult because religion and spirituality are interrelated. Every religion in its pure and authentic state is the embodiment of spirituality. However, when religion is disengaged from the spirit and needs of its time, it loses its essence and its life-giving spiritual teachings. Subsequently,

religion becomes filled with superstition, prejudice, and hatred. It loses its spirituality and then breeds contention and violence.

However, the essential need for spirituality in human life cannot be ignored much longer. The spiritually starved generations of young people who are now in our midst are already displaying signs of profound disorders due to lack of spiritual education. Among these signs are an almost total absence of inner discipline, an ever-increasing disregard for order and authority, a strongly developed state of self-centredness, and a readiness to go to extremes to get what they want and desire. These conditions inevitably result in conflict and violence. In fact, we venture to state that a new and very destructive age of barbarism is upon us. The twenty-first century may even become more violent than the twentieth century, unless we muster the will to adopt an integrated, wholesome way of life: developmentally progressive, psychologically mature, and spiritually enlightened and universal. It is within this mindset that we will be able to begin to create a violence-free world.

Prevention of Violence

Prevention of violence is the only cure for violence. Most approaches to violence call for the presence and acceptance of some degree of violence. If we think of violence as a disease, then to the degree that we are ill, to that same degree we are not healthy. Likewise, to the degree that we as individuals, families, and societies are conflicted and violent, to that degree will we suffer its negative consequences. As soon as we compromise and sanction a certain degree of violence, we are on the slippery slopes toward creating a violent mindset and a culture of violence. However, both currently and historically, world conditions with respect to violence show clearly that violence has always been with us. Therefore, it will not be easy to create a violence-free world. In fact, many believe that such an objective is unrealistic, impossible, and even undesirable. This is not our view of human violence. Our studies and

reflections on the nature of violence have compelled us to conclude that the prevention of violence is not only possible but also ultimately inevitable. This does not mean that we will create societies in which the citizens or even governments never commit any acts of violence. Rather, the concept of a violence-free society envisions a mature world in which conditions of cooperation, unity, and justice are the norm, and acts of violence and destruction are neither glorified nor justified. A different mindset and a more integrated approach are operative in violence-free societies.

Prevention of violence cannot be achieved solely with an abundance of resolve and a dearth of substance. Prevention of violence is a complex task. Violence is the final outcome of a very complicated, complex set of interwoven thoughts, feelings, desires, ideologies, experiences, expectations, and misunderstandings. Although most programs for the prevention of violence are extremely well intentioned in their objectives, they are often limited and incomplete in their concepts and contents. Consequently, they usually fail. A comprehensive and accessible formulation of the causes of violence will go a long way to help us develop strategies for a more effective handling of violence, its gradual decrease, and its eventual prevention. We do not have, at the present time, enough insight into the causes of human violence to develop such a complete program for prevention of violence. However, we have to make a start, and this is our main objective here. Toward this end, we will first discuss the life process and its relationship to violence, and then describe the most challenging aspect of the prevention of violence—disarming violence with its antidote. We approach these issues with due consideration of the developmental, psychological, and spiritual causes of conflict and violence.

Life Process and Violence

Violence is the destructive outcome of a conflicted life process. The fundamental processes of life are the same for all peoples and all cultures. In other words, all human beings are subject to certain universal processes, which direct the life of every individual and determine the quality of that life. These life processes could be classified under two broad, all-inclusive categories: challenges and opportunities.

Life Challenges

Life challenges are those processes that constantly draw upon our capacities and potentialities to meet the demands of everyday life. The most obvious of these challenges is the challenge of survival. In fact, many accomplishments of humanity such as food production, the art of building shelter, the development of medical science, economic and political systems, and many other human accomplishments that make up our sciences, technologies, and civilizations are various expressions of the efforts of humankind to survive and live a good life. There are many other challenges that we face daily. Some challenges are existential, such as creating safe and secure environments, providing for a healthy and happy life, and establishing conflict-free and loving relationships. Other challenges are scientific and social in nature, such as the challenge to discover laws of nature that constantly influence our lives and to construct new models of governance that assure equality, freedom, and justice. Spiritual challenges also need to be addressed. We need to find a purpose and meaning for our existence; to transcend our baser inclinations; to become promoters of truth, freedom, justice, and peace; to try to deal with issues of life and death, mortality and immortality, and the secrets of creation and divinity. These are among the most important life challenges confronted by every human being. Obviously, not all people respond to these challenges in the same manner. These different responses greatly determine the quality of our lives.

When we are faced with a challenge, our powers of knowledge, love, and will are immediately called into action. In other words, when we encounter a challenge, we immediately begin to think about it, to try to find a solution to the challenge, and to experience a certain degree of heightened awareness (apprehension), especially if the challenge is considerable. Likewise, when we are confronted with a challenge, we feel more concerned about our life situation and naturally become tense. The combined forces of apprehension and tension call upon our powers of will and motivate us to find a realistic and objective solution to the challenge before us. We can outline these stages in the following diagram.

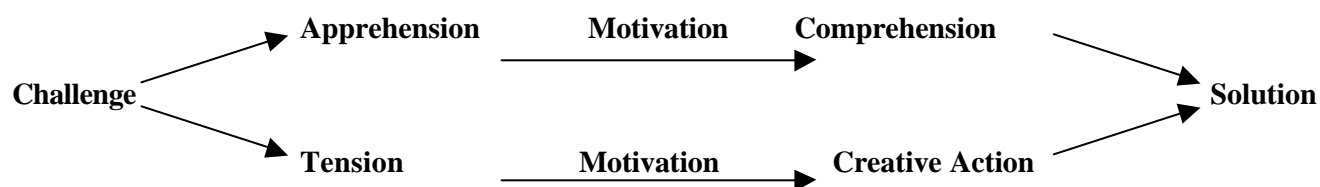


Figure 4. Healthy Response to Life Challenges

However, life challenges are sometimes not easy to face. In fact, there are challenges in life that are indeed very difficult to handle, even by the most capable of individuals. Also, not everyone has the same capacity to face the demands and hurdles of life, the ability to find realistic and meaningful ways of handling these demands, or equal opportunities for doing so. Due to these facts, the challenges of life are not infrequently perceived as threats. Once we are threatened, our thoughts, feelings, and actions are dramatically different from when we feel challenged. When we feel threatened, our apprehension is replaced by fear and even phobia; our tension accelerates into feelings of anger and even rage; and our motivation is turned into anxiety and even panic. Under these circumstances, people usually either become withdrawn and apathetic or aggressive and violent, and often a combination of these reactions

takes place. This unhealthy response to life challenges plays a major role in the development of violence; and to the degree that it is prevented, to that same degree the occurrence of violence is decreased. The following diagram depicts the human response to conditions of threat.

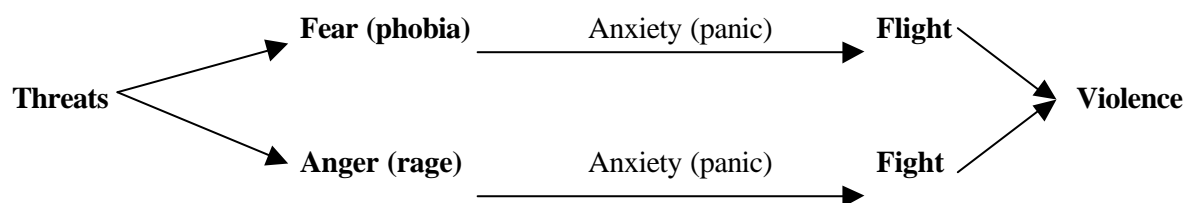


Figure 5. Unhealthy Response to Life Threats

Life Opportunities

The second dimension of the life process is that of life opportunities, which we all have to a varying degree. Although we can identify many opportunities in life, they all fall under two broad categories: opportunities for growth and opportunities for creativity.

Growth is both a sign of life and a requirement for life. In other words, every living organism is subject to the laws of growth and cannot survive if it ceases to grow. In human beings, growth includes not only our biological dimension but also the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual aspects of our reality. When we have the opportunity to develop our bodies, minds, and emotions at an optimal level and to give a morally and spiritually enlightened direction to our powers of knowledge, love, and will, we then become wholesome and universal beings. We feel at home in the world. We realize that we belong to the world and the world belongs to us. Consequently, we become much more sensitive to the needs and aspirations of others. We develop a deep sense of respect for creation. We see a coherence, interdependence, and unity in all that there is. We become lovers of humanity; promoters of truth and justice; unifiers in the arena of interpersonal and international

relationships; defenders of the rights of the weak, the poor, and those in need; conscientious protectors of our environment; and agents of pacification and beautification of our world.

These accomplishments, however, are only possible when our healthy and wholesome development takes place in the context of the other main opportunity of life—creativity. The concept of creativity is based on two facts. First, all human beings are the same in respect to the fundamental aspects of their humanness. Second, every human being is unique in respect to the manner in which his or her humanness is expressed. Therefore, while all human beings need to grow physically, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually, the manner in which this growth takes place is different for each of us. It is here that the opportunity for creativity is expressed. We human beings are created as creators. Everything that is human made is the result of the human capacity to create. Our sciences and arts, our technologies and crafts, our languages and cultures, our ideas and concepts—all are the outcome of human creative powers.

In this respect, a very important fact should not escape us, namely, everything that human beings create is based on the creation of God. Our creations often are imitations of what is already in existence and are always based on the laws inherent in the great design of creation. In other words, we cannot create without being connected to the Source of creation. As soon as we forget this fundamental reality, we become destructive. The twin opportunities for growth and creativity require not only nurturance by enlightened and universal spiritual inputs but also love and encouragement in our lives. A spiritual life framework, loving relationships, and encouragement are essential for a healthy response to life opportunities for growth and creativity. Under these circumstances, we develop to be mature and have a deep sense of fulfillment in respect to our lives and our growth. The concept of fulfillment used here refers to the fact that every life has to have a result. A fruitless life is a wasted life.

As an analogy, let us compare human life to the life of a fruit tree. In the course of life of the tree, we can identify three distinct stages: development, blossoming, and fruition. Likewise, in the life of a human being, we can identify three stages. During the first stage (the first two to three decades of life), the individual develops along biological, intellectual, emotional, moral, ethical, and spiritual parameters. Thus, the young individual becomes physically stronger and more skilled. The intellectual development of the person, under healthy conditions, results in a well-developed mind, a love of learning, and an acquisition of knowledge and skills. Emotionally, as children and youth grow in a healthy environment, they learn to discipline themselves and become less self-centred and more able to give and take. These skills are all needed for the development of a healthy, positive sense of self. Finally, when children and youth have the benefit of an enlightened and universal moral, ethical, and spiritual education, they develop to be peaceful, creative, and happy beings. As we can see, the first stage of life is the time of taking roots and building a strong foundation (the trunk and branches in our tree analogy) by developing intellectual, emotional, and ethical strengths and capacities. Individuals with strong roots and powerful trunks are more able to weather the storms of life (challenges) and spread their branches and leaves far and wide.

The second stage is the time of blossoming, typically, the middle decades of life in which we establish ourselves at our jobs, in our families, and in our societies. We excel in many different ways; we accomplish much; and we become successful, productive, and fearless. This is the time that we “look our best.” In the same way that a tree in full blossom invites the whole world to come and behold its beauty, we also, during those decades of our blossoming, want to be seen, admired, and respected.

Eventually, every life has to bear fruit. The most remarkable characteristic of the fruit is that its main benefits are not to sustain the life of the tree, but rather to contribute to the life of others and to propagate the species. Likewise, in the third stage of our life, we have to be

able to offer nourishing and delicious fruits of our life process to others. A truly mature, creative life is a life of fulfillment of our own capacities and potentialities as well as fulfillment of the needs and aspirations of others. It should be noted that although the stages of development, blossoming, and fruition are successive in the life of the tree, they are concomitant in varying degrees in human life. In other words, we as human beings are always developing, blossoming, and giving the fruits of our existence to others. However, in different stages of human life one or another of these processes is more prominent and time specific. The following diagram depicts the points presented here.

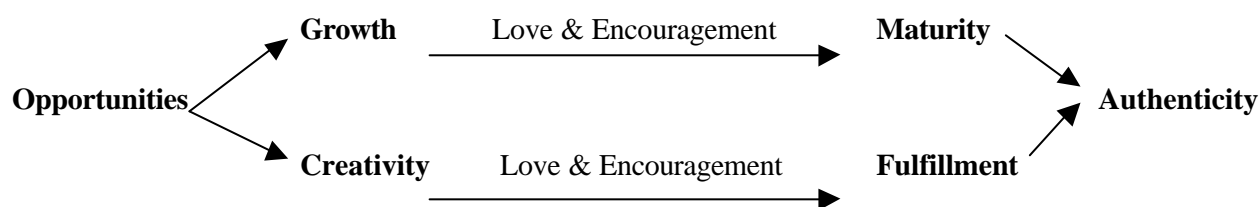


Figure 6. Healthy Response to Life Opportunities

Unfortunately, not all human beings are afforded the necessary conditions to respond to life opportunities in a healthy, positive manner. Many people are victims of circumstances beyond their control and as a result have limited opportunities for growth and creativity. Others are reared in families and communities that do not encourage, and even discourage, such fundamental issues as intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development. These individuals and groups are afraid of new ideas and approaches to life. They tend to live in conditions closed to the world. When people have closed minds, hearts, and homes, they deprive themselves of the creative relationships essential for their healthy development. Under these circumstances, life opportunities—as well as the opportunities for growth and creativity—become limited.

Under these circumstances, the main missing ingredients are encouragement, love, and spiritual guidance. Usually, criticism and fault-finding replace encouragement. Love, if not absent, is either conditional or indulgent. Finally, a spiritual framework, so absolutely essential for healthy development, is either totally absent or else mixed with such irrational, limited, and prejudicial concepts, usually doing more harm than good. Children reared under these circumstances and adults living such lives are often unaware of the need for their own growth and creativity. They tend to live limited and boring lives. Such individuals are easily threatened by the challenges of life and often become violent when their wishes and desires are frustrated. It is important to remember that such individuals may be highly educated in certain respects, very successful in acquiring wealth and power, and in manipulating their environment to achieve their objectives. However, invariably these individuals are anxiety-ridden, fearful, angry, and conflicted. Their lives are devoid of meaning and purpose beyond the immediate benefits for themselves and their constricted worlds. The following diagram outlines the main points described here.

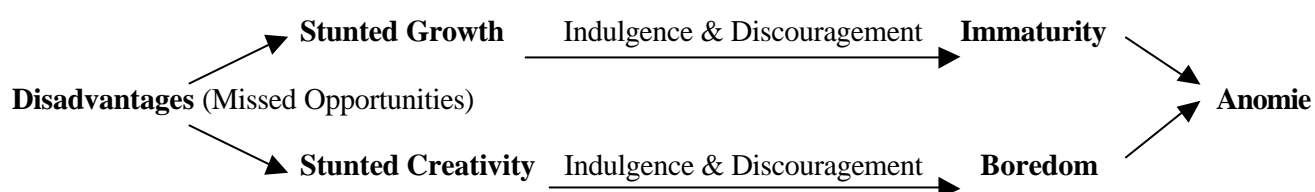


Figure 7. Violence-Prone Response to Life Disadvantages

The description of healthy and unhealthy responses to life processes clearly demonstrates that there exists both creative and destructive life cycles, which individuals and societies alike develop and maintain, thus creating either peaceful or violent conditions. This analysis also demonstrates the fact that not all individuals reared in disadvantaged circumstances become violent and that some individuals reared under positive conditions

with many opportunities, nevertheless, become violent and destructive. The main reason for these varied outcomes is that the human individual is an active and creative agent in the arena of life. Human beings have the capacity to choose. We humans are not mindless instruments responding to our environmental or inner processes in a machine-like manner with no capacity or inclination to choose. Ultimately, all human activities are in response to human decisions. It would be helpful to demonstrate these two cycles in order for us to be able to have an easily accessible mental image of both healthy and unhealthy lifestyles.

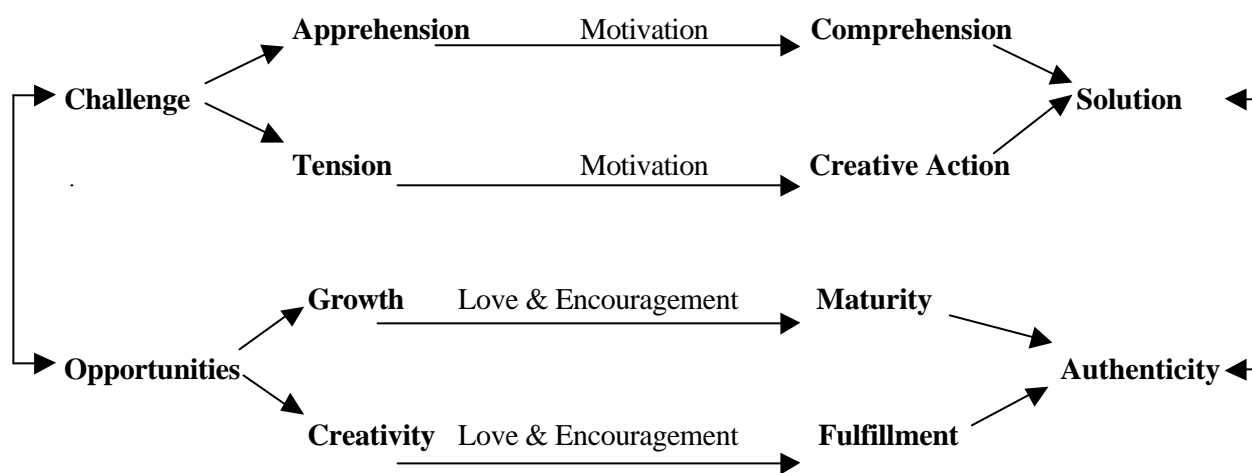


Figure 8. Violence-Free Life Process

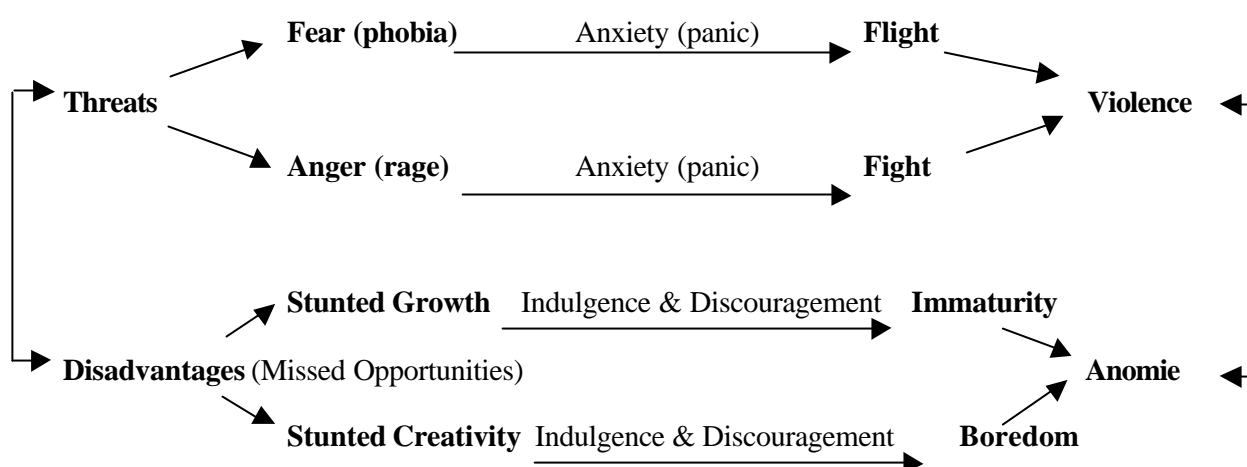


Figure 9. Violence-Prone Life Process

These two diagrams outline the main dimensions of both violence-free and violence-prone life processes. They take into consideration the developmental, psychosocial, and spiritual causes of violence as well as clearly demonstrate that prevention of violence is simultaneously a personal, familial, and social challenge. They also point to the fact that to prevent violence we need foresight of how to put into motion a long-term plan of action, courage to pursue the program in the face of political and special-interest groups' pressures, and wisdom not to abandon the plan when it inevitably meets with some failures and roadblocks. Even when we put into motion all these programs and approach them in the spirit and style described above, our efforts at prevention of violence will still not succeed unless we consider one other fundamental but perplexing issue in respect to violence. There is increasing evidence that violence does not have an independent reality of its own, and is, in fact, an indication of the absence of a condition essential for a creative and non-violent life.

Violence and its Antithesis

We are gradually arriving at a new understanding of the phenomenon of human violence. This new insight is gained from consideration of several interrelated factors that demonstrate the developmental nature of human behaviour, the integrative character of human societies, and the transcendent quality of human reality.

To summarize, human behaviour is shaped by the quality and level of capacity of the individual with regard to the twin life processes of challenges and opportunities. To the degree that we are able to meet life challenges in a healthy and mature manner and to transform them into opportunities for further growth and creativity, to that same degree, our lives become peaceful and free from violence. Because our ability to face life challenges and

take advantage of life opportunities is directly related to the level of our development as individuals and societies, it then follows that as we develop, both the frequency and intensity of violent behaviour will decrease. In other words, violence is an indication of our lower stages of development.

Development, both individual and collective, takes place on the axis of consciousness. Human consciousness evolves as we learn more about laws of nature and life, and accumulate greater understanding of ourselves through our experiences and relationships. The main two sources of insight for humanity are science and religion, and human consciousness cannot fully develop in the absence of either one. Science and religion demonstrate the fundamental fact that reality is one and that the expression of oneness in both the world of nature and human life is unity. Unity is an encompassing concept, at once, simple and complex, individual and universal, concrete and abstract, emotional and intellectual, material and spiritual. The paradigm of unity challenges us to look at ourselves in new ways and to reappraise our previously held views in a new light, particularly in respect to human nature.

The story of humanity's disunity is also that of its unity. In its long march toward maturity, humanity has achieved many remarkable acts of unity, such as the successive creation of family, clan, tribe, state, and nation. These are ever widening circles of unity. Humanity has also achieved limited, but significant, unities in respect to issues of religion, race, and culture. In recent decades, we also have achieved considerable unity of thought about the undeniable, but grievously ignored, fact that women are equal to men, and that peace and tranquility cannot be achieved, if women continue to be denied their rightful and equal place in the administration of human affairs. There are other examples of unity in human history, but they are all limited unities and, as such, have limited results. They may

even cause serious disunity. For example, racial unity becomes a negative condition if it excludes or abuses the members of other racial groups.

The primary requisite that assures a permanent and stable unity is consciousness of the oneness of humanity. Humanity has always been one. However, our consciousness of this oneness has been greatly limited due to the self-centred and identity-based preoccupations of earlier stages of our development. It is only after childhood and adolescence that we gradually begin to see humanity as one and ourselves as an integral part of this oneness.

The developmental perspective of the unity paradigm removes one of the most difficult obstacles for the achievement of unity: the strongly held view that unity in diversity is impossible. In fact, the concept of unity in diversity is being increasingly embraced by various governments and societies. The concept of diversity, however, needs careful study. The concept of unity in diversity requires a full comprehension and acceptance of the fact that, at the very core of our humanity, we are one and the same. We are all noble beings with the capacity to love, to understand, and to create. However, the *manner* in which we develop and express these capacities is unique to each individual and group. This uniqueness is at the core of the issue of diversity. In other words, diversity is neither sameness nor preference, but uniqueness in the context of equality of opportunities taking into account variations of interest and accomplishment. An example may be of help in clarifying the issue of unity in diversity. We all desire to love and to be loved and wish to know and be known. In this sense all humanity yearns for the same things, but as individuals, we follow our quest in a manner unique to each of us. This process is at the core of beauty, creativity, and richness of both individuals and societies.

The politics of power and domination are characteristics of childhood and adolescent phases of development, and they tend to create conditions of injustice, oppression, inequality, and, of course, disunity. These processes belong to the past. As humanity comes of age,

struggle for power and domination will, of necessity, give way to the forces of mutual strength, equality, and cooperation. All accomplishments of humanity are due to the ability of human beings to cooperate and create, not to compete and destroy. This perspective of history gives us cause to be optimistic and to state with certainty that the age of oneness and unity is at hand. However, to establish unity we need more than awareness, enthusiasm, and motivation. We also need know-how. It is clear that to create a new level of unity, there is need for a fresh approach to the resolution of human conflicts—an approach that not only opposes but also transcends violence, and in doing so, conquers it. This conflict-free conflict resolution is only possible, if unity is created.

Violence: A Symptom not a Disease

As demonstrated, violence is a worldwide phenomenon, affecting people of all ages, backgrounds, and conditions—the young and the old, the poor and the helpless, minorities and women, intellectuals and artists. While violence may be the result of ignorance, emotional illness, or self-defense, the majority of violent acts are deliberate and premeditated. These acts may be cloaked in the garment of love for one's family, religion, nation, or race, and performed in the name of honour, freedom, democracy, progress, or God. Regardless of these explanations and justifications, human violence remains the most alarming indication of humanity's failure to free itself from the bondage of instinctual, self-centered, and immature life. Humanity is still too fascinated with its childhood world of make-believe and adolescent bravado to accept the responsibility of freedom.

These facts notwithstanding, the age of maturity is approaching, and the welfare of humanity depends on people's preparing to live a life according to the mature laws of cooperation, other-directedness, service, and justice. To achieve these objectives, we must develop new approaches to human violence and, ultimately, prevent its occurrence. Toward

this end, it would be helpful to review some of the more common responses of people and nations to violence.

A very common response, especially when violence does not touch us directly, is to ignore it. An example of this is the generally indifferent response of people toward news of violence in other parts of the world, especially if those affected are of a different race, nationality, religion, or background. Such a response indicates our inability or refusal to accept the reality of the oneness of humanity, as well as the fact that violence against one is violence against all. While violence is frightening and many people naturally wish to avoid it, both avoidance and denial that violence is occurring are only temporarily effective strategies and are basically acts of self-delusion.

A second common response to violence is to rationalize its occurrence, an approach particularly prevalent in the biological, psychological, and sociological theories of aggression and violence. Every violent act is seen, in the last analysis, as a natural, understandable, and even acceptable response to certain psychological or social stresses or specific biological imperatives or anomalies. Therefore, theories abound on the instinctual, territorial, physiological, behavioural, and environmental roots of violence. However, these theories and explanations do not offer a plan for the eradication of war and violence and, at best, suggest coping techniques and deterrents.

The third and, by far, the most common response to violence is further violence. In our world today, responding to violence with a greater degree of violence is still considered the main solution to the problem even when all indications point to the futility of such an approach. The proponents of such a reaction obviously do not realize that one cannot remedy a disease by prescribing more of the pathogen causing it. These and other solutions proposed by experts on human violence, including the creation of a balance of power and a politics of deterrence, are pathetically inadequate when compared with the intensity and extent of

human violence. Wars waged, atrocities committed in concentration camps and prisons, brutalities inflicted in political, ideological, and religious interrogation and indoctrination centers, and, finally, cold-blooded maiming and murder of multitudes by modern instruments of death such as the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the napalm poured on people in more recent wars, and land mines implanted in numerous inhabited regions of the world, cannot be stopped by these conceptually and tactically inadequate solutions. We need a radically different approach to the solution of human violence. Our mindset has to change, and our understanding of both human nature and human violence has to be altered drastically. It is in this light that the following responses to violence merit our considered attention.

Apart from the most common responses to violence, such as ignoring, rationalizing, or combating violence with violence—all of which are considered to be natural and essential for self-protection—we have a few examples of a radically different and effective approach in the form of the nonviolence movement. We see, notably, the work of Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa and India, and Martin Luther King, Jr. in the United States. To a less dramatic degree, we have the example of Ferenc Deak, a Catholic landowner in Hungary who, in the mid-nineteenth century, mobilized the Hungarian people in a peaceful and nonviolent manner against the immense powers of Emperor Franz Josef of Austria. Finally, we can examine the nonviolent but courageous stand of the King of Denmark against the Nazi invaders, and the dramatic nonviolent stand of the Norwegian teachers against the horrendous brutality perpetrated against them by the Nazi soldiers.⁴ All these examples point to the effective results of the nonviolence movement.

There is ample evidence that methods of nonviolence have been successful both at the individual and collective levels, and that the main advantages of the nonviolent approach are

⁴ For an excellent review of the concept of nonviolence and the examples mentioned here, see Richard B. Gregg, *The Power of Nonviolence*, 2d ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1966).

its moral and psychological powers. The nonviolent individual, when facing violence, responds unexpectedly. He or she creates surprise and doubt in the attackers, attracts the attention of other people, arouses deep feelings of empathy and sympathy, especially when suffering and sacrifice are involved, and, above all, addresses the humanity and fundamental goodness of all people, including both the victim and the oppressor. Such a nonviolence movement creates conditions that render aggression and violence ineffective and, not infrequently, cause the attacker(s) to capitulate and accept defeat. However, the long-term effectiveness of the nonviolence movement has, at best, been marginal. There are several reasons for this. To begin with, unity is an essential condition for the success of nonviolence, and therefore, in the absence of unity, history has shown that the successes of the nonviolence movement have been dramatic, but limited and short-lived.

Another reason for the short-lived effectiveness of nonviolent resistance is that nonviolence does not have a force of its own and, consequently, cannot be effective on an ongoing basis. In essence, nonviolence needs violence in order to have any influence on human society. However, a violent world, even where nonviolent resistance is effective, is not synonymous with a peaceful and creative world.

When compared with the alternatives of ignoring violence (countering it with further violence or rationalizing it away), the concept of nonviolence emerges as the most viable option, but at the same time, it is clear that the nonviolence movement has been only partially successful, even among those who have benefited most from it. It is this perplexing and discouraging fact that impels us to search for another, more effective approach to deal with violence and eventually prevent its occurrence. We need to transcend violence. In this process, we can release the vast creative energies that are now being wasted in countering violence. To achieve this objective, we once again need to reevaluate our understanding of the nature and causes of violence.

Toward this end, we would like to put forward the concept that violence is actually a symptom of a more serious underlying social disease—disunity. To put it differently, violence exists when unity is absent. Therefore, the study of violence alone will not give necessary insights for its prevention. Rather, we need to eradicate the underlying disease of disunity in order to free ourselves from violence, and this is only possible through the creation of conditions of unity in human society.

The challenge of perceiving violence as the absence of unity is enormous. It calls for a remarkable change in our mindset, our concept of good and evil, our view of friends and enemies, our understanding of ourselves, and, ultimately, our understanding of reality. If violence is indeed, in reality, a symptom and not the disease itself, then it is no wonder that our attempts at controlling and preventing it have failed.

There is a parallel between violence and illness. If illness is defined as absence of health, then our efforts will be primarily focused on the promotion of health by appropriate nutrition, an optimal level of activity, purification of the environment from natural and chemical noxious agents that weaken or destroy our health, the avoidance of alcohol and other agents such as tobacco, and finally, the adoption of a lifestyle which is moderate, purposeful, joyous, and free from undue stress. These factors are all health promoting and thus preventative in nature. They are economical, pleasant, and not destructive. However, because we have poor nutrition, immoderate levels of activity and inactivity, continue to pollute our environment, and live immoderate, highly stressful lives, we have become burdened with serious chronic diseases. Furthermore, in our attempts to deal with consequences of these conditions, we have created an expensive, highly complex medical industry that is becoming increasingly inadequate. Ultimately, a change in our perspective on disease and health will help to channel our energies into the prevention of disease eventually improving the contemporary situation regarding health and illness.

Likewise, in respect to violence, we are suffering from both individual and collective lifestyles based on distrust, competition, self-centredness, inequality, injustice, separation, and disunity. Such conditions are fertile grounds for the development of violence. If we are to create a violence-free society, we need, above all, to realize that such a society must not only be free from violence but also endowed with the life-engendering and creative forces of unity.

This redefinition of violence implies that the most effective tool for both prevention of violence and its resolution once it has occurred is to create unity: a state of harmony, sensitivity, and understanding based on the fundamental reality that humanity, in its essence, is one. Therefore, the most important step we can take is to create an environment of kindness and love, even between the oppressor and the oppressed.

On the surface, this seems a most unrealistic proposition. In the face of violent attack by those who are intent to harm or kill, it seems bizarre and simplistic to ask not only for nonviolence but also for kindness and love based on the idea of human unity. One could easily imagine that under these circumstances the victims would be annihilated. One may even point to such historical events as the Holocaust for the proof of this assertion. However, before we reject this particular approach, let us again look at the phenomenon of violence.

Most students of violence assert that both the aggressors and the victims of violence, especially the aggressors, are filled with fear and mistrust. They are afraid of everyone and everything, but particularly of themselves. This fear becomes enormously destructive when combined with the view that human nature is violent in its essence, that some people are created more violent than others, and that the ultimate method to achieve our objectives is through the use of force within a competitive framework. Fear and anger are always mixed, and when one predominates, the other is barely below the surface and will manifest itself with the slightest provocation. When an aggressor and a potential victim come face-to-face,

they will be highly prone to violent interaction if they interact from the perspectives of fear, anger, mistrust, and dislike. However, if one of them begins to respond from the perspective of courage, calmness, trust, and a genuine sense of solidarity and acceptance for the other person, a different dynamic emerges. Obviously, under these circumstances, it is the victim who has to have the courage to respond to violence in this new manner. In doing so, the victim helps to decrease both the fear and anger of the aggressor by not responding with fear or anger himself or herself. More importantly, by focusing on the basic humanity of the aggressor, such a victim gives a potent reminder to the aggressor about the underlying oneness that exists between them. The reason is that at the core of all human beings and the very essence of human reality resides an ongoing quest for higher levels of love, enlightenment, peacefulness, and intimacy. Humanity, by definition, is based on the forces of creativity and life, and not on those of destructiveness and death; and the process of becoming human is that of developing our capacities to know, love, and create. All human beings, even those who seem totally violent and destructive, are nonetheless greatly responsive to the powerful forces of love, care, and kindness. An example of this phenomenon is the tenderness and love for family, children, and friends displayed by some of the most destructive and violent persons in history. Except for a few very unhealthy and exceptionally pathological individuals, people, in general, are drawn to love, unity, and creativity by the forces of their humanness.

When a victim of violence responds with courage and displays love and care, he or she is directing attention to the humanness of the oppressor and automatically reaffirming essential unity with the aggressor. While this process is initiated and carried out with a deliberate and well thought-out plan by the victim, its effects on the oppressor usually take place at the subconscious or unconscious levels, and as a consequence, the aggressor's behavior toward such a victim becomes more lenient without the aggressor's conscious

awareness and usually in spite of his or her stated intentions and sentiments. That is one reason why those individuals who have responded to human cruelty with love have had such a remarkable influence on the course of history and have been such enduring examples for people throughout the ages. The life histories of the founders of the major religions, as well as the lives of some of their followers, provide excellent examples of this new response to violence. However, these responses have historically occurred on an individual basis. At this stage in the history of humanity, we are, for the first time, capable of acting in this manner on a collective basis, creating a global civilization whose actions transcend violence.

Acts of love, courage, and kindness have at least two direct effects. First, they affect the oppressors by touching their humanness and piercing the many barriers existing between the oppressor and the victim, ultimately reaching the domain of their essential unity as members of the human family. The second effect of these acts is on others who, although not participating in the drama of the oppressor and the victim, are nevertheless touched by the potency of the affirmative response of such victims to aggression. In essence, the courage and humanity of these victims reaffirm the courage and humanity of all people and remind us that the direction of our movement in life is ultimately toward love, life, and unity. While responding to violence with forces of love and unity is extremely dramatic and fundamentally more effective than a violent and aggressive response, nevertheless, the greatest value of this new concept lies in its universal application. In other words, the forces of love, care, and unity should become the *modus operandi* of society so that the occurrence of conflict will decrease and its expression in the form of violence is eventually stopped.

It is neither sufficient nor judicious to wait for violence to occur in order to respond with an active display of love and care. Rather, we must create a new society, a new world order in which the forces of love and unity are operative at all times and under all conditions. Harnessing the forces of love and unity to nullify the forces of violence and war requires not

only a fundamental change in the mindset and behaviour of individual human beings but also a restructuring of human society so that it provides the main prerequisites for peace.

The fundamental prerequisite for peace is unity, which, in turn, is dependent upon the issue of justice. It is impossible to create a truly united society in the absence of justice. However, justice itself requires that equality of rights and opportunities be established in the society. Equality is a social phenomenon that requires a high level of individual and collective maturity. Those individuals and societies still struggling with the forces of identity formation and competitive self-affirmation are, by definition, unable and unwilling to consider others to be their equal. That is why the issues of equality, justice, and unity have eluded humanity in its developmental phases of childhood and adolescence. Maturity, in its most creative form, is expressed in the ability of the individual and society alike, to harness the forces of unconditional and universal love.

This chain of prerequisites—maturity → equality → justice → unity → peace—implies a developmental process. However, it should be noted that issues of maturity, equality, justice, unity, and ultimately peace are totally interrelated. Thus, it is more appropriate to see them in a circular form, indicating that focus on any of these issues, inevitably requires attention to all other issues involved. In a sense, peace and its prerequisites have a holographic quality. Each component part reflects the whole and the whole integrates all component parts.

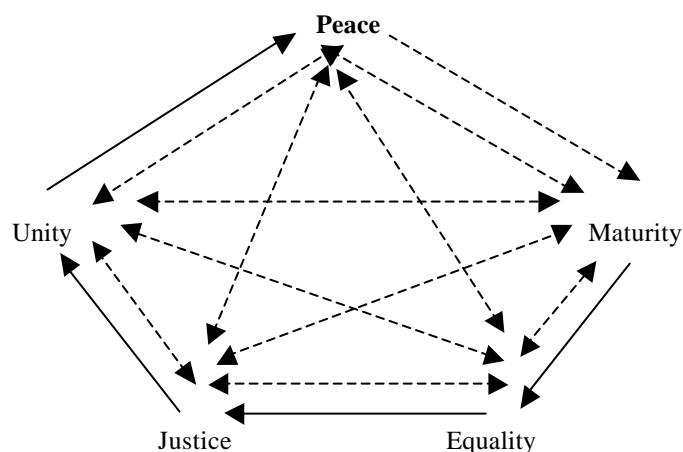


Figure 10. Prerequisites for Peace

As they now exist, the social and political structures of the world are, at best, able to deal with issues of injustice, inequality, and disunity; and at worst, they cause them. These are the characteristics of a dying order, the by-products of our collective childhood and adolescent phases of development. With the advent of the coming of age of humanity, a new world order must take the place of the old—a new order able to harness the forces of love, equality, justice, and unity, and usher in a civilization of peace.

Summary

Peace is the fruit of the tree of human unity, and unity is the hallmark of humanity's coming of age. Humanity, in its long march toward maturity, has struggled to free itself from the evils of self-centredness, aggression, injustice, tyranny, prejudice, and ignorance. The universal human yearning for love, peace, beauty, and knowledge has its source in the spiritual nature of human beings. The coming of age of humanity is, above all, the era of the spiritualization of the life and world of humanity. True maturity is a spiritual state, a new way of behaviour, a new outlook on life, and a new world order that needs to be established. Attempts to create equality of the sexes, the harmony of science and religion, cooperation and mutual trust between warring nations, races, and religions, and finally, the oneness of humanity are all spiritual undertakings that will ultimately lead to the creation of a unified global society.

The citizens of this united world will be engaged in the creation of a technology of peace, the organization of a cooperative and just society, and the elimination of the causes of prejudice, discord and inequality. In dealing with violence, a united world will depend on the constructive and life-endangering forces of love, growth, cooperation, and unity, rather than

on outdated practices based on hatred, rigidity, competition, and war. Above all, the united people of this new world will end the age of humanity's captivity in the claws of heartless and mindless materialism, which is shaping its attitudes and practices in the contemporary world. Then, they will be able to usher in the era of an ever-advancing civilization of peace.