

Book Reviews

***Positive Harmlessness in Practice*, by Dorothy I. Riddle.** Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2010. Paperback, 288 pages.

This is the second volume in Dorothy Riddle's trilogy, *Enough for Us All*. Here she tackles the difficult concept of harmlessness, a concept mandated by every spiritual tradition. As Dr. Riddle notes in the Preface, "exploring the concept of harmlessness makes it clear that we have no collective experience of harmlessness because our habits of harm are so pervasive." Consequently, the thoughtform of harmlessness is underdeveloped and is widely regarded as equivalent to powerlessness. So the author undertakes the task of educating the reader as to the real meaning of harmlessness, which she wisely terms "positive harmlessness," and of presenting a program to enable us to build our "harmlessness muscle."

Part One, consisting of three chapters, presents a carefully thought out explanation of harm (the pervasiveness of harm, the international understanding of harm, harming by commission, harming by omission, healing the effects of harm) and of harmlessness (definition of harmlessness, harmlessness in thought, in word, in action). Dr. Riddle also relates harmlessness to the Seven Principles of Abundance, which is the topic of the first book in the series. These principles are, in brief:

Interconnectivity
Participation
Nonlinearity
Nonduality
Interdependence
Adaptability
Cooperation

For a short discussion of these principles, see the review in the Summer 2010 issue of *The Esoteric Quarterly*—or, better yet, read the book.

Part Two, consisting of six chapters, details how we can create a "harmlessness mini-

immersion" experience on a daily basis in order to bring about a "Butterfly Shift." (Butterfly Shift refers to the ripple effect of our thoughts, feelings and actions, such as a butterfly flapping its wings in Brazil causing a tornado in Texas.) There are three steps in the daily Butterfly Shift practice:

Step One: Notice the Shift Potential
Step Two: Feel the Shift Potential
Step Three: Act on the Shift Potential
This involves all personality vehicles: mental, astral and physical.

These techniques can be applied to each of three types of Butterfly Shifts:

1. The Compassionate Shift
2. The Grateful Shift
3. The Joyous Shift

Part Three then turns to the larger topic of the changes that are needed globally in order to anchor harmlessness as a societal norm. This requires the transformation of our worldview from harm and violence as inevitable to harmlessness as our chosen ethic.

Dr. Riddle deals extensively with the process of maturing as a precondition to effectively practice positive harmlessness. Most interestingly, she presents seven Maturation Dimensions, each of which in turn corresponds to the seven Principles listed above:

Self-discipline
Responsibility
Decision making
Complexity
Nurturance
Goodwill
Compassion

The reader of this article might want to consider whether the Principle of Interconnectivity might correspond to the Motivational Dimension of Self-discipline (that is, one must be mature in self-discipline before one can experience and express the Principle of Interconnec-

tivity). Then proceed down the list. Some correspondences may seem obvious; others might remain elusive. The recommended solution is to read Chapter 11, in which there is a short section on each Maturation Dimension and the corresponding Principle.

The final chapter, “Developing an Ethic of Harmlessness,” bridges the gap between theory and practice. Dr. Riddle presents a “Harmlessness Scale” that she has devised, which lists eight attitudes ranging from the extreme of Brutality to the proactive attitude of Advocacy. The point of this, as she explains, is that we not only need to be aware of different attitudes toward harmlessness, we also need to understand where we are personally starting from so that we can identify the changes we want to make. Among the Appendices is a detailed questionnaire for those readers who are serious about determining their starting point and further developing their positive harmlessness.

This reference to the Appendices brings us to our final comments regarding the resources Dr. Riddle supplies, which are scattered through the text and in the end material.

As in Volume One, Dr. Riddle inserts exercises here and there in the text—68 in all and an Index of them at the end of the book. There are helpful tables to give a broader perspective, such as the one in connection with the Golden Rule. Here nine great spiritual traditions are listed, with the sentence cited from the scripture of each that corresponds to Christianity’s version (Matthew 7:12). Among the Appen-

the text. She also includes excerpts from a U.N. document, “Ending Violence Against Women: From Words to Action,” which ties into a powerful section in the final chapter—“Gender Harmlessness as a Litmus Test”—that is horrifying to read about, but necessary to be aware of.

There were several passages in the book that were of great importance to this reviewer. We will close with one that unites the esoteric, or cosmic, dimension with our responsibility as incarnate beings:

Harmlessness requires practice and maturity in how we focus and use the energy that flows among us as part of our interconnected cosmic energy field... If we accept, at least as a working hypothesis, the concept of continuity of consciousness,... surely we can build a “harmlessness muscle” over our lifetimes that allows us to be positively and proactively harmless. (pp. 203-204)

Dr. John Cobb
Asheville, North Carolina

ces can be found the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is referred to in