

Learning the Practice of Harmlessness

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For over two thousand years, religions have been espousing harmlessness in the form of the ethics of reciprocity, known in Christianity as the Golden Rule. Yet, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), “The 20th century was one of the most violent periods in human history. An estimated 191 million people lost their lives directly or indirectly as a result of [armed] conflict, over half of whom were civilians.”¹ In fact, WHO launched an ongoing Global Campaign for Violence Prevention in 2003, stating: “Each year, more than 1.6 million people worldwide lose their lives to violence. For every person who dies as a result of violence, many more are injured and suffer from a range of physical, sexual, reproductive and mental health problems.”²

Why is violence so pervasive that we assume it is an inevitable part of our lives? Why is it taking so long for the teaching of harmlessness to affect our social fabric? What steps can we take to shift from violence to harmlessness?

Understanding the Concept of Harm

Our human family is actually relatively young in its shared understanding of harm as a consistent concept across gender, class, ethnicity, and religion. While the international Geneva Convention began addressing the treatment of military prisoners of war in 1929, it was not until 1949 that attention was paid to the protection of civilian persons. Actually, the first general agreement on what constitutes harm was the Nüremberg Principles,³ developed in conjunction with the 1945 Nüremberg Trials to address the genocide of World War Two. These principles noted three types of crimes punishable under international law: crimes against peace, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. They included, as Principle VII, an assertion that complicity in a crime is itself punishable as a crime. In North American legal terms, this includes the concept of “willful blindness.” The fifty-year jail term handed down in May 2012 by the International Criminal Court to Charles Taylor, former president of Liberia, was the first highly-publicized conviction for “aiding and abetting” war crimes and crimes against humanity in Sierra Leone.⁴

The United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁵ of 1948 moved the discussion from armed conflict into the arena of everyday life. It affirmed for the first time in an international agreement “the dignity and worth of the human person and...the equal rights of men and women.” While the Universal Declaration of Human Rights itself has no force in law, the UN has subsequently passed a number of legal conventions to implement the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that are now international law.

But our history of implementation leaves something to be desired. International anti-slavery legislation, for example, has been in place since 1926, reinforced by the UN’s 1949 Convention

¹ See http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/publications/violence/explaining/en/index.html.

² See http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/en/.

³ See <http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/full/390>.

⁴ David Blair, “War crimes court hand Liberia’s Charles Taylor 50-year jail term,” *The Telegraph*, 30 May 2012.

⁵ See <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>.

for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others and its 1956 Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery. Yet the UN Office on Drugs and Crime reports that at least 2.5 million people are currently victims of human trafficking at any given time, with an annual profit being generated of over \$32 billion dollars.⁶ The UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women entered into force as international law in 1981, yet systematic discrimination against women continues.⁷ The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child became international law in 1990, and yet UNICEF continues to document that “millions of children worldwide from all socio-economic backgrounds, across all ages, religions and cultures suffer violence, exploitation and abuse every day. Millions more are at risk.”⁸

International conventions may seem distant from our daily lives, but we have also had a series of professional warnings about the immediate impact of violence on ourselves and our children. The American Psychological Association published a longitudinal study in 2003 showing that the extent to which children were exposed to media violence was significantly related to adult violent behavior.⁹ The American Academy of Pediatrics issued a similar statement in 2009, concluding that “extensive research evidence indicates that media violence can contribute to aggressive behavior, desensitization to violence, nightmares, and fear of being harmed.”¹⁰

As we come to understand the range of harm that results from violence, we have also begun recognizing that harm is more than physical. It also includes “mental, moral, or spiritual injury.”¹¹ We see this deeper understanding reflected in a broadening of anti-harassment legislation to include not only discrimination and personal harassment but also sexual harassment, abuse of authority, and (more recently) bullying.

Organizations using social media to galvanize action (such as <http://www.avaaz.org> or <http://www.change.org>) are having a significant impact on gross injustice in the global arena. But in our local settings, violence rages on. Of the many examples that exist, one of the more appalling, widely-publicized events was the brutal beating of a woman by two young women in a McDonalds restaurant in Baltimore County, Maryland on April 18, 2011. One of the staff members, rather than intervene, filmed the incident and posted it on the Internet.¹² While the subsequent media focus was on the fact that the victim was transgendered, the truly horrifying aspect was that some of the bystanders could be heard laughing in the background and seen standing idly by while only one employee and one customer tried to intervene as the victim was being dragged by her hair across the floor in front of them.

⁶ United Nations, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*, http://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/Global_Report_on_TIP.pdf.

⁷ See statistics from around the world at http://gstudies.asp.radford.edu/sources/wage_gaps/worldwide.htm.

⁸ See http://www.unicef.org/protection/57929_57972.html.

⁹ L. Rowell Huesmann, Jessica Moise-Titus, Cheryl-Lynn Podolski, and Leonard D. Eron “Longitudinal Relations Between Children’s Exposure to TV Violence and Their Aggressive and Violent Behavior in Young Adulthood: 1977–1992,” *Developmental Psychology* 39, no. 2 (2003):201–221.

¹⁰ Published in *Pediatrics*, October 19, 2009.

¹¹ Stuart Berg Flexner and Leonore Crary Hanck, eds. *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, 2nd ed. (New York: Random House, 1987).

¹² See http://www.youtube.com/verify_age?next_url=/watch%3Fv%3DtS3rf_9tpDM.

Defining the Concept of Harmlessness

So what do we mean by behaving harmlessly? The traditional ethics of reciprocity take us only so far since they are based on an assumption that people are motivated primarily out of self-interest. This limited view can be particularly damaging for women as sex role socialization encourages women to be nurturing and put others' needs before their own. A simplistic "do unto others as you would have them do to you" approach can allow for an endless repetition of harsh treatment with the rationale that it is for the other's own good to "toughen up."

From a more positive, proactive perspective, harmlessness involves moving beyond self-interest to consider what is best both for the individual and the community. It includes both avoiding harmful actions and initiating actions that are empowering. It includes both being harmless to others and being harmless to self. As described in the metaphysical literature, it includes "harmlessness in speech and also in thought and consequently in action. It is a positive harmlessness, involving constant activity and watchfulness."¹³

To help us begin to understand the range of actions involved, we can think of harm and harmlessness as existing along a continuum as outlined in the Harmlessness ScaleTM¹⁴ below:

Harmlessness ScaleTM

Attitude	Characteristics
1—Brutality	Enacting physical violence on others; willfully harming self
2—Harassment	Engaging in verbal and/or psychological violence
3—Dismissiveness	Treating others, or oneself, as not visible & not to be taken seriously
4—Defensiveness	Refusing to admit that violence is occurring or assuming that it is justified
5—Abstention	Refraining from being actively harmful, but refusing to intervene to prevent harm
6—Supportiveness	Recognizing that harm is being done & intervening, but only privately to express empathy & concern
7—Nonviolence	Exhibiting zero tolerance for jokes & casual harm; intervening to prevent specific harm
8—Advocacy	Transforming situations that traditionally result in violence into win-win solutions; dismantling structural violence

¹³ Alice A. Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1934), 490.

¹⁴ Dorothy I. Riddle, *Positive Harmlessness in Practice: Enough for Us All, Volume Two* (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2010), 209.

Each of us may have different areas of challenge. One of the most often overlooked is Dismissiveness, not only of others but also of ourselves and what is important to us. Shunning is an extreme form of dismissiveness in which the other is treated as being invisible and not existing. However, we practice less extreme forms each time we ignore our own needs or let our mind wander when another is talking with us or discount another person's observations or requests because we don't see them as important. At its core, dismissiveness is a lack of respect for another, generating harm through the withholding of acknowledgement.

The Challenge of Being Harmless

When violence is publicized, people talk with despair about human nature being basically violent. When social inequities or environmental degradation are glaring, people talk about the need to check human greed. What if the fundamental issue is not that humans are inherently greedy or violent, but that we have not grasped and internalized our true nature?

Quantum physicists have been demonstrating for over 100 years that we are all energetically entangled or interconnected.¹⁵ At the most fundamental level, there is no "us" as distinct from "them." That sense of separateness is an illusion, but it is an illusion that allows us to objectify and harm others while believing the consequences will not rebound on ourselves.

Research by scientist Lynn Margulis and others has shown that networking and cooperation, not competition, are the basic survival strategies used by microbes and all living beings.¹⁶ Recent psychological research has demonstrated that other primates are helpful, cooperative, and sensitive to inequitable treatment of others.¹⁷ Neuroeconomic research is verifying that not only are we basically cooperative but also we value equity over economic efficiency.¹⁸

When we harm another being, we are ultimately harming ourselves. While that impact may not be obvious, each time we allow ourselves the luxury of yelling at someone else when we are frustrated, we make it easier to be verbally abusive again. Each time we watch gratuitous violence in a movie or on TV or in a video game without objecting, we make it more likely that such violence will be repeated and modeled in daily life. Masaru Emoto, a Japanese scientist, has demonstrated the impact of positive or negative emotions on water crystals, with water exposed to loving energy displaying a beautiful crystalline structure while water exposed to anger or hate displaying malformed crystals.¹⁹

Why is it so difficult to behave harmlessly? First and foremost, we do not have a shared experience of harmlessness. It is not actually familiar to us. Just examine the news we receive each day—what percentage of the headlines are uplifting and what percentage are of disasters? Think about everyday encounters—how often do we dismiss the importance of others or feel

¹⁵ See summaries of the research in Rushworth M. Kidder, "Making the Quantum Leap: A Monitor 5-Part Series," *The Christian Science Monitor* (June 13-17, 1988); Ervin László, *Science and the Akashic Field: An Integral Theory of Everything* (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2004); Brian Swimme, *The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos: Humanity and the New Story* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996).

¹⁶ Lynn Margulis, *The Symbiotic Planet: A New Look at Evolution* (London: Phoenix, 1998).

¹⁷ Sadie F. Dingfelder, "Nice by Nature?" *Monitor on Psychology* 58 (September 2009), 60-61.

¹⁸ George Lowenstein, Scott Rick, and Jonathan D. Cohen. "Neuroeconomics." In *Annual Review of Psychology*, Vol. 59, edited by Susan T Fiske, Daniel L Schacter, and Robert Sternberg, 647-672 (PaloAlto: Annual Reviews, 2008); Michael Price, "Making Sense of Dollars and Cents," *Monitor on Psychology* 39, no. 2 (February 2008):34-36.

¹⁹ Masaru Emoto, *The Hidden Messages in Water* (New York: Atria Books, 2001).

dismissed in return? It is challenging to learn a new way of behaving if one does not see it continuously modeled.

Second, violence has a certain dynamism. It stimulates adrenaline. Getting angry, for example, feels empowering. Behaving harmlessly does not elicit the same excitement or surge of power. It requires effort, at least initially, rather than generating energy.

Third, behaving harmlessly is complicated. It involves not only refraining from harm but also taking action proactively to prevent harm from occurring. It may entail placing ourselves in harm's way in order to prevent harm from occurring. Because we are all interconnected energetically, behaving harmlessly involves not only actions but also thoughts and feelings—i.e., internal acts that we may not be used to disciplining.

The Practice of Harmlessness

So how can we begin to learn the practice of harmlessness, or build our “harmlessness muscle”? We need a way to develop the reflex of harmlessness in our daily lives so that it becomes more natural than behaving harmfully, despite media messages. Lasting change depends on making a shift not only in how we act but also in how we think and feel. It requires seeing harmlessness modeled for us so consistently that we have enough of an immersion experience that the new behavior becomes reflexive. The value of this immersion process is the reason why many rehabilitation programs require an initial 24/7 residency for at least a month.

We don't currently have harmlessness immersion programs, so how can we begin to affect change without them? Edward Lorenz introduced the concept of the “butterfly effect” —i.e., small changes with unintended consequences out of proportion to the original action.²⁰ One of the advantages of our energetic connectivity is that any shift we make has the potential to influence others. So we can create a mini-immersion experience for ourselves and others as long as that experience has the following characteristics: (a) It disrupts our familiar but harmful automatic response. (b) It engages a sense of hope about the possibility of change. (c) It has a high probability of leading to new behavior. The following three steps, practiced at least once daily, provide us with this type of “Butterfly Shift”²¹ to train ourselves in harmless interactions.

Step 1: Noticing

The first step is to become aware of what we notice and what we dismiss. Research shows that we typically only attend to five to nine of the thousands of stimuli bombarding us at any one time. We create our experience of reality by what we choose to notice. One of the challenges of our currently expanding multi-media input is that we become absorbed in our iPhones or iPods and don't even notice our surroundings. This tendency to “cognitive capture” or “inattentional blindness” results in our withdrawing our focus from immediate in-person human interactions.

Our awareness is typically comprised of a “figure” (what we focus on) and a “ground” (the backdrop, or everything we are ignoring). We tend to be mindful of the “figure” and mindless in relation to the ground. Awareness of the “ground” is usually triggered by something negative—a sense of something wrong or missing. In interpersonal terms, we tend to notice persons that we perceive as having power or status or who have a personal relationship with us. But we tend to

²⁰ Edward Lorenz, “Predictability: Does the Flap of a Butterfly's Wings in Brazil Set Off a Tornado in Texas?” Paper presented at the American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1972.

²¹ Dorothy I. Riddle, *Positive Harmlessness in Practice* (2010).

dismiss those who help us in a service capacity—e.g., the cashier, the repair person, the waiter—and often don't even bother to learn their name.

We have a choice to shift our mindful focus from the negative to the positive—i.e., to actively notice help that we are receiving. Becoming mindful of ways in which we respect and empower each other, instead of the violence with which we are surrounded, can be challenging. However, becoming present in a positive manner can enhance our health. So Step 1 involves practicing each day being present with those with whom we interact rather than ignoring or dismissing them.

Step 2: Feeling

Research has demonstrated that emotions are triggered faster than thought.²² So disciplining our emotions is a critical part of a shift to harmless behavior. Emotions are also critical in affecting our interactive space—warming or cooling the energy, so to speak. Candace Pert, a neuroscientist, has pointed out: “Emotions are the connectors, flowing between individuals, moving among us as empathy, compassion, sorrow, and joy...It is a scientific fact that we can feel what others feel. The oneness of all life is based on this simple reality: Our molecules of emotion are all vibrating together.”²³

Emotions give meaning to what we feel, and yet most of the research on emotions has focused on negative emotions, primarily fear and anger. Until the late 1990s, positive emotions were dismissed by psychologists as trivial. Now, however, we have Institutes of Positive Psychology as well as professional conferences focusing on happiness, so the shift is beginning.

One of our challenges is that many people have a much more intense expression of negative emotions than of positive emotions, with the exception of the emotion of being “in love.” Fortunately, research shows that, if we experience positive emotions, they will replace negative ones.²⁴

For the purposes of a harmless mini-immersion, there are three emotions that bear cultivating – compassion, gratitude, and joy. Compassion is considered one of the great virtues in many religious traditions and is fundamental to feeling empathy and respect for others. Gratitude focuses on our own situation and the benefit we have received from others. Joy is the most intense and contagious of the positive emotions. We are gradually developing practices, such as laughter yoga, to reinforce a positive emotional focus.

Each day we can practice extending the intensity and duration of our positive emotions. As Step 2 in the Butterfly Shift, we can choose which of the three primary positive emotions to focus on.

Step 3: Acting

Putting the noticing and feeling together gives us our opportunity to act. In order for our actions to have an effect, we first need to establish rapport with the person we select by

²² Institute of HeartMath, “The Power of Emotions,” <http://store.heartmath.org/store/solutions-for-stress/the-power-of-emotion>, 4.

²³ Candace B. Pert, *Molecules of Emotion: The Science Behind Mind-Body Medicine* (New York: Scribner, 1997), 312.

²⁴ Anca M. Miron, Beverly Brummett, Brent Ruggles, and Jack W. Brehm, “Deterring Anger and Anger-Motivated Behaviors,” *Basic & Applied Social Psychology* 30, no. 4 (October-December 2008):326-338.

maintaining appropriate eye contact and relaxing in their presence. Taking positive action needs to go beyond thank yous or random acts of kindness. To increase the likelihood that someone who was helpful to you will also be helpful to others, they need to understand why their actions made a difference. So it is important to provide feedback that is immediate, specific, relevant, and appropriate. That feedback needs to be delivered by speaking clearly and limiting the feedback to less than ten seconds without sounding rushed.

Combining the three steps each day means that we look for situations where someone is being helpful to us or is trying to be helpful despite challenges. We engage at least one of the three positive emotions (compassion, gratitude, joy) and then take time to briefly tell that person what a difference their help has made to us. If we commit to such a practice, we will find that our focus and actions gradually shift from harmful to harmless.

Advocating Harmlessness

If we are serious about learning to practice harmlessness, then the Butterfly Shift practice must be supplemented by Advocacy, or taking stands against common forms of harm and their causes. There is a growing concern about environmental degradation and our role as humans in climate change and the destruction of species. How we treat the environment is symptomatic of other harmful practices that also require our attention. Below are four examples of current issues where the harm we do is being challenged and where we have opportunities to become actively involved.

Teen Dating Violence

In the U.S., approximately twenty percent of high school girls have been physically or sexually abused by a dating partner and one-third report being in emotionally abusive relationship. Usually the violence is linked to a power differential in which girls are expected to meet their boyfriend's emotional and physical needs without the right to expect similar support in return.²⁵ Over eighty percent of teens recognize that not only physical abuse but also verbal abuse is a major problem for their age group. Unfortunately, almost eighty percent of girls continue to date their abuser, and twenty percent report that their boyfriends have threatened violence if they breakup.

The U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention has launched a "Choose Respect" campaign to address this growing issue, with a range of resources and activities for teens, their parents, and school officials.²⁶ In 2010, February was declared National Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month in the U.S. As community members, whether or not we are parents of teenagers, we can heighten awareness in our community of these resources and initiatives.

Hypersexualization

With the decline in media regulatory oversight, the media portrayal of females as sexual objects has intensified and encompassed ever younger girls. There is now thong underwear for five and six year olds, with young girls shown in sexually provocative poses and attire. The American Psychological Association Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls commented that

²⁵ Sadie F. Dingfelder, "Ending an epidemic," *Monitor on Psychology* 41, no. 3 (March 2010):32.

²⁶ See <http://www.cdc.gov/chooserespect/>.

“in the current environment, teen girls are encouraged to look sexy, yet they know little about what it means to be sexual, to have sexual desires, and to make rational and resistible decisions about pleasure and risk within intimate relationships that acknowledge their own desires.”²⁷

There are several unfortunate and dangerous consequences of this trend. Girls and young women become dissatisfied with their bodies unless they match the airbrushed photos of thin models, resulting in eating disorders, low self-esteem, and depression. Young men become accustomed to graphic and gratuitous sexual violence and have difficulty developing a normal, respectful intimate relationship. Also, as a result, tolerance of sexual violence and objectification of women is on the rise. In May 2012, the High Court in Edinburgh heard a case where a twelve-year-old boy raped and sexually assaulted a nine-year-old girl in an attempt to copy a hardcore pornography film that he was on the Internet.²⁸

To expose and counter this trend, a documentary film called *Miss Representation*²⁹ has been released that aims to increase the “media literacy” of young people in regard to the prevalent sexual objectification in the media. It demonstrates the link between hypersexualization of women and the parallel lack of respect for their character and accomplishments, resulting in a disproportionately low percentage of women in positions of public leadership and power. The documentary’s website has a range of resources that we can use in our communities to raise awareness and begin to address such issues.

Bullying

For generations, rites of passage have involved the form of bullying known as hazing. More general bullying behavior in primary and secondary school has historically been dismissed as “boys will be boys” or “girls are just that way.” The targets of bullying are typically those who are marginalized in some way (e.g., ethnic minorities, gays, persons with disabilities), and bullies gain satisfaction from exercising power over those unable to fight back. The sudden increase in cyber-bullying and a number of resulting highly-publicized teen suicides has raised questions about the full range of bullying practices.

Advocacy responses are now gaining momentum. Dan Savage began the “It Gets Better” Project³⁰ to inspire hope for young people facing harassment, and a number of well-known figures have recorded empowering messages. The Project is also encouraging people to take the following pledge: “Everyone deserves to be respected for who they are. I pledge to spread this message to my friends, family and neighbors. I’ll speak up against hate and intolerance whenever I see it, at school and at work. I’ll provide hope for lesbian, gay, bi, trans and other bullied teens by letting them know that ‘It Gets Better.’” More recently, The Bully Project³¹ has released a hard-hitting documentary called *Bully* that is intended to educate students, parents, and teachers about the extent of the problem and what can be done.

Gradually attitudes towards bullying are shifting from acceptance to rejection. As a sign of that shift, a recent Canadian poll showed that the majority of Canadians now favor laws making

²⁷ See <http://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/girls/report.aspx>.

²⁸ Simon Johnson, “A generation is growing up skewed by internet pornography, court hears, as 12-year-old who raped a school girl is spared jail,” *The Telegraph*, 31 May 2012.

²⁹ See <http://www.missrepresentation.org/>.

³⁰ See <http://www.itgetsbetter.org/>.

³¹ See <http://www.thebullyproject.com/>.

all forms of bullying, particularly cyber-bullying, a crime.³² Again, we can initiate discussions and documentary viewings in our communities to help address these issues.

Exploitation of Non-Human Intelligent Entities

In 2001, 1,500 scientists from over 100 countries issued the Amsterdam Declaration on Global Change, which stated: “The Earth System behaves as a single, self-regulating system comprised of physical, chemical, biological, and human components. The interactions and feedbacks between the component parts are complex and exhibit multi-scale temporal and spatial variability.”³³ This Declaration was, in part, in response to the research by James Lovelock, a researcher and inventor for NASA, who had proposed that the organic and inorganic components of the Earth comprise a single living, self-regulating global ecological system, or biosphere. Lovelock’s Gaia Theory states that “the physical and chemical condition of the surface of the Earth, of the atmosphere, and of the oceans has been and is actively made fit and comfortable by the presence of life itself...Regulation, at a state fit for life, is a property of the whole evolving system of life, air, ocean, and rock.”³⁴

The research of Lovelock and others has made it clear that the Earth is not simply a resource for us to exploit but has its own intelligence and awareness. It is interesting that many debates on climate change or ecological degradation still do not reference the Amsterdam Declaration or consider the Earth as an intelligent partner. By contrast, in 2008 Ecuador enacted legislation to give nature “the right to exist, flourish, and evolve.” In 2011, Bolivia became the first country to enact into law a comprehensive Rights of Mother Earth, with a Ministry of Mother Earth to oversee implementation.

As one example of non-human species now considered to be “persons,” research has confirmed that whales and dolphins are self-aware, social creatures who understand symbolic language, form group affiliations, and think about others in a way similar to humans.³⁵ Yet both species of cetaceans are routinely and brutally slaughtered as a food source for humans despite international legal conventions prohibiting such actions. We also keep them in captivity, in isolation from their communities, for our own recreational pleasure.

Scientists launched a Declaration of Rights for Cetaceans in May 2010 at a conference in Finland, which is gaining momentum. In it are statements like, “every individual cetacean has the right to life,” “no cetacean should be held in captivity or servitude, be subject to cruel treatment, or be removed from their natural environment,” and “no cetacean is the property of any state, corporation, human group or individual.” A recent debate of this Declaration occurred at the 2012 annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement in Science in

³² Sonja Puzic, “Most Canadians Think Bullying Should Be a Crime: Poll,” *CTVNews.ca* (February 29, 2012).

³³ See a copy at <http://www.igbp.net/documents/amsterdam-declaration.pdf>.

³⁴ James Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, revised 2000), ix, 144.

³⁵ Andy Coghlan, “Whales Boast the Brain Cells That ‘Make Us Human,’” *New Scientist* (November 27, 2006); Steve Connor, “Whales and Dolphins Are So Intelligent They Deserve the Same Rights as Humans, Say Experts,” *The Independent* (February 21, 2012), <http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/nature/whales-and-dophins-are-so-intelligent-they-deserve-same-rights-as-humans-say-experts-7237448.html>; Diana Reiss and Lori Marino, “Mirror Self-Recognition in the Bottlenose Dolphin: A Case of Cognitive Convergence,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science USA* 98 (2001):5937-5942.

Vancouver, Canada.³⁶ The Declaration is available for public signature at www.cetaceanrights.org.

Based on research showing that plants actually are self-aware, form social relationships, and can integrate a range of data to decide how to act,³⁷ Switzerland has enacted legislation to ensure that geneticists conduct research “without trampling on a plant’s dignity.”³⁸ Issues such as these remind us that behaving respectfully and harmlessly goes beyond our human relationships. If we are to embrace harmlessness as our ethic, we need to review our relationships with all living beings.

Conclusion

We are so surrounded by negative messages, harm-inducing behavior, and gratuitous violence that we assume it is normal. If we are serious about ending violence and instead behaving harmlessly, we will need to consciously practice new behavior until it becomes reflexive and the “new normal.” The three-step Butterfly Shift offers us an opportunity to do just that. While on the global stage our tolerance for certain types of violence is lessening, behaving harmfully can continue unconsciously at the personal level. Studying the Harmlessness Scale™ can help us become aware of the forms of violence embedded in how we think, feel, and act towards ourselves and others. Urging our communities to take action can help stimulate awareness of the range of harm that exists. And awareness is the first step towards a permanent change.

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³⁶ Annalee Newitz, “Why We Need a Declaration of Rights for Cetaceans,” <http://io9.com/5888796/why-we-need-a-declaration-of-rights-for-cetaceans/>; Kendra Wong, “Personhood Rights for Whales?” *Vancouver Metro News* (February 16, 2012), 1.

³⁷ See <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/06/100624144057.htm>; <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/pf/858755.html>.

³⁸ See <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122359549477921201.html>.

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