

Talk by Juliet Gellatley, founder & director, Viva!

www.viva.org.uk

For Institute of Jainology, to celebrate Ahimsa Day
Theme *Ahimsa: Conscious Compassion*

I'm utterly delighted to be the keynote speaker for the Institute of Jainology. The planet certainly desperately needs for ahimsa to become the central tenet of the human race -- if we are to survive. It does not matter whether we believe in a god, goddess or multiple gods or none at all – it does not affect the truth that ahimsa is the only way forward if we don't want to annihilate ourselves and many of our fellow passengers on this fragile, complex blue dot in space.

I'm doubly delighted because I have long respected and admired the work of the recipient of the Award tonight, Ingrid Newkirk, cofounder of Peta. A fearless campaigner who has given her life to saving animals; with very many successes; helping forge a better, kinder, wiser world. She challenges people, and so, of course, has evoked a myriad of reactions; but mostly she has helped, nudged, cajoled millions of people to change themselves – to go vegetarian and vegan, buy cruelty-free --- to wake up!

The theme today is Ahimsa: Conscious Compassion. The impact of violence is far reaching, beyond the obvious as

all life is interconnected, as expressed so eloquently by Chief Seattle (I've slightly adapted it):

"The Earth does not belong to humans; we belong to the Earth. This we know. All things are connected like the blood which unites one family. Whatever befalls the Earth befalls the sons and daughters of the Earth. We did not weave the web of life, we are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves."

As the human population continues to escalate – and it's now over 7.2 billion - the potential for catastrophic damage also escalates...

...so our species need to remember that we did not create and sustain Mother Earth. Mother Earth creates and sustains us.

Instead of seeking to dominate and control Earth, we need to practice ahimsa - we need to respect and cooperate with planet Earth and our fellow inhabitants.

Ahimsa is often translated simply as non-violence, but its implications are far wider; it is more than not committing violence, it is more than an attitude, it is a whole way of life.

An obvious, conscious and practical way of applying ahimsa is, of course, to be vegan. This is imperative on so many levels:

- 1. The most powerful action you can take to end animal suffering and protect our world is to stop eating animals and animal products. Livestock farming is a hopelessly inefficient way of feeding people that causes pollution and environmental damage on a staggering scale**
- 2. Consuming animals causes immense cruelty and suffering. Seven billion animals are killed for food in the UK (including water animals). Most of the land animals are incarcerated in prisons called factory farms for their short, miserable lives. The hoovering of life from the oceans not only needlessly takes the life of each fish, lobster, crab... but is causing the ecological collapse of their homes.**
- 3. Eating animals is detrimental for the mind and body. We suffer from more chronic diseases than ever in our history. Heart disease is the UK's number one killer and yet almost entirely preventable by a vegan diet. We, as a society, are riddled with disease and yet have never been so materialistically affluent.**

Never before has the belief in ahimsa been so needed, been so relevant to healing us and this precious world.

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT

Now couple of stories about my work and what ahimsa means to me.

In Viva!'s 20 year history, we've been at the forefront of investigating farmed animal cruelty in Britain. I don't find investigating factory farms easy.

It has meant though, that I've looked into the eyes of the animals who are incarcerated. Who have known nothing but a life of relentless, gnawing pain and utter frustration. What is hard is when they look back. Really look back like they are trying to work me out, find an answer in my soul. Hardest to handle is when they plead. I apologise for being human. I feel anger at the abject misery we cause on a global scale. Despair and sadness at not being able to rescue all the innocent prisoners. But knowing that by exposing the reality of these hellholes, people do change.

Pigs are extremely expressive animals. I find them easy-to-read, vividly emotional and sharp. Many people would say the same about their dog companion. I'll always remember a colleague describing how when he took his 'pet' piglet, Babe, to puppy training classes, he learned the exercises much faster than his canine friends but most impressive (and

challenging!) was that he quickly learned how to open the fridge with his snout!

Pigs are incredibly bright and can roll out rugs, roll themselves up in rugs (I know a pig who did this to get away from a vet!), close and open doors, dance, sing, play videogames with joysticks – you get the picture. For better or worse, pigs are also slow to forget.

It's tragic that pigs, or any animals, are bred for meat. The scale of suffering is unimaginable. Yet in the UK we kid ourselves that we are, somehow, more humane than the rest of the world. We're not! Ninety five per cent of all pig meat comes from animals who were factory farmed.

One example of how we treat pigs personifies the callousness of factory farming. Birth is magical. But not when it takes place in a cage, known as a farrowing crate, only inches bigger than the mother's body; so small she can barely move and can never turn around. Not when she is imprisoned like that for a month. What should be beautiful and rewarding becomes horribly obscene. The bars entirely frustrate her desire and overpowering instincts to mother and on the day she is released from the cage, her babies are taken away and she never sees them again. She is then placed on the so-called 'rape rack', re-impregnated and the cycle repeats itself until the mother is killed at four years old for cheap meat.

To me, as a mum of twin boys, the thought of such cruelty and deprivation is unbearable - particularly when repeated

over and over again, year after year. Sadly, it happens to thousands of mother pigs every single day.

Factory farms are much the same up and down the UK. One farm visited by Viva! on five occasions had a dimly-lit farrowing shed, festooned with generations of cobwebs. I felt desperately sad for a sow lying between her bars breathing heavily. She was at full term and about to deliver. She was lying on concrete with no bedding of any kind. Her rear end and the floor around it thickly covered in excreta. Her piglets were about to be born into her own accumulated faeces and there was nothing she could do about it.

In the crate next to her, a sow had already given birth and her piglets suckled eagerly. She was literally smothered in flies and bleeding profusely -- Of course we complained to every authority we could think of about these sickening scenes and the result was - 'confidential' (he was given a slapped wrist). The farm continued to operate, churning out sick piglets to be killed for products no one needs...

The public blindly hopes that places such as these would be closed down once investigated. They are not because they are just typical factory farms and **farmed animals have almost no legal protection.**

This is why it is incumbent on us to take responsibility – to not buy into this needless cruelty and death. To be consciously compassionate.

Which brings me to the next campaign Viva! is launching...

Chickens. And how *life is cheep*. (Viva!'s new campaign is called *Life is Cheep?* – see www.viva.org.uk) The numbers are crazy, one billion little lives wiped out each year in the UK alone. So much cruelty on a mind boggling scale. And excused by ignorance: “oh but chickens are daft” or “they don't feel” and even “but are chickens animals?”.

Incredible! On the one hand society celebrates wild birds, noting how smart they are; and on the other, relegates chickens as stupid, worthless animals! In the animal kingdom, birds display many remarkable skills once thought to be restricted to humans: magpies recognise themselves in a mirror. New Caledonian crows make tools. African grey parrots count and categorise objects by colour and shape.

Few people think about chickens as intelligent, however scientists have learned that this bird can be cunning and wily

and he can communicate in sophisticated ways that are on a par with some primates – just as the cognitive abilities of the crow family are equal to chimps and gorillas. Chickens solve complex problems and empathise with other chickens that are in danger.

But how much easier for people to bury their head and pretend this beautiful animal feels nothing and thinks of nothing.

The Guardian have recently carried out an important investigation, with some assistance from Viva!, of the bad hygiene practices in chicken processing plants. Two in three chickens are contaminated with the bacteria, *Campylobacter*. What they don't make clear (enough) is that factory farming is the root cause of food poisoning. Thousands of animals squeezed into cramped, dirty and unnatural habitats create a breeding ground for germs.

The factory farming of chickens is an abomination. Viva! filmed at a Faccenda intensive broiler unit several times.

Everywhere we looked, birds with filthy, wet feathers huddled together seeking comfort from one another. Dotted around were lame, deformed and dying chicks who had no chance of escaping painful burns from the ammonia-soaked floor.

As I crouched amongst them, the chicks eyed us with curiosity. Even in that short space of time, individual personalities shone through.

There is massive work to do – and I hope you will open your hearts if you haven't already to the plight of chickens because we have a huge educational task on our hands but one which I can't wait to launch into.

Conclusion

I founded Viva! to reveal the reality of farming and slaughter, to bring about change. If we have no compassion for animals and other humans; if we have no empathy with them and respect for the natural world – what are we?

Nelson Mandela said: *“No one is born hating another person because of the colour of their skin, background or religion. People must learn to hate and if they can learn to hate they*

can learn to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.”

Well the human race is treating animals as if we hate them. Britain may feel uncomfortable with this statement but just watch our film *Cruel Britannia* online -- see www.viva.org.uk/cruelbritannia -- you can see that it is true. People may wriggle around trying to justify what is done or blame someone else, but part of Viva!'s role is getting people to recognise we are all responsible for our actions.

Viva!'s job is to turn that hate, ignorance, apathy in to love, understanding and action – to make people feel empowered and to make it easy to change. Our role is also to help the public understand our responsibility -- we are part of nature. That destroying nature means we are destroying ourselves.

Each and every one of us has a moral obligation to animals and all of nature, and that means that we're ALL responsible for helping ensure that animals are protected and secured against abuse and exploitation. We have the right to protest, the responsibility to object; and we must do so to call ourselves humane beings.

Veganism is CENTRAL to saving all animals – both farmed and wild.

Veganism is one of the few individual acts we can all perform that has an immediate impact. It is the biggest step any of us

can take to heal the planet. To end cruelty. It is also a political act and a clear expression of a belief in a different way of doing things, a different kind of world – a better world.

Of course Viva! and the much deserved recipient of this award – Ingrid of Peta - are enablers. We have not labelled it as such but we want an awakening – conscious compassion, **ahimsa**.

Thank you.

To celebrate Viva!'s 20 year history watch and show others <http://www.viva.org.uk/20thanniversaryfilm>