

Ahimsa: Compassion in Action

Ahimsa, commonly referred to as “nonviolence” is more literally translated from Sanskrit as “absence of injury”. Ahimsa is an ancient concept originating in the Vedas, the oldest texts written nearly 4,000 years ago on spiritual and philosophical wisdom. To practice Ahimsa is ‘to not injure’, ‘to cause no injury’ and ‘do no harm’ to self, others, Mother Earth and Her inhabitants. Ahimsa has been researched and determined by the Canadian Museum of Human Rights as the oldest concept of Human Rights.

The concept of Ahimsa is found in Sanatan Dharma / Hinduism and all the religions that came out of Hinduism such as Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. It is found in the indigenous cultures and traditions of the Himalayan region.

The concept of Ahimsa was used in India by Mahatma Gandhiji, whose teachings influenced Dr Rev. Martin Luther King Jr & Cesar Chavez in the USA, and Nelson Mandela in South Africa to rebel against the injustices in their world. Mahatma Gandhiji held the view that without truth and nonviolence [Satya & Ahimsa] there can be nothing but destruction. Lao Tzu, the Chinese philosopher credited with founding the philosophical system of Taoism noted that if we must enter a battle of any kind, to do so with great compassion and sorrow. He said, ‘this is the way of ahimsa’. **His Holiness, The Dalai Lama considers Ahimsa to be Compassion in Action.**

In Yogic philosophy, Ahimsa is the first step of the first limb of the eight-fold traditional Ashtanga Yoga as codified by Sage Patanjali. Unless one is firmly rooted in ahimsa in thoughts, words, and actions, the true practice of yoga cannot begin. Through this practice of yoga, practitioners develop harmony with and reverence for nature and all beings.

The core of Ahimsa is to put love and compassion into action in all that we think, say and do for self, others and the environment. This is Ahimsa in Action.

I ask you to consider how you can live this concept of Ahimsa in your relationship with yourself. When you make a mistake, do you belittle yourself or accept that a mistake has been made and this is an opportunity to learn and move on? We have been taught that we are in control of our thoughts, emotions, words and actions, yet still we blame others for our bad behaviour, our anxiety, our stresses. We know that when we treat ourselves with love, kindness and compassion, we are better able to treat others and Mother Earth with love, kindness and compassion.

The first step to Ahimsa in Action is to treat yourself with love, kindness and compassion. Only you can do this! To live Ahimsa in Action we need a system that is simple enough to implement in our daily life. Based on my Guruji, Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji’s core teachings of Meditation – No Reaction – Introspection, I have developed, explored and live a signature system of Intention to Transformation.

Each morning connect your higher self – that divinity within and set the intention to live the day with Ahimsa – ‘do no harm’, ‘to cause no injury’, to self, others and the environment in thoughts, words and actions. Initially the intention can be ‘ahimsa’, then move into the components of ahimsa such as love, caring, kindness, compassion, etc.

During the day, give attention to your intention. Wrap each thought, word and action, with the essence of the intention of the day. Watch your thoughts – are they positive or negative? Are they judgemental, angry, frustrated, irritated, anxious, etc.? Know that your thoughts lead to actions so now is the opportunity to change the energy of the thought before it becomes words or action. Determine if what you are about to say or do is necessary, is being done at the right time, with the right intention and is beneficial to self, others and the environment. Slowly you will begin to live each moment consciously with observation before action.

In the evening or night, reflect on the day from evening to morning and appreciate all the manifestations of the day. All that went right, be grateful to those who helped in making it successful and release it. All that did not go as you expected, ask, ‘what was it about that situation that caused you to react the way you did?’ and release the incident and the question. This is an opportunity for growth and learning. Now you are a witness observing the incident to learn and grow. Then sit for a few minutes in silence or meditation to listen for the wisdom of the Universe to flow to and through you.

With daily practice of this signature system of Intention to Transformation, you will begin to live Ahimsa with self and others. Peace, joy, kindness, love and compassion become your constant companions. Then you become peace, joy, kindness, love and compassion and discover the truth of who you are beyond the roles you play in the family, at work and in the world. When you are at peace within yourself, you can then bring peace into your little piece of the world.