

Ahimsā

not hurting

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Ahimsā comes from the Sanskrit verb 'hims' which means 'to hurt, injure or cause harm'. **Ahimsā**, not hurting or non-harmfulness, reflects my inherent desire to live free of hurt or pain or threat of any sort.

Even thoughts can cause pain. If I know that someone harbours hurtful thoughts about me, although they are not expressed in word or deed, it pains me.

Ahimsā means not causing harm by any means, neither by thoughts, **manasā**, nor by words, **vācā**, nor by deeds, **kāyena**.

WHY SHOULD I NOT HURT OTHER BEINGS?

It is because I do not want to be hurt. Common sense ethics dictate that I cannot do to another what I do not want done to me. So **ahimsā**, not hurting, becomes a value for me.

Ahimsā is simple common sense **dharma**, confirmed by the Vedas and all scriptures but subject to interpretation. If an injurious act benefits another, such as the cut of the surgeon's knife, it is not **himsā**. In a relative world where one life form feeds on another, absolute **ahimsā** is not possible. Therefore, this is a value, which particularly requires understanding and interpretation.

VEGETARIANISM IS AN EXPRESSION OF AHIMSĀ

Vegetarianism is an example of the application of the value for **ahimsā**. Many arguments in favour of a vegetarian diet can be made, but the basic argument supporting non-flesh eating is simply **ahimsā**.

He or she is a self-conscious being, endowed with a free will. This means he or she can choose from many means to fulfill his or her ends, including the basic need, food. Since he or she is not pre-programmed, a human being must choose the kind of food he or she eats.

ALL CREATURES SEEK TO LIVE A HARM-FREE LIFE

It is obvious that all living beings have a value for life. Anything that is alive tries to stay alive, including plants and very simple life forms. Since I have been given a free will to exercise a choice of food, which I eat to sustain my life, I must find some norm to guide me in choosing that food. The gift of free will carries with it a responsibility to follow an ethical norm in exercising that will.

What is the common sense dharmic norm for choice of my food? The Veda tells me do not cause injury. My common sense tells me that I should not make somebody my dinner since I do not want to be somebody's dinner. Who or what is a 'somebody'? Those living creatures who have the means to run away from me and my equipment, who scream in protest or struggle against me are more of a 'somebody' than plants. Plants are rooted in one place and quietly yield their fruits for my food, often without surrendering their lives.

AHIMSĀ REQUIRES SENSITIVITY AND ALERTNESS

The value for **ahimsā** requires alertness and sensitivity in all areas of my life. It is a value that finds expression in my attitude toward plants as well as toward human beings and animals.

Ahimsā is a value for not destroying or damaging any part of creation, a creation of which I, too, am a part.

I do not casually crush, strip, uproot or cut down plants.

With regard to my fellow human beings, I watch for those words or acts or even thoughts that may be hurtful. I come to see beyond my own needs to the needs of those around me.

With such an attitude I become an alert, observant person with a sensitive, saintly mind that is ready to hear and appreciate the truth of Vedanta.

Ahimsā is an important value among the values enumerated for gaining self-knowledge.