

ahimsa  
&  
yoga

Ahimsa forum  
University of California, Berkeley

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Ahimsa: UCB:  
handout 9-21-15:  
Guest speaker Nik Warren

topic: **AHIMSA AND YOGA**

Synopsis: *The Landscape of Ahimsa*

**I. = = = Ahimsa**

*Ahimsa is a spiritual concept*

*Ahimsa is based on a perspective of realized commonality.*

*(Politics is based on a perspective of differences.)*

*Ahimsa is a yogic practice*

> *yoga: to bind; here meaning to strive for and bind to an Ideal.*

> *ahimsa: non-injury in awareness and action -- binding to the Ideals of love and truth.*

> *spiritual:*

*-- ideal of love: non-separation meaning to realize the unity of self and other*

*-- ideal of truth: that which cannot be contradicted*

**Practice of Ahimsa: Four Yogas**

*We see these four elements (love, truth, awareness, action) centrally recognized in practical spiritual philosophies which emphasize developing spiritual awareness through the training of consciousness\*. These four elements are also natural to human nature.*

<u>element</u> =	<u>love</u>	<u>truth</u>	<u>awareness</u>	<u>action</u>
<i>four yogas</i> =	<i>bhakti</i>	<i>jana</i>	<i>raja</i>	<i>karma</i>
<i>Buddhism:</i>	<i>compassion</i>	<i>wisdom</i>	<i>mindfulness</i>	<i>skillfulness</i>

*cultural & art science psychology social*  
*personal*

*tendencies of relationship and knowledge*

*\*note: Quote "Religion is nothing if not obedience to one's awareness." -- Carl Jung  
In this way, everything becomes spiritual. The issue of practice is one of expanding one's awareness -- we already tend to 'obey' our sense of awareness in our regular life. The four yogas are paths for this expansion. Ahimsa is fundamental to opening, manifesting and maintaining this expansion.*

**2 = = = = Context of Expansion: Ahimsa and World Views**

*relation to violence:*

*ahimsa = a + himsa = not + violent. Violence (fragmentation) is taken as the "ground state" (inherent in any cycle of creation, preservation and destruction). Not-violence must recognize unity transcending fragmentation.*

*I think Gandhi made a statement in South Africa, after someone asked about banditry, "No, do not stand by the front door and let the hoards come in and run away with your family. You must defend the family."*

*Nonviolence is when, ultimately, there is no pause, there is no reflection as to whether I become violent or nonviolent. I am simply nonviolent. At that point if I am that person, and somebody comes to my door; my response is that of, perhaps, the buddhist master who smiles and bows and everything is disarmed. It is a completely different type of interaction, and one cannot assume -- except as practice, except as reflection, except as forcing a pause in an impulse -- that you can achieve nonviolence without the deep personal transformation that goes with it. Here in San Francisco, the monks laughed when a person destroyed the mandala on which they were working.*

*Returning to Gandhi's statement, nonviolence stems from deep transformation and so to question whether, before that transformation, acting violently is right or wrong is, i feel, contingent. There is an act in the moment in either case. In one case i defend, in one case truth disarms us.*

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*in daily discourse we may find the term "ahimsa" or "nonviolence" utilized from a number of perspectives -- each perspective reflecting a sense of what is 'realistic' and a judgement as to the value of nonviolence as a tool for accomplishment:*

*self-interests*

- 1. political -- to gain favorable press*
- 2. claiming moral high ground*
- 3. the other is evil*

*joint serving or 'enlightened -interest'*

- 4. minimize hurt - damage*
- 5. build ground for future relations*
- 6. justice admitting forgiveness*
- 7. common good for all*

*spiritual: seeing self in other / living in universality*

- 8. golden rule*
- 9. egoless awareness*
- 10. compassion*
- 11. truth*
- 12. universal love*

**3 = = = = = yoga of ahimsa**

*Ahimsa starts with each individual.*

*It is a practice*

*and the offered result of the practice,*

*as playing a violin is both the practice and the concert –*

*the practice of living*

*and the offering of such a life.*

*It is food for the deep hunger of longing,*

*feeding both ourselves and others*

*at the same table –*

*bringing peace both in ourselves*

*and in how we relate to others.*

*Above all,*

*ahimsa lives and works in the world.*

*It is non sectarian.*

*It is always aware of violence,*

*but does not see violence as the “Other.”*

*Ahimsa is its own choice of response to violence.*

*If it faces societal violence, it takes as its attitude that violence must be spoken to by nonviolence.*

*If you cause me pain, you know I feel pain*

*because you know I am really the same as you.*

*Your weapon is only our identity to know we can be separated.*

*You cleave me as separate – the enemy or Other,*

*but only by knowing we are not different.*

*In my knowing this,*

*in our knowing this,*

*either I can return violence in kind, continue the fiction of separateness,*

*or I can respond with the demonstration of our deeper non-separation.*

*Ahimsa is not self-rightness.*

*It cannot be that.*

*It does not claim itself as greater or more right than the attitudes of violence.*

*But out of its own nature it cannot respond to fire by trying to burn it back.*

*It does not avoid pain.*

*Life goes on.*

*Ahimsa cannot avoid this perspective.*

*To live it is to choose it, to practice it,  
so deepening into us,  
as our awareness  
and becoming the only attitude in action that we can take.*

*There is no question but that nonviolence is this relationship:  
first, reflective within oneself,  
Second, without separation, to others.*

*There is power simply in knowing that people have lived this.  
- Nik Warren*

**--- -- Yogic ahimsa, the mental flower offering**

***Vedic Prayer: Sarvam khalu idam Brahman // Ahimsa paramam pushmam***

*All are pervaded by the same Reality  
(Knowing this)  
Ahimsa is the supreme flower  
We offer ourselves and all we have at the feet of God*

**4= = Quotes on Ahimsa: awareness, action, truth, love**

***The realization:***

*There is no honorable way to kill, no gentle way to destroy. There is nothing good in war, except its ending [Abraham Lincoln.]*

***The way:***

*...have no fear of human sin. Love people, even in their sin, for that is the semblance of Divine Love and is the highest love on earth. Love all of God's creation. The whole and every grain of sand of it. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day. And you will come at last to love the whole world with an all-embracing love. [Fyodor Dostoyevsky,*

*"The Brothers Karamazov"]*

**The practice:**

*"May my tongue be innocent of malice and my lips free from lies. When confronted by enemies may my soul stay calm, truly humble to all." [Prayer from Shaharit for Shabbat]*

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*The practice of nonviolence gives us a tool to challenge our ignorant obedience because it requires its practitioners to seek truth, rather than to trust authority. Nonviolence acknowledges that the most truth one person, including ourselves, can have at any given time is partial. It acknowledges that our opponent has part of the truth. The goal of nonviolence is not to win, but to gain greater understanding of the truth, and then to have all sides act on that more encompassing truth. Another, perhaps less daunting way of putting "truth seeking" into everyday, useable language requires its practitioners to get curious.*

*Laura Slattery, "Innocence Lost",  
in The Way of St. Francis, Nov – Dec 2004.*

**The Nonviolent Force of Truth**

*Ahimsa and Truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like the two sides of a coin, or rather a smooth unstamped metallic disc. Who can say, which is the obverse and which is the reverse? Nevertheless, ahimsa is the means; Truth is the end."*

*Truth {satya} implies love and Firmness {agraha} engenders and therefore serves as a synonym for force. I thus begin to call the Indian movement 'satyagraha'; that is to say, the force which is born of truth and the love of nonviolence  
--- Gandhi (in The Words of Gandhi)*

**5 = = = appendix -- Ahimsa: brief philosophy**

**The Word:**

*Ahimsa is a Sanskrit word "to harm not" or "non-violence" (a-himsa). It is an ancient word in Hindu spiritual philosophy and appears as a fundamental practice in many religions. To practice ahimsa is to cultivate an awareness which manifests nonviolence and truth in all one does. Nonviolence and its companion, truth, have been made to resonate in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century by Mahatma Gandhi in his emphasis on ahimsa and satyagraha (nonviolence and truth force respectively) during India's struggle for independence from Britain.*

*In its core principles, ahimsa is not a naïve denial of violence. Violence is a real force in a*

*world which evolves and changes through cycles of birth and death. Ahimsa faces violence but does not see it and its active root "to violate" as a singular organizing principle of the world or necessary way to act in the world. Rather, ahimsa draws our attention to, and acts out of, an awareness of profound unity in diversity – an awareness which feeds our deepest roots and can make its greatest contribution if it serves as a guiding light as fully as possible.*

**Compassion, interdependence:**

*Ahimsa can appear in various philosophical frames. In moral instructions it is the law of compassion in body, mind and spirit. In many spiritual and faith traditions, instruction may be given to opening awareness to the qualities and intrinsic value of all sentient beings. Instruction may be given in terms of a shared Divinity intrinsic to all things. The attitude of ahimsa can also be framed in an ecological realization of interdependence such that the golden rule indeed becomes doing unto others is doing to one's self. Alternatively, ahimsa may be developed largely in the context of political philosophy or defined in terms of recognizing and insuring human rights. Ahimsa establishes compassionate relationship, and starting with at least the encouragement to deep respect, grows richer as the experience of depth and respect become increasingly informed and universally broadened.*

**Respect:**

*In ahimsa, our profoundest relationship is that which comes in recognizing, respecting, and responding to our commonality and our universality. Our universality is seen in our commonalities. Perhaps a deep intuition of this is in the common sense and desire for unity of meaning and purpose expressed in all cultures. We find ourselves not divorced from the universe – our bodies are made of the very atoms born in the stars. We are not divorced from the Earth, and we are not divorced from each other.*

*Awareness of our material connections to the cosmos brings us to acting in ways which respect the Earth and environment. Awareness of our common human nature allows a way of relation other than violation of each other. We share in commonality our complexity of, and forms of, fear, anger, hatred, desire, love --- and always, the deep wish to be respected and understood in who we are. Through this we come to respect the experience of all sentient creatures.*

**Love and Truth:**

*If the material and mental denote two domains of ahimsa, the spiritual dimension is in the way we consistently live a relationship that does not violate. Such a relationship is describable as love. And so as Mahatma Gandhi stressed, this is the spiritual awareness that underlies ahimsa. Love unifies and does not lie. This is the key to ahimsa (the attitude of non-harm) and satyagraha (the power of truth). It is the realized vision of love and truth. It is powerful and it can do very practical work in the world.*