

Seminar Abstract “*Ahimsa: a Path to Peace*”

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As Gandhi used the term, *ahimsa* meant not only non-harm by thought word or deed to any living being, but the greatest love or compassion for all living creatures. Also, implicit in Gandhi's use of the term was the belief that one must take a vow to live by *ahimsa*, so described. For a number of years, I have known that Gandhi's thoughts on this ancient concept of *ahimsa* were greatly influenced by the Hindu, Jain and Buddhist traditions.

Most westerners do not understand *ahimsa*. They understand non-violence, but it is confined to not committing violent acts against other human beings. They have little or no understanding of what it means to develop an attitude and perspective such that one tries not to harm people, animals or the environment. Of course, as the Jain scholars have said, to live is to cause harm to some living creature (We step on living things and breathe them.), but the point is not to harm intentionally. The only exception which Gandhi would allow to non-harm is when one is acting in self-defense or defense of others and there is no peaceful alternative. Furthermore, one needs to develop her or his character so that she or he harbors no anger let alone hatred towards any living creature. Instead, one is to feel compassion for all living beings.

After years of working with the concept of *ahimsa* and its development in Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, I am convinced that if peace and a sense of well-being are to be realized in our homes, communities and the world, *ahimsa* must be taught to and practiced by the people of the world, especially the children. This means that, ultimately, *ahimsa* must be freed from its Indic “moorings” so that children all over the world can learn and practice it. However, since, in general, westerners and other non-Indic peoples do not understand *ahimsa*, I believe that the teachers should be persons that understand India's three great traditions. Thus, most of the teachers should be from one of the three great Indic traditions and knowledgeable about the others or at least have studied and are sympathetic to the three traditions.

Because I believe that *ahimsa* must be taught to the peoples of the world, especially the children, the first volume of the aforementioned works will be written for the people rather than scholars. I think that everyone who is concerned about the conflict and violence that occurs in relationships, the home, the community, nations and between nation-states, should be able to read this book. It is a book for the people! It involves the thought of Gandhi concerning *ahimsa*; the influence of Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism upon his thought; and the importance of *ahimsa*, for peace and well-being, in the present and the future. The other three volumes, which will be based to a large extent on articles that I have written, are for scholars. These books will be written in the rigorous language and style of philosophers. The books will be devoted to the history and development of *ahimsa* in Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism respectively.

In my talk *Ahimsa: a Path to Peace*, I will discuss some history of the concept and the importance of *ahimsa* for world peace and human well-being. However, I will focus on how *ahimsa* can be taught and what is needed for its practice.