

Ahimsa

Our world and our bodies are made entirely from the dust of ancient exploded stars. Microbes and plants generated the oxygen we now inhale over billions of years. We are divine beings, emanations of the Universe, the improbable outputs of a creation process that evolved over unimaginable aeons. We are powered by the sun and brought to life by the miraculous prana that infuses us. The living Universe experiences itself through our awareness. As we gradually realize our undying unity with all other beings in the shared awareness that is the vast Universe reflecting itself, the vow of ahimsa will be fulfilled. Our unconscious impulses to harm others will dissolve simultaneously as the false concepts of separateness and aloneness are extinguished. Kindness will become as natural as breathing.

Our purpose is to fully realize the Eternal in us, our Buddha nature, and bring happiness to all sentient beings. To that end, Patanjali said, "Being firmly grounded in nonviolence creates an atmosphere in which others can let go of their hostility." (Yoga Sutra 2.35) Practicing ahimsa empowers us to reduce the suffering of others and foster loving-kindness. We become seeds for a generous new consciousness, one that abides in the present moment, free of projections, worry and fear, acknowledging the Divine in all aspects of our lives.

A yoga mat is a great place to build an ahimsa practice. Just unrolling our mats onto the floor affirms our bodies' need for loving care. Our practice likewise teaches us to respect our limits. It brings us a deep appreciation of the human body. We transform breath into positive action on the mat. Pratyahara practice brings glimpses of the Divine, of Unity, and of Love that cannot be expressed in words. As we practice more and more and achieve deeper calmness of mind, our new consciousness naturally carries off the mat into all aspects of our life. We become aware of how we treat ourselves and others and become sensitive to others' suffering. The desire to avoid harming all beings arises naturally through realization. The stillness and stability we gain from our practice and the positive karma we generate will continue to deepen long after our bodies lose the ability to perform asana.

To students of all ages and abilities, yoga practice offers a path that inspires ahimsa. But teaching yoga allows us to cultivate ahimsa in even more profound ways. A teacher must provide a safe environment, support and encouragement for the students, that they may discover the truth of yoga on their own, through their own effort and at their own pace. Teachers must know how to care for their own bodies before they can help others. Using their own experience, and drawing on the knowledge transmitted from infinite lineage of past teachers, the teacher facilitates the student's growth and shares in the joy and benefits that it brings. Cultivating ahimsa in students through his or her own example, the teacher is able to multiply kindness in the world, just as Patanjali said.

--Bill