HINDU ETHIC OF NONVIOLENCE
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MANKIND'S SURVIVAL IS AT RISK. Our problems proliferate, our global predicament deepens daily. Humanity direly needs spiritual direction and new-found wisdom if it is to endure. Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism have for millenia been teaching noninjury, called ahimsa, as a spiritual principle and practical ethic. On these four pages we look at what Hinduism tells us about not causing others pain. Many are the sources of Hindu thought which inspire men and women to live the ideals of compassion and nonviolence. The rishis who revealed the principles of dharma, or divine law, in Hindu scripture knew full well the potential for human suffering and the path which could avert it. To them a one spiritual power flowed in and through all things in this universe, animate and inanimate, conferring existence by its presence. To them life was a coherent process leading all souls without exception to enlightenment, and no violence could be carried to the higher reaches of that ascent.

The rishis were mystics whose revelation disclosed a cosmos in which all beings exist in interlaced dependence. The whole was contained in the part, and the part in the whole. Based on this cognition, they taught a philosophy of non-difference of self and other, asserting that in the final analysis we are not separate from the world and its manifest forms nor from the Divine which shines forth in all things and all peoples. From

this understanding of oneness arose the philosophical basis for the practice of noninjury and Hinduism's ancient commitment to it.

We all know that Hindus, who are one-sixth of the human race today, believe in the existence of God everywhere, as an all-pervasive, self-effulgent energy and consciousness. This basic belief creates the attitude of sublime tolerance and acceptance toward others. Even tolerance is insufficient to describe the compassion and reverence the Hindu holds for the intrinsic sacredness within all things. Therefore, the actions of all Hindus are rendered benign or ahimsa. One would not want to hurt something which one revered.

On the other hand, when the fundamentalists of any religion teach an unrelenting duality based on good and evil, man and nature or God and Devil, this creates friends and enemies. This belief is a sacrilege to Hindus because they know that the attitudes which are the by-product are totally dualistic, and for good to triumph over that which is alien or evil, it must kill out that which is considered to be evil.

In Sanskrit himsa is doing harm or causing injury. The "a" placed before the word negates it. Very simply, ahimsa is abstaining from causing hurt or harm. It is gentleness and noninjury, whether physical, mental or emotional. It is good to know that nonviolence speaks only to the most extreme forms of wrongdoing, while ahimsa (which includes not killing) goes much deeper to prohibit the subtle abuse and the simple hurt.

Beliefs, attitudes and actions interact to produce peace or violence. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (IV, 4, ii, 6) says: "Here they say that a person consists of desires. And as is his desire, so is his will. And as is his will, so is his deed; and whatever deed he does, that he will reap." Two thousand years ago South India's weaver saint Tiruvalluvar said it so simply, "All suffering recoils on the wrongdoer himself. Therefore, those who desire not to suffer refrain from causing others pain."

Because of the knowledge of reincarnation, the Hindu knows that he may one day be in the same position of anyone he might be inclined to harm or persecute. The Hindu who is consciously aware within his soul knows that he is the time traveller and may incarnate, take a body of flesh, in the society he most opposed, in order to equalize his hates and fears into a greater understanding which would result in the release of ignorance. The knowledgeable Hindu is well aware of all these possibilities. Ahimsa is certainly not cowardice; it is wisdom. And wisdom is the cumulative knowledge of the existing divine laws of reincarnation, karma, dharma, the all-pervasiveness and sacredness of things, blended together within the psyche or soul of the Hindu.

There is a spiritual urge in every soul for peace. Even if a person is violent now, he or she inwardly yearns for peace. Man is essentially an instinctive, intellectual and superconscious, or soul, person. The instinctive nature is based on good and bad, mine and yours, up and down pairs of opposites. The soul nature is based on oneness, humility, peace, compassion, love, helpfulness. The intellectual nature is based on trying to figure both of these two out. It juggles

knowledge from the lower nature to the higher nature and from higher nature to the lower nature. It works out formulas, finds solutions and processes knowledge.

The key is yoga, yoking the soul with the energies of the physical body (the instinctive nature) and yoking the energies of the soul with the energies of the mind (intellectual nature) and then, simply, one becomes consciously conscious in the soul. This is an experience to be experienced, and for the Hindu it is personal experience of God which is essential for liberation. The Hindu strives to be consciously conscious of his soul. When those soulful qualities are unfolded, he is filled with a divine love and would not hurt a flea if he could help it.

An individual can find total peace within himself, not through meditation alone--for peaceful actions must follow introspection--not through drugs, not through psychology or psychiatry, but through control. Peace is the natural state of the mind. It is there, inside, to be discovered in meditation and then radiated out to others. How do we bring individuals to this point? Of course, if the educational system promotes it, in every community the greatest potential for peace will be achieved. The educational system is controlled by the adults, so they have to come to terms with the fact that they must not be hurtful--physically, mentally or emotionally--and accept the basic principles of the Sanatana Dharma: all-pervasive energy, cause and effect and coming back in a physical birth until all scores are settled. Once the adults accomplish this, these basic principles of life will naturally be passed on to the next generation.

Ahimsa begins in the home, in the bedroom, in the kitchen, in the garden, in the living room. When himsa, harmfulness, arises in the home, it must be settled before sleep, or else those vrittis, those waves of the mind, which were disturbed by the creation of the situation, will go to seed to erupt at a later time in life. We cannot expect the children to control themselves if the parents do not control themselves. Those who attain a personal peace by controlling their instinctive nature become the spiritual leaders of human society. People who do become these leaders retroactively control the masses because of their spirit, their soul force--not because of the mind force, their cleverness, their deceptions, their political power, their money or contacts. Peaceful homes breed gentle people. Gentle people follow ahimsa.

AHIMSA

Exploring Noninjury as a Way to Achieve Harmony with Our Environment, Peace Between Peoples and Compassion Within Ourselves.

What Is the Great Virtue Called Ahimsa?

Ahimsa, or noninjury, is the first and foremost ethical principle of every Hindu. It is gentleness and nonviolence, whether physical, mental or emotional. It is abstaining from causing hurt or harm to all beings. Aum.

To the Hindu the ground is sacred. The rivers are sacred. The sky is sacred. The sun is sacred. His wife is a Goddess. Her husband is a God. Their children are devas. Their home is a shrine. Life is a pilgrimage to liberation from rebirth, and no violence can be carried to the higher reaches of that ascent. While nonviolence speaks only to the most extreme forms of wrongdoing, ahimsa, which includes not killing, goes much deeper to prohibit the subtle abuse and the simple hurt. Rishi Patanjali described ahimsaas the great vow and foremost

spiritual discipline which Truth-seekers must follow strictly and without fail. This extends to harm of all kinds caused by one's thoughts, words and deeds--including injury to the natural environment. Even the intent to injure, even violence committed in a dream, is a violation of ahimsa. Vedic rishiswho revealed dharmaproclaimed ahimsaas the way to achieve harmony with our environment, peace between peoples and compassion within ourselves. The Vedic edict is: "Ahimsais not causing pain to any living being at any time through the actions of one's mind, speech or body." Aum Namah Sivaya.

What Is the Inner Source of Noninjury?

Two beliefs form the philosophical basis of noninjury. The first is the law of karma, by which harm caused to others unfailingly returns to oneself. The second is that the Divine shines forth in all peoples and things. Aum.

The Hindu is thoroughly convinced that violence he commits will return to him by a cosmic process that is unerring. He knows that, by karma'slaw, what we have done to others will be done to us, if not in this life then in another. He knows that he may one day be in the same position of anyone he is inclined to harm or persecute, perhaps incarnating in the society he most opposed in order to equalize his hates and fears into a greater understanding. The belief in the existence of God everywhere, as an all-pervasive, self-effulgent energy and consciousness, creates the attitude of sublime tolerance and acceptance toward others. Even tolerance is insufficient to describe the compassion and reverence the Hindu holds for the intrinsic sacredness within all things. Therefore, the actions of all Hindus living in the higher nature are rendered benign, or ahimsa. One would not hurt that which he reveres. The Vedas pronounce, "He who, dwelling in all things, yet is other than all things, whom all things do not know, whose body all things

are, who controls all things from within--He is your soul,

the Inner Controller, the Immortal." Aum Namah Sivaya.

What Is the Inner Source of Violence?

Violence is a reflection of lower, instinctive consciousness--fear, anger, greed, jealousy and hate--based in the mentality of separateness and unconnectedness, of good and bad, winners and losers, mine and yours. Aum.

Every belief creates certain attitudes. Attitudes govern our actions. Our actions can thus be traced to our inmost beliefs about ourself and the world around us. If those beliefs are erroneous, our actions will not be in tune with the universal dharma. For instance, the beliefs in the duality of self and other, of eternal heaven and hell, victors and vanquished, white forces and dark forces, create the attitudes that we must be on our guard, and are justified in giving injury, physically, mentally and emotionally to those whom we judge as bad, pagan, alien or unworthy. Such thinking leads to rationalizing so-called righteous wars and conflicts. As long as our beliefs are dualistic, we will continue to generate antagonism, and that will erupt here and there in violence. Those living in the lower, instinctive nature are society's antagonists. They are self-assertive, territorial, competitive, jealous, angry, fearful and rarely penitent of their hurtfulness. Many take sport in killing for the sake of killing, thieving for the sake of theft. The Vedasindicate, "This soul, verily, is overcome by nature's qualities. Now, because of being overcome, he goes on to confusedness." Aum Namah Sivaya.

Is Vegetarianism Integral to Noninjury?

Hindus teach vegetarianism as a way to live with a minimum of hurt to other beings, for to consume meat, fish, fowl or eggs is to participate indirectly in acts of cruelty and violence against the animal kingdom. Aum.

The abhorrence of injury and killing of any kind leads quite naturally to a vegetarian diet, shakahara. The meat-eater's desire for meat drives another to kill and provide that meat. The act of the butcher begins with the desire of the consumer. Meat-eating contributes to a mentality of violence, for with the chemically complex meat ingested, one absorbs the slaughtered creature's fear, pain and terror. These qualities are nourished within the meat-eater, perpetuating the cycle of cruelty and confusion. When the individual's consciousness lifts and expands, he will abhor violence and not be able to even digest the meat, fish, fowl and eggs he was formerly consuming. India's greatest saints have confirmed that one cannot eat meat and live a peaceful, harmonious life. Man's appetite for meat inflicts devastating harm on the earth itself, stripping its precious forests to make way for pastures. The Tirukuralcandidly states, "How can he practice true compassion who eats the flesh of an animal to fatten his own flesh? Greater than a thousand gheeofferings consumed in sacrificial fires is not to sacrifice and consume any living creature." Aum Namah Sivaya.

How Can Peace on Earth Be Achieved?

Peace is a reflection of spiritual consciousness. It begins within each person, and extends to the home, neighborhood, nation and beyond. It comes when the higher nature takes charge of the lower nature. Aum Namah Sivaya.

Until we have peace in our own heart, we can't hope for peace in the world. Peace is the natural state of the mind. It is there, inside, to be discovered in meditation, maintained

through self-control, and then radiated out to others. The best way to promote peace is to teach families to be peaceful within their own homes by settling all conflicts quickly. At a national and international level, we will enjoy more peace as we become more tolerant. Religious leaders can help by teaching their congregations how to live in a world of differences without feeling threatened, without forcing their ways or will on others. World bodies can make laws which deplore and work to prevent crimes of violence. It is only when the higher-nature people are in charge that peace will truly come. There is no other way, because the problems of conflict reside within the low-minded group who only know retaliation as a way of life. The Vedasbeseech, "Peace be to the earth and to airy spaces! Peace be to heaven, peace to the waters, peace to the plants and peace to the trees! May all the Gods grant to me peace! By this invocation of peace may peace be diffused!" Aum Namah Sivaya.

Scriptures Speak on Noninjury

To the heavens be peace, to the sky and the earth; to the waters be peace, to plants and all trees; to the Gods be peace, to Brahman be peace, to all men be peace, again and again--peace also to me! --Shukla Yajur Veda 36.17

If we have injured space, the earth or heaven, or if we have offended mother or father, from that may Agni, fire of the house, absolve us and guide us safely to the world of goodness. -- Atharva Veda 6.120.1

Protect both our species, two-legged and four-legged. Both food and water for their needs supply. May they with us increase in stature and strength. Save us from hurt all our days, O Powers! -- Rig Veda 10.37.11

When mindstuff is firmly based in waves of ahimsa all living beings cease their enmity in the presence of such a person. -- Yoga Sutra 2.35

O earthen vessel, strengthen me. May all beings regard me with friendly eyes! May I look upon all creatures with friendly eyes! With a friend's eye may we regard each other! -- Shukla Yajur Veda 36.18

He who sees that the Lord of all is ever the same in all that is--immortal in the field of mortality--he sees the truth. And when a man sees that the God in himself is the same God in all that is, he hurts not himself by hurting others. Then he goes, indeed, to the highest path. -- Bhagavad Gita 13.27-28