

Resource 6.2

What do young Hindu people say ahimsa means to them?

LOOKING AT
INTERVIEWS

Vaahila is 15

Ahimsa means not doing any harm to anyone – that means to *any* living thing, not just human beings. As Hindus we believe that all life is connected, and nothing can exist without everything else, like a giant, beautiful web. Humans are not separate from the rest of nature. In fact, we believe in samsara – the cycle of birth and rebirth. In your many other lives you will have interacted with different animals. Limiting ahimsa to humans also wouldn't make sense as, like most Hindus, I believe that Brahman (God) is in everything. When we harm another living being, we are in fact harming the Brahman too, so we need to take that very seriously. I believe harming others brings negative karma, whereas avoiding harm and working to help keep others from harm's way brings good karma and helps us towards escaping the cycle of rebirth and achieving oneness with Brahman. We call this 'moksha'.

For me, that means being vegetarian. My family and I don't eat meat, fish or eggs. We are not vegan, because we do get milk and cheese from a supplier of ahimsa dairy products here in Leicestershire, where cows are not separated from their calves and never end up being used for meat, as they are in the mainstream dairy industry. If they run out, which they sometimes do, we just eat vegan for a while. I do have a few Hindu friends who aren't vegetarian at all, but none of them eat beef, because the cow is a sacred animal in Hindu tradition.

Believing in ahimsa does not make me a pacifist though. In the Mahabharata, Lord Krishna is urged to fulfil his duty as a warrior and take up arms against enemies. I do think that violence should be avoided and, ideally, should never happen, but sometimes it is sadly necessary to fight. Look at the war in Ukraine, for instance. I believe the soldiers there must fight or they would just be overcome by Russian forces. I would love to see an end to violence and conflict in the world and for peace to prevail. If everyone lived by the principle of ahimsa, there would be no need at all for wars. We would also not be in the crisis we find ourselves in with the environment – humans have caused these problems by putting their own desires above the principle of ahimsa and doing violence to the planet, draining the Earth of her resources for our own selfishness.

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Jeevan is 16

For me, ahimsa is the most important part of my Hindu dharma, my duty or way of life. The Mahabharata tells us that ahimsa is the highest teaching. People misunderstand ahimsa, thinking it is just about what we don't do, but just avoiding doing harm yourself in a world full of suffering really isn't enough to say you're living by ahimsa. Ahimsa is about taking action, doing unselfish service, which Hindus call 'sewa'. Ahimsa is the duty to encourage care and kindness to all living beings – humans, animals, even plants. It means taking responsibility to restore harm that you or anyone else has done, and to do your best to prevent harm being done in the future as well. It's a way of life – your thoughts must be non-violent, as well as what you say and what you do.

I think that living according to the principle of ahimsa, no matter what religion or beliefs you follow, is necessary to transform the world. Ahimsa involves putting aside our own selfish desires and putting others first. Imagine everyone lived like this ... we could address everything from poverty and starvation to cruelty to animals and even the climate crisis.

Most people tend to associate ahimsa with Mahatma Gandhi. In the early twentieth century, he was a Hindu leader in India who challenged injustice for the Indian people, under British rule, through non-violent protest. Gandhi's actions made people outside of India aware of ahimsa, and influenced others, like Martin Luther King, who led a non-violent struggle for rights for black people in the USA. Ahimsa, however, is actually a very ancient teaching found in some of the earliest Hindu scriptures written thousands of years ago.

So, how does ahimsa influence how I live? Well, I volunteer at my local food bank every Saturday. This prevents the harm caused when people and their families go hungry. I also take part in peaceful protests with an environmental group, to challenge the harm that people do to our planet and to try to hold governments to account. Through our local mandir, I recently found out about the work of the charity Go Dharmic. I love their values, based on ahimsa, so I've signed up to volunteer with their local branch. I'm hoping to work on a gardening project they are running to help bring back biodiversity in our city. If my grades are good enough, I would like to be a doctor. Caring for people who are sick or injured will be the best way of fulfilling my commitment to live by the principle of ahimsa.