

Ahimsa has many translations: non-violence, non-harming, loving-kindness, compassion, care, harmony and peace.

Perhaps the greatest violence we perpetrate on ourselves is our constant criticism and effort to make ourselves conform to some external standard of what is “right,” of who we think we should be, or need to be, to be approved of, whole and loveable. Thus, over-exerting, striving, extending outside of our own center is the natural outcome of an external-directed life. **Ahimsa** invites us to live with a non-harming, non-violent attitude towards ourselves, our bodies, our emotions, and our perceived limitations - even to extend loving-kindness toward our own constant habit of judging ourselves: “Oh look, there I go again.”

Once we experience the grace of this gift, then we can naturally extend it to others. When we extend it to others and not ourselves, or those in our immediate circle, we experience a lack of balance and authenticity. Thich Nat Hahn, a modern Zen master, says “Only by truly loving ourselves, can we truly love others.”

Homework: Notice the ‘violence’ you commit to your own self and psyche. Begin to bring a sense of ‘loving kindness’ to yourself. Observe your process. (There’s no right way!) Come back willing to share next class.

Sources: Amrita, a sanctuary for yoga - handout by Sarahjoy Marsch
www.yoganorthwest.com/reflections/ahimsa.htm by Ingela Abbott