

# Hinduism's Path to Global Peace: Insights from Ancient Texts and Ethical Commandments

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## Abstract

God has made different religions to suit different aspirations, times and countries...one can reach God if one follows any of the paths with wholehearted devotion - Ramakrishna, A Hindu mystic  
Peace has been a long-cherished dream since times immemorial, however, its significance and scope in the cutting edge world has expanded many-overlap. The word Peace having no settled upon single definition has been clarified by a few, as quietness or calm, independence from unsettling influence or struggle, nonappearance or suspension of war, a condition of security or request, and a compromise after difficulty, and so on. It could anyway be best comprehended and increased in value by the nonattendance of the antonyms like war, strife, agitation, savagery, psychological warfare, devastation and so on Religion is integral to the presence of pretty much every general public and has been characterized as "a bunch of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of life and the universe, especially when considered as the creation of a supernatural agency".

All major religions of Humanity have consistently endorsed calm and urged people for universal brotherhood. Though Ahimsa or peacefulness shapes a cardinal standard of practically all Aryan religions like Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism; the Semitic religions; the Judaism, Christianity, and Islam that share the essential ideas of Monotheism, Prophets and Life after death; depict harmony and compromise among intra and inter-religious groups as carrying great rewards in the hereafter. Religions normally join a code of morals that worry about the conduct of the individual, yet men don't always live up to the standards they profess. This paper tries to analyze the quintessential uniqueness and new insights of peace in sacred texts of the world's oldest religion.

**Keyword:** Hinduism, peace, global peace, ahimsa, non violence, dharma, war

## Introduction

Hinduism, its ethical commandments for peace and war as well as the ways and means of achieving this goal.

The religion that has come to be known as Hinduism is unquestionably the most seasoned and the most differed of the relative multitude of incredible religions of the world. Hinduism calls itself the Sanatana Dharma, the eternal faith because it is based not upon the teachings of a single preceptor, or on any one text but on the collective wisdom and inspiration of great seers and sages from the very dawn of Indian civilization. A variety of beliefs, customs, rites and philosophies have merged here from time to time. According to Hindu thought, Dharma is the first of the four goals because it is the most extensive and is legitimate throughout the life of a human being. It infers the religious and philosophical framework but a total world-view, including the scheme of right conduct under various circumstances. Hinduism seeks to

look after the welfare of the entire humanity. Peace and non-violence are the virtues broadly accepted in Hinduism in the ancient texts and practice.

The Sanskrit word for Shanti is peace. The word's literal meaning is serene, peaceful, nonviolent, quiet, or undisturbed. It indicates abstention from mental and physical violence and unsettling influences. It is uprightness under which some sentiments are to be taken out from the brain instead of generating some sentiment in the mind. It is to bring the refusal of savage emotions from the mind and rough exercises from life.

The principles of peace are described variously in Hinduism. The Vedic rishis were spiritualists. They instructed a philosophy of non-difference of self and others. Hindu religion believes in the existence of God (Ishvar) everywhere, as an all-pervasive, self-effulgent energy and consciousness. This basic belief creates the attitude of sublime tolerance and acceptance toward others. All living beings are same and are from the same God so there should be a sense of equality and one should not harm or hurt others. For a peaceful coexistence, the Vedas visualize the key principles of synthesis and balance. The concept of Shanti is established on these principles. Peace as a highest human value is interlinked with other values such as with truth, nonviolence, purity, friendliness, forgiveness, tolerance, and. Peaceful attitude is regarded the foundation of all morality.

Shri Krishna became Shantiduta i.e. messenger of peace in Mahabharata to teach the lesson of peace to the enemy but finally supported Arjun to fight against the wicked enemy. Shri Krishna became Shantiduta for example courier of harmony in Mahabharata to show the exercise of harmony to the adversary yet at long last upheld Arjun to battle against the insidious foe. So Shanti can exist with the absence of non-violence as well. Indeed, harmony is to be performed on three levels – brain, discourse, and activity (Manasa, vaca, karmana). Collective peace or prosperity doesn't allude just to humankind, since animals and plants additionally go under its vision. It goes significantly further and focuses on the prosperity of all in the celebrated Shanti Mantra of Yajurveda (36.17). Likewise, Shanti is a condition of peace that is required for the proper existence of all and everybody in this universe.

### **Hindu Perspective on War and Peace**

Many believe war is unavoidable when all attempts at peacemaking have failed; some believe war is never right. Hindu perspectives on war and peace are based on principles of non-violence and duty.

There are two viewpoints in Hinduism, On the one hand, the Bhagavad Gita teaches that it is important to follow dharma. Therefore, it may be the duty of some Hindus, particularly those whose varna is Kshatriya, to fight wars. Hindus believe in karma or 'intentional action'. The Bhagavad Gita goes as far as to say it would be negative action not to fight in some cases. Though, the motive must be defence, or to protect the innocent and not to gain land, power, money or as an act of revenge or anger.

Then again, the principle of ahimsa is likewise critical to most Hindus. They may depict themselves as pacifist thus refuse to battle in a war. Besides, many Hindus would agree that to kill or use violence is bad action.

Different Hindus may have different beliefs, depending upon which teachings they follow most closely.

### **Dharma**

For many Hindus, following dharma is one of the four aims in life. Traditionally, dharma of the Kshatriya varna was to protect people in their kingdom, using violence if necessary.

If you do not engage in this righteous battle then both your personal dharma and your honour will be destroyed, and you will accumulate sin. - Bhagavad Gita 2:33

This is the advice given to the character Prince Arjun by God, in the form of Lord Krishna. This is because as a Prince, it is Arjun's dharma to protect the people of his kingdom.

Other Hindu sacred texts include the use of violence, killing by god and goddesses to overcome evil, and safeguard what is good. The mother figure of Durga Mata is demonstrated conveying weapons and riding a tiger to show that when required, she can battle like a tigress to protect the innocent.

Some Hindus would say it is the duty of everyone, regardless of varna, to protect the innocent as Durga does. If this means having to use force or fight, then that is a necessary and therefore acceptable form of evil.

### **Ahimsa**

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.

Some Hindus believe that violence in any form is wrong and a bad action, whether it be fighting in a war or harming a small living creature. Some Hindus follow Mahatma Gandhi's teaching about war and violence:

I see neither bravery nor sacrifice in destroying life or property for offence or defence.

### **Karma**

Some Hindus believe that any violence or aggression from them will lead to them being a victim of violence, either in this or another life.

### **Reincarnation**

Lord Krishna also convinces Prince Arjun to fight in the Bhagavad Gita by explaining that an atman can never be killed

...atman is not killed when the body is killed... certain is death for the born and certain is birth for the dead, so you need not grieve.-Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 2

Some Hindus would say that as long as the motive for war is not gain but protection, killing others in battle is acceptable. Others, who follow the principle of ahimsa strictly, would say war is never acceptable.

### **Atman**

The belief that atman is indestructible means that ending a life to protect others or in defence is acceptable for some Hindus. In addition to the teachings from the Bhagavad Gita, other scriptures also highlight that death is just part of the cycle of reincarnation. Killing someone is not ending the existence of that atman, just ending one lifetime of many.

### **The Hindu Concept of Just war**

A just war means a war that is morally acceptable to most people. It must also satisfy conditions about the reasons for the war and how it is undertaken.

There is clear teaching about acceptable motives, and practice, for wars in Hindu scripture. The Rig Veda states that a warrior will go to Hell if he breaks any of these rules:

- do not poison the tip of your arrow
- do not attack the sick or old
- do not attack a child or a woman
- do not attack from behind

### **The laws of manu**

The Laws of Manu also refer to the right way to behave during wartime. Kshatriyas should fight fairly and show honour, mercy and respect. They should fight according to the following rules:

- only fight other soldiers
- do not hurt any women or children
- never attack people while they are sleeping
- never attack when the opposition has surrendered

The rules from the Laws of Manu and from the Rig Veda are very similar to conditions laid out in the Christian Just War theory.

Many Hindus believe that helping people in need and working to alleviate suffering will build good merit. They may also believe that helping others will elevate them spiritually and bring them closer to Brahman. Hindus may try to help victims of war in different ways:

- praying for them and peace in the world
- making donations to and raising funds for charities that work for peace and help war victims
- volunteering to work for charities in the field, eg as doctors or aid workers
- educating people about peace, tolerance and conflict resolution
- joining peace groups
- providing emotional and spiritual support for victims of war, eg counselling or providing practical support for victims of war, eg shelter, clothing and food for those made homeless
- opening a community mandir as a place where people can go to for food and shelter
- joining the diplomatic services or getting involved in politics to help deal with the causes of war and therefore prevent more victims of war
- volunteering to help rebuild communities and countries after war, eg architects, builders, priests, medical and emergency services, teachers, ICT specialists

### **Pacifism and Hinduism**

For many, Hinduism is a religion which follows pacifist principles because there are clear reasons to lead a non-violent lifestyle. In general many Hindus do not agree with violence because:

- they believe in the concept of ahimsa
- good merit is built up by avoiding violence
- all living things are believed to have equal worth and should not be harmed
- rejection of violence can lead to world peace
- Hindu scripture, eg the Rig Veda, often comments on achieving peace

Come together, talk together, let our minds be in harmony...Perfect be the union among us.

Rig Veda 10:191-2

## Non-Violence and Peace in Hindu Scriptures

Ahimsa or Non violence is mentioned many times in different scriptures ranging from the Sruti such as the Rig Veda to Smriti such as the Patanjali Yoga Sutra to itihaas such as the Mahabharata. Despite the fact that it is considered to be a fundamental concept, however, there is no single place where it is exhaustively dealt with. Rather, it is mentioned across the breadth of scriptures, each time, in relationship with other topics that are under discussion. For example, Lord Krishna states in the Bhagawad Gita, ahimsa is among the various qualities of living beings are created by Me alone.<sup>1</sup>

### Atharveda

- "Peace be the earth, peaceful the ether, peaceful heaven, peaceful the waters, peaceful the herbs, peaceful the trees. May all Gods bring me peace. May there be peace through these invocations of peace. With these invocations of peace which appease everything, I render peaceful whatever here is terrible, whatever here is cruel, whatever here is sinful. Let it become auspicious, let everything be beneficial to us."<sup>3</sup>
- "Ahimsa is not causing pain to any living being at any time through the actions of one's mind, speech or body."<sup>2</sup>

### Rigveda

"The peace in the sky, the peace in the mid-air, the peace on earth, the peace in waters, the peace in plants, the peace in forest trees, the peace in all Gods, the peace in Brahman, the peace in all things, the peace in peace, may that peace come to me."<sup>5</sup>

### Samveda

The Chandogya Upanishad uses the word ahimsa. Later, it bars violence against "all creatures" (sarva-bhuta) and the practitioner of ahimsa is said to escape from the cycle of reincarnation. It also names ahimsa as one of five essential virtues.

- he who, after leaving the teacher's house, has settled down into a householder's life and continued the study of the Vedas in a sacred spot and made others (i.e. his sons and disciples) virtuous; he who has withdrawn all the sense— organs into the Self; he who has not given pain to any creature except as approved by the scriptures—he who conducts himself thus, all through his life, reaches the World of Brahman after death and does not return, yea, does not return. violence against domestic animals<sup>3</sup>
- Chandogya Upanishad: It bars violence against "all creatures" (sarva-bhuta) and the practitioner of ahimsa is said to escape from the cycle of reincarnation <sup>4</sup>
- It also names ahimsa as one of five essential virtues, ahimsa as a "dakshina" for the priests<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bhagavad Geeta,10.4-5 <https://vedabase.io/bg/10/4-5/> <sup>3</sup>

Atharva Veda: X. 191. 4

<sup>2</sup> Atharva Veda, Sandilya Upanishad <sup>5</sup> Rig Veda X.

<sup>3</sup> Chandogya Upanishad 8.15.1

<sup>4</sup> Chandogya Upanishad 8.15.1

<sup>5</sup> Chandogya Upanishad 3.17.4

### **Bhagavada Gita**

- ahimsa is among the various qualities of living beings are created by Me alone.<sup>6</sup>
- ahimsa is in a list of things that Lord Krishna declares to be knowledge, and besides this whatever there may be is ignorance.<sup>7</sup>
- ahimsa is in a list of transcendental qualities, the Lord declares that belong to godly men endowed with divine nature.<sup>8</sup>
- ahimsa is one of the qualities of austerity of the body.
- Gita again includes Ahimsa in the effects of attaining Dnyana, the the knowledge of Self (aatman) and thus becoming - Kshetradnya.<sup>9</sup>

### **Mahabharata**

Ahimsa is the highest dharma. Ahimsa is the best tapas. Ahimsa is the greatest gift. Ahimsa is the highest self-control. Ahimsa is the highest sacrifice. Ahimsa is the highest power. Ahimsa is the highest friend. Ahimsa is the highest truth. Ahimsa is the highest teaching.<sup>10</sup>

One should never do that to another which one regards as injurious to one's own self. This, in brief, is the rule of dharma. Yielding to desire and acting differently, one becomes guilty of adharma.<sup>11</sup>

Interestingly, the sukta Ahimsa parmo dharmah is from Mahabharata only.

In Adi Parva - Sut Muni is telling the story of a serpent who transforms itself into Brahmin named Sahasrapat and utters this verse to a Brahmin named Ruru who used to kill snakes because his wife was bitten by one.

अिहंसा परमो धमः सव ाणभृतां ृतः । त ा ाणभृतः

सवा िहं ा ा णः िचत् ॥<sup>12</sup>

Meaning- Certainly the highest virtue of man is sparing the life of others. Therefore a Brahmana should never take the life of any creature.

Vana Parva/ Aranyaka Parva - Here Markandya Muni is narrating the discussion between a brahmana named Kausika and a poultry-monger named Dharmavyadha who lived in Mithila. The Kausika asks the fowler 'How shall I know what is virtuous conduct.' In answering,

Dharmavyadha states that

अिहंसा स वचनं सवभूतिहतं परम अिहंसा परमो धमः स च स

े परिति तः स े कृ ा परित ां तु परवत

े परवृ यः ॥<sup>13</sup>

Meaning- Among holy men, virtue is differentiated in three ways--that great virtue which is inculcated in the Vedas, the other which is inculcated in the dharma shastra, and virtuous conduct And virtuous conduct

<sup>6</sup> Bhagavad Gita 10.4-5

<sup>7</sup> Bhagavad Gita 13.8-12

<sup>8</sup> Bhagavad Gita 16.1-3

<sup>9</sup> Bhagavad Gita 13:7

<sup>10</sup> Mahabharata 18:116.37-41

<sup>11</sup> Mahabharata 18:113.8

<sup>12</sup> (1.11.12) [ 1st Parva, 11th ch., 12th shloka]

<sup>13</sup> (3.198.69),Mahabharata



is indicated by acquisition of knowledge, pilgrimage to sacred places, truthfulness, forbearance, told purity and straight-forwardness.

In Anushasana Parva- Here Yudhisthir is getting final anushsana (instructions) from Bhishma who is on a bed of arrows, Yudhisthir asks Bhishma -

अिहंसा परमो धम इ उ ं ब शस तवया । शरा धेषु च भवान आह  
िपतून आिमष कािणः ॥ <sup>14</sup>

Meaning- You have it many times that abstention from injury is the highest religion. In Sraddhas, however, that are performed in honour of the Pitris, persons for their own good should make offerings of diverse kinds of meat.

Bhishma goes on to explain these issues in a great detail and in two of those verses it is mentioned again.

अिहंसा परमो धम थािहंसा परो दमः। अिहंसा परमं  
दानमिहंसा परमं तपः ॥  
अिहंसा परमो य स तथािह ा परं बलम अिहंसा परमं िम म  
अिहंसा परमं सुखम अिहंसा परमं स म अिहंसा परमं श तम ॥  
15

Meaning- Ahimsa is the highest Dharma, Ahimsa is the highest self-control,

Ahimsa is the greatest gift, Ahimsa is the best practice,

Ahimsa is the highest sacrifice, Ahimsa is the finest strength,

Ahimsa is the greatest friend, Ahimsa is the greatest happiness,

Ahimsa is the highest truth, and Ahimsa is the greatest teaching

So, while in certain contexts Mahabharata talks about ahimsa being the highest/greatest form of Dharma (ahimsa parmo dharmah), in another context Geeta ( which is a part of Mahabharata, Ch. 23–40 of Bhishma Parva) talks about how and when war is the only necessary action in accordance with dharma.

And, for one of the definitions of Ahimsa —

वेदो ेन करेण िवना स ं तपोधन । कायेन मनसा वाचा  
िहंसाऽिहंसा न चा था ॥ आ ा सवगतोऽ े ो न ा इति  
मे मितः ।

स चािहंसा वरा ो ा मुने वेदा वेिदिभः ॥ <sup>16</sup>

Meaning- Ahimsa is the highest Dharma, Ahimsa is the highest self-control,

Ahimsa is the greatest gift, Ahimsa is the best practice,

Ahimsa is the highest sacrifice, Ahimsa is the finest strength,

Ahimsa is the greatest friend, Ahimsa is the greatest happiness,

Ahimsa is the highest truth, and Ahimsa is the greatest teaching

Gandhiji was also very inspired with the Ramayana, and promoted the principle of peace and ahimsa very successfully by applying it to all spheres of life, particularly politics. His non violent resistance movement Satyagraha had an immense impact on India and impressed public opinions in many countries and influenced many civil and political movements. Martin Luther King followed same principle to achieve his goals in his country. Letting go and acceptance of others & not reacting in negative way is practicing non-violence.

<sup>14</sup> (13.116.1) Mahabharata

<sup>15</sup> (13.117.37,38) Mahabharata

<sup>16</sup> ( 1.7,8 दशनोपनिषत्)

There are many causes I am prepared to die for but none that I am prepared to kill for. Mahatma Gandhi, 1927

In 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, prominent figures of Indian spirituality such as Swami Vivekanand, Ramana Maharishi, Swami Sivananda and A.C Bhaktivedanta Swami emphasised the importance of ahimsa.

Dr. BR Ambedkar was also influenced by the Ahimsa, For him the doctrine of ahimsa does not say "Kill not", it says "Love all".

If we talk about the Contemporary Relevance of Hindu Idea of peace, There are many hindu charities and organization following the hindu tradition and working in the field of peace.

Sewa UK is a Hindu charity that promotes peace. Although not set up as a peace movement, the group encourages people from all backgrounds and beliefs to help with the main task of helping those in need and gives help to all people regardless of their beliefs, backgrounds or status.

The organisation works in areas which suffer from humanitarian disasters and tragedies by mobilising technical assistance to relief operations and by investing in building infrastructure and services in the aftermath of disasters.

Another charity, BAPS (The Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha) works with volunteers globally to offer practical help to people affected by humanitarian disasters and tragedies. The organisation is said to be underpinned by the Vedas. BAPS claims to have over a million members worldwide who devote part of each day to helping others and live by five 'lifetime vows':

- no alcohol
- no addictions
- no adultery
- no meat
- no impurity of body and mind

Hinduism teaches how to be tolerant both at international and national level. To abhor violence is a state of higher consciousness. In our nation, in the United Nations and other world bodies we can use the hindu principle of peace to promote non-violence and take action against crimes of violence. This principle of tolerance must be taught by the religious leaders, the rabbis, imams, roshis, swamis, acharyas, bhikkus, sants and priests. Tolerance and intolerance are basic attitudes found in our belief systems. These are things that one can learn.

According to Hinduism, to have a nonviolent world would simply mean that all individuals have to somehow or other reconcile their differences enough so that the stress their differences produce can no longer take over their mind, body and emotions, causing them to perform injurious acts. But how we can teach peace to the world? The best way is to teach families to be peaceful within their own home, to settle all arguments and contention before they sleep at night, even if they stay up for three days, so the children can see that peace can be attained and then maintained through the use of intelligence. The classic example I would like to cite here is of Ramayana and Mahabharata. Two great epic poems and both had the theme of Internal conflict. This internal conflict gave rise to the other conflicts at the big level. The internal conflict in Mahabharata was the reason behind the Kurukshetra war and the Internal Conflict in Ramayana was the reason for Sita's abduction and the war. Both the epics teach us about Duty, Honor, morality, and Loyalty, and why a King should possess these qualities to avoid conflict. And in the end, both the epics teach us the importance of Personal Peace.

Thus, Peaceful home breeds Gentle people.. Gentle people follow ahimsa, which is a first step towards peaceful world. Thus Hinduism believes in the personal peace, Those who attain a personal peace by



controlling their instinctive nature become the spiritual leaders of human society. Peace is ultimately an inner state that will beget positive ramifications as well for society as a whole. Thus Hindu peace approach says that for World Peace, Stop the war in the home.

## Conclusion

Thus, To conclude, Hindus who are 1/6<sup>th</sup> of the human race today, believes in the existence of God everywhere, as an all-pervasive, self-effulgent energy and consciousness and this basic belief creates the attitude of sublime tolerance and acceptance toward others. 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 blasphemy 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. 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.

For Hindus, Peace is a reflection of spiritual consciousness, and violence is a reflection of unevolved or base consciousness. The Hindu knows that at this time on this planet those of the lower nature, unevolved people, are society's antagonists. Being unevolved, they are of the lower nature, self-assertive, confused and protective of their immediate environment. All others are their enemies. They are jealous, angry, fearful. Many take sport in killing for the sake of killing, thieving for the sake of theft, even if they do not need or use the spoils. This is the lower nature, and is equally distributed among the peoples of the world in every nation, society and neighborhood. Those of the higher nature--ten, fifteen or twenty percent of the population--live in protective environments. Their occupation is research, memory, education, which is reason; moving the world's goods here and there, which is will. Those of yet a higher nature delve into the mysteries of the universe, and others work for universal peace and love on earth, as groups and individuals. The Hindu knows that those of the lower nature will slowly, over an experiential period of time, come into the higher nature, and that those of the higher nature, who have worked so hard to get there, will avoid the lower nature and not allow themselves to be caught up in it. Hindus believe in the progress of humanity, from an old age into a new age, from darkness into a consciousness of divine light. Though, we could easily see the opinion divide in the Hinduism as On the one hand, the Bhagavad Gita teaches that it is important to follow dharma. Therefore, it may be the duty of some Hindus, particularly those whose varna is Kshatriya, to fight wars. However, the motive must be defence, or to protect the innocent and not to gain land, power, money or as an act of revenge or anger. An on the other hand, Hinduism teaches us the principle of Ahimsa. They describe themselves as pacifists and so refuse to fight in a war. In addition, many Hindus would agree that to kill or use violence is bad action. However, Many scriptures allow Hindus to use the means of violence to establish peace.

“अिहंसा परमो धमः धम िहंसा तथैव चः |”<sup>17</sup>

Meaning: Besides, considering your duty as a warrior, you should not waver. Indeed, for a warrior, there is no better engagement than fighting for upholding of righteousness.

So According to hinduism non-violence is to be followed by us but we should fight valiantly if it goes against the Dharma.

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<sup>17</sup> Bhagawada Geeta,Chapter 2, verse 31