

The Jain “Yoga of Non-violence” By Cogen Bohanec, MA, PhD



Everyone has heard of yoga. But have you heard about *Jain* yoga?

The purpose of Jain Yoga is to help one stop the inflow of karma (*āśrava*), and remove existing karma (*nirjarā*). “Good” karma is a means towards that end, and “bad” karma represents actions that move one away from that end. Karma obstructs the full radiance of our soul; yoga reverses that obstruction.

Jain Yoga and Non-violence (Ahiṃsā)

The main method of attaining the goal of Jain Yoga is through the practice of *ahiṃsā*. The yogic vow of *ahiṃsā*, or “non-violence,” is stated as a negative (“non-“), however, it is more of a positive, in the sense of a completeness of the full expression of our soul. It is the presence of love, of care, and ultimately, is the means by which we realize the presence of happiness, contentment, and fulfillment in our lives.

Non-violence is a Mindfulness Practice

Non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) is a matter of being attentive to one’s actions, and making the choices that require the least amount of violence. We can be mindful and weigh our choices carefully and make those that are the least violent, and are the most positive in terms of caring for humanity, animals, and the environment and all living beings.

Non-violence (*ahimsā*) is inseparable from mindfulness, mindfulness is inseparable from concentration, and concentration is the first stage of the psychology of yoga. It takes constant and immense mental focus to monitor one's every thought, word and action to ensure that we always follow the path of least violence.

Use Non-violence to Experience the Radiance of your Soul

Ancient Jain sages have testified that our soul is pure happiness (*sukha*), and that happiness is obstructed and our spiritual essence, of pure contentment and joy, is in a sense "weighed down" by karma. We know this when we feel "lighter" after caring for others, reducing our environmental impact, or generally simplifying our lives. Conversely, we feel "weighed down" by fear, anxiety, and other emotions that are exacerbated when our actions may have some degree of harm to others that causes us self-doubt, or requires "damage control" to fix broken relationships, or protect ourselves from those who we have hurt or have wronged.

By practicing non-violence, we diminish the degree to which karma occludes the radiant "happiness" (*sukha*) of our soul. Actually, this "happiness" might be better thought of as pure love, since it is best experienced by giving of ourselves, rather than taking, and love is defined as the happiness that one feels from giving of oneself.

Thus, with non-violence, we allow the love of our soul to shine forth fuller and more completely. With non-violence we realize that this loving happiness is at the core of our being. Non-violence is an expression of love, a sharing of one's internal happiness with others, and is therefore the natural condition and expression of who we are at the core of our beings.

Conclusion: Practice Non-violence and You will be Practicing Jain Yoga

If violence causes the karma that restricts our essential nature, then non-violence is the natural condition of our essential, joyful nature since it is the means by which we find true satisfaction and purpose in life that is not dependent on external circumstances. That happiness which is our essence is the truth that we all seek, whether knowingly or unknowingly. We may be confused to think that happiness is outside of us, something we have to "get," but it has been within us all along, realizable through *ahimsā*.

Jain Yoga practices involve a variety of contemplative practices, from seated meditation (silent, with *japa*, or other forms of reflection) to seeing our daily lives as a form of "living meditation" with an acute attention to our own impact on the world. All of these practices of Jain Yoga are grounded, at their core, in the fundamental principle of non-violence (*ahimsā*).

If you are interested in learning more about the practice of Jain Yoga, please join one of my online courses here at Arihanta Academy.