

Meeting 7: Áhimsā

Nonviolence & vegetarianism in earlier & later Hinduism

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WhatsApp group

<https://chat.whatsapp.com/IXCQEkhfrcwHI7CNY8Fgat>

Next week

We'll be zooming in on $\text{RV } 10.129$ for the next two weeks, so there won't be slides.

Some questions to consider

- What are the Vedic moral prescriptions on violence in general?
 - What is the special role of the cow in the Vedic religion?
- In what contexts are these prescriptions overridden by ritualistic goals?
 - Is it permissible or an obligation to sacrifice and eat animals?
- To what extent is this Vedic mindset present in Epic Hinduism?
 - in *modern* Hinduism?
- We'll return to these at the end!

What is áhimsā?

- Álp^ha-privative endocentric (tat-púruṣa) from \sqrt{hims}
- First found in Bráhmaṇa literature
 - Non-privative appears later, probably back-formed
- Post-Vedic: wife of D^hárma, development of the Śákta tradition
- \sqrt{hims} is much older: e.g. *himsrá* (of Agní) in RV
- Thus: non-harming (where harm can be good or bad)
 - Harming whom?
 - Men
 - Kine
 - Other animals

Āhimsā towards men

- Obviously: killing Ārya-s not condoned in general
 - Two acceptable contexts:
 - Battle (e.g. Ten Kings, *between* Ārya-s)
 - Human sacrifice (present but rare)
- Killing Dāsyu-s?
- Pacifism? Vedic, Epic, Vedānta

Āhimsā towards kine

- Go-med^há and other rites
- Sacrifice of bulls: RV 10.86.14
- Yet: ag^hnyā (f., less commonly m.): synonymous with cow
- Synthesis: kine, unlike other animals, are morally akin to men.
 - Can only be sacrificed in special circumstances

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