

Gandhi's Message of Peace

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The 138th anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's birth on October 2nd offers a reminder of the core principles of his teachings. Gandhi is one of the greatest exemplars of non-violence the world has ever known. Mohandas Gandhi's message of peace permeated everything he did in his life, from the spiritual to the political realm, from family and communal life to the national and global realms. Indeed, it is still reverberating today and will continue to influence and inspire future generations. The doctrine of ahimsa, or non-violence, was one of Gandhi's core principles, and ultimately involved active, ceaseless love for all life. He said that by working with this law, human beings expressed the harmony and order of the Cosmos.

The law of love is based upon what the Hindus call *Sat*, Absolute Reality and Eternal Truth, the source and foundation of the unity of all. *Satya* means 'truth', 'real', 'existent', 'valid' and 'pure', and refers to one's best conception of truth while embodied - which is necessarily relative to the Highest Truth. Truth is the goal of existence. Gandhi believed in the absolute oneness of God and humanity; therefore, he identified with all fellow beings. *"There is nothing on earth that I would not give up for the sake of the country excepting of course two things and two only, namely, truth and nonviolence. I would not sacrifice these two for all the world. For to me Truth is God and there is no way to find Truth except the way of nonviolence. I do not seek to serve India at the sacrifice of Truth or God. For I*

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know that a man who forsakes Truth can forsake his country, and his nearest and dearest ones." (Mahatma, II, Speech, 12/20/1926, in *All Men are Brothers*, p. 73). His metaphysical and religious principles were expressed in practice through ethical action. The enactment of satya and ahimsa, however, required a commitment to hold onto the truth in the most difficult of times. Gandhi called those who practiced non-violence 'satyagrahis'; satyagraha literally means 'holding onto truth'. Gandhi referred to this holding power as 'Soul Force' because it drew out deep moral energies from within. Satyagraha was the opposite of using physical force to harm one's opponent. The life of a Satyagrahi involved a relentless search for truth, and a determination to reach truth through the realization of ahimsa, nonviolence, and ultimately, compassion for all life. In order to be able to respond non-violently in every challenging situation, Gandhi's followers practiced swaraj, or 'self-rule'. He taught that because human beings are one with the Absolute in essence, they have the necessary inner resources and faculties to practice ahimsa. Doing so required self-restraint and a conscious will to do that which benefits all other beings, not just that desired by self-interest groups. Ahimsa required disciplined rule from within, a mental struggle, a following of one's conscience, and ultimately fearlessness in the face of death.

Gandhi's message of nonviolence is highly relevant today. If we wish to be nonviolent and work for peace within ourselves and in the world, there are numerous avenues of self-examination and exploration that would bear fruit, if we are courageous and patient enough to follow through. Gandhi stands as an exemplar of truth and non-violence who continues to deeply inspire those who seek peace.

For more IWC resources on M. K. Gandhi, please see Professor Raghavan Iyer's book, *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, (see "Publications" on the IWC website at <http://www.worldculture.org> and "Gandhi on Sarvodaya (Universal Welfare)" by Professor James Tepfer, a seminar paper, available on the IWC webpage: http://www.worldculture.org/articles/gandhi_sarvodaya_tepfer.pdf

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