



Gandhi distinguished between the negative and positive meanings of ahimsa (non-violence):

*In its negative form it means not injuring any living being whether by body or mind. I may not, therefore, hurt the person of any wrong-doer or bear any ill-will to him and so cause him mental suffering... Ahimsa requires deliberate self-suffering, not a deliberate injuring of the supposed wrong-doer...*

*In its positive form Ahimsa means the largest love, the greatest charity. If I am a follower of Ahimsa, I must love my enemy or a stranger to me as I would my wrong-doing father or son. This active Ahimsa necessarily includes truth and fearlessness.*

- Gandhi in letter in  
*Modern Review*,  
October 1916

## Reflections on the Hands-on Gandhian Retreat

January 11-17, 2009

Sponsored by the Institute of World Culture

Held at and in Collaboration with La Casa de Maria Retreat Center

Together with retreat leader Shashi Tyagi from India, seventeen retreat participants from across America, of various ages and backgrounds, approximated a brief Gandhian ashram living experience here in Santa Barbara between January 11 and 17, 2009. As the Institute of World Culture's first Aim enjoins us to do, we explored a classical tradition of the East – namely, life in an ashram – and its continuing relevance to emerging modes and patterns of living. We found the discipline of the ashram to be liberating and the comradeship to engender greater inner reflection. All participants eagerly undertook their 'bread labor' of two hours a day of manual work, plus meal preparation and clean-up, without hesitation. The practical work brought to life our conceptual study of Gandhi's ideas. *(Continued on p. 3)*

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Recovering the Spiritual Heritage of Indonesia



**Seminar: Saturday, February 7**  
**3:00 - 5:30 pm**  
**Concord House, 1407 Chapala St.**  
**Santa Barbara**  
**Presenter: Richard North**

The efforts to recover and bring alive the musical traditions of the ancient Indonesian Kingdom of Cirebon will be described. Insights will be offered about the spiritual heritage expressed in this music.

Call Richard at 805/895-0592 for more information.



The Quarrel of Oberon and Titania, Sir Paton, 1849

**Institute of World Culture Membership**  
 Individual Membership \$35  
 Individual Student Membership \$15  
 Individual Supporting Membership \$70  
 Contact [memberships@worldculture.org](mailto:memberships@worldculture.org)

## Exploring *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

**Film & Forum: Saturday,**  
**February 21**  
**3:00 - 6:00 pm**  
**Coordinator: Judy Saltzman**

In preparation for a theater trip on February 28 to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, we will first view and then discuss Shakespeare's masterful comedy about how the inner elements of nature throw the human world into chaos or give it peace and harmony. When the Faery King and Queen, Oberon and Titania, are quarreling with each other, the human lovers are confused. When the Faery Kingdom is restored to calm, all is well. Read more about the play on the PCPA website: <http://www.pcpa.org/>

## *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

**Theater Trip: Saturday,**  
**February 28**  
**1:00 - 7:00 pm**  
**Coordinator: Judy Saltzman**

This trip to enjoy a PCPA performance of Shakespeare's masterful comedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, includes a conversation afterwards with the director of the play. Exploring the mysteries of the "Faery Kingdom" and its confusing interconnection with the world of human love raises many questions that can be discussed over dinner at a local restaurant in Santa Maria. Contact Judy Saltzman at [Judy@worldculture.org](mailto:Judy@worldculture.org) or call 805/528-3008 for tickets and information about carpooling. Reservations are due by February 16th.

*Reflections*, con't.

This event harmoniously blended youthful inspiration, the hard-won experience of a lifetime of practice, and a depth of philosophical understanding. The students who attended the Hands-On Gandhian Retreat, including Colorado College senior Sandhya Tillotson, who first envisioned the event, provided the motivation to make our way into a more peaceful, sustainable tomorrow. Shashi Tyagi, of the non-profit organization GRAVIS in Rajasthan, led by example, having herself given up most worldly comforts decades ago to devote her life to Gandhian service - sarvodaya - of India's rural poor. Institute of World Culture members, who were well-versed in the seminal book *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi* by the Institute's Founder President Raghavan Iyer, provided the conceptual underpinnings of the retreat. The elders in attendance graced the entire event, smoothing any rough edges with a smile, a comforting pat, a word-to-the-wise, a quick mop to a dirty floor, or a well-placed compliment.

Retreat participants woke to a 5:55 am gong every morning and began the day at 6:30 am with one of Gandhi's favorite multi-cultural prayers. We ate a healthy breakfast prepared by retreat members, then studied Gandhi's thought and life.

Each study session started by reading one or two of the 11 vows taken in Gandhi's ashrams: Nonviolence, Truth, Non Stealing, Chastity, Non-possession, Bread Labor, Control of the Palate, Fearlessness, Tolerance of all Religions, Local Production, and

**In February****Anniversaries**

- 3rd Horace Greeley, American editor, reformer, politician b. 1811
- 4th Rosa Parks, African-American civil rights activist b. 1913
- 7th Sir Thomas More, English lawyer, author, statesman b. 1478
- 7th Charles Dickens, English novelist, social campaigner b. 1812
- 7th/8th Dmitri Mendeleev, Russian chemist, inventor b. 1834
- 8th Proclus, Greek Neoplatonist philosopher b. 410/412
- 8th John Ruskin, English art critic, author, artist b. 1819
- 8th Martin Buber, Austrian-Israeli-Jewish philosopher, educator b. 1878
- 8th Peter Kropotkin, Russian prince, anarchist d. 1921
- 10th Boris Pasternak, Russian poet, writer, Nobel laureate b. 1890
- 10th Bertolt Brecht, German poet, playwright, theatre director b. 1898
- 11th Thomas Alva Edison, American inventor, businessman b. 1847
- 12th Abraham Lincoln, President of the U.S. b. 1809
- 12th Charles Darwin, English naturalist b. 1809
- 12th Anna Pavlova, Russian dancer, ballerina b. 1881
- 15th Galileo Galilei, Italian scientist, philosopher b. 1564
- 15th Susan B. Anthony, American civil rights leader b. 1820
- 17th Giordano Bruno, Italian philosopher d. 1600
- 18th Shri Ramakrishna, Indian mystic b. 1836
- 19th Nicolaus Copernicus, Polish astronomer, scientist b. 1473
- 21st Voltaire, French Enlightenment writer, philosopher b. 1694
- 20th Frederick Douglass, African-American abolitionist, author d. 1895
- 22nd George Washington, American, first President of the U.S. b. 1732
- 22nd Arthur Schopenhauer, German philosopher b. 1788
- 22nd Heinrich Hertz, German physicist b. 1857
- 24th Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Italian philosopher b. 1463
- 26th Victor Hugo, French author, artist, statesman, activist b. 1802
- 27th Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, American educator, poet b. 1807
- 28th Michel de Montaigne, French Renaissance writer b. 1533
- 28th Vaslav Nijinski, Russian ballet dancer, choreographer b. 1890

**Observances**

- 9th (2009) Chinese Lantern (Yuan-Xiao) Festival, last day of Chinese New Year
- 16th Presidents' Day (U.S.)
- 19th Russian Emancipation Manifesto legally granted full rights of citizenship to serfs 1861
- 20th American astronaut John H. Glenn orbits the earth three times in 1962
- 21st (2009) Ash Wednesday, Christian holiday celebrating first day of Lent
- 28th John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress published in 1678

*Reflections*, cont.

Removal of Untouchability. Next, one of several visiting Institute members gave a brief summary of one of our key Gandhian concepts:

- **Satya:** Truth, as Reality, which unites all of us since no human concept or religion can be higher than Truth itself – that which is real, authentic, genuine, enduring and sustaining
- **Ahimsa:** negation of the will to harm in thought, speech and deed – non-violence in an active, rather than passive, sense of extending goodwill
- **Swaraj:** self-rule, in the sense of self-discipline
- **Satyagraha:** truth-work, implying soul-force – holding onto truth in the midst of untruth
- **Bread Labor:** everyone doing enough physical labor for one's food, and devoting one's intellectual endeavors to the benefit of humankind, not to amassing personal wealth
- **Trusteeship:** holding all spiritual, mental and physical resources in trust for the good of all
- **Sarvodaya:** the uplift of all, but the least first.

Shashi ji followed up each summary with historical examples of these concepts being enacted by Gandhi or his followers, including Vinoba Bhave and GRAVIS workers. Participants engaged in discussion. In closing, we heard a biographical passage from Eknath Easwaran's book *Gandhi the Man*.

Before heading out to work, we warmed up with a brief hatha yoga session. Construction of a stone-lined labyrinth went "from above, below", starting with an inspirational idea before the manual labor began. One participant commented that the labyrinth (modeled after the one on the stone floor of the Chartres Cathedral in France) was a symbol of meditation itself: you wind your way into the center, and begin

anticipating that you are almost there, only to get flung out to the circumference again as soon as the ego gets excited; it takes several windings in and out until you can finally reach the center point of stillness.

Participants located, lifted and placed hundreds of stones and boulders to create the labyrinth – surprising themselves by week's end with their collective result.

Older participants who couldn't do as much heavy construction work manned the breakfast clean-up, vegetable collection in the organic garden and lunch-making tasks. After our morning exertions, lunch and early afternoon free time felt well-earned. The practical skills sessions from 3-5 pm in the afternoon constituted the hands-on learning of sustainable skills and peace-making. Outside speakers came to show real life examples of sustainable living, such as Permaculture, bee keeping, and cob building, as well as peace-making skills, such as mending broken communities in Liberia, which is the mission of the visiting local organization "everyday gandhis."

Evenings were a time to open the retreat to the general community. Guests joined many of our simple, delicious dinners, with Asian, Indian, Iranian, Californian and Italian cuisine prepared by the excellent participant cooks. (Meals were free of meat, eggs, and usually dessert.) We started the week's evening program with scenes from Richard Attenborough's memorable 1982 film *Gandhi*. Other evening forums featured outside speakers whose topics included "Modern Man and Woman: What Would Gandhi Think?", "Three Warriors: the Militarist, the Terrorist and the Gandhian", and "How Should We Care for Our Bodies –



*Shashi ji Tyagi*

*Reflections, con't.*

Acupuncture & Gandhi's Nature Cure." Most evenings ended with inspirational songs by musically talented members of the Institute of World Culture.

The highlight of the retreat for many was the initiation ceremony for the labyrinth on the final morning, after the last stone had been moved into place. Retreat members, La Casa de Maria staff and friends all filed silently through the new labyrinth, nearly brushing shoulders as we wound through fold after fold of the circulating pathway. Finally, all of us reached the flower-petalled center. Shashi ji suggested that we sing the American gospel of peace and the Civil Rights Movement's famed "We Shall Overcome." An African-American woman who had just arrived for a Martin Luther King, Jr., retreat at La Casa de Maria spontaneously offered to lead the verses, and a heartfelt rendition ensued. We realized how appropriate it was that a retreat on King would follow one on Gandhi, when she reminded us that Gandhi had ever been an inspiration to Dr. King. As we silently followed the labyrinth's path back out into the world, we felt enriched by our week's study of this slight man, Mahatma Gandhi, whose non-violent accomplishments seemed larger than life and yet intimately touched each of our lives. We had worked together to create a meditation labyrinth...friendships...and community. As Shashi ji, our beloved retreat leader concluded: "People spent the whole week with happiness."

Renée Tillotson  
Board Member and Retreat Participant

### Participants' Comments

*I gained renewed faith in young people 18-30 – their idealism, charity, simplicity, and activism inspire me to keep going. (from a 76 year old participant)*

*The excitement and joy of working and thinking together with such a diverse group was memorable and a blessing.*

*I gained a sense of community and recognized the power and energy of a like-minded group. But more than that, I was able to observe and meet and share with a group of extraordinarily influential people who inspire me to bring this energy to a wider community. The knowledge and the everyday examples of people practicing a Gandhian lifestyle is something that will stay with me.*

*The entire retreat was created in the spirit of giving and volunteerism that Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave would have loved, and I think it was received and engaged in by the participants in like spirit.*

*The construction of the labyrinth was an excellent example of what can be accomplished when you have a group working together.*

*I've achieved everything I wanted and need in the material world. This retreat has made me want something bigger.*

*Besides a fabulous group of new friends, I got great insight on life. Last year saw storm after storm of challenges, loss, grief and trying times, leaving me totally lost and confused. I knew this retreat would bring me hope about the future, but wasn't sure how. Although I still don't know what my next step will be exactly, I have a pretty good idea – maybe the Mahatma Gandhi School for Social Justice?*

*This was a great retreat and I hope that I am able to continue this as my life's mission. Thanks!*

For more participants' comments and photos of the week, visit the Institute of World Culture's website at <http://www.worldculture.org>.

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