

# The Gandhi Way



Placard carried on climate demo (photo by Jane Sill)

Newsletter of the Gandhi Foundation

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## **Gandhi Foundation Multifaith Celebration**

Saturday 8 February 2020 at 6.30pm for 6.45pm

Golders Green Unitarian Church

31 1/2 Hoop Lane, London NW11 8BS

*Music, singing, poetry, readings, short talks around the theme of  
Unity in Diversity*

More information from Jane Sill: [janesill@aol.com](mailto:janesill@aol.com)

## **Gandhi Foundation Annual Lecture 2020**

Monday 22 June 2020

A lecture on Gandhian Economics with particular reference to Trusteeship will be given by Graeme Nuttall OBE who presented a report on employee ownership to a previous British Government.

Venue and time are not yet fixed.

## **GF International Peace Award 2019**

The award event announced in the previous newsletter had to be postponed due to the General Election 2019 and it has not been possible yet to fix its new date.

## **Gandhi Foundation Ashram Experience 2020**

Sat 25 July - Sat 1 August 2020

at St Christopher School, Letchworth

Theme:

***Finding Principles to Live By***

Further details from [markhoda@hotmail.com](mailto:markhoda@hotmail.com)

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# Ashram Experience 2019

*Trevor Lewis*

For this year's Ashram Experience (formerly the Gandhi Summer School/Gathering) we returned to the St Christopher School in Letchworth Garden City. Our accommodation is in the block that is usually occupied by the sixth-form students. As our numbers were reduced compared to previous years, partly due to last-minute cancellations and sickness, we had a wide choice of rooms, one or two of which have en suite bathrooms. Traditionally we daily take part in *shramadana*, in other words performing cleaning and cooking, and other tasks, for the benefit of the community. However as the school provides paid staff to do the cleaning, and there were no opportunities to do gardening, etc. we were left with meal preparation and washing-up as our only *shramadana* duties.

Often we have been fortunate to have among us someone skilled in demonstrating yoga, and so there has been an opportunity for people to have an early-morning session of communal yoga. Unfortunately this year we had no such person, so it was not available.

## **Morning Sessions**

In our first morning discussion session, i.e. on the Sunday, Graham Davey outlined changes in the UK and in the wider world that he would like to see, then we had a wide-ranging discussion on those topics, and they were added to by other participants. By general consensus we decided that the highest-priority and most urgent topics were the reversal of processes that contribute to climate change and also the reduction in inequality both in the UK and across the world.

On the second day, Monday, our discussion started by considering three questions:

- i) can education bring about the change we want to see ?
- ii) does education exist to pass on human knowledge or to develop character ?
- iii) Gandhi said that the purpose of education was to instil values and develop character. Is this still true ?

We all contributed to this discussion, starting with our personal experience of school and college/university education, either private or state school, etc. By consensus we decided there should be much more emphasis on vocational education, as it is at least as worthwhile as academic education, and indeed essential for providing a skilled workforce. Also that teaching of moral philosophy and life skills should be expanded, at all stages of learning.

Our third session, on the Tuesday, focused on the media, and the way they shape our ideas of events. In our definition of media, we lumped together newspapers (in print and digital form), television, and social media e.g. Twitter, Facebook et alia. It was pointed out that we are totally dependent on these for our knowledge about the world, and that these media channels are

not as neutral as perhaps we might like to think. In particular the BBC is notably biased and susceptible to influence by outside bodies.

On Wednesday we turned to changes we would like to see in our political system, both at local and national level. We were agreed that a clear priority is to move away from a first-past-the-post system, and have some form of proportional representation instead. Another aim, to reduce inequality in UK society, is to firstly remove charitable status from public schools, and ultimately to abolish them altogether.

In Thursday's session we considered which organisations we are involved with and/or support. They included Greenpeace, The Green Party, Amnesty International, Democracy Now, Lendwithcare, Peace Direct, The Scouts movement, CND and several others. We agreed that it was normal in the past that in order to bring about change one would become a member of one or more suitable organisations, and join in their activities. Now there is often no need to pay something to join: often one can take part via social media. We also agreed that it is much less common for people to join any organisation.

Friday morning was the occasion for our final session, where we had a discussion about changes in our lifestyle we had individually made, or were considering making in the future.

Our morning sessions were notably more interactive than they have been in previous years, which was generally considered to be an improvement.



Trudy Lewis, Mark Hoda, Graham Davey enjoying the sun at Ashram Experience 2019

## Afternoon Sessions

In the afternoons, we traditionally try to engage in some creative activity. For the first time we had a small amount of equipment with which we could practice some circus skills. Some of us needed more practice than others !

## Evenings

On each of the first two evenings we watched a documentary made by *Heaven on Earth Creations*. One was *Gandhi's Gift* and the other was *Gandhi's Awakening*. A few years ago the Gandhi Foundation made a donation towards the cost of making the former film. Each has been shown numerous times on PBS in the United States.

We played games on several of the other evenings, i.e. Uno, Consequences, Boggle, Banagrams

On the final evening, instead of our traditional party we had a session of dancing to 5Rhythms music.

## Future

The Ashram Experience 2020 will again be held at St Christopher School, Letchworth. The theme for 2020 is *Finding Principles to Live By*.



Part of St Christopher School, photo taken by Graham Davey

# Ego, Literalism, and Violence

*William Jackson*

On September 29, 2019, I attended the celebration of the 34<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the New England Peace Pagoda in Leverett, Massachusetts, which also honored the 150<sup>th</sup> birthday of Mahatma Gandhi. I heard Buddhist monks and nuns of Nipponzan Myohoji chanting the Lotus Sutra, and I listened to talks and prayers by representatives from Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, Native American, and Christian paths. The head monk of the New England Peace Pagoda, the Venerable Gyoway Kato, gave an insightful dharma talk. In it he quoted Guruji Fujii, the founder of this Peace Pagoda, talking about Gandhiji's accomplishments, saying "there is no telling where help comes from in the world invisible to our eyes." That means we cannot be too certain about our own abilities, or about the ways we may get needed help from the heights and depths of the universe around us, but we can be grateful for the inner light, which Buddhists call the "Buddha Nature" in us all (and others name in a variety of ways). It is a wisdom consciousness which is known for inspiring mutual reverence among those who follow and promote the path of peace.

Gandhi taught that "When the ego dies, the soul awakens." The ego is a smaller, self-centered identity; soul or psyche is endowed with many more possibilities than the ego. Releasing oneself from the hold of the ego is part of many spiritual traditions. For example, the Tibetan Buddhist yogi Milarepa spoke about freeing himself "from the illness of ego-clinging. Depth psychologist James Hillman in *The Dream and the Underworld*,[1] and other writings, explores the attitudes and blind spots of the ego.

On the ego, Hillman writes that the "I" plays an important part in the dramatics of the psyche, as the aspect which takes itself as literally real. Thus, an ego's specific characteristic, and its specific function, is to represent the literal view: it takes itself and its view for the real grasp, the true understanding of life. Because literalism is an ego viewpoint "it means being locked into an ego's viewpoint. Ego psychology results from being trapped by the ego into its perspective".[2] Literalism means adhering to one meaning, and the habit of literalism may involve experiencing a panic when the ego feels threatened by anything other than that one meaning. Multiple views seem to the ego like babel and havoc, enemies to expunge.

Hillman agrees with Gandhi, and with William Blake that the identification of soul and ego is a big mistake. He also joins Owen Barfield and Norman O Brown in support of insisting on the importance of the "metaphor to protect plain men from literalism". He quotes Barfield: "the besetting sin today is the sin of literalism". And Brown: "The thing to be abolished is literalism; ... [the worship of false images; idolatry] ... Truth is always in poetic form; not literal but symbolic; hiding or veiled; light in darkness ... the alternative to literalism is mystery".[3]

The word “mystery” has an evocative quality, it suggests possible deep views, enigmatic realities; it is only partly scrutable, with a certain open-endedness. We can appreciate the richness of multiple possibilities existing in mystery’s uncertainties, values more open-ended than those found in a dogmatic reductionist certainty. Ego’s literalism can become a mania, an inability to see, think, feel beyond oneself. But as Fujii said, when he was reminding us of Gandhi’s accomplishments, none of us really knows where our help comes from. It is a mystery.

“Literalism prevents mystery by narrowing the multiple ambiguity of meanings into one definition”, as Brown says. It can also harden the heart, preventing deeper penetration of the imagination, as Barfield says. Religious traditions often contain the rejection of literalism and the advocacy of parable.[4] As Einstein famously quipped, “things should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler.” And as Taoism reminds us “The Tao that can be told of is not the eternal Tao; the name that can be named is not the eternal name...” Better to know there are depths you don’t know; better to be generally right than exactly wrong.

Literalism is “negligence of the vision that concrete flesh is a magnificent citadel of metaphors”,[5] and it involves a tone-deafness caused by over- simplification. The ego uses literalism, or “cherrypicks” convenient shortcuts, wanting no extraneous distractions, feeling it has no time to ruminate. The ego is a busy force, facing many obstacles, with so much to accomplish. The ego struggles day by day to face life’s challenges with limited mortal resources at its disposal. Literalism is the attitude of the ego seeing the oppositional other, the polar opponent, literally as the enemy. The overgrown and molly-coddled ego tends to see over-simplified differences, conflicts of contrasts, as signs of clashes. It feels at home in a war of wills, which can escalate into hostilities, violent acts.

Of course you don’t have to be a hero battling monsters to be a Herculean literalist. For example, look at the literalism involved in denying climate change. Because it was first called “Global Warming”, it was convenient for deniers to take it literally — any cold weather would cause them to say: “See, global warming is a scam. It’s cold today, not warm”. That over-simplifying ploy gave deniers more time to stall, as scientists gradually changed the wording to “Climate Change”. A more authentic hero, one with deeper ideals such as Gandhi, would not fight the messenger and hire propagandists, but would deal with the actual causes of climate change, by reducing pollution.

The character Hercules, a classical example of the ego archetype in Greek myths, is depicted as a mighty fighter not at home in self-reflection, contemplation, or deep wisdom — his acts were ego-driven. Hillman notes that “Hercules had to go mad literally, in order to understand the underside of things, maybe because his journey to Hades was a mess”.[6] It took a trauma to awaken him to the depths.

Hercules' propensity for acting out antagonisms violently makes him act like a bull in a china shop, belligerent, ambitious, quick to strike ("Shoot first, and aim later", as a humorous phrase goes.) Hercules' ego needs monsters to overpower: "Heroic sanity insists on a reality to wrestle".[7] A one-sided man of action, like the warrior Hercules, is by no means a man of contemplation. Compulsive Hercules must always go toe-to-toe with his foes. Nonviolence is not an option for him.

"If one has ... pride and egoism, there is no nonviolence," Gandhi wrote, "Nonviolence is impossible without humility".[8] The ego is unstable, and doubting itself, it inflates its own importance to hype, bluster and bluff its way through uncertain conditions. History includes examples of how the inflated ego can be in a mood ready to commit genocide rather than see ambiguities. I agree with Aliza Luft, who studies decision-making in violent contexts, and observes that people become participants in violence "By calling on culturally available repertoires that frame violence as the morally right thing to do". If one's hatred is enlisted to take literally that one's foe is a rat, insect, cancer, etc., it can feel like killing him is the righteous thing to do.[9]

Taking images literally, like a hero whose skill means doing battle against enemies in the clear sunlight, can provide an unconscious impulse to allow and promote mayhem, instead of using "soft power", persuasion, or negotiation. A vocal attitude which buys into literalism is a permissive insinuation of Herculean magnitude, a license to scapegoat and kill. [10] Hillman's point is that a great human potential is lost when one's usual default outlook is taking images literally instead of metaphorically. When literalism becomes second nature, it is a taken-for-granted attitude of oversimplification brought to all matters.

Literalism is a powerful force, and necessary in its own way. For example, "the literal is the favorite mode of the military and the moral, where the power of suasion are primary concerns ... The literal speaks with a single tongue, it finds the facts, clears away ambiguity ... it makes things happen". [11] The literal is a strength in debate and issuing commands, and literalism is necessary when making exact mathematical calculations, and specifying precise quantities.

In translating, concern for the literal meaning is basic and crucial, as translator A. K. Ramanujan observed, but he recognized that to "steer betwixt the two extremes of paraphrase and literal translation", as Dryden put it, is a good ideal for translators of poetry.[12] But to be generally stuck in literalism is to be confined in a cramped space which is not the only way of thought possible. Literalism does not work in thinking about deep matters, exploring underlying issues, finding understanding.

Literalism is a mindset which reduces possibilities, as if saying "This is it, the whole thing. There's nothing but this, my name, my past, my life, nothing else beyond this to be seen".[13] A sense of other characters, persons, perspectives, facets of the psyche, impulses, fantasies, possibilities of other interpretations is suppressed. In a literal-minded person some of these

repressed potentialities may surface, expressed unconsciously as symptoms, ailments, diseases, as depth psychologists suggest.

Literalism is a result of leaving the psyche out of the equation, because psyche is what brings the images, the multiple views possible to envision. Psyche has the ability to fluidly consider altogether aspects of the whole situation, allowing varied iterations, allowing thought's freedom, imaginatively exploring possibilities.

Hillman insightfully explains how “deliteralizing” is “a mode of making all things psyche, making psyche of world, of soul-making, a cosmos of soul”. [14] Finding freedom in a fluidity of images and meanings, considering thoughtfully is wiser than being stuck in literal, materially-based, rigid reductionism, choosing rashly to strike as a knee-jerk reaction. In deep matters “nothing but” reductionism is revealed to be an oversimplifying dead-end trap, a life-sentence to absence of imagination. It excludes symbolism, depth wisdom, multiple possibilities. As historian Gershom Scholem wrote, “Blessed is he who has not closed the gates of association”, for the ability to “associate” is a rich function of considering likenesses, possible options, memories, cross-disciplinary affinities, images and patterns that resonate with each other, finding new answers and learning ventures. Literalism is the lock on the gate of thought-processes whereby imagination is closed; the mental energy and curiosity involved in making connections is liberating.

As Hillman sees it, “Deliteralization as a deconstructive process (taking apart through analysis) itself depends upon the psyche's primary activity of imagining narratives. Psyche tells itself stories about how things are. These myths and theologies manifest what Jung has called the ‘religious instinct’, referring to the fact that psyche, *an sich*, natively, instinctively, compulsively contemplates cosmologically”. [15]

To summarize the issue, Hillman, mentioning Coleridge's idea that *thinking without images is dangerous*, explains it is dangerous because literalism can lead people to succumb to cynical nihilism and full-faithed fundamentalism. [16] When one oversimplifies, nuance and depths die, desiccated by lack of imagination, dearth of curiosity. Hillman, a Jungian pathfinder of depth psychology, speaks persuasively about imagination, the power of psyche, as the water of life.

Hillman observes that “‘Seeing through’ events into their myths”, [17] is a way out of the dilemma of literalism — the conditioned and constructed defensive ego which imprisons, limits, and fatally determines. Seeing nonliterally — but with images which have a transparency allowing one to see through them to meanings, ideas, envisioning depths — is a strength of magnanimous souls and eloquent thinkers. This ability can expand awareness, give freedom to adapt to challenging situations in new ways. Literalism offers a restricted view, a way where all other doors seem closed. “Seeing though” means being open, receptive with an open mind in seeing and thinking, including seeing through and into oneself, entertaining possibilities, choosing options, not shut in a preordained lock-step set-up.

Literalism sees inevitable clashes in situations where imagination finds unprecedented possibilities.

Hillman boldly states that “*Without imaginal understanding, we may expect killing*, as if our culture cannot ever take down the wild Western ego until it has restored the ancient sense of image and recovered the imaginal from the broken shards of reformational literalism”.<sup>[18]</sup> The dumbed-down restricted possibilities of literalist thought allow for and lead to violent acts. Other outlooks can explore more deeply to understand further. Until then, violence, wars, murder-suicides, terrorism, thrive.

Jung wrote that “Religious statements without exception have to do with the reality of the *psyche*, and not the reality of *physis*”.<sup>[19]</sup> The reality of the psyche is less bound, more free and open than the materialist outlook of “nothing but the literal”. The world of the mind, the world as idea, existence as a realm to contemplate, is more open-ended than hard-edged measurable things. Our sense of what is possible determines what we let ourselves see.

A “worked soul” (Hillman’s term for someone who’s been through soul-developing experiences, and suffered for a cause, self-sacrificed for a higher good) such as Mahatma Gandhi, knows what matters, and has a soulful sense of humanity, a deeper understanding. The depths of such soulfulness can be a grounding for a life lived for others, more supportive of vulnerable people in need than delusions of the ego which needs to be deflated to get its feet on the ground. Human rights are not a driving concern for a self-centered me-first ego; they are important to those who wisely share a sense of mortality with other living creatures.

Literalism which fosters the single way of bloodshed as inevitable answer to an impasse is what Hillman is scrutinizing. A Gandhi explores various ways out of an impasse. Gandhi believed that “no man is a crocodile.” The literalist attitude is “We have no other way to rid ourselves of unwanted monsters we deem undeserving of being alive. No choice. We must kill them”. Hillman suggests working on our psyches with wisdom of the depths. In the wealth of life’s symbolic images we see our shared passage on earth. Wise, empathetic, creative imagination is versatile, like life itself ...

The Peace Pagoda of New England, which I mentioned at the opening of this essay, is one of the various hopeful and inspiring signs of love for earth and life itself around the world. Other Peace Pagodas already exist in India, Japan, Korea, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Australia, Germany, Austria, England, Italy, Latvia, Canada and Mexico. Two other Peace Pagodas are currently being built in America: Northwest Peace Pagoda (being built in Bangor, Washington state, near the Trident nuclear submarine base); in the Smokey Mountains (Tennessee). The various spiritual traditions, paths of peace, and centers like Peace pagodas, are hopeful signs inspiring alternatives to violence.

## Notes

1. James Hillman, *The Dream in the Underworld*, New York: Harper & Row, 1979.
2. James Hillman, *Re-Visioning Psychology*, New York: Harper & Row, 1975, p. 48.
3. Owen Barfield, Norman Brown are cited in *Re-Visioning Psychology*, p. 149.

4. *Ibid.* For statements about use of parable language, for example in the *New Testament*, see Matthew 13:34-36, and Matthew 13:10-17.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 174.
6. James Hillman, *The Dream in the Underworld*, p. 110.
7. *Ibid.*, p.110-111.
8. M.K. Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. 75, 1976, p. 251.
9. Aliza Luft, Assistant Professor of Sociology, UCLA, in a letter to the editor entitled “The Root of Violence” *The New Yorker*, December 11, 2017, p. 5.
10. James Hillman, *The Dream in the Underworld*, p. 115.
11. James Hillman, *Philosophical Intimations*, (ed. Edward S. Casey) Thompson, Conn.: Spring Publications, 2016, p. 351. (Vol. 8, *The Writings of James Hillman*.)
12. A.K. Ramanujan, *Speaking of Siva*, New York, Penguin, p. 13. See also *Re-Visioning Psychology*, p. 248, fn 24.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
14. *Philosophical Intimations*, p. 87.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
18. *Ibid.*
19. C. G. Jung, *Psychological Reflections*, (ed. Jolande Jacobi) Princeton: Princeton/Bollingen, 1973, p. 356

**William J. Jackson** earned his PhD in the Comparative Study of Religion at Harvard University and taught at Indiana University-Purdue University. He writes books and articles about South Indian singer-saints, and about fractals in the world’s cultures.

## Jains Create a Living Legacy to Peace

To commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi this October, the Jain community have established a unique living legacy for peace and harmony in Harrow, North West London.

With enthusiasm and warm hearts over 250 members of the Jain and Interfaith community including school groups and children gathered together at Kenton Recreation Ground on Saturday 16th November to plant an incredible 1,000 trees to create the ‘Ahimsa Peace Forest’ as part of the Planting for Peace initiative. Held during Inter Faith Week, participants were there to spread the message of peace and harmony whilst supporting the environment with positive action helping to combat climate change through planting of trees. The careful planting of saplings was overseen by the charity, Trees for Cities and Friends of Kenton Rec.

Expressing his joy at the landmark event, Mr Nemu Chandaria, Chairman of OneJAIN, commented: “32 Jain organisations in the UK under OneJAIN joined their hands to create the Ahimsa Peace Forest, inculcating the responsibility in the youth to care for Mother Earth and Nature. We trust many other communities will follow the example set today”.

To the beautifully soothing notes of live flute music, visitors enjoyed activities throughout the day including writing inspiring peace wishes on

ribbons that were delicately tied around the trunk of an old oak tree, making origami animals, signing a book of peaceful thoughts and taking home a self-penned Peace pebble.

For the Jain community, their principal tenet of Ahimsa (love, compassion and non-violence) recognises the inter-connectedness of all living beings including plants, animals and human beings. Mahatma Gandhi was especially shaped by this principle of Ahimsa, and greatly influenced by his association with the Jain poet and philosopher Shrimad Rajchandra, who is recognised as his spiritual guide.



The event was also attended by The Mayor of Harrow, Councillor Nitin Parekh, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Jains, Gareth Thomas, local Councillors and leaders of local Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, Sikh, Zoroastrian and Humanist groups. The Mayor of Harrow sharing his thoughts of the occasion said: “Harrow is the most diverse borough in England and this is a great event that has brought people together irrespective of their caste, creed, colour or nationality. It is my great pleasure to be here and I’m lucky to be part of this event that is happening for the good of the world, environment and humanity”.

It is hoped that this flagship Planting for Peace project will inspire other local community groups to similarly come together to celebrate togetherness and create lasting legacies by planting Peace Trees, Peace Gardens and Peace Forests.

For more information, on behalf of OneJAIN, contact Manthan Taswala, Shrimad Rajchandra Mission Dharampur on 07920 105093.



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## **Coming Home, 1915**

Fibonacci Poem by Leonard Dabydeen

Speaks

from

outside

not knowing

what inside looks like

Gandhi keeps the diya burning

seeking the truth: from Johannesburg to Porbandar.

Leonard Dabydeen is a Guyanese born Canadian writer and human rights activist.

# Religious Freedom – A Global Overview

*Brian Cooper*

The **struggle for religious freedom** – freedom to worship God according to personal conscience – has been and remains the fundamental human rights struggle, predating and often inspiring the later democratic rights struggles. Medieval dissident movements and Reformation leaders fought for it; Britain saw Lollards, Puritans, Baptists, Covenanters, Quakers etc. uphold faith freedom and toleration – eventually won with the 1688 revolution and later legislation. Such aspirations in many countries were finally enshrined in the **UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (1948) Article 18: *“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change [his/her] religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others, and in private or public, to manifest [his/her] religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship or observance”*.

All UN members have signed this Declaration – but these rights are violated today in many countries. The Catholic organisation Aid to the Church in Need 2018 ‘Religious Freedom in the World’ Report identifies 38 countries with “significant religious freedom violations” (North Korea and Saudi Arabia the worst; worsening reality in 18). Discrimination by the state, and persecution by the state and non-state extremists, are the current pattern.

Action against **Muslims** includes two much-publicised big-scale cases:

- a) **China**: Muslims in China face severe discrimination and persecution by the Communist state, especially the Uighur Muslims of XinJiang: hundreds of thousands are now confined in so-called ‘re-education’ camps.
- b) **Myanmar**: We all know of the persecution, massacres and expulsion of Rohingya Muslims by the Buddhist military regime. Many thousands languish in Bangladesh refugee camps, fearful of returning home.

In **India**, Muslims are discriminated against and persecuted by nationalist Hindu fanatics, incited by premier Modi’s intolerant ‘India is Hindu’ rhetoric. In the **Middle East**, Muslims persecute each other where tensions between Shia and Sunni exist, eg Iraq.

Action against **Christians** was not on the Western states agenda until 2019 (albeit Vatican and Russia actively supported Middle East Christians at UN) as Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt took this very seriously, confirming that Christians are the most persecuted faith group in the world; he commissioned the Bishop of Truro’s report on religious freedom issues for the Foreign Office.

Christians suffer extreme persecution in 11 countries. In the Middle East church leaders speak of “a new age of martyrs”, notably in Libya, Iraq and Syria under Isis which killed countless thousands; and terrorism against Christian Copts in Egypt. In 2003 prior to US/UK invasion, Iraq had 1.5

million Christians, but now only has 250,000, viciously persecuted by Islamist jihadists. Bethlehem in living memory was 80% Christian; Islamist pressure has reduced this to 10%. Anti-Christian terrorism has occurred in Sri Lanka, Philippines, etc. Christians suffer mis-use of Pakistan's blasphemy laws. In China, churches are often closed or destroyed. British MPs have urged aid policies be tied to human rights including faith freedom. The US is compiling sanctions on states not respecting religious freedom.

Globally, **many other faith groups** are persecuted: eg Falun Gong in China; Baha'is in Iran; Jehovah's Witnesses are banned in Russia; anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are rising in Britain, France, Germany. In Western Europe, faith members face state imposition of secular policies, eg on gender issues.

Why is there religious discrimination and persecution ?

- a) Majority traditional religions try to restrict or exclude minority ones.
- b) Religious issues become the focus of social, economic and ethnic discontents.
- c) Religious freedom is not part of a national culture.
- d) Politicians use religion to cause or exacerbate divisions for political ends.

Positively, religious freedom is upheld in much of the world: the Americas, southern Africa, much of Europe, Japan, South Korea, Australasia. So the world is divided on religion between tolerant and intolerant societies.

**Brian Cooper**, Uniting for Peace Inter-faith Secretary, delivered this talk at an interfaith event in Annandale Street Mosque, Edinburgh, on 13 November 2019.

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## **Religion and the State in Canada**

*Ramnarine Sahadeo*

Canadian society should be proud of its leadership in separating the various branches of government so each can act independently in a system of checks and balances. The Constitution and the rule of law provides protection to minorities from a variety of religions, cultures, beliefs and non-beliefs.

The Supreme Court has demonstrated this in a unanimous and courageous ruling on April 15, 2015 involving the City of Saguenay, Quebec (2015 SCC 16).

Alain Simoneau, an atheist and resident of Saguenay, Quebec, and a regular at Council meetings objected to the practice of the recitation of Catholic prayers by the mayor and councillor. A sacred heart statue and a crucifix also adorned the walls of Council. This he testified, caused him to experience feelings of isolation and exclusion thus violating his rights to

freedom of religion and conscience as outlined in both the Quebec Charter and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

With the help of Movement Laïque Quebecois (MLQ) He took his grievances to the Quebec Human Rights Tribunal which agreed with him. However, the Quebec Court of Appeal disagreed. It reasoned that prayers expressed universal values and that the sacred heart statue and crucifix were works of art and not religious.

The Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the practice of reciting any form of prayers at the start of Council meetings constituted a violation of Charter rights. In doing so it rejected the argument that the prayers were justified on the basis of tradition and that Council's attempt at reasonable accommodation by inviting those with objections to leave the chambers during prayers and then re-enter, far from tempering the discrimination only exacerbated it. This identifies and stigmatises the non-believer. Quebec has a long tradition of the Catholic and Anglican churches being quite influential in government policies and practices but the Court felt it was time to change a practice even though it was followed for centuries.

Justice LeBel writing for the Court stated that Canadian Society has given rise to a concept of NEUTRALITY, according to which the State must not interfere with religion and beliefs. This requires that the State neither favour nor hinder any particular belief or *non-belief*.

Canadian Cultural landscape includes many traditional and heritage practices that are religious in nature. Sponsorship of one religious tradition by the State in breach of its duty of neutrality amounts to discrimination against all other such traditions as it creates a distinction, exclusion or preference that has the effect of nullifying or impairing the right to full and equal recognition and exercise of freedom of conscience and religion.

The Court looked at the purpose and effect of the practice and opined that even a non-denominational *prayer* is a religious practice that excludes atheists and agnostics and the interference is more than trivial or insubstantial. Any form of religious expression under the guise of cultural and historical reality or heritage breaches the duty of *neutrality*.

Furthermore the expression "Supremacy of God" in the preamble of the Charter cannot be relied on to deny the guarantees expressly provided in the Charter.

Pursuit of the ideal in a free and democratic society requires the state to encourage everyone to participate freely in public life regardless of their beliefs thus preserving the multicultural nature of Canadian society. In response to the argument that this would now give atheists and agnostics preference the Court stated that True Neutrality presupposes abstention, but it does not amount to a stand favouring one view over another.

**Ramnarine Sahadeo**, who was born in Guyana, is a retired lawyer in Ontario. He initiated a Mahatma Gandhi scholarship at McMaster University. [ramjihindu@rogers.com](mailto:ramjihindu@rogers.com)

# Nitin's World Journey

*Asha Buch*

Nitin Sonwane, age 28, is an Information Technology graduate from Rashin, a small town in District Pune, India. Six months after joining his job with a telecom company, he left his occupation and joined Maharashtra Gandhi Smarak Nidhi as a volunteer in helping people affected by the floods, activities aimed to remove caste discrimination and promote religious and communal harmony.

Born in a family of modest income and in a so called 'lower caste', Nitin lost his father at the age of 14. He was born into a Hindu family but his mother accepted Christianity so he used to read the Bible to her. His father observed fasts during the month of Ramadan, so he used to go to the Mosque for Iftar and his grandmother used to follow Dhan Nirankar ji (one of the sects of the Sikh religion). Nitin has never experienced any discord among his family members despite four religions were being practiced in his household. As he stated, all four Gods lived happily on one wall of his small house.

Inspired by the life and work of Buddha, Gandhi, Dr. B.R Ambedkar, and leading social reformer, activist and political leader from Maharashtra, Dr. Kumar Saptarshi, Nitin decided to dedicate his life to spreading the message of peace and nonviolence.

Gandhi left his Ashram at Ahmedabad after the famous salt march declaring "I will die at the hands of animals, but will not return without securing independence". So, he established an Ashram Sevagram near a village Se Ganv in Maharashtra. Nitin chose this Ashram as the departure point for his journey through many countries. His 'Vishva Shanti Maitri Yatra' (World peace and friendship movement) is planned to cover 1095 miles or more on a bike or on foot. So far he has cycled and walked through India, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, China, Hong Kong, Japan, USA, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania, Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt. Nitin was joined by six people from India and one Buddhist monk from Japan while he travelled in South Africa.

Nitin reached the UK in August 2019 and walked from Glasgow to London, 600 miles in 44 days. On the 150 birth anniversary of Gandhi he paid tribute at the statue situated at Tavistock Square in the presence of the Mayor of Camden, High Commissioner of India and representatives of many organisations. They walked together to the statue of Gandhi at Parliament Square. This gesture is very poignant in itself as Gandhi studied English law at the Inner Temple, London. He used his knowledge of those laws to secure independence for the people of India and ended imperial rule by the means of nonviolence. To see the statue of Gandhi opposite to that of the Mr. Churchill indicates how the world has changed for the better.

In order to follow the rule of simplicity, Nitin survives on a small budget of £4 a day, which he spends on bread, peanut butter and some vegetables. Each night he looks for a suitable safe place to pitch his tent which he bought at the beginning of his endeavour. In most of the countries he was provided with shelter and food by the Sikh Gurudwaras or Temples. The Indian Embassies have been helping Nitin in obtaining a visa and putting him in contact with individuals or organisations which may support him. Gandhi Serve in Germany, Gandhi Library in Houston and Shanti Fund also provided some financial support.



Nitin at Pietermaritzburg Station, South Africa

Nitin has given many interviews to radio and newspaper journalists in which he has stated that his experience has taught him that people all over the world are very kind, loving and trustworthy. He was a bit sceptical about visiting Sudan because he has never been to an Islamic country before, but he found the people were extremely friendly. He says, “Yes, it’s in the middle of revolution but I was there talking about peace and the people were so welcoming, asking about my journey. It’s a country without riches but with great hospitality”.

The greatest challenge faced by Nitin Sonwane in last three years was an injury to his foot resulting from wearing the wrong type of shoes and had to rest for three weeks. In Guatemala and Honduras it proved difficult to find a place to stay the night. Knowing the prevalence of violence in those countries, Nitin felt insecure in that dangerous atmosphere. On the other hand he managed to speak to some gang members and shared his stories in Mexico !

It is good to know how a young man from India perceives the world. One does find differences in food, climate and culture in a country he/she visits, but to travel to many countries in such a short time does not allow you

to absorb the customs and cultures of those places. He noticed the vast difference in the cultures of Africa and South Americas. He saw hubs of world renowned banks and corporate business companies and the poshest places to eat while roaming the streets of San Francisco; taking one left turn at the end of the street he saw so many people sitting on the street, homeless and helpless. Nitin could not understand the cause for such a contrast in a country supposed to be one of the richest in the world.



Nitin on peace march in Japan

Nitin has given talks to young students in many countries in which he said, “The most important thing Gandhi taught us was to seek your own truth. He taught that you should find your truth through your journey, through exploring, through reading, through nature and then follow that truth with nonviolence. Each and every person has their own truth and it’s up to each one of us to find it. I want to spread this message to as many people as possible in the world.”

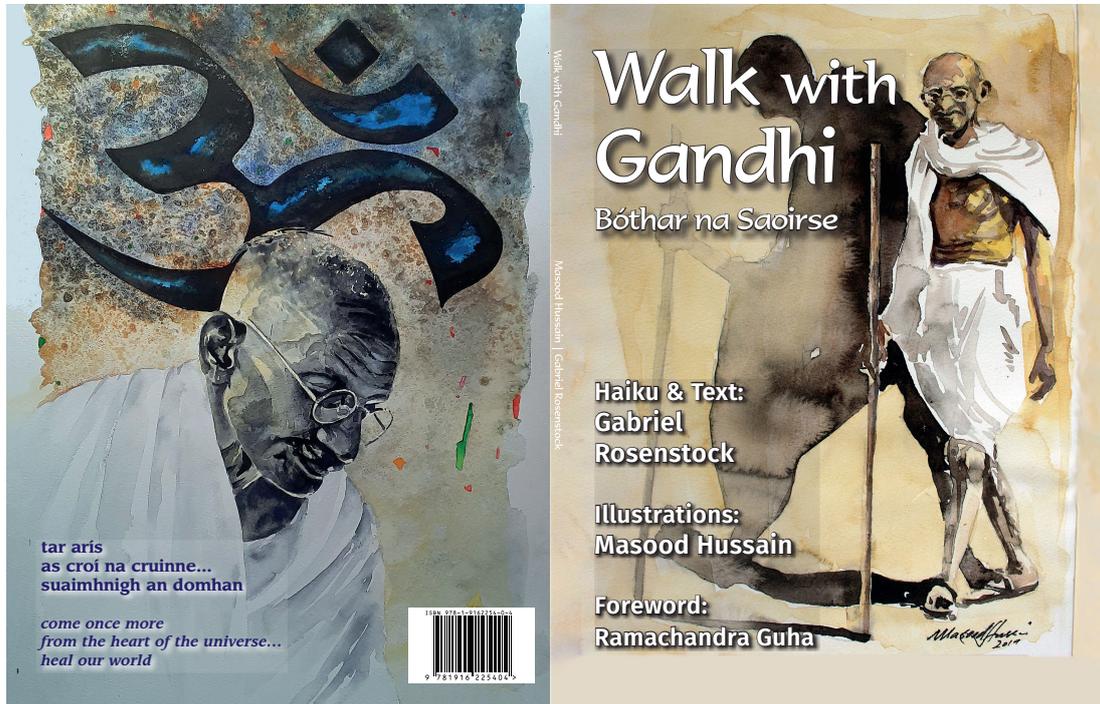
It seems Nitin has discovered his own truth. He now understands that human beings are not the only creatures on this planet, therefore he wants to dedicate his life for the cause of climate change. He is also passionate about removing caste and religious discrimination.

Nitin is going to some of the countries in Europe, starting with Germany. His journey will head towards the east through Turkey, Israel, Palestine and Iran. He aims to complete his world tour in Lahore, Pakistan. Δ

# Reviews

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**Walk with Gandhi: Bothar na Saoirse**, Haiku & Text by Gabriel Rosenstock; Illustrations by Masood Hussain, ISBN 978-1-9162254-0-4; Writers' Garage for Independent Writers. Also available as hard cover & e-book.



Timed to celebrate the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, this unique tribute is aimed at a young audience. Written by Irish poet and haiku master and illustrated by a very talented Kashmiri artist, the book crosses divides at all levels. Each haiku and image reflect important episodes of Gandhi Ji's life: the famous train journey in South Africa, the salt march, fasting, imprisonment and eventual assassination. The short text which accompanies each vignette, offers an insight into Indian as well as Irish and English history, with well known figures from each, presenting questions which are relevant today and encouraging debate and reflection. Each haiku is first presented in Gaelic with an English translation and the close roots of both languages to Sanskrit is brought to light. The Irish for cow is 'bo' and the Sanskrit 'go'. The river Boyne is derived from the Irish goddess Boan, meaning white cow. The Celtic name Bovinda, white cow, is the same as Govinda, another epithet for Krishna. Although not text heavy, there is room for inspiring quotations by contemporary and modern day figures. The book ends with some sayings of Gandhi Ji, along with a series of reflections and ethical questions, followed by a short overview of his life. Rich on so many levels, this would be perfect for schools or workshops, as well as being a visual treat for all ages.

*Jane Sill*

**Revolutionary Peace Making: Writings for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence** by Daniel Jakopovich, Democratic Thought, Zagreb, 2019, pp527.

In a series of essays, some brief, some quite lengthy, but all extensively referenced, Daniel Jakopovich critiques modern society and indicates how it needs to change. A peaceful, humane and just society is the aim – not excluding non-human animals.

One of the foundations of any society is its education system. The author advocates a collaborative and creative learning such as that found in Montessori schooling, Summerhill School, Bertrand Russell's ideas and Danish education. Learning for exams leading to jobs should not be the main focus, but rather humanitarianism and democratic citizenship, not perhaps easy to achieve with family poverty and poor housing a barrier for many.

The author also points to female genital mutilation as unacceptable in any society, but moreover he opposes male circumcision as a violation of human rights and cites the Dutch Medical Association as opposing this practice. No doubt many will see this as an attack on their culture.

Jakopovich regards monogamous marriage as not necessarily desirable as the ideal and advocates open and respectful personal relationships. This would also encourage the development of a cooperative and free society in general.

Applying the latter to places of employment is a major theme – the author was born in Yugoslavia and he relates in considerable detail the evolution of the socialist experiment which began in 1941 with the setting up of Anti-Fascist committees which were also anti-Stalinist. After World War II non-hierarchical management was preferred with businesses of more than ten workers being worker-managed. The workers elected members of councils and in 1974 they were given the right to elect company directors. Worker assemblies met yearly to approve plans. The economy developed and the standard of living rose. There was however a fundamental contradiction in that authoritarian state bodies existed alongside this democratic setup. Other negative aspects were the restriction of civil liberties and the peasants were largely excluded from the democratic process. The brutal methods used to defeat Fascism and Stalinism along with the rise in nationalism led in the 1990s to ethnic and religious wars and the end of the Yugoslav state.

The socialist theories of a number of 20th century thinkers are dealt with – Antonio Gramsci who spent 11 years in prison in Mussolini's Italy; Jean-Paul Sartre who joined the French Resistance; Rosa Luxemburg who was murdered by the German Freikorps; Hannah Arendt who escaped from the Nazis. All hoped and worked for a more equal and free society and while not being absolutely pacifist they perceived the limitations of political violence. Even Marx and Lenin believed that a peaceful transition to socialism was possible in democratic countries.

Jakopovich also looks to radical reform of the penal systems. A restorative and transformative approach is to be preferred to punishment,

even to the extent of abolishing prisons – a position that appears to me to be impossible. He examines the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa and admires its basis of ‘Ubuntu’, humaneness and justice. It was conducted by respectful listening rather than adversarial questioning. A precondition for an amnesty was full admission of guilt. He thinks however that the TRC limitation was that it did not fully recognise the structural nature of apartheid and so did not emphasise sufficiently its nature as racist, oligarchic and plutocratic.

Jakopovich takes a radical approach too to the production of food, regarding the use of animals as akin to slavery. Calling himself an abolitionist vegan he objects, for example, to the use of grains to feed animals for slaughter rather than humans using them directly as food. The significant role of cattle in contributing to global warming has only recently been widely recognised. The mistreatment of many animals in intensive farming, to provide us with cheap food, is another obvious consequence of the traditional diet.

There is much condemnation of war – Korea, Indonesia, Afghanistan, First Gulf War, Iraq War, etc. – for the millions who died but also the indirect effects such as the waste of resources which could have gone to relieve the hungry and cure the ill. Clinging to the common belief that if you want peace you have to prepare for war is something that leads to starvation and disease for millions in ‘peacetime’ as world expenditure on armaments reached \$1.8 trillion in 2018.

The latter part of the book looks at the shift in recent years to the political right in Europe but Jakopovich focuses here largely on the UK. On the far right the BNP and other small bodies attract those of fascist outlook while the growth of UKIP indicated a wider appeal on the right. Immigrants have been a convenient scapegoat for many longer-established citizens who may have suffered as a consequence of government social policies and lack of government spending. The populist press such the *Daily Mail*, *The Sun* and the *Daily Express* play a not inconsiderable role in furthering this effect. The way forward from this narrow outlook must be revolutionary nonviolence leading to democratic eco-socialist change. The profit-driven capitalist economy must be undermined by democratic organisations at all levels critical of the establishment leading to substantially more equality. The environmental challenge must be part of the change and universal human rights must, the author claims, be extended to the non-human animals also.

Educated at Zagreb and Cambridge Universities, the author is a sociologist, a peace worker (at present with British Quakers) but also a poet and quite a number of his poems are dispersed throughout the book. *Revolutionary Peacemaking* is an original and substantial work of scholarship on a subject of the greatest importance. In addition to the main text there are many, sometimes lengthy, footnotes which (if you have good eyesight!) add considerably to the value of the book. George Paxton



**Leo Tolstoy** (1828-1910) in peasant dress as depicted by GF Friend, Bhikkhu G Nagase.

Tolstoy was one of the most important influences on Gandhi and they had a brief exchange of letters towards the end of Tolstoy's life. Bhikkhu Nagase points out that Tolstoy's most famous work, *War and Peace*, was finished in 1969, the year of Gandhi's birth.

This photo of Gandhi was displayed at the planting of 1000 trees in November 2019 to create the Ahimsa Peace Forest in Harrow. See article above.



# The Gandhi Foundation

The Foundation exists to spread knowledge and understanding of the life and work of Mohandas K Gandhi (1869-1948). Our most important aim is to demonstrate the continuing relevance of his insights and actions for all of us.



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## The Gandhi Way

Articles, book reviews and letters of a specifically or broadly Gandhian nature will gladly be received by the Editor. Maximum length 2000 words.

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