

# The Gandhi Way



(From a painting by Oswald Birley)

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# The Gandhi Foundation Annual General Meeting and Illustrated Talk

Saturday 24th May 2014

at Kingsley Hall, Powis Road, Bromley-By-Bow, London E3 3HJ



The Illustrated talk, *From Breakdown to Breakthrough; Gandhi and Mental Health* will be given by **Mirabai Swingler** who is a Mental Health Chaplain and teacher, psychotherapist and spiritual director. Mirabai's life passion is raising awareness of and bringing healing to the sacred space where spirituality and 'mental illness' meet. She is a life member of the Gandhi Foundation.

2pm – Annual General Meeting. All Welcome.

2.30 – Lecture.

3.30 – Reception and the opportunity to visit where Gandhi stayed in 1931 and the rooms used by R D Laing.

RSVP: [william@gandhifoundation.org](mailto:william@gandhifoundation.org) (for catering purposes)

## Gandhi Foundation Summer Gathering 2014

**30th anniversary year**

***Gandhian Approaches to Learning and Skills***

A week of exploring community, nonviolence and creativity through sharing

Saturday 26 July - Saturday 2 August

The Abbey, Sutton Courtenay, Oxfordshire OX14 4AF

The easiest way to apply is by email —  
please request an application form by emailing

[gandhisummertgathering@gmail.com](mailto:gandhisummertgathering@gmail.com)

or from The Organisers Summer Gathering,

2 Vale Court, Weybridge KT13 9NN

Tel: 01932 841135

## Gandhi Foundation Sponsored London Walk

Saturday 5 July 2014 at 2.30pm



Join us for a sponsored walk to raise funds for the Gandhi Foundation.

We will walk from the Gandhi statue in Tavistock Square (WC1H 9JP) to Kingsley Hall, Bromley-by-Bow (EC 3HJ) where he stayed in 1931. Please endeavour to arrive by 2.15PM. The walk will take in the Inner Temple where Gandhi studied to be a lawyer and a number of other sites associated with him and the peace movement in general. The walk will be approximately 6 miles in length and it is moderately flat, though it will be along pavements so trainers are advised. The Gandhi Foundation's outreach worker William Rhind will be stopping en route to point out places associated with the Mahatma and the peace movement.



It is free to participate but we ask that you register in advance and obtain sponsorship. To register and for more information contact William Rhind on 07910215651 or [william@gandhifoundation.org](mailto:william@gandhifoundation.org). Walkers are responsible for their own safety and any walkers under 16 must be accompanied and supervised by an adult.

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# Gandhi: An Inspiration for All

## *Krystalia Keramida*

It is undeniable that Gandhi is one of the world's greatest political and spiritual leaders. In India he is honored as the father of the nation. He inspired his compatriots to fight for peace, freedom and democracy. He upheld the importance of human rights and non-discrimination. This is why he was named 'Mahatma', which means great soul.

Gandhi promoted Human Rights, which are part of every human being, independent of origin, religion, age, gender or social status. They are not just a history lesson or words without meaning, but include the essence of every single person all over the world. They allow us to live with safety, dignity, unity, love and of course peace. This latter is another word with deep meaning, because peace is not just a situation, it is the only way to joy, respect for diversity, and democracy.

But his influence has not ended. Gandhi was the light-guide for thousands of people, in order to fight against war, especially using his method of protest – 'satyagraha'. Acceptance of suffering for the sake of truth and resistance to violence with nonviolence became a powerful movement all over the world and also a way of life. The first condition of nonviolence is justice all round, in every department of life. Justice, respect for diversity, unity and solidarity, love of nature, are the keys for a better world, according to Gandhi.

The question is how someone can achieve the complete development of body, soul and mind. Gandhi answered that it was through education. Only the right and congruous combination of these three elements could lead to an integrated person. The key is the growth of the five senses. Through the conscious exercise of the senses of touch, hearing, vision, smell and taste, a person acquires better contact with others, observes, meditates and feels, looks and discovers the essence of things. Education is important for everyone, regardless of age or lifestyle.

His theory of complete development of body, soul and mind was inspired by Plato, Aristotle and Socrates, three of the most significant Greek philosophers, who changed the history of the world and became founding figures in Western philosophy. Gandhi was always looking for historical figures who have sacrificed their lives for the sake of truth, so these Greek philosophers were a natural choice for him. Gandhi translated Plato's *Apology* into Gujerati and titled the story of Socrates as *The Story of a Soldier of Truth*. In his translation summary, he described Socrates as a "heroic, extraordinary person with a fine moral character." "We must learn to live and die like Socrates", these were Gandhi's words.

Socrates lived in Athens in the fourth century BCE. He altered Western thought, because he devoted his life to the search for Truth, existing in everyone's soul. This Truth could become the ultimate knowledge and change the way we live. Gandhi called him a great Satyagrahi and emphasized, like Socrates, that we should not spend our time in finding faults with others, because only a pure person can fight evil with courage.

Plato, the student of Socrates and founder of the Academy in Athens, often characterized as the first university in Europe, developed a theory of knowledge that goes deep into the nature of knowledge itself. This is the true knowledge and it is permanent, unlike the knowledge based on appearance which is the untruth. This theory was adopted by Gandhi.

Last but not least, Aristotle, born in Macedonia and a member of Plato's Academy, considered psychology to be the study of the soul and claimed that everything has a multitude of causes. These thoughts were the basis for Gandhi to say that hard work is necessary to succeed at anything in life and to be a socially active citizen, because nothing could be achieved on one's own.

These were the inspiring reasons for UNESCO in Serres, a city in the north of Greece, which is a Club of people of different ages but with the same goal to promote culture, education, human rights, environment and innovation, to organize an educational program about Gandhi's legacy. We want to help students of primary and elementary schools come close to Gandhi's philosophy and understand the importance and the values of him, especially nowadays in a society that suffers from the economic, political and also moral crisis. As a team, we cooperate with Greek universities and significant institutions about Gandhi worldwide, because we believe that no one could achieve everything alone, but together we can move forward. Besides, as Gandhi claimed "the whole world is like the human body with its various members. Pain in one member is always felt in the whole body."

Moreover, we think that in the century of knowledge, being racist only proves how low in society you really are. This is why Gandhi and his words inspire us to help children, who are the basis of every society, understand that humane education is the only way to overcome racism, discrimination, war and to broaden your horizons.

In order to achieve these goals and also make it fun for the students, we prepare different actions, such as music, theatre, painting, and writing. Every time, based on each one of the ten most important moral values of Gandhi, we plan one action. For example, according to the value "Learn to forgive", we ask the students to play a role game. If someone hurts you, could you forgive him? If not, why? And if you hurt him, would you ask him to forgive you then? Why? Moreover, these actions aim to connect Gandhi's values to the moral intelligence of the children. Creativity, self-control, respect,

consciousness, justice are the parts of moral intelligence which helps children understand and express their feelings and have self-esteem.

Finally, this educational program is the tool to make clear that philosophy is one, commonly shared value that could change the way you think and live every day. So, despite the current difficult situation in Greece, we must look forward, try to be reborn from the ashes and get inspired by Gandhi and our ancestors in order to build the foundations of a world where peace, democracy and human rights will be the reality for all and not just a dream for a few.

Krystalia Keramida is a lawyer, a member of UNESCO in Serres, Greece, specializing in the field of Human Rights and project manager of the educational program for Gandhi.

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## A Gandhi Alphabet (III)

### **K Khan, A G**

Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan was born in 1890 in the North West Frontier, an area of India that was a constant problem for the British. Although he was a Pathan, people who were noted for their belligerence, as he grew to manhood he decided to work as a reformer in his community partly as a result of meeting two brothers who were Christians who worked as a teacher and as a doctor in the area. He saw them as examples of selfless service which he wished to emulate.

In 1929, inspired by Gandhi's example, he formed the Khudai Khidmatgar or Servants of God. This organisation aligned itself with the Indian National Congress but unlike Congress it was an explicitly religious-based body, predominantly Muslim, and it also adopted nonviolence as an ethical principle not just a political policy. Non-Muslims could be members and Muslim women were active members. Its aims were Independence for India and social reform. Its members wore a Red uniform and hence were known as Red Shirts. They drilled like soldiers and undertook long marches under a hierarchical command. They grew throughout the 1930s to more than 100,000 members. Khan quoted the Quran to demonstrate the virtues of forgiveness, and instances of toleration



in Islamic history were taught in the training programme. Khan became one of Gandhi's staunchest supporters.

Their most remarkable success was when the British had to withdraw their troops from the main town of Peshawar after failing to stop them with brutal methods. The nonviolent resistance was such that troops refused to fire on the unarmed soldiers resulting in withdrawal of the troops and the court-martialing of some of them. The Khuddai then occupied the city for several weeks and set up a complete administration to run services. They in fact set up a parallel government in certain areas which included revenue collecting in rural areas.

Khan spent many years in British prisons and later in Pakistani prisons.

## L Lawyer

Gandhi did not choose to be a lawyer, when young he wanted to study medicine, but his family considered law, especially an English law qualification, to be more useful. Although his father was adviser to the ruler of Porbander he had no academic qualifications but for the next generation it was considered that a university level qualification would be needed.

So Gandhi went to London in 1888 to study for the bar. Having successfully completed his studies at the Inner Temple and being enrolled he sailed



immediately for home. Here however he found it difficult to build up a practice, partly because he did not know Indian legal practices or disagreed with some of them, and he was also very shy about speaking in public. So when an offer came to his notice of adviser to a Gujarati company operating in South Africa who were in dispute with another Indian company he took it. It was a contract for a year but it was to lead to Gandhi staying for about 20 years, most of that time with his wife and family.

Shortly after he arrived in Durban in 1893 he visited the law court dressed in frock-coat and turban. When the magistrate noticed him he asked Gandhi to remove his turban but he refused and left the court. He wrote to the press

defending wearing of the turban.

The judgement of the case he had come to assist with went in favour of his client but the fine would have ruined the other firm so he persuaded his client to spread payments over a lengthy period and this was accepted. Everyone, including Gandhi, was satisfied with the outcome.

The following year he was admitted to the Natal Supreme Court as an attorney despite opposition from the Natal Law Society. In 1895 he defended an indentured labourer who had been beaten by his employer and the verdict

went in favour of his client. This was to lead to many cases being brought to him and his practice expanded. In 1903 Gandhi enrolled in the Transvaal Supreme Court and opened an office in Johannesburg. While in practice there his colleague Louis Ritch became articled to him and after qualifying in 1905 left for London to train as a barrister. Henry Polak also took articles with him and was enrolled as an attorney in 1908. Gandhi's office secretary/manager, Sonja Schlesin, wanted to become articled too but was turned down because she was a woman. In 1911 Gandhi gave up the legal practice due to pressure of political work and Ritch took it over. He did not take up legal work when he returned to India.

## M Mirabehn

Mirabehn was a close colleague of Gandhi who did however cause Gandhi some problems because of her emotional attachment. She was English and her name was Madeleine Slade (1892-1982), her father being an Admiral in the British Navy. She heard of Gandhi from the French writer Romain Rolland who had newly published a biography of Gandhi. Rolland's description of Gandhi drew her immediately and she planned to go to India which she did in 1925 after preparing herself by learning to spin and becoming vegetarian. Gandhi gave her the name Mirabehn which was derived from Mira the 16th century mystic poet. He was impressed by her commitment but her desire to be near him in preference to be working constructively in a village under his direction led to tensions.



Mirabehn and Gandhi 1931



Nevertheless she spent much time in remote villages trying to improve sanitation and teaching spinning.

She was at the Sabarmati Ashram in the lead up to the Salt March and with Gandhi during the negotiations with the Viceroy which followed. She also accompanied him to Britain in 1931 for the Second Round Table Conference. In 1934 she went back to Britain and then went on to the US to explain Gandhi and the Independence movement. Back in India she settled in the village of Segaon near the centre of India but when Gandhi came to settle there he wished to be alone and Mira moved to another village nearby. But soon other co-workers gathered around Gandhi and another ashram developed (later called Sevagram).

In the late 1930s Mirabehn met a former nationalist revolutionary called Prithvi Singh who had escaped from prison and lived 'underground' for years. She now transferred her love for Gandhi to Singh and hoped to marry him but he eventually married another.

In 1942 Gandhi sent Mirabehn to Orissa to prepare the population to resist the Japanese who were expected to invade India. Later in the year she and Gandhi were imprisoned, for two years, in the Aga Khan's palace in Poona because of the Quit India resolution. On her release she settled in a Himalayan village and concentrated on animal husbandry. She was with Gandhi in Delhi for three months of his last year and after his assassination she stayed on in India until 1959. She then returned to Europe and settled in Austria where she took up her earlier passionate interest in Beethoven and died in Vienna in 1982.

## **N Nonviolence (Ahimsa)**

In Indian culture the word ahimsa, which is possibly as old as 4000 years, means 'non-harm'. But the word was often applied selectively and commonly did not exclude the killing of criminals, killing in war or animal sacrifice. However there was a different tradition which regarded the individual being as sacred and therefore to be spared violence or harm. With the rise of Buddhism the mental attitude became central – from the right attitude will flow right action; compassion underlies nonviolence.

Jainism, which preceded Buddhism, regards ahimsa as the highest virtue. Even microscopic creatures and plants should be spared if at all possible. The influence of Jainism was strong in the area that Gandhi was brought up in and this permeated his thought. Like the Jains he became a convinced vegetarian and was opposed to the use of animals in experiments. For Gandhi compassion was the directing principle and so euthanising animals and human beings who were suffering was acceptable if easing of their suffering was ineffective.

Under the influence of Christianity, Gandhi broadened the meaning of ahimsa so that it became for him close to disinterested love or agape as described in Jesus's Sermon on the Mount or Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Another

expression from the West that comes close to Gandhi's understanding of ahimsa was that used by Albert Schweitzer, namely Reverence for Life.

## ○ Oldfield, J

Dr Josiah Oldfield (1863-1953) was Gandhi's first European friend who remained so to the end of Gandhi's life. They met in 1890 at the International Vegetarian Congress being held in London. Oldfield had recently become editor of *The Vegetarian*. Gandhi admired Oldfield's simple lifestyle and his ability to work long hours, as much as 16 hours per day. This meeting led to Gandhi's invitation to be a member of the Executive Committee of the London Vegetarian Society.

Oldfield was an Oxford graduate in theology and a barrister and was to qualify in medicine also. In spring 1891 Gandhi moved into Oldfield's premises before he left for India in June. Gandhi had spoken once, nervously, to the Vegetarian Society and written a number of articles for *The Vegetarian*. These were important for Gandhi being his first venture into the public sphere. Vegetarians of the time had varying opinions as to what defines a vegetarian, some eating fish, some excluding eggs; Gandhi ate eggs for a short time encouraged by Oldfield but soon gave them up as being against his vow.

As a physician Oldfield founded three hospitals including an anti-vivisection hospital and a Fruitarian Hospital where the patients were given mainly fruit and vegetables although they had been meat eaters before their illness. He founded an anti-capital punishment society in 1901. He was a Lieutenant-Colonel in the Army Medical Corps during the First World War and established a Casualty Clearing Station on the Western Front.

Gandhi kept in touch with Oldfield over the years and visited him when in London although Oldfield did not approve of Gandhi's political campaign for Indian Independence.

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## Gandhi and Theosophy Re-visited

*Margaret Chatterjee*

Gandhi heard about theosophy during his first year in London as a student when he attended Annie Besant's lecture on 'Why I became a Theosophist' in 1888. It was in this lecture that she made the remark that "she would be quite satisfied to have the epitaph written on her tomb that she lived for truth and she died for truth". (CWMG XVI, p.202, Message on Annie Besant's Birthday, Oct 1, 1919)

Gandhi's friends the Keightleys advised Gandhi to read Helena Petrovna Blavatsky's works. He dipped into these protean writings and was intrigued by the Hindu and Buddhist elements he found therein. In fact as a young man away from his own country he was pleased to find indophile leanings in

theosophy. The first volume of Blavatsky's *The Sacred Doctrine* appeared in London about a month after Gandhi landed. In this volume (there were eventually seven volumes) she defines her aim as "to show that the occult side of Nature has never been approached by the science of modern civilisation". She claims that the Theosophical Society has as one of its objectives the formation of a "nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour". Now speaking of a 'nucleus' does not fit the notion of 'universal' brotherhood very well. In short this is an elitist target. Blavatsky was an aristocrat who advocated esoteric wisdom in an attempt to attain the higher worlds. Gandhi disliked the occultist tendency in theosophy and thought that the central idea of the theosophists, the brotherhood of mankind and the moral growth of man, had been lost sight of by them. But as far as Annie Besant was concerned he wrote approvingly of her "utter disregard of man-made laws, whether social or political" and that she "stood for Truth against the whole world". (CWMG XV, p.300) So that even though Annie Besant's autobiography ends with fulsome praise of Blavatsky there was a difference between Blavatsky's occultism and Besant's very practical concerns and this difference Gandhi recognised. In Pyarelal's mind Gandhi was more influenced by the Esoteric Christian view than by the theosophists. But it may be recalled that Edward Maitland started as a theosophist.



Helena Blavatsky



Annie Besant

(Photos: Wikimedia Commons)

Another way of looking at Gandhi's relation to theosophy is to see in it his first encounter with a Russian stream of thought. This would be followed by his response to Tolstoy and Bondaref. Each of these was distinctive, and his encounter with theosophy was split into his canny understanding of differences between Blavatsky and Besant. Gandhi had his own ideas about the relation between matter and spirit. One evidence of this is the importance he attached to the bearing vegetarianism diet had on health and through health to the well-being of spirit. We can see this as an important part of his experiments with truth (or Truth). As far as human powers were concerned he was firm in his belief that there was much in the human being that still had to be developed and drawn upon, and this was true of the humbler individual. But these powers were not concerned with 'higher worlds'.

The cultivation of a nonviolent spirit took time and involved doing lowly tasks such as scavenging, making sandals, spinning and weaving. So his understanding of the relation between inner and outer was very different from that of the theosophists. Reducing the self to zero was a lifelong task for Gandhi but it did not involve turning one's back on the outer world. His inner voice was guided by a rigorous ethical discipline and must be seen in sharp contrast to the Blavatskian language 'of voices' which were occult and magical.

Among the books Gandhi advised Kallenbach to read was Blavatsky's *The Voice of the Silence* for Kallenbach, inter alia, was a theosophist and would have been familiar with whatever theosophical literature was available in Johannesburg. But, instead of trawling in the archaic, as Blavatsky did, Gandhi worked forward to the building of a new community, a new India. The press at Phoenix Settlement printed some theosophical writings and Polak joined the Johannesburg Lodge and represented it in some of the international gatherings of theosophists. Gandhi's friendship with Lewis W Ritch was brought about through their theosophical connections, although it must be said that he was one of those who were drawn to the occult. He had heard one of Annie Besant's lectures as a young man.

But, by way of wrapping up these various strands of discussion about Gandhi's relation to theosophy, I continue to think theosophy, along with several other cults, associations and movements, was caught up in the nationalist movement and the fight for Indian independence from foreign rule. And this has its own history.

Professor Margaret Chatterjee is a philosopher and author of several books on Gandhi including *Gandhi's Religious Thought*, *Gandhi and the Challenge of Religious Diversity*, and *Gandhi's Diagnostic Approach Rethought*.



# A greenie with gusto: Mehr Fardoonji

*P. SUJATHA VARMA*

Die-hard nature lover and ecologist Mehr Fardoonji talks to P Sujatha Varma about reversing the bio-diversity crisis.

‘We all die. The goal isn’t to live forever; the goal is to create something that will.’ Mehr Fardoonji lives by this maxim by leading a simple life that yields great inner riches.



Born in 1930 in Lahore (now in Pakistan) to Parsi (Zoroastrian) parents, the octogenarian gently and creatively demonstrates how ordinary living can be transformed into extraordinary through experiments and adventures in simplicity.

“I have always been different and I am happy with the way I am,” says this 84-year-old who wears the world like a loose garment — one which touches us in a few places, now and then, lightly. “I have travelled extensively, far and wide, so much that at times I feel that I belong to nowhere ... or I belong to everywhere. I am a citizen of the world,” she smiles.

Photo: V Raju

Her father died when she was all of five. “My mother was a very independent and advanced woman. She has been the light of my life. She had met Gandhi and was greatly influenced by his philosophy which she infused in me.

We went to England in 1937 with an idea to come back to India after two or three years. But war (World War II) started and the Mediterranean was blocked,” she recounts.

Mehr went to the London School of Economics. “Before I knew my result, I set off for India with just a rucksack. I travelled by land, all by myself and I was perhaps the first woman to do so.”

It took her seven months to reach Pakistan. She then headed to Gandhiji’s Sevagram ashram and worked there for a year, learning to be a village worker.

In 1955, she walked with Vinoba Bhave to Orissa to attend the Puri Sannam. “In mid-50s I also visited Vijayawada,” she reminisces. She then worked in the Tarai region as part of Vinoba’s Bhudan movement. “For four years we lived in thatched houses, in the foothills of the Himalayas, redistributing land to the landless.” In late 1950s, family demands drew her back to England to Manchester where she had grown up; there she took up organic farming on a four-acre land her brother had bought for her and her mother. Mehr went on to set up one of the first organic market gardens, the Oakcroft Organic Garden near Malpas in Cheshire.

### **Jai Bhoomi**

“During my stay at Gandhi’s ashram, I was convinced that land was the basis of life and that organic farming was the only way to the health of the land and people. Land is the most important thing in the world without which we don’t exist. The world has treated land like the poor. People have ruined it by raising concrete jungles and by using artificial fertilizers,” she rues.

To make people understand the significance of ‘bhoomi’ she coined the slogan of ‘Jai Bhoomi’. In a world where abundant has come to mean prosperity and simplicity is equated with scarcity, Mehr introduces us to a lifestyle of fullness – full in ways that only we can fill. “I don’t see television, I don’t use a mobile phone and neither do I have a computer. People’s lives have become so cluttered with electronic gadgets. I am interested in the beauty of life rather than mechanical things. I like people around me all the time and I love to work with my hands. I have done pottery, I can make clothes, I read and I also teach yoga and its philosophy.”

Inequality worries Mehr. “I have never understood why people are violent. It is self-defeating. But all hope is not lost. We will improve in certain ways. There is hope because countries have begun to open up to the idea of talking to their ‘enemies’,” she signs off.

### **Her Mr Right**

Mehr married very late, when she was 59. “I married Nicholas Gillett, an English person, an educationist working for world peace. I met him at a conference years back when I was young. He had come along with his wife and six children, five were his own and one adopted.

We met again after years by which time his wife had died. And I inherited six children, all of them grown-ups,” she says with a smile.

There was no specific reason, she informs, for the delay. “Though I was always travelling extensively, across the world, I did not find the right person. Most people I came across were almost like-minded. Things don’t work with such life partners, I guess,” she chuckles.

This article appeared in *The Hindu* 17/1/14.

Mehr’s husband, Nicholas Gillett, received the Gandhi Foundation’s International Peace Award in 1999.

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## Was this Gandhi’s worst decision ?

*George Paxton*

2014 has been chosen by the British Government to commemorate the start of the Great War. The idea strikes me as very odd, unless its aim is to encourage a determined effort to avoid war in the future. But there is little sign of that in the everyday business of government. However the commemoration does give opponents of war the opportunity to present their different approaches and peace organisations are attempting to do that this year. [See [www.noglory.org](http://www.noglory.org) for some events planned]

But what about Gandhi and WWI ? Let’s start with Gandhi’s first experience of war, namely the Anglo-Boer War. Although critical of the treatment of Indians by the white South Africans, he believed at this stage in his development that the influence of the British Empire was generally benign. So, although sympathetic to the Boers, he offered to form an ambulance corps of Indian volunteers to serve in the British army. The corps was 1,100 strong and for 6 weeks it served in the battlefield removing the wounded to field hospitals. Gandhi also felt that this support would improve the standing of the Indians in the eyes of the British. In 1906 fighting broke out between Zulus and the British and this time Gandhi gathered a smaller corps to serve with the British under his command as a sergeant-major. The corps in fact helped to treat Zulus who had either been flogged as a punishment or were ‘friendlies’ who had been shot by mistake. In both cases Gandhi believed that as the SA Indians accepted the protection of the British Empire they should be prepared to defend it when it was under threat.

Leaving South Africa in 1914 for the last time Gandhi called in at London before returning to India but the European war broke out just two days before the ship reached port and so once more he felt called on to establish an ambulance unit, this time made up of Indians in Britain, including many students. Gandhi’s health was poor during his stay but the corps was able to give aid to wounded Indians when they started to arrive from the front although they were not given permission to go to France. In all

three cases the Indians led by Gandhi were non-combatants but his actions were now criticised by some of his colleagues and friends. His close friends and colleagues Henry Polak and his wife Millie Graham Polak objected to this support for the war as being inconsistent with ahimsa. Olive Schreiner, the South African writer who knew Gandhi wrote to him saying that she had been “struck to the heart ... with sorrow to see that you ... had offered to serve the English government in this evil war in any way they might demand of you. Surely you, who would not take up arms even in the cause of your own oppressed people cannot be willing to shed blood in this wicked cause.” [*Olive Schreiner* by Ruth First and Ann Scott]

The issue of participation in war was to arise more dramatically when he was back in India. The war was not going well for the Allies early in 1918 and the Viceroy hoped to recruit more Indians for the war in Europe. For this purpose he convened a War Conference to which prominent Indians were invited. At first Gandhi thought of boycotting it but then decided to attend. He was persuaded to support recruitment. The argument put forward on the previous occasions still stood. Gandhi always greatly admired bravery – perhaps having been a timid child had something to do with that – and he perceived soldiers as displaying bravery. But he also thought that by supporting Britain now it could lead to the politicians taking a more generous attitude to Indian political aspirations after the war.

Gandhi then threw himself into a recruiting campaign in the Kheda district of Gujarat, significant because only a few months earlier he had launched an anti-tax campaign there. But the villagers could see more clearly than Gandhi. The contradiction in the votary of nonviolence recruiting for a war that had already led to the slaughter of tens of millions of human beings was clear to them and they refused to join up. Not only that but villagers did not greet Gandhi and Vallabhbhai Patel who accompanied him, nor feed them nor provide carts for the journey and so the recruiters often had to walk 20 miles a day. Gandhi now experienced non-cooperation used against himself. His actions were also once again opposed by friends and colleagues including C F Andrews.

The physical and mental strain on Gandhi led to a severe illness that was to last for months. It is clear that there was serious conflict in his mind and Erik Erikson the psychoanalyst attributes his physical collapse at least in part to a nervous breakdown at this time.

By the following year the war had ended but the Government had decided to pass the Rowlatt Acts which were perceived by Indians as oppressive, the very opposite of what Gandhi had expected following his support for the Government. So he launched the first all-India satyagraha and when a peaceful crowd in Amritsar were massacred by the Army his hope for a generous attitude by the Government was finally shattered.

Over the next decade or so Gandhi's past attitude to war continued to puzzle Western pacifists and some like the noted Dutch pacifist Bart de Ligt and the Russian Vladimir Tchertkov, Tolstoy's former secretary, argued with



him through correspondence. Gandhi gave the reasons for his participation that he had given at the time, reasons that did not satisfy his correspondents. However Gandhi spoke and wrote increasingly strongly against war during the rest of his life. There was still occasional room for confusion over his positions as, although he would not participate in war himself, he knew that most people did not share his belief in nonviolence and so he believed there were circumstances when such people should fight. On the other hand in the 1930s and 40s he advocated only nonviolent resistance against the forces of Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany and Imperialist Japan. As on other issues Gandhi could be inconsistent, or at least apparently so. But certainly he believed that satyagraha was universally applicable and that was the direction in which humankind should move and ultimately war should be completely replaced by nonviolent action and the willingness to suffer rather than kill.

*Below are some quotations from Gandhi which reveal something of his evolving views over the last 30 years of his life, although this did not follow a straight unwavering line but rather a clear direction.*

I hear and read many charges of inconsistency about myself.

.... Not only did I offer my services at the time of the Zulu revolt but before that, at the time of the Boer War, and not only did I raise recruits in India during the late war, but I raised an ambulance corps in 1914 in London. If, therefore, I have sinned the cup of my sins is full to the brim. I lost no occasion of serving the Government at all times. Two questions presented themselves to me during all those crises. What was my duty as a citizen of the Empire as I then believed myself to be, and what was my duty as an out-and-out believer in the religion of Ahimsa – nonviolence ?

... Under Swaraj of my dream there is no necessity for arms at all. But I do not expect that dream to materialise in its fulness as a result of the present effort.

*Young India 17/11/1921*

I am an uncompromising opponent of violent methods even to serve the noblest causes.

*Young India 11/12/1924*

I should be against compulsory military training in every case and even under a national Government.

*Young India 24/9/1925*

I do justify entire nonviolence, and consider it possible in relation between man and man and nations and nations; but it is not “a resignation from all real fighting against wickedness”. On the contrary, the nonviolence of my conception is a more active and more real fighting against wickedness than retaliation whose very nature is to increase wickedness.

*Young India 8/10/1925*

By enlisting men for ambulance work in South Africa and in England, and recruits for field service in India, I helped not the cause of war, but I helped the institution called the British Empire in whose ultimate beneficial character I then believed. My repugnance to war was as strong as it is today; and I could not then have, and would not have, shouldered a rifle.

*Young India* 5/11/1925

... But that still does not solve the riddle. If there was a national Government, whilst I should not take any direct part in any war, I can conceive occasions when it would be my duty to vote for the military training of those who wish to take it. For I know that all its members do not believe in nonviolence to the extent I do. It is not possible to make a person or society nonviolent by compulsion.

... But the light within me is steady and clear. There is no escape for any of us save through truth and nonviolence. I know that war is wrong, is an unmitigated evil. I know too that it has to go. I firmly believe that freedom won through bloodshed or fraud is no freedom. Would that all the acts alleged against me were found to be wholly indefensible rather than that by any act nonviolence was held to be compromised or that I was ever thought to be in favour of violence or untruth in any shape or form. *YI* 13/9/1928

I would not yield to anyone in my detestation of war. *Young India* 7/2/1929

Czechoslovakia has a lesson for me and us in India. The Czechs could not have done anything else when they found themselves deserted by their two powerful allies. And yet I have the hardihood to say that, if they had known the use of nonviolence as a weapon for the defence of national honour, they would have faced the whole might of Germany with that of Italy thrown in. They would have spared England and France the humiliation of suing for a peace which was no peace; and to save their honour they would have died to a man without shedding the blood of the robber. I must refuse to think that such heroism, or call it restraint, is beyond human nature. Human nature will only find itself when it fully realises that to be human it has to cease to be beastly or brutal. *Harijan* 8/10/1938

I do not think that the sufferings of Pastor Niemoeller and others have been in vain. They have preserved their self-respect intact. They have proved that their faith was equal to any suffering. That they have not proved sufficient for melting Herr Hitler's heart merely shows that it is made of harder stuff than stone. But the hardest metal yields to sufficient heat. Even so must the hardest heart melt before sufficiency of the heat of nonviolence. And there is no limit to the capacity of nonviolence to generate heat.

... Herr Hitler is but one man enjoying no more than the average span of life. He would be a spent force, if he had not the backing of his people. I do not despair of his responding to human suffering even though caused by him. But

I must refuse to believe that the Germans as a nation have no heart or markedly less than the other nations of the earth. They will some day or other rebel against their own adored hero. If he does not wake up betimes. And when he or they do, we shall find that the sufferings of the Pastor and his fellow-workers had not a little to do with the awakening. *Harijan 7/1/1939*

My personal reaction towards this war is one of greater horror than ever before. I was not so disconsolate before as I am today. But the greater horror would prevent me today from becoming the self-appointed recruiting sergeant that I had become during the last war. *Harijan 30/9/1939*

As against this imagine the state of Europe today if the Czechs, the Poles, the Norwegians, the French and the English had all said to Hitler: "You need not make your scientific preparation for destruction. We will meet your violence with nonviolence. You will, therefore be able to destroy our nonviolent army without tanks, battle ships and airships". It may be retorted that the only difference would be that Hitler would have got without fighting what he gained after a bloody fight. Exactly. The history of Europe would then have been written differently. Possession might (but only might) have been then taken under nonviolent resistance., as it has been taken now after perpetration of untold barbarities. Under nonviolence only those would have been killed who had trained themselves to be killed, if need be, but without killing anyone and without bearing malice towards anybody. I dare say that in that case Europe would have added several inches to its moral stature. And in the end I expect it is the moral worth that will count. All else is dross.

*Harijan 22/6/1940*

Japan is knocking at our gates. What are we to do in a nonviolent way? If we were a free country, things could be done nonviolently to prevent the Japanese from entering the country. As it is, nonviolent resistance could commence the moment they effected a landing. Thus nonviolent resisters would refuse them any help, even water. For it is no part of their duty to help anyone to steal their country. But if a Japanese has missed his way and was dying of thirst and sought help as a human being, a nonviolent resister, who may not regard anyone as his enemy, would give water to the thirsty one. Suppose the Japanese compel resisters to give them water, the resisters must die in the act of resistance. It is conceivable that they will exterminate all resisters. The underlying belief in such nonviolent resistance is that the aggressor will, in time, be mentally and even physically tired of killing nonviolent resisters. He will begin to search what this new (for him) force is which refuses co-operation without seeking to hurt, and will probably desist from further slaughter. But the resisters may find that the Japanese are utterly heartless and that they do not care how many they kill. The nonviolent resisters will have won the day inasmuch as they will have preferred extermination to submission. *Harijan 12/4/1942*

## **Bill Peters 1923-2014**

It is with sadness that the Gandhi Foundation has heard of the death of Bill Peters recently. He received the Gandhi Foundation International Peace Award in 2000 along with Martin Dent, co-founder of Jubilee 2000. He received the Cross of St Michael and St George (awarded for non-military service in a foreign country) and the Lieutenant of the Victorian Order (awarded for service to the Queen and is a personal award by her). He was a former diplomat who devoted his life to public service.

Bill Peters who died peacefully in the early hours of Saturday March 29th was born at Morpeth, Northumberland, on September 28th 1923. The son of a cabinet maker and a light opera singer, he followed a distinguished career in the Foreign Office with a very active retirement devoted to public service. The highlight of his career after retirement was his co-founding, with Martin Dent of Keele University, of the hugely influential Jubilee 2000 Drop the Debt coalition, which went on to become the Make Poverty History movement with Jubilee 2000 itself then becoming the Jubilee Debt campaign.

Bill proved himself a formidable scholar in his time at King Edward IV Grammar School and secured a place at Oxford to study Greats at the age of 17, but as with so many young men at the time, his studies were interrupted by World War II. At this time of uncertainty, he married his first wife, Catherine Bailey, known as Kit, in 1944 before deployment to Burma where he saw active service with the 9th Gurkha rifles. His time with his regiment, which on his arrival in Burma turned out to include a number of Tibetans, made a deep impression on Bill and saw the beginning of a lifelong association both with the Gurkhas and with the Tibet Foundation, to which he was passionately committed for the rest of his life, meeting with the Dalai Lama several times on the latter's visits to London.

After the war, Bill returned to the UK to take up his place at Balliol College Oxford, completing his studies in 1948, and going on to do an M.Lit. at the LSE and languages at SOAS. Bill then joined the Colonial Service with a posting in 1950 to what was then the Gold Coast where he worked to prepare for the transition to independence and was asked by the head of state for the new Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, to remain in an advisory capacity. After some thought, Bill decided his career must continue to lie with the Diplomatic service and the Foreign Office and went on to postings in Cyprus, Bangladesh, Australia, India, Zambia and Malawi as well as other appointments further detailed in Who's Who. During his time in Ghana, Bill was invited to speak to local school children and gave a speech stressing that they could achieve anything they set out to do. In the audience was a young Kofi Annan, who went on to become Secretary General of the United Nations. When they met many years later, Annan told Bill that he still remembered Bill's inspiring speech.

In 1977, Bill was offered the post of British Ambassador to Uruguay, an exciting role but a dangerous posting, as a recent former incumbent had been kidnapped and held to ransom for several months. After some deliberation, Bill accepted and his time in Uruguay passed without serious incident. Notably Bill made a point of asking to visit political prisoners, a request which was surprisingly granted. During a prison visit Bill met a concert pianist desperate to practice in the

hope of eventual release and was subsequently allowed to deliver a silent keyboard to enable him to do so. Afterwards, Bill was informed that his life might be in danger as a result of his actions and took the step of making it clear to anyone who might be interested that he carried a pistol with him at all times.

Bill went on to work as High Commissioner in Malawi before retiring from the Foreign Office in 1983. On retirement, Bill and Kit moved to Deal in Kent. There they took an active part in community life, with Bill spending 18 years as a Governor of Walmer school as well as twice becoming president of the local Rotary Club and being an active member of the Royal British Legion as well as numerous national organisations and charities including USPG, the Churches Refugee Network and the Tibet Foundation.



A few years after retirement Bill met Martin Dent of Keele University and realised that Martin shared Bill's long-held concern at what they both considered to be unsustainable levels of third world debt. This shared concern crystallised into a campaign, which Bill and Martin co-founded, to write off third-world debt in time for the Millennium. They called the campaign Jubilee 2000 in reference to the Old Testament Jubilee requirement to cancel debts every seven years. Bill's diplomatic skills were invaluable in launching Jubilee 2000 and helping steer it through early hurdles as it gathered momentum. It was supported by the Anglican Church, with Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, addressing a rally in Trafalgar Square with Bill and Martin and making Jubilee 2000 the subject of his New Year's Day Millennium address on BBC1. Gordon Brown, then Chancellor of the Exchequer,

also spoke at a rally in St Paul's Cathedral, strongly supporting the campaign and confirming the cancellation of debts to the UK.

During this time, Bill's wife Kit, who was several years older than Bill, passed away in 1998 after a brief illness. Bill continued to play an active role in the Drop the Debt campaign in the lead up to the Millennium, seeing it grow into a series of large-scale demonstrations and twice enter the Guinness book of records, once for the largest petition and once for the most international petition. The campaign launched major demonstrations at every G8 summit from 1998 in Birmingham to Cologne and Genoa with a few people even travelling to Okinawa in Japan, where Bill was able to speak with the Japanese Prime Minister.

Bill received the Gandhi International Peace Award from the Gandhi Foundation in recognition of his efforts and of the success of the Jubilee 2000 campaign, which 'made possible the provision of basic education and health-care to thousands of people.'

In his later years, Bill retained his keen interest in politics and continued to be an active supporter of the now Jubilee Debt Campaign and of other charities. In 2004 he married his second wife, Gillian Casebourne, whom he met through his charity work. Bill is survived by Gill and her two daughters, as well as by his nieces and nephews.

William Peters, born September 28 1923, died March 29 2014.

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### **International Conscientious Objector Day**

Thursday 15 May Tavistock Square, London at 12 noon

### **29th Annual Multifaith Pilgrimage for Peace**

Saturday 14 June Organised by Westminster Interfaith Tel: 020 7931 6028

**'War no more war never again'** A silent vigil 12 - 2 pm

Monday 4 August on the steps of St Martin's-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square

**Hiroshima Day gathering** Wed 6 August at Tavistock Square 12 noon - 1pm

**Nagasaki Day** Sat 9 August Peace Walk from Westminster Cathedral to the London Peace Pagoda, Battersea Park

The Anniversary of Milton Keynes Peace Pagoda will be celebrated on  
Sunday 22nd June 2014

at the Peace Pagoda, Brickhill Street, Willen Lake, Milton Keynes, MK15 0BG  
Tel. 01908 663652.

The programme will run from 10.30am to 3.30pm and will include a Buddhist ceremony, multi-faith peace prayers, speakers on anti nuclear and non-violent actions, and an afternoon multi-cultural celebration. Lunch will be provided for everybody.

## Invitation to Friends of the Gandhi Foundation

The Life Style Movement (LSM) was founded in 1973 by Rev Horace Dammers to provide a supportive network to people who recognise the link between their affluence and the poverty of others. The Movement adopted the motto, "Live simply so all may simply live", and cells were established in this country and abroad to try to put the principle into practice. An informative and entertaining newsletter, *Living Green*, is produced three times a year and events are organised including a residential weekend each autumn. A limited number of friends of the Gandhi Foundation are invited to join LSM supporters at the weekend this year. It will take place at Old Hall, East Bergholt, Suffolk from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> October.

Old Hall started as a manor house built in 1713 which became the home for an order of Benedictine nuns in 1856. In the 1940s the buildings were taken over by Franciscan Friars who maintained a worshipping community until the increasingly dilapidated buildings were put up for sale in 1973. A small group of people interested in self-sufficient community living and in saving the premises, raised the money to purchase Old Hall and set about restoring it. Making over 100 rooms and a large chapel rain-proof and habitable has been an enormous undertaking but the community has gone on to maximise the ways in which living in community can reduce consumption of non-renewables, particularly energy. Thus, visitors to Old Hall can see solar panels, a ground-sourced heat-pump and a large Dragon wood-fuelled boiler in operation and learn how these measures have cut consumption of mains electricity and gas. Members also apply organic farming methods to the sixty acres of land and produce enough fruit, vegetables, meat, butter and cheese for the community to be largely self-sufficient in food throughout the year.

Equally important is the way in which the community of over seventy adults and children has evolved. Initially agreement had to be reached on how to share space and financial responsibilities. Decision-making principles had to be established and ways of sharing the work equitably. Processes for accepting new members and allowing existing members to leave were hammered out and the success of all this cooperative endeavour can be seen in the fact that the community is still flourishing after forty years.

The theme for the LSM weekend in October will be 'The Green Society' and there will be talks and discussions on the causes and effects of inequality, on defining a Green society and on how we can help to achieve it. The programme will also include one or more films, a table-games session and free time. Accommodation and all meals are provided and it is expected that the cost for the weekend will be no more than £90. Expressions of interest from Gandhi Foundation friends should be sent to Tony Hodgson at 9 Trent House, Station Road, Oundle, Peterborough PE8 4DE Tel 0118 322 75343 e: [hodgsons@phonecoop.coop](mailto:hodgsons@phonecoop.coop)

*Graham Davey*

# The Gandhi Foundation

Charity number 292629

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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President: Bhikhu Parekh

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You can become a Friend of the Gandhi Foundation for a minimum subscription of £12, or a concession rate of £7, or be a Life Friend for a donation of £200. As a Friend you will receive the quarterly newsletter *The Gandhi Way*, and notices of events organised by the Foundation. Subscriptions to the Editor (address at bottom).

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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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