

Gandhi Foundation Multifaith Celebration

30 January 2009

This will take place as usual in a venue in London
on the anniversary of Gandhi's assassination

Details will be publicised later

See website www.gandhifoundation.org
or phone 0208 981 7628

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Thomas Merton's Reflections on Mahatma Gandhi

Rasoul Sorkhabi

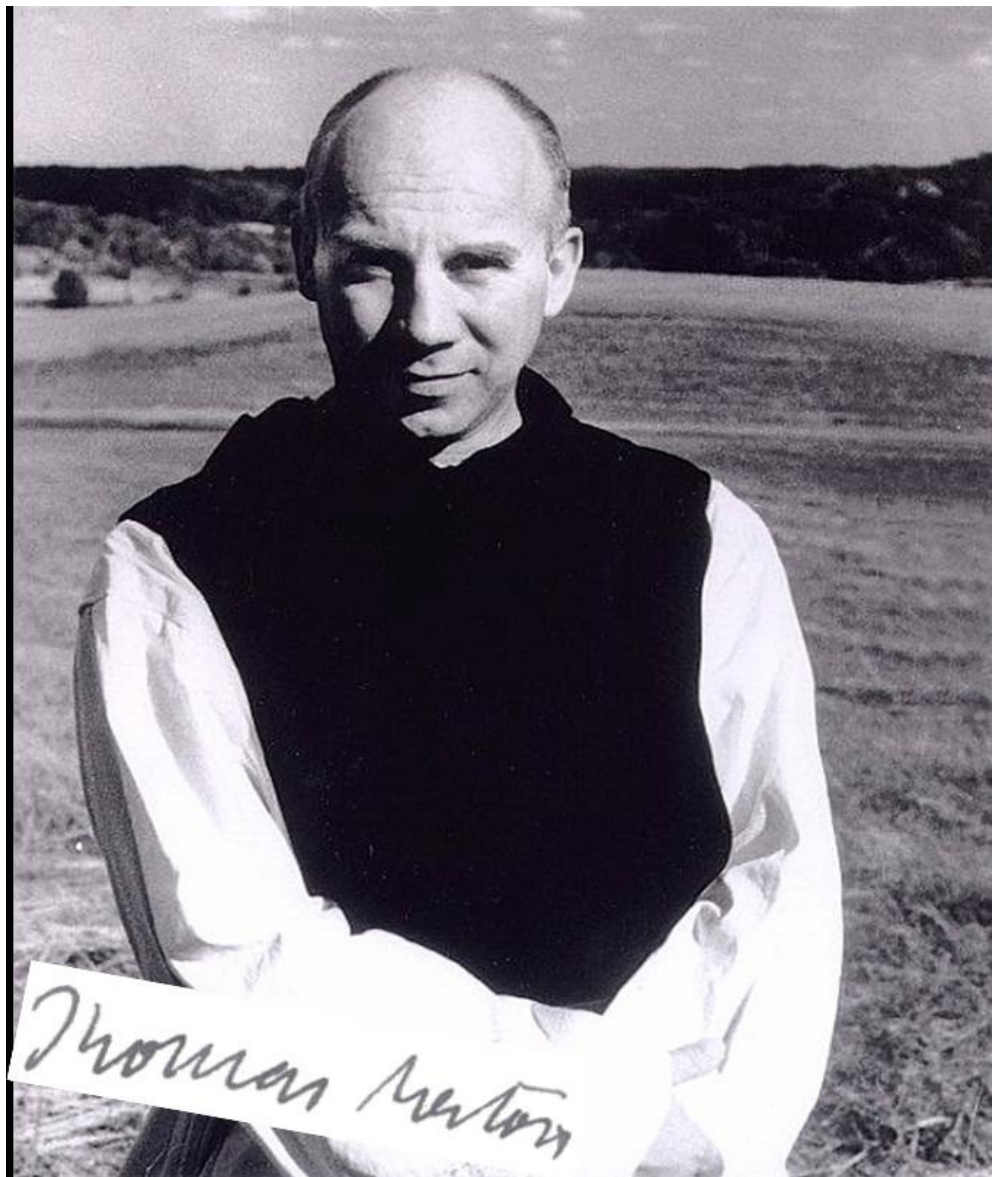
Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated in New Delhi 1948 (now sixty years ago) and Thomas Merton, a renowned Trappist monk and author, was killed in a tragic accident in 1968 (forty years ago). These anniversaries are valuable opportunities to reflect on the legacies, works and teachings of these two great men of peace. Gandhi has influenced many minds and movements of the twentieth century. In this article, we review Merton's impressions of Gandhi and how they are helpful for our century and generation as well.

Thomas Merton, born in 1915, was forty-six years junior to Gandhi. Merton spent the first two decades of his life in France, UK and USA. In 1939, he received his MA in English literature from Columbia University, and decided to become a Catholic monk. The following year, he accepted a teaching position at St Bonaventure University, a Franciscan college in southwest New York State. In 1942, he entered the Abbey of Gethsemane, a Trappist (Franciscan) monastery in Kentucky, as a novice monk. Merton or Father Louis as he was later called at Gethsemane lived the rest of his life there in a quiet and contemplative life and an inspiring natural environment. He kept journals and wrote many essays and poems, and books. His autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, published in 1948 became a best seller. In the 1960s, Merton was attracted to Eastern religious thoughts and traditions, including Gandhi's ideas.

Merton wrote two articles about Gandhi: (1) The first entitled 'Gandhi: The Gentle Revolutionary' was first published in *Ramparts* (December 1964), a magazine founded two years earlier by Edward Michael Keating (1925-2003). This article was also included in Merton's book *The Seeds of Destruction* (1964), and more recently in an anthology of Merton entitled *Passion for Peace* (edited by William Shannon, Crossroad, New York, 1995, and an abridged version in 2006). (2) The second article, 'Gandhi and the One-Eyed Giant' first appeared in the January 1965 issue of *Jubilee*, a magazine founded in 1953 by Ed Rice (1918-2001; Merton's friend from school days in Columbia). This article was later included as an introduction to *Gandhi on Non-Violence* (New Directions, New York, 1965), a selection of Gandhi's words by Merton from a much larger, two-

volume anthology *Non-Violence in Peace and War* (published by Navajivan, Hyderabad, 1942, 1949).

In both articles, Merton analyses Gandhi's thought mainly from a Christian standpoint with references to Jesus' teachings. (For instance, Merton quotes Gandhi as saying: "Jesus died in vain, if he did not teach us to regulate the whole life by eternal law of love.") This is all understandable given Merton's background and the fact that both *Ramparts* and *Jubilee* were Catholic intellectual magazines. Nevertheless, Merton's underscoring of 'Christian elements' in Gandhian thought is significant as most of the writings about Gandhi's life and works have been either political history or Indian religious philosophy.



In 'Gandhi: The Gentle Revolutionary', Merton remembers his first encounter with Gandhi in 1931 when the latter was visiting London as a representative of the Indian Congress to attend the Round Table Conference the British government was hosting to discuss the Indian issue. Merton was then a student at Oakham boarding school in Rutland, England. He was sympathetic to Gandhi's ideals about a free India and recalls an argument he had with his school football coach who believed that Indians were primitive people and needed to be governed by the British Raj. Merton then adds that "a dozen years after Gandhi's visit to London there were more hideous barbarities perpetuated in Europe, with greater violence and more unmitigated fury than all that has ever attributed by the wildest imaginations to the despots of Asia. The British Empire collapsed. India attained self-rule. It did so peacefully and with dignity. Gandhi paid with his life for the ideals in which he believed."

Merton devotes the rest of his article to the significance of Gandhi's political thought and action. He singles out Gandhi "as a great leader, one of the noblest men of our century" because he was truly and sincerely (not opportunistically or verbally) committed to peace politics. Gandhi resented power politics as a means to empower oneself and to humiliate or wipe out the other party in the battle, and instead suggested *Svad-dharma* ('religion of service') as characterizing his political action. And Gandhi's political action was based on a thoroughly religious understanding of being, life, love and human's place in the world. Merton quotes Gandhi: "If love is not the law of our being, the whole of my argument fails to pieces." Merton refers to Gandhi's concept of *Satya-graha* (usually translated as 'Truth Force') and defines it as "simply conforming one's words to one's inner thought." Merton then explains that "our aims, our plans of actions, our outlook, our attitudes, our habitual response to the problems and challenges of life" more effectively than words 'speak' of our inner being." Merton also refers to Gandhi's other formula – *Ahimsa* ('non-violence') and remarks that unlike the dirty, greedy politicians who wage wars in the name of catch phrases like liberation, Gandhi did not use the word *Ahimsa* deceitfully against the English; Gandhi really meant and intended it, and "did not think that peace and justice could be attained through violent or selfish means." In short, Merton remarks that "Gandhi is not above all criticism, no man is. But ... he was unlike all the other world leaders of his time in that his life was marked by a wholeness and a wisdom, an integrity and a spiritual

consistency.”

Merton opens his second article 'Gandhi and the One-Eyed Giant' with the remark that the white man came to Africa, Asia, and America like a one-eyed giant, “bringing with him the characteristic split and blindness which were at once his strength, his torment, and his ruin.” Gandhi emerged against this background in world history and Asian-African geography. Merton then discusses the salient features of Gandhi’s life mission and legacy which may be outlined below:

(1) Gandhi discovered the East through the West. He was educated in England, read Tolstoy, Thoreau and the New Testament, and rediscovered many Christian values in his own Indian religions.

(2) In his rediscovery of 'the right mind' in Indian religions, Gandhi’s approach was not that of a bookish scholar but as a simple human in touch with the Indian people and life. Therefore, “the Indian people were awakening in him” as well.

(3) Unlike the re-awakening process of some Asian nations (for example, Japan), Gandhi did not lead the Indian mind toward intolerance, extreme nationalism or exclusive religion. He reached out for humanity, unity, love and peace both nationally and internationally.

(4) Gandhi’s life was “eminently active rather than merely contemplative.” Although Gandhi prayed, fasted and practised his religion, his spiritual life was not separate from his political life; he participated “in the life and *dharma* of his people;” “for him the public realm was not secular, it was sacred.”

(5) Gandhi adopted *Ahimsa*, non-violent methods of struggle against injustice and oppression, not out of naivety, escapism or cowardice, but out of love, caring, bravery (“a kind of bravery far different from violence”) and the wisdom that “to punish and destroy the oppressor is merely to initiate a new cycle of violence and oppression; the only real liberation is that which liberates both the oppressor and the oppressed at the same time.”

(6) Gandhi considered his Indian experience not as a limited national case but as a part and an example of a world experiment to create a new human history.

(7) Gandhi did not consider political liberty and social freedoms as end-products of his mission; Gandhi stressed (and showed by his own example) that inner freedom from selfishness and seeing “all life as one in a sacred cosmic family” are crucially important for the spiritual

and social development of humans as well as the humanity.

It was for all these causes and ideals that Gandhi lived and stood, and for which gave his life in the end. Merton concludes his essay: “Gandhi’s principles are, then, extremely pertinent today, more pertinent even than they were conceived and worked out in practice in the *ashrams*, villages and highways of India.”

Merton’s selected texts of Gandhi in a small but rich volume, *Gandhi on Non-Violence*, brings out the essence of Gandhi’s doctrine and practice of *ahimsa*. He divides the book into five sections: (1) Principles of Non-violence; (2) Non-violence: True and false; (3) The spiritual dimensions of non-violence; (4) The political scope of non-violence; and (5) The purity of non-violence. There are many gems in this book – words uttered by Gandhi and loved by Merton. Here are three:

“When the practice of *ahimsa* becomes universal, God will reign on earth as He does in heaven.”

“Man as animal is violent but as spirit is non-violent. The moment he awakes to the spirit within he cannot remain violent.”

“Non-violence is the only thing that atom bomb cannot destroy ... Unless now the world adopts non-violence, it will spell certain suicide for mankind.”

It is true that Gandhi was influenced not only by the Bhagavad-Gita but also by other religious scriptures including the Gospels and the Quran. Reading through Merton’s essays, it appears that only in Gandhi’s political life Merton finds a Christian model of non-violent struggle for world peace for the contemporary generation. This is not surprising. First because the essence of all major religions is “the law of love.” Moreover, in the political history the so-called Christian West, as Merton would have agreed, one finds less and less Jesus and more violence and more greed. Perhaps that is why, in his second article Merton writes: “What has Gandhi to do with Christianity? Everyone knows that the Orient has venerated Christ and distrusted Christians ever since the first colonisers and missionaries came from the West.”

In 1968, Merton went to Asia – his first trip ever to the East. He was to give a lecture at a monastic conference in Bangkok in December. He journeyed to India during October and November, and

then went to Thailand. He was killed in a Bangkok hotel by electric shock as he stepped out of his bath and touched an un-grounded electric fan. That was 10 December 1968, twenty-seven years after Merton had entered the Gethsemane monastery, and twenty years after Gandhi had been gunned by a Hindu nationalist fanatic opposing his efforts to bring about peace between India and the new partitioned Pakistan. Today, there is an International Gandhi Peace Prize, which has been awarded annually by the Government of India since 1995, and also a Thomas Merton Award, awarded by the Thomas Merton Center, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, since 1972. Gandhi and Merton were brothers in soul, two great peaceful minds of the twentieth century; their legacies and messages are to inspire people of this century as well.

Rasoul Sorkhabi's previous article, 'Albert Schweitzer and Indian Thought' appeared in *The Gandhi Way* No 97. He lives in Salt Lake City, USA. Copyright: Rasoul Sorkhabi (2008).

Inequality Matters

"We are the first generation to have got to the end of what rising material living standards can do for us. Economic growth no longer makes us happier, nor does it improve well-being or reduce social problems. It does, however, threaten the planet. As inequality has risen, the contrast between the social failings of modern societies and their material success has become ever more apparent.

In redressing the balance, our task is to improve the quality of the social environment. We now know that greater equality is the foundation on which better social relations are built, and that it will improve the well-being of the vast majority of the population. The bonus is that the more equal of the developed countries also give more in foreign aid and score better on the global peace index."

From *The Friend* 16 May 2008. The authors, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, are social epidemiologists.

My ideal is equal distribution, but so far as I can see, it is not to be realised. I therefore work for equitable distribution.

M K Gandhi

The Global Greed

Shaheen Choudhury Westcombe

The credit boom (1)
Goes round and round
The economy looks
Healthy and sound

The emerging middle class (3)
Must luxury cars drive
Material possessions
For more they strive

Electronic goods
Every gadget they need
Life moves on
At a very high speed

Rising house prices
All records smashed
It was inevitable
That the market crashed

Millions will die
There is no food
Forced to grow bio-fuel
In farmland good

Call centres in India
For global business all
Without this arrangement
The economy would fall

We look behind
And on hindsight
Gandhi, the Mahatma
Was very right

The banks make millions (2)
Trade looks great
Consumers buying madly
Massive profits they create

Lavish foreign holidays
Restaurants and bars
Everything in life
Must be five stars

Living in credit
In a world unreal
Creating an environment
Very surreal

Global warming, fuel shortage
Who wants to know
As long as modern life
Does not have to slow

Chinese sweat shops
Supplying the west
With products all desire
Very cheap but best

The Bushes and Blairs
Fight wars for oil
Creating disasters
On foreign soil

The world has enough
For our basic needs
But not to sustain
The global greed

London, May 21, 2008

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Gandhi and the Baha'is

M V Gandhimohan

There are many striking similarities between the teachings of M K Gandhi and those of the Baha'i Faith. I discuss a number of these similarities in my book titled *Mahatma Gandhi and the Baha'is: Striving towards a Nonviolent Civilisation*. The book explores key common issues and discusses Gandhian and Baha'i ideas, such as the role of prayer and fasting, economic trusteeship, world citizenship and world peace. Below, I summarise some of the more important points that are discussed in greater detail in my book.

The Baha'i Faith, like Gandhi, was born in the 19th century. Indeed their history is intertwined to some extent. We know from historical records that Gandhi had personal contact with Baha'is. The President of the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Bombay, Mr Mani H M Mehta, met Gandhi and was able to share the Baha'i teachings with him. On other occasions, Mrs Shirin Fozdar, a well known Baha'i, also met Gandhi many times. Some American Baha'is visiting India were able to meet Gandhi during his imprisonment in 1942 at Aga Khan Palace, which had been converted into a jail. We also know that Martha Root, whom Baha'is sometimes refer to as the "star-servant" of the Baha'i Faith, mailed Gandhi a copy of the compilation book volume *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah* when she was in Surat, Gujarat, probably around 1937-38. And, of course, there is the famous phrase attributed to Gandhi, "The Baha'i Faith is a solace to humankind", which appeared in the Bombay Chronicle newspaper on 24 May 1944, during the centenary of the Baha'i Faith.

Who are the Baha'is ? What do they believe in ? The prophet-founder of the Baha'i Faith, Baha'u'llah, was born in Persia on 12 November 1817, about 52 years before Gandhi. His aristocratic family could trace its ancestry back to the great dynasties of Persia's imperial past, as well as claim descent from biblical figures. Declining the ministerial career open to him in government he chose instead to devote his energies to a range of philanthropies which had, by the early 1840s, earned him widespread renown as Father of the Poor. This privileged existence swiftly eroded after 1844, when Baha'u'llah became one of the leading advocates of a movement that was destined to change the course of his country's history.

In 1844 a young merchant from the city of Shiraz, known as the

Bab, a title meaning 'Gate' in Arabic, announced that the Day of God was at hand, and that he was the One promised in Islamic scripture. Although himself the bearer of an independent revelation from God, the Bab declared that his mission was to prepare mankind for the advent of that universal Messenger of God, "He whom God will make manifest", awaited by the followers of all religions. The claim evoked violent hostility from the Muslim clergy, who taught that the process of Divine Revelation had ended with Muhammad and that any assertion to the contrary represented apostasy, punishable by death. Thousands of followers of the new faith were massacred throughout the country, and the Bab was publicly executed in 1850. Baha'u'llah was arrested for his prominence in defending the message of the Bab. He was then made to endure forty years of exile, imprisonment, and bitter persecution. Confiscating his wealth and properties, the Persian authorities banished Baha'u'llah to Baghdad.

The Baha'i Faith was born in Baghdad in 1863, when Baha'u'llah declared to a number of his companions that he was the One promised by the Bab. Baha'u'llah in Arabic means the 'Glory of God'. He preached that the "earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens". He claimed to be a Manifestation of the attributes of God and repeatedly identified himself with being the Promised One of all ages. Beginning in September 1867, Baha'u'llah wrote a series of letters to world leaders such as the Emperor Napoleon III, Queen Victoria, Kaiser Wilhelm I, Tsar Alexander II, Emperor Franz Joseph, Pope Pius IX, Sultan Abdul-Aziz of the Ottoman Empire, and the Persian ruler Nasiri'd-Din Shah, among others. They dismissed his message. Today, in contrast, Baha'u'llah's vision of humanity as one people and of the earth as a common homeland stands vindicated. Indeed, it has become the focus of human hope. Baha'u'llah has left to posterity over a hundred volumes of written works. The original texts have been meticulously preserved, and the central body of these writings has been translated into more than 800 languages. Baha'is consider these texts to be holy scripture.

Baha'u'llah's teachings proclaim the oneness of God, the oneness of humankind and the oneness of religion. The central teachings of the Baha'i Faith all stem from the concept of unity and include the independent investigation of the Truth, harmony of science and religion, progressive religious revelation, the equality of men and women, universal education, equitable wealth distribution, the abandonment of all forms of prejudice, a Universal Auxiliary

Language, and a nonviolent World Commonwealth.

The reader may already have noticed similarities between the Baha'i and the Gandhian perspectives. For the reader interested in greater details my 200 page book can be purchased from the Baha'i Publishing Trust and sells for under £5. www.bahai-publishing-trust.co.uk

For more information about the Baha'i Faith, please contact The National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the UK, 27 Rutland Gate, London SW7 1PD or see www.bahai.org.uk

The author was born in Madras (now Chennai) and raised in Rio de Janeiro. He is a university professor in the northeastern Brazilian city of Maceio. With his American-born wife he founded The Center for Studies and Research for a Democratic System of Global Governance, based in Brasilia.

Book Reviews

Gandhian Way: Peace, Non-violence and Empowerment
Celebrating Hundred Years of Satyagraha (1906-2006) Indian
National Congress Published by Academic Foundation 2007
ISBN 978 81 7188 648 7 HB pp320 £34.50

This large and splendid looking book emerged from a conference held in New Delhi in January 2007. It was attended by more than 300 delegates from 91 countries. It included many politicians but also Gandhi scholars and activists in human rights, peace, economic development, and multi-culturalism.

The text consists of many of the speeches delivered at the conference. Some of the attendees are well known figures such as Desmond Tutu, Lech Walesa and Kenneth Kaunda as well as the Indian PM Manmohan Singh and Congress President Sonia Gandhi. Many of the speeches are short and inevitably there is a good deal of overlap but they do serve to show the wide interest in Gandhi around the world. One would have hoped for a greater proportion of women in attendance as it appears to be only around 20%.

Two of the longer papers were of particular interest to me: that of American Gene Sharp and our own Bhikhu Parekh. Gene Sharp has spent a lifetime studying and developing pragmatic applications of

nonviolent action. Gandhi was his starting point but he has gone beyond him and has left behind Gandhi's particular cultural background so that nonviolent struggle can be used as a pragmatic substitute for violent action, including war, in many different settings. An important aspect of this is that it involves an empowerment of the users. He cites many diverse historical cases and indicates that much nonviolent action theory has still to be refined in the future.

Bhikhu Parekh, in this particular paper, considers Gandhi as an advocate of economic equality. Gandhi is criticised for expecting too much from the wealthy entrepreneurs who, he believed, should become trustees of their wealth using most of it for the welfare of those less fortunate. However Parekh points out that Gandhi did in his mature years advocate a more assertive attitude by those who had little, recognising that this might involve satyagraha. He also came round to envisaging a role for the state in moving towards a more equal society. Parekh also revives Gandhi's idea of a national non-governmental organisation which would represent the views of the poorer sections of society and challenge the established political system.

There is a subtle defence of India's nuclear weapons by Mani Shanker Aiyar, a Government Minister. He does so indirectly by criticising the Non-Proliferation Treaty as being asymmetrical in that the original nuclear powers do not show signs of renouncing their weapons. This is the voice of the conventional politician rather than Gandhi, but he does point out that Rajiv Gandhi put forward 20 years ago a plan for general nuclear disarmament and certainly that is what the world's people need as a starting point towards a nonviolent world.

The final Declaration has of course many worthy aims but neither there nor in the Conference in general is there much mention of the environmental problems facing humankind and the planet. In Gandhi's time these issues were much less important but his ideas of simplicity of lifestyle, local production and consumption, and respect for all life are highly relevant to it.

The book is well illustrated with photographs of delegates, individually and in groups, but also many fascinating pictures of Gandhi and others from the pre-Independence period.

George Paxton

A copy of this book can be borrowed from the library at Kingsley Hall.

Recapturing Childhood: Positive Parenting in the Modern World by Mildred Mashed

Published 30th October 2008 by Green Print at £10.00

Mildred Mashed is now 91. She has been an 'early years' educationalist and author for over 60 years, teaching teachers and university students in the UK and around the world. In this, her latest book, she has brought together all her experience and deep understanding for teachers, young parents and all those involved with caring for children in these difficult times.

Dr Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, states in his fulsome recommendation of the book:

“...We have to admit that the condition of our children and young people in the UK gives plenty of cause for real concern. There are issues around the mental health of young people, around the provision of safe and accessible leisure space for them, around parenting and how it is best learned, around how to balance protection with the need to give them appropriate challenges. Mildred Mashed is a commentator of rare clarity and wisdom on these matters....”

Mildred Mashed has explained why she wrote the book:

“Young children are being increasingly deprived of their heritage – that of a rich and creative childhood – and this book aims to show parents and all those who care for children how to restore it. Recent legislation is but one more example of the restrictions being placed on the free and natural growth of young people nowadays: the Government’s Early Years Foundation Stage now demands that all children meet 69 different targets before they are 5 years old.

“My book gives a comprehensive account of the needs of children as they develop and offers creative ways of meeting them. There **is** a more wholesome and natural approach to bringing up children and I have included contributions by many parents illustrating from their own experiences how this can be achieved. You will also find summaries [and a bibliography] of current research on different approaches to child development.”

Sue Palmer, author of *Toxic Childhood* writes:

“It seems not a week goes by without alarming revelations about the effects of modern lifestyles on children’s learning, behaviour and mental health. Providing a ‘good childhood’ needs the advice of people who really understand children: Mildred Mashed is such a one”.

Dr Neil Hawkes, International Education Consultant, opens

his Foreword to the book in italics stating that this is: ***“A gem of a book that we all need to read!”***

Email [HYPERLINK "mailto:positive.childhood@which.net"](mailto:positive.childhood@which.net)
positive.childhood@which.net if you wish to purchase a copy or need a
free copy to review for some other newsletter. For details of all
Mildred Masheders publications: [HYPERLINK](http://www.positivechildhood.net)
"http://www.positivechildhood.net" www.positivechildhood.net.

John Rowley

Film Review

Lage Raho Munna Bhai EROS DVD1212. Hindi with English subtitles. Running time 145 minutes.

This film is a Bollywood comedy released in 2006, and a surprise hit sequel to a much less popular forerunner. It won thirty-six separate awards from eleven awarding bodies, grossed nearly £8 million in India alone – the highest that year, and was the first Hindi film to be shown at the United Nations. The Prime Minister of India actually cited the film at the launch of the anti-corruption bill of 2006.

Munna Bhai and his brother Circuit are petty gangsters whose ‘house clearance’ business thrives in the corruption of modern India. Munna falls in love with the voice of Jhanvi, the beautiful DJ on a Mumbai morning radio programme. To meet her, Munna has to pose as a professor of history, and to make his story credible he spends three days in a deserted library learning about Gandhi. Babu’s spirit appears, and Munna begins to take his advice.

One might think that Gandhiji’s ideas of truth and nonviolence do not readily lend themselves to the plot of a Bollywood comedy musical. But they do. And remarkably, the film manages that in an entertaining way. On its release in India, it caused a wave of ‘Gandhigiri’ protests in which people used the satyagraha techniques in the film to solve real-life issues. Two thousand farmers in Vidarbha garlanded the manager of a bank refusing to sanction loans. Flowers were also sent by Indian US green-card applicants, forcing the authorities to speed up the process. In Lucknow, residents protested at a liquor shop being opened near a mosque and a temple by handing

out flowers to the owner and his customers.

The plot is slow for the first thirty minutes but exquisitely crafted, and the comedy is sparse to western eyes, though laugh-out-loud funny on occasions. The casual violence toward Munna and Circuit's innocent victims, and Circuit's willingness to wield a knife suggests a harshness to Indian street life which is on occasions hard to watch, particularly with the current alarm in Britain over knife-crime. The PG rating is deserved.

I recommend this film to anyone. But to all *Gandhi-ists* as Munna calls them, it is essential viewing.

You can buy the DVD on Amazon.co.uk for about £7.50 including postage. Amazon describe it as region 2 PAL. It is actually region 0 TNTSC, though the quality was fine on my UK DVD player.

Chris Clarke

Letters

Ahimsa

I read with great fascination in *The Gandhi Way* no. 97 of Albert Schweitzer and Ahimsa.

What a beautiful prayer he composed as a child: "Dear God, protect and bless all beings that breathe, keep all evil from them and let them sleep in peace."

We are making a mockery of the Mahatma's message if we don't accept Ahimsa. And this flag of Ahimsa cannot fly where we have meat on offer. How can we possibly count ourselves as adherents of Ahimsa and at the same time eat meat and fish ? As members of the Gandhi Foundation we must all at least have heard this word Ahimsa. Let us study it a bit, for Gandhi gave it great importance.

Can we continue gaily to eat meat if we take Gandhi's goodwill seriously ? We ought even to question whether we can include ourselves, with clear conscience, as part of any foundation in Gandhi's name, if we continue with flesh-fancying. I was brought up to eat meat like so many Westerners of the last century. I made the change to the vegetarian diet, with God's blessings, after tasting the nectarian 'Amrit' of well-prepared vegetarian fare. Are you Ahimsa ?

Sarathi Nice, Ground Floor Apt B, 16 Frederick Street, London WC1X 0ND

Schumacher and Trusteeship

In the Autumn issue of *The Gandhi Way* Godric Bader's article Schumacher and Trusteeship pivoting around the Scott Bader company resonates with echoes of what is happening in many developing nations which have adopted the capitalistic path of economic development. This has taken a big toll of human lives bringing a lot of misery. Rapid economic growth riding roughshod over ethical considerations is the norm now. As a grassroots social activist one despairs that one is fighting a losing battle. Gandhian economics and his idea of trusteeship is given short shrift.

John Alexander, Red building (Ground Floor), Tailors Lane, Chawni, Nagpur 440013

UN President on Gandhian values

Readers might be interested in the following paragraph from the acceptance speech of the new President of the UN General Assembly, representing the Latin American and Caribbean group. He has an unusual background – American-born Catholic priest from Nicaragua, suspended by the Vatican for political involvement with the Sandinistas, elected to his UNGA post by acclamation in June. Several references in his speech prompted angry protests from the American delegation, but I think the paragraph below sums up an approach we can all go along with.

“The unity that the world requires of us is born of love and a desire to transform all of us into instruments of peace, justice and solidarity. I firmly believe that that is essential to ensuring that we achieve our common goals, while respecting our most important and diverse national interests. We cannot therefore allow hatred, rancour or a desire for revenge in our struggle. On the contrary, that is what we must firmly fight with unbending love and respect. Gandhi must be our paradigm in the struggle for a better world.”
H.E. Father Miguel d’Escoto Brockmann

Alison Williams, 11 Wilberforce House, 119 Worple Road, London SW20 8ET

Gandhi Foundation News

Cecil and Isabel Evans

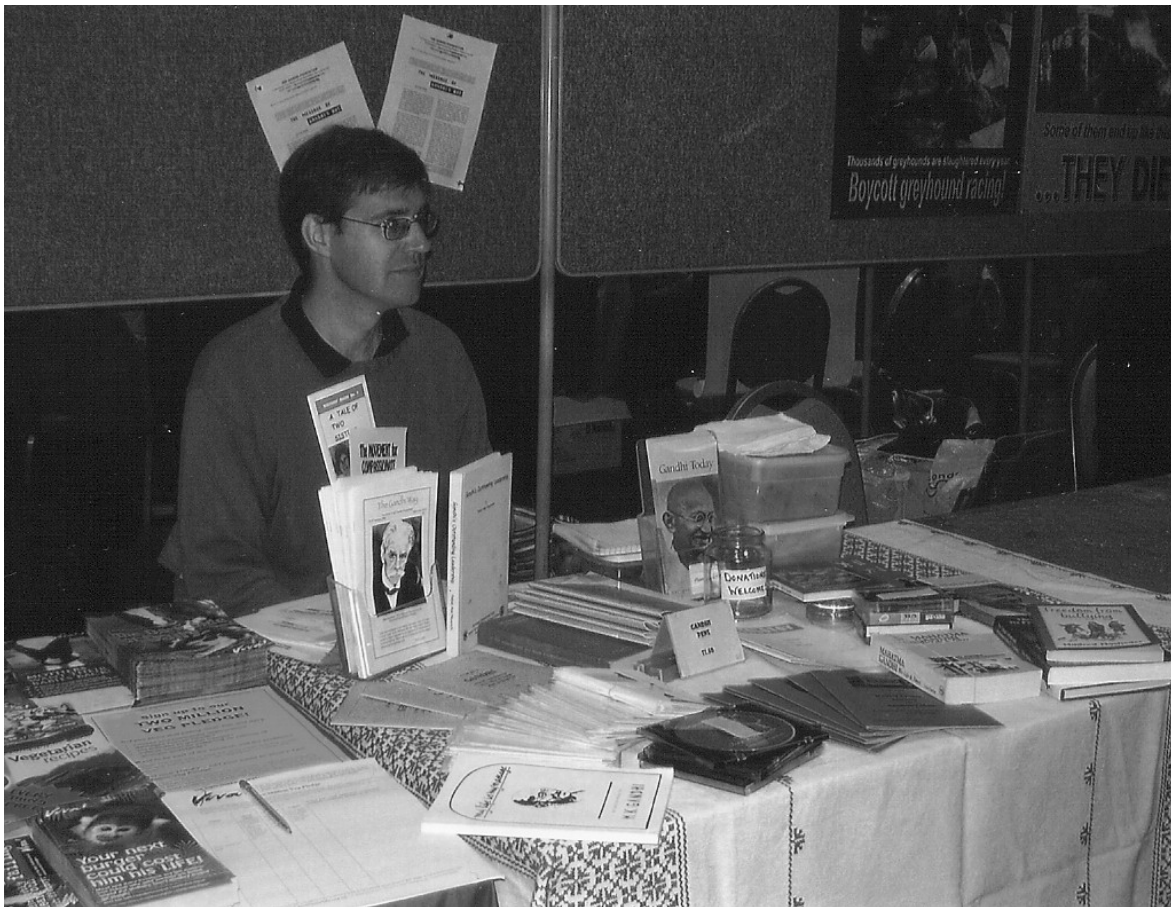


Many of you, especially the older ones, will know of Cecil's founding and devoted service to the Gandhi Foundation ever since 1985. His staunch Quakerism has contributed much to the Foundation. He is now in Room No. 4, Denham Manor Nursing Home, Haylings Lane, Denham, Bucks UB9 5DQ – and would love to hear from you. Several Executive Committee members have visited him in a very lovely room overlooking a huge garden. Isabel is constantly with him and can be reached on 01494 676581 if you would like more news.

10th Vegan Festival

The whole of Kensington Town Hall was devoted to this event on 7 September and it was so packed they had to ask people to wait before coming in at some point ! It was heartening to see such an interest in veganism and vegetarianism – and there were delicious feasts of food and tastes all over the Hall. The GF had half a stall there, which you can see manned by volunteer William Rhind – thanks William !

Helping us run stalls at these events is a great way of volunteering for us and we hope there will be offers from more of you in the future. They are usually fun occasions too.



Sabera Chowdhury

The Executive Committee is delighted to welcome Sabera to its ranks. Sabera and her family have been loyal supporters to the GF for many years. Sabera brings a valued enthusiasm, energy and keen perception to the Executive. Her main career background has been in the teaching/education sector, although in recent years she has

focused her energy on training in homeopathy and is now a fully qualified homeopath, practising from home and in London. She is born to Indian/Bangladeshi parents and speaks Bengali and Sylheti. The spirit of unity at the core of Gandhiji's philosophy (as she understands it) is essentially what draws her commitment to the GF and which also deeply resonates with her own inclinations and spiritual practice.



In the picture you see Sabera holding up the GF Banner with David Maxwell, on the occasion of Kingsley Hall's 80th Birthday Street Party in Bromley-by-Bow this summer.

To join the Executive Committee, we ask that you attend 3 meetings (which are quarterly) before a joint decision is made by you and the Committee. If this is of interest to you, please contact the Secretary on 01932 343614 or denise.gandhifdn@phonecoop.coop

Gandhi Peace Award 2008 to Rev Harold Good and Father Alex Reid on 30 October 2008

Citation by Dr Omar Hayat

Something extraordinary has taken place and is taking place in Northern Ireland. Something very powerful indeed. After decades of troubles the wholly unexpected coalition of the two extremes in the province, the Sinn Fein and the DUP has taken place (originally with the Reverend Paisley as First Minister and Martin McGuinness as Deputy First Minister).

However, it would always have been all too easy to despair of any resolution of the tribal politics of the province and Northern Ireland also has of course many similarities to the communal divide of India and the peacemakers of Northern Ireland all along faced in the Protestant/Catholic divide just the same sort of challenge as Mohandas Gandhi did in his prolonged struggle against the force of Hindu/Muslim communalism which periodically grips India. Northern Ireland was always a Gandhian challenge and sometimes we forget how much of Gandhi's struggle was one against terrorism. It was a struggle that did cost him his life. Clearly the Gandhi Foundation wanted to celebrate, indeed rejoice, in the triumph of nonviolence over violence.

Of course, key to the recent political truce was the decommissioning process. Here there was a critical barrier to be overcome. No member of the IRA could afford to be photographed handing in their weapons – this according to their military code is a treasonable offence and so another solution had to be found. That was through the witness statements to the handing in of weapons to trusted representatives of the two communities. The men asked to take on this role were the Reverend Harold Good and Father Alex Reid who acted as clerical witnesses during General John de Chastelain's disarmament process. This act of being representatives of the two communities and overseeing the disarmament requires a great deal of trust, a very uncommon virtue in today's world which strives towards transparency, which in some circumstances is a very good thing but also implies a lack of trust. So literally these two men have been trusted by the rest of the world and especially the sectarian parties of Northern Ireland, just on their say so, to have told the truth. Otherwise the whole process would not have progressed. A heavy responsibility indeed.

It may be appropriate here if I read a few comments made at the time:

'I hadn't heard of Good before I saw him being interviewed on the news following the announcement of the disarmament. He gives a feeling of gentle sincerity and integrity which I personally feel engenders trust. It's hard for me to understand why anyone would feel that he would lie or allow himself to be duped

It's wonderful to know we have such people of faith as Rev. Good and Father Alec helping to make peace between the people of Northern Ireland and perhaps an encouragement to the rest of us that continue to hold onto 'old hurt' as we continue to blast the darkness instead of lighting a candle.

The full citation and the lecture given by Harold Good can be viewed on the GF website www.gandhifoundation.org

GF meeting in Glasgow

For the first time a GF meeting was held in Glasgow, on 27 September. It was arranged to coincide with the British Library touring exhibition which was in the Mitchell Library, the largest library in the city, and the meeting was held in the Unitarian Centre which is very close to the Library.

About 30 people attended and saw a video of *Gandhi in England* (about his 1931 visit), which was followed by a talk on Gandhi Today by George Paxton. After questions and discussion almost everyone stayed to have refreshments including home-made pakora.

The issues raised by those attending largely focused on to what extent nonviolent action can be effective.

If you would like to consider holding a GF meeting in your area please contact the GF Secretary at Kingsley Hall initially.

GF Yahoo Group set up

We have now set up a Yahoo group, for discussions etc. The name of the group is gandhifoundation. You will need to have your own Yahoo id in order to logon, then go to the group and request membership. Please say a sentence or two about why you want to join the group, and the moderator will action your request.

Trevor Lewis

Farewell to Denise

Denise Moll retires as Secretary of the GF at the end of the year after six years with us. She has brought an admirable efficiency to the job as well as commitment to the ideals of the Foundation. We hope to see her often at future GF events.

The Peace Party

A political party putting peace as its first aim has been established and has already stood candidates in a small number of areas. Its values include:

- Never needlessly injure another
- Do not support the insanity of war
- Fully accept that there is no such thing as a 'just' war
- Oppose the manufacture and sale of any weapon
- Oppose injustice in all its forms
- Oppose cruelty, oppression, exploitation and corporatism
- Never waste the earth's resources or despoil nature for selfish gain

They can be contacted at The Peace Party, c/o 39 Sheepfold Road, Guildford, Surrey GU2 9TT Website: www.peaceparty.org.uk

VEGFAM

VEGFAM is a charity which “Feeds the hungry without exploiting animals” by funding plant food projects: seeds and tools for vegetable growing, fruit and nut tree planting, irrigation and water wells. It also does some emergency feeding. It has been operating since 1963 and has funded projects in more than 40 countries. Recent donations include several to projects in India and Bangladesh. They point out that using plant foods is a more efficient and sustainable way of addressing hunger.

VEGFAM, The Secretary, c/o Cwm Cottage, Cwmynys, Cilycwm, Llandovery, Carmarthenshire SA20 0EU www.vegfamcharity.org.uk

World March for Peace and Nonviolence

2 October 2009 – 2 January 2010

World Without Wars, an organisation that has been in existence for 15 years, is organising an ambitious World March starting in New Zealand on the International Day of Nonviolence (Gandhi's Birthday) and passing through Oceania, Asia, Europe, Africa and the Americas and ending in the Andes in Argentina.

The aim, say the organisers, is “to create global awareness of the urgent need to condemn all forms of violence and bring about real Peace”. Local peace groups are being encouraged to have events as the marchers reach their towns. For further details see www.worldmarch.info
