

"Generations to come will scarce believe that such a man as this, in flesh and blood, ever walked upon this earth." --
Albert Einstein

“Mahatma” Gandhi

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Mohandas Gandhi, or Bapu, as he was often called later in his life, was a peace teacher, a freedom fighter, and an honored leader. He was also called “Mahatma,” which means “great soul.” He lived from 1869 until 1948, and he

led the Indian people to freedom without ever firing one bullet. *This is his story.*

The 1800’s were very difficult times all over the world for brown and black peoples, because people were considered inferior if they were not born a white European. Gandhi taught people how to fight injustice because it was harmful, but without hating the people who were unjust, or hurting them in any way whatsoever. In fact, he insisted that his followers be polite and gentle, yet unmovable and unstoppable. He influenced others who were fighting for justice as far away as Martin Luther King in America, who had a picture of Gandhi on his office wall, and Nelson Mandela in South Africa, who inherited much of Gandhi’s early work.

Gandhi taught that his followers should oppose only an unfair act, never a person. He believed in giving love to all fellow beings and this love demanded non-violence from his

followers, but it also demanded an end to injustice by his opponents.. He also believed strongly in non-injury to any living thing.

Who was this man and where did he get the courage?

Gandhi was born on October 2, 1869 in a small village in western India. Although he was very brave as an adult, he was not very brave as a boy. He was afraid of the dark, of ghosts and spirits, and also of snakes and scorpions. At night he would cry because he was so scared. He was raised in a very religious home, though, and a woman who looked after him told him that every time he was frightened he should just say the name of God out loud or to himself, (“Rama,” in India). It worked! Gradually he got over his fear.



With elder brother, 1886

When he was 19, Gandhi went to England to study law, and he also studied philosophy and religion. He found the principle of non-violence in the writings of an American, Henry David Thoreau. He studied the great Indian religious classic the Bhagavad-Gita, which inspired him throughout his life, as well as the New Testament of the Bible, the Quran, and the teachings of the Buddha.

Gandhi found that the basic principle of love in all these religions were the same. He said that we are all part of one interconnected whole, and that wholeness is our truest identity. That is why loving God and loving others is the same. In fact, he believed that all of life was a part of this whole, not just human beings. This is why you could never injure anyone or anything. He was a vegetarian, though he would drink goat’s milk, because it did not hurt the goat to give the milk.

At 22, Gandhi went home to India to practice law but he couldn't get a good job. He finally took a job in South Africa two years later.

And then something happened that changed the course of his life. Nine days after arriving in South Africa, he was riding in the first-class compartment of a train. A white man called railway officials to remove Gandhi because he was a brown man. Gandhi had bought a first-class ticket, though, and he refused to leave. A policeman literally threw him off the train with his baggage. Nothing like this had happened to him before, and he was upset about the unfair way he and others were treated by white South Africans.

There was actually one set of laws for the Indians, Chinese, and native Africans, and a whole different set for British people. He decided to use his position as a lawyer and the information about non-violent civil disobedience to try to make the white South Africans change their unfair laws.

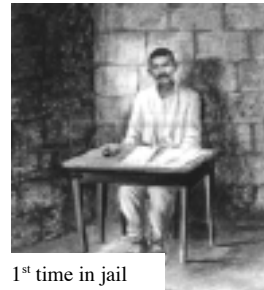
So, in South Africa, Gandhi developed methods of non-violent resistance against injustice, such as protest marches and strikes. These later served as a model for black Americans and black South Africans to also win their civil rights.



Gandhi was often harassed, sometimes even beaten or jailed because of the protests that he led. He did not give up his loving insistence that everyone was to be respected and no one harmed. He thought if he used hurtful methods to fight injustice, the end result could only be more injustice,

maybe by a different group of people. Hurting others was simply not an option, but allowing themselves to live with injustice was no loving option either. By 1913, in 20 years time, after many adventures, many new laws were agreed on and Gandhi felt his work in Africa was done. He went home to India.

What were Gandhi's methods to stop harm and injustice?



1st time in jail

Gandhi's methods included prayers, fasts (refusing to eat until the unjust thing was changed), and strikes (refusing to work or purchase certain goods until the unjust thing was changed). Gandhi refused to obey certain laws, like when he led his followers to make salt from the sea even though it was against the law, and taught

people to read and to be self-sufficient. His nonviolent action was definitely not a way to run away from problems. No-one could ignore him, and that was deliberate. In fact, he kept up his protests, whatever form they took, until the authorities reacted in un-civil ways. He stood for love and gently "turned the other cheek" when faced with hostility, but he was anything but passive. This forced his opponents to look at themselves and the problems between them differently.

Gandhi believed that hate was the real enemy, and that only love could drive out hate. He always avoided violence toward his opponents. But he did not avoid violence toward himself or his followers in the cause of justice and freedom. He said that, like any other soldier, nonviolent activists had to be ready to die for their cause. The difference was that nonviolent activists, while willing to die, must never be willing to kill, for then hatred had won the day.

Gandhi introduces a new and related method: non-cooperation. Like South Africa at the time, India was a British colony. This meant that India, like America before our war of Independence, was supposed to enrich England, and Indian citizens had little say, because Britain made and enforced all the laws to benefit themselves. This was unacceptable, and Indian citizens demanded independence, which wealthy Britains of course opposed.

So, Gandhi added a new ingredient to his recipe for freedom and justice. He called it non-cooperation. He developed the local villagers' own strengths and resources, and sent many skilled workers to live in and among them and teach them how to be independent.

Gandhi wanted India to become stronger. He told the people



to use only Indian-made goods and services and to only wear Khadi (hand spun cloth). He himself wore Khadi clothes, and would sit to spin on his Charkha (Spinning wheel). This was actually a radical move.

People stopped buying British-made goods. Instead, they lit bonfires with them. He urged all Indians to boycott(not use) British goods, courts, schools, and government offices. Of course, the people in England didn't like this, and they put him in jail from 1922 to 1924.

A very famous example of non-cooperation came in 1930. The law said it was illegal for Indians to make their own salt from their own ocean and they had to pay a special tax on British-produced salt. This was a symbol of British domination that every family could relate to.

Gandhi made a plan to march to the sea to pick up salt from the beach. Of course thousands of people walked with him. At first they decided to ignore him. But hundreds of thousands of Indians began making and selling their own salt. Gandhi announced that he intended to lead a peaceful takeover of a British-owned salt works and was arrested on the evening before the action.



Gandhi picks up salt at the sea, in defiance of the law.

The next day, with Gandhi in jail, the Indian people tried



The people prepare to take over the salt works peacefully.

nonviolently to enter the salt works. The British clubbed them, and over 60,000 people

were eventually put in jail. A journalist reports that this brutality by the British guaranteed eventual Indian victory, because of world opinion.

Gandhi frequently fasted, went without food, for many days and weeks, in order to point international attention to an unjust situation, to stop that harm from continuing. In one example, he found out that a new law, while giving most Indians the right to vote, would make a certain group of people in India not able to vote. He immediately stopped eating. He promised to continue his fast until that changed. The government knew



they had to change this quickly, for if Gandhi were to die, there could be a real revolution.

One time he had fasted in jail until he was only 90 pounds when he was released for fear he would die, though everyone knew he would be arrested again for further civil disobedience because he would continue to fight for Indian rights. He was always gentle in speech and action, never fought back, except by contrasting his gentle nature with the injustice and brutality around him.

The struggle for freedom in India continued all through the Second World War, during which Gandhi's followers refused to co-operate with England by joining their army.



Gandhi with Indian Prime Minister Nehru after Indian independence.

On August 15th 1947, India finally attained her freedom. Gandhi's work was finally completed, although he had not been able to heal the religious prejudice and rivalries between the Hindus and the Muslims in his country. The land was divided and the country of Pakistan was formed to give a homeland to the Muslim people of India. This is of course at the same time as the Jewish home state of Israel was being formed in Palestine. The most amazing part of his work was that, because his methods were non-violent,

Britain had to respect him. After giving India her freedom, there was an orderly transfer of power, and the two countries have remained friends. Gandhi died a year later, his work complete, and the whole world grieved at the loss of this great teacher.



Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. King said about Gandhi, "He was probably the first person in history since Jesus to lift the force of the love ethic above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale. He lived, thought, and acted, inspired by the vision of humanity evolving toward a world of peace and harmony."

Love is a powerful force for good in the world, and most would agree that active love is the heart of all religious teachings. Gandhi taught us the power of love, in being willing to challenge someone's harmful actions without either hating or harming the person themselves.

Gandhi was a hero, not because he is so different from everyone else, but because he was just like us, but he said a loud "NO" to hatred and injustice. He was very shy. He got scared. He was not popular. He had no particular skills. No one would have picked him out to be a leader, even in college, where he stayed mostly to himself. But he expected peace and justice to prevail on earth and knew that began with his own personal actions.

Mahatma Gandhi was one of the greatest teachers of all time, continuing even today, 50 years after his death, to lift us all to a greater love. That is perhaps his greatest and most enduring gift.