

## **Mahatma Gandhi**

He lived in India from 1869 to 1948 and was the political and spiritual leader of his country for many years. At the time India was under the rule of this country and wanted her independence. Gandhi organised the poor farmers and labourers and by peaceful means they protested the oppression they were under from the British. Even when these peaceful protests were attacked by the military, he held to non-violence and forgiveness. Eventually India was granted independence, but not before Gandhi was assassinated for his non-violent stand: he had a cause which he was willing to die for.

Mohandas K. Gandhi led the people of India to independence through sacrifice, self-denial, civil disobedience, imprisonment, fasting, and always, the power of nonviolent love to all. He first learned the power of nonviolent action while fighting against racism in South Africa. In 1915 he returned to India to serve his people and fight for the rights of the poor and oppressed. After India was liberated in 1947 he tried to quell the violence between Muslims and Hindus that was tearing apart the new country, but was assassinated in 1948.

### **The Gospel of Nonviolence (excerpts)**

I am not a visionary. I claim to be a practical idealist. The religion of nonviolence is not meant merely for saints. It is meant for the common people as well. Nonviolence is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute. The spirit lies dormant in the brute and he knows no law but that of physical might. The dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law--to the strength of the spirit...

I have been a 'gambler' all my life. In my passion for finding truth and in relentlessly following out my faith in nonviolence, I have counted no stake too great...

Nonviolence is a power which can be wielded equally by all—children, young men and women, or grown-up people—provided they have a living faith in the God of Love and have therefore equal love for all mankind. When nonviolence is accepted as the law of life, it must pervade the whole being and not be applied to isolated acts.

My nonviolence does not admit of running away from danger and leaving dear ones unprotected. Between violence and cowardly flight, I can only prefer violence to cowardice. I can no more preach nonviolence to a coward than I can tempt a blind man to enjoy healthy scenes. Nonviolence is the summit of bravery. And in my own experience, I have had no difficulty in demonstrating to men trained in the school of violence the superiority of nonviolence. As a coward, which I was for years, I harboured violence. I began to prize nonviolence only when I began to shed cowardice.

## Breaking the Cycle of Violence: Teacher Info Sheet, Lesson 1

*Rev. Oommen, 84, is an Indian pastor who worked with Mahatma Gandhi and has devoted his life to serving the poor of India, particularly the tribal peoples. He lives in Vellore, where he works as a hospital chaplain. He wrote of Gandhi:*

[For Gandhi, non-violence] was not merely a political weapon but a philosophy of life. His whole life was dedicated to passive resistance and nonviolence—physically, mentally, and spiritually. Violence to him was a lie, a denial of truth.

Gandhi was transparent; there were no secrets with him. The police officer whose duty it was to watch him all the time and report to the authorities every move he made or planned to make in the political field, had the easiest of jobs, as Gandhi himself would call him and tell him all his plans in advance.

Gandhi's simplicity was also a reflection of his nonviolence, because he felt that if he used anything more than was absolutely necessary, he would be robbing from a poorer brother or sister. Thus, when the King of England insisted on seeing him, Gandhi said he would go to Buckingham Palace in his usual attire—"the half-naked fakir." When a journalist accosted him, asking him whether he did not feel ashamed, he replied promptly, "Your king is wearing more than double of what is needed, so I must go naked, as he has robbed me of my clothes."

Insistence on an hour of manual labour daily by all his numerous followers was another of his expressions of nonviolence. The immediate effect of this was to end India's dependence on British textiles, because of the production and use of khadi, the Indian homespun cloth. Gandhi taught that no one had the right to eat unless he had made himself one with the toiling masses, whose sweat and blood had produced the food.