

September 11, 2006: The 100th Anniversary of Satyagraha

On September 11th, 1906, Mahatma Gandhi and thousands of Indians took a pledge of nonviolence against the inhumane laws of the South African government, which marked the beginning of a century of nonviolent struggle. The birth of "Satyagraha" - holding fast to truth - has reverberated around the world as millions of people have utilized the philosophy and practice of nonviolence to create better human relationships and higher levels of freedom. According to Freedom House, dozens of countries have experienced nonviolent transitions to democracy (not to mention other forms of nonviolent struggle) in the last thirty years alone.

So, on September 11th, what should we do? To get us thinking, here are the plans and reflections of some nonviolent activists and one of our staff members:

Nonviolent Peaceforce

In addition to planning an immersion trip to India, Nonviolent Peaceforce supports the worldwide Work a Day for Peace campaign, which encourages participants to use the remembrance of the September 11, 2001 tragedy to educate others about the events of September 11, 1906 and to resolve to break the cycle of violence and reflect on the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. Visit: www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org for details.

Ela Gandhi

Ela Gandhi, Gandhi's granddaughter, tells us that many activities are being planned throughout 2006 in South Africa, including a conference on nonviolence from September 11-13. According to Ela, "Satyagraha has been recognised as the most formidable but also the best way of dealing with conflict whether in the home, in society or in International affairs." Visit: www.satyagraha.org.za for details.

Arun Gandhi

Since the actual anniversary falls on September 11 and since this date is so significant in the United States as the day of vicious violence we should celebrate it as a day of interfaith prayer with a difference. The difference being that all people of whatever persuasion in every neighborhood, village, town, and city come out into the town square at 12 noon and sing a prayer for peace according to all religions. That is Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Jews and



Mahatma Gandhi (2nd row, 3rd from left) with the leaders of the Nonviolent Resistance Movement in South Africa

whoever else is represented in that neighborhood come out and sing each other's prayer for peace led by their priests. Each must be allotted the same time and the same importance. The prayer will be for peace as well as for the souls who died of violence not only on that day but at all times. I think this is simple, doable, and it empowers the ordinary man/woman to participate in a small way to work for peace. It can be followed with a dedication to work for peace and harmony in every neighborhood.

Mohammed Yasin Malik, Chairman Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front

Formerly involved in armed struggle, Mr. Malik now follows Gandhi's teachings. He is conducting a nonviolent struggle on behalf of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, who want a voice in negotiations with India and Pakistan over the fate of the disputed region. He recently gathered over one million signatures on a petition demanding that the people's will be considered. Mr. Malik comments: "We who believe in nonviolence and Gandhi's philosophy of Ahimsa [nonviolence] have to rise and fight for the oppressed like Gandhi did. Indians killed thousands of my colleagues while they were running a nonviolent movement. I was provoked to go violent but I did not. I firmly stood by the principle of nonviolence and while doing so never shunned my struggle for freedom." (Full commentary available at www.calpeacepower.org)

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Yuri Tanaka, PeacePower

The 100th anniversary of Satyagraha gives us a chance to make a constructive change through the philosophy of Gandhi. In his words, "Satyagraha is a law of universal application. Beginning with the family, its use can be extended to every other circle," and it is an attribute of the spirit within. The action I propose is to start with an inner change in our mind and to be the "actor of love." That is, to get rid of all assumptions you have towards someone who you are not comfortable with or even hate and to engage in a dialogue with and ultimately love them. Developing a sense of compassion is also a key element. The ground rule is to act fearlessly whatever may occur. Say in a ringing voice, "Even if you disown me, I will devote my life to you." Try to remember that the person is worthy of respect. Then, we will never use violent words or action. As Gandhi noted, "A Satyagrahi loves his so-called enemy even as he loves his friend. He owns no enemy." Through these processes, a peaceful environment around us will be born. With the legacy of Gandhi, we can strive towards a peaceful world with love, fearlessness, and holding on to truth from within. The force of love is contagious.

For more about Satyagraha, visit blog.mettacenter.org, and search for "Satyagraha."