

VICTORY OVER VIOLENCE: ARUN GANDHI VISITS THE NATIONAL CIVIL RIGHTS MUSEUM

Arun Gandhi shared two key points for overcoming violence that he gained from the teachings of his grandfather, Mahatma Gandhi, when he was a child. First, we must understand and control our anger. Second, we must build meaningful relationships.

Excerpts from an article by Gertrude Moeller and Richard Sadler.

Many people think, “As long as I am not using physical force against people, I am non-violent.” Not true, says Arun Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi. “I learned very early in my life that we practice many kinds of violence...economic violence, social violence, gender violence, religious violence.... Unless we look at those different forms of violence and do something to change them, we are not going to be able to create peace and harmony in the world.”

Gandhi shared with us two key points for overcoming violence that he gained from his grandfather’s teaching when he was a child. First, we must understand and control our anger. Secondly, we must build meaningful relationships. He explained why most of us do not know how to do these things.

The materialism of our culture, says Gandhi, results in an animalistic “jungle law” mentality. We are selfish and greedy, so we get angry very quickly. Anger is very powerful — “as powerful as electricity” — but we are never taught how to channel and control it. In fact, few of us ever devote any time or thought to strengthening our minds and our self-control. This is the source of today’s violence and destructiveness. “Grandfather taught me that, just as we have been able to channel electricity and use it for the good of humanity, we must learn to channel anger effectively so that we can use it positively.”

Gandhi’s grandfather also gave him two practical ways to gain mental control over anger: a meditation exercise and the use of an anger journal. The meditation exercise is to focus completely on a pleasant object for one minute, then close your eyes and see how long you can clearly visualize the object. As you repeat this exercise and gain control over your mind’s ability to focus, Gandhi says, your mind becomes stronger and you will naturally gain control over your anger. Keeping an anger journal can be very helpful too, but only if you focus on its purpose — understanding the triggers to your anger and finding a solution. An anger journal is useless or harmful if all it does is help you feel angry all over again when you read it!

The second tool for developing a nonviolent way of life lies in our approach to building relationships. Gandhi says: “Today our relationships are very selfishly motivated. We are constantly thinking about the self and about what I am going to gain from the relationship. If I don’t stand to gain anything from it, then I’m not interested in it.” His grandfather told him, “Meaningful relationships are built on the four principles of respect, understanding, acceptance and appreciation.” To be truly effective, this respect must be extended not only to ourselves and to others but to nature and all of creation as well. Everybody and everything has a purpose, Gandhi says. When we accept that we are part of nature, and that each of us has an indispensable role in the social and natural machine, we will realize that we cannot disregard or discard anybody. We will appreciate each person and understand that no one is expendable. That is the true basis for a culture of nonviolence.

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Author: Gertrude Moeller and Richard Sadler

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