

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S RECENT ACTIVITIES

SGI PRESIDENT DISCUSSES NONVIOLENCE WITH ARUN GANDHI

SGI President Ikeda met with Arun Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, on July 14 at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji. Mr. Gandhi, cofounder and president of the M. K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence, shared memories of his grandfather and his determination to carry on his grandfather's spirit.

Stating his conviction that the thought and actions of Mahatma Gandhi constitute an invaluable and essential guide for leaders in the 21st century, President Ikeda said to Mr. Gandhi: "The spiritual torch that your grandfather lit has ignited many flames that together will eventually illuminate the entire world. And I am confident that our discussion today will add further to those flames."

Mr. Gandhi replied that realizing a world of peace and harmony is his goal and that of his institute. Toward that end, he is always reflecting on how his grandfather's "ray of light" can be kept alive. He added that, on a personal level, he has tried to gather together the light of his grandfather and use it as a guide by which to live his life and to develop himself as a human being.

Commending Mr. Gandhi's attitude, President Ikeda suggested that through such efforts he was carrying on the truth for which his grandfather had stood. The SGI leader paid tribute to what he called the unadorned humanity of Mahatma Gandhi, who had waged his struggle unbuttressed by weapons, material wealth, secular power or military forces and had always acted on his convictions.

Asserting that the Mahatma demonstrated a strength more powerful than millions of armed troops, the SGI president called him a truly great human being and a sage. Gandhi's actions arose from a towering spirit that encapsulated the lofty ideals of all humanity, he said, urging all leaders to study the thought of this peerless champion of truth and nonviolence.

Receiving training during one's youth is crucial.

Turning to his guest's grandson Amish, who also participated in the dialogue, President Ikeda noted that, at 17, he was the same age his great-grandfather Manilal was when Mahatma Gandhi was imprisoned. He said he understood that the young Manilal had received a letter from his father at that time describing how he occupied himself in prison by reading. The SGI leader related that Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the first Soka Gakkai president, had similarly spent his time in jail reading books on philosophy, right up until his death. (Makiguchi was imprisoned during World War II for his opposition to Japan's militarist government.)

In the letter to his son, Mahatma Gandhi also wrote that education does not consist of the accumulation of knowledge but rather of the cultivation of character and awareness of duty. Therefore, Gandhi continued, education in the true sense means training, adding that he was confident his son was receiving the best possible education or training.

President Ikeda told Amish he was most fortunate to be likewise receiving such education and training from his grandfather. Arun Gandhi agreed, confirming that, in the Gandhi family, education means training, and that this tradition has been handed down from one generation to the next. President Ikeda said that, based on his observations, receiving proper training during one's youth is of paramount importance.

To pretend you do not see evil is a form of violence.

Asked when he first met his grandfather, Mr. Gandhi explained that it was when he was only about 5 or 6 years old. He did not have clear memories of that meeting, he said, but when he was 10 years old, he went to live with his grandfather for a year and a half at an ashram in central India. The ashram was quiet and secluded, some 13 miles from the nearest town, and the dwellings were all made of mud and bamboo, with thatched roofs. Mahatma Gandhi's room was simple, furnished with only a desk and a small mat, he added.

Asked what he had learned from his grandfather during the time they spent together, Mr. Gandhi explained that the first thing was how to understand and utilize anger. Unless you understand your anger, it will become manifest as violence toward others or toward society, he said.

But when you understand anger, you gain self-control and can use it constructively. Calling these profound words, President Ikeda noted that Buddhism also teaches that anger has both good and evil functions. The important thing, he said, is the object toward which we direct our anger.

Continuing, Mr. Gandhi explained that the second lesson he received regarded people's tendency to resort to violence without even realizing it. He related how his grandfather had taught him this by making him draw a "family tree" of violence. The "parent violence" has two children: physical violence and passive violence.

Physical violence involves the use of physical force and includes both individual acts of violence and the mass violence of war. This kind of violence is easy to discern, Mr. Gandhi explained.

By contrast, passive violence is indirect, and people may find themselves a party to it without even being consciously aware of it. It may involve pressure, coercion, oppression and discrimination. Since it is not physical, he went on, it tends to be overlooked. Mr. Gandhi said that his grandfather had taught him that to overlook or pretend not to see evil is itself a form of violence.

President Ikeda commented that such an understanding of violence offers profound insight into human nature and points to important principles for conquering discrimination and guiding people toward harmony.

People need order in their lives to win.

Mentioning that the members of the ashram led well-ordered lives, rising early in the morning and retiring early at night, the SGI leader asked Mr. Gandhi if his grandfather had given him any advice on lifestyle.

Mr. Gandhi replied that his grandfather would constantly stress that one should be conscious of one's actions during every waking moment, and that there was no time to waste. He would say, for example, that you should live a life so well-ordered that if you were asked what you did yesterday during a particular hour, you could reply immediately.

Toward that end, Mr. Gandhi shared, they carefully planned out what they would do from when they woke up at 5:00 a.m. until the time they retired. This would of course include time for recreation, he added.

President Ikeda concurred that people need order in their lives, and that in the absence of order they tend to lose their way. While the word *order* may conjure lack of freedom, he insisted that this is not the case.

The SGI leader put it this way: "Lack of proper order in our lives can cause sickness or

make us veer off in a negative direction. There are rainy days and windy days, but the movement of the universe itself is perfectly ordered.

“Human life is part of the universe. Unless you lead a well-ordered life, you cannot live in harmony with the universe.”

He added that a well-ordered life begins with prayer: “How can a person who is incapable of solemn prayer possibly live in harmony with the universe?” Mr. Gandhi agreed, adding that unless one leads a properly regulated life, one cannot produce concrete results in life.

President Ikeda said he understood that Mahatma Gandhi had included Buddhist prayers in the devotional sessions that he conducted with members of the ashram each day, and he asked whether Mr. Gandhi recalled the sound of people chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Mr. Gandhi replied that he did.

In response to a question from the SGI leader on whether the Mahatma had spoken to him about Shakyamuni Buddha or Buddhism, Mr. Gandhi replied that, although his recollection was somewhat vague, he did remember his grandfather speaking about the Buddha—the Mahatma had constantly spoken to him about the great leaders of the world.

President Ikeda recalled a comment that Mr. Gandhi had made in a documentary shown in Japan on the human rights struggle of three generations of Gandhis. As an explanation of his approach in promoting the principles of nonviolence, Arun Gandhi said he would be satisfied if he could change the thinking of one person today, two people tomorrow and three people the following day. As each of these people began to do the same, society would steadily begin to change. The SGI leader clarified that this is the same principle behind the SGI movement, stating, “The human revolution of one person can change the entire world.”

President Ikeda said he understood that during the time that Arun Gandhi lived at the ashram with his grandfather, the 77-year-old Mahatma Gandhi traveled through villages where there had been intense fighting between Hindus and Muslims in an effort to bring an end to the conflict. “Going from one home to the next, Gandhi carried out dialogue with the villagers,” the SGI leader noted, adding that this life-or-death struggle is regarded as one of the most noble chapters in Mahatma Gandhi’s lifelong struggle for peace and human dignity.

He then asked his guest if there was something that particularly struck him about his grandfather from that time. Mr. Gandhi replied that his grandfather had single-handedly brought about peace by simply traveling from village to village and talking with people. He added that seeing his grandfather’s actions gave him the confidence that one person can create peace in the world.

President Ikeda then asked whether Mahatma Gandhi had been a strict or gentle grandfather. Saying that he had been deeply affectionate and gentle, Arun Gandhi revealed that his grandfather never asked other people to do things that he himself was reluctant to do—only after he had set an example would he encourage others to do likewise.

Mr. Gandhi next explained that every day without fail he and his grandfather would spend the hour between 5:00 and 6:00 p.m. together, adding that even when his grandfather had other important commitments beforehand, he would never be late.

They would sit down at a table and do various activities as grandfather and grandson. For example, they might have contests to see who was faster at spinning thread. He added that his grandfather, who was in fact the better spinner, wrote in a letter to Mr. Gandhi’s parents about how he was no match for his grandson.

Spinning thread by hand using a spinning wheel became symbolic of the movement for Indian independence that Gandhi was advancing. At a time when the British had made it a goal of their colonial policy to undermine rural handicrafts, spinning thread came to symbolize the revival of domestic industry and the principle of self-reliance, a core tenant of Gandhi's philosophy. Gandhi himself used to spin each day.

Mr. Gandhi added that while performing such activities, they would talk. His grandfather might ask him about what he did that day or if there was something he did not understand in his studies.

Also, his grandfather might recount his experiences or relate a traditional story. The discussion would always include some kind of lesson, he added.

President Ikeda said he had heard about how as a child Arun had asked Mahatma Gandhi how long he wanted to live, and that in reply his grandfather had said: "I want to live to 125! Because it will take me that long to accomplish everything I want to do!" The SGI president observed that while people generally scoff at the notion that one could live to 125, a number of Buddhist texts expound a human life span of around 120 years.

President Ikeda also took this occasion to thank Arun Gandhi for his support of various SGI activities over the years. In addition to attending the SGI World Peace Youth Culture Festival in Nagoya, Japan, in 1998, and the SGI-USA's Youth Culture Festival in Los Angeles last year, Mr. Gandhi has spoken at Soka University of America, Calabasas in 1996 and 1998 and at the SGI-USA's Denver Culture Center earlier this year. He has also been involved in the SGI-USA youth's Victory Over Violence project.

A leader with the true spirit to serve others will be respected even by rivals.

Mr. Ikeda acknowledged that Arun Gandhi's father, Manilal, was also an active proponent of nonviolence and struggled to bring an end to racial discrimination in South Africa. He spent 16 years in prison for this cause.

When Mahatma Gandhi returned to India, he entrusted his son with the task of carrying on the struggle in South Africa. Manilal also put a great deal of energy into the newspaper that his father had founded. Arun Gandhi added that from around the age of 10, he started to help Manilal print the newspaper, which had to be typeset by hand and printed manually one page at a time.

His father had two great difficulties to contend with, Mr. Gandhi said. One was government suppression. The government wanted to censor the content of the newspaper, but his father absolutely refused to comply. Second, without anyone to provide financial backing for the paper, his father had to work very hard to raise funds to keep the paper operating.

Describing the ridicule and abuse he often met with in the course of promoting subscriptions for the newspaper, Mr. Gandhi recounted how his father, after listening to his complaints, encouraged him to direct his attention to kind people without worrying about those who were rude or unpleasant. His father told him, "For every unkind person, there are 10 people who are kind."

Praising the wisdom of Mr. Gandhi's father, President Ikeda commented on the need to "light a flame" in the hearts of young people. "If at that time your father had instead joined you in becoming angry or depressed, then the two of you might have headed toward

defeat,” he said. “With these few words, your father guided both of you toward victory.”

Wrapping things up, President Ikeda said that he wants to convey to today’s leaders Mahatma Gandhi’s thoughts on leadership, which could be paraphrased as follows: “A leader who just orders others around while failing to show people any genuine consideration will not accomplish anything. But when a leader has the spirit to serve others, then even rivals will treat him with deference and respect.”

Expressing concern over the direction of modern society, the SGI leader said he believed that exposure to Mahatma Gandhi’s spirit could help put humankind back on the right track. He then cited a number of Gandhi’s quotes on various themes:

On faith and character:

- In faith there is no room for despair.
- Fear vanishes only with the annihilation of the ego.
- Do not listen to rumor, but, if you do, do not believe it.
- Character, not brains, will count at the crucial moment.
- Life spent in service is the only fruitful life.
- Selfless action is a source of strength.
- Adversity is the crucible in which friendship is tested.
- The soul dries up without the company of the good.

On courage:

- To be courageous is the foremost requirement for spirituality. A coward cannot be moral.
- There is no sin like cowardice.
- Cowards have no sense of justice.
- Nobody progresses without opposition.

On education:

- Education of children starts with the moment of their birth. Therefore you must always bear in mind that parents are the greatest educators.
- Education which does not mold character is absolutely worthless.

We must carry on in Mahatma Gandhi’s footsteps.

Amish Gandhi said that while living with his own grandfather, he had learned many of the principles that the SGI leader had cited. Describing how Arun Gandhi has traveled the world spreading the Mahatma’s teaching of nonviolence, Amish said that he hoped to follow the same path.

President Ikeda urged the young man to carry on in his grandfather’s footsteps, calling this a most noble aspiration. The SGI leader added that he was similarly determined to spread Mahatma Gandhi’s message of nonviolence throughout the world. In response to a question about his grandmother, Sunanda Gandhi (Arun Gandhi’s wife and cofounder of the M. K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence), Amish related that, in addition to helping with her husband’s work, she has begun to undertake research on Mahatma Gandhi’s wife, Kasturbai.

Kenyan University professor Dr. Henry Indangashi, who was also present at the meeting, contributed that Mahatma Gandhi is also well known in Kenya, which has a large Indian population. He noted that in the 1950s, Kenya's Indian community was greatly inspired by Gandhi, as they joined in the struggle against colonial rule. Dr. Indangashi explained that studying the works of Tolstoy in college had piqued his interest in Gandhi. He described learning of how Tolstoy had influenced Gandhi, and how Gandhi had in turn influenced the American Civil Rights Movement. Dr. Indangashi characterized this as a "spiritual chain reaction."

In closing, President Ikeda expressed his hopes for Arun Gandhi's success in spreading Mahatma Gandhi's teachings around the globe, adding, "Please remember that there is a disciple of the great Mahatma Gandhi here in Japan, too."