UNFORGETTABLE FRIENDS FROM AROUND THE WORLD
ARUN GANDHI—PRESIDENT OF THE M. K. GANDHI INSTITUTE FOR NONVIOLENCE
BY SGI PRESIDENT DAISAKU IKEDA

In this series, SGI President Ikeda has recorded his impressions of the many friends he has made in his travels for peace. In his New Year's poem in the January issue, he states: "I will continue to knock on the doors / Of diverse cultures and civilizations, / Seeking out the humanity that is vibrantly alive / At the heart of each, / Believing that sincere dialogue/In search of our shared humanity / Will build a rainbow bridge linking the world."

It is a story of more than a hundred years of struggle, a legacy that has been passed down for three generations, from grandfather to son to grandson.

I met Arun Gandhi, the grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, and his wife Sunanda last November at the Eighteenth World Peace Youth Culture Festival. They came all the way to the Nagoya Dome, and they applauded the festival enthusiastically. "It's unbelievable, incredible!" said Mr. Gandhi. "If my grandfather and father were alive to see this culture festival, I am certain they would be just as impressed as I am."

"All of these young people you see here today," I replied, "are studying your grandfather's philosophy. Leaders all around the world should learn from his struggle."

I don't respect Mr. Gandhi because he is the grandson of Mahatma Gandhi. I respect him because he has inherited his grandfather's struggle for human rights and devoted himself energetically to it. Mr. Gandhi was born, not in India, but in South Africa. His father was Mahatma Gandhi's second son, Manilal Gandhi. Manilal remained in South Africa as his father's successor after the latter returned to India.

At the time, Manilal was only twenty-three years old. He was alone in South Africa, a place where racism and violence raged. Mahatma Gandhi, who had formerly led the nonviolent movement to end discrimination, was no longer there. Manilal's struggle in South Africa was unutterably difficult, and he spent a total of some sixteen years in prison.

In addition, the black Africans, who should have allied themselves with his cause, criticized nonviolence as too idealistic. But isolated and alone as he was, Manilal stayed true to his beliefs. For him, nonviolence was a way of life, not merely a strategy that could change with circumstances; the essence of nonviolence was that all change had to begin with oneself.

When Arun was sixteen, he drove his father to a town about eighteen miles away from home. His father was to attend a meeting, while Arun shopped and had some car repairs done. The youth finished his shopping quickly and then made arrangements to have the car serviced. There was still plenty of time before he had to pick up his father, so he slipped into a movie theater.

"I got so engrossed in the film," Mr. Gandhi recalls, "that when I finally noticed the time, I was thirty minutes late to pick my father up. I ran to get the car and rushed to the place we had arranged to meet. He was waiting anxiously. I blithely told him that the repairs had taken longer than expected, and the garage had kept me waiting. But he had already contacted the garage, and he knew I was lying. He didn't scold me. He said, 'There's something wrong in the way I brought you up that didn't give you the confidence to tell me the truth, that you felt you had to lie to me.' And he said that he would walk home, so that he could reflect upon where he had gone wrong in my upbringing."

It was already dark, and there were no streetlights. Fields of sugarcane stretched out on both sides of the road, which was rough and unpaved. His father walked on silently, and there was nothing for the young Arun to do but follow him slowly in the car, the headlights lighting his

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steps. It took five-and-a-half hours to get home — hours that seemed like an eternity.

Arun Gandhi remarked that when he saw his father going through all that agony because of a lie that he had uttered, he decided he would never tell a lie again. He also commented that if his father had simply scolded him, he might just have shrugged his shoulders and done the same thing again. He said that his father's nonviolent punishment was so effective that whenever he talks or thinks about this incident even now, almost fifty years later, he still gets goose bumps.

Arun Gandhi also learned valuable lessons from his grandfather. When he was twelve years old, he was sent to India to live with him. This had been prompted by violent attacks that had been made on the young Arun in his hometown in South Africa. One day, he was beaten up by a group of white youths because they didn't like the color of his skin; several months later, he was beaten up by a group of black youths for the same reason.

Wanting to exact "eye-for-an-eye" justice, he decided to make himself strong and take his revenge. He even started weight training. When his parents saw what was happening, they sent him to his grandfather in India, who said to him, "Anger is like electricity. If we abuse it, it can be destructive; if we use it intelligently, it can be a very good and powerful source of energy. Instead of being controlled by anger, we must learn to control it and use it in our efforts to benefit humanity."

Nichiren Daishonin also said, "Anger can be both good and bad." Mahatma Gandhi had his grandson keep an "anger journal," not with the intention of keeping that anger alive, but with the intention of finding a solution to the problems that angered him.

On another occasion, Arun threw away a pencil that had grown short with use. That night he asked his grandfather for a new one, but his grandfather told him to bring him the one he had discarded. It was pitch black outside. Though Arun protested that it would be impossible to find the pencil, he was given a flashlight and told to look for it. It took two or three hours, but he finally found it.

He related that his grandfather said to him: "Even making a simple thing like a pencil takes a lot of the world's natural resources. When we throw it away, we are throwing away the world's natural resources, and that is violence against nature. In affluent societies, where things can be bought in bulk, we buy and use products indiscriminately. Therefore, we over-consume the natural resources of the world, denying them to people elsewhere who live in poverty. And that equates to violence against humanity."

The inheritance of a spirit is more important than ties of blood. It is the true proof of our humanity. After the death of his father Manilal, Arun Gandhi and his wife Sunanda worked for three decades in India assisting members of the "untouchable" class and orphans. In 1987, they moved to the United States. On his visa application, in the box for "race," Arun Gandhi wrote "human being."

When people lose hope, they turn to violence. This is why Arun Gandhi has dedicated himself to bringing hope to young people in the United States and teaching the doctrine of nonviolence. He has faced obstructions and threats. Inheriting the legacy of great champions of justice means inheriting the persecutions they endured as well. But this does not stop Arun Gandhi; his efforts have been tireless.

His grandfather was felled by an assassin's bullet; his father's life was shortened by torture in prison. Says Mr. Gandhi: "My father could have lived a comfortable life if he had gone along with the government, but remaining silent in the face of injustice is lending support to that injustice. My father never compromised his beliefs to the very end, and he lives in my heart as an eternal victor. I am fighting, too. Though my own struggle may be as insignificant as a dewdrop, I am determined to give it my all and press forward, one step at a time!"

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