

COMMUNITY HEALTH CELL



THOUGHTS
FOR THE
GANDHI CENTENARY YEAR

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ABBREVIATIONS THAT APPEAR IN THE TEXT

ABP — The Amrit Bazar Patrika

GC — Gandhiji's Correspondence with Government, 1942-44

H — The Harijan

NV — The Nation's Voice

YI — Young India

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THOUGHTS FOR THE GANDHI CENTENARY YEAR

As we prepare ourselves for the opening of the Gandhi Centenary year, AICUF invites its members to study, read and discuss the life and works of Mahatma Gandhi. The memory of this great socio-political leader of our country has been dimmed, perhaps, by time; and the principles that proved so effective and dynamic in shaping the destiny of our country during those historic years of our freedom struggle, have been obscured, somewhat, by the practical problems that our young nation has had to face in its growth and development along the lines of modern scientific and industrial progress.

Yet we who are young, and belong to a completely different age, cannot afford to forget Gandhiji. Rather, the ideals he stood for are of value even today, and we would do well to return to these well-springs of thought and of action as we visualise and hammer out our own contribution towards the building up of our country.

Below after an introductory paper on The Spirit of Gandhiji, we offer you a selection of Gandhiji's thoughts under four main titles. We invite you to reflect on them, and to examine, individually or in groups their relevance to our own lives today.

A. THE SPIRIT OF MAHATMA GANDHI



Let us have the strength to follow the path of truth and love which he would have had us follow . . . May God have mercy on us all and give us the strength to be true to Bapu and thus build up the India of his dreams.

— RAJKUMARI AMRIT KAUR.

. . . The light which led us to freedom, though not yet to unity, still burns and will burn till it conquers. I believe firmly that a great and united future is the destiny of the nation and its people. The power that brought us through so much struggle and suffering to freedom . . . will bring us to unity.

— SRI AUROBINDO.

In this hour of national dislocation let us try and pay humble homage to his sacred memory by remembering and practising his eternal gospel of Truth and non-violence, and rededication to the service of India even as he has served.

— DR. SYUD HUSSAIN.

We have to behave like strong and determined people, determined to face all perils that surround us, determined to carry out the mandate that our great teacher and our great leader has given us, remembering always that if, as I believe, his spirit looks upon us and sees us, nothing would displease his soul so much as to see we have indulged in any small behaviour or any violence.

— PANDIT NEHRU.

Yet one should be permitted to indulge the hope and utter the prayer that, through the supreme sacrifice, Mr. Gandhi may have accelerated the achievements of those ideals for which his whole life was dedicated.

— SIR M. ZAFRULLAH KHAN.

1. These quotations are all excerpts from messages of respect and admiration that were written or spoken on the occasion of Gandhiji's death, 20 years ago. Which of these would you say is particularly appropriate today ?
2. If the Mahatma were to walk through your city today, what do you think would strike him, favourably ? or unfavourably ? and what of the whole country : would he be happy in India today ? Why or why not ?

3. What do you think would be his message to university students were he to speak to them today ?
4. Suppose you could put a question to him now. What would your question be ?

B. GANDHI : MAN OF RELIGIOUS IDEALS AND MORAL INTEGRITY

I am but a poor struggling soul yearning to be wholly good—wholly truthful and wholly non-violent in thought, word and deed ; but ever failing to reach the ideal which I know to be true. It is a painful climb but the pain of it is a positive pleasure to me. Each step upward makes me feel stronger and fit for the next. (YI, 9-4-25, 126)

I am impatient to realize the presence of my Maker, who to me embodies Truth and in the early part of my career I discovered that if I was to realize Truth, I must obey, even at the cost of my life, the law of love. (NV. 319)

We are born to serve our fellowmen, and we cannot properly do so unless we are wide awake. There is an eternal struggle raging in man's breast between the powers of darkness and of light, and he who has not the sheet-anchor of prayer to rely upon will be a victim of darkness. The man of prayer will be at peace with himself and with the whole world, the man who goes about the affairs of the world without a prayerful heart will be miserable and will make the world also miserable. (YI, 23-1-30, 26)

1. What do these extracts tell you about Gandhiji's religious and moral aspirations ?
2. To what extent do moral and spiritual ideals contribute towards sustained and effective leadership ? Are they essential ? Are they a hindrance ? What do we learn from Gandhiji's life in this connection ?
3. What is the general opinion regarding the moral calibre of our present leaders and administrators ? What basis

is there for the opinion you offer? Could this have any consequences for the progress and well-being of our country? What steps would you suggest for any necessary improvement? Be practical.

Man's ultimate aim is the realization of God, and all his activities, social, political, religious, have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God. The immediate service of all human beings becomes a necessary part of the endeavour simply because the only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and be one with it. This can only be done by service of all. I am a part and parcel of the whole, and I cannot find Him apart from the rest of humanity. My countrymen are my nearest neighbours. They have become so helpless, so resourceless, so inert that I must concentrate myself on serving them. If I could persuade myself that I should find Him in an Himalayan cave I would proceed there immediately. But I know that I cannot find Him apart from humanity. (H, 29-8-36, 226)

It is better to allow our lives to speak for us than our words. God did not bear the Cross only 1,000 years ago, but He bears it today, and he dies and is resurrected from day to day. It would be poor comfort to the world if it had to depend upon a historical God who died 2,000 years ago. Do not then preach the God of history, but show Him as He lives today through you. (YI, 11-8-27, 251)

4. What does a spiritual life mean to most of us students? To Christian students? To Hindu students? To others?
5. Do you think that a person who is deeply spiritual should be concerned with the world around him; to fight for justice? . . . to improve living conditions? . . . to restore and safeguard the dignity of the human person? to enter the fields of science and technology, politics economics and sociology, and work for the common good with a sense of mission? . . . What about culture and entertainment?

As soon as we lose the moral basis, we cease to be religious. There is no such thing as religion overriding morality. Man for instance cannot be untruthful, cruel and incontinent, and claim to have God on his side. (YI, 24-11-21, 385)

True economics never militates against the highest ethical standard, just as all true ethics to be worth its name, must at the same time be also good economics. An economics that inculcates Mammon worship, and enables the strong to amass wealth at the expense of the weak is a false and dismal science. It spells death. True economics on the other hand, stands for social justice, it promotes the good of all equally, including the weakest, and is indispensable for decent life. (H. 19-10-37, 292)

6. How are we to solve the dilemma that seems to arise when we apply the principles of moral good to the problem of the good of the masses? What was Gandhiji's contribution?
7. Do you think young people nowadays set a high value on a moral and spiritual life? Give reasons for your answer. What, for instance, is their attitude towards examinations, public property or amenities, foreign goods, leisure time, the world of fashion and entertainment, the opposite sex . . . ?
8. What practical steps would you suggest to improve matters? How could an improved moral tone be conducive towards raising the living standards of our people?

C. THE APOSTLE OF NON-VIOLENCE



It takes a fairly strenuous course of training to attain to a mental state of non-violence. In daily life, it has to

be a course of discipline though one may not like it, like, for instance, the life of a soldier. But I agree that, unless there is a hearty co-operation of the mind, the mere outward observance will be simply a mask, harmful both to the man himself and to others. The perfect stage is reached only when mind and body and speech are in proper coordination. But it is always a case of intense mental struggle. It is not that I am incapable of anger, for instance. But I succeed almost on all occasions to keep my feelings under control. (My Philosophy of Life, p. 25)

From this concrete discription of 'non-violence' we can gain some insight into the reality of what it means to live by this philosophy of life. It is not just a technique, a means of redressing wrongs, a quiet way of getting what one wants. It is a way of life. An aesceticism. A discipline. And from its practice comes an inner strength to meet life's testings, whether from within or without.

1. What is your opinion about such a 'way of life': do you think it (a) a good idea? (b) important? (c) indispensable? (d) all right for those who like or have the temperament for that sort of thing? (e) deserving of deep study and understanding? Please give reasons for the answer you choose.
2. Is this way of life 'practical' (a) in general — even in Gandhiji's day was it practical? (b) Is it relevant today — in the context of widespread demonstrations and strikes? especially in the student world where those who lead are those who can gather a 'force'? Please explain how or how not.

Non-violence is a weapon of the strong. With the weak, it might easily be hypocrisy. Fear and love are contradictory terms. Love is reckless in giving away, oblivious as to what it gets in return. Love wrestles with the world as with itself, and ultimately gains a mastery over all other feelings. My daily experience, as of those who are working with me, is that every problem lends itself to solution if we are determined to make the law of truth and non-violence the law of life. (*Ibid.*)

3. Would you agree with the first statement in this para? Kindly state your reasons for agreeing or disagreeing.

4. What is the meaning of the second sentence : how could it be hypocrisy ?
5. Can you give some instances, at least one, from your own experience (people you have known, seen) or from what you have heard or seen, that would exemplify the ideas about love and its dynamism in this excerpt ?
6. Can you think of any passage from the New Testament that you feel carries the same message ? Please quote, at least context.

'The movement he served with such eloquence and zeal was beginning to pass him by, and non-violence to many black militants had come to seem naive, outmoded, even suicidal.'

This is a statement about Martin Luther King and his movement, from *Time Magazine*, the issue that reported his death.

7. What would you say of that statement ? Would it echo in any way, do you think, the criticism of the Civil Disobedience Movement in the 30's by many of the Mahatma's adversaries in the Indian Liberation Movement ?
8. Does the Mahatma's way seem relevant today in India, to achieve the goals that require revolutionary changes ?



D. HARD WORK, SELF-RELIANCE & SOCIAL SERVICE

God created man to work for his food, and said that those who ate without work were thieves. (YI, 15-10-21, 325)

Intellectual work is important and has an undoubted place in the scheme of life. But what I insist on is the necessity of physical labour. No man, I claim, ought to be free from that obligation. It will serve to improve

even the quality of his intellectual output. (H, 25-2-47, 36)

The education that you receive today is paid for by the starving villagers who will never have the chance of such an education. It is your duty to refuse to have an education that is not within the reach of the poor; but I do not ask that of you today. I ask you to render a slight return to the poor by doing a little yajna for them. For he who eats without doing his yajna steals his food, says the Gita. (YI, 20-1-27/22).

To a people famishing and idle, the only acceptable form in which God can dare appear is work and promise of food as wages. (YI, 13-10-21, 325).

1. What percentage of students, do you think, really merit a place in College? Is it true to say that more and more students just *drift into* school and college and, hence, have hardly any sense of mission and responsibility in the matter of their studies towards the economic progress of their country and the betterment of the uneducated masses? Suggest three ways to improve the situation. In the present state of affairs, would the peasants and labourers who form the vast majority, be justified in demanding that the public funds be directed towards their own self-improvement?

What are the civil resisters thus freed to do if they are to be ready for the call whenever it comes? They must learn the art and the beauty of self-denial and voluntary poverty. They must engage themselves in nation-building activities, the spread of khaddar through personal hand-spinning and hand-weaving, the spread of communal unity of hearts by irreproachable personal conduct towards one another in every walk of life, the banishing of untouchability in every shape or form in one's own person, the spread of total abstinence from intoxicating drinks and drugs, by personal purity. These are services which provide maintenance on the poor man's scale. (ABP, 8-4-34.)

Self-government means continuous effort to be independent of Government control whether it is foreign government or whether it is national. Swaraj government will be a sorry affair if people look up to it for the regulation of every detail of life. (YI, 6-8-25, 276)

2. The above quotations imply a very great spirit of self-reliance, both personal as well as national. Is this too idealistic a picture? Were people and leaders closer to it in Gandhi's time? What are the causes for the change? How could the process be reversed?
3. How many young educated people, do you think, would have the spirit that Gandhi expected of his civil resisters? Do we still need such persons today? Give reasons. In this context what would you have to say of the large number of our trained and skilled scholars, scientists and technicians who migrate to other countries? Suggest some means to solve this problem.

In 1901, Gandhi was a young lawyer with 10 years of experience in India and South Africa, after being 'called to the Bar' in 1891, following his law studies in London. He had made his non-violent stand for justice and served in the medical corps during the Boer War in South Africa, and had established himself as a courageous civilian and a perfectly honest and meticulous lawyer. He describes an incident that took place at this time.

There were yet two days for the Congress Session (of 1901 in Calcutta) to begin. I had made up my mind to offer my services to the Congress Office in order to gain some experience. So as soon as I had finished the daily ablutions on arrival at Calcutta, I proceeded to the Congress Office.

Babu Bhupendranath Basu and Sjt. Ghosal were the Secretaries. I went to Bhupenbabu and offered my services. He looked at me, and said: 'I have no work, but possibly Ghosalbabu might have something to give you. Please go to him'.

So, I went to him! He scanned me and said with a smile: 'I can give you only clerical work. Will you do it?'

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‘Certainly,’ I said, ‘I am here to do anything that is not beyond my capacity.’

‘That is the right spirit, young man,’ he said. Addressing the volunteers who surrounded him, he added, ‘Do you hear what this young man says?’

Then turning to me he proceeded: ‘Well, then, here is a heap of letters for disposal. Take that chair and begin... Most of these letters have nothing in them, but you will please look through them. Acknowledge those that are worth it, and refer to me those that need a considered reply.’

I was delighted at the confidence reposed in me.

Sjt. Ghosal did not know me when he gave me the work. Only later did he enquire about my credentials.

I found my work very easy—the disposal of that heap of correspondence. I had done with it in no time, and Sjt. Ghosal was very glad. . . . When he learnt something from me about my history, he felt rather sorry to have given me clerical work. But I reassured him: ‘Please don’t worry. What am I before you? You have grown grey in the service of the Congress, — and are an elder to me. I am but an inexperienced youth. You have put me under a debt of obligation by entrusting me with this work. For I want to do Congress work, and you have given me the rare opportunity of understanding the details.’

‘To tell you the truth,’ said Sjt. Ghosal, ‘that is the proper spirit. But young men of today do not realize it. Of course I have known the Congress since its birth...’ (Autobiography, Ch. XIV, Pt. III.)

4. Would Gandhi’s reaction be a common one among present day graduates? or students? Do you think his example worth following? Do you find similar opportunities for service in everyday college life? Name a few.

5. Are social service projects and work-camps popular with the students of your college? How many show interest? What other activities could you suggest to involve students with the poor and the needy?
6. Merit prizes and scholarships are annually awarded on the basis of hard work, competence and proficiency in examinations. Would we be justified particularly in the context of a developing country like ours, in expecting such students to fulfil a further requirement: participation in some form of social work or service towards those less fortunate than themselves so that intelligence could be seen as a human ability *meant for service*?

E. NATIONAL FREEDOM AND POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT



We must be content to die if we cannot live as free men and women. (YI, 5-1-22, 5)

There is no such thing as slow freedom. Freedom is like a birth. Till we are fully free, we are slaves. All birth takes place in a moment. (YI, 9-3-22, 149)

The true building up of Swaraj consists in the millions of India, wholeheartedly working the constructive programme. Without it, the whole nation cannot rise from its age-long torpor. Whether the British remain or not, it is our duty always to wipe out unemployment, to bridge the gulf between the rich and the poor, to banish communal strife, to exorcise the demon of untouchability, to reform decoits and save the people from them. If crores of people do not take a living interest in this nation-building work, freedom must remain a dream and unattainable by either non-violence or violence. (GC. 354)

I am not interested in freeing India merely from the English yoke. I am bent upon freeing India from any yoke whatsoever. I have no desire to exchange 'king log for king stork'. Hence for me the movement of Swaraj is a movement of self-purification. (YI, 12-6-24, 195)

The reforms required are more from within than from without. A perfect constitution super-imposed upon a rotten internal condition will be like a whited sepulchre. (YI, 24-6-26, 226)

1. Were Gandhi living today, would he be satisfied at the kind of freedom we have achieved and now enjoy? Would he look for something more? Could you enumerate these further aims, and suggest how he would have set about pursuing them?
2. If today we experience various curbs and limitations on our freedom, do these arise from the selfishness and ill-will of our leaders and administrators or from our own misunderstanding of the meaning of freedom? Are there any circumstances beyond our control? What are they? How are we to inculcate in ourselves and others true ideas and correct notions about freedom, and the proper and effective means to achieve it?

Swaraj can never be a free gift by one nation to another. It is a treasure to be purchased with a nation's best blood. Swaraj will be the fruit of incessant labour, suffering beyond measure. (YI, 5-1-22, 4)

Surely Swaraj will not drop from the clouds. It will be the fruit of patience, perserverance, ceaseless toil, courage and an intelligent appreciation of the environment. (YI, 27-8-25, 297)

I do not believe in armed risings. They are a remedy worse than the disease sought to be cured. They are a token of the spirit of revenge and impatience and anger. The method of violence cannot be good in the long run. . . . We have a better method. Unlike that of violence it certainly involves the exercise of restraint and patience: but

it requires also resoluteness of will. This method is to refuse to be party to the wrong. (YI, 9-6-20) . . . Our non-cooperation refers not so much to the paralysis of a wicked government as to our being proof against wickedness. It aims therefore not at destruction but at construction. It deals with causes rather than with symptoms. (YI, 19-1-21, 19)

3. The passages we have just read clearly indicate Gandhi's mind on the means he advocates for the achievement and maintenance of true freedom. Are these means popular with present day students? How effective and practical would they be? What steps could we take to inculcate these ideas in the minds of our fellow students?
4. In resorting more frequently to a method of redressing grievances, real or imagined, that is alien to Gandhiji and our national character, would we perhaps be gradually playing ourselves into the hands of evil forces and find ourselves in the shackles of another, and newer form of slavery? Is it true to say that the better educated and more enlightened student population is being gradually mesmerised, misled and misguided by the clever and loud-mouthed, yet false, leaders of a mass more blind and ignorant than themselves? What are we to do about this? Outline the steps we should take to protect our true freedom.
5. Were we students to devote the next five minutes to 'an intelligent appreciation of the environment: what problems could we uncover that would be a challenge to our patient, persevering and ceaseless toil' in a constructive way? Is it possible to select one or other of these for immediate attention?

I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the culture of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. I would have our young men and women with literary tastes to learn as much of English and other world languages as they like, and then expect them to give the benefits of their learning to India and to the world like a Bose, a Roy, or the Poet (Tagore) himself. But I would not have

a single Indian to forget, neglect or be ashamed of his mother tongue, or to feel that he or she cannot think or express the best thoughts in his or her own vernacular. Mine is not a religion of the prison-house. (YI, 1-6-21, 170)

If that provincial spirit fired every province, to whom could India belong? He held that the people of all the provinces belonged to India and India belonged to all. The only condition was that no one could go and settle in another province to exploit it or rule it or to injure its interest in any way. All were servants of India, and they lived only in the spirit of service. (H, 7-9-47, 311)

6. Name three problems that India has to face in maintaining her internal unity and progress? Take them one by one, and suggest practical measures that would enable us to solve them.
7. Do you think regionalism could prove dangerous to our national unity? To what extent is it good; to what, harmful? How and by whom are certain narrow and derisive attitude created and sustained? Could the youth of our country keep themselves clear of these attitudes? Suggest some practical means by which we of the younger generation could counteract these harmful forces, and contribute positively towards national integration and harmony.
8. There are some who feel that the political field is now left clear to the action of the worldly-wise and experienced, but in fact selfish, ignorant and blundering section of the older generation. Ages ago, the Greek tyrant Pericles wrote 'When a man takes no part in public affairs, we think of him not as a man who minds his own business, but as one who is good for nothing.' Could it be that we students rather selfishly seek our own financial security in administrative, teaching or business professions, to the detriment of the kind of politics and government that would ensure the happiness of our people? What are the principles we draw from Gandhiji's life on this point? To what extent should students engage in active politics right now?