



Nonviolence Or Nonexistence – Gandhi for the 21st Century

By **ARUN GANDHI**

Arun Gandhi is the fifth grandson of India's late spiritual leader Mohandas Karamchand "Mahatma" Gandhi.

I recall when I came to India as a young boy 12 years old in 1946 because I had suffered a lot of humiliation in South Africa – racial humiliation. At the young age of 10, I was beaten up by some black youths. And both times because they didn't like the color of my skin. I was furious. I wanted to grow up and be strong and beat everybody back again. The usual eye-for-an-eye theory. And I think that when my parents decided that it was time to go to India and give me an opportunity to live with Grandfather, hopefully learning something from him. I'm ever grateful to them for having taken that decision. Because I think in many ways, the 18 months that I spent with Grandfather at that age laid the foundations of my understanding of his philosophy of nonviolence as I grew up. I had the added advantage of having parents who had dedicated themselves to the philosophy of nonviolence. They worked in South Africa all their lives fighting apartheid in a nonviolent way.

When I went to India at that age with all that anger pent up in me, the first lesson that Grandfather taught me was how to deal with anger. And he did it so beautifully, he explained it in such simple terms even for a young person to understand.

The profoundness of his philosophy of nonviolence: it's not just the non-use of physi-

cal force, as we assume. It's much more. It's an attitude, a way of life. The best way to understand it is to understand violence, to understand that we practice violence in two basic forms. There is the physical form, physical violence – the murders, rapes, killings, wars. All the physical manifestations of violence that we see in life. And there is the passive violence that we practice all the time – the hate, the anger, the prejudices, the oppressions, suppression for economic reasons, social, political, cultural. All these little things that we practice in our lives – the passive violence. The exclusivity that we practice. For one reason or another we are excluding people from our life. It is that which causes anger and the anger then results in physical violence.

Gandhi described his philosophy as **Satyagraha**. It's a combination of two words: **Saty** meaning truths and **Agraha** in one sense meaning false. I say one sense because the common translation of the word **Satyagraha** is truth/false. That is the literal translation. But I don't think that is what Gandhi meant.

He believed that nobody really knows the truths. We have to search for them. Life is one long search for Truths. So I translate his **Satyagraha** to mean the pursuit of truths, not truth/falsehood.

The fourth aspect of his philosophy was **Swaraj**. Now that again is a combination of two words – **Swa** meaning self and **Raj** meaning freedom. This has been translated to mean freedom in the political sense. He felt that we could gain our

political freedom and yet not be totally free. We can see that today, we here in the US who claim to have our independence. We have it only in the political sense, not in the economic sense, not in the cultural sense.

Gandhi used to believe that many of us had the ambitions of changing the whole world. And when we realized that we couldn't achieve it, we would give up and do nothing about it. And that is a tragedy because we may not be able to change the whole world but we can certainly change ourselves, and change people around us. And when we begin to do that, the world will take care of itself.

I'm not here to suggest to you that his philosophy is the only philosophy that we should look at. There are many other philosophies, there are many other nonviolent ways in which we can deal with issues. We should have an open mind to all of this. And that was one other lesson that I learned from him. He said your mind should always be like a room with many open windows. Let the breeze flow in from all the windows, but refuse to be blown away by any one of them. And that is what I would urge all of you to do today. Keep an open mind. Discuss this without anger and emotions and let us see how we can incorporate all these philosophies into our lives and how we can bring about a change so that we don't carry this garbage of violence into the next century.

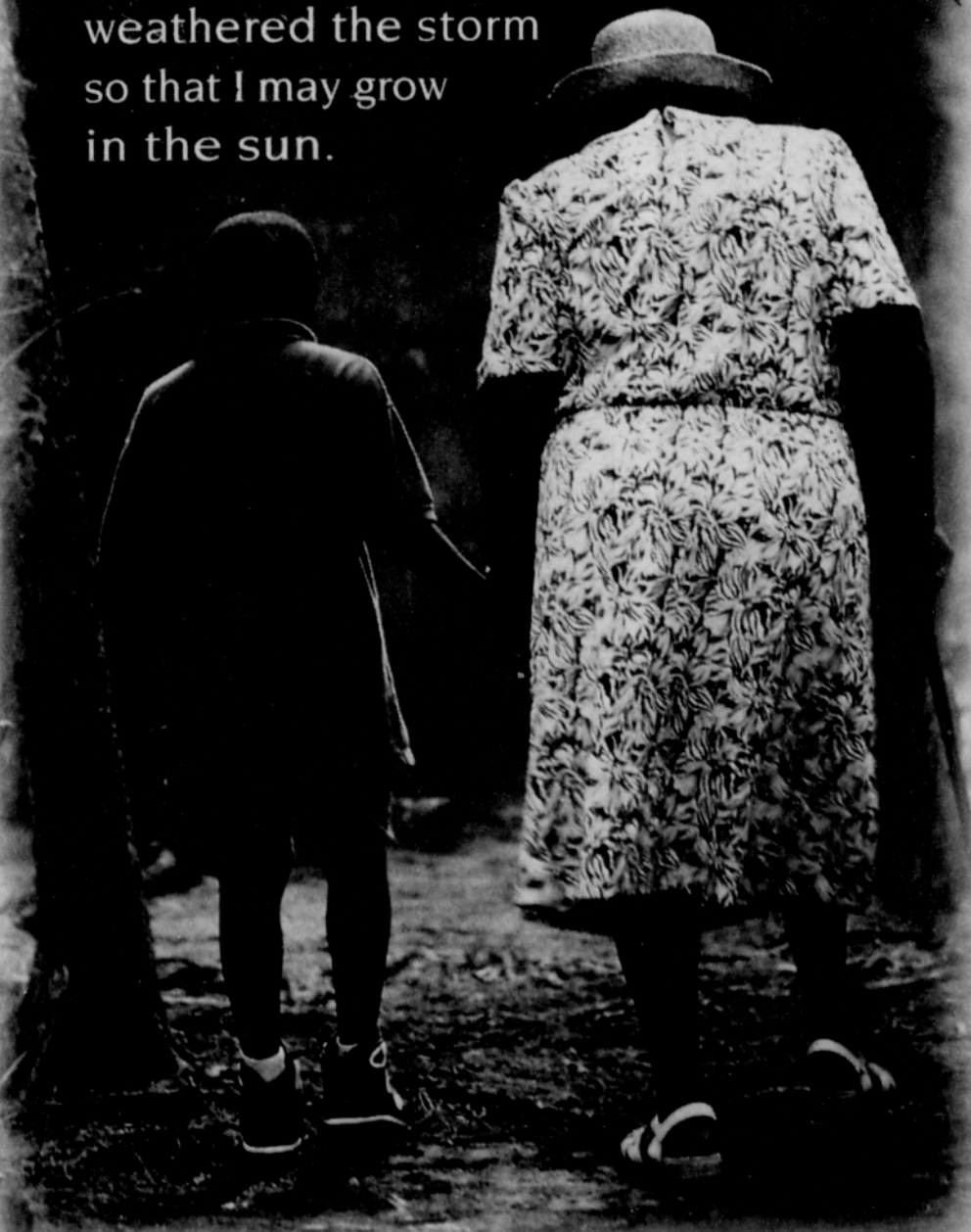
Let's leave the violence in the 20th century and begin the 21st century as people who are more peaceful, loving and able to live in harmony.



Mahatma Gandhi and his wife, Kasturba

Artwork by Lawrence Levy

As I walk down the path
a smile pervades my face
For my people before me
weathered the storm
so that I may grow
in the sun.



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