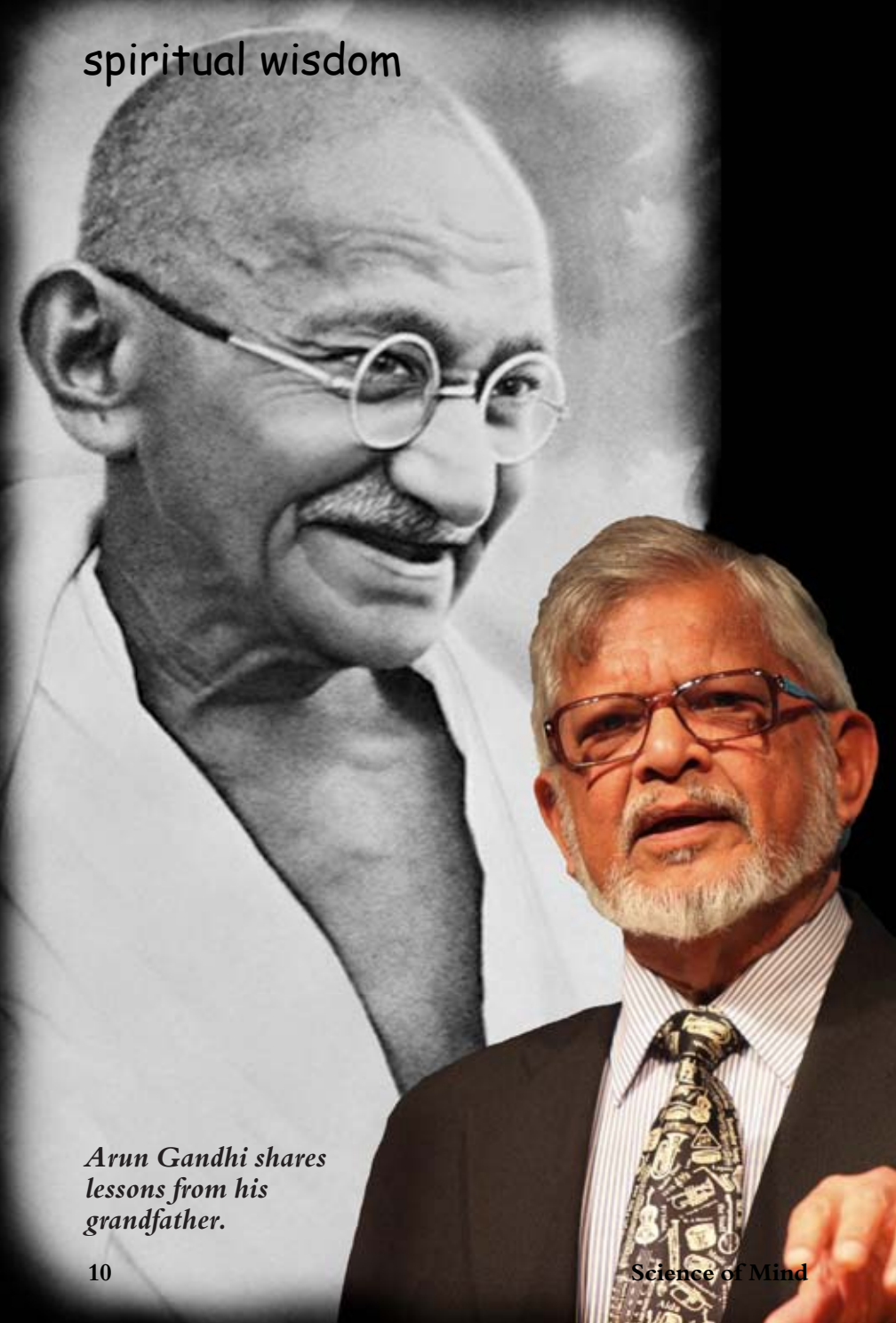


spiritual wisdom



*Arun Gandhi shares lessons from his grandfather.*

# Arun Gandhi— Messenger for Peace

Mark Gilbert

“I believe that humans are basically peace-loving people. They want peace, but they don’t know how to go about getting it,” states Arun Gandhi. “However, I have hope in humanity. If people are shown the right way, they will ultimately change their ways and make a difference.” It is this innate human desire for peace that offers Gandhi hope for our future.

As a young boy living with his famous grandfather, Mohandas Gandhi, Arun Gandhi learned the lessons of how to live a life of peace and nonviolence. Arun has dedicated his life to sharing these lessons that offer humanity a path toward peace, and he has become known as a peacemaker in his own right.

### **Lessons from Grandfather**

Born in South Africa in 1934, Arun Gandhi grew up under apartheid feeling the effects of being a “non-white,” discovering firsthand what it was like to be a victim of violence and prejudice. In 1946, Gandhi was sent to reside in India at the Sevagram Ashram where he absorbed the personal lessons of his grandfather on how to live nonviolently until the Mahatma died a violent death at the hands of an assassin in 1948.

Those two years filled Gandhi with memories of a mixture of an ascetic ashram lifestyle, eating simply and sharing chores, combined with the glamorous visits of famous politicians and dignitaries. In the midst of all of this, the elder Gandhi ensured that the young boy gained wisdom using the simple events of life as a tool for teaching. The tales of this education would later form the basis of Arun Gandhi’s memoir, *Legacy of Love*, and also

serve as stories to teach nonviolent principles as he lectured around the world.

One such story that Gandhi frequently tells relates to walking home from school one day and deciding that his small stub of a pencil was no longer worthy of keeping. He tossed it into the grass along the path, determined to ask his grandfather for a brand-new one. That evening, his request was met by the question, “Why do you need a new pencil? You had a perfectly good one this morning.”

When he replied that the pencil was too small, his grandfather asked to see it, to which Gandhi replied, “Oh, I threw it away.” At that point, the elder Gandhi handed the young boy a flashlight and directed him to retrieve it. After hours of searching, Arun finally found the pencil and returned home, certain that the proof of its size would gain him a new one. That was not to be. Instead, the Mahatma used the opportunity to teach his grandson lessons of nonviolence.

“He had me sit down,” Gandhi remembers, “and said, ‘Now you’re going to learn two very important lessons. The first lesson is that even in the making of a simple thing like a pencil, we use a lot of the world’s natural resources. When

we throw them away, we are throwing away the resources, and that is violence against nature. The second lesson is that even though we live in an affluent society where we can afford to buy all these things in bulk, we overconsume the resources of the world. Because we overconsume them, we deprive other people in the world of these resources, and they have to do without and live in poverty—that is violence against humanity.’ That was the first time I realized that all of these little things that we do every day, consciously and unconsciously, when we overconsume or waste, these things amount to violence,” reflects Gandhi.

As a follow-up to this lesson, his grandfather instructed him to keep a journal wherein he reflected each night upon the past day’s events and his personal choices. His personal experiences were categorized into a “genealogical chart of violence,” where one branch of this chart was physical violence and the other branch was passive violence. This contemplation allowed Gandhi to realize how many choices were motivated by a violent reaction.

Within months, Gandhi was able to fill his journal with pages of examples of his use of passive violence. “Passive violence is a kind of violence where

you don’t use any physical force, and yet you hurt people directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, maybe people you haven’t even seen,” says Gandhi. “This kind of passive violence is very insidious. It is so deeply rooted in us that we don’t think of it as violence.”

His grandfather taught him that this passive violence creates anger in people who then resort to physical violence in an attempt to gain a sense of justice. “We don’t care that eye-for-an-eye justice is making everyone blind.”

### **Teaching Peace**

After marrying his wife, Sunanda, Gandhi settled in India and served for thirty years as a journalist for the *Times of India*. During this time, Arun and Sunanda employed nonviolent principles to create constructive programs to address social and economic inequities. Eventually, in 1987, the couple came to the United States to study how prejudice existed here. This led them to permanently move to the United States to teach peace. In 1991, the couple cofounded the M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence. The Institute’s mission is to help individuals and communities develop the inner resources and practical skills needed to achieve a nonviolent, sustainable, and just world.

In 1996, Gandhi joined forces with Rev. Dr. Michael Bernard Beckwith to establish the Season for Nonviolence. This created an annual focus to publicize and teach the principles of nonviolence during the period between January 30 (the anniversary of the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi) and April 4 (the anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King).

Now coordinated by the Association for Global New Thought, this season has served for more than fifteen years to bring interfaith communities together to teach personal responsibility for creating peace in the world. Most member communities of the Centers for Spiritual Living coordinate and participate in these events.

### **Become a Peacemaker**

No matter whom Arun Gandhi works with, he consistently brings to the world the lessons of his grandfather. So what lessons from Gandhi can we each glean and apply in our own lives?

First, as indicated in the story of the pencil, we are called to be aware of how violence can appear in numerous forms in our lives. There is a tendency to see violence only as physical acts of aggression and harm. But as Gandhi learned from his grandfather, many violent actions are

passive in nature. Where in your life are you wasting resources? Where are you expressing in subtle ways your displeasure with others in indirect passive-aggressive actions? We could all benefit from keeping the daily journal just as Gandhi did as a child. It is in this way that we become more aware of our moment-to-moment choices and where we might make a more peaceful choice.

As Ernest Holmes reminds us, “The mind that is always confused and distraught is not at peace; the mind that is continuously upset and agitated by the little, petty things of life is not at peace; it is at war with itself. It is only when the individual mind ceases combating itself that it will stop combating others.” How can we cease the combat? A lesson that Gandhi learned was to try not to bury emotions such as anger, but rather to turn the emotion into a constructive force. Mahatma Gandhi told his grandson that anger is like electricity. It can be used for constructive or destructive ends—the choice is ours in our intentions. Arun Gandhi says that in our modern world, we are so concerned about hurting others’ feelings if we show our emotions that we are taught to bury them. They never really go away, but instead spring back up at the

most inopportune time and in an inappropriate way. A better approach, according to Gandhi, is to learn to capture the passion in our emotions and redirect that passion into a positive channel.

Another lesson Gandhi hopes that we gain from his teaching is to recognize that the seeds of peace come from each and every one of us. “My grandfather always said that peacemakers should be like farmers who go out in the fields and plant seeds and hope and pray that they would get a good crop. In the same way, we must go out and plant seeds of peace in the minds of people and hope that eventually those seeds will germinate a good crop of peacemakers.” The individual choices we make to practice peace and to model peaceful approaches in our dealings with others are a way of planting those seeds.

Students of the Science of Mind are familiar with the concept of being “seed planters.” Regarding the creative power of our thoughts, Holmes writes, “The farmer casts seed into the ground knowing that the law of growth will bring about a harvest. So we must learn to cast our creative ideas of good into the field of Mind, knowing that the Law of Mind will bring our desires to pass. No one who has tried this has failed.” What Gandhi

offers us is a direction for our thoughts—toward peace. As Holmes observed, “We must think peace if we wish to express peace.”

### **The Journey Continues**

Recently, Arun Gandhi began working with filmmakers Kell Kearns and Cynthia Lukas, who are producing a movie to capture the lessons that Gandhi has been teaching. Gandhi is optimistic that the film, set to be released in 2013, will help preserve the messages of his grandfather that he has worked for so many years to bring to humanity. Kearns and Lukas have the same intention. Late in 2011, the filmmakers, producers of such spiritually based films such as *Rumi Returning* and *Globalized Soul*, accompanied Gandhi to India to film his personal remembrances at the sites of this youth.

“One of the most moving moments of our trip to India was when we witnessed and filmed Gandhi breaking down at Birla House in New Delhi, where Mahatma Gandhi had been assassinated on his way to the twice-daily interfaith prayer service he had led for decades,” Lukas remembers. “Scores of pilgrims were visiting this memorial, praying and meditating, but all of these, including us, were mourning the Mahatma,

someone we greatly admired and followed. But then we realized that Gandhi was also mourning his grandfather, a family member, and that grief was still fresh and very real.

“Arun Gandhi represents the tender heart of the Gandhi family—humble, sensitive, loving, and immovable in the right. I am sure his Gandhian heart will also be the center of our film,” added Kearns.

No journey by Arun Gandhi would be complete if he did not bring the message of peace to willing listeners. Kearns and Lukas accompanied Gandhi as he spoke before the college students at Gujarat Vidyapith, the university Mahandas Gandhi founded in 1920 after he had persuaded many teachers and students to boycott British universities. After the evening began with music and prayers, the students, as well as Arun Gandhi, took out their spinning equipment and began to spin while he answered their questions.

“The sound and images of their spinning was mesmerizing,” recalled Lukas, “and meaningful, for Mahandas Gandhi envisioned spinning as crucial to India’s return to the simplicity of village life since it would enrich their souls and eradicate their poverty.”

Gandhi was no stranger to

spinning cotton, having done it many times with his grandfather. “I used to challenge him to see who could spin the most and the thinnest yarn, and I consistently beat him!”

Even though Arun Gandhi is in his late seventies and no longer working with the Gandhi Institute, he is still going strong, traveling the world and planting the seeds of peace. Early in 2012, Sean Penn asked Gandhi to visit Haiti as a representative of his J/P Haitian Relief Organization. There he led a workshop with community leaders and met with representatives of the United Nations and NGOs.

Summing up our future as being related to his grandfather’s famous quote that we must all be the change we wish to see in the world, Gandhi added, “All of us need to do that introspection—find out our own weaknesses and transform them into strengths. Only then will we stop feeding the fire of physical violence.” ■

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