

# Creating a Culture of Nonviolence:

## A Conversation with Arun Gandhi

by Tiffany Meyer

*In partnership with his wife Sunanda, Arun Gandhi is the co-founder of the A.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence. Born in 1934 in Durban, South Africa, Arun is the fifth grandson of the legendary leader, Mohandas K. "Mahatma" Gandhi. A world-renowned speaker, author and social change leader, Arun shares the lessons of nonviolence instilled by his grandfather all around the world. In this conversation, Mr. Gandhi offers unique insight into the global peace movement - providing peace activists of all levels hope and guidance in how to affect nonviolent change.*

**Q. Looking back on your own legacy, are there some major accomplishments that stand out in your mind? How do these accomplishments relate to the global movement?**

I have always done what I do with the intention of planting seeds and make people think of alternatives. I am content to that where ever I go. I believe in all these years I have planted many seeds. I am sure many must be blossoming now. But results are not my concern. Grandfather used to tell us that when you become overly concerned about the results then you will not do what you have to do because half of your mind is occupied by what with the result be. So I don't bother about that at all. I just go about doing what I can in the best way I can and hope it eventually makes a difference in someone's life.

**Q. What do you believe are some of the ongoing challenges that nonviolent activists face today?**

I think the biggest challenge that nonviolent activists face is the proper understanding of the philosophy of nonviolence. So long as we understand this to be a strategy to be used when convenient we will fail to make any tangible impact. There will be some successes no doubt but they will not be lasting. The emphasis needs to be not on conflict resolution but how to avoid conflicts. Thus nonviolence must become a way of life. We must begin to replace the culture of violence that dominates all aspects of our lives today with a culture of nonviolence. Violence thrives on negativity - anger, hate, discrimination, selfishness, and so on whereas nonviolence thrives on positive attitudes - compassion, understanding, acceptance, love, respect and so on. We are so dominated by negativity that it drags us deeper and deeper into the mire of violence. We must work towards understanding and assimilating the culture of nonviolence.

**Q. Are these challenges unique or do they carry similar elements to what your grandfather faced, what you face?**

I think they are similar. Grandfather was concerned first with the freedom of India and then with the idea of replacing the culture of violence in India with the culture of nonviolence. However after the success of the first part of this mission his friends and colleagues decided that a living Gandhi would make life miserable for



them but a martyred Gandhi could be exploited. So he was assassinated and India resorted to the culture of violence. What grandfather expected from India in terms of showing a nonviolent path to the rest of the world was abandoned and they adopted the culture of violence and became the most violent nation in the world. I do not have the charisma that he had so my reach is limited so within those limitations I do what I can to influence as many as I can.

**Q. What key issues permeate the global peace movement today? Are these issues we can all relate to, or are they specific to a certain socioeconomic or ethnic group?**

I think it is obvious the world has become very selfish; self-centered; greedy and violent. We do it in little ways in societies where we live and others do it on a larger scale involving nations. The belief that the United States or Britain or even India for that matter can survive on their own while the rest of the world destroys itself is ridiculous. Our futures are all intertwined and if one perishes we all eventually perish. This false sense of nationalism and national pride has made people so narrow minded that they overlook the vision of the world. We need to make them aware that our survival is linked with the survival of the world and so we must take as much interest in what is happening in Darfur and Sierra Leone as what is happening in our backyard.

**Q. How does Nonviolent Communication (as both a process and a consciousness) relate to the Gandhian philosophy of nonviolence?**

I think Nonviolent Communication is a very significant part of the culture of nonviolence. We cannot use abusive language and expect to convince people of the effectiveness of nonviolence.

**Q. How does the language we use affect our activism? What does it mean to “be the change you wish to see in the world”?**

The language makes a big difference. The first thing a nonviolent activist is required to do is to understand that in this struggle there are no enemies. There is nothing like “us and them.” We are all one and some of us need to be changed. But we cannot convince anyone to change if we do not show the change in our own attitude. For instance we cannot convince people not to treat others as enemies if we ourselves are treating some people as enemies. We must live what we want others to learn. People learn more from what we do than what we tell them.

**Q. What does NVC offer individuals and leaders who wish to affect peaceful change?**

Nonviolent Communication offers one tool from the set that is required to repair a community. We need to look at nonviolence as a set of tools which will be effective if we are able to use all of them for the various needs in repairing the damage done.

**Q. The Center for Nonviolent Communication is affiliated with activist, decision-makers and global leaders in some of the most violent and impoverished regions of the world. What hope can you grant these individuals as they work to affect peaceful change over time?**

I believe it is very good for them to learn the art of Nonviolent Communication but then they must learn also about the rest of the philosophy and implement it wholly. Someone once said that you can kill people with kindness too and that is not what we want. We want to stop the killings so along with the language we need



to change our attitudes and our behavior to reflect more compassion and understanding and look at everything from the point of view of how is what I am about to do good for everyone concerned and not just how is it good for me and my company. We need to create a society where everyone works for the good of all and not just the good of a few.

**Q. Many people around the world affiliate activism with protest, or even engaging in dissent on a national or global scale - and this may feel impersonal, even overly daunting. In your opinion, how does NVC personalize our activism?**

Activism and protest have their place in the culture of nonviolence, but they must be designed to transform the people and not to provoke them. Much of the activism today is provocative and the language used reflects a lot of anger and disrespect for the other. This should not happen because we are not there to alienate them but to transform them.

**Q. What do you believe are the hallmarks of effective nonviolent activism (in terms of specific strategies, values, vision, etc.)?**

I think every situation requires a specific approach. It would be difficult to say that this would work in specific situations and that in another. Gandhi always first studied the problem from all perspectives, even sometimes wearing the shoe of the opponent. Then, when he was satisfied he would start a correspondence with the other to try and reach an understanding. The correspondence would first be private, then he would make it public and then he would say to the person that since we have reached a stalemate I will have to resort to public campaigns to force the issue. However, he did this with extreme politeness and with no intentions of inconveniencing the opposition in any way. Once in South Africa he suspended his campaign against the apartheid government because the workers of the railway went on a strike. He said it is wrong to put pressure on the government at a time when they are occupied with a national calamity. Then once the strike was over he relaunched his movement.

**Q. January 30th marks the beginning of the 2005 Season for Nonviolence. Why is it important for individuals and organizations to get involved in the Season?**

I think it is important because the Season is designed to help people understand the philosophy and implement the culture of nonviolence so that we can transform the world before it destroys itself.

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The mission of the **A.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence** is to promote and apply the principles of nonviolence locally, nationally, and globally, to prevent violence and resolve personal and public conflicts through research, education, and programming. The institute was founded by Arun Gandhi (Mahatma Gandhi's grandson) and his wife Sunanda. Learn more at [www.gandhiinstitute.org](http://www.gandhiinstitute.org)



## About Nonviolent Communication

From the bedroom to the boardroom, from the classroom to the war zone, the Nonviolent Communication (NVC) process is changing lives every day. NVC provides an easy to grasp, effective method to get to the root of conflict, violence and pain peacefully. By examining the unmet needs behind what we do or say, the NVC process helps reduce hostility, heal pain, and strengthen professional or personal relationships.

The NVC process is now being taught in corporations, classrooms, prisons and mediation centers around the globe. And it is affecting cultural shifts as institutions, corporations and governments integrate NVC consciousness into their organizational structures and their approach to leadership.

International peacemaker, mediator, author and founder of the Center for Nonviolent Communication, Dr. Marshall Rosenberg spends more than **250** days each year teaching the NVC process, including some of the most impoverished, war-torn areas of the world. More than **180** certified trainers and hundreds more teach this life-enriching process in **35** countries to approximately **250,000** people each year.

## About the Center for Nonviolent Communication

The Center for Nonviolent Communication (CNVC) is an international nonprofit peacemaking organization whose vision is a world where everyone's needs are met peacefully. CNVC is devoted to supporting the spread of Nonviolent Communication training and consciousness around the world.

Access local, national and international training opportunities, download trainer certification information, connect to local NVC communities and purchase a variety of other NVC learning materials at:

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