

# GANDHI FOR THE FUTURE

Relevant for: Ethics | Topic: Human Values - Lessons from the lives and teachings of great Leaders, Reformers and Administrators

© 2019 The Indian Express Ltd.  
All Rights Reserved

The writer is former Vice Chancellor, Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad.

I need Gandhi today for three reasons. First and foremost, I need him for self-development. The most important lesson that I have learned from him is how he was eternally vigilant about his self and went on correcting and developing his inner self. Ignorance and intellectual arrogance have made many reject him and as a result invite disaster in their personal lives. Honesty and integrity are at stake in personal and public life. The Western libertarian thesis promised that the virtue of civil society, if left to its own devices, would include good character, honesty, duty, self-sacrifice, honour, service, self-discipline, toleration, respect, justice, civility, fortitude, courage, integrity, diligence, patriotism, consideration for others, thrift and reverence. Unfortunately, gluttony, pride, selfishness, and greed have become prominent. It has permitted permissive behaviour and left the aberrant behaviour to be corrected by systemic checks loaded with ever new technologies.

Gandhi, too, was a strong votary of individual liberty. But he differed from Mill and Spencer. His concept of liberty for vyakti (individual) arose from the individual's responsibility for self-regulation. He practised and subscribed to 11 vows. Satya (truth), ahimsa (non-violence), brahmacharya (self-control), aparigraha (non-possession), asteya (non-stealing), abhaya (fearlessness), asvaad (palate), shareer shram (bread-labour) were eight vows for self-regulation, and swadeshi (local), sprushya bhavna (removal of untouchability) and sarva dharma sama bhava (tolerance or equal respect for all religions) were for bringing back rural, decentralised economy and bringing harmony among castes and religion. This has to be woven in education and practice.

The second reason I need Gandhi is to work toward peace among warring sections of humanity. Samashti or humanity as a whole is at war. Caste, race and religion are a political façade and a socio-cultural menace. Gandhi had sensed this in South Africa and came up with ahimsa or love force. It was not only a strategic alliance of Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Parsis, but of all castes and creeds that lived in South Africa and suffered the humiliation and violation of human rights. He earnestly wanted humanity to live together in peace and harmony. He was "Gandhibhai" for all and he was fearless in facing any brute force. After his return to India in 1915, he could touch the hearts of all and identified himself with all. He carried them and led them to swaraj, although conceding that it would only be political freedom to begin with. His message reached the world humanity and people saw new hope amidst two world wars. As India reached political freedom, he was betrayed by leaders and not by people, and hunger for power and hatred speared him. He was down but not out. He walked alone in Noakhali to wipe tears and apply the love force which he had expressed in Hind Swaraj quoting Tulsidas: Of religion, pity, or love, is the root, as egotism of the body/Therefore, we should not abandon pity, so long as we are alive.

Gandhi's faith in daya or love force was so deep and he practised it with such passion that during the communal riots before and after Independence, then Governor General Lord Mountbatten famously said, "In Punjab, we have 55,000 soldiers, and large-scale rioting on our hands. In Bengal, our forces consist of one man, and there is no rioting."

Unfortunately, it is not only hatred that is back with a vengeance, it is deeply tempered by control over natural resources and concentration of economic power among communities and nation states. In our own country, newly defined nationalism has become hyper and is threatening to tear apart the finely woven socio-cultural fabric of the country. It is not incidental that after struggling for more than 60 years, the UN declared in 2007 Gandhi's birthday as the day of non-violence. Humanity has to embrace all those who have been hurt intentionally or unintentionally and heal the injury with love.

The third reason I need Gandhi today is because his vision of non-violent society will save the humanity from ecological disaster that seems to be looming large. Our relation with prakruti (nature) has to significantly alter. Humanity in general has been optimistic and so it should be. But, a business as usual approach can, and has, landed the humanity in deep crisis. In recent times, however, many of the crises are manmade. Gandhi had sensed it and voiced in 1909 in Hind Swaraj: "Let us first consider what state of things is described by the word 'civilisation'. Its true test lies in the fact that people living in it make bodily welfare the object of life."

He questioned whether big houses, many clothes, big cars, fancy food, globe destructing war material and luxuriant indulgence and leisure, was modern civilisation. In the 1930s, he wrote that if India wanted to ape the British standard of living then, it would require resources equivalent of three earths. How prophetic! The market is not innocently responding to price signals. It is manipulating tastes and preferences in favour of a particular self-indulgent life style and converting them into demand

Gandhi talked about local first and global later. Swadeshi is promoting a decentralised economy that is mainly rural. Gandhi does not deny the relevance and use of technology for survival. But he called for political, social and individual behaviour to become self-aware and to substantially change.

Gandhi offered to India and the world a wise and compassionate vision of harmony between vyakti, samashti and prakruti.

***The writer is former Vice Chancellor, Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad***

Download the Indian Express apps for iPhone, iPad or Android

© 2019 The Indian Express Ltd. All Rights Reserved

**END**

Downloaded from [crackIAS.com](http://crackIAS.com)

© **Zuccess App** by [crackIAS.com](http://crackIAS.com)