

Mohandas (Mahatama) Gandhi - Superhero

Gandhi is known worldwide for helping India gain its independence from Great Britain through a practice he developed called “Satyagraha” (pronounced suht-yuh-gruh-huh), a combination of two Sanskrit words: “satya” (truth) and “agraha” (force). Satyagraha, therefore, means “truth force” or “holding to truth.”

Gandhi also adhered to “ahimsa” (nonviolence). His principles were influenced by the Bhagavad Gita and Hindu beliefs, Buddhism, the Jain religion, Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, and the pacifist Christian teachings of Leo Tolstoy.

Gandhi first developed his methods of peaceful, nonviolent resistance in South Africa, where he experienced racial discrimination against Indians. After 21 years, he returned to India, where he used Satyagraha to fight for human rights and advance political and social goals.

He lived a spiritual life of prayer, fasting, and meditation. Although he was imprisoned four times for disobeying or ignoring laws he considered to be unfair, he remained steadfast in his goal of Indian Independence. He embraced the poorest people in India, and by his example he taught them how to empower themselves.

Gandhi’s methods inspired Nelson Mandela, who worked to end apartheid in South Africa, and Martin Luther King, Jr. and the 1960’s civil rights movement in the United States. Albert Einstein said of Gandhi, “Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.”

Mohandas Gandhi loved his country, India, especially all of the different types of Indian people — the rich and the poor, the Hindus and the Muslims, the upper class who lived in the cities and the farmers who worked in the fields. He saw everyone as equal — all children of God.

India is a free country now, but in Gandhi’s time it was a colony of Great Britain, just like America used to be. Many Indians, including Gandhi, thought that the

British rules and laws were unfair. He wanted the British to leave so that India could be free and independent. For thousands of years, countries have used violence and war as a way to get independence. But Gandhi believed that the power of love was stronger than any weapon. He wanted to peacefully free his country.

He organized thousands of Indians to use “truth force” to resist unfair laws. One of the laws stated that Indians needed to buy all of their cloth from Great Britain. Indian cloth makers couldn’t sell their cloth in India. But British cloth was so expensive, many Indians couldn’t afford it.

Gandhi told Indians that they didn’t need to follow the law because it was unfair. He encouraged them to boycott rather than buy British cloth and to make their own home-spun cloth. Gandhi traveled all across India with a small spinning wheel showing people how to spin their own thread for cloth. Thousands of people followed his example. They lit bonfires and burned their British clothes. For them it was a way to say, “Your law is unfair. We won’t follow it. We are Indians. We can make our own clothes. We are proud of what we can do.” The spinning wheel is now in the very center of India’s flag.

Another unfair law required Indians to buy salt from the British government and also pay a tax for it. Now that may seem like a silly law. What’s the big deal about salt? But to Indians it was a really big deal. India is a very hot country and the people sweat a lot, especially the poor people who work in the fields under the hot sun. They needed to eat salt every day to keep their bodies healthy. Gandhi said, “Next to air and water, salt is perhaps the greatest necessity of life.”

Gandhi didn’t know what to do to help his people. He searched inside himself. He prayed and listened to his inner guidance. The idea came to him to protest the unfair salt law by marching to the Indian Ocean where salt washed up onto the beaches in clumps. In this way, he would take the power away from the British and show Indians they could be self-reliant.

The ocean was 241 miles away. All along the way people joined Gandhi in his protest march. After 24 days, he reached the ocean leading a crowd of tens of thousands! Gandhi offered a prayer. Then he picked up a tiny lump of salt,

breaking the law. Within moments, people everywhere along the coast picked up salt, too. Over 50,000 people were arrested, including Gandhi.

News spread, and soon the whole world knew how unfair the British laws were to the Indian people. Even some of the people living in Great Britain thought India should be free. And thanks to Gandhi, India eventually did become an independent country.

Although Gandhi protested the British laws, he never hated the British people. He called them “friends” and treated them respectfully. Even when he was beaten, he didn’t fight back. Gandhi’s belief in the power of love and truth inspired people all around the world. They called him “Mahatma,” which means “great soul.”

Discussion questions:

- 1. Why did the people of India burn their British clothes?*
- 2. Why did Gandhi disobey the law against making salt?*
- 3. Gandhi reminds us to stand up against unfairness and find peaceful solutions. Are there any unfair situations you would like to stand up against?*