

125th Anniv. of Gandhi
Birth
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REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
AT 125TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF GANDHI'S BIRTH
THE KENNEDY CENTER
WASHINGTON, DC

MRS. CLINTON: I want to thank Ambassador and Mrs. Ray for inviting me to join you here this evening. Both of you have been wonderful friends to our family and to all Americans. We are grateful for the Ambassador's service in Washington, and for his and Mrs. Ray's perpetual kindness and generosity. I thought for a minute he was going to disclose what is really confidential and that is that he and Mrs. Ray and I have talked often about starting a law firm together. And we thought in India it would be Ray and Clinton and of course vice versa here in the United States. But we three have admitted we have some other obligations to fulfill first of all. I am also grateful to the entire staff of the Indian Embassy for all of the work that has gone into this commemoration. And we all owe special debt of gratitude to Srimati Kamala director of the Gandhi Center and of the evening's performance, who has devoted so much energy and wisdom to bringing the teachings of Gandhi to this country. I am also grateful that there are so many Ambassadors from other countries here this evening and I know that our Ambassador to India, Ambassador and Mrs. Wisner, are here with us as well. There are also many members of Congress who have a special affection for India and interest in the relationship between our countries and that all the rest of us, who have gathered together for this commemoration.

My daughter and I will never forget the warmth and hospitality extended to us by the Indian people during our recent visit to the subcontinent. It was an extraordinary and memorable experience for both of us. The images of first seeing New Delhi and looking from my hotel room at the colors and smelling the flowers. Of going to the Rajiv Gandhi Center, meeting Sonia Gandhi and so many others who are devoted to the work that Gandhi started. The visit to the crafts museum, having a small exposure to the extraordinary range of crafts and artisans that were there gathered. Of course the visit to the Taj Mahal and so many other experiences that run like a video through my brain.

Ambassador Ray reminded me recently that Ralph Waldo Emerson once said of India that it is "practically a profession to be studied as long and methodically as law and medicine." Mark Twain called India "the most extraordinary country on earth." I understand both remarks much better now that I have been to India.

As much as I learned, I realized that I will never fully appreciate the vastness of culture or of India's influence on our world unless I am able to spend much more time there. And both my daughter and I hope we will have the opportunity to go back in the future and that we will be able to bring my husband as well.

I would like to say, at the outset, that the President, and his Administration, and all Americans are very proud of the close ties that our nations enjoy.

The strength and endurance of that relationship is founded on our shared ideals and aspirations as pluralistic, free societies. But it also has roots in Gandhi -- Gandhi, who captured American hearts through his dedication to non-violence and democracy.

In turn, the American press and political leaders were very supportive of Gandhi's leadership of the Independence movement in India. As you may know, Gandhi and President Roosevelt had a brief correspondence in 1942, which began with a letter from Gandhi expressing support for the Allies. Roosevelt's letter in reply did not reach Gandhi until three years later, when he was released from prison. But that letter from President Roosevelt said: "Our common interest in democracy and righteousness will enable your countrymen and mine to make a common cause against a common enemy."

So I think it is fair to say that the friendship between India and the United States has roots far deeper than trade, economics, and geopolitics. It is rooted in a common humanity and a common vision of the kind of world we want ours to be.

We are here tonight to celebrate the 125th anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's birth. And in thinking about Gandhi, and what he means to us on the eve of a new century, I am drawn back to the visit my daughter and I made to his ashram. It was one of the highlights of our trip.

Of course, I had some idea beforehand of Gandhi's life and his contributions. But seeing the places where he and his wife lived, seeing the sheer simplicity of his existence, was profoundly moving to me.

I remember walking into his room, which was bare except for a mattress on the floor, a pair of slippers, a small writing table, eyeglasses, and a spinning wheel. It was the picture of a life pared down to the bare bones of survival.

And then I remember going to the museum library adjacent to this bare, spartan room, and seeing thousands of his books and volumes of correspondence. This utterly simple material life had allowed for one of the richest spiritual and intellectual lives we have ever known.

So I came away from that visit with an even deeper sense of his life being about giving, not acquiring. About "conquering hate

by love, untruth by truth, and violence by suffering."

That same day, a few hours later, I visited the Self-Employed Women's Association. Its founder, Ela Bhatt, was a disciple of Gandhi's, a woman whose own life and work was deeply influenced by his teachings. When I got there, there were hundreds of women crowded under a tent behind the bank building. The bank building was a small structure in which women would come, sometimes walking for twelve hours, to borrow a few dollars to be able to buy a milk cow, to be able to buy a new cart to be a vegetable vendor. These women, some of whom had walked for hours to meet me, told me about their lives. They talked about how their lives had been transformed because they had gained a small degree of financial independence through SEWA, and a large degree of self-respect and dignity from their solidarity with others. In each of their faces I could see hope; and in each of their faces I could see Gandhi's legacy.

That day offered an extraordinary sequence of events -- events that represented not only the universality of Gandhi's teachings and beliefs, but also their timelessness and permanence.

In the months since that visit, I have had many occasions to think about Gandhi, and about how we all need today, as diverse nations and peoples, to celebrate our oneness more. How we need to heed the theme of this evening, "the peace of absolute oneness." How we need desperately to bridge historical, religious, cultural, ethnic, and racial divides -- much as India has done as it has become a pluralistic democracy -- we need to find common ground as members of the human family.

Clearly, these are complicated times -- times when we see ancient hatreds dissolving and new hatreds arising; when the Information Age holds great potential for communications and understanding among people, but also requires that those people have new and more advanced skills; when an explosion of material expectations is fueling desires and often leading people to unrealizable fantasies and even alienation in their lives.

When we seek to understand this changing, complex, unpredictable and exciting world we live in, often it seems that there are too few places to turn for inspiration and hope.

But there are places, and there are people we can turn to and one of those people is Gandhi, and that is why we are all here tonight. His call was to elicit in people their courage and commitment to higher ideals; to call forth the heroism of those who did not think of themselves as heroes. To teach us that responsibilities are as important as rights.

The more I learn about Gandhi, the more I am struck by the universality of his message. He read from the Bible and the Koran with the same reverence as he read from the Bhagavad Gita and many other sacred Hindu writings. He often said that his heart leaped at reading about the life of Jesus and that he aspired to live the

Sermon on the Mount. He read Henry David Thoreau, whose essay on civil disobedience inspired his strategy of non-violent change.

And in turn, Gandhi influenced many of his contemporaries as well as those who followed him. Martin Luther King Jr. said that "Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale."

Dr. King, often citing Gandhi, led a historic season of non-violent action in this country.

So we see this historical and spiritual continuum, embodied in the lives of rare and extraordinary people, whose teachings guide us year after year and decade after decade, and on through the centuries as we continue to strive for a better understanding of what it means to be a human being to live and work together, to help one another realize our own humanity.

Now, there are still some who wonder what Gandhi means for Americans, or Indians, or anyone else, in an age of that one social scientist has called "turbo-charged capitalism." An age when too often we define ourselves more by style than by substance; by the logo on our sneakers more than the generosity in our hearts.

Gandhi gave us principles for behaving and living that not only enable us to improve ourselves, but also to improve our societies. We all have those images of Gandhi -- whether from old newsreels, books, photographs, movies or from his own writings.

Images of him walking with thousands of his compatriots through village after village -- 200 miles to the sea to make salt in defiance of the salt laws. Images of him organizing his compatriots to clean the latrines and perform other lowly chores in solidarity with the untouchables, whom he always referred to as harijans, children of God. And of course, images of him at his spinning wheel.

I recently came across something Gandhi wrote that I think is gaining in popularity, and it is easy to understand why. It says that "Violence Springs from Seven Root Causes, or 'Blunders'." And he listed the seven blunders as follows:

- * Wealth without work
- * Pleasure without conscience
- * Knowledge without character
- * Commerce without morality
- * Science without humanity
- * Worship without sacrifice
- * Politics without principles

If we look at our own society today -- whether we are American, Indian, or from any other country -- we see firsthand how right he was. We see ourselves committing the same blunders over,

and over again.

Somehow in this year of commemoration, if we, as a global family, could once again commit ourselves to Gandhi's belief in "the oneness of all that lives" we could perhaps begin to acknowledge our own blunders and work to prevent them from occurring again. We need to remember that his message is that diversity cannot flourish in a society without an underlying spirit of unity. And, as we learn more from the extraordinary research that is being done in genetics, we will learn in the twenty-first century that we are all truly one. Descended from the same, being part of the same, and that the differences that divide us are minor indeed.

I hope all of you will have a chance before leaving tonight to see the statue of Gandhi that was brought here from the Gandhi Center in Washington. It is a bronze of Gandhi sitting at his spinning wheel, a spindle in one hand. And as you look at it think about what he said: "The message of the spinning wheel is much wider than its circumference. Its message is one of simplicity, service of mankind, living so as not to hurt others, creating an indissoluble bond between the rich and the poor, capital and labor, the prince and the peasant."

How much better our world would be if we were all led by the spirit of Gandhi, and we were all dedicated to the high ideals he aspired to.

Thank you very much.

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