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DM - Arun Gandhi is the fifth grandson of his iconic grandfather, Mohandas Mahatma Gandhi. He traveled to the Pacific Northwest recently to talk about his work on his grandfather's legacy. In this interview, I'll be talking with Arun Gandhi.

DM - Arun Manilal Gandhi was born as the fifth grandson of Mahatma Gandhi through his second son, Manilal. Arun's father, along with his mother's sister Sushila were living in South Africa in the 1930s where Arun was born. These were the days of Apartheid, when an Indian family in Durban suffered many hardships. Growing up, Arun was rejected by whites and Africans alike for neither being white enough or black enough. And he suffered much violence at the hands of both because of it.

DM - Mr. Gandhi, thank you very much for talking with me. As you grew up, as Gandhi's grandson, what was it like?

AG - It was difficult because I grew up in South Africa, at that time when there was a lot of hate and prejudice there, and I became a victim of all that. And I wanted an eye for an eye justice, I want to fight back. And that is when my parents took me to India. And I lived with grandfather, and grandfather taught me about anger. And he said anger is like electricity, it's just as useful and just as powerful. But only if we use it intelligently. But it can be just as deadly and destructive if we abuse it. So just as we channel electrical energy and bring it into our lives and use it for the good of humanity, we must learn to channel angering the same way so that we can use it for the good of humanity rather than abuse it. So he taught me that I should use the anger that I was feeling towards the people who were prejudiced to try to change things, to try to change them and change society so that this kind of hate and prejudice doesn't exist.

DM - Arun's parents sent Arun to be with his grandfather at the age of 12 and he remained with him until he was assassinated two years later in 1948. Arun experienced firsthand the turbulent. India was going through as it tried to break free from oppressive British rule. He saw how the British overlords and the Indian nationalists clashed in that struggle for liberation. But he also saw the effectiveness of the doctrine of nonviolence his grandfather had been preaching and practicing.

AG - He never asked people to do anything that he didn't do himself. So it was through his life that we learned things. And you know, I think that in recent times he was the only person who could justifiably say that my life was my message.

DM - When Gandhi was assassinated, Arun returned to Durban and his parents.

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He was so enraged that his grandfather had been killed, the for time he sought revenge. His parents had to remind him of his grandfather's main message which was never react immediately in anger. A runes parents emphasized forgiveness and encouraged him to dedicate his life to peacemaking.

DM - When you were listening to him tell you these things, as a child, did it ever occur to you that someday you would be doing the exact same things that he was doing?

AG - No I didn't, I mean I wasn't that bright a kid. But he had a way of teaching that remained in the mind and as I grew up and began to reflect on it, and even study closely his life and his work, I recalled how important all the lessons work. And that's when it dawned on me that I have a legacy that I need to share with other people as much as possible.

DM - Mahatma Gandhi taught Arun that many lessons, not only about peace but about conservation. Here is Arun Gandhi, speaking at the Michael J Fox theater in British Columbia about the lesson of the pencil.

Excerpt

That excerpt was from In the Footsteps of Gandhi, a feature documentary directed by Garth Andrew Dyke.

DM - So the work that you're doing now, is it in the tradition of what your grandfather was doing or has it adapted to the more modern times or is the mission the same regardless of what they age is?

AG – No, the philosophy has to change. No philosophy should remain static because then it becomes outdated. So the philosophy has to change. But the change should occur within the parameters of the kernel of the philosophy. And so tt can't move away from nonviolence, but the application of nonviolence and the understanding of nonviolence has to keep changing.

DM - Arun Gandhi is a Hindu like his grandfather but expresses Universalist views. Hindu Universalism conceives the whole world as a single family that deifies one truth. This means that Universalism accepts all forms of belief and dismisses divisions and distinctions between religions. But Gandhi differs from his grandfather in that he is not an ascetic or someone who avoids worldly possessions or material value. He has not dedicated himself to a life of poverty. However he has chosen to focus not only on peace, but many other issues that

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affect the welfare of humanity.

AG - Yeah, I have tried to modernize it and bring it into more focus. And I have seen that his philosophy was not simply about conflict resolution or political conflict resolution, it was about changing people and changing attitudes and changing relationships. And that is why he said that we must become the change we wish to see in the world. If we don't change, we cannot change the world and if we cannot change the world, then we will continue to practice the culture of violence that exists today instead of becoming more peaceful and living in respect and harmony with each other.

DM - As he mentioned earlier, one of the lessons Mahatma told Arun without violence against the earth comes from an unawareness of one's personal responsibility to the earth. This is a protest prayer, written by Arun Gandhi and recited by members of an anti-franking group in New York's state capital.

Excerpt

DM - Do people ever look at you and listen to you and find themselves in awe of you, and of your legacy?

AG - They certainly are in awe of my legacy, and I don't know whether they are in awe of what I tell them. Of course the only judgment for that is that whenever I speak, large crowds come to me. And so I feel that I am saying something that makes sense to people and that's why they come to listen to it over and over again.

DM - Well it's two part question because the other part of the question is do you ever look at them and think, inside myself I feel like an ordinary man?

AG - I am an ordinary man. There's no doubt about it. An ordinary man with a very great legacy. So that is why I think I need to share that legacy is much as possible. And I have devoted my life to taking it to people all over the world wherever they are interested.

DM - I guess the question am getting at is the humility that it, that I think it would take to not let your legacy take you over. I mean, because ego is probably one of the things that was at the center of the thing that your grandfather was trying to heal.

AG - Yeah, and that is why he was able to practice nonviolence so efficiently

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because he was able to crush his ego. And I think to a large extent I have been able to do the same thing although not to the extent of my grandfather. But I have been able to control and crush the ego and don't let it take over.

DM - Is that the key to finding the solutions to political conflict, and military conflict. Individuals must seek to crush their own egos?

AG - Yes. Because ego is what leads us to aggression. And I think one of the biggest problems in the United States is the inflated ego of being the superpower, and the only power in the world. And nobody should mess around with us. And it's that ego that is leading us to more and more violence.

DM - Arun Gandhi moved to the United States with his wife Sunanda in 1987, and began work on a study of prejudice internationally. Later they moved to Memphis, and founded the Mahatma Gandhi Institute for nonviolence. In 1996, as part of a yearly celebration of the work of both his grandfather and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., he cofounded the Season of Nonviolence. But despite these good works, Arun's Gandhi's career has at times been controversial. Although his support for the adoption of nonviolence never wavered, he seemed to accuse Israeli Jews of using their history with the Holocaust as an excuse to continue to use fear and aggression as a way to subjugate neighboring Palestinians, calling it a culture of violence. These comments forced Arun Gandhi to resign of his own Institute in 2008.

DM - I have a personal question to ask you. In your family, do all members of your family, of your close family and of your distant family, do they all aspire to follow the teachings of your grandfather? Or does your family contain family members as do all families, where some are the black sheep and some are the good and some are the troubled. I mean, I'm just wondering not everybody has the good fortune of having someone like Gandhi in their family tree.

AG - Right. Of course I can't say that all members of the Gandhi family are following in his footsteps but whatever way they can to the extent they can, their all trying to. Just as I am. I it won't say that I am entirely following in his footsteps but I am trying as much as possible within the parameters that I'm faced with.

DM - I want to ask you, why do you think it's so difficult for humanity to learn this lesson. Because, humanity has been warring with itself, warring with each other, for hundreds, thousands of years. And you would think that after so much bloodshed, after so much destruction and displacement and misery, you would think that humanity would learn. I mean we seem to learn everywhere else. We

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learn how to make better buildings, we learn how to cook food better, we learn better sanitation, better communication techniques. But we just don't seem to be able to learn this. Why do you think that is?

AG - Well it goes back to the ego, humanity's ego. And also the desire to control. And we exercise that desire right from our homes. When we control our children through fear, fear of punishment. And that is the first step in the culture of violence. And that grows ultimately in society, and everybody seeks to control everybody else through fear. The governments control each other through fear and international relationships are based on fear. That's why we need a strong army and all the weapons of mass destruction because it's only through fear that we can control other people. So whenever there is fear involved, I know it is quick, you know we can build weapons, we can threaten people and control them but unfortunately people have the ability to get out of that fear. And so we have to keep escalating the fear and to the nth degree, and now we are faced with a situation where we can't exercise the amount of fear that we want to. So nonviolence is about controlling through respect and love and understanding and acceptance. And that takes a little more commitment. And we don't want to commit to anything like that because we see that as a sign of weakness. It's all the brainwashing that we have been subjected to for centuries, ever since we became sort of civilized. And I say sort of because I don't were really civilized. Material possessions don't make people civilized. It's how they behave with each other that makes them civilized.

DM - This age that we seem to of entered in, this age of guerrilla warfare and terrorism, do you think that there is any message in why conflicts seem to have, more personal. I mean to attack a military target is one thing but then to attack innocent people is another.

AG - That is the tragedy of violence. If you follow rules in violence, you'll never win against a powerful enemy. And so you have to find other ways of destroying that enemy. And so all these things come up, terrorism and fear. One man has been able to change our lives completely through acts of terrorism, and that is an indication that somewhere we have gone wrong with our relationship with that part of the world. And if we don't look at that mistake that we have made and try to rectify that mistake, we are going to go deeper and deeper into this whole cycle of violence. And those people who don't have the weapons that we have are going to find different ways of attacking us. They are going to change the rules of attacking. And that's how they expect to hurt us. And that's the tragedy, and that's the tragedy of the culture of violence we continue to face.

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DM - This is Arun Gandhi speaking at Lehigh University on the problem of terrorism versus nonviolence in the aftermath of 9/11.

Excerpt

DM - It makes sense to know that Arun Gandhi is not just a spokesperson for peace, but a social activist as well. Shortly after he and his wife were married, the South African government told him that she would not be allowed to accompany him back there. They decided to live in India and Arun worked for 30 years as a journalist for the Times of India. Together, they started projects for the social and economically oppressed using constructive programs, the backbone of Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence. The programs change the lives of more half a million people in over 300 villages. And they still continue to grow. Sunanda died in February 2007 and the family is working to establish a school in one of the poorest rural areas of India in her name. But Arun is also the author of several books. The first, a Patch of White is about life in a prejudiced South Africa. Then he wrote two books on poverty and politics in India, followed by a compilation of Mahatma Gandhi's wit and wisdom. He also edited a book of essays on World without Violence; Can Gandhi's Vision Become a Reality? And more recently wrote, the Forgotten Woman; The Untold Story of Kasturba, The Wife of Mahatma Gandhi, jointly with his late wife Sunanda. Arun and Sunanda also dedicated a lot of their work helping children using Gandhi's philosophy of Saravodoyia, the welfare of all children. They rescued and found homes for almost 130 abandoned children, and develop economic programs that successfully changed the lives of several thousand impoverished people. The new Gandhi Worldwide Education Institute was launched in may 2008 in the US by room Gandhi. Its purpose is to promote community building in economically depressed areas through the joining of Gandhian philosophies with vocational education for children and their parents. But Arun Gandhi's work with respect to children isn't just about delivering services to children. It's about delivering messages to them.

DM – Do you find it easier to communicate this message to adults or do you spend any time trying to tell to children?

AG - I have. Just yesterday I spoke to 1100 middle school children, and they understood everything that I said and I'm sure that I have been able to plant seeds in some of their minds. So I go to any audience that is interested in listening to me. It can be from children to adults.

DM - I was looking at some the stuff that you have been involved in, the

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humanism and its aspirations manifesto, your Institute for Nonviolence at the University of Rochester, your work in Salisbury University. I'm just wondering what other venues do you want to try to reach out to. You've reached out to Catholic institutions and Palestinian institutions and I'm just wondering where else will you take your message?

AG - I will take it wherever people listen to me and are willing to give it a thought. I consider myself a peace farmer, and just like a regular farmer goes out into the fields and plant seeds and hopes and prays that he will get a good crop, I also do the same thing. I go and plant seeds into the minds of people who were listening to me and hope that those seeds will germinate and we will have a good crop of peacemakers.

DM - How many generations do you think that'll take?

AG - God knows. It can be overnight or it can be several generations. Nobody knows. It's a question of commitment of the people. It's when the people decide that they want peace that peace will come. Otherwise, if we are going to wait for somebody else to start peace first, then everybody waits for everybody else.

Excerpt

DM - That was Arun Gandhi speaking to an audience at Cornell University about the importance of planting seeds of nonviolence for this generation and for subsequent generations.

DM - I really appreciate you taking the time speak to me Mr. Gandhi. Thank you very much.

AG - Thank you very much.

DM - Goodbye.

AG – Bye.

DM - I'm Don Merrill and I've been talking to Arun Manilal Gandhi. Thanks for listening.

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