

# MANDELA AND GANDHI

by John Scales Avery

Nelson Rohihlahla Mandela (1918-2013) and Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) were two of history's greatest leaders in the struggle against governmental oppression. They are also remembered as great ethical teachers. Their lives had many similarities; but there were also differences.

## **Similarities:**

Both Mandela and Gandhi were born into politically influential families. Gandhi's father, and also his grandfather, were Dewans (prime ministers) of the Indian state of Porbandar. Mandela's great-grandfather was the ruler of the Thembu peoples in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. When Mandela's father died, his mother brought the young boy to the palace of the Thembu people's Regent, Chief Jogintaba Dalindyebo, who became the boy's guardian. He treated Mandela as a son and gave him an outstanding education.

Both Mandela and Gandhi studied law. Both were astute political tacticians, and both struggled against governmental injustice in South Africa. Both were completely fearless. Both had iron wills and amazing stubbornness. Both spent long periods in prison as a consequence of their opposition to injustice.

Both Mandela and Gandhi are remembered for their strong belief in truth and fairness, and for their efforts to achieve unity and harmony among conflicting factions. Both treated their political opponents with kindness and politeness.

When Gandhi began to practice law South Africa, in his first case, he was able to solve a conflict by proposing a compromise that satisfied both parties. Of this result he said, "My joy was boundless. I had learnt the true practice of law. I had learnt to find out the better side of human nature and to enter men's hearts. I realized that the true function of a lawyer was to unite parties riven asunder."



Figure 1: *Mandela was given an outstanding education by his guardian, the Regent of the Thembu people.*



Figure 2: *Gandhi as a young lawyer*

Mandela is also remembered as a great champion of reconciliation. Wikipedia describes his period as President of South Africa in the following words:

“Presiding over the transition from apartheid minority rule to a multicultural democracy, Mandela saw national reconciliation as the primary task of his presidency. Having seen other post-colonial African economies damaged by the departure of white elites, Mandela worked to reassure South Africa’s white population that they were protected and represented in ‘The Rainbow Nation’. Mandela attempted to create the broadest possible coalition in his cabinet, with de Klerk as first Deputy President while other National Party officials became ministers for Agriculture, Energy, Environment, and Minerals and Energy, and Buthelezi was named Minister for Home Affairs...” Mandela also introduced, and presided over, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Both Gandhi and Mandela believed strongly in the power of truth. Gandhi called this principle “Satyagraha”, and he called his autobiography “The Story of My Experiments With Truth”.

Mandela’s realization of the power of truth came during the Rivonia Trial (1963-1964), where he was accused of plotting to overthrow the government of South Africa by violence, and his life was at stake. Remembering this event, Mandela wrote: “In a way I had never quite comprehended before, I realized the role I could play in court and the possibilities before me as a defendant. I was the symbol of justice in the court of the oppressor, the representative of the great ideals of freedom, fairness and democracy in a society that dishonored those virtues. I realized then and there that I could carry on the fight even in the fortress of the enemy”

During his defense statement, Mandela said: “I have fought against white domination and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons will live together with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and see realized. But my Lord, if it needs to be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.”

Although the prosecutor demanded the death penalty, Mandela was sentenced to lifelong imprisonment. His defense statement became widely known

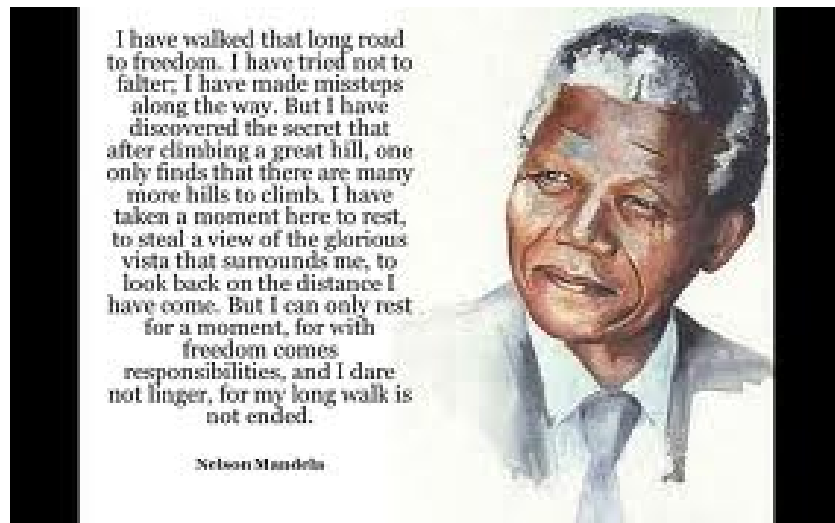


Figure 3: *Mandela with an excerpt from his autobiography*

throughout the world, and he became the era's most famous prisoner of conscience. The South African apartheid regime was universally condemned by the international community, and while still in prison, Mandela was given numerous honors, including an honorary doctorate in Lesotho, the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding and Freedom of the City of Glasgow. "Free Mandela" concerts were held in England and the UN Security Council demanded his release.

Finally, as it became increasingly clear that the South African apartheid regime was untenable, Mandela was released in February 1990. He spoke to an enormous and wildly cheering crowd of supporters, who had waited four hours to hear him. Four years later, he was elected President of South Africa. He was awarded 250 major honors, including the Nobel Peace Prize, which he shared with de Klerk.

Both Mandela and Gandhi are considered to be the fathers of their countries. Gandhi is called "Mahatma", which means "Great Soul", but he was also known by the affectionate name "Bapu", which means "father". Mandela was affectionately called "Tata", which also means "father".

### **Differences:**



Figure 4: *We must follow in the footsteps of Mandela and Gandhi*

The greatest difference between Mandela and Gandhi concerns non-violence. While Mandela believed that violent protest could sometimes be necessary in the face of governmental violence, Gandhi rejected this idea. He did so partly because of his experience as a lawyer. In carrying out non-violent protests against governmental injustice, Gandhi was making a case before the jury of international public opinion. He thought that he had a better chance of succeeding if he was very clearly in the right.

Furthermore, to the insidious argument that “the end justifies the means”, Gandhi answered firmly: “They say that ‘means are after all means’. I would say that ‘means are after all everything’. As the means, so the end. Indeed, the Creator has given us limited power over means, none over end... The means may be likened to a seed, and the end to a tree; and there is the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree. Means and end are convertible terms in my philosophy of life.”

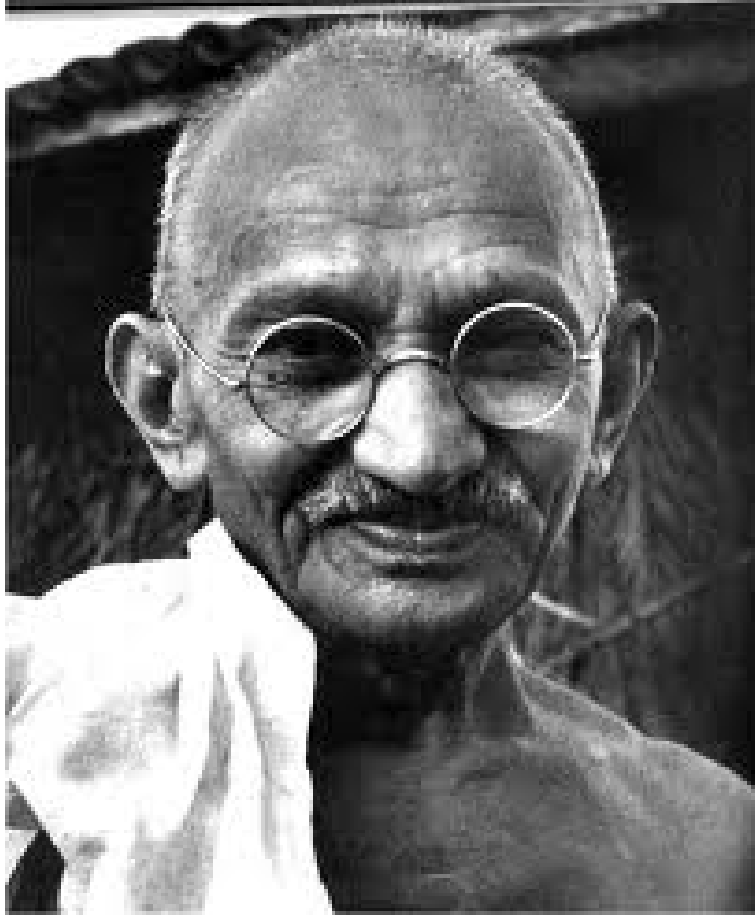


Figure 5: *Gandhi said: “Be the change you wish to see”. He also said “First they laugh at you. Then they ignore you. Then they fight you. Then you win.”*



Figure 6: *Mandela said: "It always seems impossible until it's done."*



## **What can we learn from Mandela and Gandhi?**

Today, as never before, governmental injustice, crime and folly are threatening the future of humankind. If our children and grandchildren are to have a future, each of us must work with dedication for truly democratic government, for a just and effective system of international law, for abolition of the institution of war, for abolition of nuclear weapons, for the reform of our economic system, for stabilization of the global population, and for protection of the global environment against climate change and other dangers. This is not the responsibility of a few people. It is everyone's responsibility. The courage, wisdom and dedication of Mandela and Gandhi can give us inspiration as we approach the great tasks that history has given to our generation.

### **Links:**

<https://archive.org/details/LongWalkToFreedomNelsonMandela.pdf>

<http://www.fredsakademiet.dk/library/getImg.pdf>