

Mohandas Gandhi's Autobiography



ABOUT THE READING In 1947, Mohandas Gandhi became a hero to millions for leading the movement for India's independence from Great Britain. Although the method seemed unrealistic at first, his use of nonviolent protest worked. His example inspired other nonviolent struggles for independence, as well as the Civil Rights movement in the United States. Gandhi's wisdom continues to be studied by many people. But whose ideas did Gandhi study? His autobiography describes the many places he searched for guidance.

VOCABULARY

precept basic rule

zeal enthusiasm

constrained forced



As you read try to identify the ideas or actions Gandhi thought were most important in helping him to lead a moral life.

Gandhi was born in 1869. He was raised as a Hindu in the Gujarat region of India. As a child, he was exposed to many religious faiths but did not have much interest in any of them. However, he took morality, or good conduct, very seriously. As a young man living in England, this interest expanded to include the moral teachings of a variety of religions.

[O]ne thing took deep root in me—the conviction that morality is the basis of things, and that truth is the substance of all morality. Truth became my sole objective. It began to grow in magnitude every day, and my definition of it also has been ever widening.

Source: An Autobiography: Or, the Story of My Experiments with Truth, by M.K. Gandhi, trans. Mahadev Desai, Ahmedabad, India, Navajivan Publishing House. Copied from pp. 29 to 30, 57 to 58, and 132 to 133 from the online version at www.mahatma.org.in/books/showbook.jsp?id=1&book=bg0001&link=bg&lang=en&cat=books

A [poem] likewise gripped my mind and heart. Its **precept**—return good for evil—became my guiding principle. It became such a passion with me that I began numerous experiments in it. Here are those (for me) wonderful lines:

For a bowl of water give a goodly meal;
For a kindly greeting bow thou down with **zeal**;
For a simple penny pay thou back with gold;
If thy life be rescued, life do not withhold.
Thus the words and actions of the wise regard;
Every little service tenfold they reward.
But the truly noble know all men as one,
And return with gladness good for evil done.

Towards the end of my second year in England I came across two Theosophists . . . They talked to me about the [Bhagavad] Gita, . . . and they invited me to read the original with them. I felt ashamed, as I had read the divine poem neither in Sanskrit nor in Gujarati. I was **constrained** to tell them that I had not read the Gita, but that I would gladly read it with them . . . The book struck me as one of priceless worth. The impression has ever since been growing on me with the result that I regard it today as the book *par excellence* for the knowledge of Truth. It has afforded me invaluable help in my moments of gloom . . .

About the same time I met a good Christian from Manchester in a vegetarian boarding house. He talked to me about Christianity . . . I began reading [the Bible], but I could not possibly read through the Old Testament . . . But the New Testament produced a different impression, especially the Sermon on the Mount which went straight to my heart. I compared it with the Gita. The verses “But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man take away thy coat let him have thy cloak too,” delighted me beyond

A truly good person not only rewards kind acts with ten times the kindness, but also responds to evil acts with kindness.

Theosophists are religious philosophers, or thinkers, who try to understand the nature of God and to communicate with God.

The Bhagavad Gita, part of the Mahabharata, is a sacred Hindu text. Sanskrit and Gujarati are languages of India.

measure and put me in mind of Shamal Bhatt's "For a bowl of water, give a goodly meal" etc. My young mind tried to unify the teaching of the Gita, the *Light of Asia* and the Sermon on the Mount. That renunciation was the highest form of religion appealed to me greatly.

Renunciation, or choosing to do the opposite of what one might want to do, is considered virtuous by several religious faiths.

This reading whetted my appetite for studying the lives of other religious teachers . . .

My religious **correspondence** continued . . .
All this enhanced my regard for Hinduism, and its beauties began to grow upon me. It did not, however, prejudice me against other religions . . .
I began to realize more and more the infinite possibilities of universal love.

He continues to exchange letters with people who guide his religious studies.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. According to Gandhi, what is the basis of all good conduct?

2. What lessons found in both Hinduism and Christianity did Gandhi admire?

3. Do you think Gandhi's way of thinking made his life easier or harder? Why?

Biography Candragupta Maurya

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. Maurya was said to have ruled India much like Alexander the Great.
2. Indica described what life was like in India during this time. It may have included details about civilian lives, legal and state doctrines, and even Mauryan's practices.

ACTIVITY

Answers will vary.

Biography Kautilya

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. The Arthashastra was a guidebook that discussed politics, and how to lead. It also dealt with philosophy.
2. Kautilya's thoughts and opinions were probably applicable to life in the time in which he lived, however today things are very different. I do not think politicians would be able to follow the Arthashastra, as modern government is very different from what I have learned about history.

ACTIVITY

Answers will vary.

Biography Mahinda

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. Mahinda spread Buddhism through India.
2. Mahinda was a monk who became enlightened, then traveled to Sri Lanka to convert the King to Buddhism. He then spread the teachings of Buddha. He died, and a memorial was erected where he was cremated.

ACTIVITY

Answers will vary.

Literature

ANALYZING LITERATURE

1. the consequences of good and evil
2. Both passages talk about the consequences of good and evil. The Buddhist passage uses comparisons and refers to happiness when one is good and sorrow when one is evil. The Hindu passage lists the traits of good and evil men. It refers to goodness leading to freedom and evil leading to suffering and bondage.

Primary Source The Story of Savitri from India's Mahabharata

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. Possible answers: intelligence, loyalty, devotion, lack of concern for riches, determination, concern for family members, more concerned for others than for herself
2. Answers will vary. Possible answers: She cares more about making other people happy than about her own happiness. She wants to trick Yama into continuing to grant her favors. She wants Yama to admire her and feel sympathy for her.
3. Accept any reasonable response.

Primary Source Mohandas Gandhi's Autobiography

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. Truth, which is the basis of all morality
2. If someone harms you or offends you, do not respond in anger, but try to respond with kindness.
3. Answers will vary. Examples: It was harder because turning the other cheek, or swallowing your anger, can be difficult. It was easier because he believed that returning good for evil was morally right, and being good made him happy.