

The Second of October

Today the nation is observing the birth anniversary of Mahātmā Gāndhī. There are many who complain that this observation has become nothing except tokenism. There is no heart in it anymore. Actually, the fact that there is no heart in it anymore is really a sign of his greatness.

Had he been the father of the nation because he single handedly wrote a brilliant constitution with soaring language, or had he been the father of nation because he led an army in battle and by his strategic brilliance outwitted the foe, then perhaps he would be remembered with more enthusiasm by today's citizens.

But his greatness was of a much more profound type. A greatness that is much more difficult for us to relate to than some brilliant constitution or brilliant generalship. His greatness was something that we try to avoid in our own life, or to put it more accurately and more charitably, that we don't come to terms with. His greatness was because whatever he did was based upon his own life, his own personal sense of sacrifice and discipline.

At the very foundation of his life was an incredible talent for empathy, for being able to feel the suffering of others and the weakness of others. He felt the suffering of the common man of India, but he didn't just feel that suffering from a fancy office as a barrister. Rather he dressed like them, ate like them and lived with them. He lived his empathy rather than talking about it. And the same was true with his attitude to the British. He didn't talk *ahimsā* or soul-force. He risked his life by practicing them. To him soul-force was real, not something that you speak to others about.

Therefore, if we want Mahātmā Gāndhī to be meaningful to us today, then we have to enter into his spirit. We have to recognize that in a sense it's relatively easy to write a brilliant constitution or to lead troops in battle, but to change ourselves is the most heroic thing we can possibly do. Thus the observation of October 2nd should be a time for inner reflection. It is not a time to think of all the things that need to be changed outwardly unless we are prepared to first change ourselves inwardly, to be, as he said, the change we want to see.

Therefore, if we see it correctly, today his teachings and the example of his life are needed more than they ever were, but we have to be prepared to understand them properly, and, above all, to follow his example to first change ourselves.