

## FROM OUR READERS

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### TERRORISM AND NONVIOLENCE

I was shocked to read some statements in the article by Dr. Arun Gandhi [“Terrorism and Nonviolence”], in the October 2001 issue. Specifically: “When Israel bombs the Palestinians we either rejoice or show no compassion. Our attitude is that they deserve what they get. When the Palestinians bomb the Israelis we are indignant and condemn them as vermin who need to be eliminated.”

Perhaps this was written to get an emotional reaction from readers, but in any case I felt the element of nonviolence was in fact missing from Dr. Gandhi’s own words. It could be a rhetorical device, since I don’t think he himself thinks those things. Was this a call to action to those of us who have been deeply upset by all the violence in South Asia and the Middle East? In that case, I would be very interested to know what type of action he would like us SGI-USA members to take. Although I make a firm determination every morning, particularly since September 11, that there must never ever be a World War III, and that my own workplace, family and community are my battlegrounds of peace and my human revolution, I welcome his additional suggestions.

But I honestly do not feel that most SGI members can include themselves among those who feel “they [Palestinians] deserve what they get”— except in terms of cause and effect, in which case we all do deserve what we get. I am not happy to be included as part of such an unconscious group of individuals. It made me less open to the wonderful statements he does make later in the article.

*Brigid Witkowski, Jackson Heights, New York*

*Reply from the author:*

The article was obviously written for the general public and the criticism was toward the general public. If we are against our policy toward the Israel–Palestine dispute we haven’t expressed it firmly, which means we tacitly approve of what the government is doing. I have had nastier letters from SGI members who condone what the government is doing but I cannot hold the SGI responsible for what individual members believe. People don’t have to wear the hat if it does not fit them.

Truth is often unpleasant, and unless we have the humility to swallow the bitter as we do the sweet, we will never change. Believing in Buddhism alone does not make one nonviolent. One has to demonstrate this in one’s life. Nonviolence requires that we demonstrate tangibly the positive principles of love, respect, understanding, compassion and appreciation for all individuals in our day to day living.

There are many ways in which individually and collectively we can help reduce violence,

prejudice, misunderstandings and misconceptions in society. We need to be willing to constructively help others; learn about other cultures and religion and especially help those who are economically challenged in our society and our world.

The Institute has started a Help for Humanity Fund through which we are urging communities in affluent countries to build relationships with communities in poor countries by saving a coin or a dollar every day for constructive programs. That fund can then help the community in a Third World country like Afghanistan or anywhere else attain some of the basic amenities in life that we take for granted. For instance, we spend \$1 billion on ice cream every year, which is enough to provide clean water and sanitation for all those who live in Third World countries. What we need is a people-to-people movement that is compassionate and constructive. If we reach out in this way, we will not have people hating us so much that they are willing to sacrifice their lives to express their hate.

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## **GANDHI'S NONVIOLENCE**

Mahatma Gandhi's pacifism found expression in the political tool of nonviolent protest, non-cooperation and passive resistance against British colonial rule. In comparison with the Nazis, British soldiers and policemen were not violent, and therefore, passive resistance worked very well. By contrast, even though the Jews of Europe were entirely nonviolent in their response to the Nazis, they were annihilated in the death camps. Even though Gandhi claimed that his brand of nonviolence would work against fascists bent on world domination, in the end, only a stupendous military effort by the Allies could stop them. After the Nazis and the Japanese fascists were defeated, it was then possible for nations of good will to reach out the hand of friendship toward Germany and Japan. Regrettably, the same holds true in dealing with Bin Laden and Afghanistan under the Taliban.

The claim that an endless cycle of violence would be initiated does not hold up to historical facts. After the end of the Second World War, neither Germany nor Japan held resentment against the U.S.; both nations were thankful that the Allies got rid of the fascists.

I don't think that any American likes the idea of civilians getting killed and maimed by American bombs, and it is heart rending that the Afghan people are caught in the middle of this war. But just like the fascists, the terrorists must be stopped.

*Nicholas Bergman, New York City*

## **THROUGH THE EYES OF THE PARENT**

I read with interest the article "Through the Eyes of the Parent: Helping Children Cope With Tragedy" that appeared in the October 2001 issue. While I found it extremely interesting, one paragraph provoked me to respond:

"We must then speak to them [children], striving to reconcile the dilemma of first

advocating the importance of nonviolence as Buddhists, while explaining terrorism, and why armies are maintained and the act of going to war.”

Although you don't literally say we must explain the need for armies to be maintained or for the act of going to war, you leave enough room for suggestion that these two compromises of the resolve to seek solely nonviolent solutions are O.K. both as actions in and of themselves. This should be explained to children, but not without asserting the even greater need to propagate absolute respect for the sanctity of life, as well as the need for people to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to subdue and win over the almost impossible-to-control negativity inherent in their and all others' lives.

For this reason, I strongly urge all of us to explain to our children how superior nonviolence is to the retaliation to violence with more violence.

*Marc Ginsburg, Staten Island, New York*