

Is There a Chance for Transformation Here?

Mahatma Gandhi believed that inward transformation, taking care of our mental, emotional, and physical health, precedes external change, making the world a better place, improving political, economic or environmental change. He was committed to non-violence and truth in his political activism, even in the most extreme situations. A student of Hindu philosophy, he lived simply; self-sufficient in his needs. He made his own clothes and lived on a simple vegetarian diet. He used rigorous fasts for self-purification as well as a means of protest. He believed that he needed to transform himself inwardly before transforming the world outside. His intent was to raise awareness of India's depressed classes and to draw them into freedom.

As Gandhi discovered, what's inside has to change if we want a better outside world. Each of us instinctively knows what that means for us.

For me, it means dropping those parts of my personality that do not serve me, reviewing the way I think, being immaculate and kind with my self-talk and taking responsibility for my thoughts and deeds. It means more meditation, more yoga, more kindness, more love of self and respect for myself and others.

To catch myself when I say something bad about someone else, in the lame attempt to make me feel better. This slippery slope affords me the delusion that I am better, automatically by making them wrong. To become more aware of anxiety; what triggers it and the influence I have over soothing it. When it arises, how to calm my central nervous system through deep breathing and mindfulness.

Anger is a natural response to stress and anxiety but, ultimately, if left to fester, it does more harm than good. Most of us weren't taught how to express anger safely. Rather, we store it inside or express it with a person who has nothing to do with the original cause. Why do we think it's preferable to have inner conflict over outer conflict? Why aren't we teaching our children to communicate clearly and directly about anger?

If we were taught anything, it was to be nice, to be *peacekeepers* not the *peacemakers*. Being nice hasn't got us anywhere. Being nice means abandonment of self. In particular, girls and women shove anger deep down inside so that an aura of niceness and goodness prevails. Girls learn very early to stab each other in the back, rather than being taught how to deal with anger and its cause, face-to-face. This is not our collective fault, but changing it is our collective responsibility.

When we work on being the best version of ourselves, it helps us to become better human beings. It's a great but underutilised strength that our thoughts, deeds and actions have the power to heal. When we heal ourselves, we heal the planet. We do this by cleaning up the environment, taking care of the hungry and homeless, helping others so that their pyramid of needs is being met first. Making sure everybody has access to free education, ensuring we have democracy with checks and balances. Contributing to the way we manage our world as communities, economically, morally and ethically.

Such lofty goals can only truly be achieved if we start from within. Gandhi's spiritual revolution was only possible because it started within him then expanded to others.

Covid-19 has afforded us the opportunity to look in our own backyards, into ourselves, and to fix up what needs cleaning up there: our thoughts, intentions, beliefs and the toxic, anxious parts of our mindset.

With Covid-19, we are becoming increasingly anxious, frightened, depressed and overwhelmed, but let's not kid ourselves; we were already anxious, frightened, depressed and overwhelmed before this outbreak. One thing this pandemic has done, is to give us the opportunity to re-examine the way we live, and to think about the possibilities of how we can live in the future.

Worldwide, we have an opportunity to slow down and take responsibility for who and what we are. To give to ourselves the gift of self-love. Let's take small steps to clean up our personal environment so that when this is over, we are ready to take on climate change, feeding the hungry, providing housing and education for all. Let's keep reaching out to our communities to give support and love.

Every problem has in it the seeds of its own solution - Norman Vincent Peal. When problems are unfolded with clarity and an open heart, new ways forward are discovered that are often surprising, creative and transformative.