



Hands-On Gandhian Retreat

“Having met some of the people at its heart, I am in a position to commend this Retreat most warmly. It will be an opportunity for immersion in reality plus hope plus friendship.”
- Rajmohan Gandhi (Mahatma Gandhi’s grandson and biographer)

Sponsor: The Institute of World Culture
1407 Chapala Street, Santa Barbara, CA 93101
www.worldculture.org

Dates: January 11-17, 2009

Location: Casa de Maria Retreat Center, Santa Barbara

Retreat Leader: Shashi Tyagi from GRAVIS of Jodhpur, India

Participant Max: 38 individuals

Cost: \$300 – includes room & board; scholarships available

Contacts: Renée Tillotson reneet@worldculture.org 808 864-0495
Sandhya Tillotson sandhya.tillotson@gmail.com 805 403-2304

Introduction

The idea of the **Hands-On Gandhian Retreat** started with the questions, “What can we learn from Gandhi, and how can we apply some of his principles in our daily lives?” and “How can we be, as Gandhi promoted, the change we wish to see in the world?” In true Gandhian style, this retreat is being put on by entirely volunteer efforts and contributions to bring life-long Gandhian social activist Shashi Tyagi from Rajasthan, India to Casa de Maria to lead the retreat.

As its primary sponsor, the Institute of World Culture presents this retreat as an experiment with Gandhi’s lifestyle in a week of communal living, contemplation and energetic service work. Shashi Tyagi will lead participants in a focused exploration of Gandhi’s practices of nonviolence, sustainability, service and truth. The retreat will be modeled after life at Gandhi’s ashrams. In addition to studying Gandhi’s autobiography and writings and discussing his ideas, participants will live, cook, clean and eat together.

Peace-making forums will address practical applications of non-violence in current settings. Sustainable skills workshops will emphasize hands-on, creative skills that participants can incorporate into daily life. This inter-generational retreat seeks to incorporate the idealism of the youth with the wisdom of the elders. All retreat participants will contribute to the construction of a stone meditation labyrinth as their “bread labor” to earn their keep, so to speak, of staying at Casa de Maria at a minimal price.

In keeping with Gandhi’s ascetic life-style, retreat participants agree to abstain from alcohol, drugs, sex and meat-eating during the retreat.

Sample Schedule of a Day at the Retreat

- 6:30 am Morning prayer meeting, multi-religious – Gandhi style
- 7:00 am Vegetarian breakfast – communal prep and clean-up
- 8:00 am Presentation of one Key Gandhian Concept
Reading and discussion of Gandhi's autobiography and writings, applications to daily life
- 10:00 am “Bread Labor” – work on construction of stone meditation labyrinth
- 12:30 pm Vegetarian lunch – communal prep and clean up
- 1:30 pm Personal time (e.g. hiking, meditation, reading, journaling)
- 3:00 pm Peace-making forums: dialogue with individuals with personal experience in non-violent action (e.g. community building in war-torn areas, conflict resolution in gang-afflicted cities, showing young people alternatives to military service, etc. Guest may come from Everyday Gandhi's and Nuclear Age Peace Foundation)
AND / OR
Hands-on sustainable skills workshops: (e.g. Permaculture, natural building techniques, organic gardening, hatha yoga, bread and yogurt making, simple clothing repair, farmers' marketing, simple Indian cooking)
- 5:30 pm Simple vegetarian Indian dinner – communal prep and clean-up
- 7:30 pm Forum open to broader community at no cost: Applying Gandhian thought to world problems of today (e.g. Terrorism-Militarism: 2 Sides of the Same Coin, globalized consumerism, global climate change / pollution, loss of community, energy crisis, loss of agricultural life, forfeiture of freedom for security)
- 9:00 pm Evening music/song/dance, or watching Gandhi film, then off to sleep in bunk beds in dorm room

Background of Hands-On Gandhian Retreat

In early 2008, a young member of Santa Barbara's Institute of World Culture spent 5 months on the Thar desert of Rajasthan in India volunteering for GRAVIS. It was a life-changing experience. Out of the shared dreams of this young American woman, Sandhya Tillotson, and the older Indian woman, Shashi Tiyagi, was born the concept of the Hands-On Gandhian Retreat to give Americans the chance to taste the inspiration and practical benefit of a life lived along the lines of Gandhian principles.

A century ago Mahatma Gandhi was non-violently fighting for political, economic, and social independence, religious tolerance, personal discipline and above all, Non-Violence and Truth. To protest against corrupt government systems, Gandhi spun his own cloth, grew his own food, and walked hand in hand with peoples of all faiths. Gandhi's personal fortitude in the face of daunting opposition galvanized an entire nation to demand change in the world.

Today, issues of global climate change, increased militarization, religious conflict, and globalized consumerism are at the forefront of public attention. In America, many people frustrated with the current state of the world are hoping to turn the tide. Our struggles to bring ownership of our political, commercial, and agricultural systems back to the people are not so different from Gandhi's. Although "sustainability" became a hot phrase just a few years ago, Gandhi was fervently practicing and promoting sustainability a century ago. A life of service is an enduring ideal from time immemorial, instantiated in Gandhi's real life.

Introduction of Shashi Tyagi

The retreat's guest leader, **Shashi Tyagi**, is the co-founder of GRAVIS. She has volunteered to lead this retreat with no compensation to make it accessible to as many participants as possible. (See www.gravis.org.in.) Tyagi is a devoted and noted woman activist in India, and is a member of the governing boards and committees of many development organizations. *Gramin Vikas Vigyan Samiti* (GRAVIS) was founded in 1983 by **Shashi Tyagi** and her husband, the late Laxmi Chand Tyagi. GRAVIS is an NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) that bases its approach upon the Gandhian philosophy of Sarvodaya - all rising, but the last person first. GRAVIS works for the collective rise of men, women, and children, regardless of economic situation, caste or religion. Tyagi's rural development program works with the poor of the Thar desert of Rajasthan, India, to enable the villagers to sustain themselves in an extremely harsh environment.

Tyagi is known for her hard work and soft heart. No one remembers when she might have taken a vacation from her tireless work for the desert poor. To the largely illiterate women of the villages she works in, Shashi ji ("ji" being an honorific title added to the end of a name as a mark of great respect, as in Gandhi ji) is a beacon light of hope for self-improvement for themselves and their families. Before Tyagi's organization helps any of more than 1000 villages to which they have given their assistance, GRAVIS makes sure that women and people who would formerly be considered untouchables have full representation on the village's governing committee. Daughters who are growing up to watch their mothers emulate Shashi ji in assuming positions of leadership, or being given the opportunity to get more than a 2nd grade education, are more likely to gain independence and self-sufficiency in their male-dominated culture, thanks to the efforts of Shashi ji with GRAVIS.

Some Program Details

Participants will spend **2 hours each day on construction of a stone meditation labyrinth** at the retreat site. This work constitutes "bread labor" of the sort Gandhi espoused: manual labor in exchange for food, or in this case, for lodging at the Casa de Maria Retreat Center. In gratitude for the construction of the labyrinth, Casa de Maria has deeply and generously discounted the cost of participants' stay at the retreat center. The labyrinth was designed, *gratis*, by local architect **Kirk Gradin** of **Banyan Architects**. Construction will be overseen *pro bono* by local contractor **Cliff Tillotson** of **Prometheus Construction**.

Cynthia Travis, **Founder** of Santa Barbara based **Everyday Gandhis** will lead a workshop on one afternoon of the retreat. Her organization works to restore peace in war-torn Liberia. Travis will explain her work with youth in a program called Future Guardians of the Peace.

Ethno-biologist and certified Permaculturalist Caitlin Bergman will come from the Los Angeles County Arboretum and Botanic Garden to offer a sustainable skill workshop Monday afternoon on **Permaculture**.

A cooking class and a special Indian meal during the retreat will be sponsored by the local Indian restaurant **All India Café**. Scholarships are sponsored by **Pravin Mody** of Mody's Fine Linens.

Every evening, the retreat will open its doors, free, to the community at large. People who cannot afford the time or money for a 24/7 retreat will still get to participate. Evening presentations and dialogue will focus on **applying Gandhian thought to world problems of today**, such as: globalized consumerism, global climate change / pollution, loss of community, energy crisis, loss of agricultural life, forfeiture of freedom for security. Amongst the evening discussion leaders will be **Professor Manou Eskandari** of **Santa Barbara City College** conducting a dialogue on “**Terrorism/Militarism: Two Sides of the Same Coin**”. Other potential discussion leaders include Professors **Adam Green** and **Phil Grant**.

Key Concepts

Each participant will receive a binder of readings by or about Gandhi, organized around 7 key Gandhian concepts. Likewise, each day of the retreat will be structured upon one of these concepts:

Bread Labor: everyone doing enough physical labor for one’s food, and devoting one’s intellectual endeavors to the benefit of humankind, not to amassing personal wealth

Satya: Truth, as Reality, which unites all of us since no human concept or religion can be higher than Truth itself – that which is real, authentic, genuine, enduring and sustaining

Ahimsa: negation of the will to harm in thought, speech and deed – non-violence in an active, rather than passive, sense of extending goodwill

Trusteeship: holding all spiritual, mental and physical resources in trust for the good of all

Swaraj: self-rule, in the sense of self-discipline

Sarvodaya: the uplift of all, but the least first

Satyagraha: truth-work, implying soul-force – holding onto truth in the midst of untruth

Printed Resources

The Story of My Experiments with Truth – M.K. Gandhi

Ashram Observances in Action - M.K. Gandhi

Gandhi the Man: The Story of His Transformation – Eknath Easwaran

The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi – Raghavan Iyer

The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi – Edited by Raghavan Iyer

The Good Boatman: A Portrait of Gandhi – Rajmohan Gandhi