

“Yesterday I was clever; I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise; I am changing myself”
— Jalaluddin Rumi

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BRIEFLY

Eat Together

On a late summer evening, about a dozen people gather on a picnic blanket in Chicago's Palmer Square Park, spread between kids playing on playground equipment and young adults throwing a Frisbee disc on the lawn. One of the picnickers takes a piece of pita bread and breaks it in half. "This is our body," he says, passing it to the person sitting next to him. Each person repeats the gesture before digging into a spread of food from a nearby restaurant. This gathering isn't just another group of friends soaking up the last days of summer outside. It was church. Members and guests of Root & Branch Church gather for a 'dinner church' service at Palmer Square Park in Chicago, USA. Root & Branch Church calls this service the Welcome Table. It's part of a growing trend of dinner churches popping in a number of



denominations, conservative and progressive, urban and rural. The dinner church movement sees gathering together for a meal itself as worship, rather than just another church potluck after worship. "Eating together has been central to the church for the entirety of the church's life," says Kendall Vanderslice, author of 'We Will Feast.'

— religionnews.com

Locke Scroll

A 'once in a generation' discovery of a centuries-old manuscript by John Locke shows the great English philosopher making his earliest arguments for religious toleration, with the scholar who unearthed it calling the document 'the origin and catalyst for momentous and foundational ideas of western liberal democracy'. Dated to 1667-8, the manuscript titled 'Reasons for tolerating Papists equally with others' was previously unknown to academia. It had been owned by the descendants of one of Locke's friends until the 1920s, when it was sold at



auction to a book dealer. From there, it went into private collections until it was donated to St John's College, Annapolis. Scholar JC Walmsley noticed a reference to it in a 1928 book dealer's catalogue. Walmsley said. "This manuscript shows him to be much more tolerant in certain respects than was ever previously supposed." Locke, who died in 1704, is known for his 'Two Treatises on Government,' which became a foundational text for modern western democracy. His 'A Letter Concerning Toleration,' influenced James Madison's thinking on the separation of church and state.

— theguardian.com

CHANGE The World



ANIL K RAJVANSHI, a devoted student of M K GANDHI, who practises and promotes science, technology and spirituality in a holistic manner, talks about the many lessons from Gandhiji that could help us transform ourselves and the world around us

This year we are celebrating the 150th birth anniversary of Gandhiji. His writings and messages are as relevant today as they were when he wrote them. A central theme of his life was that if we want to change the world, then it should start with us. All his life, he did experiments on himself and expanded them for the larger good.

We need to discover the truth and goodness in us and then share it with everyone. All those who have made an impact on this world have followed the regime of first finding the truth as in discovery; broadcasting it via papers, and publicity and then spreading the message by manufacturing, sales and inspiring others. This is the methodology that Gandhiji followed.

All his experiments on non-violence, *brahmacharya* and food, for example, were first done on himself and then he wrote about them, gave speeches and inspired millions of Indians to do likewise.

The quest for truth drove great scientists and inventors like Einstein, Newton, Faraday and Edison to discover the secrets of nature. They developed the science and the technology because it was the romance of discovery and they were after the truth. Besides, in discovering the truth, they got tremendous personal happiness. And each one, in his very own way, changed the world.

They did not start on their discovery path by thinking about how to change the world. They started by

thinking about how to find the truth and their discovery then changed the world. This is how nature evolves. It comes in equilibrium with its surroundings and develops slowly, but surely. Large-scale replication of such phenomena then changes the world.

So each one of us should try to search for truth in our own lives and spheres. However, this requires great courage and honesty, because each one of us has to delve deeply inside ourselves and follow the path diligently, since it is not for impressing others or to show the world.

I have always been inspired by Gandhiji. He has been my hero and in a small way I have tried to imbibe his message in my life and this essay is an attempt to chronicle it.

In my own life, my self-discovery started at the age of 13 when I came under the influence of Gandhiji after reading his autobiography. Then followed many years of spiritual journeying, resulting in interesting spiritual experiences and dreams. This journey was further enhanced by my engineering education which exposed me to the effect that technology can have on human life.

There are lots of articles written to show how Gandhiji was anti-technology and anti-science. He was neither. In fact, he worshipped the human body as the greatest machine ever designed by nature, so how could be accused of being anti-technology?

In his life, Gandhiji used the lat-

est technologies of his time — telephones, the telegraph, cars, ships and trains. What he rebelled against was the exploitative use of technology and big machines of that time that did nothing to uplift the poor.

Intuitively he felt that decentralisation and sustainable development were the solutions to alleviate rural poverty.

Gandhiji was an engineer at heart. He improvised on many things like better snake-catching equipment; *takli*, the small cotton spinning wheel; chappals, sandals from used tyres, and many more. In 1929, he instituted a prize of Rs 100,000 for the design of an improved, state-of-the-art charkha.

Such things could not come from someone who was anti-technology; these could come only from an innovator and an engineer. This is the hallmark of a great mind since it can produce original ideas in whichever field it becomes interested in.

Had Gandhiji lived in present times he would have embraced the latest technology of 3D printing, cell phones and enhanced rural mobility, since it allows decentralised development and helps improve the lives of rural population.

In my case, the enhancement of understanding through the study of



This awareness allowed us at our Institute to do interesting experiments in renewable energy research; electric mobility development; electric power from biomass energy and purifying water for drinking, among others.

All this work was done to find and understand the truth, which in turn gave me great joy and happiness. I never had any great desire to change

150 YEARS OF M K GANDHI

the world but wanted to discover the truth. However, in the process, it might have inspired others and thus we can take small credit for influencing the world.

All these things combined together, then helped me on the path of spirituality and I have become convinced that technology with spirituality should be the path of development for India and the world.

So each one of us should find the truth in our own small way and then share it with everyone. This will help increase the total knowledge of humankind and help in its evolution. This, I feel, is the essence of Gandhiji's teachings. ■

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‘Bhakti will always be relevant’

MA INDIRA DEVI strengthened seekers' spiritual ambitions and guided people through their troubled times. RANJENI A SINGH reports on her birth centenary celebrations in Delhi

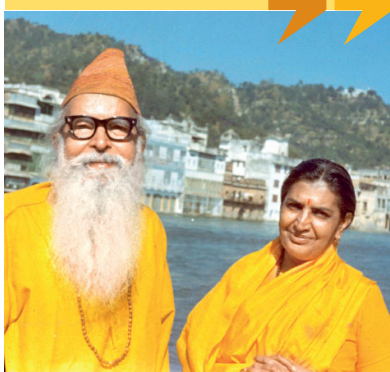
People have different spiritual needs as they come from different levels of consciousness, and they need to be guided accordingly. Through love, compassion and inner peace, one can go back to one's spiritual home. This was spiritual master Ma Indira Devi's core philosophy. And people from all walks of life and faiths came to her for succour. By deepening their spirituality, she helped them transcend the material to reach the sacred. Her followers include Bollywood film actor Hema Malini and poet and essayist Michael Sowder.

Speaking at the first centenary celebrations of spiritual teacher Ma Indira Devi, in New Delhi on Sunday, scholar and poet Karan Singh said, "We live in an age of violence, turmoil and in such times we seek light and guidance. Against such a backdrop, bhakti, as taught by Indira Devi, becomes very relevant. For a seeker in search of guidance, she used bhakti — illuminated by love for personalised aspects of the Divine — to help him realise the Ultimate." He added that she strengthened the individual's spirituality.

As Janak Kumari in her pre-initiated life, she was born into an affluent family, but renounced material riches and sought the Divine. As a medium of

MA TAUGHT ME HOW TO RECOGNISE THE DIVINE PRESENCE, WHICH IS PRESENT IN ALL OF US AND SURRENDER TO IT, COMPLETELY. SHE TAUGHT ME THAT GOD, GURU AND SELF ARE THE SAME THING

— HEMA MALINI



MA INDIRA DEVI WITH HER GURU DILIP KUMAR ROY (FILE PHOTO)

the great medieval woman mystic Mirabai — as her followers believe — Indira Devi composed over a thousand Mira bhajans in her trance state. These prayers, like the songs of Sufi mystics, elucidate the 'path of the heart' while sharing its peaks and travails with spiritual seekers. Incidentally, just like Mirabai, she was also born on Holi, the festival of colours. Indira Devi was the disciple of Dilip Kumar Roy, musicologist, novelist, poet, essayist and philosopher. Also known as 'Dadaji', Roy was a direct disciple of Sri Aurobindo and Mother of Puducherry.

She practised Savikalpa samadhi, bliss of absorption in one's true Self, in her initial days of sadhana. Later, Indira Devi attained Nirvikalpa samadhi, ego-extinction, and Bhava Samadhi — being ensconced in the Divine Love — regularly till the end of her physical life in 1997. As part of the centenary celebrations, her followers organised a *bhajan sandhya* and invoked her blessings by singing her compositions. Although her Hindi bhajans are contextualised in the Vaishnava tradition of bhakti, they can be easily extended to include all faiths. The essence of her teachings was that love for God leads to love for all.

Vinaya Kshirsagar, Sanskrit scholar and former head of the department of

Sanskrit and Indology at Deccan University, Pune, said, "The concepts and recurring themes in Ma's Mira bhajans, compiled in the volumes of *Indiranjali*, mirror the bhakti scriptures. These include the feelings of love for the Lord and, descriptions of *viraha*, separation pangs, experienced by the gopis in Krishna's absence. She guided the faithful towards God-realisation."

In 1959, Dadaji and Indira Devi built the Hari Krishna Mandir in Pune with the aim of creating a permanent nucleus for spiritual practices. Krishna and Radha are presiding deities at the shrine, but it also houses images of deities from other traditions. Indira Devi believed that one experiences the feeling of Oneness when one believes in love, and her love for the world was indiscriminate.

Talking about her experience with Ma, actor Hema Malini said, "It's always a blessing to have a guru in one's life. Till I met Ma, I had never experienced a spiritual guru. For me whoever taught me Bharatanatyam was my guru. She helped me sail through various ups and downs in life with equanimity. Ma taught me how to recognise the Divine presence, in all of us and surrender to it, completely. She taught me that God, guru and Self are the same thing." ■

Church Of The Arts

The monthly service at North Star Church of the Arts in Durham, USA, is the latest venture by one of Durham's most acclaimed residents, architect Phil Freelon, before he died last month, and his wife, singer, jazz vocalist and composer Nnenna Freelon.

The couple, internationally respected in their fields — he, perhaps most famously, as the architect for the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D C, and she as a six-time Grammy Award nominee — had long wanted to leave their adopted city of Durham a legacy its residents might enjoy after they were gone.

When the congregants took their seats at this small jewel-like church on recent Sunday morning, they saw neither a cross nor a Bible. Instead, a DJ occupied the altar, sitting in front of a controller and a laptop. As the service began, the emcee — not a clergy person — prompted visitors to take three deep breaths and exhale. A hip-hop artist grabbed the mic to rap a song called 'I Believe in You.' After him, a local poet and recording artist spent 20 minutes reading from his poems — each prefaced with a biblical quote. ■

— religionnews.com