

## Community must heal hurt Gandhi inflicted

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Guest essayists

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(January 23, 2008) — In the case of our friend Arun Gandhi's now-famous blog on the "On Faith" section of the *Washington Post's* Web site, it is not just Jewish people who were wounded by his words. As non-Jewish members of Rochester's faith community, we also felt bewilderment, hurt and anger.

We did not, nor could we, feel the depth of pain that our friends in the Jewish community spoke about. And not feeling deeply shows our spiritual lack. But the danger for Rochester now is that we will begin and end in our dealings with Gandhi by encouraging his sanction by the board of the M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence, which he co-founded.

If that is the end of it and we do not likewise engage him as a brother, then we, like Arun Gandhi himself, will have contributed to the cycle of violence.

Gandhi's grandfather and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. pointed to another way. Their strategy was to amass truth force, "satyagraha" as Gandhi called it, in such a way as to change conditions of injustice without adding to violence. The goal of Mohandas Gandhi and King was not to defeat and certainly not to punish their adversaries, but to win them over and to honor them. Our adversaries are not the people. The true adversaries, as King said, are "the giant triplets of racism, materialism and militarism."

Arun Gandhi's words contributed to the giant of racism, and the whole community was wounded by them. But he wrote because he was offended by the giant of militarism. Arun Gandhi was insensitive to the human pain his words evoked. American society shows little awareness of the suffering our militaristic policies have produced in the Middle East. Moral maturity calls us to engage all three of these giants.

The question for us is how we can use the 21st-century version of truth force to be reconciled with Gandhi and to expand the whole community's moral understanding. We encourage, and will do all we can to facilitate our community's coming together for healing no matter how the board of the M.K. Gandhi Institute decides to handle Gandhi's role in the institute. It is far better to broaden our understanding of one another than to settle for an administrative censure. Then, each of us will be more powerful witnesses of both the values and the approach of Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.

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