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## Mahatma Gandhi: The Father Of India

Mahatma Gandhi, a man who is revered by many around the world for his advocacy of peace. In Indian culture, he is a powerful symbol for their nation and has been named the Father of India. He received the title due to being one of the key figures responsible for India's independence from the British Empire. Gandhi is revered for the principles of peace he taught and exhibited in his actions during his life.

Prominent figures of history do not come from one singular path. In reality, every individual has his own story that influences their lives. In the case of Mahatma Gandhi, his story is rooted in his humble upbringing. Gandhi was born in October of 1869 in the Porbannar of, what was then, British controlled India. In Indian culture, the population is divided into different castes, which are basically permanent social classes. Gandhi was born into the Banias caste. The Banias class is considered to be the Middle Class of India. Gandhi was born into a devout Hindu family and Gandhi's father, Karamchand Gandhi, was a government official. He was the youngest of three other siblings and was very shy as a child. His academic life was not one of giftedness he was, at best, considered average. He was raised to be a devout Hindu and him and his family worshipped the Hindu god Vishnu. However, Gandhi was also influenced by beliefs of Jainism. As he grew up, Gandhi would explore the different traditions and beliefs of many different religions and adapt them into his life. When Gandhi was transitioning into his adolescent years he became rebellious against his parents, traditions and almost everything he was raised on. He rebelled by eating meat, drinking, and indulging in sexual activities. This rebellious period in his life would eventually be renounced by Gandhi as he got older. As Gandhi advanced through his academics he decided to pursue a career in law. He enrolled in the University of Bombay in India and after one year he left the university. When Gandhi was nineteen he moved to England to continue his studies. He lived in the city of London where he would find out that life in London was far different from his life back in India. At first Gandhi attempted to adapt to the culture and adopted many new habits. After a few months Gandhi stopped indulging in the societal norms and dropped the habits he developed. He joined the Theosophical Society, which was a vegetarian movement in London, and its influence over him would lead him to the Hindu principles he was raised on. This period in his life led him to give up drinking and adopt a vegetarian lifestyle and sexual abstinence.

As Gandhi grew up his philosophies and beliefs took shape. There were three writers that Gandhi obtained inspiration from and viewed as mentors. These writers were: Leo Tolstoy, Henry Salt and, John Ruskin. He read of their works which were typically works advocating pacifist beliefs. Gandhi also developed anti-colonial sentiments and desired to see his home country of India free from British. Unlike many other anti-colonial figures of his time, Gandhi did not believe the only way to achieve independence was through a violent revolution. Instead Gandhi advocated for the pursuit of peace and to achieve goals through peaceful means. Gandhi had a spirit of compassion towards people regardless of their status, beliefs, appearances and so on, this spirit is what drove him to do some of the things that he did during the independence movement that he led. He wanted there to be peace between different groups of people of his people particularly he wanted peace between India's two largest groups of people the Hindus and the Muslims. Gandhi's movement had many supporters however, there were also many who opposed Gandhi's way of pursuing independence. He faced

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opposition from both sides of the political spectrum from Communist groups to Nationalist groups opposing his pursuit of peace. Gandhi also faced an even bigger threat beyond those from his home land, he faced opposition from the very Empire that they sought to be free from. In the face of the threats Gandhi faced, he would carry the principles and values that he held in high regard throughout his life. He would not gain worldwide recognition until one key event came to pass, Indian independence.

Before India's independence the British Empire had been the dominant power over them for well over a century. Under British rule India was double the size than it is in modern times and was comprised of, what is modern day, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar. The two largest groups of people that made up the demographics of the vast country were the Hindus and Muslims. Despite major religious differences both groups coexisted peacefully, however there were occurrences of violence against each other. Gandhi became one of the key figures that led India's independence movement. During this time Gandhi was unique in the way that he pursued independence. Unlike other independence leaders. Gandhi pursued independence by peaceful means, and as a result his movement was the most successful. Gandhi used many different methods of protesting to get his message to the people of India and to their British rulers. One of the most well known protest that Gandhi did was the Salt March. The Salt March was a journey where Gandhi and 78 of his followers marched over 200 miles to the sea where Gandhi proceeded to go into the water and take a large handful of salt from the sea. The march was a significant symbol of defiance against the British because salt was made illegal to be collected and the only way to obtain it was to purchase it. This act created a wave of defiance against the British and this defiance would lead to over 100,000 arrests. Another method of protests Gandhi would employ was the act of fasting. His fasts would put pressure on the British government due to his status among Indian's who would become concerned for him. Gandhi's fasts were used as a protest against certain laws that the government would pass. His fasts were also a symbol of his commitment to the cause because he would not eat anything and would had fasted until he died of starvation if he had to Gandhi would lead another major movement against the British called the Quit India Movement. This movement protested India's involvement in World War II and stated, "the Indians cannot be involved in a war in favor of democratic purposes when India itself is not a free county". India's independence would come shortly after the conclusion of World War II. In 1947 a decisive blow to the British Empire's colonial power would be delivered by India gaining its independence. Independence did not only weaken the Empire but it also marked the end of European colonialism.

When independence was achieved Mahatma Gandhi's mission had been accomplished. However, with this achievement came a new obstacle, the founding of a nation. There were almost immediate ramifications that came as a result of independence, one of the most significant was the Partition of India. The Partition of India saw to the creation of Pakistan but had also caused an eruption of violence between Muslims and Hindus as both people groups tried to get onto their sides of the border. Gandhi's focus after independence was not as much on the political stage instead he was more focused on the violence that broke out. Any involvement that Gandhi did have in politics was at best at a minimum. Even though he had accomplished his goal he did not withdraw to his personal life. His hope was that peace could still be achieved however, there were still just as many who opposed him as there were before independence. His choice to still pursue peace would unfortunately result in him losing his life in his nation's infancy. On January 30 1948 Mahatma Gandhi was fasting in New Delhi where he was found by a Hindu radicalist who then proceeded to shoot him, snuffing out the "Great Soul" of India.

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Ghandi is revered for the principles of peace he taught and exhibited in his actions during his life. His life is a testament of peace, tolerance, compassion, and love. Gandhi wanted peace above all else. He showed tolerance for those who were not like him. Gandhi interacted with and respected Christians, Muslims, and people of other faiths. He showed compassion for even the lowest caste of society. Even though the “Great Soul” was killed in an act of violence, his values and message has transcended his life and has been spread around the world. His life served as a testament that the world’s problems do not need to be solved with a sword but instead with an outstretched hand.