

Gandhi and the Death Penalty

*A Quick Workshop for the Olympia FOR's
Committee for Alternatives to the Death Penalty
Developed May 16, 2010 by Glen Anderson*

Mohandas K. (“Mahatma”) Gandhi famously stated, “An eye for the eye makes the whole world blind.”

This statement clearly rejected the death penalty and affirmed his generous understanding of the need to stop the cycle of violence.

An unknown author summarized Gandhi’s extensive writings and teachings into eight principles of nonviolence. We can reflect on how these principles pertain to the death penalty. We can use these to move toward a Gandhian way of understanding our current criminal justice system and seeking alternatives to that futile cycle of revenge and violence.

Let’s read each of the following principles one at a time, reflect on that principle’s implications for the death penalty, and share a few of our thoughts. We can cover all eight principles in about 20 minutes.

Gandhi’s Nonviolence Principles

1. All life is one.
2. We each have a piece of the truth and the un-truth.
3. Human beings are more than the evil they sometimes commit.
4. The means must be consistent with the ends.
5. We are called to celebrate both our differences and our fundamental unity with others.
6. We reaffirm our unity with others when we transform “us” versus “them thinking and doing.”
7. Our oneness calls us to want, and to work for, the well-being of all.
8. The nonviolent journey is a process of becoming increasingly free from fear.