

AHIMSA CENTER

NONVIOLENCE IN THOUGHT AND ACTION

www.cpp.edu/ahimsacenter

2022

NEWSLETTER

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends:

It is a pleasure to write to you in my first year as the Director of the Ahimsa Center at Cal Poly Pomona.

The Center's formidable accomplishments over the last two decades have created a unique foundation for us to forge ahead on a path that is at once exciting and challenging. To widen the reach and deepen the scope of that timelessly powerful idea of *ahimsa*, we have launched a series of new initiatives this year.

In Fall 2022, we began a new series, *The Justice Dialogues*, to bring leading thinkers on Cal Poly Pomona campus for conversations on the kinds of social and political action that might help us build a more just future.

In March 2023, the Center will host the inaugural annual symposium of *The Democracy Institute* under the title "After Life: Democracy without Violence," bringing some of most original American voices across disciplines to deliberate on the possibilities of a non-violent democracy.

In Spring 2023, we will hold the inaugural *Tara and Nirmal Sethia Endowed Lecture in Ahimsa Studies*, instituted through the generous gift by Nirmal

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR AISHWARY KUMAR

By Tara Sethia

It is with great enthusiasm that I introduce Aishwary Kumar, who joined Cal Poly Pomona in the Fall of 2022 as the Director of the Center and as the Shri Shantinath Endowed Chair in Ahimsa Studies. He has a tenure-track appointment in the History Department as Associate Professor.

Educated in India and the United Kingdom, Kumar received a BA from University of Delhi; an MA from the Jawaharlal Nehru University, India; and Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge, UK.

Before his arrival at CPP, Kumar was an assistant professor at Stanford University, where he taught history and global political thought and served as the director of Stanford's undergraduate major in history, philosophy, and the Arts.

Kumar's scholarship is wide-ranging.

[Contd. on page 3](#)



and Tara Sethia. The annual lecture will celebrate their commitment to ahimsa and their hope for a more nonviolent future.

We are also planning our first trans-regional collaborative event in the Spring 2023, when the Ahimsa Center will co-host the Justice Dialogues at Stanford University, giving our Bay Area stakeholders an opportunity to participate in the conversations.

As we embark on this exciting trajectory, I am grateful for your generosity and enthusiasm.

My warm wishes to you all for a wonderful holiday season.

Aishwary Kumar, Ph.D.

Director and the Shri Shantinath Chair in Ahimsa Studies
Associate Professor of History

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Sponsorship Opportunities

Several sponsorship opportunities are available, including opportunities for naming the Ahimsa Center or endowing a conference, the teacher-institute, or a dialogue series. The Center welcomes donations in any amount. If you are interested in exploring how you can get involved with the Center or wish to donate to the Center, please [contact us](#).



Executive Editor: **Dr. Tara Sethia**
Associate Editor: **Dr. Danita Dodson**

AHIMSA CENTER RECENT NEWS AND EVENTS

Center Launched the Justice Dialogues

The inaugural Dialogue was held on Thursday, October 27, on the topic, **What is Inequality?**



This Dialogue featured Dr. Suraj Yengde, a Senior Fellow at Harvard Kennedy School, and the author of the book, *Caste Matters.*; and co-editor of the anthology *The Radical in Ambedkar.*

The focus of the dialogue was the relationship between the racial, wealth, and caste inequality in liberal democracies and the threat of violence it poses to human futures.

Center Hosted a Public Lecture

Freedom Inside? Yoga & Meditation in the Carceral State by Farah Godrej

Tuesday, November 15



Based on her recent book, Dr. Farah Godrej from UC Riverside spoke about the unlikeliest of sites where individual and collective freedom might be reclaimed and lost: inside the vast network of U.S. prisons. She addressed

how can liberty be reimagined in a society whose very foundations are intertwined with mass incarceration and systemic racism?



Faculty and Students meet at the
Ahimsa Center Open House
November 1, 2022



ABOUT THE DIRECTOR (Contd. From p. 1)

Kumar's research is wide-ranging. His book, *Radical Equality: Ambedkar, Gandhi, and the Risk of Democracy*, was published by Stanford University Press (2015). In addition, he has published a series of articles and book chapters on a variety of topics. Currently, Kumar is working on two book projects: *Neodemocracy: Freedom and Violence after Neoliberalism* and *The Gravity of Truth*.

His teaching experience includes courses on Liberalism and Violence, Gandhi and Us, Civil Disobedience, and What is Freedom?

Kumar has secured funded collaborations in Europe, and the United States. He is a member of the Executive Board of the Institute for New Global Politics, an independent network of scholars focusing on addressing the crisis of democracy, and the challenge of climate change.

It is with great pleasure that I pass the torch of ahimsa to Aishwary, wishing him all the success in his efforts to further advance the Center's mission and goals.

As the Founder and Director of the Center for nearly twenty years, it has been my great honor and joy to lead the Ahimsa Center.

I wish to thank the contributors to the newsletter, to Danita Dodson, who has served as an associate editor primarily managing the newsletter's K-12 section, our engaged readers for their interest in ahimsa and its critical relevance to all of us. Most of all, I wish to thank our donors for their continuous generosity and their stewardship.

May the upcoming Holiday Season and the New Year bring lots of cheer, good health, and happiness to all.

Tara Sethia, Ph.D.
Founder, Ahimsa Center
Emerita Professor of History

Ahimsa and Higher Education

Democracy and Nonviolence

By Andrew Moss

Russia's brutal aggression against Ukraine is seen as a struggle between autocracy and democracy.

There are good reasons for casting the conflict in these terms, but in our own country there are also reasons for using the term "democracy" with some measure of caution. Watch-dog organizations like the U.S.-based [Freedom House](#) and the Stockholm-based [International Institute for Electoral Assistance](#) have raised alarms about the state of U.S. democracy, once considered one of the most robust in the world. Congress continues to investigate the January 6 attack that sought to block the peaceful transition of power.

But there's another dimension of genuine democracy that needs to be lifted up, and that is its deep connection to nonviolence. Reverend James M. Lawson, a close associate of Dr. Martin Luther King and a long-time teacher and activist engaged in nonviolent struggles for justice, defines nonviolence as the "use of power to try to resolve conflicts, injuries, and issues in order to heal and uplift, to solidify community, and to help people take power into their own hands and use their power creatively."

By contrast, Lawson says, violence is "the use of power to harass, intimidate, injure, shackle, kill, or destroy a person or persons." One can see these concepts and their connections to democracy illustrated in a visual image – whether as photograph, video, or painting – of the

Edmund Pettus Bridge on March 7, 1965. There, several hundred nonviolent demonstrators marching from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, on behalf of voting rights met a violent response from state troopers and local law officials.



With the moral clarity of allegory, the image of that scene encapsulated, on the one side, the indivisibility of nonviolence and a people's democratic yearning for political equality. On the other side, the beatings and tear gassing inflicted by the officers showed clearly the violence deemed necessary to thwart that people's quest for full democratic participation.

Individuals and groups in power, of course, don't always need billy clubs and tear gas to suppress democracy. They have other tools available to them. A handful of justices, meeting recently in the august rooms of the U.S. Supreme Court, chose to let stand a blatantly discriminatory [redistricting plan](#) that dilutes the votes of African Americans in an Alabama congressional district. Seemingly administered with clean hands, this and other tools of voter suppression also enact violence in the attempt to silence people's voices and diminish their stature in a community. Or, to borrow from Rev. Lawson, they are attempts to

Institutional violence like this can take many forms, and unfortunately, the U.S. is rife with manifestations of it. Recently the U.S. Senate had the opportunity to extend the Child Tax Credit that helped lift millions of children temporarily out of poverty when passed last year as part of the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan. The extension of the credit, as research studies have shown, would yield immense [benefits](#) to children's health, well-being, and educational outcomes. But the refusal of senators (principally Republican senators) to pass the credit has allowed children to slide

back into poverty and the longer-term benefits to evaporate. This, too, was a form of violence, a violence made all the more bitter by widening economic inequality.

To some, it may seem highly inappropriate to speak or write of nonviolence when soldiers and civilians are engaged in a mortal struggle for freedom – for existence itself. But the unsteady state of our own democracy demands continued reflection about the degree of violence in America – and the misplaced priorities such violence entails. Can we reconsider our definition of national security when a \$753 billion defense budget, and all the advanced weaponry it can buy, has proved useless to prevent the 973,000 civilian casualties wrought by Covid?

Such reflection also asks us to consider the democratic possibilities of redemptive nonviolence.

Just as America’s founders could scarcely have imagined that descendants of their slaves would someday vote and exercise their rights in the public sphere, so too it may be difficult for some to envision a truly nonviolent democracy in America: a just and equitable society in all regards. It certainly won’t happen all at once; there’s a great need for education of our own nonviolent histories and of global active nonviolent movements today.

A starting point is to ask some basic questions. What values are essential to a democratic society? When we aspire to being fully democratic, what are we truly aiming for?

Dr. Andrew Moss, syndicated by



PeaceVoice, is an emeritus professor of English & Nonviolence Studies at California State Polytechnic university, Pomona.

Our Legacy

By Ariane White

Nearly every day, I hear of yet another eruption of violence. With this daily onslaught, I recognize the need to fight against my self-protective mechanisms that compel me toward desensitization and denial. I remind myself that distraction and compartmentalization are powerful tools of the status quo. And so, for healing to happen, for change to happen, I must allow my

heart to break with the news of every child killed, every grandmother, every teacher, every young male shooter whose suffering spurred them to cause so much harm – to replicate outside of themselves the turmoil they feel inside.

Thus, I mourn the unfathomable loss of life to gun violence in the United States as well as to the countless wars, armed conflicts, and repressive police and military forces across the globe. I mourn the conditions that human beings have wrought, the violence we continually inflict on this fragile planet that is calling out for us to find another way. And I mourn the prevailing cultural norms of isolation, suspicion, and greed that undergird each manifestation of violence, spanning interpersonal conflicts and global ones.

I know that my ability to steward into being another way of relating requires my heart to remain open, demands that I call upon the depths of empathy inside myself to counter the prevailing norm of disposability. This transformation is predicated on my capacity to reach for the humanity inside of everyone. In these moments of mourning, I call upon the power of nonviolence to connect me to all that is beautiful in the world and in each other.

This gives me the strength to directly face the brutal realities of these times, including the struggles we are facing as one species among many who are grappling with the precarity of our existence on this finite planet. I lean into the daily practices that have sustained me for decades, rituals that remind me to slow down, to make space for feelings and needs – my own and others’ – as a foundation for cultivating a culture that is deeply rooted in mutual care and connection.

Teenagers will not take up weapons and shoot people in their communities when they feel a true sense of belonging, when their fundamental human needs are met, and when they know that their lives have value. Armed police and military forces will become obsolete as we curb our overconsumption, and as our economies evolve to no longer be driven by resource hoarding and extraction, propelled by the illusion of perpetual growth. We will thrive as one species among many thriving species when we allow ourselves to face the finite nature of every life, including and especially our planet’s capacity to sustain all life. We will become the best version of ourselves when we re-center our lives on caring deeply for each other in the present. And when we do so, we render possible a future worth living for those who will follow an act of love that can be our legacy.

Dr. Ariane White is Director of [TRHT](#) at Loyola Marymount University. A longtime K-12 educator and facilitator of restorative practices,



social justice, equity, and inclusion, she is also a co-founder of [AWARE-LMU](#). She is an Ahimsa Fellow from the inaugural Ahimsa Institute for K-12 educators hosted by the Ahimsa Center in 2005.

UNIVERSITY CELEBRATES AHIMSA CENTER DONORS

In her welcome remarks, Dr. Jennifer Brown, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, said, “the Ahimsa Center is both a transformative opportunity for our students and the epitome of the Cal Poly Pomona polytechnic experience. ..Without doubt, the work of the Center exemplifies what we hope to achieve for our students.”

Celebrating the visionary generosity of the donors who have endowed the Shri Shantinath Chair in Ahimsa Studies, the Provost noted, “It is impossible to overstate the importance and impact of an endowed chair. Endowed chairs allow a university to honor, retain, and recruit distinguished faculty.” She then felicitated the donors (below) and welcomed all.



The Donors spoke about the significance of ahimsa and their involvement with the Center from its very inception, appreciated the University’s support of the Center, and welcomed Aishwary Kumar as the new director of the Center. They attributed the success of the Center and its initiatives in advancing our understanding of ahimsa to Tara Sethia, the founder and director of the Center over the last two decades.

Above: From left to right: Bipin and Rekha Shah, Meera and Jasvant Modi, Prem and Sandhya Jain



From the Left: Pradeep Iyer, Class Advisory Board, Aishwary Kumar and Tara Sethia

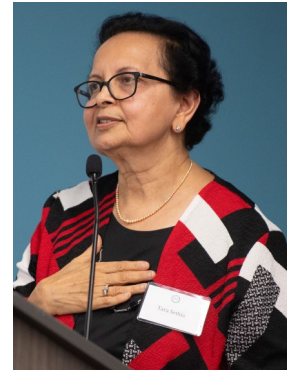


Center Donors, the Director Aishwary Kumar, and the Provost Jennifer Brown

UNIVERSITY CELEBRATES THE NEW DIRECTOR, 2022

Center Founder, Dr. Tara Sethia passed the baton to the new Director and the Shri Shantinath Chair in Ahimsa Studies, Dr. Aishwary Kumar. She thanked the Center Donors for their visionary generosity and noted that the Center is their “collective gift to humanity in a struggle to resist the rising tide of violence around us.” She welcomed all present in the audience to celebrate the momentous occasion in the journey of the Ahimsa Center.

Sharing his enthusiasm in his new role as the Director of the Center, Aishwary Kumar said, “I am deeply honored with what has been handed over to me with such generosity, such grace, and intellectual vision. I promise that I will give everything I have to uphold the idea of ahimsa, but most importantly, the dignity that past work has bestowed on us.”



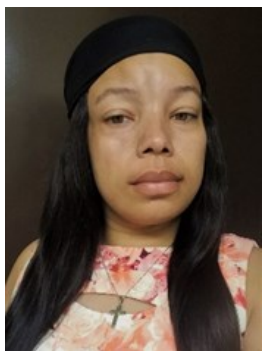
Below:
Engaged Audience at the
[Celebration](#)
October 14, 2022.



Ahimsa and K-12 Education

Social Emotional Learning, Ahimsa, and Peace of Mind

By L'aurelei Durr



Robb Elementary, Marjory Stoneman Douglass High, Sandy Hook. School shootings like these have become too commonplace

in recent history. Ask anyone who works at a school how they are feeling, and you will get a range of emotions—hopelessness, fear, sadness, anger, and the urge to do something about it. Of course, we are upset. Educators carry so much, and sometimes we even have to act as social workers and doctors. (Don't ask me how many band-aids and ice packs my teachers gave out this past year alone!)

Research shows that educators and those in other helping professions experience vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue due to caring for the varied needs of our students. Now more than ever, it is important that both educators and students adopt Social Emotional Learning (SEL) practices that help us to cultivate empathy for others and to navigate our own vulnerable emotions. We tend to think that common practices of “self-care”—bubble baths, binge watching TV, shopping, exercise—are going to help us de-stress and clear our minds, and they do to a certain extent. However, if we want to truly practice Ahimsa (nonviolence), we should also address our mental and emotional states so that we do not harm our-

selves from within through our own thoughts and feelings or allow our emotions to be vented in ways that do not align with our values. How we express our emotions can be either violent or nonviolent, and it is important that we strive to work through them instead of choosing action based on our initial thoughts and feelings. When we hold on to our negative emotions, we are only harming ourselves. Sometimes when we lash out in moments of frustration, we may even harm students we are charged with protecting.

When I was an elementary and middle school teacher, I made sure to incorporate SEL into the day. We would address everything from giving “I messages” when someone hurt our feelings, to bullying and anti-discrimination. I used to think that SEL was a waste of good instructional minutes, but over time I saw how it helped my students develop better relationships and achieve academic success. If I'm being honest, some of the strategies helped me with developing my own self-awareness and overall emotional intelligence. When we practice SEL strategies, we can focus on the skills that foster empathy and kindness. There will be more opportunities to see what we all have in common and to recognize everyone's basic humanity.

Ahimsa, in essence, does not equate to non-action. In no way am I saying that we should just get over it or “turn the other cheek” or only focus on the individual or interpersonal aspects of violence that we experience. I want to emphasize that acknowledging our emotions and feelings is a first step in the journey. Processing our emotions in healthy ways will help us think clearly enough to take appropriate actions to stop the

violence in our schools on a larger systemic scale. In *Onward*, Elena Aguilar states, “When our emotions are muddled it's hard to have a clear picture of reality. We can't act with intention or clarity.”

If we want examples of clarity and intentionality, we can look to the

Processing our emotions in healthy ways will help us think clearly enough to take appropriate actions to stop the violence in our schools on a larger systemic scale.

Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Delano Grape Strike, and Gandhi's own Salt March in India. We can see the powerful role that civil disobedience and nonviolence have played in the fight to achieve equitable conditions for those who have been systematically marginalized and disenfranchised (albeit we still have a long way to go). After we get our minds and hearts straight, we can take our cause to the streets, just like the radical and courageous ancestors before us. As Gandhi, the grandfather of Ahimsa once said, “We may never be strong enough to be entirely non-violent in thought, word and deed. But we must keep nonviolence as our goal and make steady progress towards it.”

L'aurelei Durr is a 2015 Ahimsa fellow. She is passionate about promoting equity for all students through culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices. She is an Assistant Principal and Instructional Coach in Oakland, California.

A Culture of Crisis

By Vikas Srivastava



It is commonly said that we are living in unprecedented times. However, innovation, growth, and crisis all are hardly extraordinary in human history.

What really seems to be unprecedented in our epoch is the normalization of a culture of crisis. In other words, we are living in a state of continuous reaction to (what seems) a continuous thread of crisis. Impulsively reacting to something has become the normal background to our lives. Like city folks who need traffic noise to fall asleep, many of us have accepted spontaneous reaction as a commonplace and numbing buzz.

Another unique quality of modern life is the general lack of significant and sustained effort to resolve crises (not to dismiss the many long-term efforts that are happening). The focus on symptomatic pain relief versus the response to the root cause of suffering is a cultural phenomenon that was woven into the modern approach to medicine, education, economics, social justice, and mental health long before the widespread use of the internet, mobile devices, and social media.

Crisis often magnifies many more pre-existing conditions in addition to initiating new challenges. More importantly, therefore, crises also offer opportunities for focused reflection and growth. Maybe the question is not how we react to specific instances of crisis, acts of violence, systemic oppression, or global concern. Maybe the question is how do we respond to the crises that inevitably

arise in our relationship to ourselves, to others, and to the world around us? More specifically, how do we proactively practice managing emotions and facilitating communication in our daily lives so that we can effectively navigate unexpected moments of crisis? In this model, we are empowered to embrace crisis and conflict as an opportunity for evolution.

Ahimsa serves as a fundamental approach to address the root causes and to guide responses to ward off suffering and conflict. Modern practices such as Mindfulness, Trauma Informed, and Restorative Practices resonate with Ahimsa.

I have integrated these practices into a framework that I call "Trauma Sensitive Restorative Dialogue" [TSRD]. I developed this framework specifically to facilitate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion [DEI] training for organizations. More importantly, I address DEI as a cultural issue. TSRD is an ongoing practice that both facilitates DEI training and deepens the connection between participants. Addressing DEI in this manner also helps identify cultural issues such as trauma, resistance, trust, and solidarity in addition to the issues specific to DEI.

If families, communities, classrooms, and organizations adopt routines like TSRD for regular communication, then we will have a practice in place to receive and process crises. Otherwise, we will find ourselves reacting impulsively versus responding intentionally. This is similar to practicing drills for fires and natural disasters. Furthermore, as we build resilience for crisis and conflict in general, we also build capacity to move through intense discomfort and towards necessary transformation.

Vikas Srivastava is a 2007 Ahimsa Fellow. He currently is the Director of Social Emotional Learning at the Legacy Early College (pk-12 public

charter school) in Greenville, South Carolina.

Why I Made a Film on Kasturba Gandhi

By Cynthia Lukas

I have been preparing to make the film, **Kasturba Gandhi: An Accidental Activist** throughout my adult life. As a teenager, I studied and participated in peace and justice movements, which led me to Gandhi. Over the years, I co-produced two films, *Gandhi's Gift* and *Gandhi's Awakening*, which are currently on PBS.

While researching for these films, I leaned from Gandhi's autobiography, "My wife became my guru. She taught me the lesson of nonviolence." I knew these statements were true. Gandhi would not have written them just to compliment "the wife." I had to discover Kasturba and her role in shaping Gandhi's nonviolence and share that with the world. To my dismay I



discovered there was no film on Kasturba, but many on Gandhi in which she remained his shadow. Therefore, in 2018, I decided to tell Kasturba's story of courage and compassion through a documentary. After confiding to a friend about my project, I was shocked to hear, "I didn't know Gandhi had a wife."

When I presented *Gandhi's Gift* at Rice University, Dr. Sita Kapadia

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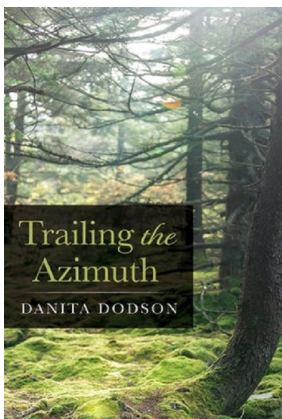
The Poetry of Ahimsa

By Danita Dodson

Like my fellow alums of the Ahimsa Center's K-12 Institutes, I have been forever changed by the lessons of nonviolence. Attending an institute at Cal Poly in 2015, I returned to my Tennessee community and my classroom to apply what I had learned. But the principles of ahimsa have not only positively influenced my curriculum and community involvement, but they have also powerfully shaped my work as a writer.

Since 2015, I have been honored to contribute to the *Ahimsa Center Newsletter*, as well as serve as its Assistant Editor. Also, the book *Teachers Teaching Nonviolence* (2020), which I coedited with my esteemed colleague Christian Bracho, made me think very deeply about the changemaking power of words that ahimsakas can share—words that can indeed make the world a better place. It is such contemplation that led me to the path of creative writing. Over the past two years, I have infused nonviolence into the core essence of the poetry I have written.

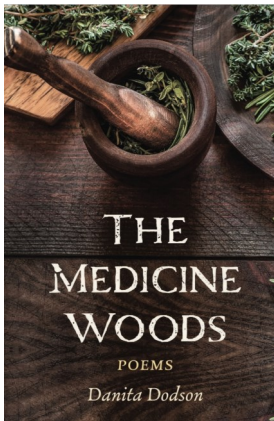
My first collection of poems, *Trailing the Azimuth*, published in 2021, represents



the search for direction in a world that is complex and uncertain, prompting the ahimsaka's journey toward light and more mindfulness of self and others. Illuminated by my voice as both a mountain woman and a citizen of the world, these poems are informed by my travels, love of nature, and cultural awareness. One of the poems, entitled "Mecca to Mon-

teagle," charts my inspiration after the Ahimsa Institute to find the old Highlander Center where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and others used my native East Tennessee as a training ground for nonviolent action.

It is in my newest collection, *The Medicine Woods*, that I truly turn most fully to articulating a meditation about how our planet's future lies in the ability to embrace the oneness of life and practice nonviolence toward each other,



the trees, the seas, and all beings. In these poems, I uplift the ecological stewardship that obliges us to seek healing in its many forms—to walk in the woods, to cure waters and soils, to mend broken hearts and minds, to give justice to the oppressed. I offer the spirit of what my grandmother sought when she ventured into the woods to find medicinal plants to heal her family: poems that distill curative words in this time of climate change and escalating violence. For example, the poem "Dogwood Ahimsa" uses an Appalachian tree in spring as a conduit for meditating upon the suffering in the world and the need for nonviolence. In "Faces of the Poorest and Weakest," I return to one of the most powerful tools of nonviolence and equity, Gandhi's Talisman, to underline the way that empathy is a foundation for enacting liberty, justice, and happiness for all beings.

My books are available directly from Wipf and Stock Publishers, Amazon, Barnes & Noble, IndieBound, and other booksellers and bookstores. I invite you to read and share the sample poem here. To find out more about my books and my work, visit my website, www.danitadodson.com.

Dr. Danita Dodson is a 2015 Ahimsa Fellow and a retired high school English and Spanish teacher. She lives in East Tennessee, where she is an adjunct instructor at Walters State Community College.



school English and Spanish teacher. She lives in East Tennessee,

where she is an adjunct instructor at Walters State Community College.

Dogwood Ahimsa

To sit fixed in the sacred stillness of the shadows in the early bright is to honor the clean slate of life, the viridity in the day's beginning, a fluid movement of mind singing gracefully like a new earth gesture, the Prithvi Mudra of rising dawn, weaving sunrise into open soul.

This act of being ever so present and conscious of all that speaks life is to breathe in the spirit of *ahimsa*, to mindfully embrace nonviolence—an intent akin to watching with care the flowering dogwood abloom.

In the snowy blossoms of this tree, through the blood-marked petals, the earth has absorbed the violence moving through its soil and roots, the muck of ancient antagonisms sown by humanity throughout time, then transformed into compassion every cry of pain, every act of hate, every cut tree, every slain body, every mother's grief—calling us to remember the earth's wounded and to see each petal as a message not only of the deepest sufferings but also of nonviolence reclaimed, the wholeness and the dayspring that we protect like sentinels on watchtowers, as we shield under our kind wings everything that is threatened today.

Ahimsa and Community

Promises and Pitfalls of Yoga and Meditation Programs in the U.S. Prisons

By Farah Godrej

An estimated forty million people in the United States regularly practice yoga, and as an industry it generates over nine billion dollars annually. A major reason for its popularity is its promise of mental and physical well-being: yoga and meditation are thought to be spiritual paths to self-improvement. Yoga is also widely practiced in prisons, another large business in the United States. Prisons in all fifty states offer yoga and meditation as a form of rehabilitation. But critics argue that such practices can also have disempowering effects, due to their emphasis on acceptance, non-judgment, and non-reaction. If the root of suffering is in the mind, as the philosophy behind yoga and meditation suggests, then injustice (including mass incarceration) may be reduced to a mental state requiring coping techniques rather than a more critical mindset. Others insist that yoga can heighten people's attention to structural violence, hierarchy, racism, and inequity. In fact, some of history's most radical activists, including M.K. Gandhi and Thich Nhat Hanh, traced their ethical and political commitments to their grounding in yogic or meditative traditions.

Yoga and meditation programs no doubt foster nonviolence and offer crucial respite for those who are incarcerated, but what sort of political effects do they have? Do they reinforce the neoliberal logic of mass incarceration which emphasizes

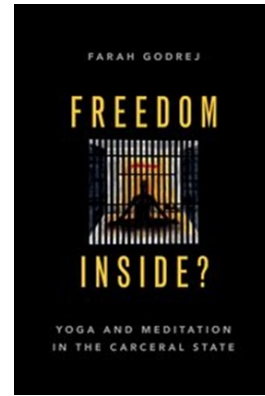
individual choices, or can they assist marginalized people in navigating systemic injustice? Drawing on collaborations with incarcerated practitioners, interviews with volunteers and formerly incarcerated practitioners, and her own fieldwork with organizations offering yoga/meditation classes inside prisons, Farah Godrej examines both the promises and pitfalls of yoga and meditation.

Freedom Inside? offers a glimpse inside the system now known as mass incarceration, which disproportionately punishes, confines, and controls those from black, brown and poor communities at exponentially higher rates, diminishing their life-chances and creating a vast underclass of disempowered, subordinated citizens.

The book reveals the ways in which incarcerated persons have used yogic practices to resist the dehumanizing effects of prisons, and to heighten their awareness of institutional racism and mass incarceration among poor people and people of color.

Godrej argues that while these practices could unwittingly exacerbate systemic forms of inequity and injustice, they also serve as resources for challenging such injustice, whether internally (via the realm of belief) or externally (through action).

A combination of ethnography and political theory, *Freedom Inside?* reimagines the concept of "resistance" in a way that considers people's interior lives as a crucial arena for liberation.



Dr. Farah Godrej, the author of this book, is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of California, River-

side. For more, [visit](#).

Kasturba Gandhi

(Contd. From page 9)

shared her full-length biography of Kasturba titled, *The Woman Beside Gandhi*, for which she had interviewed five hundred people. Dr. Kapadia, in turn, became my source, and I interviewed her for eight hours.

Dr. Peter Ruhe of the GandhiServe Foundation generously responded to my request for a few photos of Kasturba by saying, "I will contribute *all* of the existing photographs and footage of Kasturba because I expect *you* to make her definitive biography." I was honored to receive 324 photographs, twelve video clips, and that responsibility!

Making Kasturba Gandhi: An Accidental Activist has been an intense learning experience about how this woman embodied *ahimsa*. The Mahatma had many teachers, mentors, and influences, but it is vital for our world to learn about *this* one who taught him daily through her life and love.

This film will be screened by PBS during the Women's History Month (March 2023) because until now "History missed this story."

Cynthia Lukas is Producer and Director of films. She has made two films on Gandhi. For more about the film on Kasturba, [visit](#).

ABOUT THE AHIMSA CENTER

Established in 2003 in the College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, the Ahimsa Center is focused on interdisciplinary teaching and learning about nonviolence and its practical applications at personal, interpersonal, societal, national, and international levels. Educational and outreach initiatives of the Center facilitate an understanding of ahimsa as a positive force informing the ways of thinking as well as living.

The Center provides an institutional forum to innovatively serve and foster synergistic interactions among many important stakeholders in higher education, K-12 education, and the community at large.

Educational initiatives of the Center, such as the interdisciplinary Minor in Nonviolence Studies on our campus, help students understand nonviolence and nonviolent social change at intellectual and practical levels and in a global context.

To integrate in the K-12 curricula an interdisciplinary understanding of nonviolence and nonviolent social change, the Center has launched a fellowship program for the K-12 educators and offers summer institutions for them. Finally, for the benefits of the larger community, the Center organizes conferences, symposia, lectures, dialogues, workshops, and special events focusing on a deeper understanding of nonviolence as a way of life.

The Center is playing a pioneering role by fostering a vision in which each individual is an important player in the building and sustaining of a culture of nonviolence. It is a vision for cooperation and collaboration among fellow human beings on the basis of mutual respect, trust, and self restraint. It is a vision where one sees that any violence inflicted on others is a violence inflicted on oneself.

Ahimsa Center
California State
Polytechnic University
Pomona, CA 91768
www.cpp.edu/ahimsacenter
ahimsacenter@cpp.edu

UPCOMING CENTER PROGRAMS

Inaugural Annual Symposium of The Democracy Institute

“After Life: Democracy without Violence,”

March 10-12, 2022

Tara and Nirmal Sethia Inaugural Lecture in Ahimsa Studies

to be delivered by

Professor Stellan Vinthagen

Endowed Chair in the Study of Nonviolent Direct Action and Civil Resistance

Professor of Sociology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst

April 21, 2023

StayTune for Details at www.cpp.edu/ahimsacenter