

In the Footsteps of Gandhi

January 30th 1948 - January 30th 2008

To mark the occasion of the death of Gandhi, an extra-ordinary evening was organized by the Gandhi committee (which IofC is part of) composed of several peace organizations (www.surlespasdegandhi.ca), and was held at the Centre l'Emergence in Montreal.

Thanks to the creativity of artists, an 'interactive pact' was suggested to the 160 participants, inviting them to integrate Gandhi's message into their own lives.

One activity used the form of the hand, to commemorate the way that Gandhi used to present his program, in five steps (ending discrimination against the untouchables, inequality of women, hostility between religions, abuse of drugs and alcohol and ending economic dependence). As he presented each one, he would raise one finger and finally, while showing his wrist, would insist that all these actions must be brought about by non-violent means (*ahimsa*).

Thus, each of us was invited to consciously reflect on personal questions, becoming awarebut also by concrete symbolic gestures, for example: cutting the knot of a cord to signify becoming free from a dependence, or signing a collective painting of Gandhi, to be used in a non-violent action.

Then, the principal part of the evening, which consisted of :

- 1) **A journey through time and space**, while showing a brief slide-show to remind us of Gandhi's life and some of his quotations... to a very high quality and frank testimony by Benoît Lacroix, who remembers this assassination (hearing it while teaching at university) and the birth of the non-violence movement (which he links with the feminist movement of the same period). He was able to underline his vision as a historian, his convictions about today's world, the importance of the role of small groups and of the link between spirituality and action. One quotation of Gandhi has been especially inspiring to him, "Prayer is the closing down of the evening and the key to the opening of the morning".
- 2) **A journey looking inwards**, into ourselves and our interactions with others. The evening continued with a time of meditation and personal reflection about the violence within ourselves. Each one was invited to write some of these reflections on a paper, already imprinted with the image of the hand (referring to Gandhi's program)... then to think of a small step to surmount this obstacle to peace. This was followed by an exchange between neighbors---a good way of practicing "Be the change you want to see in the world".

In order to celebrate the route followed by Gandhi, space was allowed for music, for song and for dance. In a manner that was simple and yet inspired, this time for creativity allowed for the closure of this evening with beauty. Then it was time to leave, each one taking away a blessing (a quote from Gandhi) and a little cake from India.

Conviviality, simplicity, silence, sharing, commitment... A beautiful way to say "Thank you" for all by which he has inspired us.

Estelle Drouvin (01/02/08)