

How did Gandhi's religion teach him what is right and what is wrong?

In the 19th and early 20th Centuries, the British ruled over the Indian continent. Their rules and laws were aimed at creating wealth for the British Empire. This period was called 'The Raj.' As a result, the Indian people were treated badly.

Gandhi was the leader of a movement against British rule in India. He wanted to free his country from British power. Gandhi was a lawyer, an educated man. He was a Hindu following the philosophy of 'satyagraha' which aimed at revealing truth by non-violence. Gandhi himself lived a very simple life; he ate little; he owned few possessions; he wore the simple, traditional white cloths of his people.

Gandhi led a movement of civil disobedience against the British rulers. The Indian people had begun calling him "Mahatma," or "great-souled."

The British had attempted to keep India's salt trade under their thumb since the 19th century, forbidding natives from manufacturing or selling the mineral and forcing them to buy it at high cost from British merchants. Since salt was a nutritional necessity in India's steamy climate, Gandhi saw the salt laws as an inexcusable evil.

On March 2, Gandhi penned a letter to British Viceroy Lord Irwin and made a series of requests, among them was to remove the salt tax. If ignored, he promised to launch a satyagraha campaign. *'My ambition,' he wrote, 'is no less than to convert the British people through nonviolence and thus make them see the wrong they have done to India.'*

At dawn on March 12, 1930, there had been no response from the British, so Gandhi put his plan into action. Clad in a homespun shawl and sandals and holding a wooden walking stick, he set off on foot from his ashram near Ahmedabad with several dozen companions and began to walk towards the Arabian Sea town of Dandi. He would go to the shores of the sea and harvest his own salt!

With Gandhi setting a brisk pace at its head, the column crossed the countryside at a rate of roughly 12 miles per day. Gandhi paused at dozens of villages along the route to speak to people about the salt tax. He spoke to Indian people who were working for

the British - *'What is government service worth, after all?'* he asked during a stop at the city of Nadiad. *'A government job gives you the power to tyrannize over others.'* As Gandhi and his followers inched toward the western coastline, thousands of Indians joined their ranks. The *New York Times* and other newspapers from all over the world were following the walk's progress, quoting Gandhi as he denounced the salt tax as *'monstrous'* and mocking the British for *'being ashamed to arrest me.'*

Gandhi and his party finally arrived at Dandi on April 5, having walked 241 miles in the span of just 24 days. The following morning, thousands of journalists and supporters gathered to watch him commit his symbolic crime. After immersing himself in the sparkling waters of the Arabian Sea, he walked ashore where the beach's rich salt deposits rested. Gandhi picked up a lump of salt from the shore - *"With this,"* he announced, *"I am shaking the foundations of the British Empire."*

Gandhi's act opened the flood gates as hundreds of people flocked to harvest salt. Women boiled sea water and made more salt.

Gandhi was arrested and many of his followers were beaten cruelly. An American journalist Webb Miller was on the scene, and he later described what followed.

'Suddenly,' he wrote, *'at a word of command, scores of native police rushed upon the advancing marchers and rained blows on their heads...Not one of the marchers even raised an arm to fend off the blows. They went down like ten-pins.'*

This was a terrible episode in the history of Britain. Gandhi's religion told him what was right and what was wrong. He fought oppression with non-violence.

Sir Winston Churchill would later admit that the protests and their aftermath had *'inflicted such humiliation and defiance as has not been known since the British first trod the soil of India.'*