

Interviewee: Atul Kothari

Interviewers: Taylor Ginter, Cole Lambo

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Transcribed by: Taylor Ginter

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Edited by: Taylor Ginter, Cole Lambo

Background: Mr. Atul Kothari left India for New York in 1974 and finally ended up in Houston in 1976 where he has lived ever since. He holds an MBA as well as a B. Tech. and MS in Chemical Engineering. He has owned his own public accounting firm since 1984 that has grown from just himself to a six person practice. More recently, Mr. Kothari has been involved with the Gandhi Library that hosts Mahatma Gandhi Week, a celebration of Gandhi's birthday that includes the 1,000 Lights for Peace march. Mr. Kothari has also been instrumental in bringing the Eternal Gandhi Museum to Houston, the biggest project he is currently involved in.

Summary: The focus of this interview is Houston's Eternal Gandhi Museum but it also touches upon the Gandhi Library organization. The Gandhi Library started as an effort to put Gandhi's autobiography in every library and has expanded into an organization that promotes Gandhi's values of truth, nonviolence, love, and service. In 2016 Mr. Kothari was in Delhi when he visited with the Eternal Gandhi Museum's leadership and was offered the chance to bring Eternal Gandhi to Houston. Since then preparations for the Houston museum have been in the works, including fundraising two million dollars with a goal of eight and a half million, as well as hiring architects and buying a three-acre plot of land at Beltway 8 and West Airport Boulevard in Southwest Houston where a large concentration of Indo-Americans reside. Besides the plans for Houston's Eternal Gandhi Museum, Mr. Kothari also frequently brought up the role of Gandhi in his own life and how universal his ideologies are.

Interview Transcript:

Key:

AK Atul Kothari

TG Taylor Ginter

CL Cole Lambo

-: Speech cuts off; abrupt stop

...: Speech trails off; pause

Italics: Emphasis

(?): Preceding word may not be accurate

Brackets: Actions (laughs, sighs, etc.)

TG: Alright, my name is Taylor Ginter.

CL: My name is Cole Lambo.

TG: And we're here with Mr. Atul Kothari on February 7th in Fondren fourth floor, a study room. Did I say your name correctly?

AK: Absolutely.

TG: [laughs] Alright, great. So if you can start off by just introducing yourself briefly, how long you've been in Houston, what you've been doing here, and especially your involvement with the Gandhi Library.

AK: Mmhmm. Yeah, first of all. Let me thank HAAA, Houston Asian American Archive, led by Dr. Anne Chao, to give me this opportunity to meet with you and share with you some of my thoughts and everything. And of course last but not the least I want to thank the Almighty for giving me a life that I am very happy and proud of. So, in terms of how long I've been in Houston and what I've been doing here, I arrived in Houston in 1976 and took up doing MBA at the University of Houston and upon completion, fortunately I had my green card because that was the ticket to get in the job, I found a job with an independent oil and gas company by the name of Coastal Corporation, which is now called El Paso. So I worked there for about four or five years as a corporate planner, and from there on...as luck would have it, I could get my own business started. So I started my CPA practice at that point in time, because with the MBA—when I graduated from the MBA, I also took another course semester of work in accounting and was able to sit for the CPA exam and—passed it. So with that qualification and experience that I had, I started my practice and thank god it's still running and doing well. And it has grown from just one person to about six of us now we are in the firm. And that's basically, in a nutshell. [laughs] You know, I have loved Houston. Houston has been my home. I haven't tried to move anywhere, nor has anyone else tried to move me from here. So it has been great.

TG: How did you get involved with the Gandhi Library?

AK: That is a very personal, selfish reason of why I got involved. I still remember when I came to New York in 1974 to pursue my masters in engineering degree. As the plane was landing I asked myself, "Why this rivers flow?" At one time, India was the center of the world for wisdom, or wealth, people came to India. And now I'm leaving my friends, family, culture and everything, and coming over to the United States to pursue the same goals for which people used to come to India. So for many years I stated a very simple answer, and that was that science and technology as a field primarily developed by the western civilization, and we Indians just kept worshipping the Almighty and we got left behind. So about fifteen years ago, all of a sudden another thought came: what is science and technology? Science and technology is nothing else but relentless pursuit of physical truth. So, for example, Niels Bohr says atom consists of proton, neutron, electron. And then another scientist comes later on and said there are subquark (?) particles and so on

and so forth. As long as it can be proved, no matter how popular Niels Bohr is, the new truth will be accepted and then the subject will move on. So I said, “Ah! If it is as simple as that, who do I know practitioner of truth?” and I said, “Oh my god, that’s from my home backyard, Mahatma Gandhi.” So I went to the library to pick up his autobiography, and as it turned out it was on the catalog but not on the shelf. So I said “Okay, I found my mission. We’ll put his autobiography in every library.” As it turns out except for that library, all of the libraries already had the book. [TG and AK laugh] So as I mentioned to you earlier I’m in a CPA practice and at the time, I had a client from Turkey, and he knew my interest in Mahatma Gandhi so one day he mentioned, “Mr. Kothari, do you know there is a place (?) Lives of Devotion symposium at—of all the places—Rice University.” It was being organized by Turkish Student Organization, and if you are familiar with the figure Fethulla Gülen who is in the United States right now, okay. So there were four people they were going to talk about. One, about Mahatma Gandhi, one about Dr. King, one Mother Theresa, and Fethulla Gülen. Because it is being organized by Turkish traditional (?) organization and plus he does, I believe, a lot of peaceful work. So I go there, I listen to the person who talked about Mahatma Gandhi, and after the talk I go meet with him and say, “Sir, we have started a small effort here called Mahatma Gandhi Library, and can you give us some guidance as to what we can do?” So right off the bat he said, “Well there are only two people India can export at this time. One is Mahatma Gandhi, another is Swami Vivekananda.” I said, “Sorry, I know very little or nothing about Swami Vivekananda but Gandhi, I know something about.” And we were very fortunate that he and his wife taught at various Sunday schools in Houston and surrounding areas. So what we did at the time is—this is a movie titled A Force More Powerful [gesturing to DVD sitting on the table] I’ll talk more about that later on, there are six episodes in there. And what they did in the Sunday school, they showed this episode one at a time—each episode is about half an hour. And, after that, the children were asked to make a collage, regarding Gandhi or freedom struggle, or whatever topic they chose. And we were so thoroughly impressed with the output, one of the collages was the map of India, and southern coast of India is all surrounded by ocean, so on that they put the salt to represent the salt march. So we said okay, it’s time to inaugurate the library to the public. And in the Hindu community all over the world, there is a god by the name of Krishna, on his birthday we have big celebration. And that event was being held at George R. Brown Convention Center so we went and put up a whole booth as showing, okay we’ve got some books and so on and so forth. As luck would have it, right across from our booth there was a booth of artists among Greater Houston, and normally the founders of the organization here, Devinder Mahajan and Sushma Mahajan, never go to these booths. But, that day they were there! And they walked up to our booth and they asked us what we are doing. So we explained to them what we were doing, and as...circumstances would have it, they were celebrating Gandhi’s birthday that year, at their old convocation, and they asked us to come put a booth there. I said “Sure, nobody knows about us, we’d be more than happy to come.” So we go there, we put up a booth, I was asked to speak about Mahatma Gandhi to the congregation we do that and then one gentleman comes to our booth and asks how much are the books. I said, “Well, there is no price for the books, it is whatever you can afford because price should not be barrier to the knowledge.” He said, “Oh...” scratches his head and says, “Well I was really not thinking of buying or getting it, I just want a loan.” “Sure, sir, you can loan—you can

borrow the book, just like from any other library. But in addition, we will give you this prepaid, preaddressed envelope because we know our library is going to be very far from no matter where you are, so you can just put it into the postal box.” They got so thoroughly impressed, okay, so he joined the effort, and became a trustee, one of the earlier trustees of the Mahatma Gandhi Library.

Also, I would like to mention another organization I learned about there at that point in time. As to there is a young—no longer a young lady by the name of Brenda Hardt who runs an organization called Houston Nonviolent Communications. And she told me that, “Atul, did you know at Hare Krishna Temple on the day of Diwali” which is the most auspicious religious holiday of the Hindus, “there is a social, and you should go there.” I said, “Okay.” And so we contacted the people and we were asked to speak on Mahatma Gandhi there and Bhagavad Gita and so on. Because Bhagavad Gita is one of the most sacred and one of the best texts that I have ever read, or learned about it. And I said, “Look, I do not know that, but the expert who spoke at—for Mahatma Gandhi at Rice University agreed to speak there.” That’s where I learned there is a church in Houston called Unity of Houston, and they, at that time, were conducting eight week long wisdom of Gandhi workshops, for eight weekends. And I said, “Church? Holding wisdom of Gandhi workshop?? I’ve got to go and see this.” [TG and AK laugh] So I go there, I went to the second session, and I can tell you, had I not studied Gandhi, at that point in time, for two years, I would have been a total novice in that room. The people knew so much about him in depth, that I truly appreciated being part of that organization. So I told my friend Dr. Pramod Pathak who had spoken at the lives of devotion regarding this workshop, and I talked with him on the next session. And by the way, he is not a doctor although he has got masters in engineering, his doctorate is in Hindu religion, okay, so he is an expert in these matters. So after the workshop when we walked out, he and I were about the same age, and at that time he was 55 years old and he said, “Look Atul, in 55 years of my life in India I have never come across a discussion about Mahatma Gandhi like this one ever, so that way Unity of Houston we made some friends with them and Unity of Houston has come on board and there are many other organizations that I joined.

So I—in terms of...what we are doing at Gandhi Library, how did we arrive at that? Okay. So, during our first board meeting there were just four of us and we made a conscious decision at that point in time, that we wanted to go to the next generation. Uh...the reason being is that us adults—especially anyone older than 12 or 13 years old, okay, their brain is hard wired. And it is going to be very difficult to make any significant change to what the personality of the person is. Whereas children in the informative years if we reach them, okay, we can make a significant difference. So we made a conscious decision that we want to take the universal values of truth, nonviolent, love, and service to the next generation, through the study of religious peace like Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. King, Nelson Mandela, Dalai Lama and others, there are plenty of them. And to meet our goals what we did was we started a contest for the children and we called it “Mahatma Gandhi Week” okay. And I have brought with me a sample of the contest we had in 2017 and the topics [referring to sheet of paper with 2017 Mahatma Gandhi Week outlined on it], so we have speech contest, we have essay contest, we have poster contest and we have multimedia contest. Both in the junior and senior level for the children. And at the

time we said even if four children write an essay in a year we'd be more happy, we have accomplished our objective. As the thing spread, the news of what we were doing, we got more and more people coming on board.

Now in 2006, then mayor Bill White, and I don't know if you're familiar with a show here on PBS called Red, White and Blue, its inaugural show was in 2006, okay, and the invited guest was Mayor Bill White. And the format of this show is there's a republican and a democrat, and they ask the guest a number of questions regarding what they're doing, how they word it, whatever. So that's the name for the show. So...and I don't know why I had nothing better to do that Saturday so I was watching the PBS and he was like, like you said you were going to ask me soft questions [referring to pre-interview chatter] he started out with a soft question. I say, "Sir, before we go into asking you any tough questions, we will ask you a simple question." And the question was, "Who are your role models?" And I almost fell out of the chair when I heard the reply. Mayor Bill White said he had two role models: one was Abraham Lincoln, and the other was Mahatma Gandhi. [all laugh] So we knew that if we had right channel to the mayor's office then more than likely come as a shift (?) because what happens is the winners of this contest are given their prizes because we set—Gandhi's birthday is October 2nd and the Sunday following October 2nd we have grand celebration—I'll go over that in just a minute. So fortunately we found a channel.

And we approached Mayor Bill White and he agreed to be chief guest that year. The program we now call is 1,000 Lights for Peace, and I'll explain to you why we do that also in a minute, and when we went to meet with the chief of staff office to make all the arrangements, I mean we were taken aback with the question they asked. The question they asked was, "Gandhi celebration? It's a birthday celebration and no march? That's not right! You have to have a march." I said, "Okay, sir, we'll arrange that." And at that time you must be familiar because you are right here near the Hermann Park, there's a statue of Mahatma Gandhi in Hermann Park and a walk was organized from the statue in Hermann Park all the way to the steps of city hall where the first 1,000 Lights for Peace was celebrated. And that's how it started the 1,000 Lights for Peace. The reason we call it 1,000 Lights for Peace is that we would like to have around 1,000 people come to this event, and the finale of the event is the lighting of a candle where we urge everyone to light the candle and make a pledge to themselves that they will practice peace in their own lives. So that's our objective there, and in terms of what we do at 1,000 Lights for Peace, is that prior to the culture program which is from 6-8pm, from 5-6 we have a walk—a 5k walk for peace, walking through beautiful Hermann Park, paying respects at the Mahatma Gandhi statue, and they end up back at the Miller Outdoor Theatre, we are very fortunate, we have been able to have whole Houston community: African Americans, Orientals, Hispanics, Israelis, Palestinians—I mean all have come and performed some kind of peace-related program at this event at one time or another. And then as part of that we also had—we have the winners of the speech contest, both the younger and the older one deliver their speeches, and they're truly inspiring. And then at the end they are given their awards by the chief guest and so on and so forth. And then lighting of the candle. So this is how I got involved with the Mahatma Gandhi Library. And as coincidence would have it, I was born in the same town as Mahatma Gandhi. The

name of the town is Porbandar, Gujarat, India. I was raised in the town where he had ashram for almost fifteen years in the town Ahmedabad, which is in Gujarat again. And for one year, my school bus used to go by ashram every day. And the conductor would ring the bell—it was public transport—ring and say, “Gandhi ashram!” I’ll look and “Ahh okay.” [TG and AK laugh] So I knew nothing at all about him until I read his autobiography. And what I would like the listeners to focus on one aspect of Mahatma Gandhi, there are just zillions of aspects one can focus on Mahatma Gandhi, but what I would like them to focus on is, in his autobiography, on the introduction, on page three he goes something like this: That he has been looking for the all—absolute truth all his life and he hadn’t found it yet. This is a very critical admission—I will come to you later on as to why it is critical. Then he says while he is looking for the absolute truth, he must live by relative truth. What is relative truth? Normally when I ask people question, “What is truth?” all of a sudden they will say it is a trick question [TG laughs] and they will draw on god (?). It’s a very simple question. The relative truth is that anything happens in our lives, okay, each one of us make up our mind as to what is right, wrong, or in between. We don’t go consult the holy book to determine it was right, wrong, or in between. We don’t call up a holy man to get a counsel, or parents or anybody. Our looking towards within us tell us what is right, wrong, or in between. So that is our relative truth. That is how the truth is being labeled (?) to us. So now let’s take it one step further. My relative truth is going to be difference from your relative truth because your upbringing is different, your genes are different, there are many reasons why you will have a different relative truth than me. But, if I had admitted I don’t know the absolute truth, I must respect your beliefs, so no matter how disagreeable I am—uh disagree with you, but I must respect it because maybe I would learn something from you someday, or vice versa, but I cannot just say “oh no you are wrong” (?) because that’s what I think. So now we have the tolerance. And this is when the next time Gandhi swept me off my feet. That it’s just a matter of time before which you will come across somebody whose belief system is directly opposite to yours. What is called a “conflict.” Okay. So until Gandhi came about, how did the world settle this conflicts? The strong would beat up the weak one, the weak one just to stay in the game would say, “Okay, whatever you say you are right.” And when he gets strong he will beat up other people. So that’s how the conflicts were settled. Gandhi said, “No. if I’m truly interested in changing belief system of an individual, there is one and only one way. And that is that I must suffer.” I said, “Wait a minute. I’m wrong, other party is right—I’m right, other party is wrong, why should I suffer?” But, that’s what he demonstrated through Satyagraha and other movements that he did. And you have seen that in American history as well, when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. led the Civil Rights Movement, what did the African Americans do? They said simply one thing: we will not abide by these immoral laws. We will sit at the lunch counter where everyone is sitting. You want to put us in jail? That’s fine. You want to beat us up? That’s fine. You want to throw bombs at us? That’s fine. You want to throw dogs at us? We will suffer. But we will not abide by these unjust laws. So now this sounds like very high-sounding philosophy. And none of you has this experience, but ask your parents, or any lady who has children, does every mother in the world suffer for her children? It is unconditional love she offers. In the case of adversity, where does child go to run? To mom. Okay. Because shelter, protection, no matter what happens, I’m safe there. And why does mom do that? For the best for her children. Okay. That she will

suffer, she will not eat but feed the children, she will not sleep but make sure the children are sleeping. Okay. She suffers. Why? For the good of the children. So this suffering side, and another example I can throw in is, since we are in the United States, did Jesus Christ suffer? What did he say when he was being crucified? “They know not what they are doing. And therefore forgive them.” So, this is not a new concept. But Gandhi introduced the way by which it can be utilized and conflicts can be settled. So this I was caught (?) with the Gandhi Library, and I’m very happy that Almighty has shown me this path and where I can put my time and effort into it and feel really good about it.

TG: Great. That’s very interesting hearing your personal relationship with Gandhi and how it’s gone through with the Gandhi Library. Let’s move on to the new museum that’s gonna be in Houston. What sparked the idea for bringing this museum to Houston specifically? Because I know there’s one in Delhi [AK: Mmhhh.] already. So why Houston and who was instrumental in the museum?

AK: I think this was totally through providence and perhaps being in the right place at the right time. I had visited the Eternal Gandhi Multimedia Museum in Delhi. It was inaugurated (?) in 2005 and I visited soon after that, either in 2005 or 2006. And I was so thoroughly impressed with it because rather than introducing the values of truth, nonviolence, love, and service in a class surrounding, or a teaching surrounding, or telling people that this is right, or preaching surrounding, okay, what this museum has done is they have taken the latest and greatest technology, it is interactive sound and color, and they introduced the same values in fun- and game-centered play. And I said, “This is the way to do it!” Okay, anyway. So I asked to meet with the president of the organization. And I went and met with him. His name is Bharat Parekh. And for some reason he and I hit it off right away. In addition to the museum, they also have world-class souvenirs. Okay. And before meeting with them we used to give trophies to the winners of various contests. So when I looked at those souvenirs I said, “Why don’t we give these? So the children will have great keepsake and it’s related to Mahatma Gandhi.” So we started buying those from them and some other things and so on and so forth. And every time I go back to India I make it a point to go visit the Eternal Gandhi leadership.

So in 2016, I was there for a full month. And I had scheduled a meeting to meet with him. Prior to that, I believe I’m not wrong, in 2015—we had purchased—or ’16 maybe, May ’16—we had purchased a piece of land in Stafford, Texas. And we were planning to build a simple museum because National Gandhi Museum of India has 100 plus large, black and white photographs of Gandhi’s whole life chronicle, so you can see how it went one to the other and so on and so forth. And so we wanted to put that in the museum. And then, more than 116 (?) countries, if I’m correct, had published stamps in the name of Mahatma Gandhi. So we wanted to make some kind of exhibit about that, and so we wanted to invite the children to come there, visit, and learn about Gandhi. So when I visited with the leadership for Eternal Gandhi in 2016, I started describing what our plans were. And I still, to date, can’t believe. They said, “Atul, stop for a moment. Would you like to have Eternal Gandhi?” I said, “What?! Are you serious?!” Because you have to know, okay, and that’s why I brought this book [gestures to and starts flipping through

hardcover book *picture 1*], you'll see it's a book about the museum, all its exhibits, what went into it. There were 400 people all over the world, worked on this museum for a period of forty (?) years. And that's when the museum came into being. Okay.

So—and, I do not, you may or may not have heard of the name called “Birla” okay. They were one of the five industrial groups who funded Mahatma Gandhi's freedom struggle. And in fact, Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated at Birla bungalow in Delhi where he was resting, and that's where this Eternal Gandhi Museum is at this point in time, in New Delhi. So there is something—someone like Rockefellers in the United States, okay. Very extremely well (?) family and devoted to his cause. So for them to offer that to us, it was mind-blowing. And I said so but I was speechless there for a moment, and I said, “I am very honored but I have never raised money in my life. [TG and AK laugh] So I need to go back and talk to the Board of Trustees before I can say yes.” And I couldn't believe it, as soon as I came here and met with the Board of Trustees, without a moment of hesitation they said, “Atul, just go ahead. Let's go with it.” So that's how the Eternal Gandhi Museum came about.

And we currently have purchased three-acre piece of land at Beltway 8 and West Airport Boulevard. Okay. And here is the location for that [pulls out paper *picture 2*]. Which is a very prominent location for many reasons, one's, of course, it's on the feeder of a major freeway. Secondly, it's in Southwest Houston because that's where the concentration of a lot of Indo-Americans is so in order to run the museum we need a lot of volunteer help, so hopefully we'll be able to get that. And uh...three acres is just about right for what we want to do. Let me share with you also here there's a rendering of what the museum will look like [papers shuffling *picture 3*]. So our plan is to make a full circle, so right now the museum will cover part of the circle and we happen to have Autocad files of the house in which Mahatma Gandhi lived in his Ahmedabad Gandhi Ashram. And it's just mind boggling, I have visited that, it is such a simple—such a simple, okay, I've since seen simple things but this goal was beyond simple. It is mind-bogglingly simple household, and you ask yourself how a person who led this kind of struggle and has to much to offer to the world, just lived this way.

So we want to build that house at some point in time over here, right because this is going to be kind of a circle, because this is where the museum is going to go, and then later on we will complete the circle with more things they're also planning what is called a martyr's walk, because in Delhi, at the house where he was living, as he left the room and then he was going to the backyard where the prayer meeting was, so they have marked the steps that he took and finally where he was assassinated. So what we want to do is to create something similar over here. And what we will do, at the end of the martyr's walk, there will be of course the eternal flame, number one, and number two, we want to put the replica of the last possessions of Mahatma Gandhi. It is my—if you—I'd like to share with you what those last possessions are. One is rosary, one is his glasses, one is his watch, one is three monkeys statue, okay, and footwear. These are the only possessions that he had when he passed away. The reason I bring it up is the following, okay: that if I take the poll today, how many people know Bill Gates or how many people know Jeff Bezos, it'll be huge number, okay. However, if I ask how many people know

Rockefellers, I bet you the number will be far less than compared to what people would have said in 50's or 60's, and probably a hundred years from now there will be other Bill Gates and there will be other Jeff Bezos. So whatever fame they have achieved is temporary. However, take the examples of Gautama Buddha, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, there are many other such people in Hindu religion like Mahavira, Rama, Krishna, and so on and so forth. So if you take a poll of how many people know these personalities, including Gandhi, okay, the number of people who know these personalities will remain fairly constant over the time. So what have they achieved? The ultimate ego drive of a human being is to be eternal, immortal. So they have become immortal. How? Through their work, not through their possession. Not because they build huge buildings or anything like that. It is the work they did for humanity is the reason that they are being remembered today. So [coughs] that's the message hopefully we can convey to the people when they see the last possessions as to ah! Something to think about.

And just to give an example of how impressive that could be, there is an organization in Houston by the name of the Menil Collection. And from October 2nd of 2014 to February 1 of 2015, they brought in an exhibition on Mahatma Gandhi. And the director—then the director of the Menil Collection Josef Helfenstein was invited by the Houston Chronicle editorial board because they wanted to write about the exhibition and they wanted to give some space to him to write and so on and so forth. I have no clue why he invited me to go with him, but I went with him. And the editorial board asked him a lot of questions, but all the questions I had on the mind, they asked the same question. They said, “Joseph, you are a man of art. What are you doing with Gandhi's exhibition? Okay, why?” And I couldn't believe the reply he gave. He said—he's an Austrian person—as a child, he saw the picture of the last possessinos of Mahatma Gandhi, and it etched an impression in his mind that some day if he gets a chance he wants to do something for this man. And that was the result why he had brought the exhibition to Houston. Okay. And even within the—like we talked about why we made children the focus—even in Gandhi Library we have seen that. So, for example, one of the child participated in the essay contest, a high schooler, did not win the prize, however, the research he did, he got so thoroughly impressed that he said okay, he will shave his head, dress like Gandhi, and lead the Walk for Peace. Because we have been very fortunate since the time we have had the Walk for Peace, we have always had somebody dressed up as Mahatma Gandhi and lead the walk. So he did that that day. And there are many other examples—I don't want to go into that. But we have seen, there is something about this man Gandhi, that if somebody comes in touch with him once, they start every year (?). So, that's on the museum. So we have the land, we have the design, here is the floor plan [*picture 4*] as to this space is gonna be the museum, this is gonna be the lobby, these two offices are gonna be for the museum staff, storage, and we will be from here, and so you can relate to it a little bit more, let me take this picture also here with you [*picture 5*] and see this is where the guests will arrive, so it's an open area, it's where they'll come, they'll enter the museum from here, this will be the lobby, there will be a wall, behind that there will be multipurpose room where movies can be screened or spiritual songs can be sung, lectures can be done, sermons can be done, and so on and so forth. So this will really act as a big supply—meeting room and so on and so forth, and go from there. So it's coming along very nice, and I hope Houstonians will support in a strong way and make the reality come true

because we are planning to raise eight and a half million dollars, of which we have raised two million dollars, and we have another six and a half to go.

CL: One of the things we really took an interest in when we were approaching the museum was the architecture behind it and really the uniqueness. What was the thought process behind the unique architecture, specifically the circular shape, and does that accentuate any of the exhibits, or the values of Gandhi?

AK: No, great question. In fact, when leadership of Eternal Gandhi awarded us the museum back in Mumbai, okay, one of the question I asked the leadership is, “Do you have any preference for the shape?” And they said, “No, you are free to do whatever you want to do, however, okay, consider a circle.” Why circle? Because circle has infinite sides. Okay, so for example square consists of four sides, a polygon when you keep on expanding or when you take it to the infinite limit, the polygon becomes a circle, okay. And that’s the infinite wisdom that Gandhi gives, so I said, “Okay, we’ll look into that.” It’s a little expensive to go in a circular wall instead of a straight walls. However, as I showed it to you, we want to complete the circle as we go into phase two, phase three, and so on and so forth, so that was the thinking behind that. And we knew going in it will cost a little bit more but it also—because we—the other aspect was, being, talking of Gandhian thought, you should not go about showing off. But we wanted to make an impressive building so that when the visitors come—so if you’ll see here in [*picture 5*] the front of the building there is a portrait of Gandhi, there is a portrait of Dr. King, Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa, Dalai Lama, so we want to show the universality of the values of truth, nonviolence, love, and service. It cuts across all belief systems, it cuts across all sexes, it cuts across all races, okay. Everyone at their core wants to be truthful, wants to be nonviolent, wants to have a loving relationship, and want to be of help to somebody. That’s ultimately the goal of the human beings. Now, we may hide it—it gets hidden because of many other things, that’s a different story. But at the core, that’s what we are. And that’s the reason we wanted to do that so that people can—when they come, they can relate, no matter what your background, they can relate to it and go from there. Does that make sense?

CL: Mhmm.

TG: Wow has the relationship with Houston been with building the museum here. For example, maybe with the Indian Consulate here, or other organizations—how have those come into play?

AK: We, so far, we have received extremely strong support, okay. In the Consulate General when we went to show him the renderings of the conceptual design, he just summarized in one word: faaaantastic. And in fact, 26 January, in 1948 is when Indian adopted its constitution. And it is celebrated in India day as a Republic Day and a grand man (?), has huge military power and so on and so forth. So every Indian Consulate throughout the world also observes the 26th of January, and we are invited to keep a booth there because all the guests were invited there—we will talk to them about the museum and so on and so forth, and that’s how they helped us spread the word.

Uh...also, Dr. Anne Chao, she has been phenomenal supporter and there are other prominent citizens of Houston have come on board and some of the foundation—some of the premier foundations, we have been meeting with them and they have been very encouraging. So we look forward to the fantastic support of the Houston community because, remember, this is gonna be only one of three such exhibitions in the world. Okay? Eternal Gandhi Multimedia Museum when it opened in New Delhi, it was one of the first multimedia museums in the world. At the time, they also created two traveling exhibits, so that it can be shown to the rest of the population in India who cannot come to Delhi, okay. Now they have decided to go international. So of those two traveling exhibits, one is going to go to Birmingham, UK and one is coming here. So there are only three locations that will have this. Okay. So it's a very unique opportunity for Houston, and so far the support we have received—I mean we have no doubt it will come to fruition very shortly.

TG: Will there be a relationship between the three museums or will they be pretty independent?

AK: They will all be independent. Okay, so for example, the one that is done in UK, they're just focusing on these exhibits. What we are going to have is in addition to the multimedia exhibits, as I mentioned to you earlier, the National Gandhi Museum has an exhibit on Mahatma Gandhi called *Gandhi Darshan*, which in English is "Glimpses of Gandhi." So that depicts his life chronologically. We are going to have that. We are also going to have an exhibit on the stamps because we want people to learn about it. One—and by the way, this building is going to be LEED [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design] certified, okay. One of the reasons behind that is that we do not want to introduce Gandhi as an old man or saint, and you can be like him and so on and so forth. We want to introduce him as a contemporary man and that anyone can be like him. So one of the ways we are going to do is that we will have a LEED exhibit, so that when children—especially children—come, they will be given a lesson in LEED. So one of the ways we are thinking is, they will be asked: how did you go to school today? By school bus, by bus, by bike, or did your parents drive—whatever. Next question will be: what did you have for breakfast, what did you have for lunch? What kind of—a few questions will be asked. Based on that, the computer will come back and give them, "this is your carbon footprint." And now we will compare that to the carbon footprint of a child in Asia, of a child in Africa, child in Europe. So—and we will tell them that look, Gandhi practiced these principles long before it became fashion, okay, and that's how we want to introduce it. So one of the additional things we are going to do here is—especially the children from primary school, or maybe even up to middle school, when they come, we will have hopefully a professional story teller from Professional Storyteller's Guild of Houston, come and tell them the story of peace and non-violence. And when they tell the story of Satyagraha I bet you it moves even the elderless (?) as to how impactfully they deliver the whole content, and then go from there. So this will be much more than simply. In terms of long term plans, okay, see the values of truth, nonviolence, love, and service are as old as the hills, or as old as the human being has been around, okay. And human beings have been trying to pass this on to everybody to build their moral character. And unfortunately we haven't done a very good job in spite

of all the efforts we are doing. So one of the things we believe is, that it is how you communicate. So for example I mentioned to you earlier why I got so thoroughly impressed by this way of communicating, because today children can relate to that, and that will keep on changing. So we have to keep changing this thing. So what we want to do for long term and if they come on board we want to bring on companies like Disney, Apple, Microsoft, Oracle, whatever. Okay, such that we keep changing these exhibits to communicate the same values on an ongoing basis with the generation—then we'll be able to communicate. Because Disney knows a lot about children. They can teach us that, okay.

And now in terms of why I mention Apple is, that Tim Cook he visited India a year or two okay, I don't remember exactly when, and he wanted to visit Eternal Gandhi Museum—Multimedia Museum in Delhi and that was on his itinerary. So the advance (?) party goes to the Eternal Gandhi Museum staff and tells them, "Look, he has got only ten minutes and he is going to meet with the Prime Minister right after this, so you can't delay." [TG laughs] "Sure, sir, that's entirely up to him." Tim Cook goes there and spends forty minutes in the museum, okay. He sends the message to Prime Minister saying "I am running late because this is where I am." And he got a reply saying, "If you are there I can wait all day long for you, take your time."

TG: Wow.

AK: Okay. So, lemme say, at core all human beings are—want to be truthful, want to be loving, want to be nonviolent, want to be servants, so hopefully we can make this connection in the future, but our aim will be to keep changing this exhibition because we don't want to be museum where we have classic artifacts you can't find anywhere. So we don't want the cloth—the bloodstained cloth that Mahatma Gandhi was wearing when he was assassinated. No, we have no interest in that. Okay. We don't want to be the depository for these kinds of items. No, what we want to do is to spread his message... and that's the key. And that's what the plans are.

CL: One of the most incredible things that I really picked up from what you are saying is the mode of communication and bringing across Gandhi's values. Was there any difficulty creating this coherent message that this museum represents and almost the evolutionary track that it has, because there are just so many organizations and players coming together to create this.

AK: Um, sor...repeat the question if you don't mind. I've lost you somewhere

Cl: No, I was just wondering how you came to deciding how to you're going to communicate the values of Gandhi and create a unified message.

AK: We didn't do that. [Laughter] Okay, okay, our aim was simple. We want to go to children and ping them once a year. Okay. And that led, and and um the thing is that if you look at the topics also we don't say violence doesn't work—or non-violence. No! Non-violence is the way- agree or disagree. So children are free to pick the other side.

There is nothing wrong with it. Okay. Because that is the whole idea of admitting I don't know the absolute truth. What we are thinking is the...the best thing possible for the human being after all may not be, so we have to be careful not to assume that I know everything. Because see the reason is...see if you... the problem with the absolute truth is that causes conflicts. Because, we have seen that in the past. There are so many religious conflicts in the name of "I'm stronger, better than you are" and so on and so forth. Okay, so that's because... and the thing is, when one believes that one knows the absolute truth the example that I can give you: as a young parent, when my child does something wrong "Why are you doing this?! What, you don't have anything better to do?" Because I assume I knew everything. And the child is ignorant. Okay, that's where anger comes from too. And that's where resort to violence also comes from. That I know the absolute. This is the best thing. (46:27.9)

But we have to constantly remind ourselves, we don't know the absolute truth. Nobody can tell, "why was I born in a certain family?" Nobody can tell why was I given this gift of intelligence and so that I can—right, for example, you told me you are a major of economics, right? [at CL]

CL: Right.

AK: Okay so let's talk about that for a moment. In today's world, what is valued is ability to use your brains. Whether it be in mathematics, whether it be in sciences, whether it be—whatever. Okay. However, let's not go too far, let's go to Roman times. Okay. Do you not think the brave and the strength was valued a lot more than simply the brains? So this supply and demand keeps changing. Correct? So that's the idea behind it is to—do not assume you know everything. And once you admit that, all of a sudden the world will change. Okay. And go from there. Does that answer your question?

CL: I think so.

AK: Mmhmm.

TG: Can you talk a little more about the progress of the museum and where it is currently as of now, February 2018?

AK: Yeah, as I mentioned to you we have purchased the land—we purchased back in May of 2017. Since then we have hired RdIR Architects. And they are doing a phenomenal job based on what you have seen so far. So right now they are undergoing the detail engineering drawings, getting permits and whatever and so on and so forth. So hopefully they will be ready within next three to four months and hopefully we will break ground after that because we have to have all those details and in terms of our financial progress—that to break down the eight and a half million dollars, I think you should know that as well. That we are allocating value of half a million dollars to the—because these exhibits have been donated at no cost to us. They will be transported at no cost to us. They will come and install that, again at no cost to us. And they will train the local technicians to manage this exhibit on an ongoing basis at no cost. So we are allocating

half a million dollars to that. So we are down to eight million from eight and a half. Then we are going to raise three million dollars for endowment fund such that we pay for the operating expenses going into the future. Of the five million dollars, land has cost us around 1.25 million dollars, so that leaves us 3.75 million. We are allocating two and a half million dollars for the construction, so that leaves 1.25 million dollars. Of the 1.25 million, I believe half a million dollars will go for architect fees—we have also hired a fundraising fund, so we will be paying them some monies as well. That will leave us \$750,000. So with this \$750,000 what we want to do is to design the interior of the museum space in terms of—because you will see in this book [*see pictures 1, 6, 7, 8*] that some of the murals and paintings which are there in Delhi are simply comparable to Museum of Fine Arts quality [flipping through book]. Okay so we are going to engage a museumologist as well, there you go. So—and that’s the budget we have in mind and we sincerely hope we can stick to it [TG and AK laugh].

TG: So how has fundraising been going?

AK: Yeah, and I mentioned, we are already a quarter of the way.

TG: Right.

AK: Okay, and it’s moving along fine, we are meeting with the foundations and everything. And we hired the fundraising firm just back in December, so we want them to take their own time, understand everything, and they come very highly recommended. So we are moving along fine. We are happy with the—I mean fundraising is never easy [all laugh] and we have no illusions that this will be any different, okay, but based on the progress we have made so far, we feel confident that we will be able to meet the goal.

TG: So what types of events, or how, how is fundraising going about, and who is being—who is fundrai—er who is donating?

AK: Right. We are planning to keep it low-key. So, because typically when there is a fundraising, people have galas and so on and so forth okay. We are going to keep it low-key because number one, we are not a foundation that don’t go to galas, okay, and Houston has some fantastic foundations like Houston Endowment, Cullen Foundation, George Foundation so we are looking to them for the support. And then in terms of individuals, there are plenty of individuals in Houston area we believe will come on board. Once- because we are still preparing the brochures for the fundraising—through the fundraising fund and so on and so forth. And another way we are going to do is to—on March 16th, an organization by the name of Compassionate Houston is going to hold its annual luncheon. So we will have a table there with the blown-up scene of all these slides and everything, and really introduce to the people what we are doing, and so on and so forth. So that’s the procedure we are going to follow and then go from there because one of the trustees of Mahatma Gandhi Library is by the name of Mr. Devinder Mahajan who I mentioned earlier, okay. He has done a lot of fundraising for this organization in the past and he is fully committed to raising money and he has already started working on the—so, so we have lots of, and we are forming an advisory board

where we want to bring in the prominent citizens. So, for example, if we can recruit Bill White [TG laughs], I mean he himself is very lovely person but he's involved because he knows a lot of people. And we believe if we could recruit him to do the 1,000 Lights for Peace there is no reason why we can't recruit him to be the chair of the finance committee and go from there. So, but all this is still in the works because we don't want to jump the gun, as the saying goes, that until you have all your T's crossed and your I's dotted, we don't want to make a big splash. This is just a private conversation we have been able to have, because Gandhi trustees have committed 1.1 million dollars, okay, and we have got another 400,000 coming from other people so it's a great start. And the reason we are on a hold right now is that we want to make sure that when we approach a potential donor that we have all the things ready for whatever questions or queries that they might have, rather than saying, "Sorry, this is not ready yet." So, that's the reason behind that.

CL: Well, it seems like fundraising is going well for you. In addition you have great community support. Have there been any difficulties or obstacles that the effort has needed to overcome to get to this point?

AK: The biggest obstacle we had was to find land. We have been looking for land since 2016. Initially we thought we found a piece of land around Beltway 8 and Tanner—that didn't work out. Then we had a potential arrangement with a religious organization that have eight acres of land around Highway 6 and Beechnut and there was some interest in having Gandhi—Eternal Gandhi Museum over there. It didn't work out because of the plans that they had, the space that was left for us that was not large enough for what we wanted to do. And then we finally found this piece of land at a very reasonable price, and we are so happy that it's such a prominent location, because remember, one of our—not one, *the* mission is to have school children of Houston and the surrounding area come at least once for the field trip with this museum before they go off to the college. So being right on the freeway it makes it very easy for the school busses to come in, unload the children, load the children, and go. And for that matter, let me share with you what I shared the thoughts of the museum of—now he is no longer here—but rather he has gone to do other things, Reverend Howard Caesar who was the senior minister at Unity of Houston about who I talked earlier. I had gone to share with him regarding various installments of the museum and what we were doing, and I was shocked when he said, "Atul, you are going to have people coming not only from Houston, you'll have people—children coming from all over Texas to see the museum because San Antonio is a three hour ride, Austin is two and a half, or two hours," okay, so those are his words.

Okay. So we have been blessed, I mean, with this support—moral support we are getting, and appreciation we are getting for bringing this project. Because, by the way, we want you to know very well that when we started Mahatma Gandhi Library, we had no plans of any buildings whatsoever. Because in his autobiography, Mahatma Gandhi has said, "Be careful before you build any building." Because in his lifetime while in South Africa they did build a building and then it was not kept up, okay, so he said, "Be very careful. It is easy to build the building, but not easy to maintain." So we had never dreamed that we would build it, but this falls in line with our mission of taking the universal values of

truth, nonviolence, love, and service to the next generation. That's why we went into it. Because think about it, we have never done fundraising in our lives. [laughs] and raising eight and a half million dollars, okay, it's quite a challenge. Okay. So the reason we went into—and that's the reason we are trying to raise an endowment fund of three million dollars so that we will have a pretty good cushion to—because, by the way, you all can help me with something if you know somebody [TG laughs] okay. No, you are smart people at Rice University and all of you are so smart and young and smart. We are looking for someone who can help us with crowd funding. With the universal good will that Mahatma Gandhi has, if we do the crowd funding properly, it will be an amazing source of not only the capital expenditure but also ongoing expenses. So if you know some IT individual who goes “I can't have nothing better to do at Rice” [TG laughs] I mean I know how hard they make you work—I'm fully aware of that. But, if they have interest or if they know such connection, we will be more than happy to use such help. We are looking for that.

TG: You've mentioned a couple names as we've been going through about key players, can you talk a little bit more about the team that's really been behind this museum?

AK: Yeah. So team wise we have board of trustees consisting of eight people. Myself, Devinder Mahajan I mentioned already, we are very happy to have Dr. Manish Wani, he is a phenomenal young man who has come on board for last—pretty much from the beginning. Then we have Ajit Paralkar, who has recently come on board about two years ago and he has been phenomenal help in terms of meeting people, going and talking, because—by the way, I'll come to him in an minute. Then we have Sanjay Jain who is the entrepreneur and businessman. Then we have Dr. Barkat Charania—I'd like to expand on his background a little bit. He's a Muslim of Islamic faith, so he has come on board. Then we have Dick [Richard] Steele, and let's see, and Namita Sutaria She is a phenomenal designer—interior designer. So we are so glad to have them all on board. So did I count all eight? I hope I am not leaving anybody out [TG laughs] okay. But going back to Ajit Paralkar, we also are celebrating Gandhi sesquicentennial. It falls on October 2nd, 2019 and we are planning a yearlong celebration starting from October 2018 through October 2019. And we want to make it a grass root celebration, not just big seminars and talks and so on and so forth. So with that in mind, we are very fortunate, one of the things we are planning to do is to have a book club. People who are in book clubs, ask them to adopt Gandhi's autobiography as a topic book to discuss during this one year. And we were very fortunate when we met with the Harris County Public Library. I mean they jumped at it—we had no idea that they had 29 branches and one of the requirements of each of the branches is they have to have a book club associated with them. So we now have 29 book clubs [all laugh] and many more to come. So that is one. The other one we are planning is that we are asking restaurants to offer a Gandhi special, okay. So what will happen is when somebody offers Gandhi special, orders a Gandhi special they get not only the Gandhi special, they also get a Gandhi sesquicentennial t-shirt. And to make it fun, well the restaurant owner will say, “you have to wear it right here [TG laughing], otherwise you don't get it.” Okay, and then there are different ways that they—I mean I visited Lotus—I mean Loving Hut restaurant which is a total vegetarian restaurant of

Chinese owners, and when I talked to them they said, “Okay, how about this” On every October 2nd they will give 10% off the total bill.

TG: Wow!

AK: So different people are doing it in different ways. Another one is the exhibition that we talked about, we are going to place it at eight libraries, or something similar location, during that 12 month period. There is quite an effort to transport and put it up and so on and so forth. So eight locations is the maximum we can accommodate. Already Houston Public Library is on board, we have Harris County Public Library separate, Lonestar Cypress Fairbanks campus doing it, and we are talking to HCC libraries to see what happened, Rice if you can help us get in here we will be more than happy to show it here as well.

So there's another one. So, then as our—remember I was talking regarding thanking the children, okay. One of the young ladies who has participated in various several essay contests over the years—in the Indo-American community, especially the girls, they undergo dance training—classical dance training, okay. It's a very rigorous and disciplined training. It's not easy, okay, to master the art of dancing. And the graduation ceremony is called arangetram. Just so that you know how significant it is in terms of expense, it is next to the wedding. Okay, it is that expensive. This young girl invited us to her arangetram. It's lovely—it's a three hour practically nonstop recital by the dancer showing off various skills, what she has mastered and everything. I was totally stunned by the final item. The final item was on a spiritual song that was favorite of Mahatma Gandhi, and she danced on that song. So we are asking various dance groups in the Indo-American community, that whatever graduation ceremonies they have during this year, have the dancer devote the last dance to Mahatma Gandhi and go from there.

So if you go to Gandhi150.us that's the website for the sesquicentennial and if you click there on the program tab, okay, you will see there are a lot of different programs which are there that people can join. Just fill out the form there and the website will automatically populate various programs and calendar and so on and so forth and go from there. And one other thing that is taking up—that is beginning to get a lot of traction is the march. And what is the Gandhi celebration without the march. So it was I think sometime in March that Gandhi—I mean March of 1930, I meant the month March—that Gandhi started his Salt Satyagraha march from Ahmedabad to the sea shore which took him 30 days. So we are finding lot of interest from people to conduct a march to symbolize that during the month of March. So we'll see how it goes—we will go from—so that's where Ajit is putting so much effort and time and it's unbelievable. We are so happy to have him and he's working with me to go to all the foundations, potential donors, I mean he's really great, great helpful. So, so that's the leadership.

Now in addition to that we have an executive committee, which consists of around 18-20 people who organize the 1,000 Lights for Peace. We have another program called Shradhanjali which is a memorial service. Gandhiji was assassinated on January 30, 1948 and to commemorate that we have a memorial service. And, by the way, it is held in

India of Houston, for the last 6 or 7 years. And as the word is spreading, we are getting a lot of measures to come on board to far. For example, this year, we have Unity of Houston, Arya Samaj Greater Houston are strong supporters, we had Houston Nonviolent Communication, we had Ismaili Jamatkhana which is a Muslim organization Ismaili Jamatkhana and Center, Rothko Chapel, Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston, so a lot of people are coming on board and if you want to see the press release for that you can visit gandhilibrary.org there the press release on the event and go from there. And of course now we will be needing more volunteers for Gandhi sesquicentennial and the museum. So hopefully—as I said, I thank Almighty, without him nothing is possible. I mean I strongly believe that, because if I was to give the history of Gandhi Library, I already mentioned briefly how we ran into Arya Samaj at the George R. Brown Convention Center, how that led to us to their location, from there how I met up with Krishna—Hare Krishna Temple from there how I ended up at Unity to attend the—and it's been continuous. It is mind boggling, I mean can you think about I'm sitting in front of the leadership of Eternal Gandhi Museum telling them about our very simple museum we are planning to build and we are awful? [TG laughs] I mean, there was nothing that I had—was presenting—they knew we were without penny [laughs] and the only thing they knew is that we were dedicated and we were devoted. Once we take—and we were very fortunate—once we take something on, God has been kind, it has turned out to be really nice so far to date.

TG: I'm curious about Houston and what makes it unique with regards to the Indian American community—at least in your experience.

AK: There are a lot of uniqueness to Houston which, unfortunately, a lot of people do not know. So one uniqueness, and you asked me about the Indo-American community specifically, is there are so many temples, okay. I mean you may or may not know, okay, because in Hinduism there is a pilgrimage called Char Dham. So these are four very sacred religious places in India where it is believed that in your lifetime you must go at least once and visit these four places on pilgrimage. We say we do Char Dham—any day we can do it in Houston there are so many places of worship [coughs]. But in terms of the Houston community itself, and I'm trying to remember, somebody from Rice in fact, he has been doing this—I'm trying to remember the faculty's name, it's not coming to me right now—he has been doing this service for quite a long time. And I think it was about two years, if I'm not wrong, he published a survey and nobody believed it. Fort Bend County is the most diverse county in the United States.

TG: Oh yeah! Dr. [Stephen] Klineberg, right?

AK: Dr. Klineberg.

TG: Yeah, yeah.

AK: Okay. And Houston is not far behind, okay. So in terms of diversity—and again, the thing—remember, Birlas or Eternal Gandhi have not chosen Houston after studying where they should put it in United States. They simply went to Houston because Gandhi

Library has been working with them for such a long time. That's why. So there was no formal study as to what is the best place to put it in. But as it turns out, it is the best place to put it in. [TG laughs]

TG: So is there—have you had any communication with other cities in the US, with other large—other diverse populations, or other large Indo-American communities?

AK: No, we haven't gone there. ?? Because—you are talking about fundraising, right? If I'm not wrong? Or...?

TG: I was just talking about [AK coughs] in general.

AK: Excuse me. We are so swamped with the work here at this point in time and, as I said...as God has been kind, that whatever we have taken out we have been able to deliver with great performance. And we do not want to sway away from the strategy or the commitment. We want—, we do not want to dilute the efforts so nothing gets done right. It is better to focus on what you are doing rather than going to something and nothing gets done right. But let me put—give you some other piece of information that will address your concern—your question another way. Besides Eternal Gandhi in India, there is an organization called Sarvodaya Mandal of Mumbai. And...if you get a chance, you just type into the Google “Unto This Lasts.” It is an essay written by John Ruskin, an Englishman. And when Gandhiji was given this essay to read during his overnight train travel in South Africa, guess what? In the morning, when—he left the train, he gave up all his possessions and decided to go live in an Ashram—in the Phoenix Ashram. So be careful before you read it [all laugh]. So the thinking behind that is ?? that means it is the growth and affluent of everybody. So Gandhi's talisman is this: that whatever action you are taking, ask yourself, “How does that action benefit the most retched person in the world?” If it passes that test, you should do it. If not, it's up to you, okay. So this organization in Mumbai, they were contacted by somebody in Ohio because it's very well-known and they do a lot of work with Eternal Gandhi, I mean I can tell you more about it—they go and give Gandhi's autobiography in prisons in Mumbai. And one phenomenal story of that is that one inmate read the biography, went straight to the judge and confessed, “I'm guilty of everything that I am charged.” So he was given the maximum punishment, I mean whatever he did this time, and for good behavior was let off. He has since become the executive of a very large firm in India. And there was a film that was made about it, as to what happened during his childhood that he went down the wrong path. How he's remained with that. And how Gandhi's autobiography changed him and how now he is a very successful entrepreneur. Okay. So they do lots of good work. So somebody in Ohio contacted them—that they want to do something regarding Gandhi sesquicentennial. We were—they were referred to us [TG laughs] from Mumbai. So they talked to our Gandhi Library in Houston and we have talked and had a lot of good discussion. And one of the things they are going to do, and I told you I'll talk about this a little bit more [referencing movie on table titled *A Force More Powerful*, *see picture 9], but let me talk about this now. They are going to have a theater rented and they are going to show this movie over there as part of the sesquicentennial. So what is so

special about this movie? As young people and I'm sure this will impress you right away, it is narrated by none other than Sir Ben Kingsley.

TG: Oh wow. [laughs]

AK: Okay. Alright. Now, they have the actual live footage of the events as they occurred, so you see Gandhiji bending down, picking up the salt, or you can see African-Americans sitting at the lunch counter and how they were being harassed. This is for all they weren't there? So they of course, they have taken six events of the 20th century. One, India's freedom struggle. Second one is...Civil Rights Movement here in America led by Dr. King. Third one is freedom struggle in South Africa led by Nelson Mandela. Fourth one is occupation of Denmark by Nazis in the Second World War. The fifth one is the first democratic institution behind the Iron Curtain that is Lech Wałęsa and Solidarity Union. And the sixth one is removal of dictator Pinochet in Chile. They have given only 25 minutes to each episode. But to me, they make a convincing argument, each episode by itself, that nonviolence works. As it turns out, these six events occurred in six different decades on six different continents in 20th century. Now, this decade trend still continues. In 2003, then president of Ukraine refused to give up power in face of a popular vote. There was a peaceful revelation named Orange Revolution, and he was removed. And everyone is familiar with the Arab Spring of 2011, some of the gains have gone back okay. And they have interviewed various leaders of the various movements. They all give credit to Mahatma Gandhi for pioneering this technique to give voice to voiceless, to give freedom to the oppressed. So they are going to show this movie, and they may do some other things. So that's how...either something comes to us and we'll do everything we can to help them do whatever they want to do, and we are not going out seeking, or trying to influence so that they should. No, that's not what we are doing at this point in time. As I said, this project itself is going to keep us busy for many more years to come before we do anything else. So we want to remain focused.

TG: We don't want to take up too much more of your time, but if we've got any last questions?

AK: I have all the time in the world that you have [TG laughs].

TG: Great!

AK: It's not too often somebody gets to talk to HAAA! [TG laughs]

TG: Or what else would you like to talk about that you haven't had the chance yet?

AK: No, I think we have pretty much covered everything. If you want—I'll leave one extra copy here for both of you [referencing papers].

TG: Yeah, that would be great.

AK: [overlapping]--this copy. And as I said, if you know young people who are interested in helping out, this would be a good project they can be a part of. Especially crowd funding, IT, or in terms of economics—I need to do this to raise funds or so on and so forth in terms of the social standings or whatever. Background of the exhibition—there are many different ways. We need help in every area, whatever help we can get.

TG: So I guess maybe what would you say is one thing everyone can do to promote Gandhi's—to promote what he stands for. What's something everyone can do?

AK: One very simple thing: practice your truth, nonviolently, while adhering to nonviolence. Just ask yourself on a daily basis how many times you resort to violence. Either in terms of getting angry, or upset, or thinking badly of someone. Because, remember, nonviolence is in mind, word, and deed. Because people mostly connect it with deed. "I won't hit somebody" or "I won't say a lie" or something. But even a thought should not arise, okay, and if you want to really go—I mean I am not—okay first of all I do want your listeners to know, I am not an expert by any stretch of imagination in this area, okay. True test of a person is are you practicing what you're preaching? And I'm not. Okay. I'm not anywhere close to practicing what I believe in. Okay. And that's what distinguishes personalities like Gandhi, Christ, so on and so forth. They practice it to the nth degree, whatever they believe in, no matter what happens. So they, in terms of what everyone can do, is very simple: practice your truth. Don't change your belief system. Gandhi doesn't ask you to change your belief system. Believe whatever you are believing in. But practice it nonviolently. So typically the question will come up, "What about those terrorists?" Well, let's go back to child and mother example again. Does mother keep suffering no matter what the child does? Always. So, the stench—what the reason for the suffering is, the stench of violence is so bad. The one who is perpetuating the violence in himself or herself will get tired of it.

So I have not talked about it but if you have a few minutes I would like to share with you the Satyagraha. The march about which I briefly mentioned in the thing. There were 79 people who started the march from Gandhi Ashram in Ahmedabad. By the time we ended up there were thousands of people there. And Gandhi in his typical style first wrote to the viceroy saying this law should be changed, it's immoral, and so on and so forth. Viceroy said, "no, forget it. We are not going to change it." Okay, the genesis of the Satyagraha is the following. The British were ruling India and there was a tax on the common salt. Now, who doesn't eat common salt? So it was a tax on the poorest of the people, and that's why Gandhi thought it was immoral, okay. And that's why he wrote him saying, "please remove this tax." Then they said no, so I said—then he said, "okay, then on this day I'll start my march to the sea and make my own salt." So viceroy's secretary sent a note saying, going on case and file, saying "that's not ?? we are not worried about that." So Gandhi starts his walk, goes, picks up the salt, nothing happens. And he wants a fight. Because remember, nonviolence is not passive resistance. It's active resistance. Because you are trying to change the belief of the other person that what you are doing is wrong. Okay. So it's an active resistance. So he wants a fight. So he writes to the viceroy that okay, "on this particular day, I will raid the dome—salt dome—owned by the British government." Now the British government woke up they said, "How dare you challenge

us.” So the date he had given, he was arrested the night before. British government thought that this would fizzle the demonstration. Gandhi expected this could happen. So he had trained one of his staunchest disciples by the name of Sarojini Naidu. If you put in the Google, she is a world famous poetess. Okay, and he had given her all of the instructions in terms of what to do should something like this happen. Ultimately, when they raided the dome, there were about a thousand people wearing almost the same clothes that I am wearing, but instead they were all white and they were made of khadi cloth, the homespun cloth from which—yarn, from which this cloth is made. And which has a story in itself in the freedom struggle of India. So they were given three simple instructions by Sarojini Naidu. Number one, you will go in a team of ten people holding hands together. Number two, when you go up there, look at your aggressor in the eye because you love them, okay. Third was that when you are going to be hit by lathis—lathis is not a simple bamboo stick, at the end of which is a razor sharp steel edge which can cut open your skull, your spine, and so on and so forth. So when the blow comes, don’t even flinch. Take the blow like a man, okay. So they go in a team of ten people, they get bloodied and wounded. Nurses go pick them up. Next team of ten people go pick them up. Same thing happened. That goes on all day long. There was a UPI [United Press International] reporter there at that time whose dispatch went to 2200 newspapers around the world at the time. He wrote a very long dispatch describing these events. The critical sentence—and I’m paraphrasing it—was essentially along this line: The West has lost any moral authority to rule anyone in the world today. Because when British citizens read this report, they asked themselves, “Are we barbarians? All these people want is salt and they don’t mean to harm us. They have got no weapons or anything, is this how we treat them?” It took 17 years after that to melt the British heart, but then they simply walked out. Not a single shot was fired. Now think about same thing with the Civil Rights Movement here, okay. Had they not suffered—because in order for them to change the laws they had to change the minds of the majority. And in this one—I’ll be more than happy to share with you. This shows that in Nashville, okay, how the demonstrators were first trained in nonviolence. That when you do this march and you go and sit at the lunch counter, what is going to happen to you. These are the kind they will use—if not they will—so they were trained for that. But in spite of that happens, to not be violent you have to restrain yourself, okay. And within four months in Nashville, the segregation was finished. Matter of four months. Just think about it. Because they chose to suffer. Alright.

So that is the power of nonviolence. And that’s why the title of this DVD is “A Force More Powerful.” There is not a force in the world, now, what will happen is every time we suffer don’t expect the outcome will be favorable, okay. Because I will share with you—have you heard of Leo Tolstoy? The famous romantic novelist, wrote *War and Peace*. Towards the end of his life he became a reborn Christian. And he wrote a book called *The Kingdom of God is Within You*. The whole book is centered on one simple premise: resist no evil with force. This is straight from Christianity and (?) if I know it correctly, okay. Resist no evil with force. His book was banned initially at the time. Because it was blasphemy the way that Christianity was practiced at that time. In this book he writes, “Serving in tsar’s army was compulsory—draft was compulsory.” So they would go out into the villages and round up—and let me emphasize, illiterate peasants to serve in the army. They will be taken to a church and the clergy was there to

bless them, “Son, you are doing the right thing.” Guess what some of them said? Some of them said—of them said, “Our religion tells us not to harm anyone, and therefore we will not bear arms.” Guess what happened to them? They were shot dead on the scene. We don’t even know their names. So just because you practice it, okay, what I want everyone to understand is, okay, do not expect miracles. My friend [coughs] from Unity, who has passed away now. But every email he sent, his tagline was “Full effort is full victory.” Full effort is—do not just attach yourself to the outcome. So, for example, you as students right now are studying hard. And you may not become number one in the class. But you must put in the full effort. Full effort afterwards is outcome, that’s outcome. Same thing when you are going to go look for jobs. Every door you knock is not going to open, okay. It’s going to be a lot of work. But don’t get frustrated because that’s your job. Your job is to look for the job. One who is giving out that job is to give the job. Someday that match will occur and that’s fine, but no need to get frustrated. And I mentioned Bhagavad Gita earlier briefly during the discussion, and the religious scripture of Hinduism, okay. That was a constant guide for Mahatma Gandhi. As in whenever he wanted to refer to something he would refer to Bhagavad Gita. And I don’t want to show off because I don’t know Bhagavad Gita anywhere close to what I should know, but as one verse (?) in Bhagavad Gita goes something along these lines: “karmany evadhikaras te, ma phalesu kadachana, ma karma-phala-hetur bhur, ma te sango ’stv akarmani.” What it says is, “Effort is in your hand, not the outcome. So do not get attached to the outcome.” So we have to pursue this project the same way, okay. That whether it becomes grand or not, but it is our sincere desire that we want it to come to fruition and in the best way it can. And if it doesn’t, there is no point in getting frustrated. So similarly, when one adopts a life of practicing truth while being—adhering to nonviolence, you will feel, although people will look at you and say, “Are you mad? Why are you letting people do this to you?” But if your belief is strong, that’s what you are going to do. And that is the key, okay. Is to internalize that. Okay. And then go with that. So once again, to conclude, I would say if everyone can practice their own belief system, while adhering to nonviolence, the reason for adhering to nonviolence is we don’t know the absolute truth, how can we be so sure that what we think is the absolute right, and that is one reason why not to resort to violence. This world will become happy.

TG: Very wise, good words to end on.

AK: Okay.

TG: Alright, anything else you want to add?

AK: No, thank you so much. On your busy schedule, your student life, it’s not easy to take out this time. Thank you for taking your time. And once again my—heartfelt thanks to HAAA for inviting me, and to Dr. Chao, and of course, to Almighty.

TG: I mean we thank you too. As we’ve heard, you’re very busy too. Thank you so much.

AK: Thank you.

CL: Absolutely. [recorder shuts off]