

Gandhi

An Introduction



Jasiu Milanowski

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Foreword

by Peter Dougherty

Gandhi keeps inspiring me to believe things can be different, and that we are able to live out the nonviolent vision of changing ourselves and the beautiful but broken world in which we live. We all need that constant inspiration.

Therefore I am grateful for this brief biography of Mahatma Gandhi by Jasiu Milanowski, a friend who “walks the walk.” You can read it in a short amount of time. It catches the fire of the man.

For Gandhi, self-transformation is essential to changing the world for the good. It was this spiritual grounding which infused the genius he had for nonviolent tactics of social change. Nonviolence is a complete way of life — a way of being and doing in the world.

Jasiu lays out Gandhi’s vision and strategy for transforming his Indian society through nonviolence. We catch a glimpse of how we can transform our world today.

I think you will be inspired, informed and challenged to take a next step on your own journey by reading this book. Have a good journey!

Preface

I would like to thank Dave Blakeslee for his helpful critique of my manuscript. I especially want to send a deep heartfelt word of thanks to my dear friend Mark Mattison. Without his time, effort, encouragement, and persistence, this project would still be in the dreaming stages!

Jasiu Milanowski
October 2002

Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi was no doubt the greatest figure of the twentieth century. Albert Einstein said, “Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this walked the earth in flesh and blood.”

Most people know a little bit about this Mahatma or “Great Soul,” the revolutionary who put a chink in the British empire when it wanted to dominate the globe. Amazingly, Gandhi freed India from British colonial rule without the force of arms and brought a number of spiritual truths to the mass consciousness. He paved the way for the future of how we relate to each other.

Gandhi stressed the fact that he was not like Jesus of Nazareth or Buddha but just an average person making an above average effort, doing some amazing things. Gandhi even ruffled a little bit at the term “Mahatma.” If people could not see or hear him when he came into a village, for instance during his Salt March to the sea, they nevertheless felt that if they were in the crowd they received *darshan*, an Indian term meaning something like a special blessing. They believed that their lives were cleansed because they had been around this Great Soul. In some sense, maybe one could say that of Jesus of Nazareth or Buddha, but Gandhi clearly did not want to found a religion. In fact, due to his background, he promoted respect of all religions. He taught that all religions essentially have an ethical substance to them. That is what he focused on, and that is what he wanted other people to do.

Our inner well-being is what is important. In Hindu terms it is *Moksha*. Perhaps in Christian terms it is Heaven. For me it is completion, the essence, the deep inner self of me. I want to feel complete and in harmony with the universe. In that sense, I regard Gandhi as a saint. Yet he said we all could attain that, and I believe him.

1

Gandhi's Background

Gandhi grew up in a Hindu family in Porbandar and Rajkot, not too far from Bombay, in small little villages on the sea. His father was a mid-level official for the district that they lived in. So they did not live in dire poverty, but they were not maharajas either.

Indian society was divided into castes or distinct social classes. There were essentially four major castes in Hindu society, and he was from one of the middle castes, the clerk or the tradesman caste. Initially Gandhi defended the caste system, stating that there was a rationale behind it and that it was necessary for the orderly function of society. But he eventually concluded that it did not coincide with his ethics, even though he still maintained he was a Hindu.

In his early years Gandhi was admitted to the bar. He went to London and studied as a lawyer, then returned to India. He saw himself as a below-average student, without any special rank or intelligence. In his first case, he got up before the judge, but he was too shy to speak. He felt he could not do it anymore.

The important thing that dramatically influenced him from a young age was a cross-cultural practice of his minister. This minister would publicly read from the Muslim Koran and then in the next sentence from the Hindu Scriptures, the Vedas, or the Mahabharata, and the Bhagavad Gita. There were other small sects, the Jains, Parsis, and Sikhs, and this minister would read from all the sacred texts of these five very distinct religions. As a result Gandhi grew up with a strong conviction that there must be unity. Not merely in a spiritual realm, but in the political realm also. In political India where Britain ruled, he said there had to be Hindu-Muslim unity always. He stressed the idea of unity, and that is where it came from. He saw that it worked and that there is good in all religions.

Britain ruled India from the late 1700s. They said the sun never set on the British empire; it circled the globe. They had colonies all over the world, and they thought that their crown jewel was India. It boasted several hundred million people, and this little island, Britain, completely controlled it. So Gandhi grew up with the English dominating the country. He spoke English and went to England. At one point he thought that there were some good things about

England and that eventually he could be integrated into the British empire. The progression of his thought on this can be clearly traced in his writings. Eventually, he realized there was no chance for reform or compromise. Very simply, India should be for the Indians, so there go the British!

Gandhi brought a certain spirituality to politics, but he always maintained that he was “a politician trying to be a saint” rather than a saint trying to be a politician. The author of *1984* and *Animal Farm*, George Orwell, studied revolutionaries, people who threw out the oppressor like Gandhi did. Orwell wrote of Gandhi, “compared with other leading political figures of our time, how clean a smell he has managed to leave behind.”

Eventually, Gandhi came to a point where he thought that the whole British system was evil, and that it was unnecessary for the British to rule Indians. In South Africa he created a term, *satyagraha*, which roughly means “soul-force” or “truth-force.” This force included nonviolent resistance and civil disobedience. He became convinced that *satyagraha* was clearly more powerful and effective than violent resistance, and spiritually in tune with his values and ethics.

2

The Making of Gandhi

Although we regard Gandhi as a tremendous social critic and philosopher, he said that he wanted to be thought of as an activist. He had some concepts and sometimes he would change his mind about things, but he wanted to try to put these things into practice to make them real. Some of these early experiences were played out in his later life.

As a young man he was thrown off a train. He was stunned by that. He had been practicing law in South Africa. Some Indians had emigrated to the country and had done quite well financially. They were very wealthy, yet they experienced racism in South Africa. They were considered part of the “colored” class. Eventually Gandhi wound up working for the Indian community because of the discrimination that they experienced.

Gandhi had bought a first-class railway ticket. He was a member of the bar, an attorney, and the British empire boasted of certain concepts. One was equality, that everyone was equal before the law. In practice that was not the case, but that was the concept. A passenger objected to a “coolie,” a colored person, being in first class. The conductor said, “Come along, you must go to the van compartment.” Gandhi replied, “But I have a first-class ticket,” and refused to leave. As a result they bodily removed him and he spent the night shivering in a train station. Had the conductor not done that, we would have probably never heard of Gandhi. He was so shaken by the experience that he could not sleep. It bothered him that much. That was the beginning of his work towards equality, addressing some of the racism in South Africa. He was there almost twenty years.

Gandhi was notably influenced by three Western writers. One was Leo Tolstoy. Gandhi always said he did not read very much, but one of the truly great books that he did read was Tolstoy’s *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*. A second work that he read was Henry David Thoreau’s *Civil Disobedience*.

A third major influence in forging his beliefs about nonviolence and *satyagraha* was the work of a British man by the name of John Ruskin. Ruskin wrote a little booklet called *Unto This Last* which

Gandhi eventually translated. Ruskin was a Socialist who addressed economic issues, poverty, and war. Gandhi realized three things from this little booklet: that everyone's labor has value; that the labor of a barber or a garbage man is worth just as much as the labor of a clerk or an attorney or a physician; and the value of voluntary poverty and communal living. That is when Gandhi, who had acquired some wealth and estate and servants, changed. He read this book and said, "I determined to change my life in accordance with the ideals of the book." His wife was resistant and did not like moving out into the country to practice communal living, doing some of the tasks that she considered to be beneath herself.

Another important source that must be mentioned is the Bhagavad Gita, a small section of some of the Hindu writings. It has been called the Celestial Song. It has been interpreted in various ways, but for Gandhi it was the essence about how to pursue one's duty. Gandhi provided his own interpretation of the Bhagavad Gita, writing that it really implies nonviolent behavior. In the actual story of the Gita, Arjuna was a heroic warrior who returned from a battle and saw his relatives, his brothers, fighting among each other. Arjuna was dismayed by it all. Gandhi wrote that the story was really about a battle in the heart, a battle in our soul or consciousness, a battle between good and evil. What is our duty? He thought that our duty is to constantly pursue goodness in our lives, to recognize that evil is there but we have to be about pursuing the good.

Another person who affected him was his mother. Her religiousness, her devotion, and her prayer was amplified in her life. He thought she was a very devout Hindu.

He also attributed some of his insights to his wife. His parents had arranged his marriage when he and Kasturba were both thirteen. Although Gandhi really loved his wife, he later said that the whole institution of child marriage in Indian society was completely wrong. At any rate, he said he learned much about nonviolent resistance from Kasturba when he was trying to dominate her as he was inculcated to do, believing that the man was the head of the household. He said he learned a lot from the way Kasturba stood up to him, realizing that she was right to do so and admiring how she did it.

Gandhi was also influenced, politically, by Professor Gokhale. When Gandhi returned to India after his long stint in South Africa, Gokhale was the political leader of the highly regarded opposition

that advocated a dominion status for India — not full independence but the hope that they could attain a higher standing within the British empire and receive all the benefits of the empire. He was very impressed by Gokhale. Gokhale told him that he should just look around for a year. Not to say anything, not to talk much, just to travel the country and see what was going on. Gandhi took that advice and traveled, seeing the poverty and the economics. He saw the political situation. As a result, he saw Gokhale as having had a tremendous influence on his revolutionary zeal to make changes in India.

Gandhi appreciated Jesus too. He said that the Sermon on the Mount “went straight to my heart.” He said that was the essence, the tremendous value of Christianity. Yet on the other hand, he also witnessed the down side of what a number of the Christian missionaries were doing in India. As they had done in other parts of Asia and Africa, they robbed the people of their spiritual and cultural heritage and traditions, much like the way Spanish and French Catholic priests did in this country when they said that native practices were heathen, pagan, evil. That can have a damaging influence on one’s psyche and community.

3

Gandhi's Basic Principles

There are at least three main principles of Gandhi's thought. The first is nonviolent resistance to injustice and oppression. Bound up in this principle is the whole concept of ends and means. That was one of the first things that attracted me to Gandhi. He maintained that ends and means are inseparable. What he focused on was simply doing one's duty. Again, we can put it in political or spiritual terms, and for him it was spiritual, that we should not worry about the results. He explained that in one sense, it does not matter whether you are given praise or blame, because if you search your conscience and you are doing the right thing, that is all you have to be concerned about. Nothing else matters.

In Christian terms, you reap what you sow. There is a fundamental correlation between what you sow and reap; that is the point of the ends and the means. It is pretty simple. You get what you do. During the Vietnam War I would tell people, "If you rain bombs and death and destruction on people for a number of years, it's going to come back to you." That is just a law of the universe, that ends and means are inseparable. So the means are everything.

Second, he emphasized the concept of service. We can resist the oppressor, and yet we have to be of service to one another. That is all bound up in his spirituality, his ethics, his approach to life.

Third, he promoted what he called "the constructive program." This program comprised about eighteen different things that needed to happen in India if the British were to be resisted, and many of these eighteen points are applicable both personally and around the world.

Gandhi's Constructive Program

Eight points of Gandhi's constructive program are worthy of particular mention.

First and foremost, he promoted Hindu-Muslim unity. He knew the British divide-and-conquer strategy, pitting one group of people against another, one religious group against another. So he focused on unity.

The second related to his own religion. There had to be complete removal of untouchability. Again, Gandhi was unique and creative, even revolutionary, in that he changed the name of the untouchables. He called them Harijans, that is, “the children of God,” and brought a whole different mindset to the mass of Hindus who lived in India. These are no longer untouchables, they are children of God. When they are called that, they have to be treated differently.

Third, the uplift of women. There is still a long way to go on all of these things in contemporary India. Gandhi was the first who really said women have to be treated equally and no longer as property.

Fourth, trusteeship spoke to the whole economic issue. There were many capitalists who supported Indian independence and supported him, his movements, his ashrams, and his various undertakings. He said that they remained capitalists, but their goods were held in trusteeship for the common good and should be shared.

A fifth concept was *sarvodaya*, “the well-being of everyone.” That is a difficult concept for us in the West to accept. We think of democracy, the greatest good for the greatest number. While that is acceptable to a number of people, Gandhi’s concept was completely different. With that attitude there is a majority and there are minorities. There is always going to be some undercurrent of bad feeling. His conviction was that we have to develop a society which promotes the well-being of everybody. How can we do this?

A sixth point he talked about was economic. Part of the tri-colored Indian flag is the spinning wheel. He advocated spinning cloth, that is, bread labor. People have to use their hands and do village crafts. The 750,000 villages of India could be lifted out of their massive poverty if people would just spend an hour or two each day spinning. So he modeled that.

Seventh, concerning village industries. He talked about small crafts and things that were not of the machine age. This leads into a major philosophical point about machines. He said, “What I object to is the craze for machinery, not machinery as such.” In fact, he thought the Singer sewing machine was a great machine. He said our body is a nice machine. We want machines that are effective, like bicycles rather than automobiles, things that are available and easy for many people and are not very cost-prohibitive.

Eighth, regarding language. He wanted to preserve indigenous languages. There are several languages in India, and many of these are

integrated into the Indian constitution. We in this country think one language, English, is our national language, and there has been debate about including Spanish. In India there are nearly two dozen recognized, official, national languages.

Those are some of the eighteen points of Gandhi's constructive program.

4

Communal Living

In Indian society there have always been Yogis and spiritual leaders, men who will go up into the mountains and found ashrams. Ashrams are spiritual communities. Their sacred books are the Vedas and the Mahabharata, which is several thousand pages. For several centuries, there were six spiritual standards for people who went into an ashram to pursue their spiritual inner life. Gandhi adopted these standards, but modified some of them as well.

The first one is *ahimsa*. Over the centuries this term was negatively defined as “non-injury.” Gandhi took it to a higher level. He said it is not only non-injury. We have to be active in our love towards our brothers and sisters. Again, he was trying to change the mass consciousness.

The second one was the pursuit of *satya*, “Truth.” This also became one of Gandhi’s underlying principles and motivations.

The third one was *asteya*, “non-stealing.” Very simply, if we are living in community, we do not steal from one another. But then Gandhi said that had to be transformed. We use our things which belong to God and we’re trustees of them. That is the whole concept of trusteeship.

The fourth one is *brahmacharya*. Over the centuries that was defined as “celibacy.” Gandhi had four sons, and in his mid- to late-thirties decided to become celibate, to which his wife agreed. He advocated this for ashram living, but he defined it as self-restraint and self-control. Many people did not get that one. He applied this concept not just to sex but to all of our senses. For instance, one eats to maintain the body and for nourishment, but one does not eat just to be self-indulgent. In one sense that is a Puritan mentality, but it is what gave Gandhi his drive and his focus, his self-restraint as opposed to self-indulgence.

The fifth one was *asangraha*. It means that people were not supposed to get wealthy, that they could not accumulate and hoard things for themselves. If you are in an ashram, in communal living, it is just a given that you do not hoard things.

Finally, *aswada* pertained to food. Food should be healthy and life-giving. This standard also involves vegetarianism.

For centuries those were the standards of an ashram. Gandhi thought those were essentially good, but he modified them as noted and included five other ones:

First, bread-labor. Simply put, if you are in an ashram you have to participate in the life of the community. You have to wash some clothes, you have to help prepare the meals or clean or do the gardening or the carpentry. Everyone is engaged in a certain amount of what he called bread-labor. You earned your bread by your own labor, a great concept.

Second, *swadeshi*. We no longer buy cloth from England or from other countries, but we buy our own Indian-made products. *Swadeshi* was rooted in Gandhi's concern that people in ashrams use local products. That then was translated to the national level.

Third, removal of untouchability. Gandhi had a tough time with the upper castes for decades because he included Harijans or untouchables in the ashrams.

Fourth, equal respect for all religions. In their prayer services every morning, Gandhi said there had to be readings from all the major religions, from writings of the Christians, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Parsis, and Hindus. And not just tolerance, but an appreciation of all those. That is another revolutionary concept. Think about this country: to say we have to have not merely a tolerance for Black Muslims but that we have to appreciate what their religion is about! Or even within the sects of Christianity, for Catholics to appreciate what a Christian Reformed person believes. It is mind-boggling that he promoted this equal respect for religions.

The fifth and final one was that these ashrams were to build the foundation for *satyagrahis*, the people who participated in some of the nonviolence campaigns, which meant eventually perhaps being beaten or thrown into jail. Gandhi's fifth tenet was that people who lived in his ashrams had to cultivate fearlessness.

Once Gandhi started doing some things on his own, people were attracted to what he was doing to liberate India. The cream of the crop were coming to him, including Nehru and the people who later became the savvy political leaders of the country.

He would ask many of those who came to him to go to different parts of India, set up ashrams, and prepare people for civil disobedience. Very little known was his number one right-hand man, Vinoba Bhave. He would direct Vinoba Bhave to set up ashrams, but there were many others as well, people like Narayan Desai and

Jayaprakesh Narayan, whom we would consider monumental people if it was not for the figure of Gandhi simply dwarfing them all. There were some extraordinary people under him as his lieutenants. The same kind of dynamic happened with Dr. King. There were some very fine people like Jesse Jackson, Ralph Abernathy, and half a dozen various men around him who were in and of themselves fantastic people.

Gandhi in Politics

The most important element of Gandhi's political life came to the fore at the end of his career. In Richard Attenborough's 1982 film on the life of Gandhi, there are a few scenes where Gandhi stuns his colleagues. In one, while they are talking about the details of the liberation of India, he chooses to go take care of a goat. They look at each other as if to say, "What is this man doing? Is he crazy?" There are a few instances in the film like that, when they are apparently thinking, "Wow, this man is extraordinary, but he's a mad man also!"

India achieved its liberation in August of 1947, and Gandhi was assassinated six months later. In that interim, Gandhi clearly could have been the ruler of India. Somebody once did ask him if he would be willing to become the prime minister of India. Gandhi's response was, "I pray that I would have the strength to refuse such a position."

At the very end of the Attenborough film, just before he is assassinated, he is meeting with Nehru and the other Indian leaders. The film does not portray it explicitly, but now that they were in power, he had been asking the members of the Congress party (which he had not formally led but which he had essentially guided through the liberation of India) to resign their posts and become village workers. It was extraordinary. These men were thinking, "What? For decades we rebel against the British, we get thrown into jail, our lives are disrupted. Now we have the power, now we control our own country, and now you're asking us, the intellectual elite, to resign and become village workers?" Gandhi really challenged the traditional concept of power.

That is what he was advocating in those last few months, saying it was not the power that he was about and that he hoped they would join him. He wanted to call them servants of the people. That is an extraordinary concept. Again, it runs counter to our whole outlook

on what power is. That was not the kind of power he wanted or was about or had been advocating.

Why? Essentially because he was a kind of anarchist, and he didn't want the country's leaders to exercise power in the traditional way.

Earlier I mentioned *brahmacharya*, which people refer to as celibacy. Again, it played an extraordinary part in his life, but he wanted to say that it was more than just celibacy. It was self-restraint. It was that whole concept of reducing one's self to zero. That was the way he would become one with his concept of God. That was the term he used; if he reduced himself to zero, if he was lower than the dust on the road, then he would attain his meeting with God. Along with that came the concept of voluntary poverty. The starving millions throughout India were very real to him. There were people in Calcutta, Delhi, and elsewhere who were starving. He said, "How am I to talk of God to the millions who have to go without two meals a day? To them God can only appear as bread and butter."

So Gandhi thought that an essential was voluntary poverty, that whatever we have beyond what we need is in a way stolen from the poor, from those who do not have it. That was a given with the ashrams too. The philosophical implications of that led to simple living.

5

Gandhi and Spirituality

Gandhi was a theist, but his concept of God eventually became Truth with a capital T. That was rooted in one of the ashram concepts, *satya*. How can we be truthful day-to-day? But also, in a cosmological or spiritual realm, how do we pursue Truth? That is how he developed the idea of nonviolence, *satyagraha* as the way to pursue Truth. If you say, “My opponent over there has an element of Truth, and I know I have an element of Truth,” then you cannot kill him. You have got to find out what that person’s Truth is.

Truth is one. We are one. Essentially there is one Truth. Gandhi said that “God has no religion.” Various religions present God as their God. Muslims say, “Allah is our God!” Jews say, “God is our God!” Christians, “God is our God!” God belongs to everyone. God has no one religion, or perhaps Gandhi could have said God has all religions.

Gandhi on Atheism

Although Gandhi was a staunch theist, one story illustrates his incredible openness to Truth. Atheists focus on the concept of Truth also. I had a friend by the name of Gora. He was a friend of Gandhi’s who was involved in the liberation of India. The last time I saw Gora was about twelve or fifteen years ago, and he was approaching ninety years of age.

Gora was an upper-caste Brahmin who came from a well-to-do family. He was attracted to Gandhi and the independence movement. So he gave up his wealth, married an untouchable Harijan woman, and adopted several children from different castes and different religions, all intentionally. He was an amazing witness, really highlighting Gandhi’s concept of an integrated society.

Gora was a staunch atheist who spent a week with Gandhi. They arranged for him to live in the ashram. Gora told Gandhi that he wanted to explore the whole issue of theism and atheism. He wrote a book called *An Atheist With Gandhi*. After their discussions, Gandhi said to him, “I can neither say that my theism is right nor your atheism is wrong. We are seekers after truth. We change whenever we

find ourselves in the wrong. I changed like that many times in my life ... Whether you are in the right or I am in the right, results will prove. Then I may go your way or you may come my way; or both of us may go a third way.” This showed that Gandhi, in his sixties when this happened, was open to the possibility that maybe there was no God, or that in his pursuit of Truth he would find something else. I found it extraordinary for a person that age to still be so open and thoughtful.

Vegetarianism

Gandhi learned much when he was in London. He met some vegetarians. He, his family, and the members of his society were all vegetarians. But in his early life in India, when he was a teenager, one of his friends said to him, “We are a weak people because we do not eat meat. The English are able to rule over us, because they are meat-eaters.” So Gandhi did some meat eating for awhile, surreptitiously, but he felt guilty because his mother was such a devout Hindu.

At any rate, he was a young man, in his early twenties in London, when he was studying in law school. He came across a vegetarian restaurant, and he was open to ideas. He had been eating vegetarian cuisine and he realized that there was an ethical basis for it, so he explored that possibility. There were spiritual and ethical reasons. He was not doing it just by rote. That helped him in the evolution of his thinking. There were elements of Hindu society that were good, but he did not want to do them just because that was the law. He wanted to have an understanding of them.

Silence and Fasting

Gandhi did some interesting things, like setting aside a day of silence. Some of the people he met were Quakers. One Quaker in particular was attracted to what he was doing in South Africa in the 1890s. This was a continuing relationship. At one point this Quaker told him that his prayers were good, but the Quaker form of prayer was silent worship, and he should try it sometime. Gandhi said maybe, but then he did try it and realized it was so beneficial for him that he would set aside one day a week to remain completely silent.

His day of silence was a time for him to settle in, reflect on things, and meditate. He did a lot of writing on his day of silence. He found it very effective.

Another practice was his fasting. The things that happened after Gandhi began experimenting with that were remarkable. There have been some incredible fasts by other people in this country and around the world, but for Gandhi to single-handedly quell a riot simply by saying that he was going to undertake a fast unto death, is almost beyond comprehension. You can read about it in a number of books. There were Hindus and Muslims killing each other, burning homes, raping each others' women, stealing. The British had left India. At the very end they tried to maintain their status by promoting discord, and they did a good job of it. That has played out in other places around the world where they used the same tactics. The British have much to answer for.

At any rate, Hindus and Muslims fell into that communal rioting and were tearing each other apart. Gandhi undertook a fast and calmed a city. Nehru had sent several tens of thousands of troops to try to subdue rioting in the Northwest territories of India. They could not do it with troops, but Gandhi accomplished it in a city of over a million people by simply undertaking a fast.

He had said that he wanted to live to be a hundred and twenty-five years old. Some of the doctors who were in his entourage and saw him daily were amazed that he would go through these extended fasts in his eighties and bounce back from the verge of death. (As it was, Gandhi was assassinated by a right-wing Hindu who thought that he was giving too much to the Muslims and some of the other religions, the Sikhs and the Parsis.)

One of Gandhi's granddaughters wrote a book called *The Miracle of Calcutta*. She described the whole event. People came to him and turned over their weapons to him, saying that there were five thousand Muslims marching in the street and ten thousand Hindus protecting them from other Hindus. Extraordinary. Eventually the city was absolutely at peace. It was an amazingly effective nonviolent tactic that has been used by other people since.

6

Gandhi's Timeless Message

Today I am convinced Gandhi would say the same things all over again. While all the things I have been writing about certainly applied to India, the essentials of what Gandhi was about apply universally. You cannot go wrong with Truth and love. Nonviolent resistance, service to others, a constructive program. Voluntary poverty, nonattachment, communal living. He would not be deterred from those things. He was convinced that they were all wrapped up in his being complete, in his fulfillment of his life cycle or his seeing God face-to-face.

If he lived today, Gandhi would clearly be speaking against materialism in this country. Gandhi argued that the earth has enough resources for everyone's need, but not for everyone's greed. That is a timeless principle.

Gandhi spoke out against nuclear weapons. He spoke out against war and acted against the whole concept of war.

Gandhi lived into his eighties, but he spent over seven years of his life in prison. He had good company. Jesus was a prisoner. Socrates was a prisoner. Many of the people that I look to were prisoners: Dr. King, Dorothy Day, Cesar Chavez, A.J. Muste. The list goes on and on. They were all prisoners at one time or another.

So Gandhi would be speaking against war, against the inequality of people, against racism. He would be advocating unity and respect of all religions. He would be speaking out against the gross economic inequalities. Those issues are not going to change. Those are timeless things. That is why Einstein said what he did, that our future is what Gandhi was talking about.

The spiritual heir to Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave, carried out the anarchistic ideals of Gandhi. Vinoba was a Sanskrit scholar. He was never involved in politics. There was a certain tension between those who followed Gandhi in the stricter sense and the people like Nehru and Narayan who took on the political aspects of the new, liberated India.

During World War II, Gandhi was not advocating mass *satyagraha*. He called it a single *satyagraha*, civil disobedience, and the person he chose to be the first practitioner was Vinoba Bhave. He

maintained that if the *satyagraha* or nonviolent resistance you are putting forward is perfect, is in its purist form, it does not matter how many people offer it or do it. That is a concept I am still wrestling with. Here was a man who was advocating mass action and eventually liberated India, had clearly done some thinking about this, then saying that all it takes to transform society is one person who is pure and can do it perfectly.

Gandhi spoke out against the atom bomb, but at one point he said that if an atom bomb was dropped from a plane, we should be out offering resistance on the ground in the village. I don't know about that. In one sense he's probably right. If it is pure and true and perfect, amazing things might happen.

To simply offer yourselves by the thousands seems astonishing, but he showed it could work. Granted, the British were not Nazis, but they did some horrible things to a lot of people all around the world.

Hitler could be seen as the embodiment of evil, and many people do see him that way, certainly what he represents. However, we are all sons and daughters of God. Hitler was not completely devoid of truth and humanity. Interestingly, it is now known that Hitler was beaten ruthlessly by his parents as a child. How much responsibility of what he did and advocated then falls on their shoulders? Another point I would argue is that Hitler could not have done anything by himself. Hitler would have gotten a hoarse voice shouting at people. It took everyday people to go along with his practices. That is what Gandhi was advocating, that we look at what we do day-to-day, what we are about, and the systems we are involved in, and if there are forces of evil then we withdraw that involvement. Part of the problem was that everyday Germans went along and did not refuse and resist.

The argument that nonviolence could not have worked against the Nazis implies that the Nazis were subhuman, devoid of any sense of God about them, but I do not see it that way. Certainly they are the extreme, but as I wrote, the other side of the coin is that the British enslaved and killed all kinds of people too. And so have a number of other empires and armies.

I want people to read and re-read Gandhi, even some of the simple biographies. He is an extraordinary model, enabling us to think about what the future of humanity can be, building heaven on

earth. I am convinced many of the things that Gandhi was about are what we have to be about as well.

For Further Reading

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