William Penn

Lecture 1950

A Saint at Work

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A Saint at Work
A View of Gandhi's Work and Message

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The name of William Penn has been chosen because he was a Great Adventurer, who in fellowship with his friends started in his youth on the holy experiment of endeavoring "to live out the laws of Christ in every thought, and word, and deed," that these might become the laws and habits of the State.

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A SAINT AT WORK

A View of Gandhi's Work and Message

Viewing a world threatened by war, with darkening horizons of fears and mistrust, we pause before the single question: Is the nature of reality evil? We ask ourselves whether it is not rather goodness which is the ground of our being and the fabric of the Universe. Whether we should believe in peace or war would depend upon our answer to the basic evaluation of life.

If evil is fundamental, then there is nothing we can really do about it except claim temporary periods of respite. What hope is there for us in a world where man is born in sinfulness, and must live in a world which is created for fratricide and unending cycles of evil?

Obviously, intellectual man has failed to assess truth; in the words of Wells, mind is at the end of its tether. This also spells the failure of the typical modern civilizations whose driving force has been intellectual energy. But Western humanity, not to speak of Western spiritual truth, would neither be proved nor disproved by any present failure of its material or mental structure. When the intellect supports peace, without any deeper consent, we have the phenomenon of a Bertrand Russell who is content to call intellectualism the free man's worship and repudiates the structure of peace. In that he represents the modern intellect which I have called Western, but which is to be found all the world over in varying degrees. When, therefore, Russell advocated peace it meant very much the same as the advocacy of violent fratricide which his intellect demanded later for one nation, and now for another, of course, as exceptions. Neither Russell, nor Wells, nor the great humanitarian, George Bernard Shaw, believed in the spiritual goodness of being, nor in any inherent wrongness of evil save as an inconvenience or as necessary, but regrettable, evil. In a recent article the great George Bernard Shaw can repeat the word "kill" five times in one sentence, in his eugenic and world-wide advocacy of large scale fratricide. Most of the H-bomb and other scientists today belong to this category.

Much depends, therefore, on our fundamental answer. Statistics would hardly help us because no perfect catalog could be drawn up revealing the total balance of evil and good; nor would the grouping of good and evil, under exclusive categories or separate leadership, convince us. The nature of reality is to us that which we are in a state of deep perception, its definition is our definition of ourselves in what we believe are our most comprehensive moments. No matter what the physical or mental barriers, or the barriers classed as contextual, we admit their challenge, and yet do not accept them in the same order of reality on which the creation is based. In such moments, we do not admit necessary evil nor do we allow war in the name of peace. Why this should be so we cannot prove. But experience cannot be substituted by logic, it demands the experience itself. That is the position that Mahatma Gandhi took in basing pacifism on the structure of reality.

Obvious as this might sound, the implications are far reaching. We do not create peace, peace is there: we can create right conditions for its expression. We can correct the deviation by purity of means. Evil, whatever the nature of its origin, can be removed: we must study evil, as we study disease, knowing that health is the norm, goodness the return to reality. Curiously, in taking this view, we are better able to understand war and wrong and sickness, and find in their very incidence the affirmation of a transcendent truth to which they can be made to contribute if they are negated by spiritual action and not tolerated. Gandhiji accepted the deeper criterion of experience and saw that life persists in the face of death, that goodness is the root and center of our being, that love was stronger than hatred. And on that assumption he proceeded to work for peace. There, he had his own metaphysics from Patanjali of ancient India, who posited that the degree of light would decide the degree of darkness, and spoke of *Ahimsa,* or non-violence, cancelling *himsa*, or violence, according to the quality of its manifestation. Such axioms would demand not mathematics but spiritual law and stretch through all correlations. Supremely Gandhiji found this message in the spiritual works doctrine of the Bhagavat-Gita, a religious text the core and reality of which rejects its own contradictory beginning as it develops its many-branched ethic and spiritual technic of peace. But Gandhiji himself grew from a contradictory beginning into a perfect pacifism. At no point, however, was his judgment merely intellectual, it was based on an awareness which, in his case, was heightened by the experience of violence as he watched it in Africa and in a widening arena of wars.

Gandhiji's faith, and what is just as marvelous, the faith of India's millions which found itself reflected in him, confirmed the reality of pacifism. In India a continuous testimony of peace had been offered, and a basic identification made between the nature of divine reality and the ahimsa technic. *Santam*, peace, and *satyam*, reality, are one; godness is goodness, both of them *Shivam*. This is in accord with the Sermon on the Mount, where "Thou Shalt Not Kill" is an indivisible part of life in God and life in the world: not only on intellectual but on spiritual premises. According to Indian spiritual tradition also, to violate *ahimsa* was to violate the spirit; spiritual man cannot be a violent person. Nor can humanity accept violence without destruction of humanity itself.

Gandhiji drank deep in the clear springs of traditional faith, and he arrived later at the spiritual source of Christian ethics. All religions, for him, carried the core of reality based on love. For him, throughout the awakened period of his life, his ministry of over thirty years of spiritual pacifism, evil was incompatible with man's nature. So completely interpenetrative was his pacifism that one could not touch any part of his life or habit without contacting his *ahimsa*, his absolute non-violence. Mental violence was for him a barrier between oneself and reality, and his thoughts, like his actions, reflected love. He was puzzled when people admired some specific results of his campaign, just as he was surprised when failure would lessen their faith: did they not see the unvarying truth which one served? A hundred Gandhis might fail or succeed, but that did not prove or disprove truth which used human instruments: was he not trying to reveal the divine law? This aspect of Gandhiji's pacifism with its basis on the law of being, and the interconnections that confront us, whether we study him as a politician, social worker or educator, or as a fighter for freedom of humanity, needs greater examination.

1. Interconnections

When the prelude of World War II began in Abyssinia, some Indians residing abroad who did not know Gandhiji well were pained by his great silence. Did he fail to feel the agony of assaulted women and men, these people asked, because it happened in a remote land and in the context of incalculable politics?

Gandhiji's answer to this query, which I sent him from Oxford, was that if his whole life and work had not told us what his attitude must be, no words from him would help. As one read him, stricken fields and huts came to our vision, the scientific quenching of human lives, the conspiracy of old imperialisms helping the recent one to overreach itself while themselves enjoying the dividends of death; the sight of fleeing refugees pursued by aerial fury stood exposed, as it were, under the vast sky of Gandhiji's mind. His sorrow overarched the terrible betrayal. Whatever he was doing was linked up with this, and formed a part of his entire human context. It seemed strange that a distracted world had to be fed on denunciations in order that a proven friend of man, a saint, might not be misjudged. Protests, however necessary they might be, and we have to raise them against evil, depend on the validity of the entire context of our lives and not merely on intellectual reaction.

But the issue raised a point which still holds – have even those of us who profess to understand Gandhiji, and agree with this or another aspect of his work, an essential grasp of his message? To interpret a single event in connection with Gandhiji, his whole life must be seen behind him; he is all there; you must know his basic approach or miss the significance This is particularly true of Gandhiji because his life and work were one: ideals and technique, silence, service and penance, principles and objectives were never separated in what he did in the social or political sphere, or in the profound application of experience to thought.

The pivotal point in his life being spiritual, no attempt to correlate Gandhiji's activities except on the level of his inclusiveness would be effective. Some, even today, think that his politics was complicated by his saintliness because for them politics is power, while goodness is interference if it does not repose on a non-material plane. High morals are blamed for having augmented his political work, thus securing for it an unfair advantage over ruthless aims. Communal frenzy, ideological hatred, or cunningly pursued expediency stood confronted by his methods which represented a new force in politics. Gandhiji applied a simple and complete test in which goodwill was not separated from relevant action, thus baffling "practical" experts.

Again, there were reclusive Indian leaders who considered his political activities to have been derogatory because a saint should not bother about drains, food reform, or riots. Even such mundane things as national freedom are to be gained by the help of unacknowledged ordinary millions who must toil at their material tasks while the spiritual ones cleave to super-mundane privileges and claim results based on auspicious coincidences. But Gandhiji pursued the whole Truth as one, where truths converge; and whatever the immediate concern, his overwhelming consideration was for a spiritual inter-relatedness which cannot be violated. That is why his prayers alternated with peace brigade instructions. He fasted in the midst of feastful rejoicings of freedom in order to offer remembrance to myriad martyrs without claiming a personal or party triumph. His linked hours were filled with the hum of his spinning wheel and his devotion to intricate details. His work program had the force of profoundest religious appeal.

In Noakhali during the communal riots in 1947, I remember, the earliest stars of dawn would see him already engaged, after meditation, in scrutinizing statistics of harvest, disease and the social usages; his hurricane lantern grew dimmer as the morning broke upon rows of slender areca-nut palms, stacks of burnt tins and shattered, silent homes. Along dew-drenched muddy lanes he would rapidly walk, bare-footed, observing each village, field, tank, weed-locked canal, his face lighting up as he met an early passer-by of either community. He would ask questions, negotiate precarious bamboo-bridges, and the whole journey would soon become a complete adventure. All the time, the still morning air could be felt in his expression. One could also sense a supreme urgency in the utter calm of his words. His comprehensive vitality, if that is the phrase for full spiritual activity, touched many levels of material and emotional fact, and related them to the crucial events, and to the actions that must follow, without breaking the peace of the golden moment.

For most of us, used to one-dimensional habits of thought and work, this apparent contradiction in Gandhiji's activities must remain mysterious. In moving from one village to another, whether in East Bengal or in grievously afflicted Bihar, he followed a simple track. And yet it was the track of convergent paths, not the one-track simplicity enjoined by shirkers or extreme practitioners. You could call it the road of humanity.

It would be useless, in interpreting this type of greatness, to apply any logic but the logic of life itself which is not syllogistic and horizontal; it is the logic of deeper relationships that Gandhiji practiced. Many admirers have called Gandhiji "single-minded" in the wrong sense, and even professed to extol what they believed to be his narrow but determined outlook; he has been held up as the apostle of rigidity.

That would be a denial of the entire significance of Gandhiji's concentration. For the most characteristic feature of his mind was the power to improvise, to let sunlight and air play upon his ideas before he had made his decision, and though he held his decision with an iron will, his imagination was open to fresh situations and adjustments. It was the warm responsiveness of his personality, his eager goodwill and generous understanding which struck us even while we realized his immense and precise applications of power. If this be a paradox, let us accept it as such.

Rabindranath Tagore, I remember, used to tell us about the subtle appeal of Gandhiji's most spontaneous, and apparently sudden, words and decisions. Each fresh analysis would bring out some new and rare meaning in them, Gandhiji himself possibly not knowing the full implications. With a single phrase he would link up a constellation of thoughts. Once, in welcoming Gandhiji to a newly built cottage in Santiniketan, Rabindranath remarked that it was designed by a poet, and made of clay. "So are we," said Gandhiji, his eyes filled with joy. Later, when Rabindranath pointed out that here at least Gandhiji would have temporary rest from the limelight, Gandhiji demanded an explanation of Rabindranath's own name, "Lord of the Sun," and wondered what safety lay in sunlight. "But then I should be used to it," he added, "I mean, the sunlight." This is the kind of subtlety, not verbal, but of an inner nature to which Rabindranath had referred. Indeed, when these two friends met and joked, one saw that truth was simple because it was diverse; they represented this by their own divergence which was based on unity in the great and enduring things of life.

In Calcutta, less than a year before Gandhiji's death, a well-known thinker from America who was present during Gandhiji's experimental stay in Baliaghata during the tragic events, asked with affectionate wonder how Gandhiji could have come to this utterly new and unexpected decision even while he was working against time, and attending to a heavy and scheduled program. The companionship he chose, the exact locality of communal high explosiveness where he established his residence, the timing and the background of mass movement that he had in his mind must have demanded a great leisure for thought which surely Gandhiji did not have among his crowded hours. But so it was; busy with people, and papers, and urgent messages from Delhi, Gandhiji had yet found time for the higher volitions; his emotional currents, stirred by the anguish of Calcutta, had moved without interruption along with his thoughts focused on the intellectual level.

What is called *"Abhyasa Yoga"* in our scriptures indicates the nature of the resilience and freedom that saints enjoy who voluntarily accept "abhyasa," or habits of will, while being united in yoga (in yoke) with the All. The lightness and charm that Gandhiji carried with him, his utter candor and the originality of his mind revealed the true yogic power which knew how to be gay, and how to use the higher freedom of action.

In traveling with Gandhiji some years ago, we found the usual seashore of faces as the train stopped at a tiny station near Bolpur. Through that immense concourse a village woman, desperately eager, approached the third class compartment where Gandhiji sat near the window. Wistfully she looked, and said a few words, almost inaudible, as she put an *anna piece* in Gandhiji's hands. At that time Gandhiji did not know Bengali, so we interpreted; this woman had come from a distant village to the market, and hearing that Gandhiji was here she could not help offering him all the money that she had with her. She wanted to help him in his work. But would he return half the money, that is, two pice, so that she could take something back home from the market? She stood irresolute with tears, and Gandhiji after thanking her and returning half the money, turned his face.

He sat still, too deeply moved for words. The village woman had given more by taking something back for her people; she was serving their need as well as Gandhiji's, which was for other sufferers. The deeper interrelatedness of good was there, both at the level of thought and in human behavior.

The greatness of our simple folk can be witnessed all over the land. Unversed in doctrines, threatened by all-knowing religious priests with cycles of rebirth before the "ordinary souls" could get anywhere near to the state of "deserving" – a technical term used by some spiritual culturists to indicate the rights of true life – these unknown many have yet reached the highest harmony, and bear daily benediction to our lives. This is the ideal which Gandhiji's own life represented.

We can dimly understand his manifold goodness in the revelations of his dedicated life. A remark of Gandhiji remains in my mind. Referring to the woman's gift, he said, "One more thread added to the million threads with which India's strength will be woven." We thought of Gandhiji as a master weaver, and it occurred to me that the complex weave of Gandhiji's life and thought was possible because each thread was true and in its place. The pattern of his mind does not appear as a paradox if we understand the parable of multiple threads.

II. The Satyagrahi – The Basic Worker

Quite recently, as I joined the world pacifist conference at Sevagram, my mind dwelt upon the reality, not only of the multiple threads that contributed to Gandhiji's pacifism, but on the character of a *Satyagrahi*, a truth-worker, which gave unity to his life. Here, if I may, I shall draw upon notes that I had made on a previous occasion when I visited Sevagram, and when he was still with us.

A modern pilgrimage along the road from Wardha Station to Sevagram comes back to my mind. There was a squall then, and drenching rain; it was heavy going for even a trained trekker. A long walk through mud lanes and fields of green corn brought you to a cottage where the world seemed to stand still. You knew that Mahatma Gandhi lived there. This end-of-the-world feeling, this infinitude of living peace seemed to contradict the knowledge that here also was the center of power, and of world-moving events. Entering the mud hut you would find Mahatma Gandhi at work. Sitting quietly on the floor, he was in his usual state of intense activity, writing, reading, dictating, and directing a thousand things ranging from local problems to great movements which had all of India, and beyond, for their stage. Immersed in exacting details, and in the shaping of great ideas, he would yet look at you with profound peace, a merry twinkle in his eyes betraying a heart filled with love.

This has been the experience of countless pilgrims from far and near. The baffled visitor, Western or Eastern, would notice the setting of the remote village where nothing seemed to happen; he would look at the great sky and the fields and the small farms, or at the friendly trees, and wonder how a few unhurried words emanating from the hut could instantly become a moral command, widening its ring of repercussions in a myriad lives and events. Powerful nations would be rocked by the impact of those words, and peoples all over the globe would come to feel their benedictory and irresistible strength. The background of a dark cataclysmic age would make them shine with unique splendor. What was the force that lay behind those words? It was Mahatma Gandhi himself. He stood behind each idea, each word, and each implied deed. His stupendous character gave a sanction to what he said and did that cannot be measured by any national or international rod devised for assessing power. A sentence scribbled in pencil on the back of a used envelope would encircle the world with the authentic force of realized human truth.

We have to pause and think of world-power and internationalism in the context of these considerations. Mahatma Gandhi was, and continues to be, the source of a new dynamism in world affairs. Even now he is changing our thoughts, guiding our actions, raising problems, and altering the basis of our individual and collective lives. But there was no official or military power behind him, nor any of the usual methods of wielding authority. He could use the resources of human power because of his humanity. There lies the secret, open to all except those who would secure internationalism by diplomacy, and adjust human relationships by the force of arms. His power came from *Satyagraha*, the power of integral truth which overflows into correlated action; but you had to see him in order to know how simple the human personality must remain in the practice of great human virtues.

Mahatma Gandhi's primary contribution to international thought was the gift of himself to all peoples. He was there, always and utterly, in his words, actions and thoughts. For any fundamental social development, for any real change in world-government, there must be, at the center, this inspiration of self-dedication for the good of all peoples. Not merely intellectual nor emotional personalities, but men who represent our complete humanhood have to take the lead in different spheres of work. Contact between such persons and the people would inevitably develop into a mutual and strengthening power, laying the foundation of equity and justice in a new social and political order. This is a revolutionary change, which does not depend on gun-powder, and such changes have taken place in history because of the unshakable strength of great characters who have imparted their faith and courage to their fellow beings and awakened their profoundest human instincts. To expect human progress while ignoring the simple and basic character of humanity itself, and by deliberately repressing our natural urge for welfare, is to perpetuate a cycle of narrow power-cults which are often hidden under tall names. Societies dependent on wars, or on "violent peace," use doctrines of "self-preservation" and indulge in all-round mutual destruction. And that is so, because the nature of "self" is never analysed, or analysed merely in terms of biology or social doctrines which do not cover the real nature of the self, or the inner truth of man. Here we have to come back again to the individual unit, the human being, who is so often forgotten in politics and in war-making schemes but who possesses a natural reserve of spiritual power which lies buried in the individual and the collective society of men. This reserve is seldom drawn upon by our political systems. Our scientific sense of fact should not exclude the fact that the desire for goodness, for neighborliness, is a common trait in man, and that it can be developed. Internationalism depends on this fact and not on abstract theories of power-politics which result in profound injury to the human race. But Gandhiji has given to us in India the right perspective and a new sense of proportion in this field of power. He has made us aware of the true basis of internationalism.

The primary truth of human power, in its inwardness and in the social context was reaffirmed by Mahatma Gandhi, and he also evolved methods whereby this truth-force could be realized in social and political organizations. The process of attaining self-knowledge, of gaining experience regarding the motive power of humanity, of applying concentrated human will in organized movements in the direction of human good, is what Gandhi referred to as *Satyagraha*.

All great religions, and great institutions of human welfare have been based on the ideals represented by *Satyagraha*, which enjoin the service of truth through both purity of thought and purity of methods of work. But, with rare exceptions, the ideal of *Satyagraha* had not been tested and applied in previous times on a wide field of action, either in peace or in war. Gandhiji had drawn the world's attention to the power of *Satyagraha* by his sustained, united, and many-sided use of this moral weapon. His own system of training and use had been shaped on a wide basis of individual and corporate living, and on more precise and searching levels than ever before. To this sphere of action belong the various imperatives defined as non-violence, passive resistance, and non-cooperation (with evil); while the inner process would include self-purification, the spirit of dedicated service, and the sense of our divine humanity. But these terms often belong to both action and thought, and are misleading if the whole background of *Satyagraha* is not grasped.

Western thought has been profoundly moved by the challenge of Gandhiji’s *Satyagraha*. His method has confirmed the indivisible unity of our spiritual life and our material existence. They cannot be kept apart in any domain of our life without grievous injury. The implications of Gandhiji’s challenge, even if they have not been clearly understood, have already shaken the complacency of those in the modern age, whether in the wider world or in the land of his birth, who would use means which must violate every moral instinct, who plead for dual life in which so-called religion and the pursuit of anti-social ends would go together. Gandhiji’s *Satyagraha* was uncompromising; either it involves our whole life, or it is not *Satyagraha* at all. He had no place for “necessary evil,” not even for a “transition period.” *Satyagraha* cannot be practised on any basis but that of our common good, of our “total” humanity. In every country we still follow a confused system of uncomfortable loyalties which contradict each other, we imagine that the ideal and the system by which the ideal is to be attained can be separated without complete disaster. In the modern age this confusion has been given a pseudo-scientific justification and buttressed by mighty guns. Nationalists, educated on such lines, find it more difficult perhaps to see through the smoke screen of moral compromise and of the polite, expert creed of selfishness which is ruthlessly pursued in the name of politics. And then, at one of the most critical periods of modern history, Gandhiji’s figure loomed large on the horizon. The world had to reckon with a new force in affairs. We stood exposed in the light of a great leader who demanded from us the same purity in thought and in action.

And we saw that the person who demanded this was a great and simple man; that he lived what he believed, and knew all men as his own.

No scholarly effort could possibly disclose the extent to which Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagraha has influenced modern thought. We live in a segment of time in which his life continues to move and inspire millions of men; and we realise that this inspiration is a pervasive force in the modern world which will yet result in unforeseen actions. Mahatma Gandhi was at work with us for nearly half a century, he was growing and developing in his technique, intellect and moral stature all the time, as the greatest of men do; his undiminished vitality daily revealed itself in words more charged with light and power than ever before. But the world has been and is still warring; one feels also that really great events impend. It is possible that we shall have an opportunity of watching in the West the large-scale results of Gandhiji's teachings sooner than we realise. Proceeding from independent traditions and testimonies, and yet strengthened by the great affirmative power of Gandhiji's teaching delivered both in his life and through his martyrdom, increasing numbers of peoples of the West have already responded to Satyagraha by initiating new methods in their protest against war and evil. These methods, whether used by groups opposing social wrongs or by communities fighting iniquitous legislature, have produced better results through disciplined non-violent action, even on the level of immediate changes than the less aware, and imperfect, applications of moral protest which lacked a carefully adjusted technique. It has become abundantly clear that the principles and methods of *Satyagraha* can be fitted into any sphere of action in which organized evil is to be met by organized good.

But can we “organize” good? And if so, is it possible for us to do this without once more laying stress on Gandhiji’s primary demand for recognition of divinity and sacredness of individual man? Humanity for him was dependent on the human personality, and not on any machinery or system. But he would also organize, after making sure so far as it is possible, that the individual unit, that is to say, each worker, was true. Truth, here, would mean for him the inwardness of men linked up, through spiritual discipline in action and thought with social behavior. *Satyagraha,* here, reaches a point which can be clarified only by practice, and by the force of tranquil, vigilant thought. The apparent contradiction between the technique of action involving the use of social and political instruments, and the world of spiritual realization which seems to have no relation with success or failure on transient levels and is an end in itself, could be reconciled not by an attempt to enforce logistic monism, whether externalised or mental, but by the simple acceptance and use of life as it appears to us in a state of spiritual awareness. Such acceptance of life would lead us through interrelatedness, through experiment and knowledge, to a wider adjusted living. The greater difficulty comes in when large numbers are involved in movements and organizations which invariably tend to level down instead of levelling upward.

Here I would, if I may, share parts of a letter from Mahatma Gandhi around which these very inadequate reflections have been built. He touched the core of the problem which thinkers in the West and also in India have been trying to solve – the problem of harmonising the active with the meditative aspects of truthful living without any deviation from purity, whether in the field of politics or in any other realm of social behavior. The ultimate solution of this problem would show us a way out of wars and of the jungle of national and international violence which emanate from the cultivation of dual principles, enabling us to use one set of morals or another according to the dictates of expediency. Democracy at home and imperialism abroad; individual kindness and collective cruelty; the use of prayers for avenging greed – such instances could be multiplied indefinitely. Gandhiji replied to me, in his characteristic manner, that he did not know the answer, but was still experimenting. But he seemed to cast new light on the need of organizing for good, even while he insisted that the individual must he pure so that he can act as "the leaven raising the whole mass."

He wrote: "Of course there must be organized resistance to organized evil. The difficulty arises when the organizers of *Satyagraha* try to imitate the organizers of evil. I tried and failed hopelessly. The way of organizing forces of good must be opposite to the evil way. What it exactly is I do not yet know fully. I feel that it lies, as far as may be, through perfection of individuals. It then acts as the leaven raising the whole mass. But I am still groping."

III. The Process of Pacifism

Where do we stand now, in India as well as in the greater world, with regard to the three principles for which Gandhiji lived and offered his martyrdom? I refer to his concept of peace as a law of life, interlinking all aspects of action and thought: his concept of *Satyagraha* or the pursuit of truth by centering our life on character and truth, and then following the actional law of the individuated as well as the organized good; and lastly, as we shall now discuss, his idea of processive or trained, and controlled use of pacifism as differentiated from impulsive or merely emotive pacifism.

The third category, I believe, is of special moment to us and involves methods some of which were obviously more suited to him than to others but all of which reveal the same principles and challenge our understanding.

Involvement

Training in pacifist action, it seems, began with him in the sense of involvement. Nothing that happens, happens totally outside of us, that is to say, outside of the sphere of our direct or indirect participation. When we see evil outside we cannot brush it aside as not belonging to our responsibility; we are responsible for all that affects humanity. Much less can we dismiss the suffering of fellow-beings, as not involving our own suffering and service. Involvement, conscious and spiritual, would lead to training in pacifism.

But let us first take the negative condition, when we fail to be involved; how to restore the nerve of feeling, of moral sharing, when the circulation of sensitivity has so far failed as to make one part of humanity not respond to the pain of another. In a body, such lack of feeling between limb and limb would be treated as a dangerous symptom of paralysis and not as organic independence of a withering foot or injured toe revealed by callousness of vital response. If the dying look of a woman stabbed in a city riot, or the betrayed innocence of children bombed in their homes or schools have meant nothing to us by way of direct involvement, how do we restore humanity to men?

As we know, self-suffering was one of the methods that Gandhiji practised both to demonstrate and to restore human relationship. He would not undertake such vicarious atonement without due preparation; he would enter into it with prayer and make the significance as clear as possible to all around him.

To most Indians, as to people outside, Gandhi's decision to fast as a means of changing an acute situation of social or political impasse, seemed remote, irrelevant and based on individual habit and unreason. And yet the challenge was clear; right at the heart of a brutal communal upheaval in Calcutta, resting in a broken house exposed to streets where fighting was going on, Gandhiji had chosen to impose self-suffering and penance upon his aged body, as well as on his mind, which he had put to the test of fire. Everyone knew that within a day or two the sheer physical agony mounted to an hourly and momently torture which nothing could relieve; the toxic processes and tissue destruction would begin, not only bringing death nearer but setting up an intolerable psychophysical sequence. His face and eyes, made luminous by suffering and controlled suffering, would show little trace of the agony that his will had mastered, but the nature of his ordeal was unmistakable to the millions.

Even while repudiating his method and its efficacy, the one question in people's mind would be, “How is Gandhiji?” People would begin to feel uncomfortable; the grocer's boy, the rickshaw-puller, the office clerk, the school and college students would scan the news columns early in the morning and listen to the radio throughout the day and feel more and more personally *involved* in the situation. I remember how University students would come up to us and ask to be excused from attending their classes because they felt disturbed and did not know what to do. But why feel disturbed? They would say that though they did not believe in such methods and in the philosophy behind it all, one thing struck them as curious; after all, if anybody had to suffer for the continued killing and betrayal in the city, it was not Gandhi. He had taken no part in it. So, while others were engaged in crime, it was he who had to suffer like this. They felt awkward and some wanted to stop his suffering, and even gathered together weapons from streets and homes at great personal risk; they wanted to return them to Gandhi.

As we know, Gandhiji would look at groups who came with sten guns and knives and now offered these in return for his promise to break the fast and ask them, “why?” Why should it matter to them whether one more man, a man of seventy-eight, suffered or died when they had easily allowed hundreds of innocents to suffer and die? If all the agony and shame had not mattered, why should one more individual signify at all in a situation of retaliation, vengeance and crime that they had accepted as being moral, and courageous? So it was to save him, Gandhi, that they had come, but the saving of Gandhi, or not saving him, was not the point at all.

So the fast would continue. Men would come back home from their offices in the evening and find food prepared by their family, ready for them; but soon it would be revealed that the women of the home had not eaten during the whole day. They had not felt hungry. Pressed further, the wife or mother would admit that they could not understand how they could go on when Gandhi was dying for their own crimes. Restaurants and amusement centers did little business; some of them were voluntarily closed by their proprietors. Why this total and pervasive suffering for a whole city? – why did they begin to remember faces, sights of last appeal that they had seen? – why did it all begin to matter? The nerve of feeling had been restored, the pain began to be felt; the pain of the whole society, because of the pain of its members, whether Hindu, Muslim, or others. Gandhiji knew when to start the redemptive process. Involvement did not merely mean pain: it was fundamentally the joy of union, and the acceptance of new responsibility which such glad assurance of united strength makes possible. An immense release filled the atmosphere when Gandhiji declared that now we had all suffered and shared; his fast would be broken. Release turned into rejoicing, the fast actually led up to feasts in which the warring communities joined heartily, while Gandhiji sipped his small glass of orange juice.

One would like to carry the story further: but the meaning of his fast was clear. Suffering happening in a social and moral vacuum, with no response from peoples whose minds had lost all human sensitiveness. It could only be reciprocated and then redeemed by the process of suffering. Then, out of sharing and involvement would arise a new situation; it would not be merely change but a transformation.

Gandhiji would not stop at the uprise of goodwill. He would immediately proceed to implement the link between will and goodness; otherwise involvement might not lead up to action. “Who among the crowd knew how to bandage wounds?” – hands would rise up on all sides, irrespective of country and community; the task was of mutual service. So on, with the restoring of thatched cottages and buildings, cleansing the streets, opening of markets, etc. The process of involvement had begun and was continued in Calcutta. Never believing in a seven-day miracle, Gandhiji so organized the situation immediately before people’s minds slackened and evils returned, that next time it became far easier to behave with courage and as human beings.

During Gandhiji’s peace-marches in Bengal, Bihar and Delhi, we saw another aspect of involvement which it is necessary to emphasize. Before starting for a riot-stricken village, Gandhiji would make sure that the village expected him. Many of the villagers would be hostile, doubtful and divided with regard to his visit. He would at the same time be accused of appeasement, a secret desire to aggress, and perhaps to pronounce judgment. But in most cases, the village would allow him to come. He would not visit the people without their consent, the consent itself would mean a certain degree of involvement. Moreover, he would ask the village to be his host and provide him, one visitor, with food; the others with him would not be a burden on the small community but bring their own provisions. Of course, the villagers agreed that they would take charge of his food; this meant that he would not merely be a visitor, but a guest of the village.

Before undertaking crucial responsibility of mediation and service of any sort, Gandhiji would insist on preparing the ground by announcing his intention, by giving friendly notice and by waiting for at least some participation and commitment. But, of course, the commitment soon became incalculable and transcendent; what he would bring to the situation was no less than spiritual affirmation for all. Opposite sides in all cases, belonged to a single tragic situation. Before entering the village, he would, for instance, stop at the entrance, gather people together under a large shady tree, and announce his desire that there would be a prayer meeting. Was there anyone who did not want to hear the name of God chanted and sung in another tongue or from different scriptures? The lighted faces of the young workers whom he had taken with him, the unknown brothers and sisters from many provinces and lands who had come to serve them, would make it difficult for people to resist. They would feel curious, they would be interested, and soon they would forget, for a while, their worries and sorrows and resentments in an atmosphere of returning faith.

After this, it would be easier for Gandhiji to call people of both communities together – some of the representatives they had selected – and ask them how he could help them. In the meanwhile, trained girl workers would visit homes and nurse wounded children or give them milk powder or medicines, and no mothers would object. On the contrary, the villagers would crowd round small newly started clinics, and ask for help from the workers, many of whom would be from distant countries, perhaps from the Friends Service Committee, or they would be recent visitors who had undergone training and identified themselves with the cause. The communal frenzy from which all the villagers had suffered together would make no difference to their hunger for food, desire for shelter, and expectation of some kindly word. Roads and tanks would have to be cleaned, bamboo and straw brought in to rebuild burnt-out huts. The prayer meeting had somehow prepared them by making them participate in a common experience which they could not analyse or explain.

On such a basis, however momentary it might seem, Gandhiji would simply ask why they could not live together when they had lived for centuries in the same villages, spoke the same language or accepted different languages and habits. What had happened? People who drank from the same streams, worked in halves of a nearby field or fields, bought and sold in a market, have had their destinies tied together even as the destiny of all men and women are tied together. They would start arguments, prove that somebody else had begun it, very often a carrier of communal virus from the town would be indicated; but nobody would question the assumptions on which Gandhiji had started his discussions. The vital thing then was to begin the most urgent work of reconstruction which could not be done without each others' help, otherwise their suffering would be worse.

The principle to be noticed here is that the involvement situation in a village where all peoples had suffered together, and where there could hardly have been distant onlookers as in a big city, demanded no extension of suffering. Vicarious atonement, by fasting or otherwise, was not indicated. Here Gandhiji would turn directly to recreative effort, after having asked them to participate in his coming and after they had met each other in prayer and communion. The prayer meeting of course, was for him a regular approach in cities and villages wherever he was, and continued till the last day when he was stopped from participation.

The Right Issue

It will have been seen that involvement does not stop at its own frontier, because it has no frontiers: involvement leads to action. But the selection of a specific issue for action, on the individual or the collective level as a group or movement, is not always easy.

Gandhiji would apply the remedial as well as the palliative methods together; the near and long range plans would be simultaneously launched, but there were circumstances when a definite focal point had to be selected. One could belong to different loyalty areas without a sense of compromise. If any sets of loyalties have been contradictory, in crucial situations the cleavage became critical. When a fundamental loyalty was endangered, the lesser loyalty had to be challenged and broken. In the choice of such a campaign Gandhiji weighed the factors in balance, or rather held them together while in a state of prayerfulness, waiting for the light to break through. Then with complete singleness of purpose he would take up the issue, and allow others to be with him if they had themselves felt the same call of dedication.

Stopping of opium production in the fields when villagers hungered for corn would be such an issue; Gandhiji would then lead them to break, if need be, their loyalty to a Government which was forcing them to grow poison for export so that neighbors across the sea could be drugged at a high profit to the usurping power. When repeated acts of a government betrayed moral inertia and vindictiveness, the direct method had to be taken up, after repeated appeal and warning, and pursued with voluntary suffering, and unrelenting goodwill. Gandhiji broke the law in asking people to make symbolic salt at the seashore, with water given by God, as a protest against an iniquitous salt tax. He took up the issue, again, in defying a military order which sells and destroys the soul of the citizen in making him party to mass fratricide or to a surrender of his right to reason why. But the whole question of selecting an issue would greatly depend upon convergence.

Convergence

When we feel involved, when we grope toward an issue, we often find that one particular track leads to a traffic corner of many paths; that in following one obvious remedial line we have hit upon a symptom which symbolises, demonstrates and challenges a root situation. When Gandhiji spoke about one step but in the right direction, he meant that the step was from one total situation to another, and not merely episodic. By selecting an issue which is not convergent but appears to be important from one viewpoint while being tangled up and even doubtful from others, one risked taking a wrong step.

For instance, while deciding to fight segregation one would make an error in selecting segregation in alcoholic booths and opium parlors as the issue; the issue is not clean and clear enough, and raises and even accepts some premises which injure the issue itself. The right to pray together, disregarding segregated churches, or white and black doors, would be an issue of overwhelming convergence. If the right technique of prayerful, non-violent mass action is practised in taking up the issue of segregation at this point, punishment would enhance it, suppression would make the cause spread, a totally unmoral so-called law or custom thus challenged would make martyrs of those who challenged it in the name of a higher law which may not be broken.

Again and again, Gandhiji showed an instinct, a spiritual instinct, for the right issue, for the converging issues which supported each other at a point. He could use his discernment but it was given to him through a process of prayer and purity, and through utter humility in the offering of service. Having chosen an issue, however, he would stake his life on it, and what is more, his entire and integral devotion. A lesser law must give way to a spiritual law when the critical point has arrived: no suffering, or apparent failure can deviate us from our decision.

The Means

As indicated above, Gandhiji, the saint and worker, not only chose the issue but made sure that he operated with aseptic instruments. This is negatively put, but makes the case surgically clear. A partisan heart, or a communal brain would be septic instruments defeating and making worse the causes that we have taken up on deliberate choice. The whole group of workers must be vigilantly tested and selected for a major campaign. Whether we fight segregation in caste or color groups, the contamination of prejudice in a worker's mind, or the heat of his anger which has not been turned into healing light, would wreck the whole effort. That is why Gandhiji believed in training centers for *Satyagrahis*, where spiritual discipline and practical training had to be synchronised so that any crucial campaign could be well led.

Fighting for truth with weapons of war, wishing injury while professing to heal, or any such dichotomy allowed between spiritual action and spiritual thought would be cancelled by a process of *Satyagraha* training. The means and the end, as Gandhi put it, are mutually convertible. But the rock basis of such belief and practice cannot be laid on impulse or untrained good will. Too often we ignore this paramount need of trained spiritual initiative; both leadership and group discipline are dissipated in an atmosphere where there is a lot of good will but little initial preparing of the instruments of service which are ourselves.

But of course, the soul is tempered by the fire of the spirit; the steel of the instrument is our purity made strong by inward will and correlative action pursued together. The single-standard morality is the hallmark; there can be no dual or multiple standards in the service of spiritual truth. Colonialism in Morocco or Congo and home morality in metropolitan areas, caste at home and preaching abroad, segregation and democracy upheld together, would not be possible for trained *Satyagrahis*.

Peace Training Centers

In our recent world gathering for the exploration of peace, the Gandhi training centers, the Indian and Western asramas and work-camps run by different religious groups were discussed. Whether these centers maintain organizational links or not is not so important, we agreed, so long as they worked in the same spirit. It is to be hoped that they will know about each other and will draw, as it were, from the same fund of trained servers in emergency and in other situations in a wide fellowship across the earth.

This will be a new democracy of peoples who, above all, are freed from fear. To walk erect in the liberty of spirit which admits no national or nation-state barriers is to follow a democratic path. Humanity, in that emerging context, demands faith in its roots. In the training camp of *Satyagrahis*, the great secret Gandhiji taught was that of feeling secure.

Security, we learnt from Gandhiji in his training camp, lies in faith, not in guns. When distracted villagers, both the betrayers and the betrayed, remonstrated that now even women should be trained in the use of arms, he paused. “But what can restore faith if faith is not there?” was his answer, in the form of a query. Not a situation bristling with pointed steel, and charged with hidden explosives, but a return to sanity can save us. When faith goes dry, we have to explore the hidden springs, remove the rocks, and not add to impediments and worsen the load. But this work and waiting is hard training for workers. The severe test lies in not seeking to do when the right doing is to hold on, and endure, and not to rush into improper action. The secret of spiritual democracy, for Gandhiji, was organized training of citizens in a spirit of higher neutrality where every weapon is a weapon of help and none are injurious.

And I shall turn to Gandhiji's sense of humor.

IV. Spiritual Gaiety

"If I had no sense of humor," said Mahatma Gandhi, "I should long ago have committed suicide." And we can believe him. Consider his life: a day of it would fill a thousand and one nights of tales, events, interviews, clash and concord in discussions on multifarious themes, contacts with men of all walks of life and of diverse nationalities, interminable correspondence from fool to fanatic, from selfless workers and associates to charlatans. The wheels of such daily machinery would hardly move were it not oiled with generous good humor. A certain invincible chivalry, a soothing phrase, a witty word, a merry twinkle – not to speak of his disarming laughter – would come at the right moment, and put friend and opponent at ease. The real business would then begin, and it would go on without interruption.

I have seen Mahatma Gandhi in his asrams, both at Sabarmati, and at Wardha and in other centers. The situation was the same, yet always different, for he never knew what unexpected events would occur, what problems he would have to face, whom he would meet, what advice would be demanded of him by members of his vast family ("his growing family" as he called it) embracing all of India and many other lands beside. Serenely self-possessed, poised in readiness, he looked as free as a child, and yet you would sense the inner self-control. And just because he was vigilant within, he gave you ease and a feeling of tension at the same time – reality was very much there, and you could not escape its presence. And then came his unerring word, based on the particular fact or detailed observation. This, with his almost uncanny memory, made him give instant point to a remark in a manner that was irresistible.

But the quality of his humor is lost in the telling – or the retelling – because it was bound up, as this kind of humor must be, with the occasion and the atmosphere. It was almost as hard to define as his merry twinkle, though both were unmistakable and unforgetable. The intense atmosphere around him made his sudden sallies so refreshing, so genuinely mirth-provoking. "I see my friend there is plotting something," he says to a friend who has taken a moment to whisper to a companion – and the trick is done. Then he adds, "Is it for a cup of tea?" The delight is entire, for the audience now knows that the visitor in question is given to such an awful vice as tea-imbibing, and that it is past four o'clock. They also know that nothing could have been farther from the visitor's mind than to ask of his host, Mahatma Gandhi, during these few minutes of a long-sought interview, that he supply him at once with the desired beverage. The host then adds knowingly that he is not completely unprepared, for, if worst comes to the worst, help might be had from one of the erring members of the Asram who could not do without her daily “cup of poison.” And this member was none other than his wife Kasturba, his life companion. Here I speak of an occasion when the sainted lady was still with him, and I had gone on a visit to both.

I have spoken of the atmosphere that contributed to heighten Gandhiji’s humor – this was especially strong when the situation was critical, when he was, for instance, going to jail, or was actually in jail, or was fasting unto death for another’s crime. As Rene Fulop-Miller says of one such occasion: “When the news of his imminent arrest became known ... he cheered (his friends) by his sprightliness and abundant joy. For each of his friends he had a loving word or a joke – (he) spread the contagion of his lightness and happiness all around....” The following is especially characteristic. On one occasion Gandhiji made Lala Lajpat Rai’s grief at his suffering seem almost childish by saying that were it not for all of his stitches and bandages (this was after an operation in jail), he would break out into hearty laughter!

As for going to jail, Mahatma Gandhi in his felicitous phrase, described himself as a “seasoned jail-bird.” Even though we might conjecture what inner events he was all the while experiencing, he seemed to look, when he was getting ready with his papers and knapsack, as if he were going out on a picnic! In Sabarmati prison he chatted with his visitors, as one of them put it, with the “untroubled joy of a school-boy at the beginning of his holidays.”

So much of Mahatmaji’s life was passed in prison and in walking in and out of it, that many of his humorous remarks were connected with that mysterious world. Everyone knows that he was a model prisoner. He studied the jail rules carefully as a routine measure and observed them meticulously. But he was also a difficult prisoner to deal with. Firstly, because he disarmed all the authorities, high and low, by his graciousness and charm, making it difficult for them to feel superior or to impress restrictions upon him; secondly, because he got hold of flaws in the regulations which he would turn to the benefit of the imprisoned. In numerous African prisons, he had won his case for the legitimate rights of prisoners by virtue of his tenacity and his all-conquering smile. He had his own peculiar difficulties however. For instance, he related in a letter written to his great Muslim friend Hakim Ajmal Khan from the Yervada Jail:

I had to use all my ingenuity to get leave to keep seven books, five of a purely religious character, an old dictionary which I value greatly, and an Urdu manual, which Maulana Abul Kalam Azad gave me . . . I was urged to present the seven books to the library and borrow them back again. . . .

This suggestion, however, was not quite acceptable to the prison authorities. Mahatma Gandhi then told the superintendent that "he might as well destroy his right arm as these books." But, by his unrelenting banter, joined with moral pressure, Gandhiji managed to win his point and retained use of the innocent books.

About the same time another such incident occurred. He wanted to keep his pocket knife for cutting his bread and lemons. But, according to jail regulations, his knife was a lethal weapon. Then, as he wrote naively to Hakim Aljmal Khan: “I gave (the superintendent) the choice of either depriving me of bread and lemons or allowing me a knife.” But as usual he was reasonable, and good-humored. So he struck a bargain. He gained permission to use the knife if it were kept in custody of the prison-warder; he could have it twice it day during his meal-time! As he observed later on in the same letter, such things are ticklish matters for the authorities who “need time for deep reflection.”

Once out of prison, he was imprisoned by besieging crowds and events but here, too, he managed to remain free. He never gave in where his principles were concerned, but he kept his gentleness, and he was full of the fun of it all – in a fundamental sense. I mean to say, he had that quality which Rebecca West, in describing Winifred Holtby after her sudden death, described as “spiritual gaiety.” Those who knew the brave, gallant, intrepid soul of Winifred Holtby – smiling even in suffering – knew how true this phrase was in connection with her life in Africa and England and with her brilliant writings. Mahatmaji had this “spiritual gaiety.” Doctors, too, were acquainted with it, for, when between phases of his work, he suddenly started fasting inside or outside prison, and while he was suffering from the fast or from an attack of sickness, he flung his barbed jests at the physicians who hurried to him from all quarters of India.

No love was lost between Mahatma Gandhi and modern medicine, yet Mahatma Gandhi compromised and yielded with good grace to the importunities of his advisers. But he insisted on having it out with the doctors, and his tongue was active even while he lay on his back, a victim of medical inquisition. Looking enigmatically at Dr. B. C. Roy, this frail but indomitable patient resisted the stethoscope and other such evil-looking instruments that kept emerging from the doctor’s pockets. At last, yielding like a vanquished warrior, he sighed out: “Lead the attack!” – a graceful concession to the victorious enemy. The whole scene – a dying saint, silent friends, the evening light and sounds of chanting in the distance – the unpleasant need for the doctors to worry the patient – and then in the middle of it all, this invincible gaiety of India’s martyr. It is difficult to explain the effect of his words without this entire background.

I referred to his imprisonment by the vast crowds outside the jail. Such imprisonment was unremitting, and was especially trying when journalists surrounded him, especially those of the ultra-modern type. Then his answers became more witty than humorous – their laconic style and brevity gave his words a peculiarly “reaching” quality. But needless to say, there was nothing of rancor in his wit, although it was pointed and was meant to penetrate.

“Are you really a Mahatma?” one such clever journalist queried. “I do not feel like one,” was Mahatmaji’s answer. Query: “If so, will you define the word Mahatma?” Answer: “Not being acquainted with one, I cannot give any definition.” Query: “Is it a fact that formerly you traveled third class in railway trains and now you travel in special trains and first class carriages?” Answer: “Alas! You are correctly informed. The

Mahatmaship is responsible for the special trains and the earthly ease (Gandhiji had been speaking of his weak moral body) for the degradation to second class."

But we must point out that his degradation from third to second class was not a permanent one – even then he often promoted himself from higher to lower classes of railway accommodations.

This Mahatmaship business often exasperated him and lent an added acerbity to his wit. Asked once why he loved to dwell on an eminence as a leader and Mahatma, he answered promptly, "You think I am on an eminence; I assure you that I am unaware of that. I am, however, on the top of a volcano which I am trying to turn into hard incombustible rock. It may erupt any moment before I have succeeded. That unfortunately has always been a possible fate for a reformer."

Or, take the following selected questions put to Mahatma Gandhi, and his answers. Query: "When do you want to establish Swaraj (self-rule)?" Answer: "I am trying to establish Swaraj over myself as rapidly as possible." Query: "Do you think time will increase or decrease the divergence of views between you and Lord Reading?" (This was in 1921.) Answer: "The divergence is as likely to decrease as it is to increase." How courteous is his reference to the possibility of decrease coming first, and yet how delightfully sincere his suggestion of "increase"!

But one liked Mahatmaji's answer to the correspondent mentioned earlier. The question was as personal as any journalist could wish it to be: “What will be your own position when Swaraj is obtained?” Here was a chance for Mahatma Gandhi to expound his views on future humanity or to outline some further political scheme. But listen to what he said:

“I would certainly like a prolonged and perhaps well-deserved holiday.”

So the Mahatma or a man of saintliness could be human. We certainly would have granted him a well-deserved holiday, only his holiday haunt might easily have become a fair of darshan-seekers. Unfortunately we in India do not wish our great men to be human, nor do we allow them the necessary rest. And Mahatma Gandhi certainly got no rest nor respite in the days when freedom was dawning and had dawned on India. And soon it became too late for a holiday.

To insistent fools, however, he could deliver humorous words of curative shock-value. He was not afraid of startling busy do-nothings into awareness of their own peculiar position by putting his answer in the form of a pointed epigram. Thus in attacking “untouchability” in the midst of orthodox mobs he once spoke of the inhuman nature of this practice as “a home-made vice worse than any foreigner could devise” and suddenly added “Untouchability (is the) white ant which has to be touched.” There is a world of thought compressed in that whimsical phrase. Again, about untouchability he said, “I live and untouchability goes: or, untouchability lives and I go. We are the two competitors in the field.”

On another occasion when somebody referred to Indians as "Pariahs of the Empire," Gandhiji answered immediately, "In my own opinion we have become 'Pariahs of the Empire' because we have created Pariahs in our midst. Our slavery is complete when we begin to cherish it.... We may not cling to putrid customs and claim the pure boon of Swaraj."

Here is courage but expressed in a way that amuses and outwits. Courage was, of course, never absent from his humor. A writer had advocated secrecy in Congress affairs, and the need of secret societies; he had also tried to strengthen the request by making the "Holy God and the freedom of Motherland" his ally and objective. Gandhiji's humor cut at the root when he flashed out: "The writer takes the name of God in vain, when he advocates in the same breath the secret ways of Satan." One could almost hear him suffer and laugh as he uttered these words.

Subtle arguments were disposed of with a word or a phrase which fitted the occasion – and created good humor all round. Somebody had taunted him for not recognizing that, after all, certain plantation owners in Africa and India were human beings. "Once admit," answered Gandhiji, "that men may be treated like cattle, many a manager would earn a certificate from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals." Imagine planters going about with medals and certificates for having given "coolies" some cattle-comfort! Mahatmaji exposed the basic principle when he continued: "He (the "coolie") would be a freer man for being paid full wages and charges for housing and medicine – not favours, but the power to raise their own standards should be given to the poor workers." Otherwise keeping laborers like cattle and giving them "free grazing ground" and other such amenities, said Gandhiji, would be "a mere trick of the trade." These words, as we realize, have a topical message not only for the benumbed, crucified humanity of large areas of Africa held by modern guns, but for men and women who are given concessions so that the machine might function better. Amelioration of wrong, without any desire to find the remedy, presents us with a formidable problem; while supporting concessions, we must denounce them as ends in themselves. Gandhiji faced such situations often as a social and political fighter.

To self-important followers, Gandhiji administered the necessary process of gentle leg-pulling. Thus to one who gave him advice in non-cooperation methods he wrote: "I would love to feel that I was an M. A. of the University of Non-Cooperation. But my examiners show me that whilst I have matriculated ... I have yet to till many a term in the college course. ..."

The examination papers sent by a gentleman from Sindh had questions such as: "Did he (Gandhiji) think that his movement would lead to violence?" To which the examinee answered, "If I did, I would not have advised it."

Other questions visualized the possibility of massacres and asked Gandhiji if he would retire to the Himalayas if these came to pass. His answer was as follows:

"The question presupposes my sole survivorship. But assume that I have scuttled to the Himalayas ... the remaining population would certainly be expected to remain true to their faith."

Obviously scuttling to the Himalayas was incompatible with the Gandhian acceptance of responsibility.

The real test of humor lies in one's capacity to joke about oneself and about one's cherished convictions. A solemn fanatic or doctrinaire advocater of tyrannically imposed systems, could not do that. Gandhiji's greatness lay in his detachment, in his gift of looking at himself and his beliefs with a critical and ironical eye. His jokes about the eternal Charkha – "that skeleton in the cupboard," as he called it – are well known. Once he beguiled the present visitor by warning him during a conversation that this skeleton might "pop out at any moment."

Many stories could be told about his merry reflections on his own food-habits, dress, beliefs. It is not always easy to be good-humored when defending oneself against communalists who wished to perpetuate their stupid strife and refused to open their eyes to sense. And all in the name of pure religion. How neatly he could reduce their arguments to air by a process of "reductio ad absurdum." Hear this, for instance:

"Now in order to arrive at a solution ... I hate duelling, but it has a romantic side to it. I am engaged in bringing that side of it to the fore. I would love to engage in a duel with the Big Brother (Maulana Shaukat Ali). When we are both satisfied that there is no chance of unity without bloodshed, and that even we two cannot agree to live in peace, I must then invite the Big Brother to a duel with me. I know that he can twist me round his thick fingers and dash me to pieces. That day Hinduism will be free. Or, if he lets me kill him despite his strength of a giant, Islam in India will be free ... What I detest is the match between ‘goondas’ (criminals) of both the parties ... The way to get rid of ... cowardice is for the educated portion to fight the ‘goondas.’ We may use sticks and other clean weapons. My ahimsa (non-violence) will allow the use of them. We shall be killed in the fight ...”

The human side of his greatness gave a living quality to his message. He could use droll words and invest them with spiritual wisdom; the quality of surprise was never a trick with him but carne as an inevitable part of his argument. He did not impose himself upon you as a spiritual tyrant delivering oracles, but as a friend who dared not withhold the message of his faith that must be delivered.

And no one was more ready than Mahatma Gandhi to confess his mistakes when he had discovered them. Charged with inconsistency, Gandhiji gave the answer –“My eyes, I fancy, are opened.” That “I fancy” is an expression which covered both conviction and humility in equal measure. It cut both ways. Compare the delicate use of “I fancy” with an equally felicitous expression which he used when discussing the real nature of robbery, in the sense of appropriating more of earthly goods than we needed. “I suggest that we are all thieves,” he said – and that “I suggest” was grim indeed but humorous! He continued to explain how the acquisition of things without genuine need for them amounted to thievery.

Someone should gather his humorous observations and anecdotes of his travels, talks with friends, and witty sentences scattered in his writings. I give a few examples. “A patriot is so much less a patriot if he is a lukewarm humanitarian.” And: “Abstinence (from force) is forgiveness only when there is the power to punish – A mouse hardly forgives a cat when it allows itself to be torn to pieces by her. ...”

Or he might be commenting on the addiction to European habits – in this case, the habits referred to clothes – which many Indians have formed: “My esteemed friend still retains the provincial cap and never walks bare-footed and ‘kicks up’ a terrible noise even in the house we are living in by wearing wooden sandals. He still has not the courage, in spite of most admirable contact with me, to discard his semi-anglicised dress, and whenever he goes to see officials he puts his legs into the bifurcated garment and on his own admission tortures himself by cramping his feet in elastic shoes.” Elastic shoes, we are told, are rare nowadays among the most proper gentlemen.

Each might make his own selection of the felicitous words and phrases written or spoken by Mahatma Gandhi. These revealed his gifts as a skillful writer and speaker and a master of the humorous nuance. The secret of his style lay in the crystal clarity of his thought. But along with that there was the merry twinkle of his eye and the irresistible innocence of his good humor, which invest his words with an additional sparkle. What was the secret of his inexhaustible graciousness?

I have used few of his often-quoted sallies and provocative remarks: nor have I disclosed reminiscences of a more personal nature. But before concluding I would leave one more saying of his which is well worth pondering. It does not refer merely to food-faddists but to all seekers of short-cuts in moral affairs. Muriel Lester, his hostess in London, and the great peace-worker, tell us this story. An English lady, admiring the fruits which had been sent to Mahatma Gandhi, exclaimed that she was prepared to become a saint if she could enjoy such delicious fare. His helpful suggestion was: “You need not go so far to change your diet.”

Now we can follow our fruitarian fare, when we have it, with an easy conscience. Or, can we?

V. Conclusion

The picture that I would leave with you is that of a saint who was also a worker, a man who was warm hearted and never coldly ascetical, who occasionally made mistakes and was also glad to acknowledge them because he sought to serve truth.

A myth of negativism has grown round Mahatma Gandhi, both in India and abroad, which makes him a rigid authoritarian, infallible and oracular in his intellectual ideas, and divinely led even in his habits and diet. Apart from the divinity in which we move, and whose laws serve and bind us all, there was no supernatural claim that this man of God made or tolerated. He was a great-hearted and very human personality: affectionate, interested in a wide variety of men, so natural in his goodness that he passed from one sphere to another without any sense of strain. He chose his food with care and enjoyed his dates and milk and oranges, unlike ascetics who are indifferent to food and drink, indeed, he was zestfully interested in the preparation of meals which looked, tasted and felt good in the eating. In his dress he was equally fastidious, which is the opposite of asceticism, and felt happy in immaculately white *Khadi* or home-spun which had to combine simplicity with daily soap and water. He needed and enjoyed his massage, his morning walks in dew fresh air. His rooms had to be in fine order even though the equipment was not lavish. We have tried to look into his way of humor and wit, his great gentle-manliness in all circumstances, and concluded that our definition of him as a saint is that of a man who prayed and worked, as a man amongst men, in a world held by a spiritual order with which he identified himself and humanity.

The retreatist saint who left the world in order to see and serve God outside humanity, or the severe saint who worked among men but with a sense of compromise and martyrdom, or the unfailing saint who claimed an inherited authority was not Mahatma Gandhi. Visibly, he lived and learnt, outgrew his intellectual mistakes, became truer by his own standards even during his last days and years, and never ceased to experiment with Truth. That was his great adventure. A worker till the last, he died in a supreme epoch of crisis and hope. That epoch continues. We felt that we could ill spare him in a world where he had so much to give.

But suddenly in an agony of pain, in our sense of terrible shame and betrayal, we realized that Gandhiji, indeed, had not been touched by death. The bullet that went through his heart has recocheted in a million hearts and inflicted a wound on the entire mankind. He himself has risen in his immortality, and lives in all that is true and good. We cannot think otherwise. Never did he seem more real, more imperishable than now. Beyond the mounting tide of violence and crime, even in this world which we have turned into anguished living, Gandhiji's stainless goodness extends before the world. And somehow that goodness, his whole live of service for us, the supreme courage of his love has become a challenge – a challenge which we cannot ignore.

The full truth of the situation in India and abroad confronts its. This truth has to be faced. Gandhiji's sacrifice through a life of saintly service allows us no compromise. Shall the world go on maiming and injuring humanity, create walls and blocs of suspicion? Shall we persist in communal and national and racial crime and still hope that man will live? Shall we not desist, and yet save human society from scientific savagery and untruth?

The assassin who dared attack the sacred body of man, the body of the greatest among us, is the assassin who has brought death and ruin to multitudes in Bengal, in the Punjab, in Bihar, in Kashmir, in one area after another in India, and who typifies crime in a far-flung world of men. Even now the millions of stricken refugees, the weeping women and the tortured children fill the camps and deserted homes in East and West. Shall we not save them?

It is the tragic inevitability of our age that, at last, the assassin's hand should have struck the mortal blow to Gandhiji himself, the symbol of goodness and greatness, the pure, and the innocent servant of men. A shiver ran through the world; men in a thousand cities and villages reeled under the shock. The assassin's hand had reached Gandhiji. And then the assassin killed himself with the instrument of laws which were retaliatory and not redemptive, and therefore failed to touch the source of evil.

But a new tenderness of spirit has been born. Gandhiji's love, and his joyous faith in man somehow seem truer to us than a number of dark strewn facts that move in a whirl and threaten large areas of mankind. If the wrong-doer could have seen what power of truth he has raised! Not only statesmen and politicians, worldly men of renown, and representatives of nations have been shocked to the depth of their hearts, and repudiated violence when at last it assumed this unmistakable form, but people in streets and homes, villages and towns all over the earth have reacted as to a common bereavement. If this spirit remains with us, then indeed Gandhiji's suffering will not have been in vain; like the death and suffering of other innocent men, his testimony will be a part of our future. Gandhiji will perhaps succeed with us in his death though we failed him in his life.

In a last gesture of farewell, a friend of man folded his hands, and greeted us. And then when his body was carried away to the room where many of us had seen him at work, in happy conversation and full of affectionate joy, he was quiet and still. Perfect peace lay on him, as the candlelight played on his face and hymns were sung in God's name, the hymns that he had loved. That is the picture of a heroic saint who conquered.

About the Author

Amiya Chandra Chakravarty (1901–1986) was an Indian literary critic, academic, and Bengali poet. He was a close associate of Rabindranath Tagore, and edited several books of his poetry. He was also an associate of Gandhi, and an expert on the American catholic writer and monk, Thomas Merton. Chakravarty was honored for his own poetry with the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1963. He taught literature and comparative religion in India for nearly a decade and then for more than two decades at universities in England and the U.S. In 1970, he was honored by the Government of India with the Padma Bhushan award.

In 1948, Chakravarty moved to the US to join the Department of English in Howard University. He was a visiting fellow in English at Yale University, and a fellow of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton during 1950-51. In 1953, he became a Professor of Comparative Oriental Religions and Literature, Boston University. He also held professorships at Smith College and later the State University of New York at New Paltz.

Chakravarty met with many of the notable figures of his time, including Jawaharlal Nehru, Albert Schweitzer, Boris Pasternak, Albert Einstein and Thomas Merton. He visited Merton in November 1966 at the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky. Merton later dedicated his book, Zen and the Birds of Appetite (1968), to Chakravarty.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amiya_Chakravarty

About the Lectures

The William Penn Lectures started as a ministry of the Young Friends' Movement of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. In the beginning of the last century, "Young Friends" was the community of young adults from both the Hicksite and the Orthodox Philadelphia Yearly Meetings, which reunited in 1955. The Young Friends Movement began the lecture series "for the purpose of closer fellowship; for the strengthening by such association and the interchange of experience, of loyalty to the ideals of the Society of Friends; and for the preparation by such common ideals for more effective work through the Society of Friends for the growth of the Kingdom of God on Earth." The name of William Penn was chosen because the Young Friends Movement found Penn to be "a Great Adventurer, who in fellowship with his friends started in his youth on the holy experiment of endeavoring 'To live out the laws of Christ in every thought, and word, and deed; and that these might become the laws and habits of the State.'"

The first run of William Penn Lectures were given between 1916 and 1966, and are warmly remembered by Friends who attended them as occasions to look forward to for fellowship with our community, inspiration, and a challenge to live into our faith. The lectures were published by the Book Committee of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting has granted Pendle Hill and Quaker Heron Press permission to reproduce the lectures as free ebooks.

Although it was announced in 1960 that the series would be discontinued several lectures were published in the early '60s. It appears that the lectures given between 1923 and 1931 were never published. If we come upon manuscripts of these lectures, we hope to publish them in future.

In 2010, the Young Adult Friends of PYM revived the series, officially launching the second run of the William Penn Lectures in 2011. The series was renamed the *Seeking Faithfulness* series in 2016, as part of the Young Adult Friends of PYM's concern for dismantling racism within the yearly meeting and the wider society. It no longer felt rightly ordered to have a major event named after a slaveholder. The *Seeking Faithfulness* series is hosted by the Young Adult Friends for the benefit of the whole yearly meeting community, and invites a Friend to challenge us all to explore new ways to practice our Quaker faith. The Seeking Faithfulness series seeks to nourish our spiritual lives and call us to faithful witness in our communities and throughout the world.