



# GANDHI AND LEADERSHIP

New Horizons in Exemplary Leadership

Satinder Dhiman



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For my esteemed mother  
Shanti Devi  
the embodiment of peace  
and selfless service  
whose love and blessings  
have been my strength

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## PROLEGOMENA: A FOREWORD BY ARUN GANDHI

It is amazing how simple words can carry a powerful message and an incentive. Some months ago I read a sentence that made a profound impact on me. For a long time I had it under my email signature and when I took it off there were many protests. The message was simple: “If you think you are insignificant, try sleeping in a room with one mosquito.” Indeed, we all know that one mosquito can give a room full of people a sleepless night.

It was possibly something like this that inspired M. K. Gandhi, my grandfather, to coin the phrase: “We must become the change we wish to see in the world.” In fact, I would go so far as to say that the whole philosophy of nonviolence hinges on this phrase. Nonviolence may seem to succeed in certain situations like the independence of India, the granting of human rights to the South Africans and the Civil Rights struggle in the United States. But, if we examine each of these cases we will find the victory was not complete. India became free of British colonialism but it is not free of the internal exploitation, in every sphere of life, which creates conflict and chaos. South Africa is facing the same problem and so is the United States. The law has enabled integration, but not equality and respect.

The reason for this is that we tend to ignore the fact that over the centuries we have created a Culture of Violence designed to control people through fear. At every level, starting from parenting at home to controlling nations, it is always FEAR that plays an important role. Fear is the first step towards violence. So, the question we need to ask ourselves is, if FEAR AND VIOLENCE permeate entire societies how can conflicts be avoided peacefully? Another effect of control through fear is that we have become adept at “crisis management.” The tendency is to wait until a crisis explodes in our face and then we seek a quick solution which, inevitably, is violence. We seek to put an end to violence with more violence, increasing violence manifold instead of reducing it.

Gandhi's nonviolence was, therefore, much more comprehensive. If we truly believe in nonviolence we need to begin by acknowledging that we are all individually guilty of committing violence all the time. I know we have become so accustomed to looking at and experiencing violence in the physical form that we have learned not to regard violence in the passive form as violence at all. There are so many things we do, and so many ways we live, which hurt people somewhere or the other. The amount of food that we waste in the United States runs into billions of pounds a day, enough to feed an entire developing country. It is not just the food that we waste in our homes but the tonnes of food that are destroyed or dumped into the ocean to keep up the market prices. A recent newspaper report said the glut of tomatoes in The Netherlands, caused by Russia's refusal to import from countries that object to its policies in the Ukraine, was resolved by organizing a tomato fight in the streets of Amsterdam. The people and the streets were plastered with tomato pulp which must have taken even more tonnes of water to clean up.

Socrates said: "An unexamined life is not worth living." We never do examine our lives. We just live the way we want to with little or no concern for others, creating all sorts of disparities. Disparities lead to conflict and conflict to violence. In other words the passive violence that we commit consciously and unconsciously every day causes the victims of passive violence to get angry, and their anger ignites the fire of physical violence.

In a Culture of Violence even Justice has come to mean revenge. Our justice system is based on punishment and revenge and we practice the same kind of justice at home with our children when we use punishment to discipline them. What we need is reformative justice and not retributive justice.

Since the seeds of violence are planted in our children at home, it is here that we need to bring about a change to replace the Culture of Violence with a Culture of Nonviolence. This alone will save the world from perishing in a bloodbath of violence. What we are experiencing today is the beginning of World War III. History has shown us that wars have not resolved any problems, they have simply postponed them.

Gandhi provided us with the parameters of introspection which are:

Wealth without Work,  
Pleasure without Conscience,  
Knowledge without Character,  
Commerce without Morality,  
Science without Humanity,  
Worship without Sacrifice,  
Politics without Principles, and  
Rights without Responsibilities.

These, according to Gandhi, are the ingredients that make up the Culture of Violence. A study of these universal mistakes with a truly open and enquiring mind will show us a way out of the mire of violence.

Meanwhile Dr Satinder Dhiman, in his book *Gandhi and Leadership: New Horizons in Exemplary Leadership*, has done a commendable job of projecting Gandhi's philosophy in simple, lucid, understandable terms. The book is eminently readable and contributes substantially to a better and deeper understanding of Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence which not only offers a positive way of conflict resolution but also takes us along the road to personal transformation so that our existence may contribute to making this world a better place for future generations.

*Arun Gandhi*  
*Founder and President*  
*M. K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It has been rightly said that nothing worthwhile is ever accomplished alone. Every writer builds upon the work of a long tradition of scholars in any given field of inquiry. Above all, one recognizes divine blessing in the form of favorable turns of events, and myriad benevolent seen and unseen influences and helpers along the way who illuminate one's path. This writer would like to humbly acknowledge the contribution of all such benefactors, and much more.

First, I express my gratitude to Woodbury University's Faculty Development Committee for granting me a sabbatical during Fall 2013 to complete my research on this book. This enabled me to travel to India for an extended period to visit some great libraries and meet with some dedicated Gandhian scholars. Mr. Manmohan Loda, despite his failing eyesight and frail health, showed a rare example of utmost sincerity and selfless service. He put me in touch with Mr. Manubhai Patel, who had quit his college studies to support Gandhi's independence movement. Mr. Patel provided a living example of what it means to be in the company of a great soul. I am grateful to Mr. Yogesh Modi of Mumbai for arranging a rare meeting with Narayan Desai, son of Mahadev Desai, Gandhi's gifted personal secretary and biographer. Mr. Narayan Desai, who was 88 years old at the time, generously shared a few precious hours from his busy writing schedule and enriched my path with his humility, wisdom, and devotion to Gandhi's life and thought. More significantly, he shared some unique anecdotes about Gandhi's spiritual mentor, Raychand Bhai, some of which have found home in this book. From the age of one, Narayan Desai spent 21 years with Gandhi; 67 years after Gandhi's death he is still engaged in the single-minded pursuit of Gandhi's life and thought. This writer came away inspired after meeting with this utterly humble man.

I am grateful to Gandhi's grandson, Mr. Arun Gandhi, for contributing a soulful foreword to this book and for his generous conversations about Gandhi's unique interpretation of passive forms of violence. Dr. Howard Richards, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at

Earlham College, provided several useful pointers during the early phase of the research. He also very kindly connected this author with Gandhi's granddaughter, Ela Gandhi. Ms. Gandhi directed me to some seminal readings about Gandhi, for which I am highly grateful. I express my special thanks to Dr. Thomas Weber, the distinguished Gandhi scholar, who has been exceptionally generous with his guidance and much-valued encouragement.

Special thanks are also due to Dr. Ian Mitroff, Dr. Y. P. Anand, Dr. Satish Sharma, Michael Carroll, Nan Rae, and Dr. Judi Neal for their generous endorsement of my humble efforts. Finally, I want to thank my wife Shally and our three sons, Rohit, Nitin, and Tarun, for their understanding and generous sharing of time to enable me to work on this book.

Every step of the way, the divine inspiration of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the bestower of the Bhagavad Gītā, kept the wayward pilgrim steadfast. This author's gratitude to the Creator of the Song Celestial is too deep for words.

## CHAPTER 1



# GANDHI: “A ONE-MAN BOUNDARY FORCE!”

## INTRODUCTION

On August 15, 1947, India not only became independent from British imperial rule but was also partitioned into India and Pakistan. Instead of celebrating in Delhi, the nation’s capital, Mahatma Gandhi was in Calcutta (the capital of the state of West Bengal), pitting his whole soul against the communal riots that had broken out between Hindus and Muslims in the wake of partition. On August 26, 1947, Lord Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of British India and first Governor-General of Independent India, sent a letter to Gandhi that said:

My dear Gandhiji, in the Punjab we have 55 thousand soldiers and large-scale rioting on our hands. In Bengal our forces consist of one man, and there is no rioting. As a serving officer, as well as an administrator, may I be allowed to pay my tribute to the One-man Boundary Force.<sup>1</sup>

This tribute perfectly sums up the influence and gentle power that Gandhi commanded as a leader even though he did not hold any official title, office, or position. He himself had written, “In a gentle way, you can shake the world.”<sup>2</sup> What was the secret of Gandhi’s power? Why, almost seven decades after he was assassinated, does he continue to inspire millions? Why is he still on everyone’s short list of history’s most remarkable persons? It is not that Gandhi was perfect or was free from human frailties. Despite his flaws, or perhaps because of them, much in Gandhi’s life enables us to learn about his development as a leader. Focusing on the moral and spiritual roots of

Gandhi's leadership journey, this book suggests reclaiming Gandhi as a human being, set apart from some of the myths that have come to surround him.

Gandhi's power came from empowering the weak; his passion came from his uncompromising pursuit of truth; his charisma came from the courage of his convictions; his authenticity came from being thoroughly himself; and his strength came from sacrifice and service. Gandhi gave his life to a higher cause; that is where his real greatness lies. He accomplished the impossible by humanizing politics and by approaching his lifework in an utterly selfless manner, never seeking for himself any title, position, or office.

These are all valuable lessons for modern leaders to emulate.

All of Gandhi's actions stemmed from a value system that was rock solid. In him, we can vividly see the classic 4E's of leadership in operation—envision, enable, empower, and energize. Through his uncompromising steadfastness to the values of nonviolence and truth, he helped shape the largest democracy in the world. Rarely has any leader been able to rally such a band of willing followers around a common cause. His leadership vision was a combination of the spiritual, the moral, and the practical. Gandhi knew how to get people in the right place, to do the right thing. His greatest successes came from enabling and empowering others.

## WHY THIS BOOK?

Perhaps no life in human history is so abundantly well documented as Gandhi's: indeed, apart from personal testimonies, his is probably "the most minutely documented life that has ever been lived."<sup>3</sup> There are currently more than 400 published biographies of Gandhi<sup>4</sup> and numerous other books and articles. His collected works consist of 98 volumes of over 50,000 pages of closely printed text.<sup>5</sup> Despite the voluminous body of books on the life and legacy of Gandhi, he continues to be somewhat of an enigma. Every new major work on Gandhi reveals a deeper mystery, a hitherto unknown dimension of his multifaceted personality. And still, as one of his recent biographers avers, "no one so well-known is so little *known*."<sup>6</sup> Perhaps Gandhi's greatest achievements are still waiting to be fully discovered.

The scholarship on Gandhi is vast and continues to grow. Gandhi's biographers portray him in myriad roles—as an astute political innovator, a radical social reformer, a consummate nonviolent revolutionary, a determined advocate of human rights, an apostle of love and peace, and even a saint or a 'mahatma' (a great soul, a half brother to

the Buddha or Christ). While the present work builds upon such diverse strands of Gandhian literature, it focuses more on the moral and spiritual roots of Gandhi's development as a leader. Very few works have really explored the spiritual and moral origins of Gandhian charisma, much less its relationship to the leadership of contemporary organizations.

This book aspires to fill an important need in that it makes a conscious attempt to extract concrete leadership lessons from the life and thought of Gandhi. The author firmly believes that Gandhi's political work was an extension of who he was as a person. The book is dedicated to exploring the spiritual inspiration of that paragon of virtue about whom Will Durant, an American philosopher and historian, said: "Not since Buddha has India so revered any man. Not since St. Francis of Assisi has any life known to history been so marked by gentleness, disinterestedness, simplicity of soul and forgiveness of enemies. We have the astonishing phenomenon of a revolution led by a saint."<sup>7</sup> Although some lesser mortals may be guilty of proffering biased opinion, when an objective historian of Durant's standing speaks about the stature of a person, we pause and listen. While some may not entirely agree with Durant's assessment of the man, few will doubt the qualities of gentleness, simplicity, and forgiveness that Gandhi possessed in unusual measure. These qualities, together with his Buddha-like passion for self-realization, essentially served as an abiding foundation for his leadership style and legacy.

Throughout this book, Gandhi's leadership style is variously referred to as "values-based leadership" or "self-leadership" or "authentic leadership" or simply as "leading from within."

This book is written with the creative reader and thinker in mind. Such a reader tries to actively engage with the subject matter and creatively cocreate the meaning as the book unfolds. According to Francis Clifford, "A writer's task is not to spell everything out. It is really to imply and infer and hint, to give the reader the opportunity of total involvement by encouraging him or her to contribute his or her own reflections and imagery."<sup>8</sup> From what has been made explicitly clear in these pages at a given point of elucidation, a discerning reader will discover enough material to re-create Gandhi the consummate leader; nothing essential would be found wanting which cannot be inferred from what came before it and/or what is to come after, if one pays attention. It is said that Zen is about three things only: (1) everything changes; (2) everything is interconnected; and (3) pay attention. These are good working guidelines to keep in mind while going through these pages.

## WHY FOCUS ON THE MORAL AND SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS OF GANDHI'S LEADERSHIP?

In fact, what sets Gandhi apart from most leaders of the present and the past is the spiritual and moral anchorage of his leadership. Gandhi chose politics for deeply spiritual reasons. He viewed his life as an undivided whole. In fact, his "politics" was deeply rooted in morality and spirituality. As he tells us in his own words: "The call to lead India did not come to me in the nature of a sudden realization. I prepared for it by fasting and self-discipline. *My political work grew out of my spiritual preparation.*"<sup>9</sup> His spiritual understanding emanated from a deep conviction about the essential oneness of all life and served as his True North. His message of truth and nonviolence was a profound reflection of his inner spirituality and moral conviction.

Gandhi considered the spiritual and moral dimension as primary and all other dimensions as secondary. "Most religious men I have met," he said, "are politicians in disguise. I, however, who wear the guise of a politician, am at heart, a religious man."<sup>10</sup> On a more serious note, Gandhi clarifies that his experiments with truth that he describes in his autobiography "are spiritual, or rather moral, for the essence of religion is morality."<sup>11</sup> This dialectic of moral and spiritual was key to Gandhi's success as a leader. It is a well-documented fact that religion was the most creative force in Gandhi's life and that it was religious faith that made him feel whole.<sup>12</sup>

Gandhi relied on the power of inner resources to effect change outside. By his own life's example, he showed that a person's capacity for self-control enhances his capacity to influence the environment. He maintained that indomitable individual will can bring about social and political change. His innovation as a leader lies in placing the right means above the desired ends; he approached nonviolent resistance as both the means and the end. Speaking of the uniqueness of Gandhi's moral philosophy of nonviolence, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote:

The intellectual and moral satisfaction that I failed to gain from the utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill, the revolutionary methods of Marx and Lenin, the social contract theory of Hobbes, the "back to nature" optimism of Rousseau, and the superman philosophy of Nietzsche, I found in the non-violent resistance philosophy of Gandhi.<sup>13</sup>

What Dr. King liked about Gandhi's philosophy is its practical level-headedness. It was idealistic yet practical at the same time. This is perhaps one of the main reasons for Gandhi's perennial appeal.

## ABOUT THE MYTHS . . .

Myths about Gandhi abound. While he possessed many unusual qualities of head and heart, he did not hide his faults and failings. We need to reclaim Gandhi as a human being out of the myriad myths surrounding him. At least two of those myths require some special mention and active dispelling.

### Myth 1: Gandhi Was a Saint

First, "Mahatma"—or great soul—was not Gandhi's first name. Although widely known as Mahatma Gandhi, his full name was in fact Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, "Karamchand" being his father's name. "Mahatma" is an honorific he received from the poet and Nobel laureate Sir Rabindranath Tagore. Perhaps one of the most common (and most dangerous) myths about Gandhi is that he was a saint. As quoted earlier, Will Durant wrote: "We have the astonishing phenomenon of a revolution led by a saint." But was Gandhi really a saint? Gandhi did not like to be regarded as a "saint," a characterization implicit in the title "Mahatma." He noted in his autobiography that the title "Mahatma" often pained him deeply; in fact, he writes with characteristic humility, "There is not a moment I can recall when it may said to have tickled me."<sup>14</sup>

In Gandhi's view, the term "Mahatma" was too sacred to be applied to a simple seeker of truth. Writing for the weekly journal that he published, *Young India*, he explained: "I myself do not feel a saint in any shape or form. But I do feel I am a votary of Truth in spite of all my errors of unconscious omission and commission."<sup>15</sup> Likewise, Gandhi never felt comfortable being viewed as a saint. In fact, he objected when people called him "a saint trying to be a politician." He said that he was instead "a politician trying to be a saint." We ought to take his word for it.

Religious conviction was an integral part of Gandhi's being, but to call him a saint would be to do him a disservice: it would make his virtues too lofty to be emulated and his vices too glorified to be instructive. "If we label Gandhi a perfected being," observed Mark Shepard in his book *Mahatma Gandhi and His Myths*, "we lose our chance to view his life and career critically and to learn from his mistakes."<sup>16</sup>

Gandhi's glory lies in his inner strength and his spirit of selfless service. He sought relentlessly—although not always successfully—to put into practice his twin core values of nonviolence and truth. He made his entire life one long series of experiments. It is not

without significance that he subtitled his autobiography *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*.

He led the greatest anticolonial movement in history peacefully, he showed us how to lead a successful political life without compromising integrity, he revealed a rare model of morally sensitive political leadership, and he provided politics with a much-needed spiritual basis. He renounced wealth, comfort, position, and even his life “to see God face to face.” The assassin’s bullets did not and could not kill the Gandhi who had the name of God on his lips at the time of death—“Ram, Ra . . . m.” That Gandhi lives on.

### **Myth 2: Gandhi Single-handedly Wrought the Miracle of India’s Independence**

Before Gandhi arrived on India’s political scene, the struggle for India’s independence had been progressing for several decades, and this very likely would have borne tangible results of its own accord. That is why it isn’t accurate to say that Gandhi wrought the miracle of India’s independence. However, “the extraordinary manner in which it was achieved can be pointedly ascribed to him.”<sup>17</sup> It is one of the great ironies of history that the country that Gandhi led peacefully to freedom in 1947 came to be brutally divided amid communal chaos and violence into two nations, India and Pakistan. Gandhi did not want this “two-part independence” achieved in August 1947 and announced that he “cannot participate in the celebrations.”<sup>18</sup> How could he?

It pained him deeply to see 32 years of selfless work come to “an inglorious end”—“to watch India being torn apart into two bleeding fragments.”<sup>19</sup> He could not prevent the partition of India because religious divisions were stronger than feelings of nationalistic cohesion.<sup>20</sup> This writer has spoken with countless people who witnessed the inhuman slaughter that took place during partition. Those bloody days are some of the most minutely documented facts in the history of the Indian subcontinent. “Yet without Gandhi,” writes Rajmohan Gandhi, “the violence would have been even greater, the parts more than two, and the future unity, pluralism, and democracy of the Indian part far more vulnerable.”<sup>21</sup> The tribute by Lord Mountbatten in the introduction to this chapter is living testimony to the saving grace of Gandhi’s nonviolent power.

### **LEARNING FROM MISTAKES**

Perhaps Gandhi underestimated the toxicity of warring religious factions. Perhaps he let his idealism and optimism get the better of him.

Perhaps his constant use of Hindu symbolism alienated Muslims irrevocably. Perhaps he pushed his dietary practices and his experiments with celibacy beyond scrupulously reasonable limits. Or perhaps humanity was not evolved enough to genuinely embrace Gandhi's creed of love and nonviolence. It is no wonder that none of Gandhi's campaigns of civil disobedience won by bringing about a "change of heart" in his adversaries—not directly at least. A "change of heart" they did bring—but of the public, not his opponents. There are some great leadership lessons to be learned here. For example:

1. Not all people share the same values. Leaders need to understand their own and others' values and intentions. It is not always wise to be good to a fault; discretion is indeed the better part of valor.
2. When dealing with racial diversity, it is not prudent to overplay certain ethnic themes. And one needs to be moderate about moderation, too. To know when enough is enough is the hallmark of wisdom.
3. Perfection is not given to us mortals; nor does nature give us the ability to see our flaws as others see them.

Gandhi had his failings and favorites. Yet for his abiding passion to constantly "remake" himself until his last breath, his dogged determination to walk the straight and narrow path of truth and nonviolence, his exceptional ability to reduce his personal self to zero, his disarming humility, and his excruciating self-honesty, he will continue to shine as a beacon for humanity as long as might oppresses right. On the occasion of Gandhi's seventy-fifth birthday in 1944, Albert Einstein aptly wrote: "Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth."<sup>22</sup>

At least in this case, time has proven Einstein entirely right.

Perhaps, in our yearning for perfect heroes, we place our leaders on a pedestal and thereby do them a great disservice. "Perhaps he will not succeed," Tagore wrote of Gandhi. "Perhaps he will fail as the Buddha failed, as Christ failed, to wean men from their iniquities, but he will always be remembered as one who made his life a lesson for all ages to come."<sup>23</sup> History has borne out the wisdom of Tagore's precise assessment of Gandhi the leader. And unquestionably, "no myth raking can rob Gandhi of his moral force or diminish the remarkable importance of this scrawny little man," as *Time* magazine declared in its millennium issue on December 31, 1999. How so? Because by the very definition, myths cannot match, let alone surpass, the truth. Gandhi's moral truth will always sparkle brighter than any scathing myth.

Today Gandhi's critics call him idealistic, impractical, and even politically naïve. But much of what is written today about Gandhi by his most bitter critics reveals more about the critics than it does about Gandhi. The propensity to find faults with others—by trying to light one's torch on others' candles—should eventually bring one back to contend with one's own faults. Great leaders, like great teachers, act only as mirrors, faithfully revealing the truth, goodness, and beauty that dwell in the hearts of us all. After all, the image reflected by the mirror cannot be any different or better than the original.

### MAHATMA, OR AN EARNEST PILGRIM OF TRUTH?

Through the candid pages of his autobiography, Gandhi emerges as an earnest pilgrim of the soul, a pioneer of *Satyāgraha* (truth force), an apostle of nonviolence, a peaceful warrior, an astute politician, a social reformer, and a prophetic voice of conscience for humanity. The Buddha speaks of four types of human evolution—from darkness to darkness, from light to darkness, from darkness to light, and from light to light. Reading his “numerous experiments with truth,” one gets the firm conviction that Gandhi indeed grew from “truth” to “truth,” fashioning his clay into the great soul of a hero. In his own lifetime he came to be known as Mahatma, a title, as we just saw, that deeply pained him.

Gandhi's life and thought embodied a truth applicable to humanity as a whole. His leadership effectiveness proceeded from his categorical adherence to his ideals and principles. It was a values-based, principle-centered leadership. Commenting on the uniqueness of the living fire that was in this man of peace and humility, India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, wrote, “The amazing thing about Gandhi was that he adhered, in all its fullness, to his ideals, his conception of truth, and yet he did succeed in molding and moving enormous masses of human beings.”<sup>24</sup> The amazing thing was not that Gandhi succeeded. The really amazing thing was that he strove to be steadfast and to adhere to his ideals and principles without compromise or concession.

In the foreword to D. G. Tendulkar's eight-volume magnum opus *Mahatma*, Nehru wrote, “No man can write a real life of Gandhi, unless he is as big as Gandhi.”<sup>25</sup> Perhaps even when an author is as exalted as his subject, the truth of the subject's greatness will always elude him. This is true of the life and work of all great masters. Arthur

Schnabel, an Austrian pianist, having played Beethoven's piano music all his life, is reported to have said: "This music is better than it can ever be played." Gandhi's majestic harmonies likewise have a quality that exceeds all accounts of them.

## CHAPTER SCHEMA OF THIS BOOK

We present below a brief description of the chapters of the book.

Chapter 2, titled "A Hero's Life Journey: Defining Moments of Life and Leadership," chronicles defining moments in Gandhi's life and leadership as seen through the prism of his biographical details. It focuses primarily on those challenges in his life story that significantly contributed to the shaping of Gandhi into an exemplary leader. It draws upon Gandhi's autobiography, which covers the first 52 years of his life (up to the year 1921) and contains a detailed and candid "self-portrait of his mind, heart, and soul."<sup>26</sup> Gandhi appropriately subtitled his autobiography *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*.

This fine account is supplemented by several other biographies of note to draw a balanced picture of Gandhi the man, with a focus on the moral and spiritual underpinnings of his development as a leader. Starting with his early formative years (1869–1888), it maps Gandhi's development through the London years (1888–1891) and the South Africa years (1893–1914) and to his years in India (1915–1948), leading up to his assassination on January 30, 1948.

Chapter 3, titled "Gandhi's Heroes: Guiding Lights on a Hero's Journey," presents some of the key formative influences that shaped Gandhi into an exemplary leader. It presents important information about Gandhi's spiritual teachers as well as those from whom he learned important life-lessons. Exemplary leaders are aware that the road to excellence is long and hard and beset with uncertainty and challenges. This awareness leads them to an inner journey of self-transformation—the hero's journey. Gandhi had embarked upon "a hero's journey" in England, conquered his dragons in South Africa, and returned to India in a state transformed, to bestow his gifts on his brothers and sisters. His moral sensibility and his religious consciousness were influenced at least as much by Christ, Tolstoy, Ruskin, and Thoreau as by Jainism, the Bhagavad Gītā, and the living example of his Gujarati jeweler friend, Raychand. Gandhi himself acknowledged that Tolstoy influenced him more than Ruskin and Thoreau.

Among the key influences on Gandhi's life and thought, the pride of place must go to the Gītā. Gandhi's firm and sustained belief in *mokṣa* (spiritual liberation) and self-realization were almost entirely shaped by the teachings of the Gītā. Chapter 4, titled "Bhagavad Gītā: Gandhi's Moral and Spiritual Anchorage," focuses on the core message of the Gītā and the leadership lessons Gandhi drew from this timeless spiritual classic. After presenting the context and the key leadership concepts from this manual of action and liberation, the chapter focuses on the foremost practical lessons that Gandhi learned from his lifelong study of the Gītā. The key Gandhian concepts of selfless actions (*niṣkāmakarma*), nonviolence (*ahimsā*), steadfastness in truth (*sthitaprajñatā*), and nonpossession (*aparigraha*) proceed directly from his unique interpretation of the Gītā.

Chapter 5, titled "Gandhi: A Values-Based Leader par Excellence," presents an overview of some key contemporary approaches to leadership and their relationship to Gandhi as a leader. As is well known, Gandhi never compromised on the core values of truth and nonviolence, no matter what the circumstances or consequences. Given the primacy of values in Gandhi's life and thought, the chapter first reviews values-based leadership as a foundational paradigm that characterized Gandhi's style of leadership. It then presents a brief survey of some allied leadership approaches—also called "positive forms of leadership"—such as transformational leadership, authentic leadership, self-leadership, and servant leadership. On the basis of these approaches, the primary qualities of exemplary leadership will be ascertained and evaluated in the light of Gandhi's life and thought. As this chapter reveals, Gandhi embodied the key qualities of exemplary leadership to the highest degree. For that reason, there is much to learn and emulate from Gandhi's approach to leadership.

Chapter 6, titled "Nonviolence: The Matchless Weapon," explores the power of the most potent weapon that Gandhi employed to move the masses. Gandhi perceived that love, expressed as nonviolence in thought, word, and deed, was the shortest path to human progress. The first section of this chapter presents the etymology and the basic elements of nonviolence to better understand its role and significance for contemporary times. Next, the application of the principle of nonviolence is illustrated through the life example of Gandhi. The final section of this chapter suggests its wider applications and relevance in the world at large as well as in the corporate world today.

Chapter 7, titled "*Satyāgraha*: A Higher Approach to Ethics," focuses on the most innovative tool that Gandhi discovered to resist unjust policies and practices. Gandhi envisioned *satyāgraha* not only as a method for struggling against unjust politics and policies, but also as a universal remedy against injustice and harm. Gandhi's *satyāgraha* movement transformed passive resistance to political chicanery into a conquest by suffering, and moral rectitude. This is precisely where Gandhi's innovation lies—moralizing and spiritualizing politics. Today, Gandhi is universally recognized as a major practitioner of nonviolence who used it to manage conflict and resist injustice.

Chapter 8, titled "Self-Discipline: The Making of an Exemplary Leader," examines the role of self-discipline in the development of leadership competencies. This discipline constitutes a range of virtues, including self-restraint, self-purification, self-cultivation, and self-growth. This chapter critically examines some of these virtues with special reference to the 11 vows that Gandhi experimented with throughout his life to constantly "remake" himself. It also examines their relevance to the modern workplace and leadership. Gandhi believed that in order to become a fit instrument of giving of self to others, one must first undergo a process of complete self-purification and self-transformation following self-discipline. Self-discipline involves three related aspects of self-control—the ability to resist temptations, the ability to tolerate delay of gratification, and the imposition of strict standards of accomplishment upon oneself. Such self-discipline became the hallmark of Gandhi's pedagogy of transformation of character, which he achieved through various practices, such as prayer, taking of vows, fasting, and confession.

Chapter 9, titled "Seven Deadly Sins of Humanity: Overcoming Inner Demons," explores how Gandhi revolutionized politics and economics using ethics. The chapter discovers how wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, commerce without morality, science without humanity, worship without sacrifice, and politics without principles breed a culture of violence. Gandhi's talisman was to judge the impact of actions on the basis of their effect on the poorest of the poor. He advocated economics and politics as if people mattered.

The final chapter titled "Epilogue: Summing Up the Legacy of the Mahatma" provides an overview of Gandhi's legacy as a man and as a leader. The chapter includes some of the best tributes to Gandhi's contribution as an exemplary leader. Judged by the criterion of abiding

influence, Gandhi emerges as one of the most remarkable leaders of all time. He led the greatest peaceful anticolonial movement in history, showed how to lead a successful political life without compromising one's integrity, revealed rare morally sensitive political leadership, and provided politics with a much-needed spiritual basis. Gandhi's greatness is evident in how he stirred the conscience of humanity, demonstrated the power of spirit over material things, turned his moral searchlight inward, and extended the gospel of love and peace from a personal level to the social arena. The highlight of this culminating chapter is the distillation and recapitulation of Gandhi's complete leadership lessons in the form of 51 extended maxims for life and leadership. These lessons are organized under headings such as leading by values, means versus ends, crucibles, leading from within, servant leadership, non-harming and truthfulness, self-discipline, and the art of self-leadership. This chapter concludes by recounting Gandhi's relevance and legacy for modern times.

At the end of each of the chapters, we present key leadership lessons from Gandhi that encapsulate the theme of each chapter.

Figure 1.1 portrays the key building blocks of Gandhi's leadership.



**Figure 1.1** Key Building Blocks of Gandhi's Leadership

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

As humans, we have two biographies—the external that focuses mainly on our physical growth; and the inner that maps our emotional and psychological trajectory in terms of our character and spiritual development. While much in our external biography is lost with the passage of time, inner growth is the only growth that is gained for good. Another reason why most of what we gain in the external realm is lost is because it is narrowly focused on our personal well-being alone. However, in Gandhi's case, even what he gained in the external world was not lost since his life was devoted to the well-being of all beings. Even when he had nothing left to gain for his personal purpose, he lived every moment of his life devoted to the welfare of the world (*lokasamgraham*).

Gandhi founded his life on the principles of service and self-duty. He believed that if everyone took care of their duties, everybody's rights would get taken care of on their own accord. Gandhi would have wholeheartedly agreed with Ralph Waldo Emerson, who said, "The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well." Gandhi lived his life compassionately, died honorably, and made the greatest difference in the world. Whenever a soul peacefully raises his voice against any kind of oppression, Gandhi's legacy will continue.

Even with his all-too-human failings, Gandhi must still rank as one of the most positive and the most effective leaders of all time. Gandhi's vision is worthy of emulation to make this world a better place and to make the corporate leadership more cognizant of human values and more responsible for social needs. The purpose of this book is to provide a road map of essential values through the outstanding example of Gandhi's leadership.

In the course of research on any aspect of Gandhi's remarkable life, a researcher will inevitably have to sift through, reinterpret, and abstract his extensive repertoire of writings and speeches according to the requirements of the project. When one is working with such a vast body of literature, there is always a danger of missing the proverbial forest for the trees. In presenting Gandhian concepts and precepts, I have refrained from forcing my viewpoint and, for the most part, let Gandhi speak for himself.

One can only sincerely hope that in the course of formulating the leadership lessons based on Gandhi's remarkable life, one has not

done violence to his spirit! The inspiring words of Will Durant come to mind:

We are all imperfect teachers, but we may be forgiven if we have advanced the matter a little, and have done our best. We announce the prologue, and retire; after us better players will come.<sup>27</sup>

## CHAPTER 2



# A HERO'S LIFE JOURNEY: DEFINING MOMENTS OF LIFE AND LEADERSHIP

### INTRODUCTION

How are great leaders fashioned at the hands of destiny? What are the distinguishing marks separating them from ordinary people? Are there any visible outer signs? Or is it an intangible presence that defines their influence? When Mahatma Gandhi was in London in 1931 to argue for India's independence, a small girl started to ask him for his autograph. Then she drew back shyly before this strange little *dhobi*-clad man with a roughly mended coarse shawl over his shoulders and cheap wire-framed spectacles. She looked up at her mother and asked: "Mummy, is he really great?"<sup>1</sup>

Gandhi's greatness emanated from his ability to practice what he preached, to stir the conscience of humanity, to demonstrate the power of spirit over material things, to turn his moral searchlight inward and purify his mind, to approach the poor "with the mind of the poor,"<sup>2</sup> and to extend the gospel of love and peace from a personal level to all humanity. "Perhaps never before," writes Robert Payne, "on so grand a scale has any man succeeded in shaping the course of history while using only the weapons of peace."<sup>3</sup> The measure of Gandhi's gentle influence transcends all logical explanations. He lived, suffered, and gave his life to the noble cause of peace—the most important source of his greatness.

But what made Gandhi's leadership distinct? After all, the values of nonviolence and truth trace back to ancient times. Gandhi's

significance, however, resides in the vast scale of his experiments in these principles. “He was the first in human history,” writes Yogesh Chadha, “to extend the principle of non-violence to the social and the political plane.”<sup>4</sup> Gandhi’s life and leadership present an exceptional example of a higher order leader who lived, suffered, and died for his people. Higher order leaders lead from a high moral and spiritual stance and become Beacons to humanity in their wider appeal and influence. Thus, Gandhi was essentially the archetypal moral force whose appeal to humanity remains both universal and everlasting.

From a timid and taciturn soul, Gandhi grew into a paragon of higher order visionary leadership. Through nonviolent resistance, he liberated a fifth of the world’s population from the tyrannical rule of one of the largest and most powerful empires in world history. His life’s work inspired leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela and provided a catalyst for social movements around the world. Gandhi preached what he practiced and strived to live up to his principles. The legacy of his leadership and teachings belongs to all nations and times. This chapter will chronicle the defining moments of Gandhi’s life and leadership. It will focus primarily on those challenges and experiences in his life story that contributed to Gandhi’s development as an exemplary leader.

Gandhi’s autobiography ranks as one of the most candid, inspiring, and soul-stirring documents of all times. It covers the first fifty-two years of his life and contains a detailed and honest “self-portrait of his mind, heart, and soul.”<sup>5</sup> Louis Fischer, his preeminent biographer, writes, “Gandhi exposed even the innermost personal thoughts which individuals usually regard as private.”<sup>6</sup> Gandhi appropriately titled his autobiography *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Gandhi was fully aware that some things which are known only to oneself and one’s maker are clearly incommunicable. His self-portrait is so transparent and sincere in terms of the essential biographical details that it would be hard to find its parallel anywhere in the genre of memoir and biography.

Gandhi clarified that the nature of his experiments was essentially moral since he considered morality to be the very basis of spirituality: “The experiments I am about to relate,” Gandhi wrote, “are spiritual, or rather moral, for *the essence of religion is morality*.”<sup>7</sup> This seminal quote represents the defining paradigm of Gandhian ethics and spirituality. Gandhi used these two frames as lenses to examine the existential realities of life and leadership.

### Gandhi Moment: Leadership Lessons

From the beginning of his life, Truth (*Satya*) for Gandhi was the “sovereign principle” and included not only the “relative truth” as commonly conceived but also “the Absolute, the Eternal Principle, that is God.”<sup>8</sup> Throughout his experiences, his understanding about the relative truth helped him to meet the needs of the moment, and his passion for the Eternal Truth strengthened his quest for self-realization. Most important, he never strayed too far from his primary goal in a bid to meet the fleeting demands of the moment.

Effective leaders have a clear understanding of their core values. A value is only worthwhile when we uphold it in our daily lives. Gandhi inspired emulation not so much by his professed set of values and beliefs as by the exemplary nature of his life and conduct. He made his life his message.

Despite the path of truth being narrow and “as sharp as a razor’s edge,”<sup>9</sup> Gandhi found it to be “the quickest and easiest,” and he “kept strictly to this path” despite what he called his “Himalayan blunders.”<sup>10</sup> The pursuit of truth was the central goal of Gandhi’s life. In his pursuit of this quest, Gandhi wrote at the very outset of his autobiography that he was willing to sacrifice the things dearest to him: “Even if the sacrifice demanded be my very life, I hope I may be prepared to give it.”<sup>11</sup> In the end, by sacrificing his life on the altar of truth, Gandhi proved himself right. His willingness to die became his most powerful weapon.<sup>12</sup>

Through the austere pages of his autobiography, Gandhi emerges as a spiritual pilgrim, a consummate politician, a pioneer of *satyāgraha* (truth-force), an apostle of nonviolence, a peaceful revolutionary, a social reformer, a champion of human rights, and the prophetic voice of conscience for humanity. Reading the autobiography, one gets the firm conviction that Gandhi indeed grew from “truth” to greater “truth” and ultimately cultivated the “Great Soul” of a hero.<sup>13</sup>

### EARLY FORMATIVE YEARS (1869–1888)

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on October 2, 1869, at Porbandar, a coastal town in western India, to a family of the *Vaisya* (trader) class and *Vaishnava* (worshippers of Lord Vishnu) religious

affiliation. At the time of Gandhi's birth, India was under British *raj* (rule) and was considered to be "the brightest jewel in the crown"<sup>14</sup> of the vast British Empire. The Gandhis belonged to the *Modh Bania* subdivision of the *Vaisya* class, and, far back, were retail grocers ("Gandhi" means grocer).<sup>15</sup> For at least five generations, however, Gandhi's forebears had served as *divāns* or prime ministers in various small princely states of the Kathiawad peninsula, in the present-day state of Gujarat. None of these states were subject to direct British rule, and consequently old Indian traditions and customs were much more in evidence there than in most parts of British India.<sup>16</sup> This is important since certain fundamental values acquired within the Hindu way of life increasingly informed Gandhi's thinking as he matured and determined how he would live his life and lead his followers.

Gandhi was the fourth and the last child of his father's fourth and last marriage.<sup>17</sup> His saintly, austere, and religiously devout mother, Putlibai, and his equally devout nurse, Rambha, were major spiritual influences on him. Throughout her life, Gandhi's mother was given to frequent fasts and vows that left an indelible impression on her son's tender mind. She prayed before every meal, visited the Vaishnava temple daily, and lived on one meal a day during *Cāturmās* (the four-month rainy season), refusing to have food without seeing the sun. Gandhi, on those rainy days, would stand with his siblings outside the house, waiting to announce the appearance of the sun to their mother. And if by the time she stepped outside the sun was not visible, she would stand firm in her resolve, refusing to take any food. Gandhi inherited his profoundly religious nature, devotion, and asceticism from her.

His father, Karamchand, was honest, generous, and fair but short-tempered. He had little formal education, but had "rich experience of practical affairs."<sup>18</sup> He served as prime minister of the small princely state of Porbandar. His first two wives died without giving birth to a male heir for the family, and his third marriage proved childless. With no male heir in sight and with his wife's permission, he took on another consort (permitted under traditional Hindu law under such circumstances). Karamchand chose a woman named Putlibai, 22 years younger than him. Pultibai bore him four children in succession—two sons and two daughters. Gandhi was the fourth and the last child. In Gandhi's estimation, his father might have even been given to carnal desire "for he married for the fourth time when he was over forty."<sup>19</sup>

His father had many Jain friends who visited the house and taught the strict doctrines of nonviolence and self-discipline. Saints and sages of all sects were also frequent visitors to their home. Gandhi grew up in a household of austere discipline and religious tolerance. In his

autobiography, Gandhi wrote that at school, from the age of six or seven through sixteen, he was taught “all sort of things except religion.”<sup>20</sup> The religious tenor of his home, however, made up for the lack of such instruction at school.

In school, Gandhi was a “mediocre student” and earned average grades. He did not enjoy the usual sports such as cricket or football. For exercise, he liked to take long walks—a habit he kept throughout his life, which contributed to his sturdy frame. He would walk straight home from school to be with his ailing father. He was a shy, diffident lad, as he himself reported in his autobiography:

I used to be very shy and avoided all company. My books and my lessons were my sole companions. To be at school at that stroke of the hour and to run back home as soon as school closed—that was my daily habit. I literally ran back, because I could not bear to talk to anybody. I was even afraid lest anyone should poke fun at me.<sup>21</sup>

During childhood, Gandhi also indulged in occasional stealing. In the company of a cousin, he even began to smoke, collecting cigarette butts of an uncle.<sup>22</sup> As the days passed, both boys were overcome by a deep sense of guilt and even contemplated suicide.<sup>23</sup> These feelings brought their habit of smoking, and of stealing for the purpose of smoking, to a sudden end. However, by nature Gandhi was not given to lying and deception.

### **Gandhi Moment: Leadership Lessons**

During an annual inspection of the school, twelve-year-old Gandhi refused to copy the correct spelling of the word “kettle” from his neighbor’s slate even though his teacher tried to prompt him with the point of his boot. As a result, everyone else in the class, except for Gandhi, spelled every word correctly. Later on, the teacher tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to bring home the point of expediency to Gandhi. “I could never,” Gandhi said, “learn the art of ‘copying.’”<sup>24</sup> This “moral rectitude”—of placing means above desired ends—would become a cornerstone of Gandhi’s character and defined his approach to every action that he undertook in his personal and professional lives. To moral leaders, ends do not justify means because means are ends in the making. Nothing right can ultimately come from wrong means. When you do the right thing, said J. Krishnamurti, right things happen to you.

During this time, Gandhi also learned about *Rāmāyaṇa*, one of the two major Hindu epics centering on the life of Rama, the quintessential embodiment of *dharma* (duty) in the Hindu theistic pantheon. During his father's illness in 1885, Latha Maharaj, his father's friend, used to visit their house and recite *Rāmāyaṇa* of Tulsidas. The mind of 13-year-old Gandhi was enraptured listening to the recitation of *dohas* (couplets) and *chopais* (quatrains) from *Rāmāyaṇa*. Gandhi later described the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Tulsidas to be "the greatest book in all devotional literature."<sup>25</sup> The poet par excellence, Tulsidas, presented the ideal of a saint as a person who does good to those who do harm to him:

*Uma sant kai ihai badaai |  
Mand karat jo karai bhalaai ||*

~*Sundarkand, Doha 40.8*

This verily is the majesty of a saint—  
That he returns good for the evil.<sup>26</sup>

This principle of returning good for evil would become a core value for Gandhi in the form of nonviolence—one of the two most important tenets of his life and thought. However, it was his old nurse, Rambha, who made Gandhi aware of the significance of *Rāmanāma* (the repetition of God's name, also called *Japa*<sup>27</sup>) as a remedy for his fear of ghosts, spirits, and being alone in the dark. This devotional practice of repeating *Rāmanāma* at a tender age was his introduction to self-realization.<sup>28</sup> In his own words, "I think it is due to the seed sown by that good woman Rambha that today *Ramanama* is an infallible remedy for me."<sup>29</sup> In his later life, he began his days quite early, singing devotional songs before dawn. His favorite song, *Raghupati Raghava Rājā Rām*, was a song dedicated to Lord Rāma.

Gandhi's identification with *Rāmanāma* ran so deep that eventually he would start seeing the reflection of Rāma in everyone. The following quote presents a deeper dimension of Gandhi's interpretation of *Rāmanāma*:

Hanuman tore open his heart and showed that there was nothing there but Ramanama. I have none of the power of Hanuman to tear open my heart, but if any of you feel inclined to do it I assure you will find nothing there but love for Rama whom I see face to face in the starving millions of India.<sup>30</sup>

Gandhi's ability to empathize with the poorest of the poor most likely reflected this ability to see Rāma in others.

### PLAYING THE HUSBAND

Gandhi was married to Kasturba when they were both 13 years of age, an experience which later made Gandhi a bitter critic of child marriage. Initially, Gandhi was a passionate and possessive husband. In his own way, he wanted to make Kasturba an ideal wife. This was normal and no different from other Indian couples of the same age. What was unusual was that Kasturba was illiterate and Gandhi would soon become a British-trained barrister. In order to make good his authority as a husband, Gandhi felt that it was his duty to teach her. Despite his persistent efforts throughout their long marriage of 66 years, Kasturba never learned to read or write anything but elementary Gujarati, her native language.<sup>31</sup> This created constant tension in their relationship. Later on, Gandhi realized and acknowledged his own "folly" and confessed that it was actually Kasturba who had been his teacher by example through service, humility, simplicity, and patience.<sup>32</sup>

At the same time, having studied role models such as Shravana Kumar and Prahlada of the Puranic lore, Gandhi was also a devoted son. Throughout his father's illness in 1885, Gandhi would rush home to spend time with him. At night, he would massage his father's legs. One night as he was taking care of his father, his uncle who was visiting, sent Gandhi to bed. Gandhi left his dying father under his uncle's care to go to bed with his wife. His father's death during that brief absence hurt him profoundly. As he poignantly wrote in his autobiography: "I felt deeply ashamed and miserable. I ran to my father's room. I saw that, if animal passion had not blinded me, I should have been spared the torture of separation from my father during his last moments."<sup>33</sup> Gandhi felt a deep sense of remorse over this incident. He thought that he had failed in discharging his allotted duty to his father. Gandhi never forgave himself for this mistake. As he regretfully noted, "It was a blot I have never been able to efface or forget, and I have always thought that, although my devotion to my parents knew no bounds and I would have given up anything for it, yet it was weighed and found unpardonably wanting because my mind was at the same moment in the grip of lust."<sup>34</sup> This was the first major crucible in Gandhi's life, and he struggled with existential angst over the event for the rest of his life.

### **Gandhi Moment: The Beginnings of Transformation**

If authentic leadership is forged in a “crucible,” as Bennis and Thomas have found in their research, then the experience of his father’s death represented the first major “crucible” in Gandhi’s life and affected him to the very center of his being. Gandhi resolved that since he had not been a good son to his father, he could at least try to be a good son to all of humanity. This habit of consciously “internalizing” the human frailties and “transmuting” them through self-discipline into strengths formed a cornerstone of Gandhian life and leadership. In another incident, 15-year-old Gandhi pilfered a bit of gold from his elder brother. This produced a deep moral crisis. He decided to write out his confession and gave it to his father. In tears of agony, his father read the confession and tore up the note. Gandhi wrote: “This was for me an object-lesson in Ahimsa (love and nonviolence).” Here we have the first clue to Gandhi’s moral conviction: “Morality is the basis of all things and truth is the substance of all morality.”<sup>35</sup>

To make matters worse, his wife was pregnant at the time of his father’s death and the child did not survive. This sense of shame and guilt would not leave Gandhi until he was 36 and took a Hindu vow of celibacy in 1906 for reasons of spirituality, self-discipline, and commitment to public service. However, to “get free from the shackles of lust,” Gandhi “[would] have to pass through many ordeals.”<sup>36</sup>

### **LONDON YEARS (1888–1891)**

After giving a pledge to his mother that he would stay away from wine, women, and meat, Gandhi left India for London to study law in 1888. The practice of taking a vow to sustain one’s determination and keep one steadfast in discipline was a serious commitment, something which would define Gandhi’s difficult undertakings in later life. He already knew about the importance of vows from his observations of his mother’s religious devotion. In England, among other things, he tried to live the life of an English gentleman and took lessons in dancing, elocution, and violin. His friends tried to compel him to eat meat, but he abstained, adhering very rigidly to a vegetarian diet and upholding his pledge not to eat meat. He joined

vegetarian clubs and very soon became an advocate of vegetarianism. He started a vegetarian club in his locality that lasted for a few months. He was also elected to the Executive Committee of the Vegetarian Society, but he always felt tongue-tied at its meetings. “This shyness I retained,” Gandhi wrote in his autobiography, “throughout my stay in England . . . It was in South Africa that I got over shyness though I never completely overcame it.”<sup>37</sup> But this brief and modest experience did provide Gandhi some training in organizing and leadership.

### Gandhi Moment: Leader in the Making

Here we get yet another important clue to Gandhian *modus operandi*: he was not content just to abstain from meat himself; he wanted to champion the cause of vegetarianism. This habit of universalizing a personal virtue or hurt would remain at the core of Gandhi's leadership and served him well throughout his life. While ordinary people tend to take the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” too personally, exemplary leaders approach them as opportunities for individual and collective transformation. For them, the boundary-line between the self and others ceases to matter anymore.

According to the Gītā (6.32)—a book that Gandhi would come to revere and regard as his spiritual *vade mecum* (a handbook or guide)—that person “is considered best who judges happiness and sorrow in all beings by the same standard as he would apply to himself.”<sup>38</sup> Throughout his life, Gandhi would continue to apply this proverbial golden rule in all spheres of his life.

It was in England that two Theosophists first introduced Gandhi to Edwin Arnold's English rendering of the Bhagavad Gītā, a text that became his “spiritual dictionary” and provided the basis for his moral and social actions. Gandhi wrote, “It opened to me a new view of life. . . . I had found at last, as I believed, the light I needed.”<sup>39</sup> He also read Edwin Arnold's rendering of the Buddha's life—*The Light of Asia*—as well as the chapter on Muhammad in Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero Worship*. About the same time, a Christian friend whom he had met in a vegetarian boarding house introduced him to the Bible. He immediately fell in love with the Sermon on the Mount and tried to

reconcile it with the teachings of the Gītā: “My young mind tried to unify the teaching of the Gītā, *The Light of Asia* and the Sermon on the Mount. That renunciation was the highest form of religion appealed to me greatly.”<sup>40</sup> Although the idea of renunciation was not new to him, Gandhi’s reading of these texts strengthened his resolve to live a life of self-sacrifice.

Gandhi joined the bar in 1891 and returned to India immediately to practice law. Although Gandhi tried to establish his own practice, his legal career in India was unsuccessful. He was too shy to speak in court, and his first case was a complete disaster. Gandhi felt so bad about the experience that, in all the remaining months of his stay in India, he did not enter the court again. He took to drafting applications and barely managed to make ends meet. As Gandhi was struggling to establish his career, help came from a totally unexpected quarter that led him to take up a case in Durban, South Africa. He sailed for South Africa in 1893 with a plan to live there for one year, but he eventually remained there for 21 years.<sup>41</sup> Gandhi lived in South Africa from 1893 to 1914, and it is here that he designed and perfected his techniques of *satyāgraha*.

### SOUTH AFRICA YEARS (1893–1914)

In 1893, a 23-year-old, British-trained Indian lawyer arrived on the shores of South Africa. He did not know then that he would stay for 21 years, during which he would encounter humiliation and injustice on a scale that would force him to challenge not only the oppressive power and authority of the South African government but also himself. Nor did he know that this would serve as a testing ground, a laboratory, for his struggle for independence later on in his home country. Throughout his life, Gandhi would look back on South Africa as the “God-forsaken continent where I found my God.”<sup>42</sup> This period of Gandhi’s life (1893–1914) set the stage for what he would accomplish in the remaining years of his life. It was in South Africa that he discovered his most powerful weapon of nonviolent resistance—*satyāgraha*—and put it to several rigorous tests; it is also here that he experimented with his idea of community living (*āshram*), discovered the power of journalism as a powerful ally, and fashioned himself into a future leader of India’s independence movement.

When Gandhi arrived in Durban from Bombay in 1893, he was primarily interested in matters of religion and diet, not politics.

Professionally speaking, his sole mission was to win the lawsuit, and perhaps, to start his law career. Within a week of his arrival, he had an experience that changed the course of his life. The lawsuit required Gandhi's presence in Pretoria, the capital city of Transvaal. A first-class ticket was purchased for him at Durban, where he boarded the train for the overnight journey. According to Gandhi, this trip led to a conversion experience,<sup>43</sup> which he later dubbed as "the most creative experience of my life."<sup>44</sup>

The train reached Maritzburg, the capital of Natal, at about 9 p.m. . . . [an] official came to me and said, "Come along, you must go to the van compartment."

"But I have a first class ticket," said I. "That doesn't matter," rejoined the other. "I tell you, you must go to the van compartment." "I tell you, I was permitted to travel in this compartment at Durban, and I insist on going on in it."

"No, you won't," said the official. "You must leave this compartment, or else I shall have to call a police constable to push you out." "Yes, you may. I refuse to get out voluntarily."<sup>45</sup>

Gandhi's refusal to leave the first-class compartment of the train revealed two important things about his nature. First, as a trained barrister, he knew his legal rights. Second, and even more important, his spirit revolted against anything unfair and unjust. Eventually the constable was called, and Gandhi was removed from the train. Gandhi spent the extremely cold winter night in the train station's waiting room. His luggage was outside, but he did not dare ask for it for fear of being insulted again.

Without a blanket and shivering, Gandhi thought about his duty and contemplated his options. To quit and go back to India would be an act of cowardice. On a superficial level, it was merely a personal hurt, but Gandhi felt that it was also symptomatic of a deeper racial prejudice. As a result, Gandhi formulated a game plan: "I should try, if possible, to root out the disease and suffer hardships in the process. Redress for wrongs I should seek only to the extent that would be necessary for the removal of the color prejudice."<sup>46</sup>

What is significant about Gandhi's take on this defining experience of his life is that he did not view it just in terms of a personal insult. Instead, he was able to perceive the problem's universal dimension, which is normally hidden to ordinary people. Above all, he did not want to press his point further than what was necessary. This attitude demonstrates his deep sense of compassion (*mahā-karuṇā*), the key principle in his practice of nonviolence.

### **Gandhi Moment: The Chrysalis of Gandhi's Transformation**

The cold night that Gandhi spent at the railway station became the most significant experience of his life. Gandhi became a different man after this transformative incident at the Petermaritzburg railway station. He resolved to stay and fight against racial prejudice, not for personal reasons but *on behalf of all* and only to the extent that would be necessary. He wrote in his autobiography that he had made it a rule not to go to court in respect of any personal grievance.<sup>47</sup>

According to Eknath Easwaran, it would take years for Gandhi to forge this “matchless weapon” of nonviolence, based on his dogged determination “never to retaliate but never to yield.” Gandhi discovered first-hand that strength does not come from brute force but from an indomitable will. On that night in Maritzburg, “faith entered his heart.”<sup>48</sup> This is the chrysalis of Gandhi's transformation.

“When we are no longer able to change a situation,” writes Viktor E. Frankl, “we are challenged to change ourselves.”<sup>49</sup> And when we are able to do that, in due course of time, we are also able to change the situation, unexpectedly. This is the source of all social change.

Gandhi's plan to uproot the malady of racism was to search within, to train his mind, and to transform his personal emotions. Above all, Gandhi strived to help everyone involved to see clearly the terror of the situation and not resort to any tactics that would undermine the very humanity he was fighting for. This virtue of “being the change” would become a Gandhian hallmark and his most valuable legacy. He was the rare soul who preached what he practiced.

Gandhi took the next available train to Pretoria in the morning. On the way to Pretoria, he experienced further insult and humiliation—the driver of the stagecoach that carried him to Johannesburg humiliated Gandhi and even beat him.<sup>50</sup> Some months later, he was kicked into a gutter by a sentry for daring to walk past President Kruger's house in Pretoria.<sup>51</sup> Gandhi was always intrigued by the vicarious enjoyment that humans derived from the abject humiliation of their fellow beings. His tender spirit could not understand this sadistic tendency. “It has always been a mystery to me,” wrote Gandhi in his autobiography, “how men can feel themselves honored by the humiliation of their fellow beings.”<sup>52</sup> Gandhi was soon able to see the full range of prejudice toward Indians who had migrated to South Africa as indentured

laborers during the 1860s and worked on sugar and coffee plantations. In April 1894, after almost twelve months in South Africa, Gandhi was about to return to India for good. At his farewell party, however, his friends urged him to stay and to lead the fight against the Natal government's proposed bill that would have taken away Indians' right to vote. Gandhi consented to stay for a month and remained 20 years fighting the battle for Indian rights.<sup>53</sup>

Although he eventually won, triumph was slow in coming. On August 18, 1894, the regulations for indentured labor were altered. Under new rules, at the end of a five-year period, the indentured laborers had to return to India. If they wished to stay, they had to pay an annual tax of three pounds (equivalent to six months' pay) for themselves and for each of their dependents. This tax of three pounds was significant, especially when one considers the fact that the indentured laborer was paid, in addition to lodging and boarding for themselves and their families, about sixty two pence per month. Gandhi organized a fierce campaign against this tax, but it took the Natal Indian Congress 20 years before they were able to get the tax fully remitted. Gandhi poignantly wrote in his autobiography: "But truth triumphed in the end. The sufferings of the Indians were the expression of that truth. Yet it would not have triumphed except for unflinching faith, great patience, and incessant effort."<sup>54</sup> Gandhi's "unflinching faith" was the outcome of his trust in the benevolence of the universe—that no matter how oppressive the evil, good ultimately prevails.

His mostly successful campaigns in South Africa taught Gandhi how to motivate the masses, and, as noted before, it was in South Africa, that he found his "vocation in life."<sup>55</sup> Although such triumphs were slow in coming, these hard-won victories provide ample evidence of Gandhi's effective leadership and organizational abilities. However, it was not until September 11, 1906, when Transvaal passed a law requiring the registration and fingerprinting of all Indians and giving the police the right to enter their houses that Gandhi would hit upon his now well-known method of *satyāgraha*—nonviolent resistance. But first, he needed to "turn the searchlight inward"<sup>56</sup> (a favorite phrase of Gandhi) to access the fountainhead of his indomitable spirit within. For Gandhi, *satyāgraha* represented a soul-force based on self-discipline, self-control, and self-purification.

By 1903, Gandhi had begun to lead a life of formidable discipline and self-restraint. He changed his dietary habits, became his own doctor, embraced the *Gītā* as his infallible guide for conduct, and was

already challenging untouchability and slavery. By 1906, after undergoing many trials and tribulations of self-abnegation and *brahmacarya* (celibacy), he had become ready to face the South African government. Influenced by John Ruskin's preaching of rural life, Gandhi organized Phoenix Farm near Durban.<sup>57</sup> Here he trained disciplined residents on nonviolent *satyāgraha* (peaceful self-restraint), involving nonviolent violation of certain laws, mass arrests, occasional *hartāl* (suspension of all economic activity for a particular time), and spectacular marches. Ultimately, Gandhi cultivated an indomitable spirit among his followers that would fight repression without fear.

In South Africa, Gandhi also discovered journalism as a powerful tool to launch his campaign for the protest. He gained considerable journalistic experience after taking over the editorship of the *Indian Opinion* in 1904, which he published in English, Tamil, and Gujarati, sometimes running the press himself. Leveraging the power of media, on September 11, 1906, Gandhi made history after organizing a gathering of 3,000 Indian and other Asian immigrants at the Empire Theatre in Johannesburg. The protesters took a pledge to fight for their rights with truth and nonviolence, the core principles of *satyāgraha*. In Sept 1906, he organized the first *satyāgraha* campaign in protest against the proposed Asiatic ordinance directed against Indian immigrants in Transvaal.

In 1908, Gandhi had to stand trial for instigating the *satyāgraha*. He was initially sentenced to two months in jail; however, after a compromise with Field Marshal Jan Christiaan Smuts, he was released. General Smuts led the second Boer war and served as Prime Minister of the South Africa from 1919 until 1924 and from 1939 until 1948. He was a supporter of racial segregation and opposed the movement for equal rights for South Asian workers led by Gandhi. Out of jail, Gandhi was attacked for making the deal. Ultimately, Smuts broke the agreement, and Gandhi had to re-launch his *satyāgraha*. In 1909, he was sentenced to three months imprisonment in Volkshurst and Pretoria jails. After being released, he sailed for England to enlist support from the Indian community. In 1913, he helped to campaign against the nullification of marriages not celebrated according to Christian rights. He also launched his third *satyāgraha* campaign by leading 2,000 Indian miners across the Transvaal border. By December, he was released unconditionally in the hope of a compromise.<sup>58</sup> Gandhi's *ahimsā* (nonviolence) had triumphed. Victory came to Gandhi not when Smuts had no more strength to fight him but when he had no more heart to fight him. Much later, General Smuts declared that "men like Mahatma Gandhi redeem us from a sense of commonplace and futility and are an

inspiration to us not to weary in well doing.”<sup>59</sup> This assessment assumes all the more authenticity in the light of the fact that it comes from a person who once was an arch opponent of Gandhi and his *modus operandi*.

It was in South Africa that Gandhi honed his strategy of peaceful resistance in the form of *satyāgraha*. When Gandhi left South Africa for good in 1914, he wrote nostalgically: “it was a great wrench for me to leave South Africa, where I had passed twenty-one years of my life sharing to the full in the sweets and bitters of human experience, and where I had realized my vocation in life.”<sup>60</sup> As Ved Mehta has also noted, “His South African experience as a whole had brought about in him a religious conversion that was unique in that it was not a sudden revelation but a gradual realization of God.”<sup>61</sup> Many biographers of Gandhi agree that he kept on refining and deepening the ideas that he had formed in South Africa for the rest of his life.<sup>62</sup> In South Africa, Gandhi had demonstrated that “*Satyāgraha* is a priceless and matchless weapon, and that those who wield it are strangers to disappointment and defeat.”<sup>63</sup> Gandhi believed that the method of *satyāgraha* that he had developed in South Africa was India’s best chance at independence from Great Britain.

Inspired by a broad range of readings—including the Bhagavad Gītā, the New Testament, Tolstoy’s *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, and Thoreau’s *Civil Disobedience*—Gandhi launched a movement of nonviolent resistance against the oppressive government of South Africa and the society’s widespread bigotry and racial injustice against darker-skinned people. His successful establishment of the Natal Indian Congress, his weekly newspaper *Indian Opinion*, and his widely distributed 1909 pamphlet (*Hind Swaraj* or Indian Home Rule) paved the way for his return to India in 1915. Back in his homeland, he came to the attention of the country’s politicians and multitudes of pious souls who had begun to regard him as the political and moral leader of India in its long road to Independence.<sup>64</sup> The hero had won a decisive victory and was ready to come back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons [gifts] on his fellow beings!

### GANDHI’S YEARS IN INDIA (1915–1948)

Gandhi’s work in South Africa had made him famous back in India, and he was warmly welcomed by old friends at home. Nobel Laureate and Bengali poet, Sir Rabindranath Tagore, the first Asian to win the Nobel Prize, bestowed on him the title of “Mahatma” (meaning

“Great soul”) and “the crown sat forever on the politician-saint’s head.”<sup>65</sup> Gandhi’s “political guru,” G. K. Gokhale, greeted him warmly and “commanded” him to spend a year travelling throughout India with “his ears open but his mouth shut”<sup>66</sup> and “to feel the pulse” of the country he had been away from for 21 years.<sup>67</sup> Gandhi heeded the advice to travel but did so with both ears and mouth open.

Soon after returning to India in 1915, Gandhi set forth what he called the “four pillars on which the structure of ‘*Swaraj*’ (self-rule) would ever rest:” an unshakable alliance between Hindus and Muslims; universal acceptance of the doctrine of nonviolence, as a tenet, not as a tactic; the transformation of India’s approximately 650,000 villages by spinning and other self-sustaining handicrafts; and an end to the evil concept of untouchability.<sup>68</sup> *Hind Swaraj (Indian Home Rule)*, Gandhi’s first book, initially circulated as a pamphlet, which he wrote *en voyage* in 1909, is considered to be the “quintessential Gandhian thought at its purest, its fiercest, and its crudest.”<sup>69</sup> Another biographer calls it a “compendious political manifesto.”<sup>70</sup> In this book, Gandhi provided a systematic analysis of India’s predicament and its indigenous solution. The book, originally written and published in Gujarati, was promptly banned by the Bombay Government in India. This provoked Gandhi to publish its English translation, a copy of which was sent to Tolstoy. The aged sage was naturally pleased to see his own influence in the work.<sup>71</sup>

Many people find it surprising to learn that when Gandhi returned home from South Africa that he was initially an enthusiastic supporter of the British Empire. In fact, he urged his compatriots in London and India to support the British war effort in 1914, and he even recruited for the British army in India in 1918. Although he was an advocate of nonviolence, he felt duty-bound to support the empire in times of need. This loyalty would soon change, however, when Gandhi witnessed the atrocities of the colonial government. In particular, Gandhi’s changing opinion was influenced by the colonial government’s enactment of a series of laws and incidents, including the “Rowlatt Bills” and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar (Punjab) on April 13, 1919.

The “Rowlatt Bills” gave the British government the power to arrest and imprison anyone in India suspected of terrorism without a trial. Gandhi appealed to the viceroy but to no avail. On March 18, 1919, military rule was imposed in India. Gandhi called on the entire nation to observe a strike. The date was set for March 30, 1919 but later changed to April 6, 1919. Due to confusion caused by the date change, the strike was held on March 30, 1919 in Delhi—they did not

learn about the change of date until later. The people were not prepared and violence erupted. The police opened fire and riots broke out throughout the city. The strike in Bombay, nonetheless, was relatively successful, but violence broke out in other parts of the country as well. Disappointed, Gandhi decided to suspend the campaign and called it the “Himalayan miscalculation.”<sup>72</sup> The people were not yet ready to take the peaceful course of *satyāgraha* that Gandhi had envisioned. To his complete dismay, the riots kept erupting throughout the country.

### THE JALLIANWALA BAGH MASSACRE, 1919

Throughout Punjab, several government offices and railway stations were burned down. As the situation worsened in Amritsar, a city in the Northern Indian state of Punjab, General Dyer imposed a ban on public gatherings and processions. Nevertheless, people continued to gather in Jallianwala Bagh, a large area near the Golden Temple, a holy place of Sikhs in Amritsar. Without prior warning, General Dyer ordered his troops to open fire on the unarmed crowd—1,650 rounds were shot, at least 379 people killed, and 1,137 were wounded. Gandhi wrote to the viceroy that he could retain “neither respect nor affection”<sup>73</sup> for the colonial government and demanded an end to British rule in India.

Although General Dyer later admitted that he could have dispersed the crowd without firing, he showed no remorse at all. Dyer had wanted to teach the protesters a lesson and to punish them. The House of Lords initially justified the actions as necessary for maintaining law and order. Eventually, the British government asked General Dyer to resign, but he suffered no other consequences. A British newspaper, the *Morning Post*, collected nearly £30,000 from its readers as a gift for General Dyer and his defense of *Pax Britannica*. A person's ability to feel remorse depends on a deep sense of morality. In its absence, the route most likely taken is one of self-justification or rationalization. Ultimately, this attitude continues unabated and deprives the wrong-doer of any opportunity to reform.

### THE NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENT

As a result of Britain's response to the atrocities in Punjab, Gandhi became increasingly convinced that the colonial government system that he had been trying to improve needed to end. He was now ready to move to the next level of his strategy: seeking complete

independence for India through a nonviolent, non-cooperation movement. He launched a non-cooperation movement in 1920 for which he was arrested and stood trial in 1922. He brilliantly turned his hearing into a trial of colonial rule itself, using the occasion to explain his own transformation “from a staunch loyalist and co-operator” to “an uncompromising disaffectionist and non-cooperator.”<sup>74</sup> Gandhi’s actions demonstrated his strong adherence to truth and self-integrity and his ability to relate to the dictates of reality with an open mind.

Gandhi claimed that non-cooperation with evil was as much a duty as cooperation with good. He pleaded guilty and asked for the “severest penalty.”<sup>75</sup> The British judge was deeply moved. He reluctantly sentenced Gandhi to six years’ imprisonment, which Gandhi acknowledged gratefully to be as light as any judge could have imposed under the given circumstances. Later on, Gandhi was released four years early from prison due to health reasons. His trial shows the power of goodness to influence even the mightiest opponent. The British government never tried Gandhi again although he was arrested on several more occasions. Gandhi wielded far more influence when he was in prison than when he was outside.

### THE POWER OF SALT: THE FAMOUS 1930 DANDI MARCH

The demand for independence continued to rise, reaching its peak at the end of 1929. Jawaharlal Nehru, a great admirer of Gandhi, was now the president of the Indian National Congress. Under his leadership, the congress passed a resolution in favor of complete independence for India from the colonial government by means of *satyāgraha*. Gandhi was chosen to lead the movement. Part of his strategy of civil disobedience included refusing to pay colonial taxes. As usual, Gandhi waited for “an inner voice” to guide him. The inspiration came to him in February 1930; he would mount a large campaign against the salt tax to demonstrate the injustice of this practice. The British had placed a high tax on salt, and it was illegal to use salt not sold directly by the British government. All Indians were adversely affected by this tax since salt was frequently used due to India’s tropical heat. Gandhi, who had not used the spice in six years, called it a “nefarious monopoly”<sup>76</sup> of the colonial government. Gandhi chose salt for other strategic reasons as well. It affected all Indians—Hindu and Muslims—equally, burdened the poor most heavily, and highlighted the inhumanity of the colonial government in the cruelest way. This shows the genius of

Gandhi in choosing his battles, a trait that helped Gandhi to gain leverage against his opponent.

The campaign also turned out to be an ideal opportunity for Gandhi to show the British government the power of *satyāgraha*. On March 2, 1930, Gandhi sent a letter to Viceroy Irwin, stating that he regarded the British rule as a “curse” since it had impoverished the Indian people. Using the viceroy himself as an example of the economic injustice under British rule, Gandhi pointed out that Lord Irwin’s salary was 5,000 times India’s average income. The viceroy’s office acknowledged the receipt of the letter, but Lord Irwin did not send any reply.

On the eve of launching the salt march, Gandhi made a strong appeal for a truly nonviolent struggle to an assembly of more than ten thousand people during his evening prayer meeting at the Sabarmati Āshram. The next morning, on March 12, Gandhi, then 61 years of age and oldest among the group, along with 78 followers, started his 24-day march on foot to the sea coast of Dandi, a total distance of 241 miles. Everyday Gandhi walked between 10 and 15 miles while keeping his daily routine of waking up at 4 a.m., conducting prayer meetings, spinning for an hour, writing for weekly magazines, and keeping his daily diary—and requiring each *āshramite* to do the same. Walking on the winding dirt roads from village to village, Gandhi kept reminding the protesters, “We are marching in the name of God.”<sup>77</sup> As the marchers approached the seashore on April 5, people from all over India joined the march, and by the time Gandhi arrived in Dandi, the Salt March procession numbered several thousand.

In the early morning of April 6, Gandhi picked up a handful of salt in a symbolic gesture of defiance of the mighty empire. The entire nation was galvanized by Gandhi’s dramatic act and followed his exhortation to break the salt law. Men and women, young and old, marched in thousands in an attempt to get arrested. Gandhi, too, was arrested on May 4, shortly after midnight, in violation of the salt tax laws—for touching salt he had not purchased and on which he had not paid a tax. Within a few weeks, as many as 60,000 men and women were in jail, and the people had initiated a mass boycott of British goods. Gandhi continued to exert influence even while he was in prison, and the campaign remained nonviolent. With his consummate political skills, the Mahatma had peacefully elevated his campaign to the international level and sparked global sympathy for his cause. His move was simple, dramatic, and symbolic, and ultimately, it sounded the death knell of British rule in India.

*Satyāgrahis* learned that properly executed civil disobedience could be a formidable force, and the colonial government realized that India's independence was inevitable. Gandhi was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine for two years in a row, 1930 and 1931. The magazine also named him as its 1930 "Man of the Year."<sup>78</sup> A success 35 years in the making, Gandhi had emerged as a powerful moral force both within India and around the world.

Eventually, the colonial government could not cope with the mass protests and its declining revenues. Gandhi was released on January 25, 1931, and was invited to negotiate as an equal with Viceroy Irwin. Gandhi-Irwin talks led to the Delhi Pact on March 5, 1931. Gandhi agreed to suspend civil disobedience and, in exchange, Irwin agreed to release all prisoners arrested during the 1930 *satyāgraha*. This was an historic moment of triumph for Gandhi and his *satyāgrahis*. Gandhi was invited to London to attend the second round table conference as the sole delegate of the Indian National Congress. He arrived in London in September 1931, 17 years after his last visit. He met many influential figures, including George Bernard Shaw and Charlie Chaplin. He visited the king at Buckingham Palace in his usual loin-cloth. When a journalist asked Gandhi if he thought himself under-dressed, he replied: "The King had enough on for both of us."<sup>79</sup> On another occasion when a reporter asked about his sparse attire, he replied: "You people wear plus-fours, mine are minus fours."<sup>80</sup> The politician-seer had not lost a bit of his artful sense of humor.

The round table conference, however, was a failure, and Gandhi was unsuccessful in obtaining greater constitutional reforms. The British government was not ready to hand over any control of national defense or international relations. Remaining true to its policy of "divide and rule," it supported the creation of a separate electorate for each of the ethnic groups in India. Gandhi at once saw it as divisive and did not want any part of the plan. Gandhi had worked too long and hard to bring different communities together (especially Hindus and Muslims) to let the process of independence become victim to such a policy. Discouraged, he left for India unsure about the future.

### "QUIT INDIA" AND THE LAST STRUGGLE

Despite the strained relations between Hindus and Muslim during the 1930s, Gandhi believed that once Britain's divisive policy of "divide and rule" was out of the way, the divisions between these two communities would improve on their own accord. Nonetheless, tensions

continued to escalate, and for all of Gandhi's persuasive skills, he was not able to win over his greatest Muslim adversary, Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The Indian National Congress and the Muslim League remained divided with no possibility of finding common ground. As a result, the idea of two separate nations at the time of independence became increasingly inevitable. Gandhi did not like it at all and remained totally against it.

Before Gandhi arrived on the political scene, the struggle for India's independence had been progressing for three decades and very likely would have borne tangible results of its own accord. That is why it is not completely accurate to say that Gandhi wrought the miracle of India's independence; however, "the extraordinary manner it was achieved can be pointedly ascribed to him."<sup>81</sup> And this was an achievement of historic proportions. It is one of the great ironies of history that the country that Gandhi peacefully led to freedom in 1947 was divided, amid great violence, into India and Pakistan. Gandhi did not want this "two-part independence" that India achieved on August 15, 1947, and not surprisingly, he refused to participate in the celebrations for independence.

The British realized that they were once again facing mass protests in India and began deliberating possible ways to create an independent India. Although Winston Churchill vehemently opposed the idea of losing India as a British colony, the British announced in March 1941 that it would free India at the end of World War II. This was not acceptable to Gandhi, and he organized a "Quit India" campaign in 1942. In response, the British once again imprisoned him.

When Gandhi was released from prison in 1944, Indian independence seemed well in sight. Unfortunately, as before, there were fierce disagreements between Hindus and Muslims. Since the majority of Indians were Hindus, the Muslims feared not having enough political power if there was an independent India. Therefore, the Muslims proposed that the six provinces in northwest India with a majority population of Muslims should become an independent country. Gandhi greatly opposed the idea of partition and tried his best to bring both sides together. In the end, however, the decision was beyond his control.

On August 15, 1947, India's first day of freedom, Gandhi was conspicuously absent from the public ceremonies. He was deeply troubled, for independence had brought in its wake the partition of India and terrible Hindu-Muslim riots. Much of his life's work appeared to be in vain. "Yet," as Whitman rightly states, "ahead of these days of tragedy lay his pilgrimage of reconciliation to the blood-soaked riot

areas and his fasting for communal harmony.”<sup>82</sup> This is the beginning of a very sad period of Gandhi’s life as his worst fears about Hindu-Muslim hostilities were soon to be realized.

Gandhi saw most of this coming and greatly despaired. It pained him deeply to see 32 years of his selfless work come to “an inglorious end” and “to watch India being torn apart into two bleeding fragments.”<sup>83</sup> He could not prevent the partition of India because religious divisions were stronger than nationalistic cohesion.<sup>84</sup> Massive violence ensued, including widespread slaughter, rape, and the burning of entire towns. Gandhi toured India, hoping his mere presence could check the violence. Although violence did stop where Gandhi visited, he could not be everywhere at once. “Yet without Gandhi,” writes Rajmohan Gandhi, “the violence would have been even greater, the parts more than two, and the future unity, pluralism, and democracy of the Indian part far more vulnerable.”<sup>85</sup> This is not a small achievement by any standard. Even when Gandhi did not succeed in preventing the partition, he was certainly able to contain its destructive power.

The British, apprehensive of what seemed sure to become a violent civil war, decided to leave India in August 1947. Before leaving, the British were able to get the Indian National Congress, against Gandhi’s wishes, to agree to a partition plan. On August 15, 1947, Great Britain granted independence to India and to the newly formed Muslim country of Pakistan.

As 15 million Indians became uprooted from their homes, Hindus and Muslims attacked each other with a vengeance. At no other time in history have so many people become refugees in so short a period. The lines of refugees stretched for miles and miles, and countless people died along the way from illness, hunger, and dehydration. To stop this widespread violence, Gandhi once again went on a fast. He would only eat again, he stated, once he saw clear plans to stop the violence. The fast began on January 13, 1948. Realizing that the frail and aged Gandhi could not survive a long fast, both sides worked together to create a peace plan. On January 18, a group of more than a hundred representatives approached Gandhi with a promise for peace and ended Gandhi’s last and perhaps “greatest fast.”<sup>86</sup>

Unfortunately, this final fast also alienated many among his own community of Hindus who resented what seemed to them as Gandhi’s unjust treatment of Hindus and his unfair concessions to Muslim interests. There were even a few radical Hindu groups who believed that India should never have been partitioned and partially blamed Gandhi for the Indo-Pak separation. “How is one to explain the fact,” asks Krishna Kripalani, “that the Mahatma’s many fasts, sublime

penances, to use Tagore's words, not unoften embarrassed and irritated those for whose moral benefit they were undertaken?"<sup>87</sup>

## GANDHI'S ASSASSINATION

There is a certain sense of urgency that marks the lives of all great people as if they are more conscious of their impending mortality. And yet they carry their daily life functions with a sense of normalcy and inner clam. St. Francis of Assisi was hoeing his garden when someone asked what he would do if he were suddenly to learn that he would die before sunset that very day. "I would finish hoeing my garden," he replied.<sup>88</sup> Gandhi kept on hoeing his garden until the very end of his life, and on January 30, 1948, before an evening prayer meeting, the 78-year-old was assassinated by a fellow Hindu.

Gandhi spent his last day discussing issues with various parties and individuals as usual. At a few minutes past 5 p.m., when it was time for the prayer meeting, Gandhi began his last walk to the Birla House in Delhi, where he had spent the last 144 days of his life. A crowd had surrounded him as he walked, supported by two of his grandnieces. In front of him, a young Hindu named Nathuram Godse stopped and bowed. Gandhi bowed back. Then Godse rushed forward and fired three shots point-blank at Gandhi's chest. Two bullets passed right through and the third was found lodged in his right lung. Gandhi sank to the ground. The only sound that escaped his lips was the word, "Rama," his favorite name for God. Before the crowd realized what had happened, he was dead.<sup>89</sup>

On hearing the news of Gandhi's assassination, E. Stanley Jones, the well-known missionary evangelist to India who had worked with Gandhi for over 40 years, said that it was "the greatest tragedy since the Son of God died on a cross."<sup>90</sup> Plato's famous words on the death of Socrates, who also sacrificed himself at the altar of truth, come to mind: "Such was the end of our friend, whom I may truly call the wisest, the justest, and best of all the men whom I have ever known."<sup>91</sup> Even Gandhi's assassin, Nathuram Godse, stated at his trial at which he was sentenced to be hanged: "Before I fired the shots I actually wished him well and bowed to him in reverence."<sup>92</sup> Thus ended the life of perhaps the greatest champion of peace that the world has ever seen.

The real tragedy of Gandhi's life, as Lelyveld, one of his recent biographers, maintains, was "not because he was assassinated, nor because his noblest qualities inflamed the hatred in his killer's heart. The tragic element is that he was ultimately forced, like Lear, to see the limits of his ambition to remake his world."<sup>93</sup> Perhaps as humans

we can never truly succeed in fashioning the world to fit our personal designs and desires. Lao Tzu writes:

*As for those who would take the whole world  
To tinker as they see fit,  
I observe that they never succeed:  
For the world is a sacred vessel  
Not to be altered by man.*<sup>94</sup>

Lao Tzu's words emphasize the poignancy of human life and the vainness of human effort to mold the world. Perhaps, the glory of the human is not in the conquest of the universe but in being an integral part of it.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

As humans, we all are given the choice to play one of two roles—the inner and the outer. While most of humanity remains busy playing the outer Darwinian game of “survival of the fittest,” the finest minds of humanity, from time immemorial, have kept busy pondering this eternal question—“Am I growing in wisdom, truth, and goodness?” This inner growth has more to do with self-transformation than outer achievements of fame and success. Perhaps, the greatest gift we can give to the universe is our own transformation. When we purge our mind of all forms of harmfulness, anger, hatred, and greed—in thought, word, and deed—and awaken the deep compassion within our heart, we benefit the whole universe. Such is the law of unity and oneness of all existence that governs the inner game.

Gandhi lived by the rules of the inner game: a sincere, searching mind willing to challenge its most cherished assumptions and beliefs; a unified will that can ensure the propriety of the means in a most determined way; a clear conscience that can look at one's own faults with the same objectivity as others see us; and finally, the willingness to conduct one's affairs without personal likes and dislikes. The rules of the outer game are clear: always be right or at least try to look good; make sure things go exactly the way as planned; cling tightly to material objects; seek positive experiences; and actively avoid or ignore negative experiences. It might be a good approach to hold on to the status quo but not very effective in a VUCA world—a world that is at once volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous.

In the inner game of self-transformation, there is no reason to despair about how much (or how little) difference one person can make in the outer world. The greatest effort one can put forth is being able to live up to one's own creed. When one is able to do that, the

world around us starts to change in some small way. In this pursuit, the victory does not belong to the winner but to the striver. It has been said that “only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly.”<sup>95</sup> As Romain Rolland, a Nobel Laureate in literature and one of Gandhi’s earliest biographers, has observed, “Victory lies not in realization of the goal, but in a relentless pursuit after it.”<sup>96</sup> It is in the steadfast pursuit of truth and nonviolence where the triumph of Gandhian tragedy rests. Gandhi also showed that the greatest fulfillment in life comes from serving others. As a U.S. Marine who handed out food and blankets to tsunami victims in 2004 said, “I have been serving my country for 34 years and this is the first day I’ve gotten any fulfillment out of it.” Life is like tennis, only those who are good at service win the game.

Ours is not a meaningless, empty universe, “much sound and fury, signifying nothing,” as the bard of Avon mused. It is an exquisitely structured and finely hued world discreetly founded on the principles of goodness and benevolence. Although the most popular story thrust upon us through the media is that of the relentless struggle to secure our transient spot on the social totem pole of ancestral hierarchy, underneath our savage instincts are the divine fountain-springs of compassion and love that can be harnessed at will. As Michael Nagler has rightly observed, “We have somehow created a system that draws upon the lowest, most destructive drives of our evolutionary heritage without engaging in the best of which we are capable. *We can get far in this work with only two founding principles, which we do not need to take on faith*; we can hold them as hypotheses and test them out in our own experiences. They are truth and non-violence.”<sup>97</sup> Gandhi’s life shows that by the force of divinity inherent within all of us, it is possible to live a life of total selflessness and harmlessness, a life completely dedicated to the service of the divine through the service of humanity.

While Gandhi may have “struggled with doubt and self until his last days,” writes Lelyveld, “[he] made the predicament of the millions his own, whatever the tensions among them, as no other leader of modern times has.”<sup>98</sup> This is a fair assessment of the man who completely lived for others. Selflessness, obviously, comes at a price—an ultimate price at that—of the giving up of the self. Lelyveld concludes his critical study of Gandhi and his struggle with India, succinctly:

In India today, the term ‘Gandhian’ is ultimately synonymous with social conscience;—his example of courage, persistence, and identification with the poorest, striving for selflessness—still has power to inspire, more so even than his doctrine of nonviolence and techniques of resistance, certainly more than his assorted dogmas and pronouncements on subjects like spinning, diet, and sex.<sup>99</sup>

Perhaps Gandhi's greatest legacy is that he became the voice of social conscience for the world through his singular selflessness and steadfastness to truth and nonviolence.

### E. STANLEY JONES'S HOMAGE TO GANDHI

Few writers have presented as clear an interpretation of the spirit and leadership style of Gandhi as Dr. E Stanley Jones, a distinguished American Christian missionary in India, who knew Gandhi in a uniquely personal way for over 40 years. In his informative and inspiring little volume entitled *Gandhi: Portrayal of a Friend*, Jones tells us that Gandhi had an amazingly clear mind that found expression in his writings and speeches. Gandhi's thought process was simple and clear because his intentions were simple and clear. Jones further states that though Gandhi was not intellectually brilliant, yet he was so fundamentally grounded that his moral intentions carried him almost by intuition to right conclusions. Gandhi had a way of being right even when many felt that he was wrong. His spirit transcended the mental processes and came out on the right side of things.

Providing an essential key to the understanding of Gandhi as both a person and a leader, E. Stanley Jones wrote: "After you have looked at him through a microscope, you have to look at him through a telescope to get the total man. For he stands against a background of the ages and must be interpreted with that background to get the full stature and meaning of the man. . . . Many get caught in subsidiary statements and miss the sum total of the meaning of his teaching."<sup>100</sup>

Sadly, most of Gandhi's critics and detractors suffer from this problem. They focus on subsidiary statements and acts of Gandhi and miss the overall meaning of his message. In order to discover Gandhi's real stature and the essence of his total message, one has to look at him through a telescope after one has looked at him through a microscope. Only then will one be able to get to the heart of the real Gandhi. Future researchers and readers of Gandhi, the quintessential enigma, would be well served by this advice.

E. Stanley Jones further informs us that Acharya Kripalani, the then-president of the Indian National Congress, told him one day: "The Mahatma is more right when he is wrong than we are when we are right."<sup>101</sup> This insight is the key to understanding of Gandhi's character. His spirit and magnificent intention carried him past a myriad of mental detours and brought him almost unerringly to his goal. Many of us are correct in our personal correctness and are small in the process, but the Mahatma was incorrect in many things and yet

correct in the sum total and big in the very inconsistencies.<sup>102</sup> E. Stanley Jones sums up his tribute: "I bow to Mahatma Gandhi and I kneel at the feet of Christ. . . . A little man . . . has taught me more of the spirit of Christ than perhaps any other man in East or West."<sup>103</sup>

No higher tribute can be written for the man who is as great in death as he was in life. Indeed, "[m]en like Gandhi do not happen very often—no oftener perhaps than men like Buddha, Jesus, and Mohammed."<sup>104</sup> Nature will most likely have to wait a few centuries to send one like him again.

### Essential Leadership Lessons

1. Effective leaders have a clear understanding of their core values. This understanding helps them to stay true to their core values.
2. Effective leaders inspire emulation by their exemplary life and conduct. They practice what they preach and make their life their message.
3. Effective leaders know very well that ends do not justify the means. For them, means are ends in the making for nothing right can ultimately come from wrong means.
4. Effective leaders establish their conduct on the high ground of ethics. For them, morality is the basis of all things, and truth is the substance of all morality. Gandhi's example is a living testimony to a life founded on the high ground of morality and truth.
5. Exemplary leaders do not respond to personal insults as potential threats; instead, they see them as opportunities for individual and collective transformation. They transmute personal challenges and champion universal causes.
6. An outstanding trait that all exemplary leaders share is that they are able to envision the universal dimension of personal struggles.
7. Exemplary leaders understand the origins of social change: when faced with challenges, they dive within, train their mind, and transform their emotions to be the change they wish to see in others.
8. Effective leaders have the uncanny ability to harness the ideas that have been the common property of humankind for thousands of years. But, more importantly, they are able to internalize those ideas, and, through their lives, recreate them with all their elemental freshness and force.

## CHAPTER 3



# GANDHI'S HEROES: GUIDING LIGHTS ON A HERO'S JOURNEY

### INTRODUCTION

We all need heroes who can awaken the best in us and inspire us to be what we can be. But what is the inspiration behind a hero's own transformation? What are the formative influences that shape a great leader? What alchemy makes great leaders and fashions a lump of clay into the great soul of a hero? After all, exemplary leaders do not just emerge suddenly from nowhere to take charge of the prevailing situation. They mature slowly and steadily in life's laboratory through the interplay of myriad interactive processes of nature and nurture. Gandhi's development as an exemplary leader is no exception.

The history of humankind is a testimony to the fact that the making of great leaders requires them to make great sacrifices. "What is to give light," said Victor Frankl, "must endure burning."<sup>1</sup> For Nelson Mandela it meant a struggle of over 50 years, 27 of which were spent in jail. For the Dalai Lama, the struggle continues after 56 years in exile from his homeland, Tibet. "Give me six hours to chop down a tree," Abraham Lincoln said, "and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe." Gandhi worked long and hard in sharpening his axe—3 years in England, 21 years in South Africa, and 33 years in India!

In his book *Greatness: Who Makes History and Why*, Dean Keith Simonton states, "To achieve success of the highest order, a person may have to suffer first."<sup>2</sup> He further points out that orphanhood has been seen to spur the development of eminent people in world

history. Biographies of a number of historic figures show upsetting circumstances, such as parental loss, in the early part of their lives. Simonton quotes a study of 699 historic figures, of whom 61 percent lost a parent before the age of 31; Gandhi lost both of his parents early—his father died when he was 16 and his mother when he was 22. However, two other groups, juvenile delinquents and depressive or suicidal psychiatric patients, show similar orphanhood rates. This shows that some people are able to rise above their early traumatic experiences while others lack the inner strength to cope; in other words, orphanhood is *not* a precondition for achieving greatness.<sup>3</sup> It all depends upon what we do with what happens to us. The same fire that purifies gold also burns down wood.

Gandhi belongs to the first category. He had the moral and spiritual strength to fashion his clay. The traumatic experiences Gandhi faced did not break him; they helped purify and refine him, preparing him for the great challenges to come. Gandhi's experiments with truth provide ample evidence that his passion for truth and selfless service was kept aflame despite the strong winds of opposition and hardships. In this chapter, we consider some of the formative influences that helped shape Gandhi into an exemplary leader. We will also present some important information about Gandhi's teachers in life and spirit.

### THE ALCHEMY OF "WORK AND WAIT"

Leaders recognize that the most important issues confronting organizations and society at large are so profound and pervasive that they can only be resolved at the fundamental level of the human spirit—at the level of the authentic self. They know that leading with authenticity requires delving deep into one's being and engaging in a process of self-exploration. They are familiar with the discipline of self-mastery, which requires patience, understanding, and courage—the alchemy of "work and wait." They know that it takes three months for pumpkins to grow and mature while an oak tree takes hundreds of years. They are aware of the fundamental fact that the "finest timber comes from the slowest growing trees."<sup>4</sup> Leaders are willing to go the whole distance with patience, perseverance, and courage.

This awareness and willingness brings them to the threshold of an inner journey of self-transformation—the hero's journey.

## A HERO'S JOURNEY

Joseph Campbell, the renowned American mythologist and author of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, held that various myths from different times and places share certain fundamental stages and patterns, which he described as follows: “A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons [gifts] on his fellow man.”<sup>5</sup> Campbell’s theory divides the journey of the archetypal hero found in world mythologies into a schema of 17 distinct steps. These steps are commonly organized into three classic stages or rites of passage: Separation, Initiation, and Return.

The first stage of the journey is about the separation or departure of the hero from the normal world. Separation has the figurative echo of an infant transitioning away from the mother. During the primary part of the journey, the hero is initiated into true heroic stature and cleansed by various trials, tribulations, and rites. Persevering courageously through inner battles, the hero’s true character emerges, and the hero receives the ultimate boon of his quest: self-mastery. After the rite of initiation, the hero returns home in triumph to share with his fellow travelers the knowledge and gifts acquired during the journey, although this stage may have its own challenges.

The life stories of mythological characters such as Prometheus and spiritual leaders like Moses, Jesus, and the Buddha follow this sequence of a soul’s journey quite closely. We can perhaps add Gandhi to this select list. The three stages fit neatly into Gandhi’s story as well in terms of his years in England (1888–1891), South Africa (1893–1914), and India (1915–1948). Gandhi left for London to study law at the age of 18, and shortly before his return to India from England in 1891, his mother passed away. This formative period, which laid the foundation for his life’s spiritual quest, can be regarded as the phase of *departure* or *separation* in his journey. It was in England that Gandhi discovered, for the first time, vegetarianism, the Bhagavad Gītā, the Sermon on the Mount, and the teachings of the Buddha.

The 21 years that Gandhi spent in South Africa represent the vital phase of his initiation, where he was fashioned into true heroic stature. As we saw in the previous chapter, it was in South Africa that Gandhi had what can be called a spiritual conversion experience.<sup>6</sup> The

final phase—the 33 years Gandhi spent in India, until he was assassinated—marks the hero's return to his homeland to share the knowledge acquired during the transformative phase of the journey. Thus, we see that Gandhi's leadership development follows the three stages of a hero's journey—Separation, Initiation, Return—that Campbell described.

Gandhi had embarked upon a hero's journey in England, conquered his demons in South Africa, and returned to India in a state transformed, to bestow his gifts on his brothers and sisters. Gandhi was beset with challenges through all three phases, but he persevered courageously every day in his quest for truth and self-realization. "Gandhiji, it has been well said," wrote J. M. Upadhyaya, "could fashion heroes out of common clay. His first and, undoubtedly, his most successful experiment was with himself."<sup>7</sup> It is true that self-exploration is the greatest journey that we take. This is a journey of self-realization in which we thoroughly become who we are. This is the journey Gandhi avowed to take, eventually paying the price with his own life.

### GANDHI'S HEROES: EARLY INFLUENCES

Gandhi's saintly and devout mother, Putlibai, and his equally devout nurse, Rambha, were early spiritual influences. Stories of three legendary figures from the Purāṇas<sup>8</sup>—Shravana Kumar, Harishchandra, and Prahlada—instilled in him the values of parental devotion, unconditional adherence to truth, and steadfast faith in the Lord. After he read the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Lord Rama became his ideal and *Rama Rajya* (the rule of Rama, synonymous with the rule of righteousness) became his most cherished dream.

In the epic *Rāmāyaṇa*, Rama is presented as an ideal person of heroic qualities and as an upholder of perfect virtue (*dharma*), given to keeping his promises. To a devout Hindu, Rama *is* god. As Gandhi came to know the epic more intimately, he began to revere Rama as his role model and *Rama Rajya* as the perfect model of society. Rama is said to have devoted himself to the task of spreading truth and righteousness as it was believed that "as the king, so are the subjects" (*yathā rājā tathā prajā*). In his reign, the people were steadfast in their adherence to truth and righteousness. Gandhi would later equate *Rama Rajya* with his concept of *swaraj* (self-rule) and describe it as "sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority"<sup>9</sup> or as "the establishment of the Kingdom of righteousness."<sup>10</sup> This adherence to

moral righteousness became the hallmark of everything that Gandhi would undertake in his personal and public life.

As we will also see in the chapter on nonviolence and *satyāgraha*, an early reading of a poem by Gujarati poet Shamal Bhatt (1718–1765) inspired Gandhi's philosophy of "returning good for evil." In 1908, when Joseph J. Doke, Gandhi's first biographer, questioned him about the origin of his deep faith in nonviolence, Gandhi said:

I remember how one verse of a Gujarati poem, which, as a child, I learned at school, clung to me. In substance it was this "If a man gives you a drink of water and you give him a drink in return, that is nothing. Real beauty consists in doing good against evil." As a child, this verse had a powerful influence over me, and I tried to carry it into practice.<sup>11</sup>

According to Gandhi, a superior person will, in the fullness of his strength, forgive the wrongdoer and try to redeem him and convert him to the ways of doing good.<sup>12</sup> Gandhi was one such being who did what all of us *know* but only a few are able to *do*, that is, return good for evil, forgive the wrongdoer, and in the process transform the wrongdoer. This principle—of returning good for evil—became increasingly important to Gandhi and formed the cornerstone of his core creed of *satyāgraha*—or truth-force.

This is not to suggest that Gandhi had, at such an early age, developed a deep faith in truth and in *ahimsā* (nonviolence) by mere exposure to these ideas. However, such moral teachings did create in him a "magnetic center"—to borrow a phrase from the Russian mystic Gurdjieff—that would grow and attract similar ideas which would eventually develop into firm religious conviction through his ongoing experiments with truth. Even at that early stage, this exposure awakened in him a deep sense of morality:

But one thing took deep root in me—the conviction that morality is the basis of things, and that truth is the substance of all morality. Truth became my sole objective. It began to grow in magnitude every day, and my definition of it also has been ever widening.

A Gujarati didactic stanza likewise gripped my mind and heart. Its precept—*return good for evil*—became my guiding principle.<sup>13</sup>

This shows us that from quite an early age, Gandhi developed a strong conviction for morality and passion for truth. The foundation of ethics and spirituality that had been laid kept growing stronger and stronger with the passage of time until it became unshakable.

### Three Root Paradigms: Shravana Kumar, Harishchandra, Prahlada

In his autobiography, Gandhi relates the impression made on him by the story of Shravana Kumar and Harishchandra, two legendary figures in the ancient Hindu scriptures (Purāṇas). As a child Gandhi did not like to do any extra reading; however, the book on Shravana Kumar was an exception and made “an intense impression” on him. Shravana was extremely devoted to his parents and sacrificed his own comfort to take care of them. While reading a play about Shravana’s devotion to his parents, Gandhi saw a picture in which Shravana was shown carrying his blind and aging parents on a pilgrimage, using slings fitted onto his shoulders. He felt that this was a great example for him to follow.

During this time, the young Gandhi also got a chance to see the play *Harishchandra*, which captured his heart. He believed in the story of Harishchandra wholeheartedly. To follow truth and to go through all the ordeals that Harishchandra went through became a goal. “Why should not all be truthful like Harishchandra?” was the question that Gandhi asked himself day and night. The story influenced his sense of sticking to *dharma* (moral duty) regardless of trials and tribulations. This steadfastness in the path of righteousness no matter what the challenges became a trait that Gandhi would live his life by.

Prahlada was another figure who influenced Gandhi deeply. A saintly character from the Purāṇas, Prahlada is famous for his unwavering devotion to Lord Vishnu<sup>14</sup> (the preserver god of the Hindu sacred triad) and for proclaiming Vishnu as the true god, despite his father’s repeated attempts to force Prahlada to do otherwise. Prahlada’s unflinching devotion to the Lord enabled him to survive his father’s every attempt to kill him. He disobeyed his father’s commands without ill will toward him and continued to love his father. Although he realized he was wrong to be disobedient, Prahlada resisted his father under the solemn dictates of his conscience. Gandhi was greatly influenced by Prahlada’s manner of opposing unrighteousness and believed that it was a perfect approach to *satyāgraha*.

We find that Gandhi shared several traits with all three Puranic figures. From all of these three paradigmatic icons, Gandhi drew vital lessons to prepare himself in his quest for truth and nonviolence. Like Shravana Kumar, Gandhi was devoted to his parents. He took every opportunity to serve his father and sincerely kept the vows he made to his mother. Like Harishchandra, Gandhi remained steadfast in his

adherence to truth throughout his life regardless of the hardships. Like Prahlada, Gandhi remained steadfast in his devotion to the truth. Of all three, perhaps it was from Prahlada's example of opposing unrighteousness that Gandhi would draw many of the principles of *satyāgraha*—his most powerful weapon in practicing nonviolent resistance.

### **Raychand: A Sterling Example of Freedom from Attachment**

Of all the heroes in Gandhi's pantheon, Gujarati jeweler and saint-philosopher, Raychand, would unquestionably rank first—the only living example to inspire Gandhi in the spiritual realm. Gandhi regarded Raychand as his friend, philosopher, and guide. Gandhi writes about him in his autobiography: "In my moments of spiritual crisis . . . he was my refuge."<sup>15</sup> Gandhi further tells us that Raychand had been a constant influence on him all his life and that among the religious people that he had met, he had not found another person to equal Raychand in religious perception.<sup>16</sup> Gandhi revered him for "his wide knowledge of the scriptures, his spotless character, and his burning passion for self-realization. I saw later that this last was the only thing for which he lived."<sup>17</sup> These spiritual qualities combined to become a light in Gandhi's life and the foundation for his future role as a leader. Gandhi's own quest for self-realization was inspired by Raychand's.

One year older than Gandhi, Raychand hailed from the same state as Gandhi. His family were businessmen dealing in diamonds and pearls internationally, with their headquarters in Bombay. Gandhi first met him when he landed in Bombay after finishing law school in England; he spent one night with the family. Raychand was introduced to him as a business partner, a poet, and a person with a remarkable memory, but Gandhi was to discover later that he was also a profound Jain philosopher with wide knowledge of other religions. Raychand was immersed in a spiritual quest even while actively participating in business matters and shouldering the responsibilities of a wife and a son. When Gandhi practiced law in Bombay for a short while, he would visit Raychand frequently. There, they would discuss religious questions and other philosophical matters. It was on those occasions that he discovered the spiritual loftiness of Raychand and gradually elevated him as foremost amongst his teachers.<sup>18</sup>

Narayan Desai, who spent 21 years with Gandhi and wrote an authoritative four-volume biography of Gandhi titled *My Life Is My*

*Message*, narrated this remarkable incident about Raychand's nonattachment to material things:

Raychand, who died at the young age of 33, was not only a great poet, a polymath, and a spiritual genius, but also a very successful diamond merchant. Once a neighboring merchant borrowed an expensive diamond and signed a note stating the terms and conditions of the loan. A few weeks later, the price of diamonds skyrocketed and the borrower was reluctant to return the borrowed diamond, which he had already sold to one of his wealthy clients. Whenever he passed by Raychand in the market, the borrower would look in the other direction lest Raychand ask for the diamond or the money. This continued for some time.

Realizing this, one day Raychand brought the note that contained the terms and conditions of the loan and went straight to the neighboring merchant. Raychand addressed him thus, "This piece of paper (referring to the note) is what is keeping us apart and making you shy away from me. Here, I am tearing it off. That is the end of your debt. You no longer owe me anything!"<sup>19</sup>

Elsewhere, Gandhi notes the external markers of Raychand's inner spiritual state, clearly stating that inner control and freedom from attachment were his crowning attainments:

I watched his daily life respectfully, and at close quarters. He accepted whatever he was served at meals. His dress was simple. . . . He used to walk slowly, and the passer-by could see that he was absorbed in thought even while walking. There was a strange power in his eyes; they were extremely bright, and free from any sign of impatience and anxiety. . . . The face was smiling and cheerful; it shone with the light of inner joy. . . . These qualities can exist only in a man of self-control. A man cannot become free from attachment by making a show of being so. . . . The poet made me feel that this state of freedom from attachment was spontaneous to him.<sup>20</sup>

This quote contains the essence of the spiritual life, both as a means and as an end, that Gandhi strived to attain all his life. It shows how a person steadfast in the wisdom of the Self (*sthita prajña*) should conduct himself and also shows the means to attain such an exalted state. The crux of the matter is a higher degree of emotional maturity and a dispassionate attitude toward things ephemeral. This state of dispassion (*vairāgya*) is a natural development on the path of spirituality when the seeker understands the essential difference between what is real and what only appears to be so. It cannot be brought about by force; it happens spontaneously, like a ripe fruit falling to the ground

on its own accord. And it has nothing to do with any external markers of renunciation whatsoever.

Gandhi rightly notes that “the first step towards *moksha* is freedom from attachment. . . . Without genuine *vairāgya* [dispassion] in the mind, one cannot be possessed with a yearning for *moksha*.”<sup>21</sup> This dispassion about things unreal and discrimination (*viveka*) between the real and the unreal mark the first two steps for the seeker to undertake the spiritual journey. They also mark the first two arms of the fourfold discipline<sup>22</sup> of an accomplished spiritual seeker (*sādhana catustaya sampañā adbhikārī*). The other two steps include the sixfold virtues (*shata sampat*<sup>23</sup>) of mental and physical restraint and a burning desire for liberation (*mumukṣutva*). The spiritual quest begins when one is able to discern the real from the unreal. This subtle logic is called sense of discrimination (*viveka*). This discernment naturally leads to developing dispassion for the unreal (*vairāgya*). With *viveka-vairāgya* in place, the spiritual aspirant undertakes certain disciplines such as mental calmness and sense restraint which finally lead to an intense desire to free oneself from all conditioned existence. Gandhi strove to embody all these qualities and all of his vows, fasts, and other practices in self-restraint were the operationalization of these virtues.

In the early years when Gandhi was struggling to find answers to existential questions, Raychand served as a guide with his in-depth knowledge of Hindu spirituality. Gandhi often consulted him, seeking the inner meaning of such terms as soul and spiritual freedom. Raychand offered the following explanation about the *ātman* (the Self) and *mokṣa* to Gandhi:

The *ātman* is fundamentally different from all that exists, and is the author (*kartā*) of its own *mokṣa*. In the state of bondage, the *ātman* commits deeds of anger, love, attachment, greed, etc. *Mokṣa* is freedom from such attachment, from all bondage of passions and the body; it is the state of self-realization in which the spirit fully realizes its own pure nature and its freedom from all connection with matter.<sup>24</sup>

In this seminal quote on the nature of the Self and its realization, Raychand provides a clear explanation of the *ātman* as a pure consciousness that essentially remains untainted by the deeds of the body. The very nature of *ātman* is freedom (*mokṣa*) since it is eternally free. To realize the *ātman* means self-realization and freedom. Gandhi admired Raychand for his self-control and freedom from attachment,

qualities that Gandhi himself imbibed from his study of the *Gītā*. He also believed that Raychand was like the *sthitaprajña* of the *Gītā*—the man of steady wisdom—an ideal that Gandhi tried hard to live up to.

Though Gandhi would not place Raychand “on the throne of his heart as Guru,” he was on many occasions his “guide and helper.” “His words,” says Gandhi, “went straight home to me.”<sup>25</sup> In South Africa, when his Christian and Muslim friends tried to convert him, Gandhi expressed his confusion and bewilderment in a letter to Raychand and got a prompt reply. Raychand asked him to be patient and to study Hinduism more deeply. He also impressed upon Gandhi that the core of all religions carries the same message and is equally effective if followed sincerely. The concluding remark in the letter was succinct: “On a dispassionate view of the question, I am convinced that no other religion has the subtle and profound thought of Hinduism, its vision of the soul, or its charity.”<sup>26</sup>

According to Satish Sharma, a scholar who has extensively researched Gandhi’s teachers, Raychand:

1. Encouraged soul liberation as the main goal of life—all else was of secondary importance.
2. Emphasized equality of religions and encouraged religious tolerance.
3. Revived Jain philosophy, encouraged spiritual living, and taught seeking of simplicity and austerity.
4. Demonstrated soul liberation while engaged in worldly responsibilities.<sup>27</sup>

From the example of Gandhi’s own life, one can easily discern that these qualities—discovering the sacred in the secular, living a life of simplicity and austerity, religious tolerance, and passion for liberation—became the *sine qua non* in his quest for self-realization.

## WESTERN INFLUENCES

Gandhi was a practical moralist and imbibed his ethical values from many sources. He was influenced by religious and moral writings from both East and West. He read abundantly during his days in England as a law student and later during his long stay in South Africa as a political activist. In particular, he was influenced by the writings of Leo Tolstoy, John Ruskin, and Henry David Thoreau. Gandhi saw his moral convictions reaffirmed in their work and this provided him the confidence he needed to actualize what he had learned in his own life. This is the key to Gandhi’s life and thought; he put into practice the valuable lessons he learned and thereby made them his own by testing them in the laboratory of life.<sup>28</sup>

Gandhi was quintessentially a product of his times. In him, we see a happy amalgam of the best from East and West. It is important to note, however, that despite Gandhi's initial upbringing according to the Hindu tradition and despite his traditional Indian attire, some of the most unique influences on Gandhi's mental and moral outlook were derived from his Western contacts. In the words of Krishna Kripalani:

His meticulous regard for hygiene and sanitation, his food habits and dietetic experiments, his insistence on punctuality and his endless curiosity about the why and how of everything could hardly be said to have been inherited from his traditional Hindu background. His moral sensibility and his religious consciousness, too, were at least as much influenced by Jesus, Tolstoy, Ruskin and Thoreau as by Jainism and Gitā and the lessons received from his Gujarati jeweller-friend Raychandbhai. Gandhi's adoption in later life of the loin-cloth as dress invested him with an exaggerated Indian-ness which was in a way misleading.<sup>29</sup>

Gandhi imbibed the virtues of both cultures, bypassing their vices for the most part. What were some other formative influences on Gandhi? In his autobiography, Gandhi tells us about his heroes:

Three moderns have left a deep impress on my life and captivated me. Raychandbhai by his living contact; Tolstoy by his book, *The Kingdom of God is within you*; and Ruskin by his *Unto this Last*.<sup>30</sup>

By adding Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Henry David Thoreau to this list one may get a near-complete list of who Gandhi may have considered his heroes. By perusing biographies of Gandhi, it is clear that whatever time Gandhi could spare from his hyperactive life he would devote to self-contemplation (*svadhaya*) and some very eclectic reading. Thomas Weber, a Gandhian scholar, finds the influence of Western texts on Gandhi's speeches and writings revealing:

Reading Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, Thoreau's *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience* or Plato's dialogues of Socrates (especially the *Apology* and *Crito*) are genuine eye-openers in this regard—many of Gandhi's favorite sayings or examples and even whole areas of his philosophy, have been taken almost verbatim from these sources.<sup>31</sup>

Gandhi himself acknowledged, however, that Tolstoy influenced him more than Ruskin and Thoreau. Citing a 1928 issue of *Navjivan Weekly* that Gandhi started in 1919, Iyengar quotes Gandhi stating:

“Three persons have influenced me the most. I give the first place to Raychandra Kavi, second to Tolstoy and third to Ruskin.”<sup>32</sup>

In this section, we take a closer look at some of these key Western influences that shaped Gandhi’s life and leadership.

### Leo Tolstoy: The Great Pacifist

The second most important influence on Gandhi was Leo Tolstoy. Although Tolstoy is more famous for the novels *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, it was *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* that “overwhelmed” Gandhi and left “an abiding impression”<sup>33</sup> on him. Tolstoy was a commanding writer who wrote with the force of conviction and experience. This is the aspect Gandhi liked the most about Tolstoy: he practiced what he preached. Gandhi exchanged letters with Tolstoy during 1909–1910 and sought his views on peaceful civil resistance. He received Tolstoy’s support and advice on many occasions.<sup>34</sup> Less than two months before his death, Tolstoy wrote to Gandhi:

The longer I live, and especially now, when I vividly feel the nearness of death, I want to tell others what I feel so particularly clearly and what to my mind is of great importance, namely, that which is called ‘Passive Resistance’, but which is in reality nothing else than the teaching of love uncorrupted by false interpretations. That love, which is the striving for the union of human souls and the activity derived from it, is the highest and only law of human life; and in the depth of his soul every human being . . . feels and knows this.<sup>35</sup>

Tolstoy’s interpretation of “passive resistance” as “love” is quite unique and profound and speaks of his spiritual evolvment. It struck a deep chord with Gandhi and became key to his understanding of nonviolence as a positive force of love and compassion. It also freed the term nonviolence from its conventional meaning of merely being harmless. Tolstoy shunned all forms of slavery, violence, and war as is seen in his insight: “Slavery was opposed to all the moral principles advocated by Plato and Aristotle, yet neither of them saw that, because to renounce slavery would have meant the breakup of the life they were living.”<sup>36</sup> That even the great may be blissfully unaware of their faults tells us something very interesting about human nature: that nature does not give us the gift of seeing ourselves as others see us.

Gandhi was impressed by Tolstoy’s “independent thinking, profound morality, and . . . truthfulness.”<sup>37</sup> Before reading Tolstoy,

Gandhi admits that he was skeptical about many things and even entertained atheistic views. When he went to England, he was a votary of violent resistance, had faith in it, and none in nonviolence. After reading *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, Gandhi's belief in violence vanished and he entrenched himself firmly in thoughts of nonviolence.<sup>38</sup> Satish Sharma summarizes the influence of Tolstoy's work and thought on Gandhi:

Tolstoy advocated simplicity, work with own hands for living ("bread labor"), and a shared living ("trusteeship"). He emphasized higher social and moral values and creation of a God-centered society. Non-resistance to evil ("passive resistance") was one of the strategies of Tolstoy that Gandhi took over and applied to his Satyagraha movement in South Africa with the added component of peaceful civil resistance ("civil-disobedience"). Tolstoy's lessons left large marks on many people and "Tolstoy Colonies" ("Tolstoy Farm" in the case of Gandhi) started coming up in Russia and abroad to practice his principles and strategies.<sup>39</sup>

Tolstoy and Gandhi looked at life's problems in a similar fashion in that both advocated nonviolent solutions to life's problems. Both believed in higher order moral virtues and in living a spiritual life. Gandhi, 41 years younger than Tolstoy, was impressed with the novelist's intellectual stature and simplicity. He modeled much of his *satyāgraha* movement by drawing inspiration from Tolstoy.

### **John Ruskin: Good of One Is the Good of All**

Although Gandhi found very little time to read beyond the aforementioned books, whatever he did read, he thoroughly "chewed and inwardly digested."<sup>40</sup> The third major influence on Gandhi was John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, which brought "instantaneous and practical transformation" to his life. Gandhi translated the book into his native language, Gujarati, and titled it *Sarvodaya* (the welfare of all).

On October 1, 1904, Gandhi took a 24-hour train journey from Johannesburg to Durban. His friend Henry Polak came to see him off at the railway station and gave him a book that he said Gandhi "was sure to like." The book was *Unto This Last*. In a chapter titled "The Magic Spell of a Book" in his autobiography, Gandhi tells us that he found the book compellingly readable and "impossible to lay aside." He did not get any sleep that night and decided to change his life "in accordance with the ideals of the book."<sup>41</sup>

Gandhi summarized the discourse of *Unto This Last* as follows:

1. That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all.
2. That a lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's inasmuch as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.
3. That a life of labor, i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman, is the life worth living.<sup>42</sup>

Gandhi took these principles to heart and structured his āshrams on these principles. Deeply influenced by the ideas of Tolstoy and Ruskin, Gandhi, although a product of the modern era, became a severe critic of modernity and considered the Industrial Revolution a “bane” of humanity. As Jonathan Hyslop noted, “Perhaps driven by a sense of rejection in Britain, and influenced by Ruskin, Tolstoy, and Thoreau, Gandhi delivered a sweeping condemnation of modern Western Civilization. It was based on violence, he charged; he deplored its form of state, its industrialism, and its militarism; he condemned its means of communications, its medical services, and its legal system.”<sup>43</sup> What Gandhi really abhorred was the culture of exploitation, artificiality, and greed concomitant to industrialization and modernization.

Asked by a British journalist what he thought of modern civilization, Gandhi curtly replied: “I think it would be a good idea.”<sup>44</sup>

### **Henry David Thoreau: The Great Transcendentalist**

Gandhi would also add the name of the American transcendentalist, Henry David Thoreau, to this august list of people who influenced him. During 1908, while he was in solitary confinement, Gandhi came across Thoreau's essay *On Civil Disobedience* in the prison library. In this essay, Thoreau calls on readers to follow their own conscience and to disobey the government if needed. Gandhi read the essay with great interest and found that he had much in common with the American author.

Thoreau chose to live a simple life to live up to his creed. He refused to pay taxes to protest the policies of a US government that favored both slavery and the ill-conceived American–Mexican War. Interestingly, Thoreau was a great admirer of Indian philosophy, especially that of the Gitā. In *Walden*, he wrote: “In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita.”<sup>45</sup> Both Gandhi and Thoreau sought abiding moral values rather than fleeting wealth and fame. In his conclusion to *Walden*, Thoreau wrote: “Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth.”

Thoreau's concept of civil disobedience helped Gandhi to solidify his concept of nonviolent resistance—his most powerful weapon. Gandhi refined this concept considerably: Gandhi's movements were more "civil" and less "obedient" than Thoreau's original conception of civil disobedience.

### THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ: GANDHI'S SPIRITUAL DICTIONARY

It was in England that Gandhi was first introduced by two theosophists to Edwin Arnold's English translation of the Bhagavad Gītā, a text that was to become his "spiritual dictionary" and his chief gospel. "It opened to me a new view of life . . . I had found at last, as I believed, the light I needed."<sup>46</sup> Gandhi was convinced that self-realization is "the only ambition worth having," and to him the Gītā appeared to show "the most excellent way to attain self-realization."<sup>47</sup> The Gītā soon became the guiding star of Gandhi's life and leadership.

He also read Edwin Arnold's writing on the life of the Buddha, *The Light of Asia*, as well as the chapter on Prophet Mohammed in Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero Worship*. Around the same time, a Christian friend whom he had known in a vegetarian boarding house introduced him to the Bible. He fell in love with the Sermon on the Mount and tried to reconcile it with the teachings of the Gītā: "My young mind tried to unify the teaching of the Gītā, *The Light of Asia* and the Sermon on the Mount. That renunciation was the highest form of religion appealed to me greatly."<sup>48</sup> One can see that Gandhi followed these teachings both in letter and in spirit.

Among these key influences on Gandhi, the pride of place must go to the Gītā, for his firm and sustained belief in *mokṣa* and self-realization were almost entirely shaped by the teachings of the Gītā. *Mokṣa* supplied the unifying force through all of Gandhi's activities and the Gītā played a decisive role in shaping and solidifying his beliefs and actions. Gandhi regarded his life as an undivided whole in which the personal and professional were seamlessly blended. Gandhi published an edition of the Bhagavad Gītā, in which he states succinctly in the introduction: "In my opinion, the author of the Gītā . . . has drawn no line of demarcation between salvation and worldly pursuits."<sup>49</sup> The Gītā taught Gandhi the art of seeking the sacred in the secular.

In following the teachings of the Gītā, one of the most disconcerting questions for Gandhi was, "How could Śrī Kṛṣṇa tell Arjuna to kill?" This is a question many Western scholars and readers of the Gītā ask. Will Durant has mused,

We are a little shocked to find the man taking what might seem to be the higher moral stand, while the god argues for war . . . What the author had in mind to do, apparently, was to shake the Hindu soul out of the enervating quietism of Buddhist piety into a willingness to fight for India. . . . All in all it was a good lesson which, if India had learned it, might have kept her free.<sup>50</sup>

However, the key to this profound issue lies in understanding the artful setting of the *Gītā* within the larger epic, the *Mahābhārata*. A modern day Advaita-philosopher has suggested:

In the study of the *Gītā*, the blemish of the canvas should not be attributed to the picture in the mind of the painter. The canvas here was the historical setting of the *Mahābhārata* war as described in the epic poem, and the painting was the wisdom teaching that Vyāsa wanted to transmit to future generations through this medium.<sup>51</sup>

The message of the *Gītā* can be approached in several different ways and at several levels. What message one extracts depends upon the level of one's being. As we shall see in the next chapter, Gandhi interpreted the epic war as an allegory signifying the human condition—the universal predicament—characterized by the eternal battle between good and evil in the world and in every human heart. Arjuna and his four brothers, the Pāṇḍavas, represent the good in us, while the Kauravas represent the selfishness and greed. Gandhi would have completely agreed with all of this as well as with what Nataraja Guru has to say about the pragmatic assessment of the setting of the human predicament as enunciated in the first chapter of the *Gītā*:

The very first word of the *Gītā* is *dharma* (right life that is in keeping with wisdom) which is to be set off against the merely historical actuality of the battlefield. The latter has to be revalued in terms of the former by the battle about to begin. Absolute Necessity or Urgency in the Actual has to be understood in the light of the highest Absolute sense of intelligent and normal living by Arjuna. He is called upon to be a man of unitive life without conflict, which is that of a yogi.<sup>52</sup>

The *Gītā* teaches us that our sense of duty should be revalued in terms of the actuality of our daily life. But ultimately, it must lead us to the supreme value—seeking the unitive life of the Absolute.

From the *Gītā*, Gandhi also learned to approach every act in a spirit of sacrifice that aims for the welfare of all beings, in a spirit of offering to the Supreme. Those who do not contribute to the turning of this cosmic wheel of creation are essentially thieves.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps, the most

distinctive spiritual tenet Gandhi learned from the Gītā was the truth of One Reality that pervades all and everything in the universe. This Reality is called Brahman<sup>54</sup> (the Absolute) and is the very Self (*ātmā*) of everyone and everything. According to the Gītā (6.29), those who experience the unity of everything and have the vision of sameness everywhere, see their own Self in all beings, and all beings in their own Self:

*sarvabhūtastham ātmānaṃ sarvabhūtāni cātmani/  
ikṣate yogayuktātmā sarvatra samadarśanaḥ//*

Seeing *ātmā* in all beings and all beings in the *ātmā*, the yogī established in the One Reality looks upon everything with an equal eye.

The knowledge of this truth, that we are essentially One Reality or Brahman, “strikes at the very root of narrow views based on selfishness and is the foundation of ethics. This higher Self is of the nature of Bliss, as displayed in our instinctive love of Self; and to recognize it in others is to bring social harmony for no one will be inclined to harm himself. It paves the way for spiritual and moral perfection. . .”<sup>55</sup> The Gītā (13.28) puts it succinctly: “He who perceives the one Lord dwelling in all beings as their Self cannot harm another, for the Self cannot harm itself.”<sup>56</sup> Perhaps the greatest *raison d’être* for nonharming is presented in the following verse of the Gītā:

*ātmaupamyena sarvatra samaṃ paśyati yorjuna /  
sukhaṃ vā yadi vā duḥkhaṃ sa yogī paramo mataḥ//6.32*

O Arjuna, that yogī is the considered the best who judges what is happiness and sorrow in all beings, by the same standard as he would apply to himself.<sup>57</sup>

These two verses (6.29 and 6.32) are quintessential and provide the greatest ontological support for Gandhi’s categorical adherence to nonviolence and selfless service. This understanding paves the way for spiritual and moral perfection, which lead to self-realization, which signified the summum bonum for Gandhi. The Gītā (18.20) speaks of self-realization as pure knowledge since through it the undivided One existing in all beings is realized. One who has this understanding will not harm in any way any creature; he will be engaged always in the well-being of all beings (Gītā: 5.25, 12.4).

In the next chapter titled “Bhagavad Gītā: Gandhi’s Moral and Spiritual Anchorage,” we will elaborate on the main message of the Gītā and the lessons Gandhi drew from this timeless spiritual classic.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Gītā provided the terra firma of *mokṣa* through self-realization; Raychand provided the role model of a life free from attachment and solely devoted to self-realization; the life examples of Shrivana Kumar, Harishchandra, and Prahlada provided the call to unconditional adherence to the truth; Tolstoy, Ruskin, and Thoreau contributed the necessary impetus for *satyāgraha* and nonviolence; and the *Rāmāyana* provided the inspiration to live a life of virtue and fidelity to one's vows. This was the stuff by which Gandhi's leadership was molded.

Gandhi recounts his debt to these great luminaries in the introduction to his work *Hind Swaraj* (Indian Home Rule): "Whilst the views expressed in '*Hind Swaraj*' are held by me, I have but endeavored humbly to follow Tolstoy, Ruskin, Thoreau, Emerson and other writers, besides the masters of Indian Philosophy."<sup>58</sup> His concept of *sarvodaya* (welfare of all) was directly based on the teachings of Ruskin. Gandhi set up many āshrams: two in South Africa and several in India. Phoenix Settlement (based on Ruskin's *Unto This Last*) and Tolstoy Farm (inspired by Tolstoy's ideas) were established in South Africa. Sābarmati Āshram, Ahmedabad, served as home base for Gandhi's activities from 1915 to 1933.<sup>59</sup>

All of Gandhi's teachers in life and spirit hold one thing in common—they had the courage to live according their convictions. There was no distinction between what they preached and what they practiced. This quality—*living the teachings*—became the hallmark of Gandhi's life and leadership. If there is one characteristic that sets him apart from most leaders of the past and the present, it is this. Since Gandhi practiced what he preached, he did not have to preach it. His very life became the personification of his ideals—a living testimony to steadfastness in truth and nonviolence. He became the living embodiment of the change he wanted to see in the world. "To be or not to be" was never an option for Gandhi.

### Essential Leadership Lessons

1. As leaders in the making, we all need exemplary role models who can awaken the best in us and inspire us to be what we can be.
2. Exemplary leaders mature slowly and steadily amidst the vicissitudes of life through myriad interactive processes of nature and nurture.
3. Good things take time. “The finest wood comes from the slowest growing trees.” Exemplary leaders are willing to work hard and wait.
4. Gandhi’s development as an exemplary leader took a lot of groundwork: 3 years in England, 21 years in South Africa, and 33 years in India! Gandhi hoed his garden till the very end of his life.
5. It has been well said that “Gandhi could fashion heroes out of common clay. His first and, undoubtedly, his most successful experiment was with himself.”
6. Research shows that to achieve success of the highest order, a person may have to suffer first. Dean Simonton’s studies in the field of genius, creativity, and leadership have shown that orphanhood (the loss of one or both parents) has spurred the development of eminent people in world history.
7. Leaders recognize that the most important issues confronting organizations and society at large are so profound and pervasive that they can only be resolved at the fundamental level of the human spirit—at the level of the authentic self.

## CHAPTER 4



# THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ: GANDHI'S MORAL AND SPIRITUAL ANCHORAGE

### INTRODUCTION

Among the key influences on Gandhi's life and thought, pride of place must go to the Bhagavad Gītā. It is well known that Gandhi modeled his life upon the teachings of the Gītā<sup>1</sup> and “constantly referred to it as his ‘spiritual dictionary,’ ‘the mother who never let him down,’ or his ‘*kāmdhenū*,’ ‘the cow that grants all wishes.’”<sup>2</sup> This book played a pivotal role in guiding, shaping, and solidifying his beliefs and actions. Gandhi's firm and sustained belief in spiritual freedom (*mokṣa*<sup>3</sup>) and self-realization was almost entirely shaped by the teachings of the Gītā. *Mokṣa* supplied the unifying force in and through all of Gandhi's activities, as he tells us in his autobiography,<sup>4</sup> and the Gītā's emphasis on self-realization and selfless service were the primary sources of inspiration for his life and leadership.

Prominent world leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa, the Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, and many others have drawn abiding inspiration from their spiritual roots and moral convictions. Contemporary leadership writers and thinkers such as John H. Maxwell, Max De Pree, C. Michael Thompson, James A. Autry, and Stephen R. Covey, to name just a few, have also underscored the moral and spiritual dimensions of leadership. That Gandhi considered the spiritual dimension as primary is evident from his autobiography:

What I want to achieve,—and what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years,—is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain *Mokṣha*. I live and move and have my being in pursuit of this goal. All that I do by way

of speaking and writing and all my ventures in the political field, are directed to this same end.<sup>5</sup>

Since spirituality without ethics is of little value,<sup>6</sup> Gandhi further clarifies that the existential experiments with truth that he is going to describe “are spiritual, or rather moral, for the *essence of religion is morality.*”<sup>7</sup>

In this chapter, we focus on the core message of the Gītā and the practical lessons in leadership that Gandhi drew from his lifelong study of this timeless spiritual classic. But, first, we will consider the context and the content of this manual of action and liberation that exercised such a singular hold on Gandhi’s mind and heart.

### FROM BATTLEFIELD TO BOARDROOM

It has been observed that the Bhagavad Gītā is as relevant in the boardrooms of the twenty-first century as it was on the battlefield of ancient times.<sup>8</sup> Consisting of 700 aphoristic verses in 18 chapters, it unfolds the whole spectacle of human drama, full of challenges met, victories won, and freedom attained. It teaches us how to emerge from a state of utter apathy, gloom, sorrow, or dejection to a state of perfect engagement, understanding, clarity, wisdom, renewed strength, and triumph. The Bhagavad Gītā (a part of the great Indian epic, the *Mahābhārata*) can be approached today as a powerful tool for change management and as a catalyst for organizational transformation. It teaches us how to harmonize the needs of the individual with the needs of the society and, by extension, how to harmonize the needs of employees with those of the organization. It presents an inside-out leadership development approach based on self-knowledge and self-mastery, the two main qualities of authentic self-leadership.

Thus, the Gītā contains timeless leadership lessons for contemporary organizations. Modern leadership concepts such as vision and mission, motivation and empowerment, self-awareness and self-mastery, excellence in work, ethical means and righteous ends, attaining meaning and fulfillment, service before self, and ensuring the well-being of everyone are all lucidly discussed in this text. Likewise, we find that many contemporary constructs such as authentic leadership, servant leadership, and values-based leadership were already conceived, albeit notionally, in the Bhagavad Gītā thousands of years ago. Peter Senge, one of the key management thinkers of our time, has quoted the Gītā in two of his celebrated books, *The Fifth Discipline* and *Presence*.<sup>9</sup>

## OLD TEXT, NEW CONTEXT

Although traditionally interpreted as a religious-spiritual text, the Gītā encompasses great practical life lessons for modern times. Its message fosters the holistic development of human personality in all its dimensions (physical–psychological, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual) by providing guidance on the three essential spiritual practices: “training the mind,” “transforming the passions,” and “guarding the heart.”<sup>10</sup> The Gītā unfolds as an infallible guide for those higher-order individuals who *externally* live a life of full engagement with the world, while *internally* always remaining steadfastly anchored in the wisdom of their Higher Self. Its nonsectarian message speaks endearingly to people from all walks of life who are in search of abiding answers to the fundamental questions of life. The universal message of the Gītā is comprehensive in its outlook and concrete in its suggestions. It is a textbook of enlightenment applicable to all humanity.

This crest-jewel of India’s scriptures holds a special place in the world’s sacred and philosophical literature and has wielded an enduring influence on the spirit of humankind. According to a preeminent modern Sanskrit scholar, J. A. B. van Buitenen, “No other Sanskrit text approaches the Bhagavad Gītā in the influence it has exerted in the West.”<sup>11</sup> A. L. Basham and other Sanskrit scholars agree that the significance of the Bhagavad Gītā in India is comparable to that of the New Testament in Western civilization.<sup>12</sup> Noting its widespread appeal and popularity, Robert N. Minor, a modern exegetical commentator, states that the Bhagavad Gītā has become “the most translated text after the Bible.”<sup>13</sup> Count Hermann Keyserling, a German philosopher, hailed it as “perhaps the most beautiful work of the literature of the world.”<sup>14</sup>

Over the centuries, many have expressed their sincere appreciation for its perennial appeal. According to Aldous Huxley, “The Gītā is one of the clearest and most comprehensive summaries of Perennial Philosophy ever to have been made. Hence its enduring value, not only for Indians but for all mankind. The Bhagavad Gītā is perhaps the most systematic scriptural statement of the Perennial Philosophy.”<sup>15</sup> The Gītā is a spiritual text with a universal message, completely free from schism and sectarian dogma. As Scott Teitsworth has rightly observed:

There is no vengeful God in it, only a benign and loving principle, called Brahman, or the Absolute. It is replete with the finest spiritual advice tendered without compunction or guilt. . . . There are no chosen or cursed souls, only more or less damaged and confused ones. The game here is to rectify the damage and dispel the confusion with clear thinking and action. . . . In learning from the Gita, we have to find and express our own inner motivation.<sup>16</sup>

It is important to remember that though in its ultimate bidding the Gītā is essentially a manual for the attainment of spiritual freedom (*mokṣaśāstra*)—as Śaṅkarācārya, its greatest commentator and exponent, constantly reminds us—yet in its practical aspect it is also a great manual for living. The Gītā is not a world-abnegating esoteric treatise on spirituality. As A. Parthasarathy has rightly noted, “The Bhagavad Gītā is a technique, a skill for dynamic living, not a retirement plan.”<sup>17</sup> It teaches us, here and now, how to live a life imbued with service, contribution, and meaning, free from the trammels of desire, anger, and greed: the great art of seeking the highest spiritual good amidst the ordinary practical matters—the alchemy of supreme fulfillment through secular behavior. There is no shying away from any responsibility or any effective action, as long as it is done with the right attitude and in the right manner.

At what point of one’s life one should pursue the goal of *mokṣa* or self-realization? Many believe that spiritual quest is something to be pursued during the last phase of one’s life. Dispelling this popular “superstition” that self-realization is to be attained only in the last stages of life, Gandhi tells us in his autobiography that people who defer it until then “attain not self-realization but old age amounting to a second and pitiable childhood, living as a burden on this earth.”<sup>18</sup> This serves as a strong warning to those who think that spirituality is something to be pursued only at the end of one’s life. “Seek ye the good things of the spirit,” we are told; the rest will either not matter or, we are assured, will be supplied to us.<sup>19</sup>

### The Setting of the Gītā

The grand scheme of the Gītā is to evoke the eternal existential dilemma—the choice between duty and desire, the *śreyas* (the right) and the *preyas* (the pleasant). Although the Gītā forms a part of the *Mahābhārata*, it is a profound spiritual and philosophical text in its own right. Meaning literally “Lord’s Song,” the Gītā unfolds as a dialog between Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the divine incarnation, and his warrior-disciple, Arjuna, on the eve of a historic battle of cosmic proportions.

The setting of the Gītā is the austere battlefield of Kurukṣetra, the land of Kurus, where the armies of the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas, who are first cousins, stand ready to fight. After living 12 years in exile, and a subsequent year incognito (*ajñātavāsa*), the Pāṇḍavas, according to the terms earlier agreed, demanded the return of half of their kingdom from their eldest Kaurava cousin Duryodhana—the kingdom they had lost in a game of dice. But Duryodhana flatly refused to give back even as much land as would accommodate the tip of a needle (let alone half the kingdom). Thus a war between the

Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas became inevitable and both sides began preparations for it.

As Arjuna stands on the battlefield just as the war is about to start, he begins to have doubts about fighting his own cousins, his elders, and his teachers. Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who is with Arjuna as his charioteer, addresses Arjuna's feelings of conflict, and this discourse comprises the teachings of the Gītā.

### **Gandhi Moment: A Warrior of Spirit, Spirit of a Warrior**

Very early in his life, Gandhi realized that in order to serve a cause higher than himself, his own personal transformation was necessary. To become what is now widely known as a “servant leader,” he realized that he needed to get his self out of the way, to get his ego out of the way and put service before self. In the concluding section of his autobiography, he wrote, “I must reduce myself to zero.”<sup>20</sup>

We think of warriors training themselves for battle and all the disciplines they must undergo by way of endurance training. From his autobiography and other writings, we gather that Gandhi had to undergo similar training and discipline to effect his spiritual transformation and become a peaceful warrior of spirit. And he had a great training manual to follow: the Bhagavad Gītā! The warrior metaphor is very appropriate here since the Gītā is a dialog between the warrior-prince, Arjuna, and Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Lord within.

Effective leaders understand the vital difference between a fighter and a warrior. A fighter always thinks in terms of *ends*, namely, winning or losing; a warrior focuses on perfecting the *means*. At every failure, the fighter gets into the blame game and contemplates quitting; the warrior confronts the enemy within and perseveres. When a master-archer fails to hit the target, he does not blame the target. He steps back, works more steadfastly on his technique, and comes back—doubly renewed.

### **The Methodology of the Gītā**

The Gītā expounds a threefold path to self-realization: (1) the path of selfless action (*karma yoga*); (2) the path of devotion (*bhakti yoga*); and (3) the path of knowledge (*jñāna yoga*). This division of disciplines conforms to the three powers human beings are endowed with—the power to do, the power to know, and the power to accept (or to believe); they use the physical body to “do,” the intellect to “know,” and the heart to “believe.” Individuals have different aptitudes in following these paths: a

person of action is better fit for *karma yoga*; a person of intellect for *jñāna yoga*; and a person with feelings of faith for *bhakti yoga*.<sup>21</sup>

It is important to remember that these disciplines are not optional; we cannot pick and choose between them. The Gītā stresses the mutual relationship and the unity of the three disciplines in that they mark essential stages of progress on the spiritual path. Self-knowledge (*ātma-jñāna*) is not possible without first going through the self-purifying disciplines of selfless action (*karma yoga*) and unswerving devotion (*bhakti yoga*); and the paths of action and devotion are incomplete without the path of knowledge (*jñāna yoga*). Actions performed without attachment to the results, and with devotion, purify the mind of the seeker. Only a mind which is purged of impurities (*mala*) such as selfish desire, anger, and greed, and which has attained equanimity and one-pointedness (*samatā and ekāgratā*), is ready to receive the transcendental knowledge of the Higher Self (*ātma-jñānam*).

### Ethics: The Foundation of Human Conduct

In the scheme of the Bhagavad Gītā, ethical conduct (*dharma*) furnishes the essential foundation of the quest for spiritual freedom; the scriptures do not cleanse the ethically impure. It is interesting to note that the very first syllable of the first word of the first verse (*śloka*) of the Gītā—“*dharmakṣetre*” (1.1<sup>22</sup>)—and the very last syllable of the last word of the last *śloka* of the Gītā—“*mamā*” (18.78)—together form the word “*dharma*.” Hence, *dharma* (more specifically, *dharmateuddharyatevaiti dharma*—that which supports, sustains, and uplifts) is the province of the entire Gītā! The opening words of the Gītā (1.1) are *dharmakṣetrekuruṁkṣetre*. *Kuruṁkṣetre* literally means “the field of actions.” And *dharmakṣetre* means that field of moral principle which sustains everything. So, the Gītā is about the domain of our actions, actions guided by the moral law or principle that sustains everything within the cosmic sphere.

In the Gītā’s terminology, the selfless performance of actions as a service or as an offering to the Supreme sustains the cosmic system. In turn, such actions purify the mind and make it a fit vessel for the reception of self-knowledge which alone is the true means to spiritual freedom. Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the teacher par excellence in the Gītā, does not merely want to make us philosophically learned but wants to help us realize the Truth *experientially*—not to merely *instruct* but to make us truly *wise* and *free*.

Thus, underscoring the role of ethics in life, the Gītā upholds a vital competency that is sorely needed in the modern world plagued by rampant financial frauds and inveterate moral ineptitude. It has been rightly observed that “ethics lies at the very heart of leadership.”<sup>23</sup> When leaders forget this vital point, leadership regenerates into a narcissistic pursuit of self-aggrandizement to the detriment of the society. In the final reckoning, “the only true leadership is values-based leadership.”<sup>24</sup>

The spirituality of the Gītā is firmly rooted in ethical values. There is no progress on the path of spirituality if there is no harmony and unity between our *vicāra* (thought process) and *ācāra* (conduct). Without ethical purity, the true message of the Gītā will elude us.

### From Apathy to Engagement

The Gītā starts with temporary apathy (“I will not fight,” *nayotsye*: 2.9) on the part of its warrior-hero, Arjuna, and ends with his promise of full engagement in the fulfillment of his duty (“I will do thy bidding,” *karisyevacanamtava*: 18.73). Thus, Śrī Kṛṣṇa demonstrates leadership qualities in evolving Arjuna’s thoughts and guiding him to successful engagement in the just war. The whole Gītā is dedicated to enlightening us, through the example of Arjuna, about how to fully engage in our duties efficiently, effectively, and ethically while at the same time ensuring our highest goal (*nīśreyas*), that is, spiritual freedom (*mokṣa*). Through the practice of selfless work (*niṣkāma karma*)<sup>25</sup> for the well-being of all (*sarvabhūtabhite*: 5.25), and by developing steadfast wisdom, the Gītā teaches us how to discover the sacred in life while remaining fully engaged in secular activities.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, the key lesson of the Gītā is how to transition from a state of inertia to one of righteous action, from a state of alienation to one of self-confidence in the ultimate performance of ethical action. By leading from within, Śrī Kṛṣṇa inspires the warrior-hero Arjuna to engage in his rightful duty, cultivating in himself mental equilibrium and objectivity to deal with any situation or crisis. The Gītā’s ideal is not indifference to the world, but love and compassion born out of identifying oneself with all beings.

### Doing the Right Thing

The Gītā starts with the classic management dilemma: What is the right thing to do? Although Arjuna has undertaken the challenge of a just war, fully aware of the gravity and the implications of

the decision, at the final hour when the battle is just about to begin, he realizes the horror of the situation—that in this war, he has to shoot arrows at his close relatives and teachers. He is conflicted between his natural duty as a warrior and instinctive kindness as a human being. His warrior nature is overcome by faint-heartedness and his mind becomes confused about his allotted duty (*kārṣṇayadoṣopahatasvabhāvaḥ . . . dharmasamm-ūḍhacetāḥ*: 2.7). Arjuna beseeches Śrī Kṛṣṇa to guide him about the best course of action (*yacchreyakṣyānniścitambrūhi tan me*: 2.7) as he does not see any way out of this grief which is drying up his senses (*ucchoṣanamindriyāṇām*: 2.8).

Warren Bennis, a preeminent leadership scholar, has observed, “Leaders are people who do the right thing; managers are people who do things right.”<sup>27</sup> While this may be a bit of an oversimplification—*since both leaders and managers need to do things right as well as do the right thing*—doing the right thing remains the perennial leadership challenge. But doing the right thing presupposes knowledge of what the right thing is in the first place. *This is exactly the point where the Gītā begins.* What is the utmost right thing to do in any given situation? Surely, the answer to this enigmatic question holds the key to many a management conundrum. By helping us focus on the highest good in all we do, the Gītā unfolds as an extended ode to the attainment of the ultimate good (*nīśreyas*)—the knowledge of our oneness with the Ultimate Reality (*ātma-jñānam*, which is *Brahma-ātma-aikyam*).

### Mind: Our Greatest Friend and Foe

The Gītā reminds us that an unruly mind is our greatest foe, and a stable mind our greatest friend. Hence great emphasis is placed on self-restraint and mental discipline. It is common knowledge that mental strength and determination are the keys to leadership success; leaders who are mentally weak and wayward cannot achieve a durable and consistent organizational vision or mission.

The outcome of an unrestrained mind is a life given to selfish desire, anger, and greed. The Buddha also warned his disciples of these three mental traps. All wisdom traditions of the world are in agreement that self-centered desire is the source of all sorrow and evil. The Gītā calls desire, anger and greed the triple gates of hell, which bring about one’s downfall (*trividhaṃnarakasyedamdvāramnāśanamātmanah*: 16.21). It clarifies that (unsatisfied) desire is the cause of greed as well as anger. The reason the Gītā lays so much importance on curtailing one’s desires is because all evil proceeds from self-centered desires. A person who is selfish cannot serve others; in fact,

such a person becomes a bane to the society. Therefore, according to the Gītā, a leader must first conquer desire if he or she is to serve others.

The three traps (excessive desire, anger, and greed) are present in every dysfunctional organization, manifested to the highest degree in its leaders. Elsewhere in the Gītā, Kṛṣṇa explains that attachment breeds desire, and from desire (unfulfilled) ensues anger; anger clouds judgment, and when judgment is beclouded, reasoning power is lost; and with the loss of reasoning, one falls from one's status as human being (2.62–63). A leader should, therefore, manage his anger well and should not let anger gain control over him. Mastering the emotion of anger is a not an easy task, as many sages past and present have reminded us. Aristotle expressed it deftly: "Anybody can become angry, that is easy; but to be angry with the right person, and to the right degree, and at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way, that is not within everybody's power and is not easy."<sup>28</sup>

If leadership is an extension of who we are, then leaders first need to manage themselves before they can aspire to lead others. Underscoring the importance of self-leadership, the Bhagavad Gītā further stresses that, when facing a crisis, leaders must elevate themselves by self-effort (*uddharedātmanātmānam*: 6.5). This requires a deep understanding of the workings of the mind. For those who have conquered their mind, the mind is the best of friends, but for those who have failed to control their mind, the mind will be their greatest enemy (*ātmaivahyātmanobandhurātmaivaripurātmanaḥ*: 6.5). An untrained mind is very weak and unstable and cannot carry out any task, let alone lead. Arjuna tells Śrī Kṛṣṇa that his mind is unsteady, restless, and yet very powerful, and as difficult to control as the wind. Śrī Kṛṣṇa agrees that the mind is not easy to control; however, he says that it is possible to control the mind by constant practice and detachment or dispassion (*abhyāsena . . . vairāgyeṇaca*: 6.35).

Leaders need to employ their intellect effectively to direct their mind. In this regard, another Indian wisdom text, *Kathopanīṣad* 1.3.3–4, likens the human body to a chariot (*rathakalpanā*) to describe the position of the individual self (*ātmā*) vis-à-vis the senses (*indriya*), mind (*manas*), and intellect (*buddhi*). The mind represents the reins and the five senses are the horses. The objects perceived by the senses chart the chariot's path. The intellect is the driver and the self as the passenger acts as the enjoyer or sufferer in the association of the mind and senses.<sup>29</sup> Whereas an ordinary leader is constantly driven by a wayward mind and unruly desires for sense objects, a wise leader uses the power of intelligence to discern between what is pleasant (*preyas*) and what is right (*śreyas*).

## Anger Management

Generally speaking, many methods are recommended to control anger, with varying degrees of effectiveness. Most people recommend the “delay tactic”—not to respond at all in the heat of anger. That is effective only if one remembers this counsel of perfection before the onset of the fit of anger. The *Gītā* says that to control anger we first need to pay attention to its root cause. Anger arises when someone stands in the way of our desired object—that is, anger ensues from (unfulfilled) desire. And attachment to things, ideas, and opinions lie at the root of desire. Basically, to control anger, we should first guard and calm our mind. If our mind remains in a state of calm then no negative emotions can provoke it. The easiest way to be peaceful in mind is to let our mind rest content within its own inner sanctuary rather than constantly hankering after the worldly objects outside.

We should also consider cultivating a daily practice of some form of meditation, since in meditation the mind becomes naturally calm and tranquil. In addition, one needs to be patient with oneself as well as with others. Practicing loving kindness and forgiveness toward all helps us develop understanding and tolerance. One of the most effective techniques to manage anger is to keep in mind the acronym “F.I.R.”—frequency, intensity, recovery. To manage anger effectively, we have to work patiently on reducing the frequency of the anger, its intensity, as well as the recovery period.<sup>30</sup>

### Gandhi Moment: Transforming Anger into Light

The *Gītā* (16.21) calls anger one of the triple gates to hell—desire and greed being the other two. Gandhi knew from experience that anger conserved becomes compassion that can be harnessed in the service of others. “I have learnt through bitter experience,” he tells us, “the one supreme lesson to conserve my anger, and as heat conserved is transmuted into energy, even so our anger controlled can be transmuted into a power which can move the world.”<sup>31</sup>

Gandhi once told young Arun Gandhi, his grandson, that uncontrolled anger can be deadly like lightning; however, when channeled properly, it can serve to illuminate our life like a lamp:

Have I told you how anger is like electricity. . . . Anger can strike like lightning, and split a living tree in two. . . . Or it can be channeled, transformed. A switch can be flipped, and it can shed light like a lamp. . . . Then anger can illuminate. It can turn the darkness into light.<sup>32</sup>

The Gītā categorically states:

*śaknotīhaivayaḥsoḍbhūṃprākṣarīravimokṣanāt/  
kāmakrodhodbhavaṃvegamaṣayuktahsasukhīnarah//5.23*

Only those who are able to withstand the impulses of lust and anger arising in the body are integrated (*yuktaḥ*) and live in joy.

## EMPOWERING VS. DISEMPOWERING WORK CULTURES

In order to understand human behavior better, the Gītā makes a special reference to the psychological make-up of individuals as comprising three basic qualities—*sattva* (purity/goodness) that brings truth/harmony; *rajas* (movement/passion) that kindles action/activity, and *tamas* (ignorance/inertia) that leads to delusion/confusion. The key to understanding this tripartite composition of human nature is to understand that no individual has absolute *sattvic*, *rajasic*, or *tamasic* qualities. Depending upon our inherited tendencies and current mode of living, several permutations and combinations are possible across this broad spectrum of psychological types. This knowledge fosters understanding, tolerance, and patience. At the same time, it provides guidance to effect change based on fuller information and greater understanding.

In chapter 16 of the Bhagavad Gītā, we find very practical guidance on building an empowering (*daivi*) work culture—characterized by fearlessness, purity, self-restraint, sacrifice, straightforwardness, non-violence, truthfulness, tranquility, gentleness, modesty, forgiveness, and the absence of fault-finding, greed, ostentatiousness, envy, and pride (16.1–3). Leaders should strive to embody these qualities and to foster an environment where these qualities can be nurtured. A strong work ethic marked by these empowering qualities goes a long way to achieve workplace excellence and harmony. Similarly, the Gītā goes on to describe what may be called a disempowering (*āsuri*) work culture—characterized by hypocrisy, arrogance, self-conceit, anger, harshness, and lack of discrimination between the real and unreal, duty and nonduty (16.4).

It is to be noted that a strong work ethic is not enough to build an empowering work culture; after all, a hard-core criminal also has a very strong work ethic. What is needed is a *work ethic* guided by *ethics in work*.

The deeper message here is that we should not focus on the faults of others; rather, we should tackle our own shortcomings. A too critical, carping attitude toward our fellow-beings is a source of much unhappiness. “If you want peace of mind,” says Sri Sarada Devi, “do not find fault with others.”<sup>33</sup> Swami Dayananda, a modern Advaita teacher, says

that the purpose of knowing about these values is not self-judgment or judgment of others. “All kinds of people make up this world. You want to change others so that you can be free, but it never works that way. . . . People are what they are because they have their own backgrounds, and they cannot be otherwise.”<sup>34</sup> Understanding this fosters tolerance, empathy, and consideration that lead to all-round wellness.

The Gītā teaches a higher level of accountability based on one’s own innate duty (*svadharma*). The very *raison d’être* of the teachings of the Gītā was to reawaken Arjuna to his innate sense of responsibility, which he had temporarily lost due to delusion born of ignorance (*ajñānasammohat*: 18.72). The higher accountability is garnered by renouncing egoism (*amānitvam*: 13.7) and cultivating humility, teamwork, dignity, sharing, cooperation, compassion, harmony, and trust; sacrificing lower impulses for higher needs; and seeing others in ourselves and ourselves in others (*sarvātma bhāva*). These are precisely the qualities required to build an empowering work culture in any organizational setting.

### Do Your Duty (*Karma Yoga*)

Teachings regarding *karma yoga* are present throughout the Gītā,<sup>35</sup> although chapters 2–5 specifically deal with this path, starting with two succinct verses in chapter 2:

Your right is to work only, but never to its results. Let not the fruit of action be your motive, nor let your attachment be for inaction. Do your duty to the best of your ability with your mind steadfast in equanimity, abandoning worry and selfish attachment to the results, and remaining equanimous in both success and failure. This equanimity of mind is called yoga. (2.47–48)

Śrī Kṛṣṇa presents all the foundational elements of *karma yoga* in these two well-known verses. The first (2.47) presents an existential fact: we have no control over the results of our actions. Even our control over our own actions is very limited, given that our actions are governed by the force of our nature. However, so that we do not therefore resign ourselves to inaction, the verse clarifies that the teaching here is about renunciation of results and not renunciation of actions themselves; that is, renunciation *in* action and not *of* action. Verse 2.48 exhorts us to perform our actions to the best of our capacity, abandoning any concern for their results, remaining equanimous in both success and failure. This evenness of mind (*samatvam*) is favorable as well as

adverse conditions is called yoga. However, remaining unconcerned about the results is not a license for sloppiness. One has to perform one's actions remaining steadfast in the yoga of equanimity. This yoga is in fact the dexterity (*kauślam*) in the performance of actions (2.50), which works in two ways: it frees actions from their inherent binding power, while at the same time transforming actions into an effective means of spiritual freedom.

It is important to note that *samatā* (equanimity) is the “fulcrum” on which all the teachings of the Gītā are balanced. Wherever Śrī Kṛṣṇa has mentioned the highest peaks of the paths of action, knowledge, and devotion, He has very carefully interspersed “*samatā*” in their consummation (2.48, 53, 57; 5.6, 18–20; 12.13–19; 14.24, 25; 18.10, 26). So, *samatā* is the crest-jewel of perfection (*siddhi*) in all the paths to God-realization. All virtues obtain in a mind that has cultivated equanimity. Whatever the spiritual practice, if evenness of mind (*samatā*) is not attained, the goal is still far away.

Chapter 3 of the Gītā, specifically designated as the path of action (*karma yoga*), states that one attains the Supreme by performing actions effectively, without attachment, as a matter of duty (3.19). Only actions in the spirit of renunciation do not bind (3.9). The wise, therefore, act for the solidarity of the world at large (*lokasaṅgraham*, 3.20, 3.25). Then come two verses that provide perhaps the greatest *raison d'être* of the path of knowledge (*jñāna yoga*):

All actions are performed by *guṇas* (qualities) of primordial nature (*Prakṛti*). One whose mind is deluded by egoism thinks, “I am the doer.” But one, with true insight into the respective domains of *guṇas* and action, knowing that *guṇas* as senses merely move among *guṇas* as objects, does not become attached. (3.27–28)

These verses state that all actions are performed by the interplay of three qualities (*guṇas*)—purity (*sattva*), activity (*rajas*), and inertia (*tamas*). Deluded by our sense of ego (*ahaṅkāra*), we take ourselves to be the “doers.” But those who understand the respective domains of these *guṇas* and their actions do not get attached to them: The knower of truth, [being] centered [in the self] should think, “I do nothing at all”—though seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, going, sleeping, breathing, speaking, letting go, holding, opening and closing the eyes—*convinced that it is the senses alone that move among sense objects* (5.8–9). *Yogis* perform actions unattached, says the Gītā, for the purification of their mind (*yoginah karma kurvanti saṅgamtyaktvātmaśuddhaye*: 5.11).

This is then the gist of *karma yoga*: perform all actions in the spirit of service to the Lord (*Īśvara-arpanabhāvanā*) and accept all results as gracious gifts from the Lord (*Īśvara-prasādashāvanā*). In fine, the alchemy of *karma yoga* lies in performing actions without the tag of doership; this is also the master-key to *jñāna yoga*. When actions are performed with the spirit of self-renunciation and by way of submission to divine will, so that one remains unattached inwardly while being fully engaged in actions outwardly, they serve as harbingers of sagehood—the realization of one’s highest self.

### FROM CONSUMER TO CONTRIBUTOR: TURNING THE COSMIC WHEEL

The *Gītā* is a practical manual of living. It lays down the guidelines for leading a meaningful life—a life marked by goodness and contribution. What makes our life purposeful and meaningful? What is the essence of being good and doing good? What does it mean to grow in goodness? How can one grow from being a consumer to becoming a contributor? The *Gītā* holds the keys to all these existential questions. It recommends that we approach life as a network of mutual interdependencies in which everyone has to contribute their allotted share. And the touchstone is not mere human welfare but the welfare of all beings (*sarvabhūtahite*: 5.25; 12.4). Only then we can ensure the preservation of the universe. This understanding holds the key today to a sustainable future for all.

In order to grow spiritually, one has to convert one’s whole life into an offering to the Divine, as a cosmic sacrifice (*yajñārthātkarmano*: 3.9). According to the *Gītā* (3.10–3.13), all beings are a part of the cosmic wheel of creation, sustained by the principle of mutual contribution and mutual maintenance. Therefore, every work should be performed in a spirit of sacrifice which sustains all beings, in a spirit of offering to the Universal Lord. They are great thieves who do not help in the turning of this cosmic wheel of sacrifice (3.12).

The *Gītā* (18.5) mandates threefold acts of sacrifice (*yajña*), charity (*dānam*), and austerity (*tapas*) and considers these as the “purifiers of the wise.” “*Yajña*” literally means a sacrifice or an offering. The highest form of offering is living a life of sincerity—a life led by being good and doing good. A sincere life is characterized by doing what we love and loving what we have to do. “*Dānam*” means charity and denotes much more than writing a check to a favorite cause or organization. At the deepest level, it means the gift of “expressed love.” “*Tapas*” means austerity or discipline. The *Gītā* talks about several kinds

of discipline. The most important is “*vāk tapas*”—“discipline of speech.” There are five such disciplines of speech that the Gītā recommends:

*anudvegakaraṁvākyamṣatyamṁpriyahitamṁcayat/  
svādhyāyābhyasanamṁcaivavāñmayamṁ tapa ucyate//17.15*

That speech which causes no mental anguish (disturbance) to anyone, which is truthful, agreeable, and beneficial, as well as the practice of study of the sacred books is considered to be the discipline of speech.

Gandhi’s whole life was defined by the threefold acts of sacrifice, charity, and austerity. He converted his whole life into an offering to the Divine, devoted all his time and energy to service, and led all his life in self-discipline and self-restraint. This inspired trust, faith, and hope in those he led. Gandhi’s dedication to selfless service is one of the keys to understanding his influence as a leader.

### Beware the Imposter Ego

Misplaced ego has dire personal and professional consequences: it is the greatest enemy of workplace amity and harmony. Most psychological and emotional stress is caused by our excessive self-centeredness. Understanding the workings of the imposter ego and thereby rendering it ineffective is the first step on the path of wisdom. In chapter 13 of the Bhagavad Gītā, where Śrī Kṛṣṇa begins to describe the marks or means of true knowledge, we see “absence of self-pride” (13.7) listed as the very first mark. In the next verse (13.8), Śrī Kṛṣṇa again states: “and absence of egotism also” (*ahamkāra’evaca*). Note the word “also” after the word “egotism.” Of the 20 marks of true knowledge listed in verses 13.7–11, the word “also” is appended only to egotism/self-pride (*ahamkāra*). Something to take serious note of and ponder over deeply!

As long as one harbors a sense of distinction/superiority, regardless of the reason—justified or unjustified—one will labor in vain, not much unlike the ox that turns the oil-press going back and forth. When God is all there is (*Vasudevaḥ Sarvam: 7.19*), where is the need for entertaining any feelings of distinction or superiority—no matter what the justification may be? Those who are truly awakened become aware of the fact that “God is all there is”—and that God includes all, even the ones who may not be as superior as themselves, in their estimation! This knowledge fosters amity, understanding, and harmony

in all settings and removes the conflict inherent in the “game of one-up-ness” that plagues most human interaction.

### Lead by Example

Śrī Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that those in leadership positions should act responsibly, since whatever standards or example the leader sets, people in general will follow (3.21). Leaders’ actions do speak louder than their words. In essence, leaders are the brand ambassadors of their organization. Humanity has yet to discover a more effective way to bring about change and lead others than by setting an example. All great leaders lead by example. Gandhi inspired emulation not so much by his professed set of values and beliefs as by the exemplary nature of his life and conduct. *He made his life his message*. This virtue of “being the change” that we wish to see in the world became a Gandhian hallmark—his most precious legacy for which he is always remembered. He was a rare one who did what is most difficult: he practiced what he preached.

The Gītā states that the wise leader acts to set an example to the masses; so that the unwary do not go astray (3.26); for the unification of the world at large (*lokasaṃgraham*: 3.20, 3.25); for the welfare of all beings (*sarvabhūtahite*: 5.25); and for the purification of the self (*ātmasuddhaye*: 5.11). These four goals together furnish a touchstone for leadership success in any setting. Leaders do their duty for duty’s sake (cf. Kant’s Duty Ethics), to set an example for others, to bring communities together, for the well-being of all; and above all, for the purification of the mind and the heart. No higher teaching on the sublimity of a leader’s work ethic can be conceived.

In the ultimate analysis, leadership is not about changing outer conditions or others. More often than not, there is not much that we can do to change what is external to us. However, we have full control over our own conduct. “When we are no longer able to change a situation,” writes psychotherapist Viktor E. Frankl, “we are challenged to change ourselves.”<sup>36</sup> And when we are able to do that, in due course of time, we are also able to change the situation, unexpectedly. This is the alchemy of all social change.

### From Self-doubt to Self-knowledge

The Gītā “begins on a note of self-doubt and its culmination is the restoration of full confidence based on self-knowledge.”<sup>37</sup> It teaches us that the fundamental human problem is the lack of self-knowledge

and the resultant extrovertedness of our search for happiness and the mistaken way we relate to the world. In all our quests, we approach people, objects, and situations through the prism of our likes and dislikes (*rāga-dvēṣa*), which leads to attachment or aversion. Attachment leads to sorrow and sorrow leads to delusion, which in turn compounds our misery. When self-knowledge (*ātam-jñāna*) dawns, we realize that whatever we have been seeking is already within us. It is in fact our own very nature or self.

The Gītā identifies *kāma*, a state of constant desiring and wanting, as life's fundamental problem. This feeling of lack springs from a mistaken sense of inadequacy about oneself, and leads to a constant aspiring toward the objects of desire in an attempt to fill the void. The feeling of fascination for an object (*viśaya*) in the mistaken belief that it can give one security and happiness is called *śobhanādhyāsa* in Vedānta. The proper resolution of this problem is to be found in understanding oneself, through self-inquiry and contemplation, to be the full and complete self (*ātman*). Such knowledge enables one to act in the world with a deep sense of peace and inner fulfillment.

Self-knowledge also helps us to transcend the egocentric little individual self and develop it to the higher consciousness of the Eternal Self, and ultimately identify with the Supreme Self, that is, *Puruṣottama*. This is what is meant by being *ātmanvān* (2.45), possessing the real self, or being unitively self-possessed. According to the Gītā, no action is genuine unless it is performed in the full wakefulness of self-knowledge. Self-knowledge transforms our motivation and liberates us from the narrow confines of self-centered action to the freedom of serving others. Through this rediscovery of our intrinsic freedom, we are also able to experience the calm bliss of the fullness of our real self and intuit the harmonious oneness of all existence. When the false divisions and distinctions based on our narrow personal likes and dislikes disappear, we are able to extend our benevolence without preference or prejudice in all directions, and our existence benefits the whole universe.

Our very existence then becomes an offering to the Supreme, a celebration of the Whole. And our feet get firmly planted on the path that leads to peace, happiness, and liberation. True happiness is that which puts an end to our existential sorrow, grief, and fears. It brings peace and bliss in our mind. Any pleasurable pursuit may give us momentary gratification; we experience once again the sense of lack, or dissatisfaction, later on. Happiness is that which ends all sorrow, and removes all grief (*duḥkhasaṃyogaviyogam*: 6.23). As long as

it is dependent on something, it cannot be true happiness. The Gītā tells us that without self-knowledge, no matter how much we have in terms of external possessions, self-fulfillment will always elude us.

### A Dictionary of Daily Conduct

It is now well known that Gandhi regarded the Gītā as his primary go-to spiritual reference book, to which he constantly turned for daily guidance and solace.<sup>38</sup> Writing for his weekly journal *Young India* in 1925, he tells us:

I find a solace in the *Bhagavadgītā* that I miss even in the Sermon on the Mount. When disappointment stares me in the face and all alone I see not one ray of light, I go back to the *Bhagavadgītā*. I find a verse here and a verse there, and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming tragedies—and my life has been full of external tragedies—and if they have left no visible or indelible scar on me, I owe it all to the teaching of the *Bhagavadgītā*.<sup>39</sup>

In no uncertain words, Gandhi describes how the Gītā has helped him in dealing with the “slings and arrows” of life and establishes the practical utility of its teachings. However, what is not generally known is that

Gandhi not only wrote a verse-by-verse translation of the Gītā (*Anāsaktiyoga*), but also delivered 218 discourses on it, compiled a comprehensive glossary (giving meanings) of words and phrases in the Gītā (*Gītāpadārthakōṣa*), wrote 18 letters from jail on each chapter of the Gītā (*Gītābōdha*), . . . and, above and beyond all this referred to the study, teachings, and relevance of the Gītā (often citing specific verses) about 1200 times in his articles, letters, speeches, and discussions as recorded in the *Collected Works of Mahātmā Gandhi*.<sup>40</sup>

Even at his first acquaintance with the book while he was still a law student in England in 1889, the Bhagavad Gītā struck him “as one of priceless worth.”<sup>41</sup> It became for him, as he tells us in his autobiography, the “book *par excellence* for the knowledge of Truth.”<sup>42</sup> Gandhi’s mother passed away shortly before his return to India from England in 1891. Later he referred to the Gītā as his beneficent “mother”: “The Gītā has been a mother to me ever since I became first acquainted with it in 1889. I turn to it for guidance in every difficulty, and the desired guidance has always been forthcoming.”<sup>43</sup> He regarded the Gītā as his “dictionary of daily reference”<sup>44</sup> and it never failed to provide him guidance and solace in moments of doubt, difficulty, or gloom. He

translated the Gītā into his native Gujarati and pondered over it incessantly until its message became inscribed on the tablet of his heart.

Soon the Gītā became “an infallible guide of conduct”<sup>45</sup> for Gandhi and he began to pattern his whole life on its lofty teachings. To put into practice the concepts that he gleaned from the Gītā text, such as *aparigraha* (nonpossession) and *samabhāva* (equanimity), became his constant challenge: “How was one to divest oneself of all possessions? Was not the body itself possession enough? Was I to give up all I had and follow Him?” As he wrestled with such questions, straight came the answer in the form of inner renunciation: “I could not follow Him unless I gave up all I had.”<sup>46</sup> He let his insurance policy lapse, gave all he had saved up to that moment to his brother, and pledged all future savings, if any, to “be utilized for the benefit of community.”<sup>47</sup> Such was the sincerity of this pilgrim of soul who gave up all that was inessential and extra on the journey to the Divine.

### **Gandhi Moment: Knowledge to Conviction to Paradigm Shift**

What is the process that transforms knowledge into conviction and finally leads to a shift in perspective? It starts with the acquisition of knowledge through listening, converting knowledge into firm conviction through reflection, and finally changing our perspective—a paradigm shift—through internalizing or assimilating the doubt-free knowledge made firm through constant reflection.

How did Gandhi come to this certainty of moral conviction and his goal of self-realization? He tells us that he deeply pondered over the message of the Gītā constantly for 40 years! “It was characteristic of Gandhi,” Narayan Desai informed this writer in a personal interview, “that he will strive hard to put into practice what he had learned. . . . Once he has determined the moral worth of an idea, he will follow it unswervingly with a great courage of conviction. . . . The most remarkable thing about Gandhi was that his life indeed was his message.”<sup>50</sup> Through his understanding of the key teachings of the Gītā and by observing his spiritual role model, Raychand Bhai (a Jain jeweler), Gandhi set self-realization and selfless service to be his supreme goals in life and devoted all his waking hours to achieving these goals. Everything he did—the *satyāgraha* in South Africa or the Dandi Salt March or his fasts for self-purification in India—was a part of his struggle for self-realization, a facet of his soul-searching.

Where did Gandhi get the courage of his moral conviction? What was the source of his spiritual strength? We believe that it was indeed the Bhagavad Gītā. “At the back of my reading of Gītā,” writes Gandhi, “there is the claim of an endeavor to enforce the meaning in my own conduct for an unbroken period of forty years.”<sup>48</sup> Gandhi interpreted the Gītā as the “Gospel of Selfless Action” (*Anāsaktiyoga*).<sup>49</sup> Key Gandhian concepts such as selfless action (*niṣkāma karma*), nonviolence (*ahimsā*), steadfastness in truth (*sthitaprajñatā*), and nonpossession (*aparigraha*) proceed directly from his unique interpretation of the Gītā. By reflecting deeply on the import of the Gītā’s teachings, it became clear to Gandhi that his path was the path of self-realization through service to humanity and he made efforts and experiments at every moment of his life to come nearer to this goal.

The Gītā’s goal of self-realization and its doctrine of selfless action (*niṣkāma karma*) defined Gandhi’s modus operandi: choose the right goal (common good) and follow the right means (nonviolence) and be detached from the results (by dedicating them to the Supreme Lord). Gandhi once eloquently paraphrased this formula when he replied to an English Quaker who was complaining about being ignored by the media, “Throw the right stone into the right pond, let the ripples take care of themselves.”<sup>51</sup> Gandhi defined “right” in terms of “harmlessness” or “nonviolence” which provided the foundation for his core strategy—*satyāgraha* or “truth force.” He took an expansive view of nonviolence to denote not just noninjury but a positive force of love and compassion.

### **Gandhi Moment: The Secret of Servant Leadership**

Gandhi extracted the idea of trusteeship from his reading of Snell’s Maxims of Equity during his study of the Law in England. He discovered a whole new religion in it, interpreting it in the light of the teachings of the Gītā. Particularly appealing was the maxim that one should hold everything in trust on behalf of those who follow. What a brilliant idea to relate to our possessions!

Only by not regarding anything as our own can we truly devote ourselves, body and soul, to the selfless service of others. For, unless the mind is purged of personal desire and attachment, even service is but an inflation of the ego. When asked to sum up the meaning of life in three words or less, Gandhi responded cheerfully, “That’s easy: Renounce and enjoy.”<sup>53</sup> It was this spirit of renunciation that made Gandhi a paragon of servant leadership.

This greater regard for the right means above desired ends served as a moral compass for Gandhi throughout his life and defined all that he undertook in his personal and political life—which to him constituted one undivided whole. He did not regard the Gītā as a book only for the learned; he found its message to be eminently *practical* and meant to be *lived*. It has been rightly observed that the Gītā is “catholic in its message, comprehensive in its outlook, and concrete in its suggestions.”<sup>52</sup> Gandhi believed that its teachings could be easily understood and put into practice by all, to whatever race or religion, time or clime they might belong.

### Selfless Service and Servant Leadership

Selfless service, the cardinal doctrine of the Gītā that Gandhi lived by, has great applications in the realm of leadership. First and foremost, leadership is a responsibility—a call to serve—and not an opportunity to wield power or influence. The power that is bestowed upon the leader by the followers is of the nature of trust and good faith. In other words, leadership is a fiduciary relationship built upon mutual trust between the leader and the followers. Viewed in this manner, the only reason a leader exists is to enable and empower the followers. Great leaders approach their work as a contribution, as a service, without any sense of entitlement whatsoever. “Like the ‘Guardians’ of Plato’s *Republic*,” writes Al Gini, “leaders must see their office as a social responsibility, a trust, a duty, and not as a symbol of their personal identity, prestige, and lofty status.”<sup>54</sup>

Servant leaders act as fiduciaries of trust in the service of their followers—the beneficiaries. They hold the resources of the organization as trustees for the common good and not for their personal use. Gandhi was a paragon of such servant leadership. He held everything life brought into his orbit in sacred trust and related to it in an utterly unselfish way. He treaded the planet lightly but left his footprints and fingerprints on the sands of human consciousness; he was a true pilgrim of soul.

One key requirement of servant leadership is the ability to subordinate one’s personal ambition for the common good. As long as one is belaboring under self-ignorance, even social service is but an inflation of ego. Only those who have freed themselves from the shackles of the imposter ego can truly serve. This then represents the essence of leadership: selfless devotion to a cause greater than oneself. Practicing servant leadership is deceptively simple: one is led by the deep desire to serve others. It is also about putting others’ interests first. The Gītā teaches us that leaders should serve a common cause greater than their individual self (*lokasamgraha*), by becoming an instrument of the

whole (*nimitamātra*) and by immersing themselves in the well-being of all (*sarvabhūtahite ratāḥ*). History is testimony to the fact that humanity's truest leaders were servant leaders. When all is said and done, there is no human ideal higher than the gift of selfless service. In giving of ourselves unconditionally and serving others selflessly, we truly redeem our existence.

### Gandhi's Unique Interpretation of the Gītā

Gandhi interprets the war of the Bhagavad Gītā as a symbolic inner duel. The human heart is the battlefield on which are marshaled the divine and demonic impulses—the twin forces of knowledge and ignorance. The Gītā says that one should first fight the real enemy within, and then venture to wage the external war. The enemy is in league with the senses and their objects—within the mind. Hence, mind matters the most.

The key to understanding Gandhi's analysis of the message of the Gītā lies in his interpretation of the epic *Mahābhārata* as an allegory. Gandhi states again and again that for him the great epic is not a historical work in the accepted sense<sup>55</sup> of the word, but rather it “describes the eternal duel that goes on between the forces of darkness and of light.”<sup>56</sup> He takes a firm stand on treating the Gītā also as an allegory, which is abundantly clear from the way he interprets the very opening verse Gītā (1.1): “The human body is the battlefield where the eternal duel between Right and Wrong goes on. . . . The Kauravas represent the forces of Evil, the Pāṇḍavas the forces of the Good,”<sup>57</sup> and “All the names given in the First Chapter of the Gītā, are, in my opinion, not so much proper nouns as names of qualities. In describing the eternal warfare between the heavenly and the devilish natures, the poet has personified them as the characters in the Mahābhārata.”<sup>58</sup> It is important to bear in mind that this was a very unique interpretation of the epic war and it determined how Gandhi understood certain key concepts of the Gītā such as *ahiṃsā* (nonviolence), *svadharma* (self-duty) and *aparigraha* (nonpossession).

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to enter into a scholarly debate regarding the correctness of Gandhi's exegetical position. What is important for us is to know that once Gandhi accepts the *Mahābhārata* as an allegory, he then consistently and boldly takes great pains to prove that the central principle of its philosophy is nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*)—the doctrine which is the be-all and end-all of Gandhi's philosophy. It is also important to remember that, for Gandhi, *ahiṃsā* is a positive force of loving kindness to all beings, not

merely “noninjury.” He agrees that the Gītā is not written to preach *ahimsā*, though it accepts the basic tenet of nonviolence; but then argues that even if “it is difficult to reconcile certain verses with the teaching of Nonviolence, it is far more difficult to set the whole of the Gītā in the framework of violence.”<sup>59</sup> Further, “the author of the *Mahābhārata* has not established the necessity of physical warfare; on the contrary, he has proved its futility. He has made the victors shed tears of sorrow and repentance, and has left them nothing but a legacy of miseries.”<sup>60</sup> It is hard to disagree with this viewpoint as it seems to be intuitively right, especially in the light of Gandhi’s persistent following of nonviolence as the key message of the Gītā.

These, then, are the two unique ways in which Gandhi interprets the message of the Gītā: that the doctrine of *ahimsā* denotes a positive force of loving compassion and that the context of the Gītā is an allegorical war that is constantly fought within the human heart between the forces of good and evil. Which of these two forces wins depends upon which one we care to cultivate.

### Gandhi and the Central Teachings of the Gītā

Gandhi was a man of action, a *karma yogi*. For him, the key message of the Gītā was, unequivocally, selfless action. That is why he titled the introductory essay that accompanied his Gujarati translation of the Gītā *Anāsaktiyoga*—The Gospel of Selfless Action.<sup>61</sup> This is also the most commonly held meaning of the Gītā. When asked about the message of the Gītā, every Indian, even if he or she has a very cursory acquaintance with the text, would immediately venture to say: *niškāma karma*—selfless action. In simple words, do your duty diligently without worrying about the results. At first this may sound counterintuitive; how can one be motivated to do one’s duty without any expectation of reward or result? Should one, then, give up actions? Not at all, the Gītā says. This calls for a little explanation.

The Gītā tells us that every human being has to do some work. So what is the way to free oneself from the bondage of action? Gandhi goes right to the heart of the matter without mincing words: “That matchless remedy [i.e. the way to self-realization] is *renunciation* of fruits of action: Do your allotted work but renounce its fruit. Be detached and work. Have no desire for reward and work.”<sup>62</sup> This interpretation is consistent with the generally accepted meaning of *karma yoga*: renunciation of the sense of doership and, by extension, the desire for the fruits of actions. This renunciation of the fruits of action, Gandhi avers, is the “central Sun, round which devotion,

knowledge, and the rest revolve like planets.”<sup>63</sup> Gandhi was quintessentially a man of action and this interpretation does full justice both to him and to the *Gītā*.

### Selfless Action and *Ahimsā* Are Interdependent

Gandhi then links the renunciation of the fruits of action with his two favorite concepts, truth and nonviolence. When there is no desire for reward, Gandhi tells us, “There is no temptation for untruth or *himsa*. . . . He who is ever brooding over results often loses nerve in the performance of his duty. He becomes impatient and then gives vent to anger and begins to do unworthy things. . . . He who broods over results is like a man given to objects of senses; he is ever distracted, he says good-bye to all scruples, everything is right in his estimation and he therefore resorts to means fair and foul to attain his end.”<sup>64</sup> Further, in Gandhi’s estimation, *ahimsā* is the key to the renunciation of the fruits of action. He tells us about his discovery: “But after forty years’ unremitting endeavor fully to enforce the teaching of the *Gītā* in my own life, I have, in all humility, felt that perfect renunciation is impossible without perfect observance of *ahimsā* in every shape and form.”<sup>65</sup> Selfless action is only possible when one renounces the desire for the fruits of action, and all selfish action is in effect violent action. Thus, in the Gandhian scheme of things, selfless action and nonviolence mutually reinforce each other.

### The Sage Steadfast in Wisdom

At the heart of the *Gītā*, there is this conception of a sage steadfast in wisdom.<sup>66</sup> Gandhi believed that the last 18 verses of chapter 2 of the *Gītā* represented the quintessence of the entire art and science of ethics and spirituality. These verses were recited during his daily prayers and magnificently describe the marks of the sage steadfast in wisdom—*sthitaprajña*—“unparalleled in the spiritual literature of the world.”<sup>67</sup>

All his life, Gandhi strived very hard to put the essence of these verses into practice. For those who came into close contact with him, Gandhi was a living embodiment of the central archetype of the *Gītā*—a person of steady wisdom, who has so conquered his carnal desires, subdued his senses, disciplined his mind, purified his heart, and attained the highest levels of virtuous living that there is no trace whatsoever of the ego left behind. Steadfast in the wisdom of the self, such a person functions in life spontaneously and equanimously, free from the tug of the warring pairs of opposites such as success and

failure, good and bad, happiness and sorrow, gain and loss. This is the summit of the teachings of the Gītā.

Let us first look closely at these 18 magnificent verses (2.55–2.72) that Gandhi used for his daily prayers and meditation, in order to understand their true import for self-knowledge and self-realization. In these verses the marks of a sage established in wisdom of the self (*sthitaprajña*) are described:

When one completely casts off all selfish desires of the mind, finding contentment by the Self in the Self alone; neither agitated by sorrow nor hankering after the sense pleasures; free from lust, fear, and anger; free from attachment; neither elated by good fortune nor depressed by bad; with senses subdued and mind ever absorbed in the Divine within—such a person is truly wise.<sup>68</sup>

In this part of the description of the traits of a person of steady wisdom we notice three main things: freedom from self-centered desire (and the resultant anger, greed, and attachment: the triple gates of hell), an attitude of equanimity, and absorption in the wisdom of the Self or Divine. Then the Gītā goes on to explain the psychology of anger and the glory of a person who has gone beyond self-interest and egotism:

Brooding on sense objects leads to attachment; from attachment comes desire; and from (unfulfilled) desire ensues anger. Anger clouds judgment and leads to loss of reason; and loss of reason brings utter ruin. . . . One who has given up all desires and moves about free from longing, without self-interest and egotism, such a person attains peace. Attaining this state even at the time of death, one passes from death to immortality.<sup>69</sup>

According to Gandhi, these verses contain the essence of the Gītā: “If the rest of the scripture were lost, these verses alone will be enough to teach a complete way of life.”<sup>70</sup> It is important to note that the description of a person steady in wisdom starts and ends with casting off all the selfish desires of the mind. Yogavāsīṣṭha Mahāramāyaṇa also states succinctly: “Wisdom proceeds from the curtailing of desires.”<sup>71</sup>

There are at least four places where the characteristics of an ideal sage are presented in the Gītā from different perspectives: 2.55–72; 12.13–20; 14.21–27; and 18.49–56 (in addition, we also find reaffirmation of the same theme in selected verses of two other chapters: 13.7–11 and 16.1–3). For example, chapter 12 (verses 13–20) describes the marks of a devotee (*bhakta*); these have a striking similarity to the qualities of a person who has transcended the sway of three modes of material nature—*triḡuṇātīta* (14.21–27), which in turn bear

a great similarity to the characteristics of a person steadfast in wisdom (*sthitaprajña*) as described in chapter 2 (verses 55–72) as follows:

That person is dear to me who is free from ill-will, friendly and compassionate; free from the sense of “I” and “mine”; equanimous in joy and sorrow, forgiving, ever-content, firm in faith with his mind ever united with Me; who has subdued his mind, senses, and body; and has surrendered heart and mind to Me. . . . Not agitating the world, nor agitated by it, above the sway of delight, envy, desire, and fear; who regards equally friend and foe, praise and blame, pain and pleasure, free from selfish attachments; quiet, ever-content, in harmony everywhere, firm in faith—such a person is dear to Me.<sup>72</sup>

What is noteworthy in the above-quoted verses is that almost all of these qualities of an ideal sage more or less focus on emotional maturity—the ability to manage emotional disturbances and reactions calmly. Cultivating these qualities is important for everyone, in both personal and professional arenas. For example, being friendly and compassionate and free from malice (*adveṣṭāsarvabhūtānāmmaitraḥkaruṇa*: 12.13), being free from attachment, fear, and anger (*vītarāgabhayakrodhaḥ*: 2.56, 4.10), and neither being a source of annoyance to fellow-beings nor feeling vexed with them (*yaśmānnodvijatelokolokānnodvijatecayalḥ*: 12.15)—all these are signs of emotional stability which is the key to harmony in personal and professional relationships.

This is a tall order of personal qualities for any leader to cultivate and requires years and years of dedication, commitment, and perseverance. These qualities represent the highest level of emotional maturity, self-awareness, self-discipline, equanimity, and detachment that may appear to be unattainable by any leader according to modern standards. In the estimation of Eknath Easwaran, who was present at one of the prayer meetings that Gandhi regularly held, Gandhi “fulfilled every condition that the *Gītā* lays down.”<sup>73</sup> An exemplary leader like Gandhi acts as a “witness” of high moral leadership without whom the limits of higher human possibilities would neither be known nor sustained.

It is important to understand that the key to life’s fulfillment according to the *Gītā* lies in self-realization through self-knowledge. Self-realization is the means as well as the end. And all the keys to self-realization are presented at the very beginning of the *Gītā* (2.55–2.61):

When one, finding contentment by the self in the self alone, completely casts off all selfish desires of the mind; neither agitated by the sorrow nor hankering after the sense pleasures; free from lust, fear, and anger; free from attachment; neither elated by good fortune nor depressed by bad; with senses subdued and mind ever absorbed in the Divine within—such a person is truly wise.

The net result of cultivating these qualities is peace, fulfillment and real happiness. This is the desideratum and the summum bonum of all human aspiration and quest.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Easwaran writes about the significance of the Gītā in Gandhi's life: "He knew it by heart, knew it *in* his heart, studied it over and over every day, used it in prayer until it became a living presence. . . . Those years in South Africa were a studio in which Gandhi worked every day like an artist, studying his model and chipping away at the block of stone that hid the vision he was striving to set free, painstakingly removing everything that was not Gītā."<sup>74</sup> The Gītā was a spiritual reference book for Gandhi. He studied it all his life; he lived, worked and died according to the spirit of the Gītā.

The most distinctive spiritual tenet Gandhi learned from the Gītā was perhaps the truth of One Reality that pervades all and everything in the universe. This nondual Reality is called *Brahman* (the Absolute) and is the very Self (*Ātman*) of everyone and everything. He who perceives the one Divine Principle dwelling in all beings as their very Self cannot harm another, for the Self cannot harm itself. This provided the ontological support for Gandhi's categorical adherence to nonviolence and selfless service. This understanding in turn paved the way for him to strive for spiritual and moral perfection, the twin preconditions to self-realization, signifying the summum bonum for Gandhi.

Only when we perceive the self as the Self of all, through the discipline of selfless action—actions done with devotion and without desire—we come to the realization of Truth or God, for "to realize God is to see Him in all that lives, and to recognize our oneness with all creation."<sup>75</sup> This then is the essence of the path of action (*karma yoga*), the path of devotion (*bhakti yoga*), and the path of knowledge (*jñāna yoga*). In enshrining the teachings of the Gītā in his life, Gandhi personified the essence of these threefold means to self-realization.

In sum, the Gītā teaches us to become an instrument of the Divine in all that we do, to let all our actions be for the well-being of all (*sarvabhūtahiteratāḥ*: 5.25); to be role models for bringing together the communities of the world and maintaining the world order, and above all, to accept the results of our actions with graceful equanimity, as the Grace of the Lord. Then our actions will never taint us, and we will attain the highest pure knowledge by which the One Imperishable Being is seen in all forms of existence, undivided in the divided: *avibhaktamvibhakteṣu*. This knowledge of the essential

oneness of all existence (*sarvabhūteṣuyenaikambhāvam*) the Gītā regards as the purest (*sāttvik*) knowledge: *tajjñānanviddhisāttvikam* (18.20). Living with this understanding, by the Divine Grace, we will attain the communion of the individual self with the Supreme Self.

By dedicating his life unconditionally to the service of humanity, Gandhi sought the true value of self-realization through the teachings of the Bhagavad Gītā. By reflecting deeply on the import of the Gītā's teachings, it became clear to Gandhi that his path was the path of self-realization through service to humanity and he made efforts and experiments at every moment of his life to come nearer to this goal. Gandhi's goal was to become *sthitaprajña* (2.55–72) and *triguṇātīta* (14.19, 14.22–27). He succeeded.

When we delve deep into the core of our being, we come upon the core of all—the Self. Then we come to realize that not only this world but all life is one. This is the true wisdom of the Self, the art and science of self-realization. The Gītā is a clarion call to return to and act from the wisdom of the Self.

This is the timeless message of this manual for life, leadership, and liberation.

### The Bhagavad Gītā: Gandhi's Leadership Lessons

1. Leadership is an internal affair. All wars are first fought within the mind.<sup>76</sup> Mind matters most in life and leadership. Ultimately, right thinking and right conduct serve as the two unshakable pillars of leadership.
2. Effective leaders master their senses instead of letting their senses master them. Above all, they manage their anger and do not let anger gain control over them. Śrī Kṛṣṇa stated that from anger, delusion arises, and from delusion, bewilderment of memory. When memory is bewildered, reasoning power is lost and with the loss of reasoning, one falls from one's status as human being.
3. Effective leaders do not lead by anger or fear. They practice forbearance and use forgiveness as their principal armor. They are well aware that leading by anger and fear is unproductive and leads to disempowerment and disengagement.
4. Effective leaders approach life and leadership as peaceful warriors—bereft of attachment and personal likes and dislikes. Every decision they make represents a concrete choice between the right/wrong means for a just/unjust end.

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5. The Gītā teaches the high art of detached engagement—to focus on actions rather than results. When we shift our attention from goal-orientation to process-orientation, the results take care of themselves.
6. The Gītā teaches that selfless service is the highest principle of life and leadership. Effective leaders become instruments of the Whole and work for the well-being of all. This is the essence of the servant leadership.
7. The Gītā teaches us to choose the right goal (common good) and follow the right means (nonviolence) and be detached from the results (by dedicating them to the Supreme).
8. Effective leaders know that self-awareness is the key to leading from within. They manage their awareness alertly to lead others effectively.
9. Self-awareness ultimately depends upon self-knowledge. The Gītā presents detailed instructions for attaining steady abidance in self-knowledge (2.52–72; 13.7–11).
10. Self-knowledge means the knowledge of one’s true self at the “soul-level”—beyond the senses, mind, and intellect. While all other knowledge pertains to knowing everything that can be objectified externally, self-knowledge is about knowing the knower.
11. Selfish desire obscures self-awareness and prevents one from achieving life’s true ends. Self-aware leaders are not motivated by personal desires or interests.
12. A leader’s true inspiration comes from doing selfless work. Selfless work brings equanimity of mind which in turn contributes to effective leadership.
13. It is only when a leader is able to relinquish self-interest and egotism that he is able to know the true peace—to rejoice and repose in the real Self. Such a person then has nothing left here to do for himself (*ātmanyevacasamtuṣṭastasyakāryamṇa vidyate*: 3.27).
14. To rejoice and repose in the true Self is to be the true Sage Steadfast in Wisdom of the Gītā—a *sthitaprajña* (*ātmanyevāt manātuṣṭaḥsthitaprajñastadocyate*: 2.55)
15. The greatest lesson that Gandhi learned from his lifelong study of the Gītā was *karma yoga*—a discipline he lived his life by: *use the right means for a just cause and leave the results in the hands of God.*

## CHAPTER 5



# GANDHI: A VALUES-BASED LEADER PAR EXCELLENCE

### INTRODUCTION

Leadership has always been more challenging during difficult times, but the unique leadership challenges facing organizations throughout the world today call for an even greater renewed focus on what constitutes “values-based leadership.” In the wake of the economic downturn, financial crises and rampant corporate scandals, the field of leadership has come under heavy criticism from all circles. Many are asking: What good are leaders, anyway? Consequently, increasing attention is now paid to the role and propriety of the leadership function. Some researchers have argued that the influence of leaders on organizational performance is overrated and romanticized and that programs of training in leadership qualities have become a cult in the Western world.<sup>1</sup> Despite these assertions, however, it is now widely recognized by researchers and practitioners that leadership is an important function and studies confirm that leaders do contribute to organizational performance.<sup>2</sup>

In a world beset with rising international terrorism, economic uncertainties, flagrant violation of human values, and rampant character crises among leaders, the importance of a values-based approach to leadership can hardly be overemphasized. Values-driven leaders have long known the importance of building and sustaining trust through the force of role-modeling. Study after study shows that the character of the leader plays a vital role in leadership success and credibility.<sup>3</sup> An authentic leader operates from a strong personal and moral position.

We live in an interesting period of material progress and moral impoverishment. Never before in the history of humankind has there been a greater need for exemplary leaders, leaders who are both good and great, leaders who can show us a way out of this moral morass and spiritual chaos. As Bennis and Nanus have observed, “The need [for leadership] was never so great. A chronic crisis of governance—that is, the pervasive incapacity of organizations to cope with the expectations of their constituents is now an overwhelming factor worldwide.”<sup>4</sup> Under these circumstances, everybody is searching for the Holy Grail, the secret key, the silver bullet that will save the world. As a result, many new approaches to leadership have been gaining momentum in recent years. Values-based leadership is one such approach that we will explore in this chapter.

Presented here is an overview of some key contemporary approaches to values-based leadership in the context of Gandhi as a leader. As is well known, Gandhi never compromised on the core values of truth and nonviolence, no matter what the circumstances. Given the primacy of these values in Gandhi’s life and thought, the chapter will first review values-based leadership as a foundational paradigm that characterizes Gandhi’s style of leadership. Then it will present a brief survey of few allied leadership approaches—also called “positive forms of leadership”<sup>5</sup>—such as transformational leadership, authentic leadership, self-leadership, and servant leadership. Based on these approaches, the primary qualities of exemplary leadership will be ascertained and evaluated in terms of Gandhi’s life and thought. As this chapter will reveal, Gandhi embodied the key qualities of exemplary leadership to the highest degree. As such, there is much to learn and emulate from Gandhi’s approach to leadership.

## THE VALUE OF VALUES IN LEADERSHIP

Values represent the heart of leadership and guide behavior and performance. As Samuel Blumenfeld has clearly pointed out, “You have to be dead to be value-neutral.”<sup>6</sup> The values we hold dear influence the quality of decisions we make as well as the credibility we have in influencing others to support our decisions. The trustworthiness of a leader is measured in terms of not only the nature of the values the leader espouses but also how consistently the leader aspires to live up to those values. In this sense, leadership and values are intertwined and all leadership is essentially values-based, entailing unity and purity of thoughts, words, and deeds. Since leadership is an expression of

who we are, in discovering, living, and sharing our deepest values lies the fulfillment of our life and leadership.

Gandhi consistently embodied the perennial values of selflessness, humility, service, nonviolence, and truthfulness in and through his life and death. His leadership effectiveness proceeds from his categorical adherence to these values and his openness to learn from his own mistakes. Gandhi believed he had nothing new to teach to the world, for these values are as old as humanity itself. His innovation lay in experimenting with his core values on as vast a scale as he could, extending them from the personal to the public arena. He preached what he already practiced and strove hard to live up to his values. His was essentially a values-based, principle-centered approach to leadership. Gandhi's life and thought embodied a truth applicable to humanity as a whole. His leadership legacy became the harbinger of freedom for many countries in Southeast Asia and Africa and his life became a guiding star to leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Nelson Mandela. With his life as his legacy, Gandhi, the leader, now belongs to all humanity.

We can learn some key leadership lessons from Gandhi's successes and failures. "I have worked hard," said the great composer J. S. Bach, "anyone who works just as hard will go just as far." Gandhi agrees: "I claim to be an average man of less than average ability. . . . I have not the shadow of a doubt that any man or woman can achieve what I have, if he or she would make the same effort and cultivate the same hope and faith."<sup>7</sup> The life example of Gandhi shows us that we can also achieve what great leaders have achieved, if we are willing to put forth the necessary effort and to cultivate the values that such exemplary leaders embodied. Herein lies the real purpose of studying the lives of great leaders.

*Lives of great men all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime,  
And, departing, leave behind us  
Footprints on the sands of time.<sup>8</sup>*

### Values-Based Leadership

As stated earlier, the need for ethical leadership is felt all the more acutely in modern times in the face of dwindling morals and uncertain economic and political situations. Harry M. Jansen Kraemer, Jr., a clinical professor of management and strategy at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management, maintains that the only

true leadership is values-based leadership. He contends that in the present times, there is widespread lack of confidence in leadership, in business, government, education, and elsewhere. Every leader needs to regain and maintain trust. While values-based leadership may not be a cure for everything that ails us, it's definitely a good place to start. He identifies the four principles of values-based leadership: self-reflection, balance, self-confidence, and genuine humility.<sup>9</sup>

In his seminal essay titled "Notes toward a Definition of Values-Based Leadership," James O'Toole calls Gandhi the "most manifestly values-based of all leaders."<sup>10</sup> Besides Gandhi, the author's shortlist of such leaders includes Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, Vaclav Havel, Mother Teresa, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Jean Monet.

According to O'Toole, values-based leaders help their followers "by enabling them to see clearly, and to achieve effectively, that which they hold dear . . . the role, task, and responsibility of values-based leaders is to help followers realize the most important ends that they hold dear but cannot obtain by themselves."<sup>11</sup> O'Toole goes on to describe the following characteristics of values-driven leaders:

1. Their leadership is not about realizing their personal needs, but about helping their followers realize their true needs.
2. They display a high degree of selflessness—they find personal fulfillment in providing opportunities for others to realize their dreams and potential.
3. They have a high sense of clarity of their values and even their smallest acts are consistent with their highest values.
4. As their biographies show, values-based leaders too have their share of flaws and common human frailties; they choose to do the necessary hard work in reflecting honestly on their life-experiences and learn from them. And that is what makes all the difference!<sup>12</sup>

This is the alchemy of turning *stones* into *milestones*. Values-based leadership rests on certain specifically defined core values that serve as the "True North" for its practitioners. Providing a way of leading from within, these core values are rooted in the leader's very being in a unique manner. A values-based leader begins by asking some of the most fundamental existential questions, such as: Who am I? What do I stand for? What matters most to me? In the final analysis, it is about two things: right knowledge and right conduct. We must first know, then do, and finally be the change that we aspire to inspire in others. This knowing-doing-being framework takes place in three distinct

steps: learning, reflecting, and transforming. Exemplary role models present the best values to emulate. Through reflection, we convert learning into strong conviction. Through assimilating and internalizing values, we are able to bring about a paradigm shift and transform our behavior. As Al Gini has pointed out, “Without the witness of moral leadership, standards of ethics in business and organizational life [can] neither emerge nor be sustained.”<sup>13</sup> A leader truly acts as the “witness” of higher moral leadership, and one with a strong moral compass like Gandhi becomes a beacon for humanity.

This conceptual framework will be applied to explore and unravel the leadership values of Gandhi who made his life his message. Gandhi viewed his life and work as an undivided whole and his political work was an extension of who he was as a person. He exalted means above ends and approached his lifework in an utterly selfless manner, renouncing the usual trappings of title, authority, and position. Despite his faults, or perhaps because of them, we find there is much to learn about Gandhi’s development as a leader—who lived and died for the values he held most dear.

The one and the only goal Gandhi strove for in his life was “self-realization”<sup>14</sup> that embodied self-reflection, self-awareness, and self-steadfastness. He declares in his autobiography: “I live and move and have my being in the pursuit of this goal.”<sup>15</sup> Every time Gandhi confronted human frailties in the outer world, he turned his moral searchlight within (a phrase Gandhi loved using) to find answers in the deep recesses of his soul. This spiritual and moral anchorage was the key to Gandhi’s political potency and innovation and became his most important discovery: A person’s capacity for self-discipline enhances his capacity to influence the environment around him.<sup>16</sup> And no power on earth can make a person do a thing against his will. He who disciplines himself gains the strength to shape the environment.

These are all valuable lessons for modern leaders to emulate.

### **Being-Centered Leadership**

In Gandhi’s thought and life we find the perfect expression of both values-based leadership and being-centered leadership. He led from within—from the deep moral and spiritual core of his being. His life and leadership were inseparably one and all his existential experiments were a series of steps toward self-realization—the supreme goal underpinning all his strivings. Through prayer, contemplation, self-abnegation, self-purification, he cultivated his being to such an extent that it emanated a gentle soul-force that endeared him even to his

severest critics and detractors. “There is nothing striking about him,” wrote Romain Rolland, a Nobel Laureate in literature and one of Gandhi’s earliest biographers, “except his whole expression of ‘infinite patience and infinite love’ . . . he is modest and unassuming . . . yet you feel his indomitable spirit.”<sup>17</sup> Rolland puts his finger right on the pulse in stating that Gandhi’s strength lay in his towering spirit that resided in his frail frame. Where did Gandhi get his being-power? What was the source of Gandhi’s “power of making heroes out of the clay” (as his political mentor, G. K. Gokhale, aptly put it)?<sup>18</sup> We believe that it was his moral and spiritual strength. With his indomitable spirit Gandhi was able to win his ideological wars in the long run, even when he seemed to be losing his battles in the short run.

### THE NEED AND IMPORTANCE OF VALUES-BASED LEADERSHIP

Few will doubt the primacy of ethics in leadership or disagree that all leadership is ultimately values-based. Although many practitioners have explored the role of ethics in leadership in recent years, very few scholars have tackled the subject in a systematic manner. At the opening of a remarkable collection of essays by various leadership scholars, Joanne Ciulla, its perceptive editor, takes us to the very heart of the current leadership debate by pointing out its key challenges as follows:

We live in a world where leaders are often morally disappointing. Even the greats of the past, such as Martin Luther King, Jr., and George Washington, are diminished by probing biographers who document their ethical shortcomings. It is hard to have heroes in a world where every wrinkle of a person’s life is public. . . . The more defective our leaders are, the greater are longings to have highly ethical leaders. . . . Yet, given the central role of ethics in the practice of leadership, it’s remarkable that there has been little in the way of sustained and systematic treatment of the subject by scholars.<sup>19</sup>

Unquestionably, in recent years the reputation of many leaders has been tarnished as researchers and writers turn probing searchlights on their character. Many of the greatest leaders of humanity have not fared very well under such scrutiny, to say nothing of our modern leaders. Leadership is no longer viewed as a position but a complex moral relationship between people, based on trust, mutuality, commitment, and a shared vision of the good of the broader society. Ethics, says Ciulla, lies at the very heart of leadership and the “study

of ethics generally consists of the examination of right, wrong, good, evil, virtue, duty, obligation, rights, justice, fairness, and so on, in human relationships with each other and other living things.”<sup>20</sup> In essence, ethics is that branch of philosophy which deals with such questions as right and wrong, good and evil.

Leadership research has long suggested that traits such as honesty, integrity, and credibility are associated with the perception of an effective leader and are important predictors of leadership effectiveness.<sup>21</sup> Previous studies have suggested that such traits contribute to leadership effectiveness.<sup>22</sup> According to this perspective, ethical leaders are altruistic, honest, trustworthy, and principled decision-makers who care about the well-being of their followers and the needs of the broader society. In addition, ethical leaders proactively try to transform followers by communicating ethical standards, modeling ethical behavior, and holding followers accountable for their actions.

### THREE LEVELS OF LEADERSHIP VALUES

In the Foreword to the book *Ethics, The Heart of Leadership*, James MacGregor Burns lists three levels of values as follows:<sup>23</sup>

1. *Old Fashioned Character Tests* such as sobriety, chastity, abstention, kindness, altruism, and other “Ten Commandments” rules of personal conduct;
2. *Modal Values* such as honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, reliability, reciprocity, and accountability; and
3. *End Values* such as order (or security), liberty, equality, justice, and community.

In the social context, the first two levels represent more or less “means” that can really serve as transformative forces if the leader can translate them into actions to reach the “ends” of the third level. Gandhi measures supremely well on all counts of the three-level criteria listed above. As is widely known, he was able to bring about “real, intended, durable change”—the test Burns lays down for a leader’s effectiveness—both in South Africa and in India, solemnly adhering to his principles of nonviolence and truth. Gandhi also displayed in the highest measure what Burns calls the modal and end values of honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, reliability, equality, justice, and community. Gandhi’s uniqueness as a leader, though, lay primarily in categorically emphasizing the value and purity of means in attaining ends. In terms of

exalting the means above ends, notes Louis Fischer, “his greatness lay in doing what everybody could do but doesn’t.”<sup>24</sup>

### THE CASE OF ADOLF HITLER

Can an evil leader be an effective leader? The answer to this question depends on whether we consider ethics to be a necessary condition for leadership. It also begs the fundamental question, “What good is leadership if it is not ethical?”

The possibility that a leader could be simultaneously an effective leader and malevolent (e.g., Hitler, Stalin, or Mao) presents the greatest challenge to researchers who define leadership in terms of influence. Ronald Heifetz, who teaches the most popular class at the most popular graduate school in the United States, Harvard’s John F. Kennedy School of Government, maintains that

when influence alone defines leadership, Hitler qualifies as an authentic and successful leader: he mobilized a nation to follow his vision. . . . If we assume that leadership must not only meet the needs of the followers but also must elevate them, we render a different judgment. . . . Hitler misdiagnosed Germany’s ills and brought his nation to a disaster. He exercised leadership no more than a charlatan practices medicine when providing false remedies.<sup>25</sup>

For Heifetz, leadership is inherently a normative process and, therefore, cannot be value-free.

“Was Adolf Hitler a leader, measured against [the] three levels of values?” asks Burns. His reply is as revealing as it is succinct—“My student may have Hitler—I’ll take Gandhi, Mandela, and King.”<sup>26</sup> We want our leaders to be both great and good—that is, ethical and competent. One cannot assess leadership effectiveness as discrete from its moral quality. In the estimation of Ciulla, “Burns does not consider Hitler a leader or a transforming leader because of the means he used, the ends that he achieved, and the impact of Hitler as a moral agent on his followers during the process of his leadership.”<sup>27</sup> That Hitler had influence, there is no question. But because his influence was not founded on ethical principles, it led to disastrous results.

### MORAL AND SPIRITUAL DIMENSION OF LEADERSHIP

It would not be amiss to say that a high sense of moral responsibility is the very foundation of leadership. As John Gardner has observed, “It isn’t in the grand design that we can have freedom without obligation.”<sup>28</sup>

Gandhi believed that life is one single unitary movement. The moral and spiritual reality that we encounter is but a reflection of who we are. The world we live in is a grand existential mirror, faithfully reflecting our very own reality:

We but mirror the world. All the tendencies present in the outer world are to be found in the world of our body. If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him. This is the divine mystery supreme. A wonderful thing it is and the source of our happiness. We need not wait to see what others do.<sup>29</sup>

Within the short compass of this paragraph, Gandhi provides a resume of all his moral and spiritual convictions. Inherent in Gandhi's observation is the conviction that if we want to bring about any change in the world, we have to begin with ourselves. We have to be the change that we wish to see in the world. This was his most important discovery and gift to humankind.<sup>30</sup>

An impartial survey of Gandhi's life and thought reveals that ethics and spirituality were at the heart of his leadership. "There are few among the 20th century leaders," says Arun Gandhi, "who can measure up to the standards set by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in the practice of ethical leadership. . . . Through his example he gave the world an alternative to violent conflict resolution—a comprehensive philosophy of nonviolence—the practice of which requires high moral standards."<sup>31</sup> Gandhi's morality rested on the principle of nonviolence as informed by his spiritual quest for truth. These two values—nonviolence and truth—were integrated in his conduct to the highest possible degree.

Gandhi strived all his life toward a vision of good for the broader society. Impeccable integrity, humility, credibility, trustworthiness, and selfless service were some of the hallmarks of his leadership. Gandhi's ethical worldview was shaped by his religious belief in the existence of cosmic spirit—a spiritual power that informed and gently guided the universe. He believed that the universe is not amoral and that it has a structural bias toward good. In his view, although good and bad exist in the world, good not only survives but triumphs in the long run. "If we take a long view," said Gandhi, "we shall see that it is not wickedness but goodness which rules the world."<sup>32</sup> He believed that the universe is built on benevolence and goodness, and supports these qualities as well.

For a long time, Gandhi had said, "God is truth," implying that truth is one of the properties of God and the concept of God is logically prior to truth. In 1926, he reversed his position and said,

“Truth is God.” This new formulation had many advantages for Gandhi, foremost of which was that it gave primacy to truth and provided the common basis for the possibility of a dialog between him and nonbelievers. He regarded this reformulation as one of his most important discoveries that crystallized his years of reflection.<sup>33</sup>

For Gandhi religion was a living reality and not the “dead bones of dogmas.”<sup>34</sup> He applied his religious beliefs in all areas of his life, including politics, and repeatedly insisted that “those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, by placing it on a high moral ground, Gandhi spiritualized politics. Yet, his religious conviction was not dogmatic in its intent or application. As Bhikhu Parekh has observed:

Gandhi’s view placed the individual at the center of the religious search, liberated religion from the stranglehold of traditionalism and literalism, encouraged fresh readings of scriptures, and made space for an inter-religious dialogue. However, it also violated the historical integrity of the religious tradition, deinstitutionalized religion, and encouraged in less competent hands an attitude of shallow cosmopolitanism.<sup>36</sup>

### ON BECOMING AN EXEMPLARY LEADER

Warren Bennis, who has authored or coauthored some 30 books on leadership and has been hailed as the “The ‘Dean’ of Leadership Gurus,”<sup>37</sup> contends that to become a leader, a person first has to develop as an individual. Leadership qualities, he maintains, can only emerge from an “integrated self.”<sup>38</sup> Howard Schultz, the founder and chairman of the Starbucks chain of coffee shops, says that Bennis once told him that to become a great leader you have to develop “your ability to leave your own ego at the door, and to recognize the skills and traits that you need in order to build a world-class organization.”<sup>39</sup> This goes on to show that humility is an essential ingredient of values-based leadership. When leaders are too focused on their personal interests and wants, they are more prone to act in morally questionable ways to accomplish their goals.

After three decades of research on the enigmatic topic of leadership, Bennis and Thomas state that they are now convinced that the four qualities that mark all exemplary leaders, regardless of their age, era, gender, ethnicity, or race, are adaptive capacity, the ability to engage others through shared meaning, a distinctive voice, and unshakable integrity.<sup>40</sup>

*Adaptive capacity* or competence is what makes us all thrive in a VUCA world—one that is volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. It has to do with a certain inner hardiness and resilience, a yearning for

### Gandhi Moment: Exemplary Leadership

How does Gandhi measure up to Bennis and Thomas's four qualities of exemplary leaders? Gandhi's life provides an excellent example of his *adaptive capacity*. His autobiography which is subtitled *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* is proof of this. The sincere seeker that he was, Gandhi in his unending search grew from "truth to truth." He always stressed that if there was a contradiction between his writings on a particular issue, his later writings should be taken as more valid than his earlier ones. In all that he undertook, Gandhi maintained a willing attitude to unlearn, relearn, and change. "I am essentially a man of compromise," said Gandhi, "because I am never sure that I am right."<sup>47</sup>

Gandhi was a master of engaging other people in *shared meaning*. The day he landed in South Africa, he was able to perceive bigger social issues beyond personal hurts and deprivations. He was able to awaken the oppressed to a common understanding by creating a mutually beneficial shared meaning. His remarkable leading of the Salt Satyāgraha March in 1930 is another example of his ability to engage the masses and create shared meaning.

History is testimony to the *distinctive voice* of Gandhi. His voice was not only distinctive but also authentic. Even his greatest critics agree that Gandhi was one of the handful of human beings in history to experiment with the application of nonviolence on such a large scale. At a time when the human conscience was tarnished by the holocaust and nuclear war, his was a solitary voice vehemently opposing the horrors of violence in any form.

Gandhi was a paragon of unshakable *integrity*. His whole life was an open book. Never ever had a public figure made his private life so accessible and transparent to public view. Gandhi strived to live a life of the highest integrity; his life was "his only 'real book' as he called it and by which alone he wished to be judged."<sup>48</sup>

constant learning, and openness to new things. It is about becoming a "first-class noticer"—a phrase borrowed from the novelist, Saul Bellow. Jack Welch puts it bluntly: "Good leaders are, by definition, voracious learners."<sup>41</sup>

*Engaging others through shared meaning* starts with engaging all constituents in the process of co-creating a shared vision and hinges on the willingness of the leader to seek and benefit from feedback—whether it is good news or bad. In his now classic book *On Becoming a Leader*, Bennis wrote, "Leaders know the importance of having

someone in their lives who will unfailingly and fearlessly tell them the truth.”<sup>42</sup> They invite dissent, not mindless rubber-stamp approval of their perceived position. “Shared vision,” Peter Senge reminds us, “is not the same as vision shared.”<sup>43</sup>

*Voice* is about knowing what you stand for—your deep values and beliefs—as well as encouraging others to discover their voice. Leadership is a two-way street without any distinct double yellow lines in the middle.

*Integrity* is more than a moral compass—it includes excellence as well as the propriety of achieving our goals fair and square. In addition to staying true to our core values, integrity means exercising our faculties along the lines of excellence—in conscientiously becoming the best we know we can be—and “*balancing competence and ambition with a moral compass.*”<sup>44</sup>

According to Bennis, the real task of becoming a leader boils down to becoming an authentic individual first: “At bottom, becoming a leader is synonymous with becoming yourself. It’s precisely that simple, and it’s also that difficult.”<sup>45</sup> Finally, Bennis offers four lessons of self-knowledge for leaders:

1. You are your own best teacher.
2. Accept responsibility. Blame no one.
3. You can learn anything you want to learn.
4. True understanding comes from reflecting on your experience.<sup>46</sup>

### **Authentic Leadership**

Personal authenticity has been explored throughout history, from Greek philosophers (“Know Thyself”—Socrates) to Shakespeare (“To thine own self be true”—Polonius, *Hamlet*). At one level, it implies owning one’s personal experiences, as indicated by “Know Thyself.” Additionally, “To thine own self be true” advises that one act in accord with one’s true self.<sup>49</sup> Thus, authenticity as defined in this context seems to be closely linked with self-awareness, sincerity, truth, and transparency.

The first essay on authentic leadership was written by R. W. Terry in 1993, followed up in 2003 by Bill George, the exemplary former head of Medtronic, who popularized the concept of authentic leadership in his bestseller *Authentic Leadership: Rediscovering the Secrets to Creating Lasting Value*. In the context of rampant corporate scandals and pervasive financial crises, George argues that leadership needs to be completely reexamined and rethought. This calls for a new type of

leader who embodies qualities such as integrity, transparency, humility, and a deep sense of purpose.<sup>50</sup>

In recent times, authentic leadership has gained increasing importance since it places high emphasis on behaving transparently, with a high moral and ethical stance. According to Avolio and Gardner, authentic leadership is a somewhat of a generic term and can incorporate transformational, charismatic, servant, spiritual, or other forms of positive leadership. As one of the positive forms of leadership, authentic leadership complements work on ethical and transformational leadership.<sup>51</sup> Walumbwa et al. define authentic leadership as follows:

A pattern that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development.<sup>52</sup>

The key components of authentic leadership that emerge from this definition are: self-awareness, moral perspective, and relational transparency. Zhu et al. clarify that to be authentic, leaders must transcend their own narrow self-interests and focus on the greater common good.<sup>53</sup> Thus authentic leadership is more than just “being true to oneself” and encompasses moral perspectives and honest relationships with followers.

As a practitioner of authentic leadership, Bill George has proposed a view that leaders need to follow their internal compass to reach their true purpose. Based on interviews with 125 contemporary heads of various organizations, George and Sims have identified the following five dimensions of *authentic leaders*: (1) pursuing purpose with passion, (2) practicing solid values, (3) leading with heart, (4) establishing enduring relationships, and (5) demonstrating self-discipline.<sup>54</sup>

Building on the metaphor of a compass pointing toward a magnetic pole, George, McLean, and Craig equate the search for authentic leadership with a journey toward our True North and point out:

True North is the internal compass that guides you successfully through life. It represents who you are as a human being at your deepest level. . . . Your True North is based on what is most important to you, your most cherished values, your passions and motivations, the sources of satisfactions in your life. Just as a compass points toward a magnetic pole, your True North pulls you toward the purpose of your leadership. When you follow your internal compass, your leadership will be authentic, and people will follow you naturally.<sup>55</sup>

George et al. acknowledge that finding our True North is a lifetime journey beset with risks and uncertainties. It takes hard work and a sincere look at our strengths and shortcomings: “Becoming an authentic leader,” they state, “takes hard work. It is not much different from becoming a great musician or a great athlete. To become great in any endeavor—whether it is your career, your family, your community—you must use the unique strengths you were born with and develop them to the fullest, while acknowledging and learning from your shortcomings.”<sup>56</sup>

In the Epilogue to their book *True North: Discover Your Authentic Leadership*, George and Sims invite us to reflect upon what our legacy will be by envisioning the end of our life. What would we like to say to our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren about the impact of our lifework? Or, what difference did we make in the world through our combined efforts? With a seriousness characteristic of certain urgency, they conclude thoughtfully:

Why not take the opportunity to think about that question right now, while you are still writing your life story? Just as it is never too late to lead, it is never too late to make a difference in the world and to leave a legacy . . . the only thing you take with you is what you leave behind. . . . *That is the fulfillment of leadership.*<sup>57</sup>

It is commonly believed that once a leader becomes an icon, it is almost impossible for that leader to remain transparent and be authentic. As we have seen, Gandhi represents an important exception to this phenomenon. Every aspect of his life remains an open book for all to see. It is hard to imagine the public life of a leader as transparent as that of Gandhi. The over 54 years of Gandhi’s public life were an open book. He eventually arranged his life in such a manner that privacy had no place in it. He wrote prolifically about his thoughts and struggles; the collected works of Gandhi run to some 98 volumes, totaling approximately 50,000 pages. His autobiography is an exemplary model of candidness and transparency. Such a level of “transparency” has not been observed in the life of any other public leader before or after.

Many researchers point out that the authentic leadership construct is still in its infancy, so some of its practical implications are not fully developed or corroborated.<sup>58</sup> One nagging question always presents itself in this regard: While one may purport to be authentic toward oneself, how does one determine that one is “authentic” toward others? Without a high sense of conscience, authenticity may become a

cover for inconsiderateness toward others. Therefore, leaders need both consciousness and conscience to guide them; they need both moral sensibility and emotional sensitivity. There is no authenticity without morality. And success does not cleanse the ethically impure either.

For Gandhi, the moral component of the [authentic] leadership equation was the most important. He never employed any questionable means to attain honorable ends, nor was his private life morally questionable. In Gandhi, we find complete purity and unity of thought, word, and deed. His life was guided by a strong moral compass signifying the twin values of truth and nonviolence. His conduct, through selfless service, most naturally pointed to the True North of common good. Perhaps that is why he was able to leverage his transformative charisma most ethically and effectively.

### **Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership occupies a central place among the “new leadership” paradigms for its obvious promise of changing and transforming people. Transformative leaders stand for true values and wield an exceptional type of influence on people, which moves them to accomplish extraordinary things above and beyond what is normally expected of them. Transformational leadership motivates the followers and elevates them to become better persons and leaders in their own right.

We find the first systematic presentation of transformational leadership in the book *Leadership* by Burns, published in 1978. The author later expanded the subject in his 2003 work *Transforming Leadership*, offering a new vision focused on ways by which leaders emerge from being ordinary “transactional” deal-makers to become dynamic agents of major social change by empowering their followers. In both of these works, Burns preferred to use the term “transforming” leadership. According to him, transforming leaders have a very strong sense of values. Although Burns, as a true political historian, considers results to be very important in determining the impact of leadership, he is equally concerned about means, for “insufficient attention to means can corrupt the ends.”<sup>59</sup>

Burns contrasts two types of leadership: transactional and transforming. He notes that transactional leadership is more common; its object is to achieve the immediate, separate purposes of both leaders and followers. Politicians offering jobs for votes, managers offering bonuses to employees who surpass their targets, are examples of trans-

actional leadership. In contrast, transformational leadership looks beyond immediate needs and focuses on potential larger issues. According to Burns, “the transforming leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, engages the full person of the follower.”<sup>60</sup> Elsewhere, he notes that a transforming “leader not only speaks to immediate wants but elevates people by vesting in them a sense of possibility, a belief that changes can be made and that they can make them.”<sup>61</sup> For Burns, transforming leadership is generally superior to transactional leadership. From an ethical standpoint, transactional leadership is merely transaction and hardly leadership at all, whereas transforming leadership is ultimately “moral in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led.”<sup>62</sup>

Transforming leadership differs from servant leadership in that transformational leaders influence through a powerful and uplifting vision, whereas authentic leaders exercise their influence by virtue of their strong sense of who they are and where they stand on fundamental issues, values, and beliefs. Wong and Cummings note that while both types of leaders may have a deep sense of self, vision is the distinguishing feature of transformational leadership. While an authentic leader too may have vision, it is not an essential condition for authentic leadership.<sup>64</sup>

### **Gandhi Moment: The Sandals that Made History**

Here is a sterling example how Gandhi was able to transform his arch opponent, General Smuts, during his time in South Africa.

His work there finished, Gandhi left South Africa with his family in July 1914. Before he departed, he sent General Smuts a pair of sandals as a gift. Smuts wore the sandals every summer at his farm and then returned them on Gandhi’s seventieth birthday.

Smuts remarked, “I have worn these sandals for many a summer . . . even though I may feel that I am not worthy to stand in the shoes of so great a man. It was my fate to be the antagonist of a man for whom even then I had the highest respect. . . . He never forgot the human background of the situation, never lost his temper or succumbed to hate, and preserved his gentle humor even in the most trying situations. His manner and spirit even then, as well as later, contrasted markedly with the ruthless and brutal forcefulness which is the vogue in our day.”<sup>63</sup>

## Charismatic Leadership

First described by the German sociologist Max Weber in 1947 as one of three leadership styles—bureaucratic, traditional, and charismatic—the study of charismatic leadership later evolved with Burns’s concept of transforming leadership. In *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, Weber defined charisma as follows:

Charisma is a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader.<sup>65</sup>

Some researchers look at charismatic leadership as a type of transformational leadership. The charismatic leader and the transformational leader can have many similarities, in that the transformational leader may well be charismatic too. They differ, however, in their basic focus. Whereas the transformational leader’s focus is on transforming the followers, the charismatic leader may not be interested in changing anything. Huang et al. found that charismatic leadership actually may have significant impact on employee outcomes.<sup>66</sup>

Charismatic leaders are often viewed as heroes whose personal charm and appeal attract followers. But a leader’s charisma can be both a blessing and a bane for the society depending upon the moral purity of the leader and how it is used. Charisma can be used for the good of society but also for self-aggrandizement. All charismatic leaders lead by articulating an overarching vision. They often express their vision using metaphors and stories in ways that everyone can relate to. The followers see the leader as one who possesses the ability to visualize the future with clarity and is able to communicate it to them in a most compelling way. Few will doubt that Gandhi was a charismatic leader par excellence.

Under certain conditions, charismatic leaders can help transform an organization and lead it into new areas, and inspire followers, sometimes bringing about extraordinary performance and results. Despite their charm and apparent concern for others, charismatic leaders may well be working more for themselves. That is why values matter the most in the case of charismatic leaders. If they are selfless and well-intentioned toward others, they can elevate and transform an entire organization. If they are selfish and unscrupulous, they can create havoc and pollute the minds of their followers. Their self-belief being high, they easily

convince themselves that they are infallible and indispensable which can take them and their followers into an abyss. An exaggerated sense of self can also lead them into narcissistic conceit, where they become self-absorbed and exhibit a high need for admiration and worship. Peter Drucker has rightly noted, “The three most charismatic leaders in this century inflicted more suffering on the human race than almost any trio in history: Hitler, Stalin, and Mao. What matters is not the leader’s charisma. What matters is the leader’s mission.”<sup>67</sup>

### Servant Leadership

Regarded by many authors as “a valid, modern theory of leadership,”<sup>68</sup> servant leadership was first introduced by Robert K. Greenleaf’s powerful short essay written in 1970, titled “The Servant as Leader.” Describing what he called “the leadership crisis,” Greenleaf notes that “colleges, universities, and seminaries have failed in their responsibility to prepare young people for leadership roles in society.”<sup>69</sup> According to Greenleaf, “The servant-leader is servant first . . . . It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. That person is sharply different from one who is *leader* first.”<sup>70</sup> Greenleaf believes that through selfless service, servant leaders achieve trust among employees, customers, and communities. He then goes on to present the litmus test of effectiveness of leadership:

The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived? . . . The servant-as-leader must constantly ask: How can I use myself to serve best?<sup>71</sup>

Greenleaf informs us that he got the idea of servant leadership by reading Hermann Hesse’s book entitled *Journey to the East*. Therefore, the best way to understand servant leadership is to read *Journey to the East*. The book is about a spiritual journey to the East. During the journey, a humble servant named Leo does all the chores for the travelers. He keeps the group together through his songs and high spirits. And when Leo disappears, the group falls into disarray and the journey is abandoned. They cannot continue without him. Later on in the book, the narrator finds out that, Leo, whom he had taken to be a servant, was actually the noble leader of the group.<sup>72</sup> This radical shift is the core of servant leadership: from followers serving leaders to leaders serving followers.

Servant leadership is shared leadership in essence: it emphasizes increased service to others, a holistic approach to work, promoting a sense of community, and the sharing of power in decision-making.<sup>73</sup>

In short, the basic mind-set of a servant leader is a strong desire to contribute. Stephen Covey writes: “Deep within each one of us there is an inner longing to live a life of greatness and contribution—to really matter, to really make a difference.”<sup>74</sup> Swami Dayananda, a preeminent modern spiritual teacher, puts it even more succinctly: “One must grow from being a consumer to become a contributor.”<sup>75</sup>

Servant leadership is similar to transformational leadership in that both emphasize, appreciate, and empower followers. However, as Stone et al. point out, the main difference between servant leadership and transformational leadership is the focus of the leader: “Transformational leaders tend to focus more on organizational objectives, while servant leaders focus more on people who are their followers.”<sup>76</sup> These authors further point out that servant leaders influence followers through service itself, while transformational leaders rely on their charismatic abilities.

## GROWING LEADERS: BASIC INGREDIENTS

According to Bennis and Nanus, leaders come in all shapes and sizes—short, tall, neat, sloppy, young, old, male, and female. Based on their research, the basic ingredients of leadership are a guiding vision, passion, integrity, trust, curiosity, daring. For them, leadership is all about character, and integrity matters most.<sup>77</sup>

### **Integrity: The Most Important Ingredient**

The importance of integrity is also borne out by many other leadership researchers. Kouzes and Posner, having surveyed over 75,000 people around the globe over the last 30 years, discovered that honesty emerges as the single most important ingredient in the leader-constituent relationship. They conclude that “nearly 90 percent of constituents want their leaders to be honest above all else.”<sup>78</sup> They list five practices of exemplary leadership: (1) Model the way; (2) Inspire a shared vision; (3) Challenge the process; (4) Enable others; (5) Encourage the heart.<sup>79</sup>

According to social learning theory, role models facilitate the acquisition of moral and other types of behavior. This theory highlights the influence aspect of leadership. Albert Schweitzer is reported to

### **Gandhi Moment: Transforming Leadership Par Excellence**

A perfect demonstration of transforming leadership was the historic Salt Satyāgraha Movement that Gandhi led, uplifting the aspirations of the people, which prepared the stage for India's independence from British rule. It awakened the slumbering self-respect and dignity of millions of Indians and elevated them from the morass of disempowerment. On March 2, 1930, protesting against the tax on salt, Gandhi wrote in a remarkable letter to Lord Irwin, the Viceroy of India: "Dear Friend, I cannot intentionally hurt anything that lives, much less fellow human beings, even though they may do the greatest wrong to me and mine. Whilst, therefore, I hold the British rule to be a curse, I do not intend harm to a single Englishman or to any legitimate interest he may have in India."<sup>81</sup>

As always, Gandhi was willing to sacrifice himself for the good of others. Two important social principles were central to his thinking: *Sarvodaya* (the welfare of all) and *Antodaya* (the welfare of the least). Gandhi's precept of concern for the welfare of all (which he imbibed from Ruskin's *Unto This Last*) is in contrast to Mill's Utilitarian precept of concern for "the greatest good of the greatest number."

There was not even a trace of transactional motivation behind anything that Gandhi accomplished, whether in South Africa or India. All his fasts and campaigns, for example, were aimed at transforming his opponents by drawing their attention to the unjust and unfair processes that he was trying to change. For him, a battle that did not lead to a change of heart of the opponent was a lost battle, even when the results were transactionally favorable. That is why Gandhi never really accepted India's partition as a part of the independence bargain.

have said, "Example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing."

Defining the process of becoming a leader in terms of authenticity and self-mastery, Bennis equates it with becoming yourself, which is not as simple as it sounds. He gives out all the keys to exemplary leadership in an interview to *Fast Company*:

The process of becoming a leader is, if not identical, certainly similar to the process of becoming a fully integrated human being. It's got to do with authenticity, it's got to do with candor, it's got to do with the fact that one cannot

truly lead unless one is an expert in self-management. The essence of leaders is placed firmly in issues of character, on who we are, on self-awareness.<sup>80</sup>

All of the positive types of leadership approaches discussed above put the emphasis on the moral side of leadership, thus underscoring the basic link between a given leadership style and what could be considered as “values-based leadership.”

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Enron to Worldcom, Bernie Madoff to Martha Stewart, and so many other instances in the past decade have made us understand that business leaders have lost their True North. Survey after survey has shown that employees’ trust in their leadership is at its lowest ebb. The erosion of trust has led to a lack of engagement in the workplace. Now more than ever, organizations need to pay close attention to the impact the character of their leaders is having on the rest of the workforce and consider how leaders can win back trust. The erosion of values is widespread in our society today. Even as early as 1999, in a survey by Public Agenda, adults in the United States cited “not learning values” as the most important problem facing today’s youth. Notably, in the public’s view, drugs and violence trailed the absence of character as pressing problems.<sup>82</sup>

Gandhi was a visionary whose spiritual maturity still shines like a beacon in the present turbulent times. Gandhi belonged to our own world and faced many of the problems that still plague us today. The sheer force of Gandhi’s personal character and charisma lent further credibility to his leadership style. Little wonder that the impact of his leadership is still felt in the world. A frail man of modest physical strength brought to knees the most powerful empire on the planet by the sheer force of his character, courage, and compassion. He taught the values of nonviolence, selflessness, and truth—values that are more relevant today than any other time in human history.

As his preeminent biographer Louis Fischer has noted, “Gandhi never sought to humiliate or defeat the whites in South Africa or the British in India. He wanted to convert them.”<sup>83</sup> Gandhi’s life demonstrates the force of nonviolent power in action. He was a *mahatma*, a great soul, not only to the Indian people but also to millions around the world. Albert Einstein, in tribute, said that Gandhi “demonstrated that a powerful human following can be assembled not only through the cunning game of the usual political maneuvers and trickeries, but through the example of a morally superior conduct of life.”<sup>84</sup>

All of Gandhi's actions stemmed from a rock-solid value system. We can see the classic four E's of leadership in operation—envision, enable, empower, and energize. He helped shape the largest democracy of the world. Rarely has any leader been able to rally such a band of willing followers. His leadership vision was a combination of the spiritual, the moral, and the practical. Gandhi knew well how to get people in the right place, to do the right thing. His greatest successes came from empowering people. Even with his human, all too human, failings, he must still rank as one of the most positive and the most effective leaders of all time. Gandhi's vision is worthy of emulation to make this world a better place and to make corporate leadership more cognizant of human values and more responsible toward social needs.

Gandhi took an expansive view of morality that included truthfulness, nonharm, and selfless service. His sense of ethics was deeply rooted in his spirituality—the understanding that all life is essentially one unitary movement. As Parekh has noted,

Morality for him consisted in serving and becoming one with all living beings. Negatively it involved refraining from causing them harm, and positively it involved 'wiping away every tear, from every eye' and helping them realize their full moral and spiritual potential. In Gandhi's view, morality and spirituality or religion were inseparable. Since spirituality consisted in becoming one with the cosmic spirit, and cultivating the love of all living beings, it necessarily entailed morality.<sup>85</sup>

I was fortunate to meet Narayan Desai, who spent 21 years with Gandhi and has written an authoritative four-volume biography titled *My Life Is My Message*. When I asked him which Gandhian value stood out most for him, based on his lifetime study of Gandhi's life and leadership, he simply said, "The incessant drive to put into practice what Gandhi believed to be true."<sup>86</sup> Then, after a brief pause, he added, "I have not seen this degree of unity and purity of thought, word, and deed in any other human being."<sup>87</sup> Gandhi's life was indeed his message!

The basic ethical tenets of Gandhian leadership stem from eternal moral truths and progress toward the more applied principles of social contract and conduct. Gandhi's political work was an extension of who he was as a person. He accomplished the impossible by "humanizing politics" and by approaching his lifework in an utterly selfless manner, never seeking any title, position or office whatsoever. He lived by the simple ideal that a "life of labor . . . is the life worth living."<sup>88</sup>

Gandhi recognized that even though humans are always interested in maximizing their own individual good, they are also social beings. The rise and advance of human civilization and growth of human societies and institutions are clear testimony to this fact. Hence the Gandhian dictum, “The good of the individual is contained in the good of the society”<sup>89</sup> holds the key to all-round societal growth. While maximizing their own individual good, humans may also enhance the collective social good. It is precisely such ideas that make Gandhi a beloved leader of all time. His life, work, and thought serve as a guide for human conduct in all its aspects, personal and public.

For Gandhi, this anchorage emanated from a deep conviction about the essential oneness of all life and served as his True North. He strongly believed that the very first step in nonviolence is that we cultivate in our daily life, and among ourselves, truthfulness, humility, tolerance, and loving kindness. How far Gandhi succeeded in living these values is a matter of common knowledge. In practicing what he preached, Gandhi will always serve as an unparalleled paragon of virtue. One cannot expect to pay a greater price for living one’s values than dying for one’s convictions!

How far was Gandhi able to influence those around him in terms of the righteousness of values that he embodied? Considering his influence, one may safely conclude that the world is a better place because there once lived a man named Gandhi. Even if he did not succeed, despite his best efforts, in securing single-nation independence from British rule, at least one can never fault Gandhi for not sincerely trying for what he believed to be the right course of action. As Romain Rolland has observed, “Victory lies not in realization of the goal, but in a relentless pursuit after it.”<sup>90</sup>

Let us conclude this chapter with the words of a great scholar, Dr. Francis Neilson: “Gandhi is unique. There is no record of a man of his position challenging a great empire. A Diogenes in action, a St. Francis in humility, a Socrates in wisdom, he reveals to the world the utter paltriness of the methods of the statesman who relies upon force to gain his end. In this contest, spiritual integrity triumphs over the physical opposition of the forces of the State.”<sup>91</sup>

**Gandhi Moment: Values-Based Leadership Lessons**

1. The only true leadership is values-based leadership.
2. Values represent the heart of leadership and guide behavior and performance.
3. Leadership is not a position but a highly interrelated web of moral relationships between people, based on trust, mutuality, commitment, and a shared vision of the greater common good.
4. Values-driven leaders are altruistic, honest, trustworthy, and principled decision-makers who care about the well-being of their followers and the needs of the broader society.
5. Ethical leaders proactively try to transform followers by communicating ethical standards, modeling ethical behavior, and holding followers accountable for actions.
6. The propriety of ends depends upon the purity of means. Take care of the means and the ends will take care of themselves.
7. The trustworthiness of a leader is measured not only in terms of the nature of the values the leader espouses but also by how consistently the leader aspires to live up to those values.
8. A person's capacity for self-discipline enhances his capacity to influence the environment around him. And no power on earth can make a person do a thing against his will. *He who disciplines himself gains the strength to shape the environment.*
9. Since leadership is an expression of who we are, in discovering, living, and sharing our deepest values lies the fulfillment of our life and leadership.
10. If we want to bring about any change in the world, we have to begin with ourselves. We have to be the change that we wish to see in the world. This was Gandhi's most important discovery and his greatest gift to humankind.

## CHAPTER 6



# NONVIOLENCE: THE MATCHLESS WEAPON

### INTRODUCTION

Gandhi was a naturally charismatic leader. His entire leadership agenda rested on the moral principle of nonviolence (*ahimsā*) and the spiritual philosophy of truth (*satya*). These were the two categorical imperatives of his moral and spiritual worldview. No mere best policy, nonviolence was a living reality for Gandhi. With the possible exception of the Buddha and the Jain teacher, Mahāvira, seldom has any other human being laid so much importance on nonviolence in their life and thought. What was great loving compassion (*karuṇā*) for the Buddha became love expressed and actuated as nonviolence for Gandhi. In his own words: “Nonviolence is the first article of my faith. It is also the last article of my creed.”<sup>1</sup> *Ahimsā* is an important tenet of the ancient Indian religions, Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, and represents an ontological stance about the sacredness of and reverence for all life. Its awareness is what really distinguishes us from other animals. All great teachers of humanity have highlighted it from time immemorial with varying degrees of emphasis.

In this age of impending nuclear warfare, rising international terrorism, and rampant racial conflict, this message of love and nonviolence from Gandhi comes with added force and significance. Gandhi noticed that violence had become so pervasive that people had come to accept it as normal way of life. As Parekh has rightly observed, “In Gandhi’s view, violence ‘oozed from every pore’ of modern society, and had so much become a way of life that human beings today were in danger of losing the capacity to notice its pervasive presence,

let alone find ways of dealing with it.”<sup>2</sup> In his speech at the Lehigh University of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, Arun Gandhi likewise expresses his dire concern about the culture of violence that dominates every aspect of our life—our language, sports, entertainment, business, religion, government, and even education, and underscores the urgency of choosing between nonviolence and nonexistence: “In 1945 after the atom bomb was thrown on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a correspondent asked grandfather what do you think the future of the world is going to be. And his response was that we no longer have the luxury of choosing between violence and nonviolence. Now the option before us is nonviolence or nonexistence.”<sup>3</sup> Today, humanity seems to be marching toward self-annihilation very fast. This is precisely why Gandhi’s approach of nonviolence is more relevant now than ever before.

Since the days of Gandhi and King, the world has seen a dramatic upsurge in nonviolent resistance. Scholars have recently been able to show that “nonviolence is twice as effective as violence in dislodging unjust regimes—and usually three times as fast. Nonviolence can be a safe, effective, and lasting way to defeat injustice.”<sup>4</sup> By the strength of his own life-example, Gandhi has shown how the brute forces of darkness and destruction can be overcome, and how a foe may be converted into a friend, through the gentle power of love and nonviolence.

Gandhi regarded nonviolence to be the greatest force in the world and the surest method of discovering the truth. So complete was his trust in *ahimsā* as the only means for the realization of truth that on the very last page of his autobiography, he proclaims: “But this much I can say with assurance, as a result of all my experiments, that a perfect vision of Truth can only follow a complete realization of *Ahimsa*. To see the universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself.”<sup>5</sup> Within the compass of these two short sentences, all the essential building blocks of Gandhi’s moral and spiritual philosophy are present in their fullest measure. No wonder he regarded nonviolence in thought, word, and deed to be the highest gift of life. However, nonviolence was not a mere creed for Gandhi but a way of life. No armchair philosopher, Gandhi was essentially a man of action—a *karma yogi*. He learned his precepts through action and tested them in the laboratory of life.

This chapter will explore the power of the most potent weapon that Gandhi employed to move the masses and win over his opponents. Gandhi perceived that love, expressed as nonviolence in thought,

word, and deed, was the shortest path to human progress and evolution, both at the individual and the social level. If influence is the measure of man, Gandhi was perhaps the greatest apostle of nonviolence known to humanity. He of course did not invent the philosophy of nonviolence; however, he was a pioneer in extending its application from personal to the social realm: "I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and Nonviolence are as old as the hills. *All I have done is to try experiments in both on as vast a scale as I could do.*"<sup>6</sup> Gandhi was not deterred by the question of whether humanity would ever consciously come to embrace the law of love. He believed that, like the law of gravitation, the law of love would work whether some people accepted it or not.

In the first section of this chapter, we will present the etymology and the basic elements of nonviolence to better understand its role and significance for contemporary times. Next, the application of the principle of nonviolence will be illustrated through the life-example of Gandhi. The final section will suggest its wider applications and relevance in the world at large, including the corporate world today. Gandhi's ethical leadership approach is highly relevant today. As Arun Gandhi has rightly observed, "It seems clear to me that a deep understanding of nonviolence, or *satyagraha*, is essential to practice true ethical leadership."<sup>7</sup> In Gandhi we have a strong voice and great role model for the practice of this matchless weapon.

## ETYMOLOGY

The Sanskrit word *ahimsā* is formed by adding the negative prefix "a" to the word "*himsā*" which is derived from the root "*han*," i.e. "to kill," "to harm," or "to injure." *A-himsā*, therefore, means noninjury or nonharm, or simply nonviolence. The precept of nonviolence is present in every religion, but in Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism its practice was cultivated into a science of mind and an art of living. *Ahimsā* as a religious principle represents belief in the oneness and, therefore, sacredness of all life. It signifies noninjury in thought, word, and deed. The ultimate purpose of practicing nonviolence is to lessen the overall suffering in the world and foster peace, amity, and harmony.

The term "*ahimsā*" refers not just to nonharming physically, but also to refraining from the emotional and psychological humiliation of others, thus encompassing a tolerant attitude toward all. For Gandhi, nonviolence was a broader concept—a way of life based on love and compassion. In his own words, "The very first step in

non-violence is that we cultivate in our daily life, as between ourselves, truthfulness, humility, tolerance, loving kindness.”<sup>8</sup> Clearly, nonviolence is not an isolated quality; its cultivation depends upon many other qualities such as empathy, understanding, consideration, and compassion. It should be borne in mind that pride or egotism is the very antithesis of nonviolence. Thus, humility is concomitant to nonviolence. Gandhi recalls that, “It was only when I had learnt to reduce myself to zero that I was able to evolve the power of Satyagraha in South Africa.”<sup>9</sup> In Gandhi’s vision, humility remains to be the key ingredient of *ahimsā*.

Thus, the commonly used English equivalent “nonviolence” may be misleading as it seems to give the impression that *ahimsā* is just a negative virtue. *Ahimsā* is not mere abstention from the use of force, nor just abstention from killing and injuring; it also implies the positive virtues of compassion and benevolence because not killing and not injuring a living being implicitly amounts to protecting and preserving it and treating it with mercy.<sup>10</sup> For Gandhi, *ahimsā* was a positive force of love.

Michael Nagler clarifies the positive aspect of nonviolence and underscores the superiority of a nonviolent approach to conflict resolution: “The original Sanskrit word *ahimsa* implies the power released when all desire to harm is overcome. This is why, in the nonviolent approach to conflict, we try as far as possible to resist wrongs without resisting people; that is, without wishing them harm or doing anything to compromise their long-term well-being and fulfillment.”<sup>11</sup> The key to Nagler’s interpretation of the sovereignty of the nonviolent approach is ensuring the well-being of people by “resisting wrong without resisting people.”<sup>12</sup> And this is precisely where the power of *ahimsā* resides.

This approach of resisting the wrongs without resisting the wrongdoer calls for the highest form of self-discipline on the part of a leader. It has great potential to transform the workplace because it challenges us to focus on behaviors and not personalities. While providing feedback to people, our critique is generally focused more on their personality than their behavior. The modern approach of focusing on a specific situation or behavior, and not on the person or his intentions, is based on the principle of nonviolence.

## NONVIOLENCE IN THOUGHT, WORD, AND DEED

Nonviolence presents an integral approach to human interaction in which every thought and every intention matters. “In the empire of non-violence, every true thought counts, every true voice has its full

value.”<sup>13</sup> For Gandhi, nonviolence in thought, speech, and deed was true nonviolence. Most violence first starts at the mental level, slowly finds expression at the verbal level, and finally gets actuated at the physical level. So, if one wants to practice nonviolence at the physical level, one has to start at the psychological and verbal levels first, by disciplining one’s thoughts and speech. Really speaking, disciplining our thoughts is the most important first step in curbing nonviolence in our life since mind matters most.

Nonviolence in deed can be expressed as a principle to “not kill any living being.” This principle is expressed in the Hindu dictum: “Nonviolence is the supreme virtue” (*ahiṃsā parmodharma*). In Jainism and Buddhism, the importance of nonviolence is emphasized significantly as their key defining spiritual value. The Buddha, for example, denounced all forms of violence and preached that loving kindness should be extended not only to humans, but to all animals. The Jains extend the concept of *ahiṃsā* to all humans, animals, plants, micro-organisms, and all beings having life or life potential. Jain monks and the nuns undertake five major vows known as *Mahāvratas* at the time of their ordination to monkhood, of which *ahiṃsā* is the first and foremost. All life is sacred and every form of it has a right to live fearlessly to its maximum potential. *Ahiṃsā* does not merely indicate absence of physical violence, but also indicates absence of desire to indulge in any sort of violence. This Jain ideal of *ahiṃsā* profoundly influenced Mahatma Gandhi; through his friendship with the Jain scholar Shrimad Rajchandra (Raychand Bhai), it formed a basis of his *satyāgraha* (truth struggle) against colonial rule.<sup>14</sup> As we saw in chapter 3, Gandhi was greatly influenced by the Jain philosophy of nonviolence quite early on in his life, and continued to imbibe all influences conducive to it as he went through various experiences.

Nonviolence in speech or verbal nonviolence is practiced by eschewing words that are harsh, insulting, disempowering, demeaning, untrue, and unkind. Most violence starts at the mental level and slowly finds expression at the verbal level. The Bhagavad Gītā regards verbal discipline (*tapas*) to be most important and explains that speaking words that are truthful, agreeable, beneficial, and nonagitating constitute such discipline (*anudvegakaramvākyaṃsatyaṃ priyahitam*: 17.15). The following traditional tale about Socrates underscores the need to avoid unnecessary speech that is neither true nor beneficial.

Applying Socrates’s triple-filter test of truth, goodness, and usefulness to our own speech in workplace interactions can save lot of anger and heartburn and help foster an environment of mutual respect and affirmation.

### Verbal Nonviolence: Socrates's Triple-filter Test

In ancient Greece, Socrates was widely lauded for his wisdom. One day an acquaintance ran up to him excitedly and said, "Socrates, do you know what I just heard about your friend, Diogenes?"

"Hold on a minute," Socrates replied. "Before you talk to me about my friend, it might be good idea to take a moment and filter what you're going to say. I call it the triple-filter test. The first filter is Truth. Have you made absolutely sure that what you are about to tell me is true?"

"Well, no," the man said, "actually I just heard about it and. . ."

"All right," said Socrates. "So you don't really know if it's true or not. Now, let's try the second filter, the filter of Goodness. Is what you are about to tell me about my friend something good?"

"Umm, no, on the contrary. . ."

"So," Socrates continued, "you want to tell me something bad about my friend, but you're not certain it's true. You may still pass the test though, because there's one filter left—the filter of Usefulness. Is what you want to tell me about my friend going to be useful to me?"

"No, not really."

"Well," concluded Socrates, "if what you want to tell me is neither true, nor good, nor even useful, why tell it to me at all?"<sup>15</sup>

Nonviolence in thought is about not entertaining violent thoughts about others. All thoughts that breed anger, hatred, jealousy, divisiveness, aggression, conflict, or self-conceit are myriad forms of violence in thought. Harboring thoughts that others are bad or evil or regarding others as bad or evil is another form of violence in thought which is perhaps the most destructive of all. What makes nonviolence in thought more destructive is the fact that while there are limits to causing physical violence to others, nonviolence in thought knows no bounds. As Schoch states, "Modern science tells us that from the standpoint of our brain activity there is no difference between hitting a person and merely thinking about the act. Our brain's limbic system, the part of our brain that is responsible for controlling motor function, releases all the muscle energy that would be required to actually hit someone just by thinking about it. Our brain just cannot tell the difference between thinking about hitting someone and actually doing it!"<sup>16</sup> To this observation, the Buddha would add that if we think about

hitting someone, its effect on our happiness will be similar to the effect of our actually hitting someone.

Therefore, for Gandhi, nonviolence was not mere abstention from physical violence, it was a way of being totally nonharming in thought, word, and deed. More importantly, it was a positive force that sustains life as the Law of Love. Gandhi saw nonviolence as not only a method for struggling against physical violence, but as a universal solvent for subtle emotional and psychological violence. As Martin Luther King wrote, “Nonviolent resistance . . . avoids not only external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit. The nonviolent resister not only refuses to shoot his opponent, but he also refuses to hate him.”<sup>17</sup>

### RETURNING GOOD FOR EVIL

Gandhi believed that violence only breeds more violence and “an eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind.”<sup>18</sup> This is a twist on “an Old Testament reference regarding the legal penalties for violence. Gandhi rejected violence as a means to seek justice or change, and only engaged in peaceful ways of protest.”<sup>19</sup> When Gandhi read such passages as “Love your enemies” or “Turn the other cheek” in the New Testament, he was overjoyed to find his opinion confirmed where he least expected it. “The Bhagavad Gītā deepened the impression,” writes Gandhi, “and Tolstoy’s *The Kingdom of God is within You* gave it a permanent form.”<sup>20</sup> This therefore is the genesis of the concept of nonviolence in Gandhian life and thought. Gandhi did not draw the idea out of thin air; it was based on the solid foundation of the lived philosophy of seers and saints.

Gandhi had a firm conviction that the best way to end the evil is repay it with good: “The old sages returned good for evil, and killed it.”<sup>21</sup> This is the alchemy of peaceful change that Gandhi strived to bring in the world. A traditional tale on the next page underscores the value of returning good for evil in a gentle way.<sup>22</sup>

### NONVIOLENCE IN ACTION: THE INSPIRING EXAMPLE OF MALALA YOUSAFZAI

On October 9, 2012, Malala Yousafzai was shot in the head by Taliban on her way to school. On her sixteenth birthday, on Friday, July 12, 2013, at the United Nations, she marked her first high-level public appearance by giving a historic speech on the importance of education, love, peace, and nonviolence. Listening to the speech of this remarkable

### Returning Good for Evil

In the traditional lore of India there is a story about an old sanniyasi, a Hindu monk, who was sitting on the bank of a river silently repeating his mantram. Nearby a scorpion fell from a tree into the river, and seeing it struggling in the water, the sanniyasi bent over and pulled it out. He placed the scorpion back in the tree, but as he did so, the creature bit him on the hand. He paid no heed to the bite, but went on repeating his mantram. A little while later, the scorpion again fell into the water. The monk pulled him out and set him back in the tree and again was bitten. This little drama was repeated several times, and each time the sanniyasi rescued the scorpion, he received a bite.

It happened that a villager, ignorant of the ways of holy men, had come to the river for water and had seen the whole affair. Unable to contain himself any longer, the villager told the sanniyasi with some vexation:

“Swamiji, I have seen you save that foolish scorpion several times now and each time he has bitten you. Why not let the rascal go?”

“Brother,” replied the sanniyasi, “the fellow cannot help himself. It is his nature to bite.”

“Agreed,” answered the villager. “But knowing this, why don’t you avoid him?”

“Ah brother,” replied the monk, “you see, I cannot help myself either. I am a human being; it is my nature to save.”

young education activist, one is amazed how wisdom, love, and vision have transcended violence and fear in her life. She exemplifies the best in today’s youth. On October 10, 2014, Malala Yousafzai, at age 17, became the youngest recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize.

The Norwegian Nobel Committee noted that Malala has become a leading spokesperson in the struggle for girls’ right to education:

Despite her youth, Malala Yousafzay has already fought for several years for the right of girls to education, and has shown by example that children and young people, too, can contribute to improving their own situations. This she has done under the most dangerous circumstances. Through her heroic struggle she has become a leading spokesperson for girls’ rights to education.<sup>23</sup>

The Nobel Committee decided that the Peace Prize for 2014 would be awarded jointly to Kailash Satyarthi and Malala Yousafzay, each of whom is involved in the struggle against the suppression of children

and young people and for the right of all children to education. The Nobel Committee regarded it as important to recognize the common cause of a Hindu and a Muslim, an Indian and a Pakistani, for education and against extremism.<sup>24</sup> This was great recognition of the contribution of two selfless leaders who are continuing Gandhi's august tradition of nonviolence.

**Malala Yousafzai Addresses United Nations  
Youth Assembly**

... I raise up my voice—not so that I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard. . . . Dear Friends, on the 9th of October 2012, the Taliban shot me on the left side of my forehead. They shot my friends too. They thought that the bullets would silence us. But they failed. And then, out of that silence came, thousands of voices. The terrorists thought that they would change our aims and stop our ambitions but nothing changed in my life except this: Weakness, fear and hopelessness died. Strength, power and courage was born. I am the same Malala. My ambitions are the same. My hopes are the same. My dreams are the same.

I do not even hate the Talib who shot me. Even if there is a gun in my hand and he stands in front of me, I would not shoot him. This is the compassion that I have learnt from Muhammad the prophet of mercy, Jesus Christ and Lord Buddha. This is the legacy of change that I have inherited from Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and Muhammad Ali Jinnah. This is the philosophy of non-violence that I have learnt from Gandhi Ji, Bacha Khan and Mother Teresa. And this is the forgiveness that I have learnt from my mother and father. This is what my soul is telling me, be peaceful and love everyone.<sup>25</sup>

Four things become abundantly clear when we listen to Malala's moving plea for the education of the youth. First, she has been remarkably able to rise above the personal hurt and perceive the larger, underlying cause of the problem. This is a sterling trait that all exemplary leaders share: they are able to envision the universal dimension through personal challenges. One is reminded of the long, cold night Gandhi spent on the platform of the Maritzburg railway station in 1893 when he was brutally thrown out of the train for sitting in the first-class compartment even though he had a first-class ticket. Instead of approaching this incident as a personal humiliation, Gandhi was

able to perceive the universal malady of how Indians were treated in South Africa at that time. He stayed and fought for a cause for the next 21 years. And he won.

Second, Malala has proved that no brute force can ever win over the force of indomitable human will. Paradoxically, the human spirit emerges tenfold strong when confronted with brute force. As Malala says, the incident changed nothing in her life except that her weakness, fear, and hopelessness died, and her strength, power, and courage were reignited. This is a key lesson of Gandhi's life as well.

Third, Malala has been able to transmute her fear and anger into forgiveness and hope. In a lesser soul, such an incident might have provoked a feeling of anger, hatred, revenge, and bitterness. It is the hallmark of all great leaders that they are able to harness their latent goodness when confronted with wicked in human nature. And in doing so, they are eventually able to transform the wicked into good.

Finally, and most importantly, Malala has done what very few of us would be able to: She has forgiven the wrongdoer by awakening her spirit of innate compassion and mercy. She is able to return evil with good.

### NO FUTURE WITHOUT FORGIVENESS

We find the same spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation presented by Desmond Tutu in his oft-quoted observation, "There is no future without forgiveness."<sup>26</sup> Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984, and whom President Nelson Mandela named as the Chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, has been at the center of an unprecedented attempt at healing South Africa after decades of racist apartheid policy. "It is ultimately in our best interest that we become forgiving, repentant, reconciling, and reconciled people because without forgiveness, without reconciliation, we have no future."<sup>27</sup> History is testimony to the fact that lasting peace and security can never be won through the barrel of a gun. In his outstanding classic of forgiveness, Tutu writes subliminally about his "dream for humanity—when we will know that we are indeed members of one family, bound together in a delicate network of interdependence."<sup>28</sup>

Through experience and reflection we know that, in due course, the path of forgiveness leads to reconciliation and harmony. In the long run, requiting evil for evil proves self-defeating and leads to

infinite regress. Violence only breeds more violence. It has been observed that failure to forgive is metaphysical suicide. As Tutu poignantly points out,

We are bound up in a delicate network of interdependence because, as we say in our African idiom, a person is a person through other persons. To dehumanize another inexorably means that one is dehumanized as well. . . . Thus to forgive is indeed the best form of self-interest since anger, resentment, and revenge are corrosive of that *summum bonum*, that greatest good, communal harmony that enhances the humanity and personhood of all in the community.<sup>29</sup>

With profound wisdom and insight born out of decades of experience and reflection, Tutu shows the reader how to move forward with forgiveness and compassion in order to build a newer and a more humane world. Addressing an assembly of newly elected government leaders, he averred “that the cycle of reprisal and counter reprisal . . . had to be broken and that the only way to do this was to go beyond retributive justice to restorative justice. . . .”<sup>30</sup> The vision of nonviolence, reconciliation, and forgiveness is “a centripetal process, a moving toward the center, toward unity, harmony, goodness, peace, and justice, a process that removes barriers. . . . [In the Divine] . . . cosmic embrace, all, everyone, everything, belongs. None is an outsider, all are insiders, all belong. There are no aliens; all belong in the one family, God’s family, the human family.”<sup>31</sup>

## NONVIOLENCE AND GANDHI

Gandhi was born into a family of Vaishnavas (worshippers of the Lord Vishnu) and his mother was piously devout. However, the household in which Gandhi grew up was highly ecumenical and secular. His father had many Jain friends who frequently visited their house and taught the strict doctrine of nonviolence. Gandhi’s reading of the Gītā and other world scriptures greatly contributed to his outlook. These lessons were later reinforced by Leo Tolstoy’s writings, especially the work *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*. However, as noted before, Gandhi was a man of action and learned his most important lessons in the laboratory of life. This becomes clear from the following quote in which Gandhi recounts his debt to his wife for gently giving him a practical lesson in nonviolence:

I learnt the lesson of non-violence from my wife, when I tried to bend her to my will. Her determined resistance to my will, on the one hand, and her quiet submission to the suffering my stupidity involved, on the other, ultimately made me

ashamed of myself and cured me of my stupidity in thinking that I was born to rule over her and, in the end, she became my teacher in non-violence.<sup>32</sup>

There were several formative influences that helped Gandhi refine his understanding of the concept of *ahimsā*. As we will see in the chapter on *satyāgraha*, an early reading of a poem by a Gujarati poet, Shamal Bhatt (1718–1765), inspired Gandhi’s philosophy of returning good for evil. Arun Gandhi told this author in a personal interview that the hymn “*Vaishnava Jana Tō*” (The True Vaishnava) influenced Gandhi the most and he strived very hard to live up to the ideal of a true Vaishnava:

His idea right from childhood was to become such an ideal person himself. So, he struggled every day of his life to acknowledge his own weaknesses and to transform them into strengths. That was something he practiced and encouraged those around him to practice. For him, life was not about going in circles from birth to death—it was about self-improvement to attain self-realization, not simply to grow materially but also morally and ethically.<sup>33</sup>

The hymn (*bhajan*) was composed by a fifteenth-century Gujarati poet, Narsinh Mehta, and was recited daily in Gandhi’s prayers. It is in essence a definition of the true hallmarks of a Vaishnava: strict vegetarianism, *ahimsā*, simplicity. Elements of this hymn were also included in Hollywood film *Gandhi* (1982).<sup>34</sup>

They are real *Vaishnavas* who feel the suffering of others as their own suffering. Ever ready to serve, and never guilty of overweening pride, they bow before everyone, despise none, and preserve purity in thought, word and deed. They see all equally, renounce greed and avarice, respect women as they respect their own mother. They preserve equanimity and never stain their mouth with falsehood, nor covet the riches of another. The bonds of desire cannot hold them. Ever in harmony with the Lord’s name (*Rāmanāma*), they embody all the places of pilgrimage. They know neither desire nor disappointment, neither passion nor wrath.<sup>35</sup>

Arun Gandhi further explained in the interview that he disagreed with many scholars and academicians who believed that nonviolence was nothing but a weapon, a strategy of convenience. He indicated that Gandhi himself has said in his writings that “nonviolence is not a coat you can wear today and discard it tomorrow. It is something you have to make a part of your life.” Arun recalls his days with Bapu and the lessons he learned about understanding his anger and directing it into a positive, constructive action:

Growing up as a boy living in Durban, South Africa, in the 1940s, I was bullied from all quarters. I was a victim of racial prejudice. I was beaten up by whites and by blacks and was filled with anger. I wanted revenge. And that is when my parents brought me to India. The first lesson Bapuji taught me was about understanding anger and being able to channel that energy into positive action. He (Gandhi) said, “Anger is like electricity. It is just as powerful and just as useful but only if you use it intelligently. But it can be just as deadly and dangerous if you abuse it. So, just as we channel electric energy and use it in our lives for the good of the humanity, we must channel anger in the same way so that we can use it for the good of the humanity rather than abuse it to cause death and destruction.”

So, I think that is the first major step one has to take if one wants to be non-violent. . . . The nonviolent practitioner has to control his or her anger and direct it to positive, constructive action.<sup>36</sup>

There is a great lesson here for all of us to learn, since anger is a very powerful emotion capable of both constructive and destructive consequences. Uncontrolled anger has caused much harm to our society at all levels—personal, social, cultural, and religious. Unaddressed anger is not good for anyone and needs to be transformed and channeled into constructive action. One cannot aspire to be nonviolent in one’s behavior if one continues to be angry inside. Anger is a bad master but could be a good servant.

We have been told by experts that anger instigates almost 80 percent of the violence that we experience either in our personal lives or as a society or nation. Anger leads to conflict and conflict to violence. Learning how to use the powerful energy of anger intelligently and effectively is the foundation of Gandhi’s philosophy of nonviolence.<sup>37</sup> When used properly, rightly channeled anger can go a long way in reducing the passive violence at the workplace.

### WASTE AND OVERCONSUMPTION ARE FORMS OF VIOLENCE TOO!

Arun Gandhi recalled another incident from his childhood visit with his grandfather. Arun was twelve to fourteen years of age when his family came from South Africa to spend the years 1945–1947 in India and visited Gandhi at Sevāgrām, Gandhi’s service village. There were lessons, chores, prayers, meals, and some fun. There were no movies, not even electricity, and life at the Āshram was tough. Idleness was not allowed.<sup>38</sup>

### **Gandhi Moment: Conservation is a Form of Nonviolence**

Arun reminisced about a day when he was walking back from school: “I had a very small pencil which seemed too small for me to use. I threw it away, sure that grandpa would give me a new one if I asked him for it. That evening when I asked him for a new pencil, he subjected me to a lot of questions. He wanted to know how the pencil turned so small, why and where I threw it away. Finally, he gave me a flashlight and made me go look for it. When I found the pencil and brought it back, grandpa made me sit and said to me: “I want you to learn two very important lessons:

“First lesson: Even in the making of a simple thing such as a pencil, we use the world’s natural resources. And when we throw them away, we also throw away the world’s natural resources. And that is violence against nature.

“Second lesson: Because, in an affluent society, we can afford to buy all these things, we overconsume the resources of the world. And because we overconsume them, we are depriving people elsewhere of these resources and they have to live in poverty—and that is violence against humanity.

“That was a profound lesson in nonviolence,” said Arun Gandhi. “I never thought that all of these little things we do every day—things we throw away, waste, and overconsume—that that would amount to violence!”<sup>39</sup>

## **PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AND PASSIVE VIOLENCE**

Violence has many faces and dimensions. We not only have the physical violence of wars, riots, assaults, murders, rapes, shootings, etc., but there is more destructive “subtle” violence where we hurt people without using physical force. The subtle “passive” violence can take several forms, as there are countless inconsiderate ways in which we may be hurting people unconsciously. At the emotional level, for example, it could take the form of jealousy, hatred, humiliation, intimidation, threatening, etc. At the psychological level, it could manifest as verbal aggression, isolating, belittling, insulting, slighting, neglecting, and so forth. “Passive violence,” says Arun Gandhi, “manifests in a thousand different ways, like wasting resources, overconsumption, hate, prejudice, name calling. . . . Passive violence fuels the fire of physical violence, which means if we want to put out the fire of physical violence we have to cut off the fuel supply.”<sup>40</sup>

In his interview with this author, Arun Gandhi underscored the same point, albeit more forcefully, illustrated through his personal example. When he was a child at Sevāgrām, by way of self-introspection, his grandfather made young Arun draw up a family tree of violence—on the same principles as a genealogical tree. Violence was the grandparent or trunk—with physical violence and passive violence as its two main branches. Every day before going to bed, Arun had to analyze everything he had experienced during the day and put it down at the appropriate place on the tree. We have forms of violence where physical force is used—kicking and beating, punching, wars, murders, killings, and rapes. And then there are acts of violence where we do not use any physical force and yet we hurt people—such as discrimination; economic, political, social, and cultural oppression or suppression; name calling and teasing; overconsumption of resources; and hundreds and hundreds of things that we do unconsciously without even realizing that we are hurting others. Arun further explains:

When I began to do that introspection, in one month, I was able to fill a whole wall in my room with examples of the acts of passive violence. And then he explained the connection. He said we commit passive violence all the time, everyday—consciously or unconsciously—that generates anger in the victim and the victim then resorts to violence to get justice. It is the passive violence that fuels the fire of physical violence. So, logically speaking, if you want to put out the fire of physical violence, you have to cut off the fuel. And since the fuel supply comes from each one of us, we have to become the change we wish to see in the world. Unless we bring peace and nonviolence within ourselves, we cannot engender peace and violence in the world. *That is why the only person so far who can so righteously say that my life is my message was Gandhi.*<sup>41</sup>

That is why when scholars like Gene Sharp claim that nonviolence is just a strategy, I say that is humbug. It is not a weapon you can just pick and discard. It has to be a part of your being—you've got to be spiritual. I do not mean spiritual in the narrow sense of bringing your personal religion in it; you have to transcend your personal religion and treat all religions of the world with equal respect as much as you respect your own. It is only when we reach that stage, we can call ourselves spiritual. And he achieved that.<sup>42</sup>

We provide this long extract from our interview with Arun Gandhi for two reasons. First, it provides a firsthand account of his grandfather's steadfastness to his principles. And, second, it shows that nonviolence is not a "flu-shot" approach to resolving conflicts. It has to be an integral part of the very core of our being.

## NONVIOLENCE IS NOT A COVER FOR COWARDICE

According to Gandhi, nonviolence is not a weapon of the weak, but it is the supreme virtue of the brave. He made repeatedly clear that there is no place for hypocrisy in the practice of nonviolence and that between violence and cowardly flight, he can only prefer violence to cowardice: "It is better to be violent, if there is violence in our hearts, than to put on the cloak of non-violence to cover impotence. . . . There is hope for a violent man to become non-violent. There is no such hope for the impotent."<sup>43</sup> For Gandhi, the path of nonviolence required far more courage than violence and the practice of nonviolence required far greater bravery than that of swordsmanship.

In his autobiography, Gandhi has stated that the phrase "passive resistance," then in vogue in Europe, was too narrowly conceived and could be interpreted as a cover for cowardice. Or else, it could be disguised hatred and could finally manifest itself as violence.<sup>44</sup> Gandhi believed that mere nonretaliation without love and compassion toward the attacker was not true *ahimsā*. For Gandhi, *ahimsā* signified universal love and an indirect means to the spiritual end of realization of the ultimate truth.

As a principle, *ahimsā* is far more profound than a simple injunction to cause no physical harm. In its original meaning, it denotes dynamic peacefulness that undergirds our essential mutual connectedness with one another and with the rest of existence. It is important to remember that, in Gandhi's life, nonviolence did not just mean causing no harm; rather, it permeated his whole character and emanated from his deeper being as a positive force to help others in the most natural ways.

Mahatma Gandhi's cardinal principle of *ahimsā* emanated from a deep conviction about the essential oneness of all life and served as a True North for that great leader. It sustained him well during India's long struggle for independence. By his own acknowledgement, he learned it from his readings of Tolstoy, the Bible, and the Bhagavad Gītā. Gandhi believed that *ahimsā* without compassion is worthless. *Ahimsā* should begin in self-discipline and must end in love and compassion. So harmlessness does not simply entail not doing harm; it also occasions doing good through loving kindness and compassion. This principle also later inspired a host of other moral leaders, including Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Nelson Mandela.

Gandhi believed that the road to truth is travelled by a steadfast pursuit of nonviolence alone:

*Ahimsa* is not the goal. Truth is the goal. But we have no means of realizing truth in human relationships except through the practice of *ahimsa*. A steadfast pursuit of *ahimsa* is inevitably bound to truth—not so violence. That is

why I swear by *ahimsa*. Truth came naturally to me. *Ahimsa* I acquired after a struggle.<sup>45</sup>

Nonviolence is not a dry intellectual creed but a living matter of heart. It is only when our hearts are rid of conflict, jealousy, anger, and hatred that nonviolence can find true expression in our actions. We must first become nonviolent in our hearts before we can act nonviolently. Mairead Corrigan Maguire, the Northern Irish co-recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize whose family suffered personally from sectarian violence, explains the importance of realizing the moral and spiritual imperative of nonviolence in our hearts as follows:

Gandhi realized that the spirit of nonviolence begins within us and moves out from there. The life of active nonviolence is the fruit of an inner peace and spiritual unity already realized in us, and not the other way around. . . . As our hearts are disarmed by God of our inner violence, they become God's instruments for the disarmament of the world.<sup>46</sup>

Maguire goes on to add that becoming a nonviolent person requires "inner conversion," without which we run the risk of becoming embittered, disillusioned, despairing, or simply cynical and jaded.

### ALL LIFE ENTAILS VIOLENCE

Gandhi acknowledges that "all life entails violence. Our duty is to minimize it."<sup>47</sup> It is an inevitable principle of life that life feeds on life. As a Vedic verse puts it, "Life lives by living off another life" (*jīvo jīvena jīvati*). Merely taking life is not always *himsā*. Sometimes it may become necessary to take life to some extent to sustain one's body or to protect those under our care. Under such circumstances, a compassionate person will commit "as little *himsa* as possible, only when it is unavoidable, and after full and mature deliberation, and after having exhausted all remedies to avoid it."<sup>48</sup> Gandhi acknowledges that in certain cases "even manslaughter may be necessary. Suppose a man runs amuck and goes furiously about with sword in hand, and killing anyone that comes his way. . . . From the point of view of *Ahimsa*, it is the plain duty of everyone to kill such a man."<sup>49</sup>

Deeply influenced by Indian religious thought, especially the principle of nonviolence, Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965), a Christian theologian, organist, philosopher, physician, and medical missionary, developed his doctrine of "reverence for life," for which he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952. He considered this principle both a universal frame of ethics for our times and an evolutionary

imperative. Simply stated, the principle of reverence for life finds its expression in “unconditionally respecting the wish of other beings to exist as one does towards oneself.” Schweitzer strove hard to put this principle into practice in his own personal life as well as in his work as a medical missionary in central Africa.

Like Gandhi, Schweitzer acknowledged that in nature one form of life must always prey upon another. However, he believed that a self-aware, ethical human being respects the will of other beings to live and endeavors hard to minimize the unavoidable harm as far as possible:

Standing, as all living beings are, before this dilemma of the will to live, a person is constantly forced to preserve his own life and life in general only at the cost of other life. If he has been touched by the ethic of reverence for life, he injures and destroys life only under a necessity he cannot avoid, and never from thoughtlessness.<sup>50</sup>

David Bohm, Einstein’s colleague and successor at Princeton, believed that the quantum theory reveals the “unbroken wholeness of the universe.”<sup>51</sup> Quantum physics tells us that separation is only an optical illusion. According to Bohm, this is the natural state of the human world—separation without separateness. However, we continue to delight in differences and fail to see that which is essentially same in all of us. It is abundantly evident that divisions of race, religion, color, creed, and culture have contributed to the most heinous horrors of humankind. This will continue unabated, as history testifies, until we see the tyranny of our disempowering stance and discover our hidden wholeness.

### WHO LOVES HIMSELF SHOULD NEVER HARM ANOTHER

Our self is the dearest of all to us. Love of self comes as a natural endowment that perhaps has its roots in the instinct of self-preservation. An important verse in one of the Upaniṣads, states that we do not love our husband, wife, son, or any other being for their sake, but for our own sake: “It is not for the sake of all, my dear, that all is loved, but for one’s own sake that it is loved.”<sup>52</sup> However, in our bid to get our self-interest across, we often tend to forget the simple fact that, likewise, everyone’s self is also most dear to him or her. According to the teachings of the Buddha, too, every creature holds itself most dear of all; every being wants to live and thrive.

Gandhi's commitment to a nonviolent way of life emanated from his profound understanding of the moral and metaphysical basis of life. It is only when one is able to perceive and "realize one's self in the Self of all" can one become nonviolent in the truest sense. The Christian dictum of "love thy enemy as thyself"—because our self is most dear to us—the practice of loving all, including our enemies, as "ourselves" hinges on realizing the fundamental oneness of all life.

### VIOLENCE BEGETS MORE VIOLENCE

Gandhi strongly believed that violence can never be conquered by violence. Any object acquired by violence has to be retained by violence as well. "There is a law of nature," writes Gandhi, "that a thing can be retained by the same means by which it has been acquired. A thing acquired by violence can be retained by violence alone, while one acquired by truth can be retained only by truth."<sup>53</sup>

Nonviolence is an intensely active force when properly understood and used—"three-fourths invisible and only one-fourths visible." One can characterize its difference from violence as follows:

Nonviolence sometimes "works" *and always works*

while

Violence sometimes "works" *but never works*.<sup>54</sup>

A sterling example of the difference between the outcomes of violence and nonviolence is provided by the Gandhi-led Salt Satyāgraha of 1930. At the cost of much suffering, the campaign produced virtually no change in the salt laws, outside of minor concessions from the government. Yet it has been identified by historians as the turning point that led to the independence of India seventeen years later. Thus, the campaign that "did" the greatest work "did not" seem to work, at least initially, by the usual worldly standards of success. Yet now, we know that it made India's freedom inevitable.<sup>55</sup> Such are the mysterious ways in which the power of nonviolence seems to work.

### GANDHI, AHIMSĀ, AND VEGETARIANISM

When as a young man Gandhi went to London to study law, his friends tried to compel him to eat meat but he abstained, adhering very rigidly to a vegetarian diet in pursuance of his pledge given to his mother not

to eat meat. He joined vegetarian clubs and very soon became a champion of vegetarianism. Because of his unconditional respect and reverence for all living beings, Gandhi remained a strict vegetarian throughout his life and encouraged people around him to do so as well.

*Ahimsā* is the basis for the vegetarianism within Jainism, Hinduism, and Buddhism though it goes well beyond just being vegetarian. This core principle is derived from the Vedic injunction “*mā himsyāt sarva-bhūtanī*”—do no harm to living creatures. This recommendation is also repeated to the seeker after truth in the Upaniṣads. According to the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (7.26.2), “When the food is pure, the mind becomes pure. When the mind is pure, the memory becomes firm. When memory is firm, all ties are loosened.”<sup>57</sup>

According to the Hindu Vedic tradition, all creatures form the limbs of a single, all-pervading divine being. To benefit any one limb is to benefit the divine being and to harm any is to harm the integrity of the divine being. Therefore, every one of our actions should be performed for the welfare of all beings. All the great spiritual traditions of India, drawing upon this root idea, dictate that a spiritual aspirant must abstain as much as possible from causing any harm to any living being. However, at the same time, it was recognized that life inherently involves harm of some form or another.

It is true that vegetarians too cause harm by killing plants or using animals to plough the fields, so inadvertently harming other beings in the process of raising crops. However, this seems minimal compared to the routine cruelty that is involved in raising, transporting, and slaughtering animals for food. It is true that no one in reality can have a completely harmless existence. But that does not mean that we should abandon the core value of harmlessness. We must minimize the harm we cause to other creatures as far as possible. The Buddha said, “All tremble at violence; all fear death. Putting oneself in the place of another, one should not kill or cause another to kill.”<sup>58</sup>

### **Gandhi Moment: Live and Let Live!**

When a scholar named Chou Yu was cooking some eel to eat, he noticed one of the eels bending in its body such that its head and tail were still in the boiling point liquid, but its body arched upward above the soup. It did not fall completely in until it finally died. Chou Yu found the occurrence a strange one, pulled out the eel, and cut it open. He found thousands of eggs inside. The eel had arched its belly out of the hot soup to protect its offspring. He cried at the sight, sighed with emotion, and swore never to eat meat.<sup>56</sup>

Clearly no one is arguing that Eskimos and others who have no other means of sustenance should adopt a vegetarian diet. However, abstaining from eating meat is possible for nearly all of us, given the choices that the modern life accords. The great scientist Albert Einstein is reported to have declared vegetarianism to be the only viable and sustainable way of living on this planet. Likewise, Gandhi observed, “I do feel that spiritual progress does demand at some stage that we should cease to kill our fellow creatures for the satisfaction of our bodily wants.”<sup>59</sup>

It is well beyond the scope of this book to recount the health hazards of eating meat. They are very well documented in the current scholarly and popular literature on health and nutrition. In the final reckoning, it all depends upon our personal beliefs and choices. These choices, being habit-driven, are not always easy to change, even if one is willing. The spirit is willing, says the Bible, but the flesh is weak. Observation and reflection make it clear that as human beings we are not the most rational creatures when it comes to forming our beliefs and making our choices. If life were rational, nobody would choose to smoke. For some, the decision to become vegetarian happens instantly. They read some study on the risks of eating meat or watch documentary footage of a factory farm, and meat is off their menu for good. For others, the decision may come in fits and starts.

We can choose to become vegetarian as a healthy decision both for ourselves and for the environment. We can also choose not to eat meat guided by the pure motivation of nonviolence—becoming vegetarian out of love, kindness, and compassion. Choosing not to cause the suffering of other living creatures for the satisfaction of our taste buds and appetites is the minimal expression of compassion we all can offer. The choice is ours.

## HELP EVER, HURT NEVER

The great Indian epic, Mahābhārata, contains 100,000 verses and is considered to be the world’s longest epic poem (it is more than seven times the combined size of Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*).<sup>60</sup> Its claim to greatness, however, does not rest on its length but in the breadth of its message. It has been rightly said about the Mahābhārata, “Whatever is here, on Law, on Profit, on Pleasure, and on Salvation, is found elsewhere. But what is not here is nowhere else.”<sup>61</sup> The legendary author of this epic, Veda Vyāsa, represented all conceivable human tendencies in the form of characters in the epic. When someone asked him to select the most important single verse that represented the essence of the work, he is reported to have stated, “The gist of a

million treatises is expressed in half a verse: The highest merit is helping others; the highest wrongdoing is hurting others.”<sup>62</sup>

It is important to reflect on this verse singled out by the learned author of this great work. In order to understand the depth of this observation that hurting others is the highest possible spiritual demerit, we have to dig further into the truth of our existence. Consider the following illustration: At its most basic level, all existence—from a piece of rock to the most developed specimen of living beings—is composed of five fundamental elements: earth, water, fire, air, and space. Each of these elements within our body, for example, exists with reference to the totality of its corresponding element outside our body. Take, for example, the element of air. The air that we breathe in exists by virtue of its relationship and interaction with the totality of air that exists outside in the environment. Likewise, the water that exists in our body in the form of various liquids cannot exist without the totality of water that exists outside. The same is true of the remaining elements: they exist in the microcosm of our body by virtue of their relationship with the totality of these elements in the macrocosm. If this is true regarding these physical elements, how much more so must it be of the consciousness that is the fundamental building block of all existence?

This short excursion into the interconnected nature of reality perhaps provides the simplest compelling reason yet to understand the oneness of the whole of existence. In our human terms, it means that we are inseparably one with the rest of existence. So, in effect, to hurt others is to hurt ourselves. That is why sages of humanity have always advocated helping others; they understood that, essentially, there are no others, and all life is inseparably interlinked and interconnected.

### AHIMSĀ AND THE GĪTĀ

Many people, reading the Bhagavad Gītā perfunctorily, conclude that it teaches nonviolence since the Gītā ostensibly exhorts Arjuna, its warrior hero, to engage in a just war as a part of adherence to his allotted duty (*svadharma*) as a warrior. A deeper reading of the text reveals that a person who has attained the highest levels of virtuous living, according to its teachings, cannot indulge in war and violence. In fact, as Y.P. Anand has observed, “Ahimsa is described in the Gīta as one of the vital human qualities proceeding from God (10.5), a virtue denoting wisdom (13.7), a quality of the righteous (16.2), and an essential component of austerity (17.14).”<sup>63</sup>

According to the Gītā (6.29), those who experience the unity of all and have the vision of sameness everywhere (*sarvatra samadarśanah*), see their own self in all beings, and all beings in their own self

(*sarvabhūtaṣṭham ātmānaṃ sarvabhūtāni cātmani*). Perhaps the greatest *raison d'être* for nonharming is presented in the following verse of the *Gītā*:

*ātmaupamyena sarvatra samam paśyati yorjuna /  
sukham vā yadi vā duḥkham sa yogī paramo mataḥ // 6.32*

O Arjuna, that yogī is considered the best who judges what is happiness and sorrow in all beings, by the same standard as he would apply to himself.

Śrī Śāṅkarācārya (ca. 788–820 AD), the great Indian philosopher, explains in his commentary on this verse that such a person views happiness and sorrow in the same way: “Just as happiness is dear to me, so also is happiness agreeable to all creatures . . . ; just as sorrow is unwelcome to me, so also is sorrow unwelcome and unfavorable to all creatures. In this way, . . . he does not act against anyone. That is, he is non-injurious. He who is thus non-injurious and is steadfast in full Illumination [in the unity of all existence] is considered as the best among all the yogīs.”<sup>64</sup> It is only when one acts on the basis of false separateness that one entertains thoughts of anger and hatred toward one’s fellow beings. If we loved everyone like ourselves, we would not even think of harming anyone.

Perhaps in the perennial fight for self-preservation, this type of thinking does not further any evolutionary agenda. Perhaps by some sort of optical illusion, we are not able to see beyond the façade of self-centered, separately existing objects vying for their survival and flourishing. This leads to self-defeating strategies that disempower at best and seriously impinge upon the mutual preservation of everyone’s interest (*sarvabhūtaḥita*) and the mutual maintenance of the universe (*lokaṃgraha*)—the two ideals cherished and practiced by a self-realized person according to the *Gītā*.

### A PLEDGE OF NONVIOLENCE<sup>65</sup>

Believing as we do that life is an interconnected whole, and that there is an inescapable harmony between means and ends, and convinced by the proven effectiveness of nonviolent struggles in a just cause, we take the following pledge:

- While engaged in actions associated with our movement we will refrain from violence in deed, word, and as far as possible even in thought.
- We will remain aware that our opponents are systems, not people; that our goal is to win over, wherever possible, rather than coerce. Therefore

we will not indulge in abusive language or threatening gestures toward anyone.

- We will not confine ourselves to disestablishing what we regard as unjust without at the same time offering a positive alternative.
- Where we succeed, we will not exult in our “victory” or add a fresh issue to the struggle.
- To maintain our own decorum and control, we will not bring or, as far as possible, allow others to bring intoxicants to an action.
- We will take responsibility to control those who might attempt to depart from the nonviolent character of our action, without resorting to their tactics.
- As preparation for a long-term struggle in this spirit, we will learn everything we can about the history, theory, and future promise of nonviolence.
- At the same time, we will minimize our exposure to the commercial mass media, with their dehumanizing message of violence and consumerism.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

An impartial survey of Gandhi’s life and thought reveals that: (1) *ahimsā* refers to the principle of nonviolence based on the sacredness and reverence of all life; (2) it is an important tenet of ancient Indian religions, specifically Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism; (3) it is a universal value cherished by all the wisdom traditions of the world from time immemorial with varying degree of emphasis; (4) Gandhi regarded it as the ontological core of all existence; and (5) the main points of the doctrine find their clearest and noblest expression and exemplification in his own life and thought.

E. Stanley Jones, the well-known missionary evangelist to India, said, “I bow to Mahatma Gandhi and I kneel at the feet of Christ. . . . A little man . . . has taught me more of the spirit of Christ than perhaps any other man in East or West.”<sup>66</sup> Most religions and world history are testimony to Gandhi’s wry observation: “The only people on earth who do not see Christ and His teachings as nonviolent are Christians.” Jones regarded Gandhi as “one of the most Christlike men in history [who yet] was not called a Christian at all.”<sup>67</sup>

Our planet is plagued by mindless exploitation, rampant destruction, dogged self-centeredness, and unbridled greed that has manifested in terrorism, war, and violence. If there is one thing that can save our species from the mad self-destruction of war and terrorism, it is the gift of complete nonviolence. Humanity will forever remain indebted to Gandhi for bestowing this matchless weapon of peace.

### Nonviolence: Gandhi's Leadership Lessons

1. Most violence first starts at the mental level, slowly finds expression at the verbal level, and finally gets actuated at the physical level.
2. Means are ends in the making; nothing good can result from violent means.
3. Nonviolence is both the end and the means. Nevertheless, nonviolence is the means to truth as the end.
4. Nonviolence is not a cover for cowardice. Gandhi has said that "where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence."<sup>68</sup>
5. A thing can be retained by the same means by which it has been acquired. A thing acquired by violence can be retained by violence alone, while one acquired by truth can be retained only by truth.
6. Nonviolence is the farthest limit of humility and is impossible without self-effacement. Pride or egotism is the very antithesis of *ahimsā*.
7. Truth and nonviolence are interrelated; there is no spirituality without morality. And scriptures do not cleanse the ethically unworthy.
8. Some *himsā* (violence) is always going to be a part of the equation of life. But its scope and extent can be controlled and should be minimized. And *ahimsā* (nonviolence) can still inform the spirit in which the violence is done.
9. One cannot aspire to be nonviolent in one's behavior if one continues to be angry inside. Anger is a bad master but could be a good servant.
10. Effective leaders do not lead by anger or fear. The practice of forbearance and forgiveness is their principal armor. Gandhi knew about the alchemy of transforming anger into compassion and harnessing it in the service of others.
11. Violence sometimes "works" but it never works (i.e., makes things or relationships better). Nonviolence sometimes "works" and always works.<sup>69</sup>
12. Be constructive wherever possible, obstructive wherever necessary.<sup>70</sup>
13. One of the key lessons of Gandhi's life and leadership is that brute force can never overcome indomitable human will. It only redoubles the strength and courage of the unified will.
14. An outstanding trait that all exemplary leaders share: they are able to envision the universal dimension through personal challenges.
15. If there is one dogma in Gandhian philosophy, it centers here: that the only test of truth is action based on the refusal to do harm.

## CHAPTER 7



# SATYĀGRAHA: A HIGHER APPROACH TO ETHICS

### INTRODUCTION

By critical standards, the most powerful legacy Gandhi left to the world was the technique of *satyāgraha* (literally, holding steadfastly to the truth, or truth force). It was a direct outcome of his adherence in all his actions to truth and nonviolence, the two cardinal principles of his life and thought. As Eknath Easwaran has observed, “Ahimsa is the bedrock of *satyāgraha*, the ‘irreducible minimum’ to which *satyāgraha* adheres and the final measure of its value.”<sup>1</sup> *Satyāgraha* is an umbrella term that brings noncooperation and civil disobedience in its wake—although, as we will see, it is much broader in scope. It is believed that Gandhi’s unique interpretation of nonviolence as nonharm in the widest possible sense galvanized contemporary movements such as ecosustainability and ecofeminism and helped lay the foundation of a broader movement toward a nonviolent future.

In *satyāgraha*, Gandhi knew that he had hit upon a new principle for social and political change through constructive conflict resolution. Starting as “passive resistance,” the technique of *satyāgraha* soon grew to be eminently more than “civil disobedience.” Soul force it was indeed, but there was nothing “passive” about it; it required hard core action. Thus, *satyāgraha* is soul force pure and simple but is not a weapon of the weak. Paradoxically, it takes a warrior to practice true *satyāgraha*. So unswerving was Gandhi’s faith in it that he concluded his magnum opus on *satyāgraha* with these prophetic words: “*Satyāgraha* is a priceless weapon, and those who wield it are strang-

ers to disappointment or defeat.”<sup>2</sup> *Satyāgraha* was the culmination of a profound development in Gandhi himself. The reason why it found favor among participants was that it harnessed their inmost resources, and thereby gave them the much-needed dignity to bring about change at both the personal and the social level.

For Gandhi, *satyāgraha* was not an abstract concept but an eminently practical way of life. It is a testimony to Gandhi’s genius as a “practical idealist” that everyone who participated in the “new dynamic” of *satyāgraha* got transformed by it at the personal level even when they did not fully become votaries of this technique at the social level. In the West, it has become a fashion to put Gandhi on a pedestal as a saint and thereby deny the practical significance of his vital contribution in the political arena. Even if one does not endorse Gandhi’s asceticism and religious views, one can still value and benefit from this matchless weapon of *satyāgraha*. As Bondurant, a preeminent Gandhian scholar, has pointed out, “It is not necessary to subscribe either to asceticism so characteristic of Gandhi or to his religious notions in order to understand and to value the central contribution of his technique of non-violent actions.”<sup>3</sup> It is here that Gandhi’s real significance and relevance in the contemporary world lie. We need to reclaim Gandhi in totality—in moral, spiritual, and practical realms all at once.

In this chapter, we will present the essentials of *satyāgraha* and its practical application as an instrument of social and organizational change.

## THE GENESIS OF THE WORD

The term *satyāgraha* was coined and developed by Gandhi during his early struggles for the rights of Indians in South Africa, and was later introduced by him in the Indian independence movement. This method was to inspire Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s civil rights movement in the U.S., Nelson Mandela’s anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, as well as revolutions in Poland, Burma, and the Philippines. Gandhi derived the concept of *satyāgraha* from his twin doctrines of truth and nonviolence because *satyāgraha* literally means holding on to Truth (*satya* meaning “truth”; *agraha* meaning “gentle insistence”). In his seminal work *Satyagraha in South Africa*, Gandhi has himself explained the genesis of the word in considerable detail.<sup>4</sup>

At first Gandhi had named his campaign “passive resistance.” This was found inadequate to fully capture the intent and purpose of the movement—for the word “passive” could be misinterpreted as “weakness” by the uninformed. Besides, it led to some confusion on account

of being an “English name.” After reading Thoreau, Gandhi began to term his movement civil disobedience. But neither term—passive resistance or civil disobedience—satisfied him fully; for the *resistance* he envisaged was based on a positive force of love and truthfulness. Looking for an alternative, Gandhi announced a small prize in the Indian newspaper *Indian Opinion* to be awarded to the reader who came up with the best designation for the struggle. One competitor suggested the word “*sadāgraha*,” meaning “firmness in a good cause.” Gandhi liked it, later changing it to “*satyāgraha*” (holding fast to truth) which more fully expressed the moral sentiment behind his concept. Gandhi explains how he came upon the term “*satyāgraha*” and why he gave up the use of the phrase “passive resistance,” as follows:

I liked the word, but it did not fully represent the whole idea I wished it to connote. I therefore corrected it to “*satyāgraha*.” Truth (*satya*) implies love, and firmness (*agraha*) engenders and therefore serves as a synonym for force. I thus began to call the Indian movement “*satyāgraha*,” that is to say, the Force which is born of Truth and Love or non-violence, and gave up the use of the phrase “passive resistance” in connection with it. . . .<sup>5</sup>

However, Gandhi did not draw the idea out of thin air; there were definite influences that contributed to it. Gandhi’s Hindu religious upbringing, early Jain and Buddhist influences, the Sermon on the Mount, and the writings of Leo Tolstoy, Ruskin, and Thoreau all had a share in it. In 1908, when Joseph J. Doke, his first biographer, questioned him, Gandhi explained the genesis of the term “*satyāgraha*” as follows:

I remember how one verse of a Gujarati poem, which, as a child, I learned at school, clung to me. In substance it was this “If a man gives you a drink of water and you give him a drink in return, that is nothing. Real beauty consists in doing good against evil.” As a child, this verse had a powerful influence over me, and I tried to carry it into practice.

As we have seen earlier, this was a real discovery for Gandhi—the freedom to return good for evil. It contained the germ, the acorn of Gandhi’s interpretation of nonviolence. Gandhi appropriately calls it the “real beauty.” Gandhi then goes on to explain how the teachings of the Bhagavad Gītā, the Sermon on the Mount, and the writings of Tolstoy brought his conception of nonviolence full circle:

Then came the “Sermon on the Mount.” Of course I knew the Bhagavad Gītā in Sanskrit tolerably well, but I had not made its teaching [my own]. It was the

New Testament which really awakened me to the rightness and value of Passive Resistance. When I read in the “Sermon of the Mount” such passages as “Resist not him that is evil but whosoever smiteth you on the right cheek turn to him the other also,” and “Love your enemies” . . . I was simply overjoyed, and my own opinion confirmed where I least expected it. The Bhagavad Gītā deepened the impression, and Tolstoy’s “The Kingdom of God is Within You” gave it a permanent form.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, by 1908, Gandhi knew that he needed a new term to clearly denote the movement of the Indians in the Transvaal and to prevent its being confused with passive resistance. Throughout his life, Gandhi not only kept refining the technique of *satyāgraha* but also strove to understand it better himself and explain its implications to others as the method evolved. However, he was very clear about one thing even at the very inception of the movement—that there was no room whatsoever for brute force in *satyāgraha* since brute force and soul force are antagonistic:

But brute force had absolutely no place in the Indian movement in any circumstance, and . . . that no matter how badly they suffered, the *satyagrahis* never used physical force, and that too although there were occasions when they were in a position to use it effectively. . . . *Satyāgraha* is soul force pure and simple, and whenever and to whatever extent there is room for the use of arms or physical force or brute force, there and to that extent is there so much less possibility for soul force. These are purely antagonistic forces in my view, and I had full realization of this antagonism even at the time of the advent of *satyāgraha*.<sup>7</sup>

As a key element of *satyāgraha*, nonviolence was the categorical imperative for Gandhi, and throughout his life he remained steadfast in his insistence on nonviolent means. *Satyāgraha* excludes every form of violence, direct or indirect, and whether in thought, word or deed. For Gandhi, means were ends in the making and victory won violently even for a most cherished goal was not worth having. Gandhi would have agreed wholeheartedly with the Nobel Prize-winner Adolfo Perez Esquivel: “Nonviolent action implants, by anticipation within the very process of change itself, the values to which it will ultimately lead . . . it does not sow peace by means of war.”<sup>8</sup> Esquivel rightly asserts that using violent means to achieve peace will be counterproductive since it will mean trying to secure peace by means of war.

Likewise, there can be no *satyāgraha* in an unjust cause. As a result of its absolute purity, Gandhi believed that the principle of *satyāgraha*

has universal application: “It is the beauty of this spiritual weapon that when it is completely free from the taint of *himsa* [violence] and its use is actuated purely and solely by love, it may be used with absolute impunity in any connection and in any circumstances whatever.”<sup>9</sup> By describing *satyāgraha* as a force of love, Gandhi endowed nonviolence with the most positive connotations. This in fact became the most subtle part of Gandhi’s interpretation of *satyāgraha* as a unique method quite unlike any other.

It is important to bear in mind that in the ultimate analysis, *satyāgraha* is a soul force—resistance of the soul against what is wrong. It is not retaliation against wickedness, which Gandhi believed only increased wickedness. It is a complete mental and moral opposition to immorality. What gives *satyāgraha* its unique position is that, being a soul force, it is beyond any conquest at the physical level. It puts one in touch with one’s indomitable spirit. As Gandhi explained, “It is a fundamental principle of *satyāgraha* that the tyrant, whom the *satyāgrahi* seeks to resist, has power over his body and material possessions, but he can have no power over the soul. The whole science of *satyāgraha* was born from the knowledge of this fundamental truth.”<sup>10</sup> Here, Gandhi underscored another very important point: no amount of brute force can ever triumph over indomitable will. Gandhi would use this powerful principle in all of his *satyāgraha* movements.

### PASSIVE RESISTANCE AND SATYĀGRAHA

As we saw earlier, before Gandhi developed his doctrine of *satyāgraha* to its full logical and spiritual extent, he used “passive resistance” as a term for his technique of struggle against injustice. But as the doctrine of *satyāgraha* developed, the expression “passive resistance” was dropped, as passive resistance was inadequate and admitted of violence. At the same time, Gandhi was concerned that equating *satyāgraha* with passive resistance, it might lead to it being misinterpreted as a weapon of the weak by the universal power of suggestion. Thus, even though the expression “passive resistance” was used initially for its popular value, later it was abandoned by Gandhi as a misnomer.

Gandhi made it very clear that *satyāgraha* is essentially different from “passive resistance.” For example, there is no scope for love in passive resistance—and Gandhi often used the words love and nonviolence interchangeably. Not only has hatred no place in *satyāgraha*,

it is a positive breach of its cardinal principle, namely, love. Pointing out some key distinctions between these two, Gandhi writes:

While in passive resistance there is a scope for the use of arms when a suitable occasion arrives, in *satyāgraha* physical force is forbidden even in the most favorable circumstances. . . . *Satyāgraha* and brute force, being each a negation of the other, can never go together . . . in *satyāgraha* there is not the remotest idea of injuring the opponent. *Satyāgraha* postulates the conquest of the adversary by suffering in one's own person.<sup>11</sup>

Here is another unique element of Gandhi's conception of *satyāgraha*: winning over the adversary by the gentle force of self-suffering. Gandhi is quite categorical in his insistence that *satyāgraha* and brute force are as antagonistic to each other as light and darkness. Thus, Gandhi stopped using the term "passive resistance" for it was limited in scope, gave the impression of "passivity," and had the potential of involving violent means. After all, "non-violence plus violence, non-violence with violence held in reserve, is no nonviolence at all."<sup>12</sup> Elsewhere, Gandhi succinctly explains that passive resistance "is different from *satyāgraha* in three essentials: *Satyāgraha* is a weapon of the strong; it admits of no violence under any circumstance whatsoever; and it ever insists upon truth."<sup>13</sup> *Satyāgraha* is sometimes contrasted with its opposite *durāgraha* "clinging to the bad," which implies the use of coercion or force. The ultimate aim of *satyāgraha* is always to bring parties closer together, and so persuasion is preferred to coercion wherever possible.

### THE ROOTS OF SATYĀGRAHA

In order to understand the origins of *satyāgraha*, we have to consider the metaphysical roots of Gandhi's view of reality since "*Satya*"—the Truth—and "*Sat*"—the Reality—form the essential parts of the technique. We have seen that the concept of truth was central to Gandhi's philosophy. Gandhi based his worldview on traditional Hindu philosophy, especially as enunciated in the Bhagavad Gītā. As Glyn Richards has observed, "The early Hindu tradition refers to ultimate Reality as Brahman, the substratum of all and everything, which in Advaita Vedānta tradition is identified with the Ātman, the innermost Self and principle of life, which man is required to live in accordance with . . . Gandhi preserves the metaphysical and moral connotations

of these Hindu terms by the use of Satya or Truth.”<sup>14</sup> This goes to show that Gandhi’s understanding of *satyāgraha* was deeply rooted in the metaphysical and moral underpinnings of the Hindu spiritual tradition. For Gandhi, truth is the essence of reality since nothing exists except the truth:

The world rests upon the bedrock of *Satya* or Truth. *Asatya* meaning untruth, also means non-existence: and *Satya* or Truth also means that which is. If untruth does not so much as exist, its victory is out of the question. And Truth, being that which *is*, can never be destroyed. This is the doctrine of satyagraha in a nutshell.<sup>15</sup>

As is clear from the foregoing, Gandhi equates truth with reality, the reality of that which *is*. One can clearly trace this understanding of Gandhi to specific verses in the Gītā. For example, in one of its most famous half-verses, the Gītā (2.16) declares, categorically: The unreal has no being and the real never ceases to be (*nāsato vidyate bhāvo nābhāvo vidyate sataḥ*). Similarly, Truth, being the substratum and the essence of all, pervades entire creation and is imperishable; no one is capable of destroying it (Gītā, 2.17). However, it is important to bear in mind that *Satya* as Truth was not an intellectual abstraction for Gandhi; it was a living reality, a way of life.

The Brahman, the ultimate reality, is frequently expressed as *Sat-Chit-Ananda*, Being-Consciousness-Bliss-Absolute. Everything that exists has this Being-Consciousness-Bliss as its ultimate nature or substratum which is essentially nondual—One, without a second. On this quantum soup of metaphysical oneness which forms the warp and woof of all life, flora and fauna, various names and forms (*nāma-rūpa*) are superimposed which account for all the multiplicity of creation. It is very important to understand this view of life and reality in order to fully appreciate Gandhi’s insistence on nonharm to any being. Since there is one Self that pervades all the myriad selves, to hurt any being is essentially to hurt oneself. Once one understands this fundamental point, the teachings of various spiritual traditions that emphasize the essential unity of all existence become abundantly clear. From Gandhi’s life and thought, one can clearly determine that this principle was a living reality for him.

The following Buddhist story underscores the fundamental fact that those who understand that one Self pervades all—and that our self is our most precious possession—do not harm anyone or anything.

### Gandhi Moment: Our Self Is Most Dear to Us All

Pasenadi, the king of Kosala, is taking a stroll with his queen, Mallika. In an intimate mood, King Pasenadi asks his wife, "Is there anyone who is more dear to you than yourself?" This surely not meant as a philosophical inquiry; the King no doubt expects the Queen to reply, "You, of course, my dear." But the Queen is in a very frank mood, and she answers, "No." Then she returns the question to the King, asking, "Is there anyone who is more dear to you than yourself?" Her candor is disarming; the King has to be frank too. "I also know no one who is more dear to me than myself," he says. Not long after this troubling conversation, the King sought the counsel of the Buddha.

Buddha, understanding the true meaning of this, pronounced these inspired verses: "If you thoroughly search in ten directions with your mind, nowhere will you find anything more dear to you than yourself. In the same way, the self is extremely dear to others. Therefore, *one who loves himself should cause no harm to another.*"<sup>16</sup>

In summary, *satyāgraha* can be described as follows:

1. *Satyāgraha* is holding on to truth nonviolently, come what may.
2. It is a direct corollary of truth and nonviolence.
3. It is a soul force or truth force that excludes the use of violence in any shape or form—whether in thought, speech, or deed.
4. It is a weapon of the strong and not of the weak.
5. It requires self-sacrifice and readiness to go through self-suffering bravely.
6. It is to be exercised by a band of well-prepared people who are devoted to truth, nonviolence, and the welfare of all.
7. It is universally applicable to all injustice, all tyranny.
8. It cannot and should not be used for an unjust cause.
9. The purpose of *satyāgraha* is conversion, not coercion.
10. One aspect of nonviolence emphasizes the nonharming, the negative part, while the other aspect emphasizes the love and compassion, the positive part.<sup>17</sup>

## MEANS AND ENDS

Gandhi laid the utmost importance on the purity of the means: "In *satyāgraha*, the cause has to be just and clear as well as the means.

The ideal of *satyāgraha* is not meant for the select few—the saint and the seer only, it is meant for all.”<sup>18</sup> In the Gandhian philosophy of life, means and ends are interchangeable terms. Furthermore, means are ends in the making—the realization of the ends precisely matches the means employed. For Gandhi, there was no rigid “wall of separation” between means and ends because, according to the Law of Karma, we reap exactly what we sow.

The Law of Karma is the law of ethical causation or moral retribution that precisely links our actions with their results. We cannot expect to get roses by planting noxious weeds: “The means may be likened to a seed, the end to a tree; and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree . . . we reap exactly as we sow.”<sup>19</sup> This is in stark contrast to the view of Machiavelli, that “some things which seem virtuous, would, if followed, lead to one’s ruin and that some others which appear vices result in one’s greater security and well-being.”<sup>20</sup> As Raghavan Iyer has noted, “Gandhi explicitly rejected the doctrine that ‘the end justifies the means,’ and went so far as to assert that a moral means is almost an end in itself because ‘virtue is its own reward.’”<sup>21</sup>

Gandhi’s view of the interrelation of means and ends is summarized in the following statements: (1) “There is no wall of separation between means and ends. Indeed, the Creator has given us control (and that too very limited) over means, none over the end. Realization of the goal is in exact proportion to that of the means. This is a proposition that admits of no exception”; (2) “For me it is enough to know the means. Means and end are convertible terms in my philosophy of life”; (3) “I feel that our progress towards the goal will be in exact proportion to the purity of our means”; and (4) “They say ‘means are after all means.’ I would say ‘means are after all everything’. As the means so the end.”<sup>22</sup>

These statements have far reaching psychological and moral implications for leaders. The first statement, for example, dispels the myth that we can control the results of our actions. The outcome of our actions depends upon countless known and unknown causes. To the extent that they are determined by past tendencies, our actions are not even fully under our control. This understanding frees us from our undue concern for outcomes and enables us to focus more on the “righteousness” or “moral purity” of our actions. Only when our actions are just can we hope to receive results that will be salutary. The Law of Karma is inexorable and gives results according to the moral quality of the means employed. This was the founding principle underlying Gandhi’s

technique of *satyāgraha*—adherence to truth by following nonviolent means. No wonder that, for Gandhi, means were everything. This means-ends connection governed all he did. Nonviolence was a law of life for Gandhi and essentially encompassed both the means and the end. What an object lesson for all leaders to learn.

The entire edifice of ethics depends upon the bedrock of means and ends. Throughout its long history, humanity has struggled with this dichotomy and taken two basic approaches to address it. One approach advocates that “ends justify means” and is based on the notion of self-preservation at all costs. It has been argued repeatedly that any means is legitimate that is indispensable for a nation’s security or to defend society against its external enemies. It admits no categorical imperative; its goal is expediency rather than principle. As Raghavan Iyer has correctly pointed out, “For Gandhi, on the other hand, the end is *satya* or truth, which requires no justification, and the means (*ahimsa* or noncoercion) must be justified not merely with reference to the end but also in itself; every act must be independently justified in terms of the twin absolutes, *satya* and *ahimsa*.”<sup>23</sup>

Gandhi based his view of ends and means on a metaphysical faith in a higher moral law—the Law of Karma. He was also deeply affected by his study of the *Gītā* which teaches the doctrine of detached action. For Gandhi the ultimate test of one’s moral integrity was nonviolence. Some years later, Aldous Huxley confirmed Gandhi’s position that means are at least as important as the ends if not more important: “For the means employed inevitably determine the nature of the result achieved; whereas, however good the end aimed at may be, its goodness is powerless to counteract the effects of the bad means we use to reach it.”<sup>24</sup>

### TRUTH AND LOVE: THE HIGHEST PRINCIPLES

Gandhi called his overall method of nonviolent action *satyāgraha*, whose meaning, fully rendered, would be “the force generated through adherence to Truth.” Gandhi’s aim was to win the opponent through a “change of heart.” “*Satyāgraha* is soul force pure and simple . . .” he wrote, “not a weapon of the weak.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, for Gandhi, brute force and soul force constitute two opposite forces, one material and the other spiritual, and never shall the twain meet. The individual committed to the truth of the soul force must willingly endure suffering and sacrifice rather than inflicting them upon others.

Gandhi described *satyāgraha* as a coin, on one of whose faces you read love and on the other truth.<sup>26</sup> Fundamental to understanding Gandhi’s position about adherence to truth is his belief that, “There

is an indefinable, mysterious Power that pervades everything . . . a Living Power that is changeless, that holds all together, that creates, dissolves, and recreates. That reforming Power is God . . . is Life, Truth, Light."<sup>27</sup>

In the personal realm, *satyāgraha* engenders a creed of "freedom from injury to every living being." In the workplace setting, *satyāgraha* represents the value of nonviolent conflict resolution. However, it must be kept in mind that, as stated above, passive resistance does not describe *satyāgraha*; it represents only a step in the civil disobedience effort. *Satyāgraha* as practiced by Gandhi is an active force which cannot be described by such expressions as "passive resistance."

### THE LAW OF SUFFERING<sup>28</sup>

The Law of Suffering was defined by Mahatma Gandhi as the necessity of the nonviolent actor voluntarily enduring suffering as a mechanism for transforming an opponent. The law rests on Gandhi's observation that "real suffering bravely borne melts even a heart of stone. Such is the potency of suffering or *tapas*. And there lies the key to *satyāgraha*."<sup>29</sup> In other words, the law does not apply to just any suffering, but to suffering borne voluntarily and without hatred or ill-will toward the opponent. In effect, the *satyāgrahi* deliberately takes on suffering that is already inherent in the situation in order to awaken the conscience of the opponent and, as Martin Luther King put it, this kind of "unearned suffering is redemptive."<sup>30</sup>

Gandhi established the Law of Suffering early in his career and clearly formulated its definition in *Young India* in 1931. In his words,

The conviction has been growing upon me, that things of fundamental importance to the people are not secured by reason alone, but have to be purchased with their suffering. . . . suffering is infinitely more powerful than the law of the jungle for converting the opponent and opening his ears, which are otherwise shut, to the voice of reason. I have come to this fundamental conclusion that, if you want something really important to be done, you must not merely satisfy the reason, you must move the heart also. The appeal of reason is more to the head, but the penetration of the heart comes from suffering. It opens up the inner understanding in man. Suffering is the badge of the human race, not the sword.<sup>31</sup>

The law of self-suffering may appear to carry a ring of negativity and undue asceticism to it. However, in the Gandhian scheme, it draws upon and generates the most positive force in oneself and others. As Bondurant has noted, "Just as *ahimsa* carries in the Gandhian ethic the positive meaning of love and goodwill, self-suffering requires the

positive attribute of courage.”<sup>32</sup> Self-suffering entails the endurance of suffering as a means to an end, the end being the moral upliftment or progress of an individual or society.

### SATYĀGRAHA IN ACTION: THE CASE OF KAILASH SATYARTHI

We often confuse popularity and media presence with real greatness or contribution. More often than not those who are after fame usually have little or no time to make any real contribution to the society—and those who contribute and serve have little or no time for self-promotion. A parallel of this can be found in the corporate world, too—there are *informers* and there are *performers*.

A case in point is the work of Kailash Satyarthi,<sup>33</sup> who shared the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize with Malala Yousafzay. Malala came to international notice when she was shot in the head by Taliban militants on her way to school in 2012, but Satyarthi is still relatively unknown even in his homeland, India. This second Indian to win the Nobel Peace Prize, after Mother Teresa in 1979, is an Indian child right activist and a global leader against child labor. He has initiated and led several projects such as the Global March Against Child Labor, South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude (SACCS), and Rugmark. In 1980, he founded the *Bachpan Bachao Andolan* (lit., Save the Childhood Movement) and has acted to protect the rights of more than 83,000 children from 144 countries.<sup>34</sup> Satyarthi was trained as an electrical engineer, but he began his work by staging peaceful raids on Indian manufacturing, rug-making and other plants where children and often entire families worked as bonded labour.<sup>35</sup>

While conferring the Peace Prize on Kailash Satyarthi, the Norwegian Nobel Committee noted about his contribution:

Showing great personal courage, Kailash Satyarthi, maintaining Gandhi’s tradition, has headed various forms of protests and demonstrations, all peaceful, focusing on the grave exploitation of children for financial gain. He has also contributed to the development of important international conventions on children’s rights.<sup>36</sup>

Kailash Satyarthi’s life work is an excellent example of Gandhi’s *satyāgraha* in action. This 60-year-old social activist from New Delhi has peacefully fought his “crusade against child servitude.”<sup>37</sup> When recently asked if he thought India’s government had failed the country’s children, Satyarthi said: “Absolutely, they have failed. Not just them, it is a collective failure of the international community.”<sup>38</sup>

## FASTING

Gandhi observed fasts as a part of *satyāgraha*—as an act of persuasion and not of coercion. He undertook fasts as a means of communicating with his fellow beings. As Gandhi once said, “I fasted to reform those who loved me . . . you cannot fast against a tyrant.”<sup>39</sup> Fasting in *satyāgraha* has to be distinguished from a hunger strike which is undertaken in protest but not necessarily with the focus on changing the mind of the opponent. Similarly, it has to be distinguished from a purificatory or penitential type of fast—or fast for health—which may not be directed toward another at all. Gandhi’s fasts were higher-order acts of self-sacrifice.

One may fast for one’s health sake or fast as a penance for a wrong done. In these fasts, the fasting person need not believe in *ahimsā* as no one else is involved. However, Gandhi believed that when a follower of nonviolence feels impelled to undertake a fast by way of protest against some wrong done by society and in which there is no other remedy left, the strictest tenets of nonviolence must be followed. At best, fasting may be used as an adjunct to other forms of *satyāgraha*.

Gandhi considered fasting as a “fiery weapon” that should not be entered upon lightly:

Fasting is a fiery weapon. It has its own science. No one, as far as I am aware, has a perfect knowledge of it. Unscientific experimentation with it is bound to be harmful to the one who fasts, and it may even harm the cause espoused. No one who has not earned the right to do so should, therefore, use this weapon. A fast may only be undertaken by him who is associated with the person against whom he fasts. The latter must be directly connected with the purpose for which the fast is being undertaken.<sup>40</sup>

He frequently warned against the indiscriminate use of the fast and extensively wrote on the dangers of considering any fast as a part of *satyāgraha*. The majority of fasts, he declared were nothing more than “hunger strikes undertaken without previous preparation and without adequate thought.”<sup>41</sup>

Gandhi believed that he must undertake a fast only when the still small voice within him called for it, never out of anger. He himself carried out about a dozen fasts of this type, not all of which he considered successful, in terms of transforming the behavior of the other.

In the course of his writings and life, he outlined the following five principles for a successful fast:

1. One must be a certain type of person in order to undertake it. In the case of a “fast unto death,” for example, one must really be capable of voluntarily laying down one’s life if one’s demands are not met.
2. The person to whom *satyāgraha* is being offered in that form must be someone who feels in some way part of one’s community. The act loses its meaning if the person to whom it is offered feels no such bond. (Throughout his career Gandhi never really fasted against the British, but rather to awaken his fellow Indians.)
3. It must be the last resort.
4. The demand must be reasonable.
5. It must be consistent with the rest of one’s campaign, if not one’s life.<sup>42</sup>

### GUIDE TO SATYĀGRAHA IN ACTION

The specific steps that need to be undertaken in a given *satyāgraha* movement will be dictated by the need or the context of the situation itself. However, a successful *satyāgraha* campaign involves a strict code of discipline and adherence to some fundamental rules. In the course of his myriad experiences, Gandhi refined these rules and made a science out of *satyāgraha*. We present below a brief outline of the code of discipline and rules of conduct.

#### Code of Discipline<sup>43</sup>

The following points were laid down by Gandhi as a code for volunteers in the 1930 movement:

1. Harbor no anger but suffer the anger of the opponent. Refuse to return the assaults of the opponent.
2. Do not submit to any order given in anger, even though severe punishment is threatened for disobeying.
3. Refrain from insults and swearing.
4. Protect opponents from insult or attack, even at the risk of life.
5. Do not resist arrest or the attachment of property, unless holding property as a trustee.
6. Refuse to surrender any property held in trust at the risk of life.
7. If taken prisoner, behave in an exemplary manner.
8. As a member of a satyagraha unit, obey the orders of satyagraha leaders, and resign from the unit in the event of serious disagreement.
9. Do not expect guarantees for maintenance of dependents.

### Fundamental Rules of *Satyāgraha*

Although developed as ideological creed, Gandhi kept on refining the rules of *satyāgraha* over a period of 50 years in South Africa and India. Bondurant summarizes the fundamental rules for a *satyāgraha* campaign as follows:<sup>44</sup>

1. Self-reliance at all times. Outside aid may be sought under certain circumstances, but should never be counted upon.
2. Initiative in the hands of the satyagrahis. Through careful and continuous assessment of the situation, the satyagrahis should press the movement ever forward.
3. Propagation of the objectives, strategy and tactics of the campaign. Propaganda should be made an integral part of the campaign. Education of the opponent, public, and participants should continue apace.
4. Reduction of demands to a minimum consistent with truth. The demands should be continuously assessed and adjusted if necessary.
5. Progressive advancement of the movement through steps and stages determined to be appropriate within the given situation. However, direct action should be launched only after all other efforts to achieve satisfactory settlement have failed.
6. Examination of weakness within the satyagraha group. The morale of the participants should be upheld at all times through appropriate awareness.
7. Persistent search for avenues of cooperation with the adversary on honorable terms. Every effort should be made to win over the adversary through sincerity rather than a victory over the adversary.
8. Refusal to surrender essentials in negotiation. All agreements that compromise the essential objectives of the satyagraha should be excluded.
9. Insistence upon full agreement on fundamentals before accepting a settlement.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

*Satyāgraha* was Gandhi's unique discovery to attain the goal of self-realization. In Gandhian scheme, it meant steadfast adherence to truth while following the path of complete nonviolence. Gandhi envisioned *satyāgraha* as not only a method for fighting against unjust politics, but as a universal solution to injustice and harmfulness. Sri Aurobindo, the Indian sage who was also a part of the *Swadeshi* (self-sufficiency)

movement in India as early as 1902–1905, provides a succinct view of *satyāgraha*: “Mahatma Gandhi’s non-cooperation movement was . . . a transformation of passive resistance (“Satyagraha”) from political means into a moral and religious dogma of soul-force and conquest by suffering.”<sup>45</sup> This is precisely where Gandhi’s innovation lies—moralizing and spiritualizing politics, an area in which humanity can learn and benefit to the highest degree. And this shift also made his task daunting.

The last sentence of the *Ethics* of Spinoza reads, “*Sed omnia praeclara tam difficilia quam rara sunt*”—But everything great is just as difficult to realize as it is rare to find. Gandhi strove to take the difficult path of meeting violence with love (*ahimsā*)—the road less travelled—and remained steadfast in his adherence to truth (*satyāgraha*). That is where his uniqueness as a leader lies. Today Gandhi is universally “recognized as a major practitioner of and thinker about nonviolence as a form of managing conflict and resisting injustice.”<sup>46</sup> Unquestionably, as long as there are oppressed who seek to resist injustice, his legacy will live on.

#### ***Satyāgraha*: Gandhi’s Leadership Lessons**

1. The power of suggestion is such, that a man at last becomes what he believes himself to be. *Satyāgrahis* should never believe themselves to be weak and powerless.
2. Nonviolence is not a cover for cowardice.<sup>47</sup>
3. As a soul force, *satyāgraha* is beyond any conquest at the body level. It puts one directly in touch with one’s indomitable spirit which cannot be subdued.
4. Individual will can effect social change. First, the will has to be trained in patience and persistence.
5. Ends do not justify the means and a moral means is almost an end in itself because “virtue is its own reward.”
6. One of the key ingredients of *satyāgraha* is tolerance, not in the sense that one is prepared to compromise one’s beliefs but in the sense that one is prepared to respect other belief systems. This leads to better understanding and harmony.
7. Some *himsā* (violence) is always going to be a part of the equation of life. But its scope and extent are controllable and should be minimized. And *ahimsā* (nonviolence) can still inform the spirit in which the violence is done. This is an important insight into the practice of nonviolence.
8. *Satyāgraha* is not only a method for fighting against unjust politics; it is a universal remedy for injustice and harmfulness.

## CHAPTER 8



# SELF-DISCIPLINE: THE MAKING OF AN EXEMPLARY LEADER

### INTRODUCTION

Leadership is the art of putting others first and giving of oneself to a cause greater than one's own progress or profit. In order to become a fit instrument of "giving of self to others," one must first undergo a process of complete self-purification and self-transformation following strict self-discipline. Self-discipline involves three related aspects of self-control—the ability to resist temptation, the ability to tolerate delay of gratification, and the imposing of strict standards of accomplishment upon oneself. Essentially, it entails the conservation of energy so that it can be rechannelized in harnessing self-awareness. Such self-discipline became the hallmark of Gandhi's pedagogy of transformation of character and he achieved it through various practices such as prayer, vows, fasting, and confession. In his own words: "The call to lead India did not come to me in the nature of a sudden realization. I prepared for it by fasting and self-discipline."<sup>1</sup>

Gandhi believed in the credo of "simple living, high thinking"<sup>2</sup> and remained steadfastly true to these twin precepts throughout his life. He believed that a vainglorious life of pomp and show distracts leaders from their true aim and becomes a hindrance on the way to self-development and selfless service to others. For Gandhi, "A certain degree of physical harmony and comfort is necessary, but above that level, it becomes a hindrance instead of a help. The ideal of creating an unlimited number of wants and satisfying them seems to be a delusion and a snare. . . . A man must arrange his physical and cultural

circumstances so that they may not hinder him in his service of humanity.”<sup>3</sup> He considered the multiplication of wants a hindrance to an individual’s spiritual growth and ability to render selfless service to humanity. This understanding of the vital difference between needs and wants lies at the very root of much of Gandhian economics.

For Gandhi, self-discipline constituted a whole trajectory of virtues such as self-restraint, self-purification, self-cultivation, and self-growth. He believed that one should start the task of improvement with oneself since this is the only place in the universe that one can be sure of improving. All battles need to be fought first on the battlefield of one’s own mind and heart. “The only devils in this world,” said Gandhi, “are those running around in our own hearts, and that is where all our battles should be fought.”<sup>4</sup> Self-discipline may seem to be a high price in the beginning, but it is well worth paying for what one becomes at the end.

This chapter will critically examine some of these virtues of self-discipline, with special reference to Gandhi’s 11 vows that he experimented with throughout his life to constantly “remake” himself, and their relevance to the modern workplace and leadership.

## PREPARATION FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF SELF

Self-transformation is a long and hard process and is beset with challenges at every step. It has been compared to walking on a razor’s edge.<sup>5</sup> The path to self-transformation is paved with self-discipline and self-restraint. These are necessary because the flesh and the spirit follow different tracks and more often than not are in fierce conflict with each other. Even when the spirit is willing, often the flesh remains weak. Preparation for the path begins with taming the flesh and making it a willing participant on the journey to self-transformation. To bring the flesh along, so to speak, and to make the body willing, the seeker has to follow certain disciplines by way of preparation for the path. This preparation involves removing the roadblocks constituted by the baser passions of flesh and transmuting these into higher aspirations of spirit. It requires single-minded persistence to prepare oneself for the spiritual journey with self-discipline and self-purification. Gandhi has written: “It is my firm belief that the strength of the soul grows in proportion as you subdue the flesh.”<sup>6</sup> This conviction was at the root of all he undertook under the general rubric of self-discipline.

From time to time, Gandhi used to make vows that imposed voluntary suffering on himself, to cleanse himself and to make

himself spiritually ready for the challenges ahead. Gandhi's 11 vows were a part of his "*tapas*"—austerity or self-denial for self-purification. Gandhi explains the necessity and importance of the first five of these vows as follows:

Just as for [conducting] scientific experiments there is an indispensable scientific course of instruction, in the same way strict preliminary discipline is necessary to qualify a person to make experiments in the spiritual realm. Unless you impose on yourselves the five vows, you may not embark on the experiment at all.<sup>7</sup>

As is evident from the above quote, Gandhi regarded spirituality as objectively as a scientist would regard science. Just as one requires a strict course of preconditions for the successful conduct of scientific experiments, so a seeker after truth must prepare by undertaking the vows. The same laws govern success, whether in the sacred or the secular field.

#### **Humility: An Essential Leadership Trait**

One of the most important preconditions for the spiritual quest is humility. Many spiritual traditions speak about the need to "be poor in spirit and pure in heart."<sup>8</sup> The seeker must realize his or her utter nothingness and become a humble instrument of the Whole to receive spiritual wisdom. Gandhi strongly believed that the "truth is not to be found by anybody who has not got an abundant sense of humility. If you would swim on the bosom of the ocean you must reduce yourself to a zero."<sup>9</sup> In fact, humility is both the means and the goal. In the field of leadership, the importance of humility can hardly be overemphasized. Only humble leaders can serve a cause higher than themselves.

### **THE 11 VOWS OF GANDHI**

Gandhi first declared his 11 vows when he established his first Āshram in India in 1915. Only those who were ready to take these vows were admitted as inmates to the āshram.<sup>10</sup> These vows were like 11 steps to higher awareness, higher realization, and higher attainment. We first list them below and then present a brief description of each vow.

1. Nonviolence (*ahimsā*)
2. Truth (*satya*)
3. Nonstealing (*asteya*)
4. Self-Discipline or Celibacy (*brahmacarya*)
5. Nonpossession (*aparigraha*)
6. Bread (Physical) Labor (*sharīrasbrama*)
7. Control of the Palate (*aswāda*)
8. Fearlessness (*sarvatra bhayavarjana*)
9. Equality of All Religions (*sarva dharma samānatva*)
10. Use of Locally Made Goods (*swadeshi*)
11. Removal of Untouchability (*sparsabhāvanā*)

The first five vows<sup>11</sup> on the list form the five *yamas* (fivefold abstinctions) and constitute step one (*Yoga Sūtra* 2.30) of the eight well-known steps that Patañjali states in the *Yoga Sūtras*, his user-manual on meditation. In Jainism, these are also known as the five great vows (*Pancha Mahāvratas*). Gandhi's father had many Jain friends who were frequent visitors at home when Gandhi was growing up; so, Gandhi imbibed these influences early on. These five vows have to do with training our actions, speech, and thoughts in relation to the external world, particularly with regard to other people. So important were these five vows to Gandhi that he considered them as the necessary five disciplines to observe to arrive at the correct understanding of the interpretation of the Gītā:

But you must approach it with the five necessary equipments, viz., *ahimsa* (non-violence), *satya* (truth), *brahmacharya* (celibacy), *aparigraha* (non-possession), and *asteya* (non-stealing). Then and then only will you be able to reach a correct interpretation of it. And then you will read it [the Gītā] to discover in it *ahimsa* and not *himsa*, as so many nowadays try to do.<sup>12</sup>

These five disciplines are called *yamas* since they represent “moral restraints” or rules for living virtuously. These rules can be very important in the workplace to create an atmosphere of understanding and harmony. Practicing these vows, however, does not equal becoming “ineffectual” or allowing ourselves to be taken advantage of by others. Commenting on these five *yamas*, Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood have rightly noted, “We must think of ourselves as the servants of mankind, and be ready to put ourselves at the disposal of those who need us. It does not mean, however, to lend ourselves to the evil purposes of others. . . . The truly helpful man is like public trolley car, available to all who care to use it, but travelling,

nevertheless, along a fixed route to its destination.”<sup>13</sup> These authors judiciously point out the importance of keeping to one’s own course even when one is available to help others in theirs.

The remaining six of the eleven vows of Gandhi fall into two sets of observances: from number six to eight, they represent disciplines aimed at self-restraint and self-mastery, and from number nine to eleven, they reflect observances that foster understanding and harmony in the society. As a whole, these six vows draw upon a variety of sources that Gandhi was familiar with through his various interactions with the Indian religion (*Hindu Dharma*). We discuss some of these sources below to show that Gandhi did not create them out of the thin air, although some vows such as bread labor, self-reliance (*swadeshi*), and removal of untouchability do represent unique Gandhian innovations.

Patañjali, for example, concludes the list with the five *niyamas*<sup>14</sup> (fivefold disciplines) which represent the following virtues:

1. *Śauca*m (purity)
2. *Santoṣa* (contentment)
3. *Tapas* (austerity)
4. *Swādhyāya* (spiritual study)
5. *Ishwara Pranidhānam* (surrender to God)

*Niyamas*, according to Patañjali, constitute five observances that prepare the mind for spiritual freedom (*Yoga Sūtra* 2.32). Although these five self-explanatory disciplines do not explicitly form a part of Gandhi’s eleven vows, Gandhi practiced every one of these with utmost fidelity. Given the fact that Gandhi’s ultimate goal was self-realization, one is able to clearly discern his commitment to all of these virtues of self-discipline.

Another variation of the list is available in the context of a popular Indian festival, Dussehra, which signifies the victory of good over evil. Most Indian festivals have deep symbolic meaning and are designed for self-introspection and self-purification. *Dasha-hara*<sup>15</sup> is a Sanskrit word which means overcoming ten bad qualities or tendencies within us:

1. *Kāma vāsanā* (Lust)
2. *Krōdha* (Anger)
3. *Mōha* (Attachment)
4. *Lōbha* (Greed)
5. *Mada* (Excessive Pride)

6. *Mātsara* (Jealousy)
7. *Swārtha* (Selfishness)
8. *Anyāya* (Injustice)
9. *Amānavatā* (Cruelty)
10. *Ahankāra* (Ego)

Dussehra is also known as “Vijayadashamī” in South India which means gaining victory (*vijaya*) over these ten (*dasha*) bad qualities. Vijayadashamī refers to the tenth day of the month (*dashamī*) on which Goddess Durga slew the demon king Mahishasura (signifying the victory of good over evil). Note that overcoming these negative qualities primarily revolves around moderating ego and self-importance, and the evils incidental to an overly inflated ego such as excessive desire, anger, attachment, jealousy, and greed. A comparison between these myriad lists reveals how deeply immersed Gandhi was in the spirit of Indian thought and religion (*Hindu Dharma*). These spiritual roots kept him steadfast in observing the 11 vows with an abiding courage of conviction.

Let us take a closer look at these vows through which Gandhi sought to govern his inner life and transform himself.

### *Ahimsā* (Nonviolence)

Even among the five great vows, nonviolence (*ahimsā*) is considered to be the most important and the highest spiritual principle (*Ahimsā parmo dharma*). As we have seen, nonviolence is not a negative virtue but is based on the positive quality of universal love and compassion. One who lives by this ideal cannot be indifferent to the suffering of others.

Simply put, *ahimsā* is the avoidance of violence and harm in thought, word, and deed. The grossest form of *himsā* is physical violence. When we begin to put this vow into practice, we must first pay attention to physical violence. After overcoming the weakness of violence in the physical form, we can concentrate on abstaining from verbal violence—using harsh, abusive, or indecent language. Then there is a subtle form of violence called passive violence. In the chapter on nonviolence, we have presented a detailed account of how Gandhi considered passive violence to be the most destructive manifestation of *ahimsā*. At the emotional level, for example, it could take the form of jealousy, hatred, humiliation, intimidation, threats, and so on. At the psychological level, it could manifest as verbal aggression, isolating, belittling, insulting, slighting, neglecting, and so forth.

Gandhi was of the view that we commit passive violence all the time, every day—consciously or unconsciously—that generates anger

in the victim, who then resorts to violence to get justice. Most violence first starts at the mental level, slowly finds expression at the verbal level, and finally gets actuated at the physical level. It is the passive violence that fuels the fire of physical violence. So, as we have seen, if we want to put out the fire of physical violence, we have to cut off the fuel. And since the fuel supply comes from each one of us, we have to become the change we wish to see in the world. Thus controlling violence at the thought and emotional level is the key to put an end to physical violence.

Gandhi considered *ahimsā* not the way of the timid but a weapon of matchless potency for the brave. For Gandhi, *ahimsā* was not merely a negative state of harmlessness, but a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil-doer.<sup>16</sup> We can cultivate loving kindness toward all by developing a conviction that there resides one spirit in all (*sarvātma bhāva*). Without this understanding, Gandhi believed, we cannot extend our benevolence toward all and everything. Here again, we find that the secular and sacred were one for Gandhi.

Gandhi equated nonviolence with goodness. He showed the same love to all creatures. The good man, said Gandhi, is the friend of all living beings. Nonviolence for Gandhi was the direct route to the realization of truth. In the last chapter of his autobiography, titled “Farewell,” Gandhi explains the direct link between *ahimsā* and truth as follows:

My uniform experience has convinced me that there is no other God than Truth. And if every page of these chapters does not proclaim to the reader that the only means for the realization of Truth is *Ahimsa*, I shall deem all my labor in writing these chapters to have been in vain.<sup>17</sup>

From its placement at the very end of his autobiography, Gandhi clearly intends to convey to the reader the strategic importance of these two cardinal tenets in defining his course of life, both personal and professional.

### **Satya (Truth)**

Truth is the beginning and end of spiritual life—both the means and the end of spirituality. Since both means and ends were equally important to Gandhi, truth and nonviolence became just like the two sides of the same coin in all his undertakings. Truth is the most important vow, being the very basis of all the others. At the human interaction level, it is a verbal discipline and assumes harmony between our

thoughts and words. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that true spirituality consists in “making the heart and lips the same.”<sup>18</sup>

Again, Gandhi insisted that truth should be of thought, speech, and action, much more than just verbal discipline: Truth is God—the fundamental Reality behind all existence. From the subtitle of his autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, one can understand that truth was the summum bonum for Gandhi. He wrote, categorically: “To the man who has realized this Truth in its fullness, nothing else remains to be known, because all knowledge is necessarily included in it. What is not included in it, is not truth and so not true knowledge.”<sup>19</sup> The vow of truthfulness means that one has to observe truth under all conditions:

He alone is a lover of truth who follows it in all conditions of life. Nobody is forced to tell lies in business or in service. One should not accept a job which does so, even if one starves in consequence.<sup>20</sup>

One should not only refrain from falsehood, but should always speak the truth which is wholesome and pleasant. A Sanskrit verse (*Manu Smṛiti* 4.138)<sup>21</sup> puts it succinctly:

*satyaṁ brūyāt priyaṁ brūyāt na brūyāt satyaṁ apriyaṁ/  
priyaṁ ca nānuṣṭaṁ brūyāt eṣa dharmah sanātanaḥ//*

Speak truth in such a way that it should be pleasing to others. Never speak truth which is unpleasant to others. Never speak untruth which might be pleasant. This is the path of eternal morality.

To speak the truth requires moral courage. Only those who have overcome greed, fear, anger, jealousy, pettiness, vanity, and so on can really speak the truth. Having the courage to remain silent is also a part of being truthful. One should remain silent if the truth causes pain or hurt to any living being. So simple, yet so profound!

Gandhi provides detailed practical instructions, framed as questions, on how to examine ourselves about the truthfulness of our conduct in our interactions with others.

Each of us should examine only himself or herself from this point of view: Do I deceive anybody knowingly? . . . Do I try to show, in order to win people’s respect or esteem, that I possess certain virtues which in fact I do not possess? Do I exaggerate in my speech? Do I hide my misdeeds from persons to whom I should confess them? If a superior or co-worker puts me any question, do I evade him? Do I keep back what I ought to declare? If I do any of these things, I am guilty of untruth.<sup>22</sup>

What a wonderful set of questions to help us remain steadfast on the path of truth in our interactions with others. In this list of questions, Gandhi emerges as a practical moralist. The last two have direct application in the workplace. One can only marvel at Gandhi's sincerity and thoroughness in delineating these questions. All of them underscore profound virtues that are so important for the smooth functioning of any relationship both at the personal and at the professional level. Just take the simple matter of evading our supervisor or a coworker. How often are we guilty of this untruth?

### TWIN PILLARS OF GANDHIAN LEADERSHIP

As is clear from the foregoing, Gandhi's life and leadership was solely founded on the twin cardinal values of truth (*satya*) and nonviolence (*ahimsā*). It is important to bear in mind that these two Sanskrit words have no true equivalents in English; both signify far deeper values than what is denoted by the English words "truth" and "nonviolence." "*Satya*" is derived from the root "*sat*" which literally means "that which exists" and has a deeper dimension not usually associated with the English word truth. Similarly, "*ahimsā*" according to Gandhi is much more than mere absence of physical violence. It means love and compassion:

The ultimate value Gandhi assigns nonviolence stems from two main points. First, if according to the Divine Reality all life is one, then all violence committed towards another is violence towards oneself, towards the collective, whole self. . . . Second, Gandhi believed that ahimsa is the most powerful force in existence. Had himsa been superior to ahimsa, humankind would long ago have succeeded in destroying itself.<sup>23</sup>

We can easily discern the profundity of Gandhi's analysis of the sources of *ahimsā* as stated in the above quote. At one level, Gandhi saw it as the representation of oneness of all life, as underscored in the teachings of the Bhagavad Gītā. At another level, he established the superiority of nonviolence purely due to its pragmatic expediency.

Taken together, truth and nonviolence constitute the alpha and omega of Gandhi the man, as well as Gandhi the leader; every form of discipline or vow that Gandhi observed in his life was just a variation on these themes. And based on all the available evidence, Gandhi remained true to both of these vows in both letter and spirit. For Gandhi, there was the "relative truth" of truthfulness in human interactions, and the "absolute truth" of the Ultimate Reality. This ultimate truth is God (as God is also Truth) with ethics as expressed in

the moral law as its basis. Gandhi was humble enough to acknowledge that the truth we experience at the level of human interactions is “relative, many-sided, plural, and is the whole truth for a given time. There is no scope of vanity in it and the only way to reach it is through ahimsa. Pure and absolute truth should be our ideal.”<sup>24</sup> This humility gave Gandhi the understanding to be on the side of the truth rather than insisting for the truth to be on his side. Such humility and courage of conviction are object lessons for contemporary leaders. Even while committing to truth and nonviolence as the absolute ideals, leaders should remain open to the fact of manysidedness of truth encountered at the level of human interaction.

For Gandhi, truth and nonviolence were indistinguishable, and nonviolence (*ahimsā*) was the truest manifestation of ethical behavior. He wrote: “Truth is the end and ahimsa is the means thereto.”<sup>25</sup> As stated earlier, truth and nonviolence were two core practices that defined Gandhi’s life and leadership. Of the two, Gandhi found the ideal of nonviolence to be the hardest to fathom and practice. He wrote in his autobiography: “It seems to me that I understand the ideal of truth better than that of Ahimsa, and my experience tells me that if I let go my hold of truth, I shall never be able to solve the riddle of Ahimsa.”<sup>26</sup> And yet, it is in the realm of practicing nonviolent resistance that Gandhi’s true legacy lies.

### ***Asteya* (Nonstealing)**

Stealing consists of taking others’ property without their consent or by unjust or unfair methods. Gandhi considered stealing as a form of violence, and gave a far wider meaning to it. Nonstealing for Gandhi did not mean merely nontheft. Stealing does not mean just breaking into a house and stealing. To keep or take anything which does not belong to one is also stealing. Similarly, taking or keeping more than what one needs is also a form of stealing. Any unfair transaction through which we derive some benefit is stealing. Not paying a person his due is also a form of stealing because it entails holding back what rightfully belongs to another person. Likewise, nonstealing also denotes not entertaining any thoughts of covetousness toward either persons or objects.

The practice of this vow becomes spontaneous if we remember that in fact nothing in this world really belongs to us. The source of this conviction in Gandhi perhaps can be traced to his appreciative reading of the opening verse of *Īsopaniṣad*<sup>27</sup> which states, “Behold the universe in the glory of God: all that lives and moves on earth. Leaving the transient, find joy in the Eternal: set not your heart on another’s

possession.”<sup>28</sup> As noted earlier, Gandhi held this opening verse in such high esteem that he believed that it contained the essence of Hinduism. *Īśopaniṣad*, one of the ten principal Upaniṣads, is a short text of just 18 verses. Gandhi believed that the entire Bhagavad Gītā could be seen as a commentary on just that initial verse.<sup>29</sup>

Taking more than we need, or wasting resources, is also a form of stealing from others. Gandhi insisted that one who follows the observance of nonstealing must bring about a progressive reduction of his own wants. He believed that much poverty in the world has arisen out of breaches of the principle of nonstealing. Rampant greed has resulted in the mindless multiplication of our wants, completely out of step with our needs. Gandhi has observed: “Earth (*prithvī*) provides enough to satisfy every man’s need but not for every man’s greed.”<sup>30</sup> He saw the ubiquitous tendency of humans to hoard as the cause of much poverty. To hoard more than what one really needs is a subtle form of stealing since it deprives those who may need the things that one is hoarding. Thus the solution to this problem lies in the voluntary reduction of one’s wants in favor of other’s needs: “There would be no poverty on Earth if we made a sacred resolution that we would have no more than we need for our creature-comforts.”<sup>31</sup> Gandhi believed that we generally rationalize about the things that we want. If we were honest, we would be astonished to find how few things we really need.

A person who wishes to apply nonstealing (*asteya*) in his life ought to lead such a simple life that he takes for himself only his minimum requirements from society. It means treading lightly on the planet—reducing our total footprint, not just the carbon footprint. In the Gandhi āshrams, one aspect of *asteya* was avoiding waste of any kind. Gandhi considered waste to be a sin against nature. Clearly, this broader interpretation of nonstealing has far-reaching implications for our modern quest of sustainability, besides being directly beneficial in any workplace setting.

### ***Brahmacarya* (Celibacy or Self-Discipline)**

Total abstinence from sensual pleasure is called celibacy. Sensual pleasure is an enamoring force which beclouds all virtues and reason at the time of indulgence. It is one of the most powerful of temptations that can cause one to stray from the narrow path of truth. This vow of controlling sensuality is very subtle and difficult to observe in its true form. One may refrain from physical indulgence but may still dwell on psychological pleasures of sensualism. According to the Gītā (3.6), a person who outwardly controls the organs of sense, but mentally dwells on the objects of senses is a hypocrite. Gandhi described

*brahmacharya* as the search for Brahma (truth) and, in the most commonly accepted sense, the “control in thought, word, and action, of all the senses at all times and in all places.”<sup>32</sup>

A man or woman completely practicing *brahmacharya* is absolutely free from passion. Such a one therefore lives high unto God, is Godlike. Gandhi wrote: “I have no doubt that it is possible to practice such brahmacharya in thought, word and action to the fullest extent. Brahmacharya means control of all the organs of sense. I am sorry to say that I have not yet reached that perfect state of *Brahmacharya*, though I am every moment of my life striving to reach it.”<sup>33</sup> Gandhi insisted that *brahmacharya*, like all other vows, must be observed in thought, word and deed. He constantly strived to gain greater control over his thoughts to overcome his carnal desires:

Owing as I do all the good there may be in me to my mother, I have looked upon woman, never as an object for satisfaction of sexual desire, but always with the veneration due to my own mother. . . . I have never claimed to have been a perfect *brahmachari* of my definition. I have not acquired that control over my thoughts that I need for my researches in non-violence. If my non-violence is to be contagious and infectious, I must acquire greater control over my thoughts.<sup>34</sup>

In this revelatory quote in *Harijan*, his weekly journal, Gandhi candidly lays bare the challenges he faced in overcoming lust. He is honest in confessing that he is far from acquiring full control of his thought process. In 1906, at the age of 36, Gandhi had taken the Hindu vow of *brahmacharya* (chastity), determined to remain celibate for the rest of his life, for reasons of spirituality, self-discipline, and commitment to public service. When he went to London to study law, he had taken an oath to stay away from wine, woman, and meat. In London, Gandhi soon came under the influence of the Vegetarian Society and its president, Arnold Hills, who, besides vegetarianism, also advocated abstinence from sex even within marriage, except for the purpose of procreation. He slowly began to realize the vital link between food and sexuality, between control of the palate and control of the impulses of the body and the mind. However, it was not until he went to South Africa in 1893 that Gandhi really started to refine his thinking about *brahmacharya* and discover the essential interconnectedness of truth, nonviolence, and celibacy. And when he returned to India in 1915, much to the chagrin of his closest associates, his experiments in self-restraint assumed extraordinary proportions. As Tridip Suhrud, a social scientist, has noted:

Though it took him several decades, but through his observances, his experiments, Gandhi developed insights into the interrelatedness of Truth, Ahimsa and *Brahmacharya*. . . . Truth and non-violence were also means to Satyagraha and Swaraj. Thus, his practice of *brahmacharya* moves between two planes of private and public, between spirituality and politics.<sup>35</sup>

And this exchange of spirituality and politics, private and public life, is precisely the reason behind much of the controversy that has been generated around this aspect of Gandhi's life. Gandhi saw *brahmacharya* as one of the three means for self-purification, the other two being prayer and fasting. It is to Gandhi's credit that, as a part of his vow of truthfulness, he did not keep anything secret about his experiments in this arena either.

A partial biography by a Pulitzer Prize-winning author Joseph Lelyveld (*Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and His Struggle with India*) published in 2011 created much outrage among the public in India.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, much controversy was created by a *Wall Street Journal* review of this book by a reviewer unfriendly to Gandhi who made summary statements about his character, leading the author Lelyveld to say, in an attempt to clear the air, "The reviewers have been reading too much into my work."<sup>37</sup> More books on this topic have been published recently and the diaries of one of Gandhi's grand-nieces came to light in 2013 providing further material for scholars.<sup>38</sup>

It is unclear if such radical experiments served any useful purpose other than generating endless controversies. Perhaps Gandhi pushed his experiments with celibacy beyond reasonable limits that many people find so unacceptable. Perhaps we secretly wish our heroes to fail, for their perfection is too irritating to our egos. Or perhaps we can never really understand the true import of these experiments, for "there are certain things," as Gandhi reminds us at the outset of his autobiography, "that are known only to oneself and to one's Maker."<sup>39</sup>

Be that as it may, it is perhaps safe to say that such controversies generally tend to generate more heat than light—depending upon one's agenda. They also tend to reveal more about the researcher than about the subject of their research. Perhaps as yet we have not developed the requisite objectivity about exploring this aspect of Gandhi's life. As Suhrod has rightly observed:

We have not been able to cultivate the distance and the equanimity necessary to ask the questions of Gandhi's sexuality. . . . We would continue to explore this aspect of Gandhi in the years to come as it is an integral aspect of Gandhi's self practices. What sense we make of it would depend upon what each individual researcher brings to the endeavor, those seeking gossip would find that and those seeking an age-old spiritual practice would find that light.<sup>40</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this book to go into further detail on this subject. Readers who wish to learn more about Gandhi's experiments in this area can start with Nirmal Kumar Bose's balanced and sympathetic account in *My Days with Gandhi*.<sup>41</sup>

### *Aparigraha* (Nonpossession)

*Aparigraha* means nonhoarding, nonavarice, noncovetousness and nonattachment, all part of the development of an attitude of detachment or independence. *Aparigraha* is a great remedy for the affliction of greed. However, it is much more than just managing greed in oneself; it is about truly respecting others and nature. By extension, it includes generosity as well: to receive and not share is selfish.

Why is it necessary to develop an attitude of detachment towards our possessions? Quite simply, attachment brings anxiety and interferes with our spiritual growth. As Swami Prabhavananda and Isherwood have observed, "Attachment, and the anxiety which accompanies attachment, are obstacles to knowledge."<sup>42</sup> *Aparigraha* also helps one in slowly giving up the acquisition of worldly possessions, an essential condition of a seeker of truth. Grasping and acquiring new objects can be an addiction also, and as we painfully discover, these acquisitions do not bring lasting happiness or make the craving go away. To use a well-known cliché: "Live simply so that others may simply live." This will lighten our footprint upon earth.

Realizing fully well that it would not be easy for many businessmen and landlords to give up the idea of possessions, Gandhi advocated that they should consider themselves not owners but trustees of the property that they held. A trustee is expected to use the income of the trust solely for its beneficiaries. The concept of trusteeship can be seen as an extension of both nonstealing and nonpossession.

Gandhi felt that a deeper understanding of the idea of nonpossession in fact requires a complete transformation of one's orientation about how one relates to property and possessions. As he explains in his autobiography: "I understood the Gītā teaching of non-possession to mean that those who desired salvation should act like the trustee who, though having control over great possessions, regards not an iota of them as his own. It became clear to me as daylight that non-possession and equability presupposed a change of heart, a change of attitude."<sup>43</sup> Gandhi was also the ultimate minimalist. It was an inviolable principle of Gandhi's life that he proved everything he preached by putting it into practice in his own life. Nonpossession was no

different. When Gandhi died, he had less than ten possessions including a watch, spectacles, sandals, and an eating bowl. He was a true man of nonpossession.

These are the five great vows or observances (*yamas* or moral codes). Let us now turn to the remaining six vows, which seem to represent the social application of these five.

### ***Sharirashrama* (Bread Labor)**

Gandhi got the idea of bread labor from the writings of Leo Tolstoy, John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, and the third chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā.<sup>44</sup> "One who enjoys the gifts of the gods," says the Gītā (3.12), "without offering them (anything in return) is, indeed, a thief." The idea of Vedic sacrifice is just this: the individual act of sacrifice (as an offering to the Whole) becomes imbued with significance of cosmic proportions—the mutual coexistence and maintenance of the universe. This is not just a principle related to Vedic life, but a universal principle underlying all life: the existence and well-being of each entity ensures the existence and well-being of all others.<sup>45</sup> Scientists call this web of mutually sustaining coexistence "deep ecology."

Gandhi believed that the "sacrifice" by way of "offering" mentioned in this verse could only mean bread labor.<sup>46</sup> He modified this idea into the concept of *shrama-yajña*. The idea is that everyone must put in some physical labor to earn his daily bread. He suggested that even those who earn their livelihood through white-collar jobs should devote at least one hour every day to some kind of physical labor in the spirit of oneness with the poor. Gandhi once said that if he had the good fortune of meeting with the Buddha in person, he would not hesitate to ask him why he did not teach the gospel of work, in preference to one of contemplation.<sup>47</sup>

In his own life, Gandhi's daily spinning on the *charkhā* was a symbol of this offering of labor or *shrama-yajña*. All the āshramites were also expected to spin for an hour every day. This practice provided a great venue to Gandhi and his associates to connect with the people. Considering that more than 70 percent of the Indian population hailed from villages where it was possible to follow this practice, this symbolic gesture—together with wearing the cotton clothes made from such handspun thread—sent a very powerful message to the British government. In one stroke, Gandhi was able to connect with the Indian public as well as shake the conscience of the British by refusing to buy foreign-made clothes.

One marvels at Gandhi's exceptional ability to capture the heart of the masses. This was perhaps one of his most unique strengths as a leader. He used home-spun symbols to evoke public awareness. His insistence on bread labor had many aspects. It meant that one does not have a right to eat unless one has contributed in some way that is socially beneficial. In its extended application it also means that everyone has a basic right to bread labor, that is, employment. Thus for Gandhi bread labor denotes both the duty and the right to work. It also means ensuring the dignity of labor. Bread labor requires an attitude of service and sacrifice in work, which to the one who practices it must obviously bring inner satisfaction, and, hence peace.<sup>48</sup>

### ***Aswāda* (Control of the Palate)**

All spiritual traditions place great importance on the control of the palate. It is not only important for spiritual well-being but also vital for our physical health. Gandhi believed that "true happiness is impossible without true health and true health is impossible without a rigid control of the palate. All the other senses will automatically come under control when the palate has been brought under control. And he who has conquered his senses has really conquered the whole world."<sup>49</sup>

Gandhi gave *aswāda* a special place as a separate vow because he believed that as control of the palate was helpful in the conquest of other senses, the observance of *brahmacharya* became easier if taste was conquered. Since taste is one of the most powerful senses, its control is obviously a part of spiritual practice for the pilgrim of Truth.

This vow was also followed strictly in the āshrams of Gandhi. The food in the āshram kitchen was as simple as possible, without any spices, sometimes even without salt.

### ***Sarvatra Bhayavarjana* (Fearlessness)**

The Bhagavad Gītā places absolute fearlessness (*abhayam*: 16.1) at the top of its list of divine virtues. Such fearlessness is the fruit of a well-cultivated spiritual life. Gandhi laid great importance on fearlessness partly because he used to be a timid child, full of all kinds of fears, including fear of the dark. Later in his life, he consciously trained himself to rid himself of fear, and fearlessness in the form of courage became his hallmark as a leader.

Although one should train oneself to overcome all psychological fears, the fear of God, however, is one fear which no one should give up. This fear guards us from doing wrong and going astray. Gandhi further clarifies that fearlessness does not mean arrogance and aggressiveness (which in itself is a form of fear). Fearlessness presupposes faith in a higher power, calmness, and peace of mind. For that, it is necessary to have a living faith in God.<sup>50</sup>

### ***Sarva Dharma Samānatva* (Equality of All Religions)**

The concept of interfaith harmony is relatively new to the modern world. Gandhi was quite a pioneer in this regard and quite ahead of his time. From the early times in his āshrams, in his daily prayer meetings, he included readings and hymns from all the world's major faith traditions. He insisted that we must treat all religions as equal. Gandhi was able to see a special quality in every religion and regarded no one as higher than the other. He believed that religions are complementary to one another and always aspired to arrive at the universally accepted principles endorsed by all faiths. He expressed his belief in and respect for the fundamental truth in all religions as follows:

For I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world. I believe that they are all God-given, and I believe that they were necessary for the people to whom these religions were revealed. And I believe that, if only we could all of us read the scriptures of the different faiths from the standpoint of the followers of those faiths we should find that they were at bottom all one and were all helpful to one another.<sup>51</sup>

Equality of all religions is a very important vow in a multi-faith country like India. Gandhi believed that the key to interfaith harmony lies in first studying one's own religion thoroughly, and then as many other religions as possible to appreciate the good aspects of them all. Gandhi was strictly against conversion, an idea that is foreign to the Hindu religion.

If there is one quality that can bring peace and harmony in our war-ravaged world, it is probably respect for all religions and faiths. As we know, most conflicts throughout history have been ostensibly for religious and ideological reasons and this continues unabated to this day. The twentieth century was one of the bloodiest in human history and we can only hope that lessons will soon be learnt to prevent an even worse situation arising in this century.

### Gandhi Moment: Deep Reverence for All Faiths

It is a well-known fact that Gandhi's prayers were the most egalitarian and diverse and were conducted with the spirit of reverence for all faiths. Kurangi Desai explains:

In the daily prayers at all ashrams, there were chantings from the Koran, the Buddhist prayer, the Bible and so on. In South Africa a bhajan was being sung which said "Dear to me is the name of Rama." A Parsi friend once suggested, "Why don't we sing 'Dear to me is the name of Hormuzd?'" The congregation took up the idea. That was the spirit generated by Gandhiji's ideal of Sarva-Dharma-Samabhava.<sup>52</sup>

### *Swadeshi* (Use of Locally Made Goods)

Gandhi's vow of *swadeshi* has close parallels to the modern concept of using locally made goods. Immediately after his return from South Africa in 1915, Gandhi saw that India was filled with items of daily use imported from England. The British would buy raw material dirt cheap from India and sell finished goods back at exorbitant prices. Gandhi identified this as one of the main causes of India's poverty. He saw *swadeshi* as an answer to the country's economic problems. As early as 1917, he was entertaining the "idea of making use of the spinning-wheel to produce handmade clothes on a large scale."<sup>53</sup>

This was also necessary to inculcate a sense of pride in home-made goods. As vindicated by the success of the historic Salt March (March 12–April 6, 1930), *swadeshi* proved to be an effective strategy. No wonder, Gandhi saw *swadeshi* central to *swaraj* (self-rule). Joan V. Bondurant explains the connection between home production and home rule and its wider ideological implications in India's struggle for independence:

Swaraj (self-rule) implied something beyond independence for India—it carried the meaning of an all-embracing self-sufficiency down to the village level. Self-sufficiency translated into concrete program of action in Indian circumstance led to the *swadeshi* (home production) movement. . . . *Swadeshi* not only served an economic function in the actual supply of cloth, it also carried significant ideological implications.<sup>54</sup>

This is typical of Gandhi: all his campaigns carried significant ideological implications. Not all his efforts were rewarded with success, but even when he did not succeed, he was able to shake the conscience of the opponent through the sheer power of his ideological stance.

The Salt March of 1930 was a case in point. Although none of the specific demands were met, it delegitimized British rule and put its future in question. Its far-reaching ideological implications attracted the attention of the whole world, and the British learned that Gandhi was a force that they had to reckon with and could not ignore.

As Gandhi explained succinctly, “Swadeshi is that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote.”<sup>55</sup> In today’s world, when better-informed consumers are beginning to choose locally grown and locally made goods, one can only marvel at Gandhi’s farsightedness in advocating this ingenious strategy. Gandhi saw in *swadeshi* philosophy the best opportunity to serve one’s neighbor: “I must not serve my distant neighbor at the expense of the nearest. It is never vindictive or punitive. It is in no sense narrow, for I buy from every part of the world what is needed for my growth.”<sup>56</sup> None of Gandhi’s campaigns were ever vindictive. He always took the course of a higher moral stance and was never unkind or spiteful in his approach.

### ***Sparshabhāvanā* (Removal of Untouchability)**

Gandhi always resisted the very basis of untouchability and called it a cancer of Hindu society. His revolt against untouchability started when he was a lad of 12. He narrates the incident: “My mother said ‘You must not touch this boy, he is an untouchable.’ ‘Why not?’ I questioned back, and from that day my revolt began.”<sup>57</sup> One can see how, even at that early age, Gandhi was a bit of a revolutionary. This revolt assumes greater significance if we consider Gandhi’s deep respect for his mother. It shows his tendency to not accept anything irrational, no matter what its source. This would eventually grow into a penchant for questioning authority, a characteristic that served him well in his revolt against the highhandedness of the British rule in India.

Gandhi had already begun advocating the removal of untouchability while in South Africa. Later he gave the name “Harijan” to the untouchables and devoted a great deal of his time to improving their lot. Kurangi Desai explains how steadfastly Gandhi practiced this vow from the earliest days of his return from South Africa:

Soon after he returned to India he accepted an untouchable family in the Ashram. Several of the inmates, including Kasturba were quite upset at this step; the financial aid that the Ashram was receiving all but stopped. Gandhi however did not flinch from his decision. The resentment soon died down and sympathetic friends solved the financial problem as well.<sup>58</sup>

This shows Gandhi's ability to stick to his position come what may, once he had determined it to be right. Given the degree of social censure then present in India in matters of caste, it was not an ordinary matter for Gandhi to accept an untouchable in his āshram. But Gandhi never recoiled from paying the price once he knew that his position was right. Gandhi considered untouchability a social disease and a heinous crime against humanity. He had himself been a bitter victim of social discrimination and the very concept of untouchability was intolerable to him. Gandhi was not ready to accept any code of conduct that was contrary to reason and his sense of righteousness. As Bondurant writes, "The experience of social disability and the idea of structured class positions offended Gandhi's reason. He had 'no hesitation' in 'rejecting scriptural authority of a doubtful character' if it supported a 'sinful institution.'"<sup>59</sup> This also shows that Gandhi could stand against the greatest institution or authority if he believed that its position was questionable.

Thus, Gandhi was never a blind follower of any tradition, even if it happened to be his own. He tested every belief under the microscope of reason and had the courage to go along with his reason even if it meant challenging long-held traditions and going against the beliefs of his close family and associates. What really distinguished Gandhi, and made him a unique leader, was his willingness to put his own life on the line. He had a highly developed sense of empathy which served him throughout his life and was a distinguishing mark of his leadership. That he was not an armchair philosopher is evident from the following:

I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should be born an untouchable, so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings, and the affronts leveled at them, in order that I may endeavor to free myself and them from that miserable condition.<sup>60</sup>

The ability to identify with the lot of the sufferer made Gandhi a champion of the downtrodden. This common touch gave him special power and influence, which few secular leaders have enjoyed in the history of humankind.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE RELEVANCE OF THE GANDHIAN VOWS

It is a testimony to Gandhi's farsightedness and ingenuity as a leader that he was able to find strong economic, political, and social reasons to support what he intuitively felt was the morally right thing to do. He was effective in using ethical teachings culled from various Hindu sacred texts and blending them with the pragmatic philosophy of the

West. Bondurant splendidly summarizes the uniqueness and the effectiveness of the Gandhian approach to life and leadership that combined the best of Eastern spiritual traditions with Western humanist and rational traditions:

Gandhi went to the people of India with teachings phrased in terms reminiscent of the Vedas, with Upanishad reminders, with quotations from the *Gītā* and with exhortations familiar from the times of Manu. Indians responded to an appeal presented in the currency of Jain and Buddhist and Hindu ethics. *Satya*, *ahimsa*, and *tapasya* were common coin. But into these traditional precepts, Gandhi introduced considerations unfamiliar to Indian tradition and reminiscent of the rationalist, humanist tradition of the West.<sup>61</sup>

This shows that Gandhi was not just a blind imitator of a tradition but a great innovator in his own right. He was able to take what was best in Indian tradition in terms of its emphasis on nonviolence, sacrifice, self-purification as precursors of truth, and blend this with the rationalistic and humanistic ethics of the West. For example, he showed courage in discarding what had become outdated in the Indian tradition such as the caste system, and recognizing the benefits to be gained from Western cultural practices such as emphasis on punctuality and cleanliness.

What is the relevance of these vows in modern times, especially for those in leadership roles? As is clear, some of these vows, such as *swadeshi* and removal of untouchability, are more historically rooted in the cultural milieu of a particular time and place—while there is much in the others that is of continuing universal appeal and applicability. These vows also show how seriously Gandhi wanted to prepare himself as a humble servant of humanity. He was willing to go the full course and left nothing to chance in preparing himself for the role the destiny had chosen for him. He was a serious seeker, a pilgrim of soul, and strove very hard to achieve the spiritual goal of *mokṣa* through selfless service.

In the opening verse of the *Ashtavakra Gītā*, one of the greatest Hindu wisdom texts, the disciple inquires how to attain liberation (*mokṣa*). Ashtavakra, the great sage, replies: “If you want liberation, my dear, then shun the passions as poison, and seek forgiveness and innocence, compassion, contentment, and Truth as the nectar.”<sup>62</sup> [There is a play on words here in terms of passions being called poison. The Sanskrit word for poison is “*viṣa*”; and sensory objects are called “*viśhya*.”] Gandhi embodied these qualities to the highest degree in his thought and life in the form of his quest for truth and nonviolence (compassion). And his self-discipline in the form of various vows was a part of his “shunning the passions.”

**Self-Discipline: Gandhi's Leadership Lessons**

1. The road to self-transformation is paved with self-discipline and self-restraint. Self-discipline may seem to be a high price in the beginning, but it is well worth paying for what one becomes at the end.
2. Self-discipline involves three related aspects of self-control—the ability to resist temptation, the ability to tolerate delay of gratification, and the imposing of strict standards of accomplishment upon oneself.
3. A vainglorious life of pomp and show distracts leaders from their true aim and becomes a hindrance on the way to self-development and selfless service to others.
4. We should start the task of improvement with ourselves since the only place in the universe that we can really be sure of improving is ourselves.
5. One of the most important preconditions for the spiritual quest is humility. Only humble leaders can serve a cause higher than themselves.
6. Truth is the beginning and end of spiritual life. There is the “relative” truth of truthfulness in human interactions, and the “absolute truth” of the Ultimate Reality. This ultimate truth is God (as God is also Truth).
7. At the level of human interactions the truth is “relative, many-sided, and plural.” The only way to reach it is through *ahimsā*. Pure and absolute truth should be our ideal.
8. Attachment, and the anxiety which accompanies attachment, are obstacles to wisdom. A leader aspiring for impartiality and objectivity should overcome attachment to ideas and people.
9. In this mutually coexistent web of interdependencies, the existence and well-being of each entity need to ensure the existence and well-being of all others and vice versa.
10. Honoring this universal principle underlying all life, leaders should treat their life-work as an “offering” for the well-being of all. This is the epitome of servant leadership.

## CHAPTER 9



# THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS OF HUMANITY: OVERCOMING INNER DEMONS

### INTRODUCTION

On May 29, 1953, the New Zealander Edmund Hillary and the Nepalese Sherpa Tenzing Norgay became the first human beings to reach the summit of Mount Everest on the Nepal-Tibet border. Headlines worldwide declared “Man Conquers Everest.” Although at the personal level Hillary considered it more of a conquest over the self,<sup>1</sup> this attitude of subjugation of nature permeates our thinking and has become the defining paradigm of humanity, typical of our contemporary approach to nature and the environment. Ever since the dawn of Industrial Revolution, our primary approach toward nature has consistently been that of the conquest and control rather than harmony and coexistence. Unfortunately, this approach has come to dominate all our economic and political policies as well as our way of life in general. The horrific consequences of this perspective are too evident to recount.

The lack of ethical values in the economic and political arenas was unacceptable to Gandhi. For him, politics was first and foremost a normative science involving a definitive moral dimension of value. In a world plagued by greed and exploitation, he recognized that the need of the hour was to revolutionize politics by ethics. He believed that unless people’s moral and spiritual qualities are nurtured and developed, the best of political systems will not work.

Gandhi's political and economic thinking was attuned to spirituality rather than materialism. For him, the way to achieve harmonious living in all spheres was through ethics and spirituality. When someone said to Gandhi that no religion was any good that did not make sense in terms of economics, Gandhi countered that no economics was any good that did not make sense in terms of morality. While in lesser mortals this could be dismissed as mere idealistic thinking, in Gandhi this insight emanated from his relentless experiments with truth in life and leadership. It was a way of life for him and found expression in every walk of his life.

Hoda, a social politician, states that E. F. Schumacher, the author of the best-seller *Small is Beautiful*, described Gandhi as the greatest "People's Economist."<sup>2</sup> For Gandhi, human beings were the ultimate measure and touchstone of every social, economic, and political ideology. In Schumacher's view, "Gandhi refused to treat economics as if people did not matter."<sup>3</sup> In this chapter we will find out how Gandhi revolutionized politics and economics by ethics and what lessons we can draw from his revolutionary ideas about work and wealth, politics and ethics, knowledge and character, science and humanity within the context of leadership.

## VIOLENCE: THE ROOT OF ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL EXPLOITATION

Gandhi was able to clearly perceive the deep-seated violence at work at the root of all economic and political exploitation. Wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, commerce without morality, science without humanity, worship without sacrifice, politics without principles—these, according to Gandhi (as Arun Gandhi tells us in the Foreword to this book), are the ingredients that make up the culture of violence and are humanity's blunders. In an interview with this author, Arun Gandhi, further explained why he would add yet another blunder, "rights without responsibilities," to the list:

I believe very firmly that democracy can survive only if we have rights *and* responsibilities. We are always fighting for our rights in a democracy, but I haven't seen anybody fight for their responsibilities. Accordingly I would add "rights without responsibilities" as number 8 on my grandfather's list of "blunders."<sup>4</sup>

### Gandhi Moment: Living with the Mahatma

As a boy living in Durban, South Africa, in the 1940s, Arun Gandhi faced bullying from all quarters. White kids beat him up because he was not white. Black youths assaulted him because he wasn't black. The thing he most wanted, he recalls, was "to grow up and be strong and beat everybody back again." But his parents had a different idea about how to deal with their son's adolescent rage. They sent him to India to live with his grandfather for a time. And those 18 formative months at the side of the man who personified nonviolent resistance to oppression changed Arun forever.

The last time Arun saw his grandfather, the old man slipped the boy a piece of paper. On this was Gandhi's list of what have come to be known as the "Seven Blunders of the World" that lead to violence.<sup>5</sup>

### THE GENESIS OF GANDHI'S SEVEN SOCIAL SINS<sup>6</sup>

Gandhi first published the list of seven social sins in his weekly newspaper, *Young India*, on October 22, 1925. A cursory perusal of this topic on the net reveals that it has found a widespread currency in the ever-growing Gandhian literature. It finds book-length treatments in Eknath Easwaran's slim volume titled *The Compassionate Universe: The Power of the Individual to Heal the Environment* and J. S. Rajput's edited volume *Seven Social Sins: The Contemporary Relevance*; a chapter in Steven Covey's *Principled Centered Leadership*; and honorable mention in several other books and articles. However, as Gandhi himself acknowledges, he did not create this list. The only reference to this topic in the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* is in Volume 28, under the title "When Crime Not Immoral," on page 365.<sup>7</sup>

Under the heading, "When Crime Not Immoral," Gandhi writes about a "fair friend"<sup>8</sup> who had sent him some "crisp sayings" on crime. This friend wanted the readers of *Young India* to know about the following seven social sins:

1. Politics without principles
2. Wealth without work
3. Pleasure without conscience
4. Knowledge without character
5. Commerce without morality
6. Science without humanity
7. Worship without sacrifice

Gandhi adds that one must guard against these seven conditions not “just intellectually” but at the deeper “being level,” so that our resistance to them becomes concrete and guides us in our daily behavior. Gandhi considered these conditions to be the most spiritually perilous to society.

The list represents “one of the best X rays of contemporary society ever taken.”<sup>9</sup> One is struck by the pervasive moral impoverishment of these sins. A clear understanding of these universal social sins with a truly open and enquiring mind will help us to emerge from the quagmire of widespread self-centeredness and greed, the twin banes of modern society. The demise of corporations like Enron and WorldCom is clear testimony to the fact that when selfishness and greed rule the roost, even the best strategy and the cleverest leadership cannot save an organization.

### POLITICS WITHOUT PRINCIPLES

Gandhi believed in the power of natural law governing the universe, a law that no one is above. He once said that the glory of humans lies in obedience to a higher law—the law of unity and oneness of all life. We can see the operation of this law in an Indian wisdom text that states: For the magnanimous, the entire world constitutes but a single family (*udāracaritānām tu vasudhaiva kutumbakam*).<sup>10</sup> When politics is devoid of the higher moral law, it soon turns out to be politics devoted to the lowest and the meanest tendencies in us. The examples, historical as well as contemporary, where principles have been sacrificed at the altar of political expediency are too numerous to recount. Adherence to sound principles of justice helps us to maintain social justice as a matter of course.

By its very nature, all politics tends to be competitive and aggressive and needs to be regulated by principles to prevent its degeneration into conflict, violence, and even anarchy. Without sound principles for applying the natural law, rulers have been able to force entire populations into various forms of economic or military subjugation, including slave labor. Gandhi revolted against all such forms of politics and fought till his death to free others from inhuman treatment.

From time immemorial, the finest minds in the field of philosophy have devoted their energies to finding out how best to govern societies with justice and fairness. Plato, for example, in his best known treatise titled *Republic*, was concerned with discussing the meaning of justice and examining whether or not the just person is happier than the unjust person. The last sections of this book discuss the pros and cons of various practical forms of government. Ultimately, Plato’s

*Republic* remains a contribution to ethics: a discussion of why a person should be just. Social justice and happiness were Plato's two governing principles. These twin principles remain as valid today as they were in that time.

### WEALTH WITHOUT WORK

Wealth without work represents one of the greatest banes of modern society. By training and concerning ourselves only in making a living, without learning how to live meaningfully, we deprive ourselves of one of the greatest joys of human life. If we indulge in moneymaking without purpose and meaning, our life may seem to flourish outwardly, but inwardly the bankrupt spirit gets stifled and dies. As human beings we are so constituted that we need to invest a certain amount of effort in order to enjoy a sense of accomplishment. Nature needs us to sweat before we can enjoy the fruit of our labor.

For Gandhi, rewards had to be a result of earnest effort. This philosophy is perhaps best contrasted in the present-day scenario where avarice and greed rule our hearts and we want rewards regardless of whether we have earned them or not. Any well-directed effort devoted to a particular task fosters a sense of well-being and brings certain rewards when the task is brought to its fruition. These rewards can be both intrinsic and extrinsic. Most of us work for the extrinsic rewards, though we experience intrinsic rewards as a sense of fulfillment in our chosen occupation or profession. However, it is good to work even if it may not be extrinsically required. After all, even when the work may not be necessary for making a living, it will still be necessary for making a life. The intrinsic rewards from work—such as sense of accomplishment, personal satisfaction, and increase of knowledge—are as important as the extrinsic rewards of wealth and status.

The social malady of wealth without work can also be stated as consumption without contribution. When prosperity is measured by how much we consume, consumption becomes a norm and an end in itself. It detracts us from becoming productive contributors to the economics of life. This attitude is also responsible for much of the greed and over-consumption rampant in our consumer-oriented society and its attendant ills of inequality and ever-widening gaps between the haves and have-nots. Since consumption is merely a means to human well-being, the aim should be to obtain the maximum of well-being with the minimum of consumption, to paraphrase the

sensible guidelines of the British economist, Schumacher, a protégé of J. M. Keynes. For him, working for the mere multiplication of needs was the very “antithesis of wisdom.”<sup>11</sup> Schumacher believed that the economy is measured by the health and creativity of its members as much as by the amount of things it produces and consumes. Gandhi, too, was guided by this centrality of human beings in all matters social, political, and social.

This approach, ultimately based on simplicity and nonviolence, epitomized Gandhi’s life and work. The crux of Gandhian economic thought is the protection of the dignity of the human person and not mere attainment of material prosperity. Through his *swadeshi* movement based on the premise of self-reliance, he championed the cause of using more local and naturally produced goods. We can appreciate this foresight of Gandhi in the present-day emphasis on encouraging the use of locally grown and produced goods. Such a system may not necessarily bring what is cheapest on the market, but it best serves the aims of simplicity and nonviolence and ensures the overall health and creativity of its contributing members.

At one level, perfunctorily, we may find wealth without work or getting something for nothing to be an attractive proposition, and it remains one of the most important marketing ploys. However, when it becomes our primary goal, it leaves little room for personal growth or change. We succumb to a life solely devoted to ease and leisure that fails to draw upon our deeper inner resources of creativity and excellence. This in turn breeds manipulation and mediocrity and results in the greatest loss of all—unrealized, wasted talent. Wealth without work turns out to be more of a curse than we realize.

Greek thinkers of yore have defined happiness as the exercise of human faculties along the lines of excellence. In the same manner, the Bhagavad Gītā defines Yoga as dexterity or excellence in action (*yogah karmasu kauśalam*: 2.50). It is common to experience a feeling of soaring spirit when we are doing excellent work. The converse is also true. It has been observed that the best way to kill human motivation is to expect and accept mediocre performance from others. Expecting less than excellent work is the greatest disservice we can do to ourselves and to others. We owe excellence to ourselves, as much as we owe it to the society.

No mere ideology, this passion for excellence has far-reaching implications for leaders and for workplace performance. Nobody comes to work to put in a shoddy performance. Everyone is looking for creative self-expression. And when we create opportunities for meaningful self-expression, we help build a workplace where people

act with self-fulfillment and not merely work for it. Creating such a liberating work environment is the real job of a leader. In such a workplace, there is no room for wealth without work, because everyone would discover their inner wealth through meaningful work and contribution.

## PLEASURE WITHOUT CONSCIENCE

All living creatures are hard-wired to seek pleasure and avoid pain. Even if pleasure (physical, intellectual, emotional, or aesthetic) may take myriad refined forms for human beings, the pursuit of pleasure basically remains more or less true to the instinctual apparatus of gratifying one sense or the other. Whereas in all other species this pursuit is regulated by instincts without any regard to right or wrong, with humans, it becomes a matter of choice in terms of the what, how, and why of the very nature of the pleasure. Accordingly, pleasure becomes a fertile ground for the perennial conflict between duty and desire. And the possibility of choice both accords us the freedom and exacts from us the responsibility to seek pleasure guided by the light of conscience.

While the counsel of moderation and nonharm (to oneself and to others) can, for the most part, serve us well in tempering our pursuit of pleasure, the cult of consumerism—constantly bombarding us with goods, relentlessly vying for our attention, and offering easy gratification of the senses—makes things all the more challenging for us. This also necessitates the existence of thriving industrial machinery constantly churning out a slew of goods to satisfy our ever-growing wants. And soon we lose the good sense to make a distinction between our wants and our needs. In turn, this leads to gross misuse of natural resources, exploitation of human beings, and a host of other social and economic ills such as war, poverty, and hunger.

Gandhi was fully aware of the pitfalls of seeking pleasure and ignoring conscience. He repeatedly reminded us that there is enough for everyone's needs, not enough for everybody's greed. In his own personal life, he developed norms for living a simple, temperate life and constantly strove to confront his inner demons through such practices as self-discipline, fasting, nonpossession, and nonharming. He learned from his favorite spiritual guidebook, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, that excessive desire is root cause of all evil; it breeds the other two highly dangerous human tendencies of anger and greed, which make it hard to follow the dictates of the conscience. Gandhi strove to live by the counsel of the *Gītā*, to control the mind through dispassion and

practice. He knew that the pursuit of pleasure without conscience erodes the collective human spirit.

Conscience is essentially our inner guide and the repository of timeless wisdom. It requires a certain mindfulness or consciousness to remain true to one's conscience. Pleasure without conscience remains one of the key challenges for today's leaders. Too often they fall into the entitlement trap of believing "I have earned it" or "I deserve it." The call of conscience can help leaders pause and reflect whether they have really earned their pleasures to the extent that they think. How about others who may be equally deserving? This entails asking hard questions: Do I really deserve the exorbitant high pay that I get? Is it really justified in terms of my contribution? Peter Drucker, whom this author had the honor of meeting, thought that top executives should not get more than 20 times the average salary in the company. While Drucker agreed that a compensation algorithm is hard to develop in scientific terms, exorbitant disparities in compensation undercut the mutual trust among people who work together. No hard and fast rules can be laid down here in the manner of one-size-fits-all; nevertheless, one should be guided by one's inner conscience to modulate one's expectation of pleasure.

### KNOWLEDGE WITHOUT CHARACTER

If a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, even more dangerous is the knowledge devoid of wisdom. The prime paradox of modern times is that, despite our wide knowledge and scientific achievements, we still lack the ability to live wisely. We need the sensibility of the mind as well as the sensitivity of the heart to develop our character. Education is a lifelong pursuit, an endeavor involving simultaneous growth in knowledge, wisdom, and character development. Educating the mind without educating the heart is really no education at all since it fails to shape character. The development of character along with education produces wisdom that prompts one to use one's education for the good of others rather than for furthering one's own selfish agenda. Gandhi encouraged his associates to judge people by the content of their character and not by their outer appearance.

The role of character in leadership can hardly be overemphasized. Character has come to be recognized as the most critical component of the leadership equation. In the chapter on values-based leadership, we saw that authentic leaders lead from a strong, personal, moral position. First and foremost, leadership requires trust since a leader's ability to lead depends upon the strength and trustworthiness of his

character. Trust commands respect and is achieved by consistently demonstrating competence and good character.

Most of our difficulties can be traced to our lack of ability to act on what we know is right. It has been said that leaders are people who do the right things. Authentic leaders know the difference between right and wrong and always strive to do what is right. Although one may know what is the right thing to do in a given situation, to act on this knowledge requires the strength and courage of character. Character has been defined as the “integrity to walk the talk.” Having seen the horrors of knowledge without character playing havoc in corporations over the last 20 years, what we sorely need today is character-based leadership. We need leaders who are centered, not self-centered, leaders who dare to do what is right, no matter what the cost.

### COMMERCE WITHOUT MORALITY

All the sins discussed above involve missing the underlying moral dimension, be it in the context of work, pleasure, or knowledge. They place the responsibility of developing a high moral sense on the individual and on the power of individuals to heal the society. In commerce without ethics, we move to understanding the role of businesses in reclaiming their social responsibility.

Perhaps the central paradox of the contemporary business world is commerce without ethics. After watching the recent financial meltdown, innumerable corporate scandals and frauds, one is tempted to question the wisdom of Milton Friedman’s oft-quoted statement that “the business of business is business.”<sup>12</sup> When profit-maximization becomes the sole objective of business, morals and ethics are thrown overboard.

Businesses in modern times have come to embrace the concept of social responsibility; yet, surprisingly, Friedman calls this a “fundamentally subversive doctrine.” In his book *Capitalism and Freedom*, he goes on to say that in a free society, “there is one and only one social responsibility of business—to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition without deception or fraud.”<sup>13</sup> This book was originally published in the 1960s and unfortunately dominated corporate thinking for four decades. It provided many unscrupulous businesses an excuse to flout ethics under the guise of maximizing shareholders’ wealth. Friedman’s position is not widely acknowledged even within the community of pre-eminent economists. For example, Professor J. K. Galbraith,

perhaps the most widely read economist of the 20th century, provides the much-needed corrective: "Economics of production and consumption alone, without any higher values, can certainly make economics a dismal science."<sup>14</sup>

In the wake of flagrant violation of social responsibility by many large corporations during last two decades, few will agree with Friedman's view today that the social responsibility of business is to increase its profits. Even Jack Welch, the greatest proponent of "shareholder's value theory," abandoned it calling it "the dumbest idea in the world."<sup>15</sup> Profit-maximization can be no more the purpose of a business than eating is the purpose of life.

Ethics deals with choosing actions that are right and proper and just. Ethics is vital in commerce and in all aspects of living. Society is built on the foundation of ethics. Without adherence to ethical principles, businesses are bound to be unsuccessful in the long run. Gandhi recognized that economic and political systems that are not based on sound moral foundations are doomed to fail ultimately. Without ethics, a business degenerates into a mere profit-churning machine, inimical to both the individual and the society.

### SCIENCE WITHOUT HUMANITY

Over the centuries, the relationship between science and religion has remained at best strained. This dichotomy is implicit in Gandhi's sixth social sin, science without humanity. When he discerned science without humanity as the root cause of violence in the world, he was probably referring back to the dehumanizing effects of industrialization and the destruction caused by the First World War. Gandhi was appalled to view the new factories and mass-production systems that were being developed across the world. These systems reduced human workers to cogs in a wheel, mere automatons, with no creative, artistic, or cognitive contribution.

Gandhi perceived very clearly that science without humanity becomes a potential cause of violence. To be precise, when scientists ignore their moral responsibilities, they create situations that increase the potential for science becoming the cause of violence. Knowledge gained through scientific methods needs to honor the human condition and its underlying qualities of wisdom, compassion, and character. When scientific knowledge and its resultant practices degenerate into mere technology, science ceases to be a salutary force and comes into direct conflict with humanity. As a result, human beings become

victims of science and technology. Something that was supposed to serve human ends becomes an end in itself. Without an understanding of the greater purpose of humanity, scientific achievements yield very little in the way of human progress.

Thus science has a tacit responsibility to uphold the scientific ethic using humanity as a baseline and a guide. However, in an age where most modern scientific projects require corporate or governmental funding, there's an inherent conflict with ethics *ab initio*. Gandhi perhaps did not have to deal with such scenarios, at least not to the extent they are prevalent in modern times. In the contemporary world, however, we have this phenomenon where big corporations hire scientists to carry out research. Although the decision to work for an organization is a personal one made by the scientist, an immoral organization is more likely to prevail upon the scientist by its greater bargaining power. In a society where laws may also be made subservient to corporate might, the probability of science without humanity will continue to loom large.

Although morality cannot be enacted into laws, it remains for the society and its members to ensure that science is not divorced from humanity.

## WORSHIP WITHOUT SACRIFICE

Spirituality, religion, and ethics were synonymous terms for Gandhi. In religion, we worship, but if we are not willing to sacrifice for the greater good, our worship has little value. Therefore, Gandhi regarded it a sin to worship without sacrifice. Sacrifice becomes all the more necessary when we want to serve others. It takes sacrifice to serve the needs of other people—the sacrifice of our own pride and preference. Religion without sacrifice is shallow and meaningless. Without sacrifice, even service is but an inflation of ego.

The *Gītā* employs the concept of *yajña* (ritual offering) to denote sacrifice. It indicates that the principle of life consists in sacrifice of some sort or the other. Every moment of our life is a sacrifice that we perform in the service of a higher fulfillment, and sacrifice therefore is a gain and not a loss. It is a law that we cannot achieve a higher state of being without giving something away of equal worth. Gandhi was thoroughly familiar with the principle that all moral authority comes from sacrifice, and he practiced self-sacrifice throughout his life. He sacrificed his personal desires, career, wealth, everything for humanity. This is what gave Gandhi power over himself and his environment.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The last century has highlighted both the creative and the destructive power of human ingenuity. Whereas humanity's greatest gains in this century came in the areas of science and technology, we also witnessed the horror of two world wars, the rise of international terrorism, and economic and financial meltdowns. Many believe that the greatest harm occurred in the erosion of moral and spiritual values. In his splendid little book, *The Compassionate Universe*, Eknath Easwaran notes the urgency of the responsibility of humans to heal the environment—"the only creatures on Earth who have the power—and, it sometimes seems, the inclination—to bring life on this planet to an end."<sup>16</sup> Gandhi was mindful of this inherent destructive human tendency born of self-centeredness, and recognized the urgency of dealing with it solely on human terms. He knew that the choice here is between conscious change and collective ruin.

Gandhi viewed life in its wholeness. His integral humanism comes loud and clear through these seven social sins. In identifying these blunders of humankind, he at once humanized politics, science, commerce, and religion. His rejection of wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, commerce without morality, science without humanity, worship without sacrifice, and politics without principles as the "seven sins of the contemporary world" will remain relevant as long as material values continue to usurp the moral and the spiritual. We believe that the concepts of service, contribution, morality, conscience, character, humanity, and sacrifice offset the seven deadly sins and help to make life worth living. Gandhi was not an individual but an institution, not a man but a movement, not an episode but a phenomenon. In any era of darkness, his light will remain relevant and meaningful.

Gandhi's seven social sins also serve as a great reminder that led by self-centeredness and greed, we are engaged in changing everything in the external world except ourselves. Gandhi has repeatedly reminded us that "as human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world—that is the myth of the 'atomic age'—as in being able to remake ourselves."<sup>17</sup> Politics without morality, as also economics without ethics, is a dead end road for it ignores the humanity that is our essence. As we evolve spiritually, we realize the terror of this disempowering stance.

As Veerendrakumar has observed:

Every generation had lived under the delusion that they were passing through the most turbulent period in history. With us the delusion has turned reality. We can claim the dubious distinction of being the first species on vasundhara, to have contrived to bring about its own doom and that of amazing biodiversity. This is in contrast to the five mass extinctions recorded in the last six hundred million years, precipitated by natural causes.<sup>18</sup>

With this understanding comes the liberating realization that “there is no sustainability without . . . spirituality.”<sup>19</sup> Only “an individual life rooted in the continuous harmony with life as a whole”<sup>20</sup>—a life based on selfless love and contribution is a life worth living.

### **Seven Social Sins: Leadership Lessons**

1. One cannot conquer the adversary outside until one has overcome one’s inner demons.
2. When politics is devoid of the higher moral law, it soon turns out to be politics devoted to the lowest and the meanest tendencies in us.
3. Wealth without work lends itself to decadence, entitlement, lack of appreciation, ingratitude, and a mind-set of elitism.
4. When you have wealth without work, it will provide you ample opportunity to indulge in pleasure without conscience. Leaders beware.
5. Commerce without morality spells greed and cluelessness. The present-day corporate scandals and business failures furnish ample examples.
6. Science without humanity brings in its wake war, imperialism, genetic manipulation, and playing God.
7. Principle-centered politics is as rare as a hare’s horns. And yet, politics guided by ethics is the only way to create a just and peaceful society.
8. Religion without sacrifice is shallow and meaningless. Effective leaders know that all moral authority comes from sacrifice. Without sacrifice, even service is but an inflation of ego.

## CHAPTER 10



# EPILOGUE: SUMMING UP THE LEGACY OF THE MAHATMA

## INTRODUCTION

Nature gives very few the great honor of becoming legends in their own lifetime. Gandhi was one such rare person. As early as 1921, a Unitarian minister, John Hayner Holmes, declared in a sermon in New York City that Gandhi was “unquestionably the greatest man living in the world today.”<sup>1</sup> In the words of General George C. Marshall, the American Secretary of State at the time of Gandhi’s death, “Mahatma Gandhi was the spokesman for the conscience of all mankind.”<sup>2</sup> Several world leaders since then have acknowledged Gandhi’s leadership acumen in inspiring them in their own quest for strategies for large-scale social change. In 1958, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. recorded his debt to Gandhi:

Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale. Love, for Gandhi, was a potent instrument for social and collective transformation. It was in this Gandhian emphasis on love and non-violence that I discovered the method for social reform that I had been seeking . . . I came to feel that this was the only morally and practically sound method open to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom.<sup>3</sup>

We quote Martin Luther King, Jr. because he was also, like Gandhi, a great apostle of nonviolence. As he acknowledges in the above quote, he learned from Gandhi the high art of using nonviolence as a positive instrument of social reform. And he too gave his life for what he stood for. When, as the last century ended, *Time* magazine asked its

readers to pick the person of the century, Gandhi was a favorite nominee, second only to Albert Einstein.<sup>4</sup> After almost seven decades of his martyrdom, Gandhi's legacy remains as strong as ever. He has influenced, and continues to influence, world leaders, including Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, the Dalai Lama, Aung San Suu Kyi, and Barack Obama. While receiving the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1989, the Dalai Lama accepted it not only on behalf of "the oppressed everywhere and the six million Tibetan people" but also "as a tribute to the man who founded the modern tradition of non-violent action for change, Mahatma Gandhi, whose life taught and inspired me."<sup>5</sup>

Gandhi's life and leadership present an exceptional example of a superior person who lived, suffered, and died for his people. He was the archetypical moral force whose appeal to humanity is both universal and lasting. Originally a timid and taciturn soul, he became "a century's conscience"<sup>6</sup> and grew into a paragon of higher-order visionary leadership, helping to secure the liberation of a fifth of the world's population from the rule of the largest empire on earth. His leadership legacy became the harbinger of freedom in many countries in Southeast Asia and Africa.

"His legacy is courage, his lesson truth, his weapon love."<sup>7</sup> With his life as his monument, Gandhi now belongs to all humanity, and his leadership lessons apply to all nations and times. "Of all the modern politicians and statesmen," writes a recent commentator, "only Gandhi is an authentically *global* figure."<sup>8</sup> What makes Gandhi a truly global figure is his nonpartisan philosophy that was free from all sectarian dogma. He was a leader with a common touch. His lessons can be applied by anyone who cares to live a life guided by truth and non-violence. Gandhi practiced his philosophy and lived up to his principles. His life is an inspiration to many and of interest to all who wish to lead a better life.

### THE SECRET OF GREATNESS

Gandhi's greatness lay in stirring the conscience of humanity, in demonstrating the power of the spirit over material things, in turning his moral searchlight inward, and in extending the gospel of love and peace from personal level to the social arena. "Perhaps never before," writes Robert Payne, "on so grand a scale has any man succeeded in shaping the course of history while using only the weapons of peace."<sup>9</sup> In leveraging the weapon of love in solving social problems on the grandest scale, Gandhi became, and will remain, a great teacher of all humanity.

“He did not preach about God or religion,” writes Louis Fischer, “he was a living sermon. . . . His greatness lay in doing what everybody could do but doesn’t.”<sup>10</sup> This quality of being the change in all that he endeavored was perhaps the most outstanding trait of Gandhi as a leader. In all that he achieved, he was guided solely by the twin principles of truth and nonviolence. In this, he knew he had nothing new to teach to the world for these values are as old as humanity itself. Gandhi’s innovation lay in experimenting “in both on as vast a scale as he could do.”<sup>11</sup> He was the first in human history to extend the principle of nonviolence to the social and the political plane.<sup>12</sup>

According to Gandhi, there are three types of human beings: (1) the cowardly, (2) the brave, (3) the superior. The coward, in order to save his skin, supinely acquiesces in injustice and wrong. The brave hero, on the other hand, violently resists injustice and wrong in order to re-establish justice and right. The superior person is he who, in the fullness of his strength, forgives the wrongdoer and tries to redeem him and convert him to the ways of doing good.<sup>13</sup> Any one of us can become a Mahatma if we make a vocation of living the good life, putting principle above expediency, duty above pleasure, service above self, God above the world, and conscience above fleeting rewards.<sup>14</sup>

## THE GREAT EXPERIMENTER WITH TRUTH

The seeker Gandhi was a true scientist in spirit. He approached his life as a work in progress. He constantly insisted that if the reader came across inconsistencies in his writings on the same subject, then it was the later writing that should be chosen. The reader of Gandhi’s works will be struck by the fact that many are prefaced with the following quotation from an April 1933 issue of *Harijan*, one of Gandhi’s journals.

I would like to say to the diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. . . . What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment, and therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he still has any faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject.<sup>15</sup>

This is an important piece of advice since we often find contradictions in the writings of great people who constantly strive to improve themselves and may change their thoughts and views as they progress.

Gandhi was a true renaissance man and fought at once on several fronts. His life covered a gamut of multiple roles and myriad dimensions. He strove to accomplish success in several disparate areas—social, political, cultural, moral, economic, and spiritual. But it was the spiritual goal (*mokṣa*) that shone through all his activities. When one strives on so many fronts, one is not able to attain all one's goals in equal measure. It is not so much the success per se that matters; rather it is the steadfastness of our pursuit. As Romain Rolland, a Nobel Laureate in literature and one of Gandhi's earliest biographers, has observed, "Victory lies not in realization of the goal, but in a relentless pursuit after it."<sup>16</sup> Reviewing Gandhi's life and thought, Bhikhu Parekh provides a balanced assessment:

There have been greater saints, religious and social reformers, spiritual seekers, moralists, statesmen, nationalist leaders, and organizers than he, but it is difficult to think of one who was all these and fought simultaneously on so many fronts with varying degrees of success. For the first thirty odd years of his life he dutifully obeyed the conventions of his society and married, raised children, and discharged his social obligations. Thereafter his life underwent a profound change and was dominated by a Buddha-like passion for *mokṣa*.<sup>17</sup>

This clearly shows that Gandhi fought at once on many fronts: social, religious, cultural, and personal. And this was his challenge and probably his strength, too. Although starting as an obedient member of society in the first 30 years of his life, Gandhi's tender spirit could not withstand the dead weight of worn-out traditions, especially when they came in conflict with the tenets of common sense and social justice. This led Gandhi to search for the sources of violence and, finally, to his quest for truth and self-realization. He wanted to free himself from subservience to the pangs of the flesh and from the servitude of the emotions of greed and jealousy. This led him to the final frontier—*mokṣa*—the human yearning to be free from all the strictures and limitations that flesh is heir to. Parekh continues to describe what *mokṣa* meant for Gandhi:

*mokṣa* meant three things to him: first, complete mastery of all the senses including sexuality; second, a totally pure and transparent mind freed of fear, jealousy, pettiness, meanness, vanity and other base passions; and third, dissolution of the sense of selfhood by becoming one with all living beings in a spirit of universal love and service.<sup>18</sup>

And yet, his strength and uniqueness lay in the realm of spirit. Gandhi recreated his spirit to recreate the world around him. Although the most popular picture about Gandhi is that of a political leader, he was essentially a spiritual seeker (*sādhaka*). His ultimate goal was *mokṣa* or God-realization. Since he believed that service to humanity was the best way to realize God, he lived and died in the service of humankind. Gandhi's life demonstrates the force of nonviolent power in action. It is proof of the fact that individual will can effect social change.

### “MY LIFE IS MY MESSAGE:” TWO STORIES ABOUT GANDHI

A mother once brought her son to Mahatma Gandhi and said, “Sir, please tell my son to stop eating sugar.” Gandhi looked at the boy for a long time and then, turning toward the mother, said, “Bring your son back to me in two weeks.” The mother did not understand the rationale for the delay, but she did as she was asked. Two weeks later she and her son returned. Gandhi looked deeply into the boy's eyes and said, “Stop eating sugar.”

The mother was grateful, but puzzled. She asked, “Why didn't you tell my son to stop eating sugar two weeks ago when we were here?”

And Gandhi replied, “Two weeks ago, I was eating sugar.”<sup>19</sup>

There is another story about Gandhi in which, as he was boarding a train, one of his sandals slipped from his foot and landed near the track. Suddenly the train began pulling away, leaving him no time to retrieve it. Immediately, Gandhi removed the other sandal and tossed it back to lie with the other along the track. When his astonished fellow passenger asked why he had done this, Gandhi replied, “Now the poor man who finds it will have a pair he can use.”<sup>20</sup>

### **Be the Change: Fifty-One Gandhian Maxims for Life and Leadership**

As is evident from the foregoing chapters, Gandhi approached his life as a series of “experiments” with truth, at the absolute level as well as the relative level. It has been well said that Gandhi could fashion heroes out of common clay. His first and undoubtedly most successful experiment was with himself. He was a true seeker of truth, who like Socrates, sacrificed his life for his principles.

Throughout his life, Gandhi relentlessly sought and strived to “remake” himself. Based on what life taught Gandhi, we distil and present below some key leadership lessons with the earnest hope that

these insights will serve as a beacon on the path to leadership from within—the only leadership that really matters.

### Leading by Values

1. Leadership is not a position or a title but a highly integrated web of moral relationships between people, based on trust, and guided by commitment, contribution, and a shared vision of the greater good.
2. Effective leaders establish their conduct on the high ground of ethics. All true leadership is values-based leadership. Values are like a lighthouse; they do not change. It is the ship of practices that has to find its way guided by the lighthouse of values.
3. Effective leaders realize the importance of the head and the heart in leading themselves and others. Both sensibility and sensitivity are required to make a complete leader.
4. The trustworthiness of a leader is measured not by the values the leader espouses but by how consistently the leader strives to live up to those values. Effective leaders inspire emulation by their exemplary life and conduct. They practice what they preach and make their life their message.
5. Gandhi considered morality as the basis of all things and truth as the substance of all morality. For him, any path that did not finally lead to common good and oneness was a detour. In this web of mutual coexistence and interdependencies, the existence and well-being of each entity ensures the existence and well-being of all others.
6. One of the key lessons of Gandhi's life and leadership is that brute force can never overcome indomitable human will. It only redoubles the strength and courage of the unified will.
7. Indomitable personal will remains the greatest strength of character of a leader. Gandhi's life is a testimony to the fact that individual will can effect social change. However, it has to be first trained in patience and persistence.
8. Effective leaders use culturally rich symbols to convey their message and to demonstrate their moral and practical worth. With impeccable integrity and a compelling voice, they appeal to mutual expectations and create shared meanings.
9. Gandhi used culturally rich symbols to convey his message and to demonstrate its moral and practical value. In this manner, he was able to appeal to shared expectations and recognitions. This is the alchemy of his true influence as a leader.

### Placing Right Means above Desired Ends

10. Effective leaders recognize that ends do not justify means, for nothing right can ultimately come from wrong means. Means are ends in the making. Ethical means are ends in themselves because “virtue is its own reward.”
11. The propriety of ends depends upon the purity of means. Take care of the means and the ends will take care of themselves. Effective leaders know this logic very well; they choose the right goal (common good), follow the right means (nonviolence), and remain detached from the results (by dedicating themselves to the Whole).
12. Effective leaders place right means above desired ends. They focus on their actions more rather than the results. They strive to master the high art of detached engagement—for when we shift from goal-orientation to process-orientation, the results take care of themselves.
13. The greatest lesson that Gandhi learned from his lifelong study of the *Gītā* was the path of selfless action (*Karma Yoga*)—a discipline he lived his life by: use the right means for a just cause and leave the results in the hands of God.

### Crucibles: Grand Opportunities for Leadership

14. An outstanding trait that all exemplary leaders share is that they are able to envision the universal dimension through personal challenges. Exemplary leaders see personal challenges as universal opportunities for individual and collective transformation. They transmute personal trials to champion universal causes. The Greek mythological king Sisyphus was not wasting his time. He was developing his muscles!
15. Exemplary leaders know the alchemy of social change: when faced with “crucibles,” they dive within, train their mind, and transform their emotions. They convert all unfavorable circumstances into austerities (*tapas*)—accept them as the decree of the Divine or the universe.
16. Exemplary leaders are willing to work hard and wait. They are well aware that the finest wood comes from the slowest-growing trees. Gandhi’s development as an exemplary leader took long groundwork: 3 years in England, 21 years in South Africa, and 33 years in India! He kept on hoeing his garden till the very end of his life.

### Leading from Within

17. Every time Gandhi confronted human frailties in the outer world, he turned his searchlight within to find answers in the deeper recesses of his soul.
18. Effective leaders lead from within. They recognize that leadership is an internal affair—an inside-out job. All wars are first fought within the mind. They master their senses instead of letting their senses master them.
19. They learn from the Parable of the Chariot in which senses act as horses, mind as reins, the intellect as the driver, and the Self as the master which directs the intellect in the journey of self-transformation. Through self-mastery they are able to lead the organizational chariot to the desired destination of workplace wellness and excellence.
20. Effective leaders approach life and leadership as peaceful warriors—bereft of attachment and personal likes and dislikes. Every decision they make represents a concrete choice between the right/wrong means for just/unjust ends.

### The Art of Servant Leadership

21. Selfish desire obscures self-awareness and comes in the way of achieving life's true ends. Self-aware leaders are not motivated by personal desires or interests. They recognize that selfless service is the highest principle of life and leadership. They become instruments of the Whole and selflessly work for the well-being of all beings.
22. A leader's true inspiration comes from doing selfless work. Selfless work brings equanimity of mind which in turn contributes to leadership effectiveness. It is only when a leader is able to relinquish self-interest and egotism that he is able to know the true peace—rejoice and repose of the real Self. This abiding peace is the fruit of self-knowledge.
23. Real selfless service springs from true self-knowledge—the liberating knowledge that our self is the very Self of all, and vice versa. Gandhi was right: the best way to find oneself is to lose oneself in the service of others. One of the most important pre-conditions for the servant leader is humility. Only humble leaders can serve a cause higher than themselves.
24. Only those who have renounced personal ambition can truly serve. Honoring the universal principle underlying all life, leaders should treat their life-work as an “offering” for the well-being of all beings. This is the epitome of servant leadership.

25. Gandhi believed that only by not regarding anything as their own (*aparigraha*) can leaders truly devote themselves, body and soul, to the selfless service of others. For, unless mind is purged of personal desire and attachment, even service is but an inflation of the ego.
26. When asked to sum up the meaning of life in three words or less, Gandhi responded cheerfully: “That’s easy: Renounce and enjoy.” This spirit of sacrifice is what made Gandhi a true paragon of servant leadership.

### **Self-Awareness and Self-Knowledge**

27. Self-awareness is the art of being alertly aware about one’s body, mind, and intellect. It ultimately depends upon self-knowledge. Effective leaders know that self-awareness is the key to leading from within. They manage their awareness attentively to lead others effectively.
28. Self-knowledge means the knowledge of one’s true self at the “soul-level”—beyond the senses, mind, and intellect. While all other knowledge pertains to knowing everything that can be objectified externally, self-knowledge is about knowing the Knower.
29. Exemplary leaders recognize that the most important challenges confronting organizations and society at large are so profound and pervasive that they can only be resolved at the fundamental level of the human spirit—at the level of one’s authentic self.
30. Leading with authenticity first requires delving into the core of one’s being and engaging in a process of deep self-exploration characterized by self-reflection, self-understanding, self-knowledge, and self-mastery.
31. Effective leaders know that their strength resides in the richness of their being, not in the multitude of their possessions. Their goal is to be, not to have. Happiness is a flower that blossoms on the tree of self-knowledge.

### **Nonharming and Truth: Matchless Leadership Weapons**

32. Nonviolence is both the end and the means. For Gandhi, nonviolence was the means and truth was the end.
33. The only test of truth in action is refusal to do harm. Some *himsā* (violence) is always going to be a part of the equation of life. But its scope and extent are controllable and should be minimized. And *ahimsā* (nonviolence) can still inform the spirit in which the violence is done.

34. Nonviolence is not a cover for cowardice. Gandhi has said that where the only choice is between cowardice and violence, he would advise violence. He believed that most violence first starts at the mental level, slowly finds expression at the verbal level, and finally gets actuated at the physical level.
35. It is a law that a thing can only be retained by the same means by which it has been acquired. A thing acquired by violence can be retained by violence alone, while one acquired by truth can be retained only by truth.
36. In nonviolence, you can lose all the battles but still go on to win the war! Gandhi discovered that violence may initially win sometimes; however, nonviolence always wins in the long run.
37. The oppressor needs at least as much love and compassion as the oppressed. This is the alchemy of social change and harmony.
38. Truth and nonviolence are interrelated—two sides of the same coin. There is no spirituality without morality. And scriptures do not cleanse the ethically unworthy.
39. Nonviolence is the farthest limit of humility and is impossible without self-effacement. Pride or egotism is the very antithesis of nonviolence (*ahimsā*).
40. One cannot aspire to be nonviolent in one's behavior if one continues to be angry inside. Anger is a bad master but could be a good servant. Effective leaders do not lead by anger or fear. The practice of forbearance and forgiveness is their principal armor. They know the alchemy of transforming anger into compassion and harnessing it in the service of others.
41. *Satyāgraha* is not only a method for struggling against unjust politics and policies, but a universal solvent for injustice and harmfulness. One of the key ingredients of *satyāgraha* is the need for tolerance, not in the sense that one is prepared to compromise one's beliefs but in the sense that one is prepared to respect other belief systems. This leads to better understanding and harmony.
42. For Gandhi, truth was the beginning and end of spiritual life. There is the "relative" truth of truthfulness in human interactions, and the "absolute truth" of the Ultimate Reality. This ultimate truth is God (as God is also Truth).
43. At the level of human interactions the truth is "relative, many-sided, and plural." Gandhi believed that the only way to reach it is through *ahimsā*. Pure and absolute truth should be our ideal.
44. In its ultimate bidding, the quest for truth is about searching for the truth of our real self. Only seekers of self-truth are self-fulfilled. All other seeking produces weariness of soul and is ultimately unsatisfying. Gandhi discovered that nonviolence is the

route to the truth of our deepest self. This unique insight was probably his best gift to humanity.

### Self-Discipline and the Art of Self-Leadership

45. To lead others one must first lead one's self. To lead one's self, one must first know oneself. To know oneself, one must first "be" oneself. To be oneself is the first and last step. This is called self-discovery—a journey of recognition, from here to here.
46. The road to self-leadership is paved with self-discipline and self-restraint. Self-discipline may seem to be a high price in the beginning, but it is well worth paying for what one becomes at the end.
47. Self-discipline involves three related aspects of self-control—the ability to resist temptation, the ability to tolerate delay of gratification, and the imposing of strict standards of accomplishment upon oneself. There is joy of self-mastery; one is not suppressing but rather disciplining oneself. This is the difference between fasting and starving.
48. One should start the task of improvement with oneself since the only place in the universe that we are really sure of improving is ourselves. A person's capacity for self-control enhances his capacity to influence the environment around him. This was the key to Gandhi's political potency. He who controls himself gains the strength to shape the environment.
49. "The unexamined life," said Socrates, "is not worth living."<sup>21</sup> Till the very last moment of his life, Gandhi relentlessly continued his self-examination. A day before his assassination, he said to Manuben, "How can we look the world in the face? . . . Where do I stand and what am I doing?"<sup>22</sup>
50. Since leadership is an expression of who we are, in discovering, living, and sharing our deepest values lies the fulfillment of our life and leadership.
51. We have to be the change that we wish to see in the world. Gandhi became the source and embodiment of his own teachings. This was Gandhi's most important discovery and his greatest gift to humankind.

### GANDHI'S RELEVANCE AND LEGACY IN MODERN TIMES

Gandhi was a naturally charismatic leader. His entire leadership agenda rested on the moral principle of nonviolence (*ahimsā*) and the spiritual philosophy of truth (*satya*). No mere best policy, nonviolence was

a living reality for Gandhi. With the possible exception of the Buddha and Mahavira, seldom has any other human being laid so much importance on nonviolence in their life and thought. *Ahimsā* is an important tenet of ancient Indian religions, specifically Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, and represents an ontological stance about the sacredness and reverence for all life. It is what really distinguishes us from all other animals. All great teachers of humanity have highlighted it from time immemorial with varying degrees of emphasis.

But in this age of impending nuclear warfare, rising international terrorism, and rampant racial conflict, this message of love and nonviolence from Gandhi holds added significance. By the strength of his own life-example, Gandhi has shown us how to overcome the brute forces of darkness and destruction and how to convert a foe into a friend through the gentle power of love and nonviolence. If influence is the measure of man, Gandhi was perhaps the greatest apostle of nonviolence known to humanity. He of course did not invent the philosophy of nonviolence; however, he was a pioneer in extending its application from the personal to the social realm. Gandhi was not deterred by the question of whether humanity would ever consciously come to embrace the law of nonviolence. He knew that, like the law of gravitation, the law of love would work whether people accepted it or not.

Truth was to him God and he worshipped God as Truth alone. Through all his moral, spiritual, and political strivings, his life's ultimate goal was to "see God face to face." And in pursuit of this quest, Gandhi tells us at the very outset of his autobiography, he was willing to sacrifice the things dearest to him: "Even if the sacrifice demanded be my very life, I hope I may be prepared to give it."<sup>23</sup> Gandhi lived and died as he had always wished to—*without a groan and with God's name on his lips*. Less than 20 hours before he was shot on January 30, 1948, Gandhi had said:

Note down this also that if someone were to end my life by putting a bullet through me—as someone tried to do with a bomb the other day—and I met his bullet *without a groan*, and breathed my last taking *God's name*, then alone would I have made good my claim.<sup>24</sup>

God heard his prayer and honored his wish, and Gandhi now belongs to all humanity. "His legacy is courage, his lesson truth, his weapon love."<sup>25</sup> "Gandhi was prepared to die: this was his most powerful weapon."<sup>26</sup>

For Gandhi, love was the active state of nonviolence (*ahimsā*) which alone was capable of bringing a change of heart in the oppressor. And *ahimsā* and truth were inseparably intertwined in Gandhian

ethics. In its most expansive interpretation, *abimsā* signified for Gandhi *the unity and purity of one's thoughts, words, and deeds*. This object lesson in authenticity can serve as a guiding light for leaders of contemporary states and corporations.

### GANDHI'S TALISMAN

This was Gandhi's advice to a fellow seeker, given five months before his assassination:

I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man [woman] whom you may have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him [her]. Will he [she] gain anything by it? Will it restore him [her] to a control over his [her] own life and destiny? . . . Then you will find your doubts and yourself melt away.<sup>27</sup>

This admirably sums up Gandhi the humanist. Gandhi lived his life by this acid test of whether an action would benefit the poorest of the poor. The Bhagavad Gītā talks about a person of steady wisdom who is deeply immersed in the welfare of all beings. Such a person no longer has any personal desire or ambition left to fulfill. His very existence becomes a boon to society. Gandhi was one such person.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

John Quincy Adams, the nineteenth-century American President, provides a succinct touchstone of judging a leader: "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader." Judged against these criteria and in terms of his abiding influence, Gandhi emerges as one of the most remarkable leaders of all time. He led the greatest anti-colonial movement in history peacefully, showed how to lead successful political life without compromising integrity, revealed a rare model of morally sensitive political leadership, and provided politics a much-needed spiritual basis.

On hearing the news of Gandhi's assassination, E. Stanley Jones, the well-known missionary evangelist who had known and worked with Gandhi for over 40 years and who had arrived in New Delhi just an hour before the tragedy, lamented that it was "the greatest tragedy since the Son of God died on a cross."<sup>28</sup> Jones further adds, "I am still an evangelist. I bow to Mahatma Gandhi, but I kneel at the feet of Christ and give him my full and final allegiance. And yet a little man, who fought a system in the framework of which I stand, has taught

me more of the spirit of Christ than perhaps any other man in East or West.”<sup>29</sup>

“A man’s value,” wrote the great Indian sage, Sri Aurobindo, “does not depend on what he learns, or his position or his fame or what he does, but on what he is and inwardly becomes.”<sup>30</sup> Gandhi’s life was proof of his inner strength and greatness—a testimony of hope and belief in the sovereignty of goodness. The power of humility and gentleness is illustrated through the life of this “little brown man in a loincloth”<sup>31</sup> who brought the mightiest empire on earth to its knees.

## NOTES

### 1 GANDHI: “A ONE-MAN BOUNDARY FORCE!”

1. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Electronic Book), New Delhi, Publications Division Government of India, 1999, 98 volumes, Vol. 96, p. 303. Retrieved: October 27, 2014, <http://www.gandhiserve.org/e/cwmg/cwmg.htm>. Considered to be the most authoritative and exhaustive collection of Gandhi’s writings, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (CWMG) is a collection of Gandhi’s writings, including letters, essays, personal notes and interviews, comprising over 50,000 pages, which took about 40 years to compile. They cover the period from 1884 to 1948 in chronological order. The first edition of the CWMG was published between 1960 and 1994 by the Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India. The second printed edition of *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* was issued in 1998, and a CD came out in 1999. The page and volume numbers of this edition are not identical with the original print version published during 1960–1994. Gandhians across the world protested against this edition and the CD, claiming a number of errors and omissions. In mid-2005, the ministry issued an order to withdraw the revised edition and the CD. Originally, the CWMG consisted of 98 volumes; Volume 98 comprises the Index of Subject. In the 100-volume edition of the CWMG, Volume 99 consists of the Index of Person and Volume 100 comprises Prefaces. See: <https://www.gandhiheritageportal.org/the-collected-works-of-mahatma-gandhi>
2. A quote widely attributed to Gandhi. Embedded on a large stone at the Union Square, New York City.
3. See: John Hick, *Who or What Is God? And Other Investigations* (New York: Seabury Books, 2009), 162.
4. See Arvind Sharma, *Gandhi: A Spiritual Biography* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 54; also see Ved Mehta, *Mahatma Gandhi and His Apostles* (New York: The Viking Press, 1977), ix.
5. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, 1999, 98 volumes.

6. Rajmohan Gandhi, *Gandhi: The Man, His People, and Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), ix.
7. Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization: Our Oriental Heritage* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), Vol. 1, p. 628. Note: Only a part of the quotation appears here. Durant is reported to have said the first and last lines of the quotation during his visit to India. Durant reportedly said this when he heard about Gandhi's assassination.
8. Cited in John Adair, *The Art of Creative Thinking: How to Be Innovative and Develop Great Ideas* (London: Kogan Page, 2009), 52.
9. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 48, p. 63. Emphasis added.
10. Homer A. Jack, Ed., *The Wit and Wisdom of Gandhi* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), 202.
11. Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Autobiography* (New York: Dover Publication, 1983), viii.
12. Margaret Chatterjee, *Gandhi's Religious Thought* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1983), ix; Glyn Richards, *The Philosophy of Gandhi* (London: Curzon Press, 1991); Gandhi, *Autobiography*, 28–31.
13. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 97.
14. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, viii. It is generally believed that the honorific title "Mahatma" was first applied to Gandhi by Nobel laureate Sir Rabindranath Tagore. "'Great Soul in peasant's garb,' the poet wrote," says Louis Fischer, "and the crown sat forever on the politician-saint's head." Louis Fischer, *Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World* (New York: A Mentor Book, 1982), 50.
15. *Young India*, January 20, 1927, 21.
16. Mark Shepard, *Mahatma Gandhi and His Myths* (Los Angeles, CA: Shepard Publications, 2002), 6.
17. Yogesh Chadha, *Gandhi: A Life* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), vii.
18. Fischer, *Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World*, 176.
19. Robert Payne, *The Life and Death of Mahatma Gandhi* (New York: Konecky & Konecky, 1969), 14.
20. Fischer, *Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World*, 176.
21. Rajmohan Gandhi, *Gandhi: The Man, His People, and Empire*, xi.
22. Contribution to "Gandhi: His Life and Work," July 1944, AEA, arch. no. 28-608. Also see Chadha, *Gandhi: A Life*, 1.
23. Fischer, *Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World*, 143.
24. Cited in D. G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi* (New Delhi: The Publications Division, Government of India, 1961), Vol. 1, p. 8. E-book edition retrieved on July 10, 2014, [http://www.mkgandhi.org/imp\\_bks\\_mahatma.html](http://www.mkgandhi.org/imp_bks_mahatma.html)
25. Ibid.
26. Cited in Louis Fischer, ed., *The Essential Gandhi* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), 1.
27. Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy: The Lives and Opinions of Great Philosophers* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953), x.

## 2 A HERO'S LIFE JOURNEY: DEFINING MOMENTS OF LIFE AND LEADERSHIP

1. Cited in Yogesh Chadha, *Gandhi: A Life* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), 1.
2. Cited in Vishwanath S. Naravane, *Sarojini Naidu: An Introduction to Her Life, Work and Poetry* (Hyderabad, India: Orient Longman, 1996), 39.
3. Robert Payne, *The Life and Death of Mahatma Gandhi* (New York: Konecky & Konecky, 1969), 16.
4. Chadha, *Gandhi: A Life*, 1.
5. Louis Fischer, ed., *The Essential Gandhi* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), 1.
6. Ibid.
7. Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (New York: Dover Publications, 1983), viii. [Emphasis added].
8. Ibid., ix.
9. This expression, 'sharp as razor's edge,' occurs in Kaṭhōpaniṣad 1.3.14:

*uttiṣṭha jāgrata prāpya varān nibodhata |  
kṣurasya dhārā nisītā duratyayā durga pathas tat kavayo vadanti ||*

Arise, awake, seek the wise and gain understanding. The path is as sharp as a razor, difficult to cross, so say the wise. [author's rendition].

The famous English novelist, W. Somerset Maugham, named his 1944 novel, *The Razor's Edge*, based on Kaṭhōpaniṣad. It is well-known that Maugham was exposed to the teachings of Upaniṣads. Maugham visited Sri Ramana Ashram, where he had a direct interaction with Ramana Maharshi, the great seer, in India in 1938. See, *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai, India: Sri Ramanasramam, 2000), 537.

10. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, ix.
11. Ibid.
12. See Payne, *The Life and Death of Mahatma Gandhi*, 14.
13. Between his *Autobiography* and his book, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, one gets the complete genesis of the making of the "Mahatma"—Great Soul—a title he received from India's Poet Laureate, Rabindranath Tagore.
14. The phrase is attributed to Benjamin Disraeli, the British prime minister from 1874 to 1881. Cited in Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text* (Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 149.
15. Louis Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), 12. See also: Gandhi, *Autobiography*, 1.
16. Chadha, *Gandhi: A Life*, 2.
17. Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, 13.
18. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, 2.
19. Ibid., 1.

20. Ibid., 28.
21. Ibid., 4.
22. Ibid., 22.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., 4.
25. Ibid., 29.
26. Śrīrāmacaritamānasa, *Sundarkānd*, *doḥa* 40.8, author's translation. Literally, *Rāmacaritamānasa* means "the lake of life and deeds of Lord Rama."
27. The "*Japa*" or the repetition of a holy name or word is a religious practice that helps the aspirant to focus on a chosen subject or thought and builds up a reservoir of spiritual power. The analogues of this practice are found in all religions. Some Christian prayer forms (e.g., the prayer of the heart), the practice of *dhikr* by Sufis, traditional Jewish prayer, and the practice of *nembustu* in Pure Land Buddhism are a few examples of the universal nature of this practice. *The Cloud of Unknowing* (New York: Harper Collins Spiritual Classics, HarperOne, 2004) and *Philokalia* (London: Faber & Faber, 1983) are examples of works that describe this practice within the Christian tradition.
28. Chadha, *Gandhi: A Life*, 5.
29. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, 28.
30. *Young India*, March 24, 1927, 93.
31. See: Fischer, *The Essential Gandhi*, 16.
32. Jad Adams, *Gandhi: The True Man Behind Modern India* (New York: Pegasus, 2012), 33.
33. Fischer, *The Essential Gandhi*, 16.
34. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, 27.
35. Ibid., 23–30.
36. Ibid., 27.
37. Ibid., 54–55.
38. S. Gambhirananda, tr., *Bhagavad Gita with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya* (Calcutta, India: Advaita Ashrama, 1984), 302.
39. Krishna Kripalani, *Gandhi: A Life* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, India, 2013, reprint edition), 9.
40. Ibid.
41. Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 2.
42. Krishna Kripalani, *Gandhi: A Life* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, India, 2013, reprint edition), 18.
43. See: Arvind Sharma, *Gandhi: A Spiritual Biography* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 2013), 54–56. Sharma devotes a whole chapter on the theme of Gandhi's conversion experience. For its details in Gandhi's own words, see Gandhi, *Autobiography*, 92–98.
44. Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, 41.
45. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, 97.
46. Ibid., 96–97.
47. Ibid., 113.

48. Cited in Fischer, *The Essential Gandhi*, xx.
49. Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*, 3rd ed. (New York: A Touchstone Book, 1984), 116.
50. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, 100.
51. Parekh, *Gandhi*, 3.
52. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, 135.
53. Fischer, *The Essential Gandhi*, 38.
54. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, 138.
55. M. K. Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa* (Ahmedabad, Gujarat: Navajivan Publishing House, 2008, reprint), 308.
56. Fischer, *Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World*, 132.
57. Ruskin's ideas of reviving traditional rural handicrafts appealed to Gandhi greatly. As we will see in the next chapter, Gandhi was highly influenced by Ruskin's *Unto This Last* and paraphrased the work in his native language, Gujarati.
58. These biographical details were retrieved on August 5, 2014, at [http://www.gandhi-manibhavan.org/aboutgandhi/biography\\_southafrica.htm](http://www.gandhi-manibhavan.org/aboutgandhi/biography_southafrica.htm).
59. Cited in Sankar Ghose, *Mahatma Gandhi* (Columbia, MO: South Asia Books, 1991), 83.
60. M. K. Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, 306.
61. Ved Mehta, *Mahatma Gandhi and His Apostles* (New York: Viking, 1977), 130.
62. Mark Thomson, *Gandhi and His Ashrams* (Mumbai, India: Popolar Prakashan Pvt. Ltd., 1993), 22. Also see: Parekh, *Gandhi*; Ved Mehta, *Mahatma Gandhi and His Apostles*.
63. Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, 307.
64. Timothy Conway, *Mahatma Gandhi, Life and Teachings*. Retrieved: August 5, 2014, [http://www.enlightened-spirituality.org/Mahatma\\_Gandhi.html](http://www.enlightened-spirituality.org/Mahatma_Gandhi.html).
65. Fischer, *Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World*, 50.
66. *Ibid.*, 53.
67. See: Bella Jaisinghani, "Centenary celebrations to retrace Bapu's arrival in India from SA," *Times of India*, January 9, 2015, retrieved February 6, 2015, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/Centenary-celebrations-to-retrace-Bapus-arrival-in-India-from-SA/articleshow/45816953.cms>
68. Geoffrey C. Ward, "How Gandhi Became Gandhi," review of *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and His Struggle with India*, by Joseph Lelyveld, *New York Times*, March 24, 2011.
69. Kripalani, *Gandhi: A Life*, 83.
70. B. R. Nanda, *Mahatma Gandhi—A Biography* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 124.
71. Kripalani, *Gandhi: A Life*, 85. Also see: Satish Sharma, *Gandhi's Teachers: Leo Tolstoy* (Ahmedabad: Gujarat Vidyapith University, 2009).
72. Interestingly, Gandhi titles a chapter in his *Autobiography* as "Himalayan Miscalculation." See: *Autobiography*, part v, chapter XXXIII, 424.

73. Parekh, *Gandhi*, 12.
74. *Ibid.*, 13.
75. *Ibid.*
76. Fischer, *The Essential Gandhi*, 227.
77. *Ibid.*
78. “Saint Gandhi”: Time Man of the Year 1930, accessed January 21, 2015, <https://sites.google.com/site/mahatmagandhionthetnet/time-man-of-the-year-1030>
79. Parekh, *Gandhi*, 16–17.
80. Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, 280.
81. Chadha, *Gandhi: A Life*, vii.
82. Hazel Whitman, “Toward an Understanding of Gandhi,” review of *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, by Louis Fischer, *Commentary Magazine*, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/the-life-of-mahatma-gandhi-by-louis-fischer/>.
83. Payne, *The Life and Death of Mahatma Gandhi*, 14.
84. Fischer, *Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World*, 176.
85. Rajmohan Gandhi, *Gandhi: The Man, His People, and Empire* (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 2008), xi.
86. See: G. D. Khosla, *Stern Reckoning: A Survey of the Events Leading Up To and Following the Partition of India* (Delhi/Bombay/Calcutta/Madras: Oxford University Press, 1989), 114–244.
87. Kripalani, *Gandhi: A Life*, 190.
88. Fischer, *Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World*, 177.
89. Kripalani, *Gandhi: A Life*, 196.
90. E. Stanley Jones, *Gandhi: Portrayal of a Friend* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 11.
91. Cited in Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy: The Lives and Opinions of the Great Philosophers* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1926/1962), 14.
92. Fischer, *Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World*, 189.
93. Lelyveld, *Great Soul*, 27.
94. Raymond B. Blakney, trans., *The Way of Life Lao Tzu: A New Translation* (New York: Mentor Books, 1960), 81.
95. Attributable to Robert F. Kennedy, brother of John F. Kennedy. See: Robert Kennedy. Accessed: January 21, 2015: [http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Robert\\_F.\\_Kennedy](http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Robert_F._Kennedy)
96. Cited in *Young India*, November 26, 1931, as quoted in R. K. Prabhu and U. R. Rao, eds., *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1996),
97. Michael Nagler, “Do We Live in a Meaningless Universe?” *Metta Center Blog*, retrieved August 3, 2014, <http://mettacenter.org/blog/do-we-live-in-a-meaningless-universe/> [emphasis added].
98. Lelyveld, *Great Soul*, 349.
99. *Ibid.*
100. Jones, *Gandhi*, 5.

101. Ibid., 7.
102. Ibid.
103. Ibid., 8.
104. Opinion cited, Whitman, “Toward an Understanding of Gandhi.”

### 3 GANDHI’S HEROES: GUIDING LIGHTS ON A HERO’S JOURNEY

1. Victor Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy*, Revised and Expanded (New York: Vintage, 1986, 3rd edition), 67–68.
2. Dean Keith Simonton, *Greatness: Who Makes History and Why* (New York: Guilford Press, 1994), 153.
3. Ibid., 153–155.
4. Quoted in Dilip Kumar Roy, *Yogi Sri Krishna Prem* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965), 10.
5. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), 30.
6. See: Arvind Sharma, *Gandhi: A Spiritual Biography* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 2013), 54–56.
7. J. M. Upadhyaya, ed., *Gandhi as a Student* (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1965), 3.
8. Puranas (Sanskrit: “of ancient times”) denote sacred lore of Hinduism that depict various myths about various Hindu deities. According to online Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Puranas represent “a class of Hindu sacred writings chiefly from AD 300 to AD 750 comprising popular myths and legends and other traditional lore.” Retrieved February, 6, 2015, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/purana>
9. *Harijan*, January 2, 1937, p. 374.
10. Mahatma Gandhi, *Young India: 1919–1922* (Madras, India: S. Ganesan, 1922), 475.
11. Joseph J. Doke, *M. K. Gandhi: Indian Patriot in South Africa* (Varanasi, UP: Akhil Bharat Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, 1909), 77–78. The Gujarati hymn (*bhajan*) referred to in this quoted extract was composed by fifteenth-century poet Narsinh Mehta in Gujarati and was recited daily in Gandhi’s prayers. It is in essence a definition of a *Vaishnava*. Strict vegetarianism, *ahimsā*, and simplicity are the hallmarks of a true *Vaishnava*. Elements of this hymn were also included in the Hollywood film *Gandhi* (1982). Please refer to the chapter on nonviolence for more details about this bhajan.
12. Haridas T. Muzumdar, *Mahatma Gandhi: Peaceful Revolutionary* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1952), ix.
13. Mohandas. K. Gandhi, *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (New York: Dover Publications, 1983), 30. [emphasis added].
14. Etymologically, the word ‘Vishnu’ means ‘the All-Pervading One.’ *Veveshti vyāpnōti iti Vishnuh*—“That which pervades everywhere is

- Vishnu.’ See: Swami Chinmayananda, *Thousand Ways to the Transcendental: Vishnu Sahasranama* (Bombay, India: Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, 1980), 16.
15. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, 77.
  16. Satish Sharma, *Gandhi’s Teachers: Rajchandra Ravjibhai Mehta* (Ahmedabad: Gujarat Vidyapith, 2005), 4.
  17. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, 76.
  18. Sharma, *Gandhi’s Teachers: Rajchandra Ravjibhai Mehta*, 69–96.
  19. Unpublished transcripts. Narayan Desai, personal interview with the author, Ahmedabad, India, October 15, 2013. Professor Satish Sharma, author of six books on Gandhi, confirmed this incident in an email communication on October 11, 2014: “Regarding the [Raychand] episode you mentioned, it must be true and there may be many more like this. So you may use it for your book.”
  20. Cited in Raghavan Iyer, *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks, 2012), 80–81.
  21. *Ibid.*, 81.
  22. Advaita Vedānta lays down four disciplines for a seeker after self-knowledge, which are as follows:
    - i. Discrimination—*viveka*—between the real and the unreal
    - ii. Renunciation—*vairāgya*—of the unreal
    - iii. Six Virtues/Treasures—*ṣatsampatti*—of self-control
    - iv. Longing for liberation—*mumukṣutva*

See: Pranipata Chaitanya, trans., and Satinder Dhiman, revised and edited with notes and an Introduction, *Śrī Śankara’s Vivekaśūdhāmaṇi: Devanāgarī Text, Transliteration, Word-for-Word Meaning, and a Lucid English Translation* (Burbank, California: Metta House, 2012).
  23. These six virtues are: *sama* (tranquility), *dama* (sense-restraint), *uparati* (withdrawal), *titikṣā* (forbearance), *śraddha* (faith), and *samādhān* (focus).
  24. J. T. F. Jordens, Gandhi and the Bhagavadgita. In Robert Neil Minor, ed., *Modern Indian Interpreters of the Bhagavad Gita* (New York: State University of New York Press), 107.
  25. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, 76–77.
  26. *Ibid.*, 120.
  27. See Sharma, *Gandhi’s Teachers: Rajchandra Ravjibhai Mehta*, 69–89.
  28. During this author’s exclusive two-hour interview with Narayan Desai, the author of a four-volume biography of Gandhi titled *My Life Is My Message*, this point of “living the teachings” came up several times. When asked what was the most important quality that Gandhi had, Narayan Desai immediately replied, “The ability to practice what he preached.” Narayan Desai lived with Gandhi for the first 21 years of his life and later devoted more than 60 years in studying and teaching only one subject, i.e., Gandhi. Such a dedication to the philosophy of one person is very rare to come by!
  29. Krishna Kripalani, *Gandhi: A Life* (New Delhi: NBT, 2013, reprint), 60–61.

30. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, 77.
31. Thomas Weber, *Gandhi as Disciple and Mentor* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011, reissue), 20.
32. Cited in Sudarshan Iyengar, Foreword in Satish Sharma, *Gandhi's Teachers: Leo Tolstoy* (Ahmedabad: Gujarat Vidyapith University, 2009), vi.
33. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, 120.
34. For all major correspondence between Gandhi and Tolstoy, see Satish Sharma, *Gandhi's Teachers: Leo Tolstoy* (Ahmedabad: Gujarat Vidyapith University, 2009).
35. D. G. Tendulkar, *Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Vol. 1 (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1960), 122.
36. Leo Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* (Radford, VA: Wilder Publications, 2008), 90.
37. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, 120.
38. Sharma, *Gandhi's Teachers: Leo Tolstoy*, xii.
39. *Ibid.*
40. "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested," said English essayist Francis Bacon, paraphrasing *The Book of Common Prayer*: "hear . . . , read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest."
41. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, 265.
42. *Ibid.*
43. Jonathan Hyslop, "Gandhi 1869–1915: The Transnational Emergence of a Public Figure," in Judith M. Brown and Anthony Parel (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 30–50.
44. Ramachandra Guha, *Gandhi Before India* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2014), 3.
45. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden: A Fully Annotated Edition* (New York: Yale University Press, 2004), 287.
46. Cited in Kripalani, *Gandhi: A Life*, 9.
47. M. K. Gandhi, Introduction, in John Strohmeier, ed., *The Bhagavad Gītā According to Gandhi* (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Hills Books, 2000), 17–18.
48. Cited in Kripalani, *Gandhi: A Life*, 9.
49. Gandhi, *The Bhagavad Gītā According to Gandhi*, 21.
50. Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization, Vol. 1: Our Oriental Heritage* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1942), 567.
51. Nataraja Guru, trans. and comm., *The Bhagavad Gita: A Sublime Hymn of Dialectics* (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 2008, 2nd edition), xiv.
52. *Ibid.*, 51–52.
53. The Gītā recommends to approach life as a network of mutual interdependencies in which everyone has to contribute their share. Those who only consume and do not contribute to the mutual maintenance of the universe are nothing but thieves (Gītā: 3.12). And the touchstone is not mere human welfare, but the well-being of all beings. The Gītā (18.5)

- recommends the threefold acts of sacrifice (*yajña*), charity (*dāna*), and austerity (*tapas*) and considers them as the “purifiers of the wise.” In order to grow spiritually, one has to convert one’s whole life into an offering to the Divine.
54. Brahman refers to the Absolute Reality or Pure Existence. Not to be confused with Brahmin which denotes the priestly caste in Hinduism.
  55. K. A. Krishnaswamy Iyer, *Collected Works of K. A. Krishnaswamy Iyer* (Holenarasipur: Adhyatma Prakash Karyalaya, 2006), 239.
  56. *Ibid.*, 251. This is Mr. Iyer’s rendition of Gita’s verse 13.28. This author has not come across such a unique and apt interpretation anywhere else.
  57. S. Gambhirananda, tr., *Bhagavad Gita with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya* (Calcutta, India: Advaita Ashrama, 1984), 302.
  58. M. K. Gandhi, *Preface to Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*. E-book retrieved November 1, 2014. url: <http://www.soilandhealth.org/03sov/0303critic/hind%20swaraj.pdf>
  59. See Mark Thomson, *Gandhi and His Ashrams* (Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, 1993).

#### 4 THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ: GANDHI’S MORAL AND SPIRITUAL ANCHORAGE

1. See: Ramesh S. Betai, *Gītā and Gandhi* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House/National Gandhi Museum, 2002).
2. J. T. F. Jordens, “Gandhi and the Bhagavadgita,” in Robert Neil Minor, ed., *Modern Indian Interpreters of the Bhagavad Gita* (New York: State University of New York Press), 88. See: Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (New York: Dover Publications, 1983), 59, 60, 232, 233, 296–297.
3. *Mokṣa* is a Sanskrit term for liberation which means freedom from the servitude of sensual pleasures and equanimity toward favorable and unfavorable circumstances while living, and, ultimately, liberation from the conditioned existence—the cycles of birth and death.
4. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, viii.
5. *Ibid.*
6. According to a well-known Indian dictum, “Scriptures do not cleanse the ethically unworthy.”
7. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, viii. Emphasis added.
8. Debashis Chatterjee, *Timeless Leadership: 18 Leadership Sutras from the Bhagavad Gītā* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), front flap matter (liner notes).
9. Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, Revised and updated edition, 2006), 76.  
Peter M. Senge, C. Otto Scharmer, and Joseph Jaworski, *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future* (New York: Crown Books, 2008), 92.

10. In his fine preface to *The Essential Gandhi* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), Eknath Easwaran calls these three practices “the essence of the spiritual life.” This conforms to the threefold disciplines enunciated in various Indian wisdom texts—the path of knowledge (*jñāna yoga*), the path of action (*karma yoga*), and the path of devotion (*bhakti yoga*). Madhusudana Saraswati, a preeminent commentator, divides the *Gītā* into three sections of six chapters, each section dealing successively with *karma yoga*, *bhakti yoga*, and *jñāna yoga*, the first leading to the second and the second to the third [*Gambhīrananda, Bhagavad Gītā with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya*. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1984), 21.] Another sacred text provides the following order of spiritual disciplines:

*Yōgāstrayomayāproktānarrnāmsbreyo-vidhitsuḥ;  
Jñānam karma ca bhaktis canauḥpāyaḥ anyoastikutracit.*

(*Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 11.20.6)

[I have enunciated three paths for those who want to attain spiritual welfare—the path of knowledge (*jñāna yoga*), the path of selfless actions (*karma yoga*), and the path of devotion (*bhakti yoga*). Besides these three, there is absolutely no other path for the spiritual advancement of human beings.]

11. J. A. B. van Buitenen, ed. and trans., *The Bhagavad Gītā in the Mahābhārata: A Bilingual Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).
12. K. W. Bolle, *The Bhagavadgītā: A New Translation* (California: University of California Press, 1979), 224.
13. R. N. Minor, ed., *Modern Indian Interpreters of the Bhagavad Gītā* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 5.
14. Cited in Will Durant, *The Case for India* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1930), 6.
15. Swami Prabhāvananda and Christopher Isherwood, trans., *The Song of God: Bhagavad Gītā, with an Introduction by Aldous Huxley* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951/2002), 22 (emphasis added).
16. Scott Teitsworth, *The Path to the Guru: The Science of Self-Realization According to the Bhagavad Gita* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2014), 3–4.
17. A. Parthasarathy cited in Dennis Waite, *Back to the Truth: 5000 Years of Advaita* (Winchester, UK: John Hunt Publishing, 2007), 519.
18. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, 302.
19. According to the Bible, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (verse 33, King James Version).
20. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, 454.
21. See: Satinder Dhiman, trans., *Sahaja-Gītā: The Essential Gītā* [Selection and Compilation, Rajendra Kumar Dhawan]. Based on Paramśraddheya Swāmijī Shri Rāmsukhdāsji Mahārāj’s commentary on Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā, entitled *Sādhaka-Saṅjivanī* (Gorakhpur, India: Gita Prakāshan, 2013).

22. All quoted verses are stated in this manner: chapter and verse number. Thus, 1.1 denotes chapter 1, verse 1 of the Gītā. All translations of the quoted Sanskrit words or [partial] verses are by the author, unless otherwise noted.
23. Joanne B. Ciulla, ed., *Ethics, The Heart of Leadership* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004, Second edition), xv.
24. Harry M. Jansen Kraemer, Jr., *From Values to Action: The Four Principles of Values-Based Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, April 2011). See also: James O'Toole, "Notes Toward a Definition of Values-Based Leadership," *The Journal of Values-Based Leadership*, 1(1), Article 10 (2008): 4.
25. Interestingly, the word *niškāma karma*—the most popular epithet applied for the central message of the Gītā—does not occur *as such* in the Gītā.
26. Dhiman, *Sabaja-Gītā: The Essential Gītā*, 14.
27. Warren Bennis, *An Invented Life: Reflections on Leadership and Change* (New York: Perseus Books Group, 1994), 78.
28. Quoted in Edith M. Leonard, Lillian E. Miles, and Catherine S. Van der Kar, *The Child: At Home and School* (New York: American Book Co., 1944), 203.
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41. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, 59.
42. Ibid.
43. Eknath Easwaran, *Gandhi the Man: The Story of His Transformation* (Tomales, CA: Nilgiri Press, 1997), 107.
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47. Ibid.
48. M. K. Gandhi in John Strohmeier, ed., *The Bhagavad Gītā According to Gandhi* (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Hills Books, 2000), 16.
49. Ibid, 14.
50. Conversations with Sriman Narayan Desai, unpublished interview transcripts. Narayan Desai, son of Mahatma Gandhi's personal secretary and biographer, Mahadev Desai, lived with Gandhi for 21 years since he was about one year old. His magnum opus, *My Life Is My Message*, is the English translation of the epic four-volume biography in Gujarati, *Maru Jivan Ej Mari Vani*, and is hailed as one of the finest insights into the life of Gandhi. It brings alive Gandhi's several quests as one indivisible whole, in which the political is not outside the realm of the spiritual. The interviews with Narayan Desai took place in 2013 in Ahmedabad at his sister's house where he was staying at the time. Sriman Narayan Desai informed this author that for the last 68 years, he has studied and taught only one topic: Gandhi!
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*iśāvāsyamidamsarvaṃyatkiñca jagatyāṃ jagat /  
tenatyaktenabhuñjīthāmāgr̥dhalḥkasyasviddhanam //*

[Enveloped by the Lord must be This All—each thing that moves on earth.

With that renounced enjoy thyself. Covet no wealth of any man.]

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58. *The Diary of Mahadev Desai*, p. 172 [Cited in Anand T. Hingorani, ed., *Gandhi for 21st Century: The Teachings of the Gītā* (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1998), 9.]
59. Cited in Hingorani, *Gandhi for 21st Century*, 10.
60. *Ibid.*, 19.
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62. Strohmeier, ed., *The Bhagavad Gītā According to Gandhi*, 18.
63. *Ibid.*
64. *Ibid.*, 21.
65. *Ibid.*, 23.
66. Śri Śaṅkara, in his legendary commentary on the Gita (*Gītā Bhāṣyam*), defines *sthitāprajñāḥ*, a person established in steady wisdom, as follows: ‘*sthitā pratiṣṭhitā ‘ahamasmi param brahma’ iti prajñā yasya saḥ sthitaprajñāḥ*’. He is a person of steady wisdom who has a firm conviction/awareness, “I am the Supreme Brahman.” [author’s rendition].
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74. *Ibid.*, xxi.
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## 5 GANDHI: A VALUES-BASED LEADER PAR EXCELLENCE

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50. Albert Schweitzer, *Out of My Life and Thought* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 236.
51. See David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (London: Routledge Classics, 2002). For general background, see also Ken Wilber, ed., *Quantum Questions: Mystical Writings of World's Great Physicists* (Boston: Shambhala, 1984).
52. *na vā are sarvasya kāmāya sarvam priyam bhavati, ātmanastu kāmāya sarvam priyam bhavati*: Swāmī Mādhavānanda, *Brihadāranyaka Upaniṣad, with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya* (Kolkata, India: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 246–247.
53. M. K. Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa* (Ahmedabad, Gujarat: Navajivan Publishing House, 2008, reprint), 306.
54. Nagler, *The Search for a Nonviolent Future*, 106.
55. *Ibid.*, 98.
56. This story is repeated on the internet on multiple web and blog sites, some of which attribute it to a book called *Record of Protecting Life*; this author has yet to find any conclusive publication information on the book. Story accessed January 12, 2015, <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/SpiritualAwakening/conversations/messages/2083>.
57. Swami Nikhalananda, trans. and ed., *The Upanishads: A One Volume Abridgement* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1964), 347.
58. Acharya Buddhārāhita, trans., *Dhammapada: The Buddha's Path of Wisdom* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1985), 43.
59. M. K. Gandhi, *India of my Dreams* (New Delhi: Rajpal & Sons, 2009), 151.
60. See: Krishna Maheshwari, Mahabharata, *Hindupedia*, retrieved February 12, 2015, [http://www.hindupedia.com/en/Mahabharata#cite\\_note-0](http://www.hindupedia.com/en/Mahabharata#cite_note-0).
61. J. A. B. van Buitenen, trans., *The Mahabharata, Volume 1: Book 1: The Book of the Beginning* (Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press, 1980), 130.
62. *Śloka-arbhena pravakṣyāmi yad-uktam grantha-kotibhiḥ;  
Paropakaraya punyaya, papaya para peedana.*  
(The gist of a million treatises expressed in half a verse: Highest merit is helping others; highest wrongdoing is hurting others.)
63. Y. P. Anand, as cited in Ramesh S. Betai's, *Gītā and Gandhi* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House/National Gandhi Museum, 2002), xii.
64. Swāmī Gambhīrānanda, trans., *Bhagavadgīta with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1984), 302–303. The English translation of verse 6.32 is also by Swāmī Gambhīrānanda.
65. Nagler, *A Pledge of Non-Violence*.
66. E. Stanley Jones, *Gandhi: Portrayal of a Friend* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 8.

67. Cited in Louis Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), 334.
68. *Young India* (August 11, 1920, as quoted in Joan V. Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1958/1988), 28.
69. Nagler, *Six Principles of Nonviolence*.
70. Ibid.

## 7 SATYĀGRAHA: A HIGHER APPROACH TO ETHICS

1. Eknath Easwaran, *Gandhi the Man: The Story of His Transformation* (California: Nilgiri Press, 1997), 151.
2. M. K. Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa* (Ahmedabad, Gujarat: Navajivan Publishing House, 2008, Reprint), 307.
3. Joan V. Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1958/1988), vi.
4. Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, 102–107.
5. Ibid., 102.
6. Joseph J. Doke, *M. K. Gandhi Indian Patriot in South Africa* (Varanasi, UP: Akhil Bharat Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, 1909), 78.
7. Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, 104–105.
8. Cited in Michael Nagler, *Principled Non-Violence*, Metta Center for Nonviolence. Retrieved: August 15, 2014. <http://mettacenter.org/definitions/principled-nonviolence/>.
9. *Young India* (March 1, 1928).
10. *Young India* (May 21, 1931).
11. Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, 106.
12. Michael N. Nagler, *The Search for a Nonviolent Future: A Promise of Peace for Ourselves, Our Families, and Our World* (San Francisco: Inner Ocean Publishing, 2004), 100.
13. M. K. Gandhi, “Letter to Mr.—,” January 25, 1920, cited in M.K. Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (electronic book) (New Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India, 1999), Vol. 19, 350. Retrieved: February 13, 2015. <http://www.gandhiserve.org/cwmg/VOL019.PDF>.
14. Glyn Richards, *The Philosophy of Gandhi* (London: Curzon Press, 1991), 157.
15. Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, 260.
16. *Samyutta Nikaya*, PTS 1:75 (author’s emphasis). Story accessed January 12, 2015. <http://www.wisdomportal.com/Peace/Peace-Quotes.html>.
17. Based on Richards, *The Philosophy of Gandhi*, 48–51.
18. Quoted in Thomas Merton (ed.), *Gandhi on Non-Violence* (New York: New Directions, 1965), 79.
19. M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1938), 115.
20. Cited in Richards, *The Philosophy of Gandhi*, 32.
21. Raghavan Iyer, *The Moral and Political Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 364.

22. Ibid., 362–371; See also: *Young India* (July 17, 1924), 236.
23. Ibid., 366.
24. Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1941), 52.
25. Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, 105; *Young India* (November 10, 1921).
26. *Young India* (May 11, 1919).
27. *Young India* (October 11, 1928).
28. Michael Nagler, *Law of Suffering*, Metta Center for Nonviolence. Retrieved: August 15, 2014. [http://mettacenter.org/tag/law\\_of\\_suffering/](http://mettacenter.org/tag/law_of_suffering/).
29. Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, 16.
30. Nagler, *Law of Suffering*.
31. *Young India* (November 5, 1931).
32. Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence*, 28.
33. “Satyarthi” literally means “seeker of truth.”
34. “Who is Kailash Satyarthi?” *Hindustan Times*. Retrieved: October 10, 2014.
35. Ibid.
36. “The Nobel Peace Prize 2014,” Nobel Foundation, October 10, 2014. Retrieved: October 10, 2014. [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/2014/press.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2014/press.html).
37. Kailash Satyarthi: The Seeker of Truth. Biographical information retrieved: October 19, 2014. <http://www.kailashsatyarthi.net/biography/index.php>.
38. Sean McInain, Niharika Mandhana, and Kjetil Malkenes Hovland, “Nobel Peace Prize Awarded to Pakistan’s Malala Yousafzai, India’s Kailash Satyarthi: Committee Seeks to Draw Attention to Violations of Children’s Rights and Persistence of Child Labor,” *The Wall Street Journal*, October 10, 2014. Retrieved: October 10, 2014. <http://online.wsj.com/articles/nobel-peace-prize-awarded-to-kailash-satyarthi-malala-yousafzai-1412933020>.
39. Louis Fischer, *Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World* (New York: A Mentor Book, 1982), 76.
40. M. K. Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (electronic book), Vol. 79, p. 295. Retrieved: February 14, 2015. <http://www.gandhiserve.org/e/cwmg/cwmg.htm>.
41. Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence*, 37.
42. Michael Nagler, *Fasting*, Metta Center for Nonviolence. Retrieved: September 15, 2014. <http://mettacenter.org/definitions/fasting/>.  
See also: M. K. Gandhi, *Fasting in Satyagraha, Its Use and Abuse*, compiled by R. K. Prabhu and Ravindra Kelekar (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1965), 25, 27, 45, 66.
43. Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence*, 39–40.
44. Ibid., 38–39.
45. Sri Aurobindo, *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest* (Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 2006), 14.

46. Judith Brown, "Introduction," in Judith M. Brown and Anthony Parel, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi* (New York: The Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1.
47. *Young India*, August 11, 1920, as quoted in Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence*, 28.

## 8 SELF-DISCIPLINE: THE MAKING OF AN EXEMPLARY LEADER

1. M. K. Gandhi, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India, 1994), Vol. 48, p. 63.
2. Shri Manubhai Patel, former Member of Parliament, Gandhian Freedom Fighter, Personal Interview with the author. Vadodara, October 25, 2013 (unpublished transcripts). Mr. Patel was a 19-year-old college student when he first heard Gandhi speak at a public rally. He told this author, "Hearing Gandhiji for the first time, I immediately decided what to do with my life. I dropped everything I was doing and joined Gandhiji's freedom movement." Shri Manubhai Patel, who also served as the president of Servants of the People Society, was 92 years old when this author met him for a two-hour-long conversation about Gandhi and his leadership style. He looked very healthy physically—he walked without a stick—and exuded a vivacious spirit. When asked about the secret of his all-round health, his eyes shone and he replied succinctly: "Gandhian principle of 'simple living and high thinking.'"
3. *Harijan* (August 29, 1936), as quoted in Nirmal Kumar Bose, *Selections from Gandhi: Encyclopedia of Gandhi's Thoughts* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1950), 49.
4. Quoted in Richard Attenborough (Producer and Director), *Gandhi* (Culver City, California: Columbia Pictures, 1983). This quote occurs in the following conversation:

*Margaret Bourke-White:* So you really are going to Pakistan then? You are a stubborn man.

*Gandhi:* I'm simply going to prove to Hindus here and Muslims there that the only devils in the world are those running around in our own hearts. And that is where all our battles ought to be fought.

*Margaret Bourke-White:* So what kind of a warrior have you been in that warfare?

*Gandhi:* Not a very good one. That's why I have so much tolerance for the other scoundrels of the world.

Accessed February 12, 2015, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0083987/quotes>.

5. The path of self-realization is often described as sharp as the edge of a razor. This analogy occurs in one of the most important wisdom texts, Kathopaniṣad (1.3.14):  
 Arise, awake, and learn by approaching the exalted ones,  
 for that path is sharp as a razor's edge, impassable,  
 and hard to go by, say the wise.  
 See: V. Panoli, trans., *Prasthanathraya Volume II: Isa, Kena, Katha and Mandukya Upaniṣad with the Karika of Gaudapada* (Kochi, India: Mathrubhumi MM Press, 2006).
6. *Young India* (October 23, 1924), as quoted in Bose, *Selections from Gandhi*, 299.
7. *Young India* (December 31, 1931), as quoted in Bose, *Selections from Gandhi*, 6.
8. Matthew: 5:3, 8.
9. *Young India* (December 31, 1931), 427, as quoted in Bose, *Selections from Gandhi*, 7.
10. Gandhi Research Foundation, 11 Vows of Gandhiji. Retrieved: October 5, 2014. <http://www.gandhifoundation.net/about%20gandhi2.htm>.  
 Several websites on the net present various versions of the 11 vows. This section draws upon the following two website mainly: [http://www.gandhi-manibhavan.org/gandhiphilosophy/philosophy\\_11vows.htm](http://www.gandhi-manibhavan.org/gandhiphilosophy/philosophy_11vows.htm) and [http://www.gandhi-manibhavan.org/activities/essay\\_elevenvows.htm](http://www.gandhi-manibhavan.org/activities/essay_elevenvows.htm).
11. Swami Paramarthananda, Ten Commandments: The Do's and Don'ts of Hinduism: Transcription of New Year 2000 Talk. Retrieved: October 5, 2014, [http://www.vedanta.gr/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/SwParam\\_NY2000\\_10-Commandments\\_ENA4.pdf](http://www.vedanta.gr/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/SwParam_NY2000_10-Commandments_ENA4.pdf).
12. Cited in Raghavan Iyer, *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press/Oxford India Paperbacks, 2012), 69.
13. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, *How to Know God: The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali* (Hollywood, CA: Vedanta Society, 1953/2007), 148–149.
14. Swami Paramarthananda, Ten Commandments.
15. Vijayadashami. Retrieved: October 5, 2014, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vijayadashami>.
16. *Young India* (August 25, 1920).
17. Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (New York: Dover Publications, 1983), 453.
18. Cited in Prabhavananda and Isherwood, *How to Know God*, 149.
19. M. K. Gandhi, *From Yeravda Mandir: Ashram Observances* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1932), p. 2. (Gandhi referred to Yeravda prison [where he was interned by the British] as a “temple,” *mandir*).
20. Cited in Raghavan Iyer, *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, 234.
21. Cited in Haridāsa Bhaṭṭācāryya, *The Cultural Heritage of India: Itibāsas, Purāṇas, Dharma and other śāstras* (Madras, India: Ramakrishna Mission, Institute of Culture, 1962), 343.

22. Raghavan Iyer, *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, 235.
23. Stephen Murphy, Brief Outline of Gandhi's Philosophy, adapted from: *Why Gandhi is Relevant in Modern India: A Western Gandhian's Personal Discovery*, Gandhi Peace Foundation (New Delhi: Academy of Gandhian Studies, Hyderabad, 1991). Retrieved: October 16, 2014. [http://www.gandhiserve.org/information/brief\\_philosophy/brief\\_philosophy.html](http://www.gandhiserve.org/information/brief_philosophy/brief_philosophy.html).
24. *Ibid.*, 236.
25. Gandhi, *From Yeravda Mandir*, 19.
26. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, 411.
27. Upaniṣads are spiritual treatises of Hinduism that contain the culminating wisdom of the Vedās. They are also known as Vedānta (Veda + anta: the end of the Veda). Literally, the Sanskrit word *Upaniṣad* means "sitting down near": *upa* (near), *ni* (down), and *śad* (to sit). That is, knowledge received by sitting down humbly near a teacher. Alternatively, the word *Upaniṣad* could denote: *upa* (near), *ni* (definitive, doubt-free), and *śad* (to loosen or to destroy). So it represents that knowledge which destroys ignorance most certainly and brings the seeker close to the Ultimate Reality. A book that contains such knowledge is therefore called Upaniṣad.  
 The great commentator of sacred Hindu texts, Ādi Śaṅkarācārya, takes this derivation and therefore equates the term Upaniṣad with self-knowledge (*ātma-vidyā*) or the knowledge of the Absolute (*Brahma-vidyā*). This is also referred to as "secret knowledge" or "esoteric knowledge." The secrecy is not so much a matter of unwillingness on the part of the teacher to *reveal* this teaching as it is to ensure *preparedness* on the part of the student to *receive* this knowledge.
28. Juan Mascaró, translated and selected, *The Upanishads* (New York: Penguin Books, 1965/1979), 49.
29. Thomas Weber, "Gandhi's Moral Economics: The Sins of Wealth Without Work and Commerce Without Morality," in Judith M. Brown and Anthony Parel, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 138. See also: Eknath Easwaran, *The Upanishads, Translated for the Modern Reader* (Tomales, CA: Nilgiri Press, 1987), 205.
30. Y. P. Anand and Mark Lindley, "Gandhi on Providence and Greed." Retrieved February 12, 2015: [http://www.academia.edu/303042/Gandhi\\_on\\_providence\\_and\\_greed](http://www.academia.edu/303042/Gandhi_on_providence_and_greed). There is enough for everyone's need, not enough for everyone's greed: This alleged statement is a distorted version of a remark attributed to Gandhi by a firsthand witness, Pyarelal, in a chapter entitled "Towards New Horizons" in Part II of *Mahatma Gandhi—The Last Phase* (1958 and later editions). Retrieved: October 10, 2014, [http://www.academia.edu/303042/Gandhi\\_on\\_providence\\_and\\_greed](http://www.academia.edu/303042/Gandhi_on_providence_and_greed).
31. *Ibid.*, 3.

32. Gandhi, "What is Brahmacharya," *Young India* (June 5, 1924), reprinted in M. K. Gandhi, *The Law of Continence: Brahmacharya*, ed. Ananda T. Hingorani (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1964), 18.
33. *Young India* (June 5, 1924), 186.
34. *Harijan* (July 23, 1938), 193.
35. Tridip Suvrud, "Why Read Gandhi between His Sheets?" *Tehelka Magazine*, 8(15) (April 16, 2011). Retrieved: February 13, 2015. [http://archive.tehelka.com/story\\_main49.asp?filename=Op160411Why.asp](http://archive.tehelka.com/story_main49.asp?filename=Op160411Why.asp).
36. Thomas Weber, Misreading the Mahatma [online Book Review], *Australian Book Review*, No. 360 (April 2014): 15. Retrieved: October 13, 2014, <http://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=382470184651679;res=IELAPA ISSN: 0155-2864>. Professor Weber writes, "Two years ago, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Joseph Lelyveld published a partial biography of Mahatma Gandhi (*Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and His Struggle with India*, 2011), which outraged public opinion in India and served as a vehicle for the self-promotion of leading politicians who railed against the supposed contents. Although the book was not yet available on the subcontinent, and so had not been read by the politicians, populist calls for its banning came quick and fast. The controversy could be traced back to a review of the book in the *Wall Street Journal* by an admirer of Gandhi's nemesis Winston Churchill. The reviewer claimed that Lelyveld's book allowed the reader to conclude that Gandhi 'was a sexual weirdo, a political incompetent and a fanatical faddist', not to mention a homosexual and a racist, something that the book itself did not say."
37. New Gandhi book sparks controversy: Joseph Lelyveld in a video interview about the controversy. Video courtesy of Reuters and photo courtesy of AP. Retrieved: October 12, 2014. <http://online.wsj.com/article/263C9589-353A-4984-AD00-C6ED56BBD5DE.html#!263C9589-353A-4984-AD00-C6ED56BBD5DE>.
38. See: Jad Adams, *Gandhi: Naked Ambitions* (London: Quercus, 2010). Uday Mahurkar, "Mahatma & Manuben: Newly Discovered Diaries of Gandhi's Personal Attendant Reveal How His Experiments with Celibacy Changed Her Life," *India Today* (June 7, 2013). Retrieved: October 15, 2014. <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/mahatma-gandhi-experiment-sexuality-manuben-discovered-diaries/1/278952.html>.
39. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, viii.
40. Suvrud, "Why Read Gandhi between His Sheets?"
41. Nirmal Kumar Bose, *My Days with Gandhi* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1987, Reprint edition).
42. Prabhavananda and Isherwood, *How to Know God*, 158.
43. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, 233.
44. Gandhi, *From Yeravda Mandir*, p. 35 as quoted in R. K. Prabhu and U. R. Rao, eds., *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1996), 198.

45. Swami Muni Narayan Prasad in his commentary on the Gītā titled *Life's Pilgrimage through the Gītā: A Commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā* (New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 2005), 105, tells us that “such examples of mutual satisfaction are found everywhere. When mango trees bloom as spring arrives, along with it come thousands of bees to enjoy the nectar of mango blossom. The pollination that takes place with the help of the bees ensures the happiness of the tree . . . animals, and humans.”
46. Prabhu and Rao, *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, 198.
47. *Harijan* (November 2, 1935), p. 298 as quoted in Prabhu and Rao, *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, 203.
48. Y. P. Anand, “Interview with the Director of Gandhi Museum: Y. P. Anand,” *Journal of Peace Studies*, 11(3) (July–September 2004). Retrieved: October 17, 2014. <http://www.icpsnet.org/description.php?ID=326>.
49. Cited in Bose, *Selections from Gandhi*, 362.
50. *Harijan* (November 3, 1946).
51. *Harijan* (February 16, 1934).
52. Kurangi Desai, “The Eleven Vows of Mahatma Gandhi—Their Observance and Relevance.” Retrieved: October 18, 2014. [http://www.gandhi-manibhavan.org/activities/essay\\_elevenvows.htm](http://www.gandhi-manibhavan.org/activities/essay_elevenvows.htm).
53. Prabhu and Rao, *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, 536.
54. Joan V. Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1958/1988), 180.
55. Prabhu and Rao, *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, 410.
56. *Young India* (March 12, 1925), 88. Cited in Prabhu and Rao, *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, 413.
57. *Harijan* (December 24, 1938), 393. Cited in Prabhu and Rao, *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, 107.
58. Desai, “The Eleven Vows of Mahatma Gandhi.”
59. Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence*, 169.
60. *Young India* (May 4, 1921), 144, as quoted in Prabhu and Rao, *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, 107.
61. Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence*, 108.
62. Swami Nityaswarūpānanda, trans., *Aṣṭāvakra Saṁhitā* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1994), 4 [slightly modified].

## 9 THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS OF HUMANITY: OVERCOMING INNER DEMONS

1. “It is not the mountain we conquer, but ourselves.” Edmund Hillary Quotes. Retrieved: February 15, 2015. [http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Edmund\\_Hillary](http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Edmund_Hillary).
2. Surur Hoda, Schumacher on Gandhi. Retrieved: February 10, 2015. <http://gandhifoundation.org/2007/05/21/schumacher-on-gandhi-%E2%80%93-surur-hoda/>.

See: Antony Copley and George Paxton (eds.), *Gandhi and the Contemporary World* (Madras: Indo-British Historical Society, 1997). See also: E. F. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered* (London: Blond and Briggs, 1973).

3. Ibid.
4. Arun Gandhi, Personal Interview with the author, February 2, 2013 (unpublished transcripts).
5. Brad Knickerbocker, "Gandhi Grandson Pursues Peace," *The Christian Science Monitor* (February 1, 1995). Retrieved: October 25, 2014. <http://www.csmonitor.com/1995/0201/01141.html>.
6. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (electronic edition), (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India, 1999), Vol. 28, pp. 364–365. See also, *Young India*, Vol. 7, October 22, 1925, pp. 359–360.  
 Later Gandhi gave this same list titled "Seven Blunders" to his grandson, Arun Gandhi (October 1947) written on a piece of paper on their final day together shortly before his assassination. Variant version: "The seven blunders that human society commits and cause all the violence: wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, commerce without morality, science without humanity, worship without sacrifice, and politics without principles." Retrieved: September 22, 2014. [http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Mahatma\\_Gandhi](http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Mahatma_Gandhi).
7. *Young India* (October 22, 1925), 359–360. Gandhi introduces the topic as follows:

#### WHEN CRIME NOT IMMORAL

"A fair friend sends me 'crisp sayings' by Dan Griffiths on crime and wants me to find room for them in these pages. Here are some extracts which a satyagrahi can readily subscribe to:

State law is not necessarily moral. Crime is not necessarily immoral. There is a world of difference between illegality and immorality. Not all illegalities are immoral and not all immoralities are illegal. Who can say that, whilst not to crawl on one's belly at the dictation of an officer might be an illegality, it is also an immorality? Rather is it not true that refusal to crawl on one's belly may be illegal, but it would be in the highest degree moral?"

Another illuminating passage is the following:

Modern society is in itself a crime factory. The militarist is a relative of the murderer and the burglar is the complement of the stock jobber.

The third excerpt runs as follows:

The thief in law is merely a person who satisfies his acquisitive instincts in ways not sanctioned by the community. The real thief is the person who takes more out of society than he puts into it. But society punishes those who annoy it, not those who injure it, the retail and not the wholesale offenders.

- Gandhi continues, stating that the same “fair friend” wants the readers of *Young India* to know about the seven social sins. See: *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 28, pp. 364–365. See also, *Young India*, Vol. 7, October 22, 1925, pp. 359–360.
8. On March 20, 1925, a sermon presented by Frederick Lewis Donaldson, a high-ranking clergyman, at Westminster Abbey in England included a list of seven social evils in the world. The list is identical, word for word, to the one Gandhi published seven months later. Gandhi’s and Donaldson’s social agendas clearly had substantial overlap, and it is certainly not impossible that Donaldson was the “fair friend” that sent Gandhi the list. For further details, see: What are the Seven Social Sins (and Who Wrote Them?). Retrieved: March 25, 2015. <http://quezi.com/21020>.
  9. Eknath Easwaran, *The Compassionate Universe: The Power of the Individual to Heal the Environment* (California: Nilgiri Press, 1989), 24.
  10. *Mahōpaniṣad*—VI.73 (a). Alternative rendering: For those who live magnanimously, the entire world constitutes but a family. See: Dr. A. G. Krishna Warriar, trans., *Maha Upanishad* (Chennai: The Theosophical Publishing House, n.d.). Accessed: February, 14, 2015. [http://advaitam.net/upanishads/sama\\_veda/maha.html](http://advaitam.net/upanishads/sama_veda/maha.html).
  11. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful*, 34.
  12. Milton Friedman, “The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits,” *New York Times Magazine* (September 13, 1970), 122–126.
  13. Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom, Fortieth Anniversary Edition* (New York: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 133.
  14. Cited in J. S. Rajput, *Seven Social Sins: The Contemporary Relevance* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 2012), 10.
  15. Cited in Steve Denning, “The Origin of ‘The World’s Dumbest Idea’: Milton Friedman,” *Forbes* (June 26, 2013).
  16. Easwaran, *The Compassionate Universe*, 7.
  17. Quoted in *ibid.*, 20.
  18. Cited in Publisher’s Note to V. Panoli, trans., *Prasthanathraya Volume II: Isa, Kena, Katha and Mandukya Upanishad with the Karika of Gaudapada* (Kochi: Mathrubhumi MM Press, 2006), v.
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