

# GANDHI ON PERSONAL LEADERSHIP

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LESSONS FROM THE LIFE AND TIMES  
OF INDIA'S VISIONARY LEADER

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ANAND KUMARASAMY

JAICO



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## **GANDHI ON PERSONAL LEADERSHIP**

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*This book is dedicated to  
my Parents & my Sister.*

*This is what you shall do: Love the earth and sun and  
the animals, despise riches... devote your income and labor  
to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have  
patience and indulgence towards people.... re-examine all  
you have been told at school or church or in any book,  
dismiss what insults your very soul, and your very flesh shall  
become a great poem.*

**WALT WHITMAN**

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# 1

## Introduction

*You my friend, a citizen of this great and mighty city of Athens, you devote yourself to acquiring the greatest amount of money, honour and reputation, and yet you care so little about wisdom, truth and the greatest improvement of the soul, which you never regard or heed at all?*

- Plato, Apologia An increasing number of people are growing tired of the frantic pace and pressures of modern life. In spite of all the unprecedented material comforts we enjoy as a society, a strong sense of incompleteness pervades the lives of many people in our culture. The oft-heard complaint is that something crucial seems to be missing. The old, traditional assumption that material wealth and scientific progress can, by themselves, lead to happiness and true fulfilment is being questioned by a growing number of individuals. People today, more than ever before, are yearning for a purpose beyond mere profits — a meaning beyond money.

This disillusionment with modern life is fuelling a powerful, contemporary spiritual quest for greater substance, fulfilment and authenticity, and it is for this reason that books on the meaning of life and spirituality routinely hit the bestseller lists. Some examples of such books in recent years are *What do I do with my life?* by Po Bronson, *How to know God* by Deepak Chopra and *The Purpose-Driven Life* by Rick Warren. Interest in yoga, tai chi and meditation has gone up tremendously. Moreover, as people become increasingly aware of the perilous state of the planet, environmental degradation, the loss of a sense of community, religious intolerance and hatred and the increasing gap between the rich and poor, there is a growing realisation that the old ways of thinking and perceiving must change. Indeed, as Einstein stated, *a problem cannot be solved from the same level of thinking we were when we first created it.*

This book attempts to provide some principles, ideas and alternatives that can help us in our personal quest for greater substance and also help address some of the pressing social and ecological challenges of our times. It studies the life of one extraordinary individual, Mahatma Gandhi, and emerges with 39 powerful lessons of personal growth and transformation. These lessons, gleaned from Gandhi's life, offer us invaluable advice on leading an enlightened life — a more meaningful, self-aware, socially responsible and saner life.

"Why Gandhi?" you might ask. Besides being the chief architect in the Indian struggle for freedom, Gandhi evolved the unique way of "Satyagraha" (soul force or truth force), a highly effective method of civil disobedience and non-violent resistance that was intended to be an alternative to violence and designed to bring about positive social and political change. More importantly, Gandhi envisioned a world that would evolve towards peace and harmony — a world where different religions, cultures and peoples of the world would live together with mutual respect and tolerance, rather than in suspicion and animosity. In a century marked by two world wars, the holocaust and the atomic bomb — when the world was torn apart by hate and intolerance — Gandhi emerged as a powerful antithesis to man's cruelty and small-mindedness. He became the voice of sanity, and a beacon of hope for peace-minded and tolerant individuals everywhere .

Although Gandhi was by no means perfect (he had his share of faults and flaws), he made significant and seminal contributions that span across such disciplines as economics, spirituality, conflict resolution, politics and more. His name has become synonymous with non-violence, social justice and civil disobedience. Most notably, Gandhi and his method became inspirations for Martin Luther King, Jr. and Nelson Mandela in their respective freedom movements.

Gandhi's contributions, his achievements and his life were extraordinary by any measure. Most importantly, however, Gandhi's life offers us vital lessons on living a meaningful, purpose-driven, and morally awake life. He lived his life seeking truth and wisdom and, like Plato, he cared for "the greatest improvement of the soul." In studying his life, a very clear set of principles, ideas and convictions emerge. I have attempted to encapsulate and distil them into lessons that can be integrated into our lives. These are enduring and timeless lessons that transcend time period, place, person, culture or economy. As such, they are very timely and relevant to the concerns and issues of our time — perhaps more so than at any other time.

This book has four core objectives.

- One is to *inform* the reader about the life of Gandhi. This book traces the life-journey of one man from being a timid, young child to the visionary leader who bequeathed to the world a novel method of fighting oppression, thus becoming an inspiration to millions in India and abroad.
- Secondly, his story and the lessons therein are intended to *inspire* us to stretch beyond ourselves, and to get in touch with the power that lies hidden

within us. Gandhi's life offers compelling evidence that we can become the conscious shapers of our own destinies, rather than being merely shaped by circumstances.

Thirdly, this book is an attempt to *remind* us of what 'the better angels of our nature' are capable of. Every day, we see and hear news of human immorality such as corporate corruption, exploitation, religious intolerance, violence and impending ecological disasters precipitated by society's greed and apathy. In such a scenario, people like Gandhi are powerful reminders of the greater capacities and farther reaches of the human spirit.

- Fourthly, it is a psychological and philosophical study that aspires to be a *guide* for our own journey of self-discovery, maturity and learning. It is a roadmap for all those who are in pursuit of a more meaningful existence. The process of personal transformation seldom happens "by accident"; it is the product of conscious choice. Therefore, I have outlined many vital lessons from Gandhi's life that are both timeless and universal, and these essential lessons have formed the bedrock of some of the most productive lives ever lived.

This book will start with a short biography of Gandhi, which highlights some of his formative experiences and a few of his most important achievements. It then clearly outlines the lessons of personal growth and transformation that we can learn from his life. In order to explain and illustrate these lessons, I have drawn from a diverse range of fields such as psychology, management, leadership, philosophy and spirituality. I have tried to present the lessons in a simple, succinct, easy-to-read and interesting manner. Finally, while I have not specifically described any practical techniques or exercises, I have listed books and resources at the end of this book — some of which contain very good exercises, tools and techniques that one can use to fashion positive changes in one's life.

One last thing before we begin: given the complexity of such a life as Gandhi's and the relative brevity of this text, I am profoundly aware of the limitations of this book. Many of Gandhi's core ideas and principles such as "Swaraj," "Sarvodaya" and "Satyagraha" are complex and nuanced, and are not greatly touched upon here. His own definitions underwent a constant expansion as he made these ideas more complete and comprehensive through constant experimentation and practical application over the years. I have only skimmed the surface of these ideas, to give you a very basic introduction to them. If you would like to delve deeper into those ideas, there are a number of books and

articles that explain and analyze these themes in greater detail. You will find many of these resources on the Internet and at your local library.

Let us now begin....

**Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi: A Brief  
Biography** **Hate does not cease by hate. By  
love alone it ceases. This is eternal law.**

- Buddha

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on October 2, 1869 in Porbandar, a small seaside town on the shores of the Arabian Sea in India. His family, for many generations, served in provincial governments as prime or home ministers. Gandhi, the youngest of four children, was by his own confessions a painfully shy and fearful child. He writes 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 the stroke of the hour and to run back home as soon as the 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>1</sup>

He even admits to a childhood fear of darkness, and an inability to sleep without a light on in the room. He confesses, *Moreover, I was a coward. I used to be haunted by the fear of thieves, ghosts and serpents. I did not dare to stir out of doors at night.* <sup>2</sup>

Gandhi's childhood was not unlike those of many others. He went through a brief rebellious phase where, at the convincing of a friend, he took to eating meat in secret (a practice strictly forbidden by his community), tried smoking and even visited a brothel (although he writes of being so paralysed with fear that a lady showered abuse upon him and had him thrown out). But soon his better sense prevailed, and Gandhi gave up these novelties and experiments.

Gandhi was married at the "preposterously early" age of 13, under the Hindu tradition of child marriage — a custom that Gandhi grew up to vehemently oppose. His young wife, Kasturba, was also 13 and had a mind of her own; their early relationship was marred by discord, thanks in large part to Gandhi's unfounded suspicions, jealousies and possessiveness (as admitted in his autobiography). Regarding the marriage itself, Gandhi, at that tender age, saw it naively as nothing more than having a "strange new girl to play with." The

young boy was enamoured by the marriage feasts, the colourful clothes, and the processions. Gandhi soon became besotted with his new wife: *I must say I was passionately fond of her. Even at school I used to think of her, and the thought of nightfall and our subsequent meeting was ever haunting me. Separation was unbearable. I used to keep her awake until late in the night with my idle talk.* <sup>3</sup>

While his wife was in the later stages of pregnancy, Gandhi spent most of his time after school tending to his sick father. He loved nursing, and would sit by his father's bedside massaging his feet, until he slept. Gandhi writes of finding it difficult to control his sexual desires, noting that *Every night whilst my hands were busy massaging my father's legs, my mind was hovering about the bedroom, — and that too at a time when religion, medical science and common sense alike forbade sexual intercourse* <sup>4</sup>

One night, overcome with desire, he left his father's side to be with his wife. No sooner did he leave his father's bedside and go to his conjugal room, there was a knock on his door. Gandhi was informed that his father had died. Gandhi was heartbroken that he had not been by his father's side at that crucial moment — and to add to his woes, his and Kasturba's child died within three days of being born. Gandhi blamed himself and writes that he never got over this "double shame." His inability to control his passions, when it most mattered, weighed heavily on him for the rest of his life. In his words, it was *a blot I have never been able to efface or forget.* <sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, Gandhi's mediocre grades meant his future was not looking too promising. He was at a crossroads of sorts when a relative suggested that Gandhi study law in England. Gandhi grabbed the opportunity with both hands (so to speak). After much controversy and debate within the community, Gandhi was allowed to go, but only after he had vowed to his mother that he would keep away from meat, alcohol and women. Gandhi made this promise, and looked forward to this new life of adventure and "a long and healthy separation" from his wife. In 1888, a raw, young Gandhi — all of 18 years — set sail for England.

Gandhi's shyness was a major impediment in his travels. On his way to England, Gandhi stayed away from conversations with fellow passengers on the ship. Self-conscious and unable to speak English, he even had his meals in his cabin, which were mostly sweets and fruits that his mother had packed for him. His early days in England were full of loneliness, and he writes of being terribly homesick. It was daunting for the young man to learn a new language, and to adjust to new food, new customs and a new culture. From the small town of

Porbandar to the hustle and bustle of London (which was, at the time, the largest city in the world) was overwhelming and highly challenging. But slowly things took a turn for the better.

Since he had vowed to his mother that he would not touch meat, he sought out vegetarian restaurants in London, and found one after much searching. He also joined the vegetarian society and was a part of its executive committee. Nonetheless, Gandhi remained quiet at meetings, feeling awkward and tongue-tied when asked to offer his opinions to the group. He would write out speeches and somebody else would read them aloud. All the same, he began to form some friendships and acquaintances.

It was during his time in London that he also began his exploration into matters of religion. He had been an atheist in his younger days, since most of what he saw as religion were oppressive customs, rules and laws that only curtailed his freedom. Now, he began to take an interest in religion and spirituality, discussing it with his small but growing group of friends and acquaintances. He had traversed the "Sahara of atheism," and was now hungry for something of substance. Around this time, he was introduced to the Bhagavad-Gita, a sacred text within the Hindu tradition. It was "love at first sight" for Gandhi, who wrote that *the verses in the second chapter made a deep impression on my mind, and they still ring in my ears. The book struck me as one of priceless worth.* <sup>6</sup>

The Gita is an epic poem set amidst a battlefield where Arjuna, the warrior, finds himself in the unenviable position of having to fight against his own brothers and close relatives. The sight of his brothers arrayed against him and the very thought of having to kill them drives Arjuna to deep anguish, and he sinks to his knees in utter despair. His charioteer and friend, Krishna — who is the representation of the Universal Self — comes to his rescue. What follows in the Gita is profound metaphysical and practical advice: as Krishna expounds on the meaning of life, the struggle of the human soul on its upward ascent, and the prescription to knowing one's true self (i.e., yoga). Gandhi himself was to say that the Gita is an allegory and it used the battlefield as a metaphor representing "the duel that perpetually went on in the hearts of mankind."

The Gita became his spiritual staff and support until the very end of his life. It was his rock-solid companion, pulling him out of his dark days and inspiring him in the despairing moments of his life. Years later, he would write that ...when doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and I see not one ray of light, on the horizon, I turn to the Bhagavad-Gita, and find a verse to comfort me; and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming

sorrow. My life has been full of external tragedies and if they have not left any visible or invisible effect on me, I owe it to the teaching of the Bhagavad-Gita. <sup>7</sup>

Back in England, some Christian friends gave him the New Testament. The Sermon on the Mount profoundly affected him, and he also read the biography of the prophet Mohammed; they all whetted his appetite for religion. Strikingly, Gandhi's spiritual foundations at this point were being laid, and he was already beginning to glimpse the underlying unity that existed among all these diverse and great religions. It was this ability to see beyond the superficial — to see a deeper unity amongst human beings and religions — that would become his hallmark, his signature inclusive style. His natural tendency was towards *uniting* rather than *fragmenting*.

He was also slowly moving out of his "comfort zone" (that space in which we all find ourselves in the *status quo*). He developed a small but diverse group of friends and acquaintances. He started a vegetarian society, visited France, and most importantly, continued to introspect on issues of right and wrong, values and ethics. Because of his interests in morality and his desire to apply them to his own life, he was constantly noticing instances, both small and big, where he found himself not being truthful, and he would make efforts to set them right. Within the vegetarian society, he stood up to support a member who was unjustly asked to leave the society. Although he failed, this was the first instance wherein Gandhi took a thoughtful, principled stand in a public sphere, risking unpopularity in the process.

Of course, Gandhi's main reason for coming to England was to study law. Although Gandhi was not an exceptional student, he applied himself diligently and learned Latin and French along with his law degree. He passed his bar examinations and his time in England came to an end, but he still deeply doubted his ability to stand up in a court of law and argue a case convincingly. Gandhi's early life was quite mediocre and uneventful and, at the age of 21, there were still no overt signs of greatness.

Having completed his studies, Gandhi returned to India. Upon his arrival, he was given the heartbreaking news that his mother had died while he was away. His brother had withheld the news to spare him of the shock while in a foreign land. Gandhi was deeply pained, but he buried his grief and attempted to set up his law practice in Bombay. But Gandhi was not very successful because he could not get over his shyness and fear of speaking in public. He attempted to eke out some semblance of a career, doing legal paperwork and drafts. Obviously, the Gandhi that we've all come to know had not yet surfaced.

After two years of unsuccessfully attempting to set up a law practice in India, Gandhi received a chance to help out with a legal case in South Africa. In 1893, Gandhi — who was now 24 years old — once again set sail for a distant land. This time it was South Africa — another British colony — and he thought he would be back soon. Little did he know of the momentous changes his life was about to undergo.

### In South Africa

Gandhi's early experiences in South Africa made it clear to him that it was not a very hospitable nation for a person of colour. While his Indian employers and colleagues treated him warmly, he soon had his first brush with overt racism, when he was thrown out of a first-class railway compartment car, though he held a first-class ticket. Indians were simply not allowed to travel in first class, which was reserved exclusively for whites. This event would prove to be a watershed moment in his life.

Gandhi soon found out that the experience such as he had had on the train was not new to Indians. All people of colour were treated as second-class citizens — and sometimes worse. Indians were called condescending names such as "coolies" and, even in official books, as "semi-barbarous Asiatics." Indians could not remain out at night without a permit, nor could they walk on the footpath at any time of day. Most Indians had become used to such differential treatment and Gandhi was told by many to "pocket this insult" and ignore it. But such events and experiences only served to increase his sense of moral indignation. He writes that *I saw that South Africa was no country for a self-respecting Indian, and my mind became more and more occupied with the question as to how this state of thing(s) might be improved.* <sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile professionally, Gandhi began to mature and blossom. He diligently applied himself and learned the basics of the case he was assigned to. He developed his knowledge, both theoretical and practical, of the law. Most significantly, his confidence in his abilities and capacities had increased dramatically. In his first case since coming to South Africa, he noticed that although his client's case was strong, a lengthy court case would be financially ruinous to both parties. Moreover, the defendant and plaintiff were relatives, and their relationship was becoming increasingly strained. Gandhi successfully convinced both of them to negotiate a compromise out of court. He writes triumphantly that *I had learnt the true practice of law. I had learnt to find out the better side of human nature and to enter men's hearts. I realised that the true*

*function of a lawyer was to unite parties driven asunder.* <sup>9</sup>

Gandhi steadily began to develop a good reputation and won the trust of his community. The cornerstone of his law practice was attempting to bring about private compromises between the parties involved. He writes, *I lost nothing thereby — not even money, certainly not my soul.* <sup>10</sup> He was fast becoming a well-respected lawyer who was known for his principles and ideals .

With his contract in South Africa coming to an end, Gandhi was persuaded by his friends and clients to stay back to help them protect their rights and civil liberties. A collective body called the Indian Congress of Natal was formed. Their first assignment was to oppose a bill that was soon to be passed, which would take away even the existing civil liberties of the Indian community. It was at this point that Gandhi was pulled into the social and political field. He began to hold meetings, draft petitions, and publish and edit newspapers highlighting the plight of Indians in South Africa. All this experience, as it would be proven in India, was invaluable for Gandhi.

Meanwhile, ideals and principles such as simplicity, service to the poor, non-violence and sacrificing smaller impulses to achieve greater goals was beginning to take root within Gandhi's mindset. He began to simplify his lifestyle and changed his diet as he matured in spiritual and moral awareness. He volunteered to be a nurse at a hospital so that he could satisfy his thirst for service. He accepted no. money for his community work, and even liquidated any expensive gifts he received and invested it in a trust fund for the benefit of the Indian community. He was also beginning to learn that self-control and discipline were necessary, if one were not to respond to one wrong with another — an act which he felt solved nothing and only served to increase the spiral of violence. As he was to say, *an eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind.*

Gandhi read widely, drawing inspiration from such diverse sources as the Bhagavad Gita, Sermon on the Mount, John Ruskin and Leo Tolstoy. In order to put into practice the ideas and principles from these books, Gandhi started the Phoenix farm, an experimental community made up of a diverse group of Britons, white South Africans, and Indians. It was a microcosm of the ideal world, at least as imagined by Gandhi. The farm was founded and managed on the bases of service, equality of all and the dignity of labour. As a result of these experiments, his inward transformation began to accelerate, and manifest itself in his outer work.

Meanwhile, the political and social repression of Indians in South Africa was

reaching new heights with each passing day. The government had proposed a bill that, if passed, would mean that any Indian could be deported from South Africa under the smallest pretence. It would give to the police draconian powers that would allow them to enter Indian homes at will and even search women. It was restrictive, humiliating and, if passed, could mean the beginning of the end for Indians in South Africa. Gandhi convened a meeting attended by 3,000 people to discuss their future options.

The Indians seethed with anger as Gandhi started to speak. He stated that it was *better to die than to submit to such a law*. Even as Gandhi was speaking, all his past work — the inner momentum that had built up — erupted from within. Spontaneously, and almost without thinking, Gandhi stated that they would defy the law, but not retaliate with violence. They would adhere to the highest possible standards of conduct, but not yield in their demand for equality. Gandhi gave an inspired speech, and the force and conviction with which he spoke won over his audience. Every man and woman pledged and took a sacred vow to offer non-violent resistance to the very end. *Thus came into being*, Gandhi later declared, *the moral equivalent of war*.

Gandhi began to call this method "satyagraha," meaning *firmness in truth*. Rather than brute force, the weapon would be *soul force* or *truth force*. Abhorring violence, one would disobey the "unjust laws," even if it meant risk to one's life and limb. Such a method, in his opinion, would not only stem the tide of violence, but the self-suffering would also appeal to the heart and conscience of the one who inflicts the suffering.

Gandhi's methods were based on the fundamental assumption that man's nature is innately good. As Nelson Mandela has pointed out, *Man's goodness is a flame that can be hidden but never extinguished*. Gandhi had a deeply abiding trust in that goodness, and his methods were suited to speak to that goodness within humans. But in order to do so, one had to be courageous, highly self-disciplined and, above all, truthful and non-violent in thought, word and deed. "Satyagraha" appeals to the conscience within the opponent — to the "God within" — and it attempts to awaken in the other a moral sensitivity. Gandhi never tired of saying that non-violent struggle or Satyagraha Was not a possibility for the weak or the cowardly; it was only for the wise, the courageous and the disciplined.

On many occasions, Gandhi led long marches, broke what he considered were unjust laws and courted arrest; he refused to cooperate with the upholders of the law. As a result, Gandhi found himself in prison on more than one occasion and it was while in prison that he read Thoreau's essay on civil disobedience. Henry

David Thoreau (1817-1863) was an American writer, philosopher and naturalist from Concord, Massachusetts. Thoreau himself had spent a night in jail because he refused to pay a poll tax; he did so as an act of disobedience against the American government's position on the Mexican War and slavery. He put forward his ideas and convictions in his essay entitled civil disobedience, and it is this work, which Gandhi read. Although they had lived in different eras and in different countries, both men shared the deeply-held conviction that they should disobey a law that their conscience (the higher law) told them was unjust .

Convinced that he was headed in the right direction, Gandhi intensified his spiritual, political and social activities. Around this time, Gandhi also wrote for and helped edit a newspaper called Indian Opinion. He emerged as a strong, trustworthy and morally upright leader for the Indian cause in South Africa. Even Indians back home were beginning to take notice. Gandhi continued the struggle in South Africa over the next decade, putting considerable pressure on the South African government to reverse its oppressive laws. The only thing Gandhi refused to do was resort to violence or untruth.

It was at around this time that another major aspect of the Gandhian method would reveal itself. During the Indian civil disobedience campaign, the South African railways, completely unconnected with the Indians, went on strike. The government, already struggling because of the Indian strike, had its resources spread thinly, and it was at its wit's end. Gandhi, rather than continue his campaign and bring the government to its knees, immediately called off his campaign under the principle that it would be unfair to take advantage of an opponent's weakness or attempt to humiliate them. This move was welcomed by the British, and congratulations poured in on Gandhi. More importantly, it opened the door for negotiations, and Gandhi was invited by the government for discussions. The deadlock was thus broken, and a settlement was reached.

In the year 1914, the South African government made important concessions to the Indian community. Gandhi felt that his work was done and was contemplating heading back home to India. His friends in India — with whom he was in regular contact — were persuading him that his real work awaited him there. It was not just that India needed him, but he felt he needed India too, for his spiritual growth and awakening. His inner prompting to "see God face to face" was growing louder. He had left India thinking that he would be back in a year; instead, he had stayed in South Africa for 21 years. Now his homeland was beckoning him.

India was a land where more than 90 percent of her people lived in villages. The

entire Indian system of landlords and administrators, together with the British overseers, were ruthlessly exploiting the poor and underprivileged. For decades, poverty-stricken farmers and other small labourers did backbreaking work, but had nothing to show for it — and then there was the even greater evil of "untouchability," which kept the poorest of the poor chained to their miserable conditions. (The subject of untouchability will be discussed in greater depth later in this book.) Nehru, the first prime minister of an independent India and a protege of Gandhi who had been brought up in the midst of wealth and opulence, writes movingly about the India that confronted him on his visits to the rural areas. Everywhere he went, the poor would greet him, deeply grateful that someone had come to listen to their genuine grievances. He writes, *Looking at them and their misery and overflowing gratitude, I was filled with shame and sorrow, shame at my own easy going and comfortable life and our petty politics of the city which ignored this vast multitude of semi-naked sons and daughters of India, sorrow at the degradation and the overwhelming poverty of India.* <sup>11</sup>

The poor seemed to be long forgotten. For centuries, nothing but poverty, death and disease was their lot, and their cries went unheeded. Now, however, Gandhi was heading back to India with his tried-and-tested methods. Indeed, hope was on the way .

### Back in India

In 1915, Gandhi arrived back home to India. He then slowly began to get involved in social and political activities. He once again began to organise civil resistance campaigns, mostly at the local level, to address injustices that affected farmers and labourers such as the Champaran struggle in Bihar, and the dispute between management and workers at a textile mill in Ahmedabad. Gandhi was successful in helping bring about a successful resolution in both these instances. Due to the successes of these and many such campaigns, his fame began to spread and Gandhi soon found himself leading the Indian independence movement.

Meanwhile, British brutality was steadily increasing. In 1919, hundreds of unarmed civilians, including women and children were brutally shot dead at a religious rally in Amritsar in Northern India. Gandhi called for a nationwide civil-disobedience campaign. He urged Indians to boycott British products, stop paying taxes, and to forsake British titles and honors. This placed the British under considerable pressure. But the campaign was marred by a singular incident of violence when a group of policemen were killed. Gandhi deeply disturbed by this violence immediately suspended the movement. He was, nevertheless

arrested on charges of sedition, and sentenced to six years imprisonment. He was released after two years.

Upon his release, Gandhi withdrew partially from national politics and concentrated more on social activism. He established an Ashram (a place for social work and spiritual practice) and also started a newspaper called *Young India*. He was working to socially uplift the poor and marginalised by helping open small village industries, cooperatives and so forth that encouraged self-sufficiency. Over the following years, he toiled incessantly to preserve Hindu-Muslim relations, and in 1924 he observed, a 21-day fast when Hindu-Muslim riots broke out in Northern India. Through out his life, he went on many such public fasts, and in 1932 he undertook his famous "epic fast unto death", for the eradication of untouchability.

Meanwhile, the clamour for Indian independence was steadily growing within the country. In 1930, the Indian National Congress, the leading political force in the Indian independence movement, declared that Indians would now be satisfied with nothing short of complete independence. Gandhi launched a nation wide civil disobedience campaign beginning with his now famous salt march to protest the imposition of tax on salt. He along with thousands of people marched 240 miles to the coastal town of Dandi to collect their own salt in defiance of this "unjust law". This march is considered to be one of the most remarkable events in the history of modern India. (I have written about this event in greater detail later in this book).

The Satyagraha campaign would continue for well over a decade. In the year 1946, 16 years after Dandi, Britain — economically depleted by the war — announced that they would be leaving India. However, India would soon be partitioned and Pakistan a separate nation for Muslims was to be created. Gandhi who had worked unceasingly for Hindu-Muslim unity was vehemently opposed to this plan. But it was adopted and approved by the Indian National Congress, the Muslim League (a political party representing Muslims) and the British.

In the year 1947, as the partition of India was becoming a reality, tensions between Hindus and Muslims grew. Large parts of the country descended into chaos as groups within both the Hindu and Muslim community resorted to arson, loot, rape and murder. It is now widely agreed upon by historians that Gandhi's actions during this period, in many respects were nothing short of magnificent. He fasted in Calcutta, where the violence was at its worst and within days the riots ended. What was called the great Calcutta killing was now the great "Calcutta miracle". He then walked from village to village in the riot-torn district

of Noakhali, nursing and consoling the victims who had lost their loved ones and urging people to give up violence. In the words of Lord Mountbatten, India's last viceroy, Gandhi became a "one-man boundary force" between Hindus and Muslims. (I have written about the Calcutta fast in greater detail in another chapter).

On January 30, 1948, Gandhi, escorted by his two nieces — on his way to a prayer meeting — was shot three times in the chest. Gandhi fell to ground, as he uttered the words, "He Ram" (One of the words for God in Hinduism). His assassin was a fanatic belonging to a Hindu extremist group that had been angry at what they perceived to be Gandhi's bias towards Muslims.

At the time of his death, his personal possessions were valued at less than two dollars; he held no office or title, and was lovingly called "Bapu" (father) by millions and venerated with the title "Mahatma" (great soul). As a shocked nation attempted to come to grips with this tragic loss, heartfelt messages of condolences and grief came pouring in from all over the world. Among so many other accolades, he earned from George C. Marshall the deserving title, *spokesman for the conscience of all mankind*.

Albert Einstein wrote,

*He [Gandhi] has demonstrated that a powerful human following can be assembled not only through the cunning game of the usual political manoeuvres and trickeries but through the cogent example of a morally superior conduct of life.... in our time of utter moral decadence he was the only statesman to stand for a higher human relationship on the political sphere.* [12](#)

Martin Luther King Jr. wrote many years later, *Man has thought twice in our century: once with Einstein, then with Gandhi*. He added, If humanity is to progress, Gandhi is inescapable. He lived, thought and acted, inspired by the vision of humanity evolving toward a world of peace and harmony. We may ignore him at our own risk.

## **LIFE LESSONS**

## The Power of Our Everyday Choices and Actions

*Nothing great is created suddenly, any more than a bunch of grapes or a fig. If you tell me that you desire a fig, I answer you that there must be time. Let it first blossom, then bear fruit, then ripen.*

- Epictetus (55 AD-135 AD)

Many of us hold the assumption — a taken-for-granted belief — that "small" is synonymous with "inconsequential" or "insignificant." We believe that small actions and choices do not have much of a bearing on our lives. We think that it is only the big things, the big actions and the big decisions that really count. But when you look at the lives of all great people, you will see that they built their character through small decisions, small choices and small actions that they performed every day. They transformed their lives by working on their day-to-day behaviours slowly, steadily and consistently. Their personal and spiritual transformation did not occur in one giant felled swoop, or in one singular, spectacular action. It happened more through a step-by-step or day-by-day approach. They nurtured and nourished their good habits and chipped away at their bad habits, one step at a time. It was their small day-to-day decisions, their everyday choices and actions, that cumulatively added up to make tremendous difference in the long run. Indeed, in matters of personal growth and character-building, there is no such thing as an overnight success. <sup>1</sup>

Growth always occurs through a sequential series of stages. There is an organic process to growth and transformation that cannot be circumvented. When we look at children growing up, we can see this process at work: the child first learns to crawl, then to stand and walk, and finally to run. As it grows, it masters each level and moves to the next. It goes through a sequential series of steps where each step is a preparation for the next; no step can be avoided or bypassed. The same is true in the natural world. We cannot sow today and expect to reap tomorrow. The soil must first be tilled, and then the seed must be planted. Next-, it must be nurtured and nourished with enough water and

sunlight, and only then will it grow, bear fruit and finally ripen and be ready to eat.

Gandhi intuitively understood this organic process, and used this natural law to his benefit. Gandhi grew in small ways, in his day-to-day affairs. He did not wake up one day and find himself to be the "Mahatma" (great soul). Gandhi did not start out as "the Gandhi" that the world came to know so well. In fact, there was nothing much in his early life that showed signs of greatness. But from his mid-twenties onwards he consciously, deliberately and consistently attempted to change himself, reform himself, and grow in some small way everyday. Day by day, hour by hour, he risked failure, explored, experimented and learned from mistakes. In seemingly small and large situations alike, he took up rather than avoided responsibility. Understanding that "a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step," he seized each day and made it count.

People have always marvelled at the seemingly effortless way in which Gandhi could accomplish the most complex tasks. He exhibited a level of self-mastery and discipline that was astounding. It would, however, be wrong to claim that these things came easily to him. Many people saw him exhibiting his self-mastery, but did not see the years of practice and disciplined training that went into making his successes possible. Very few saw, up-close and personally, his trials, tribulations, fears, doubts and anxieties, or his inner efforts to overcome them. They saw the victory, but not the struggle. They saw Gandhi reaping the rewards but they did not see him tilling the soil, sowing the seeds or nurturing the plant. Only through years of patience, practice and perseverance — by working day in and day out on his habits — was the "effortless performance" made possible.

If one were to ask what the singular, defining moment in Gandhi's life was that made him the "Mahatma," we cannot answer that question; there was *no* single, defining moment. It was the aggregation of his daily choices, small changes, little actions and many defining moments that cumulatively added up over a period of time to determine the quality of his life and its impact. All his great actions had their genesis in smaller ones. No singular event or action can be credited as being the definitive or decisive reason he had such a profound impact on the world.

This is a common factor in the lives of all great people: by exercising their freedoms and choices in small ways, their ability to influence and impact their lives and their environment grows. Each of their small and seemingly insignificant decisions and actions, taken every day, adds up cumulatively to

have a profound impact in the long run. By making these small decisions — small changes in their everyday affairs — they build a momentum that makes it easier for them to choose and act with conviction and courage when the large dilemmas and decisions arise. As Phillip Brooks writes, *character may be manifested in the great moments, but it is made in the small ones.*

By understanding this principle, we can move forward, with confidence, in the direction of our dreams. Often when our "ideal goal" looms too far from us, we become easily discouraged, disheartened, and pessimistic. However, when we choose to grow in small ways, and when we break down any great task into small steps, performing it becomes progressively easy. As John Shaw Billings (1838-1913) wrote, There's nothing really difficult if you only begin — some people contemplate a task until it looms so big, it seems impossible, but I just begin and it gets done somehow.

We can begin by choosing to grow in small ways, in our day-to-day affairs; from there we build up slowly but steadily. Each day brings the opportunity for decisions and actions that will hold value for us. Large actions will flow from the little ones; hence, rather than disregarding the little things and the minor incidents, we can use them to guide our own growth and maturity.

**The Power of Spiritual over Material Nothing splendid has been achieved except by those who dared to believe that something inside them was superior to circumstance.**

- Bruce Barton (1886-1967) To create anything of significant worth, a human being must first become aware that he or she holds the capacity within to transcend outside circumstances and external limitations. The greatest lesson we can learn from pioneers, creators, innovators and visionaries is that by using our inner abilities (such as self-awareness, faith, hope, courage, conscience, free will, imagination, thoughts, ideas, ideals and attitude), we can transcend outer circumstances, situations and past conditioning.

While we may be powerfully conditioned and significantly influenced by our genes, our environment and our childhoods, we are not completely determined by them. To paraphrase Stephen Covey, we are the products of our choices and not products of our past. <sup>1</sup> When we believe that outer institutions and material realities are more powerful than we are, we become resigned to our fate. We are more likely to see ourselves as powerless victims, and we feel that one man or woman cannot make a difference against powerful institutions. Great people, however, do not let circumstances dictate to them. Creators, pioneers and visionaries transcend and triumph over outer determinants and conditions. People who have made a lasting and profound impact on humanity — who have changed the course of history — have always believed that the human spirit is primary, and that outer circumstances are secondary.

The notion of consciousness being primary has been expressed in wise traditions and by many philosophers of the past. In the words of Emerson, *We become what we think all day long...thoughts rule the world.* Shakespeare stated that *there is nothing good or bad, but thinking makes it so.* Jesus said *as you think so you shall be.* The Buddha affirmed that *all we are is the result of what we have thought.* Last but not least, Einstein stated that *Imagination is greater than knowledge.* Gandhi is one in a long, prodigious list of luminaries who deeply felt

that there is great power within human beings — in their consciousnesses. According to these greats, the outer world can be significantly changed by changing what is within us. Outer realities did not have "the last say," so to speak; inner realities did. These great people placed a greater value on the invisible and intangible world that lay within human beings than on things in the material world.

Most of us, especially in the modern era, place exclusive importance and emphasis on the external world. We attach great significance to outside events and external circumstances, and very little (if any) significance on inner forces such as faith, hope, courage, imagination and so forth. Too many of us assume that external situations, social circumstances and institutions are superior to the inner person, and to our internal world. We hold the belief that our circumstances in life solely determine our happiness. This has been a debilitating belief and a crippling assumption that leads to reactive living; it is a self-fulfilling prophecy that engenders and reinforces a sense of powerlessness.

Does man shape history or does history shape man? Throughout history, great philosophers, poets, prophets and scientists have debated this issue. But this debate on free will versus fate is no closer to being resolved today than in the past. We may never fully know to what degree human beings are free, or to what degree we are creatures of circumstance.

While this debate may never be fully resolved, what we believe defines what we expect from life. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy: if you believe that outer circumstances and events are more powerful, then we will feel extremely powerless and become mere passive victims. On the other hand, those who break free from the grip of fate are the ones who *believe* that they can. Hence William James, the pioneering psychologist, wrote, "My first act of free will shall be to believe in free will."

Gandhi's moral leadership accomplished what was thought to be impossible by many. Not many believed in this old man in a loincloth, who was spouting words about the power of love, compassion, truth and non-violence. How could this "half-naked fakir" — as Winston Churchill condescendingly called him — take on the might of the British Empire? His claim that freedom can be won without war or resorting to violence seemed laughable. Throughout his life, Gandhi had to deal with the press, political pundits and even some close friends who advised him that his methods would not work. He was told that his plans were "impractical" or "naive." Time and again, people would say to him, "it is not possible."

While all these experts and colleagues saw a world of limitations and obstacles, Gandhi saw a world of possibilities. Gandhi placed a greater emphasis on the inner, spiritual reality while others placed a greater emphasis on the outer, material reality. These different worldviews created two completely different sets of expectations, and would therefore generate completely different realities. People saw themselves as merely passive victims, shaped by events and experiences, but Gandhi saw himself as the proactive shaper of events and circumstances, as a co-creator of reality.

Gandhi's life shows us that we can choose: we can consciously choose to become the proactive designers of our lives, rather than simply be designed by our experiences. We can change the scripts of our lives, rather than merely living out our borrowed and obsolete scripts of the past. We are conditioned by our personal history, but we can transcend it through our conscious choices. We don't have to be like rudderless boats that are at the mercy of the weather and waves. "I know of no more encouraging fact", wrote Thoreau, "than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life through conscious endeavor".

To further understand the power of man's internal capacities, we can travel back to the recent past. In the 1940s, Europe was under the power of the brutal Nazi regime led by Hitler. Jews and other visible minorities were being rounded up. Men, women and children were all huddled into cargo trains and sent to concentration camps, where they would be eliminated with chilling efficiency. Among these masses was Viktor Frankl, a well-respected psychiatrist in Vienna, Austria. Overnight, he lost everything he ever valued and suddenly found himself in the brutal, terrifying conditions of a concentration camp. Life became a bleak, everyday fight for survival.

Frankl lived to tell the tale of his trials and tribulations in his munificent and moving book, *Man's Search for Meaning*. He writes of the nightmarish conditions in the prison camps where starvation, torture and death were all around him. But there were a few men who, even in those horrific conditions, would give away their last piece of bread to a hungry comrade, or would walk through the camp offering comfort and solace to others. Frankl writes that these men were few, and were the exceptions rather than the rule. Nevertheless, they provided undeniable proof that while a man may be robbed of everything, one thing *cannot* be taken away from him: the ability "to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances." Appropriately, Frankl called this "the last of the human freedoms." <sup>2</sup> Each of these men *chose* what sort of person they would become.

In fact, Frankl's own survival is a classic example of the triumph of the human spirit. How did Frankl make it out of this ordeal alive? He faced the reality of his situation, but refused to give into hopelessness or nihilism. He *chose* his attitude and responses. He intensified his inner life by exercising his awareness and imagination. For example, he imagined with vivid detail that he had survived the prison camp and that he was in a classroom, giving a lecture on his experiences to students. At other times, while he was subjected to hard labour in the biting cold, perpetually starving and semi naked, he brought forth to his mind the image of his beloved wife and held conversations with her. He could almost feel her palpable presence with him. He remembered the life they had shared, and the love that he had been lucky enough to have. <sup>3</sup>

Through the use of many such exercises, Frankl began to assert his mental and spiritual freedom. His body was in prison, but his spirit soared beyond it. Through his inner resources, he transcended the walls and fences that held him captive. Ultimately, Frankl survived the prison camp, and rebuilt both his life and his sanity. He founded a very influential school of psychology called "logo therapy," and made seminal contributions to our understanding of human nature. Indeed, the words of the English poet and statesman John Milton are very appropriate here: *The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, and a hell of heaven.*

When we look at the lives of great men and women, what stands out is their consistent ability to *choose and decide* for themselves, however bad the outside situation may be. Their actions make amply clear the primacy of the inner life, of consciousness, and of self-awareness. As history shows us, even in the most seemingly hopeless situations of overwhelming negativity, individuals have stood up and asserted their freedom. They stand as a testimony to the fact that people can choose their reactions, even in the most degrading of circumstances. As Gandhi told his fellow Indians at the peak of British brutality, *they cannot take our self-respect, if we choose not to give it to them.*

In the last two decades, the corporate world has come to a new understanding. In the past, it was assumed that the wealth of a company lay in its buildings, machinery and other material assets. Companies are now waking up to the reality that the hearts and minds of its employees are its greatest assets, its true competitive advantage. The *New York Times* once stated that the real wealth of Microsoft was in the imagination of its employees. This has been called variously intellectual capital, knowledge capital, *etc.* Simply put, the things that truly matter are not tangible things at all!

At the time of Gandhi's death, his personal possessions were valued at less than two dollars. He held no property, wealth, office or title. Yet without any material wealth, he accomplished so much. His strength and power was not derived from external things, but rather from the internal depths of his soul. He convincingly demonstrated the supremacy of spiritual power over material possessions. In a world where power is measured by economic wealth and military might, Gandhi showed that the human heart — far from being impotent — is a source of tremendous power that can make possible even the seemingly impossible. It holds the capacity to change the course of history.

## The Salt March and the Calcutta Fast

In this chapter, we pause and take a break from outlining the lessons from Gandhi's life. Before proceeding any further, it would be appropriate to study in greater detail, two seminal events in the life of Gandhi. These two events, The Salt March of 1930 and The Calcutta Miracle of 1947 go down in history as two of Gandhi's finest moments and they will give us a deeper understanding of what Gandhi stood for and the power of the Satyagraha movement pioneered by him.

### The Dandi March

In 1915, when Gandhi returned from South Africa and started to lead the Indian independence movement, he was open to the idea of dominion status for India, similar to what Australia and Canada had earlier gained. Britain, however, would have none of it; it refused to relax her stranglehold on the Indian colony. In the 15 years that Gandhi had been in India, Britain's repression and subjugation was only worsening. Gandhi now knew that dominion status would not do; India would need complete independence from an empire that was becoming increasingly evil.

On January 1, 1930, the Indian National Congress defiantly unfurled a flag of "free India." It was done to serve as a powerful symbol that India wanted complete independence, and that now she would struggle and strain with all her might to achieve it. The nation was restless, with everybody waiting and watching with bated breath. The youth around the country were beginning to get impatient and edgy. They hitherto had not believed in the efficacy of Gandhi's methods, dismissing him as a "silly old fool," and a "saint who cannot lead us." They increasingly realised, however, that Gandhi was the man for the job. Letters from men, women and even children were beginning to pour into Sabarmati Ashram, where Gandhi was staying. They wanted action — decisive action — and they were eager to help.

Gandhi withdrew and cloistered himself, turning his searchlight within. He spent his days in prayer, silence and spinning the charka. He waited for an answer from within. Were his countrymen ready? Were they ready to undergo the tough

suffering that any decisive action would involve? Were they disciplined enough not to retaliate when the British would inevitably resort to violence? India was a nation divided along the multiple lines of caste, religion, community, economic wealth and state loyalties. What could get everybody "on board"? Most of his earlier campaigns had been done within a particular region, but now the whole nation was watching and waiting.

By the end of February 1930, he had the answer. The British had imposed a steep tax on salt and Gandhi drawing on all his past experiences and experiments, developed a plan and strategy. The plan was that he and 78 of his fellow ashram members would march to the coastal town of Dandi, 240 kilometres away, and pick up salt from the shoreline, thus technically breaking the law. This would then serve as a signal for the entire nation to disobey the salt law — and it would serve as a clarion call for a larger, nationwide civil disobedience campaign.

When Gandhi announced his plan, even his closest aides and associates were completely unconvinced. The Indian National Congress was mystified and incredulous. Of all things, why *salt*? Gandhi had once again proved that he was no mere saint-like figure, but also a superb strategist. This would prove to be his masterstroke, as it was a plan that was at once simple and brilliant. Salt, for Gandhi, was largely symbolic; by choosing salt as an issue, Gandhi was showcasing the heartlessness of an empire that would tax something so basic and essential to the human diet. It served as a powerful symbol of the callous and cruel colonial exploitation, imposing a burden on the already-poor millions. What was even more ridiculous was that salt could be freely made on the seashores, yet no Indian was allowed to make it. If ever a law could be unjust, here was one. Above all, given the essential nature of its use, this issue would cut across all lines of caste, creed, state and language. Finally, it was a powerful emotional issue for the Indian woman struggling to feed her family.

Gandhi then wrote a letter to the British viceroy of India, addressing the letter as "Dear Friend." (This was always a part of the Gandhian method; in his worldview, there were no enemies, because he was fighting the evil of the system and not these individuals. He hated the sin, but not the sinner.) He fully informed the viceroy of the plan, and detailed the reasons of why the campaign was necessary; he wrote of how the actions of the empire had left him and his followers with no choice. He fully disclosed his plans and wrote that he did not intend to spring any behind-the-back surprises, and that everything would be done in full view.

On March 30,1930, the day of the event, an immense crowd had gathered outside the ashram. There was a tremendous energy of excitement and expectation. After prayers and chanting, Gandhi, along with 78 ashram members, set off for the village of Dandi, 240 miles away. They walked briskly along the dusty roads of India, on a clear sunny day, with crowds cheering, clapping and egging them on. They stopped at villages on the way, resting and holding prayer meetings. This was again a part of the Gandhian strategy, to help build momentum and allow time for the news media (both Indian and International) to arrive on the scene; they came in large numbers. Villagers flocked to catch a glimpse of this remarkable little brown man. Many joined the rally, and the size was increasing with each passing day. A number of fellow marchers grew tired and rode on bullock carts for a while to rest their sore feet and gather their energy. Not so with Gandhi. He was 61 and was marching along, determined. He knew that here was an idea whose time had come; it was, in his words, "an opportunity of a lifetime." He wanted to show to the world that nonviolence was a powerful weapon in the momentous "battle of Right versus Might." Years later, Nehru, Gandhi's protege, would write,

*Many pictures rise in my mind of this man [Gandhi],... But the picture that is dominant... is as I saw him marching, staff in hand, to Dandi on the salt march in 1930. Here was the pilgrim on his quest of Truth, quiet, peaceful, determined and fearless, who would continue that quest and pilgrimage, regardless of consequences. <sup>1</sup>*

They had been marching for 24 days. What had started as a group of 78 swelled to several thousand people, the entourage now two miles long as they headed close to the seaside of Dandi. They reached the seaside of Dandi in the evening. Gandhi stated that the salt law would be broken on the next day. The day chosen was not random: it was on this day, 10 years previous, that 340 men and women had been killed at a religious gathering. They had been brutally shot in cold blood by General Dyer and his troops .

There was an all-night vigil, with a prayer meeting under the stars. Morning came and this sea of humanity, led by Gandhi and representing the hopes and yearnings of all Indians, made its way to the sea. Gandhi paused, bent down and picked up a few grains of salt from the seashore, and held it up. It was a symbolic gesture that meant that the law was now to be broken. The crowd erupted in a frenzy of joy. All the Indians present lined up the seashore and began to make salt, thus breaking the law.

The news of Dandi spread like wildfire across the country, and people all over

India's vast coastline began breaking the salt law. Initially, the British had been ambivalent about arresting Gandhi, because they did not want to further arouse the passions of the people. But they had seriously miscalculated. People across the nation, inspired by the events at Dandi, were joining in the civil disobedience, breaking the law and quietly courting arrest without resorting to violence. The fire unleashed at Dandi was sweeping across the nation.

A brutal reprisal followed as the British tried to break up the crowds. They arrested all the top leaders of the independence movement. They filled the prisons with an unprecedented 60,000 people. Nonetheless, the movement showed no signs of abating. The British forces could not stem the tide. Nehru writes about how astonished he was to see salt transforming into such a "mysterious word" — a symbol of such power that seemed to unite all Indians. He recalls,

*It seemed as though a spring had been released... As we saw the abounding enthusiasm of the people and the way salt-making was spreading like a prairie fire, we felt a little abashed and ashamed for having questioned the efficacy of this method when it was first proposed by Gandhiji. And we marvelled at the amazing knack of the man to impress the multitude and make it act in an organized way.* <sup>2</sup>

The remarkable and unprecedented events of Dandi culminated at the Darsana salt works. Gandhi was now in prison, but another protege of Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu, led a group of 2,500 volunteers and satyagrahis in a nonviolent raid into the salt works. The volunteers were prepared to take in violence but not retaliate, come what may. Women set up a makeshift medical unit, prepared for any violence on the part of the British.

Four hundred policemen, commanded by six British officers, were present on the scene. The volunteers slowly marched forward in columns and Webb Miller, an American journalist, was on hand to witness this event; he describes it in vivid detail:

*Suddenly at a word of command, scores of...policemen rushed upon the advancing marchers and rained blows on their heads with their steel shod lathas [batons]. Not one of the marchers even raised an arm to fend off the blows. They went down like ninepins. From where I stood, I heard the sickening whack of the clubs on unprotected skulls.... Those struck down fell sprawling unconscious or writhing with fractured skulls or broken shoulders.... Although everyone knew that within a few minutes he would be*

*beaten down, perhaps killed, I could detect no signs of wavering or fear.... They [the volunteers] marched steadily, with heads up... The police commenced to savagely kick the seated men in the abdomen and testicles and then dragged them by their arms and feet and threw them in the ditches.... Hour after hour stretcher-bearers carried back a stream of inert bleeding bodies.* <sup>3</sup>

Thus the volunteers marched, column after column, neither cringing nor retreating. At the end of it, 320 men lay injured and two had died, but not a single blow had been retaliated to.

It was the reporting of these and many other events that showed the immoral stranglehold of Britain that could no longer be justified. It showed Britain as a heartless and greedy exploiter of areas outside its own borders. Independence for India now seemed inevitable — it would soon become a surety, and the question would only be when and in what shape would that freedom come to India. In the year 1946, Britain announced that they would be leaving India. India had won her freedom, but dark times loomed ahead.

### The Calcutta Fast

The year was now 1947, and India was on the verge of independence. But freedom would come not to one nation, but two: India was to be divided and a separate nation for Muslims called Pakistan would be formed. Gandhi had vehemently opposed this. He could not bear to see the partition of his beloved India, and he had always nurtured and nourished the hope that Hindus and Muslims could live together in harmony. But Hindu-Muslim riots were becoming a regular feature, and with partition imminent, what was always an uneasy truce between the two was now marked by open and violent hostility. Cases of arson, looting and murder were increasing, and all of this culminated in a vicious bloodbath that came to be known as the "Great Calcutta Killing." In a mere four days, 4,000 people died and another 11,000 were injured in a tremendous orgy of violence and hatred — the degree of which had hitherto been unseen. People saw that the spiral of violence was now escalating and spreading dramatically across the rest of the country. It seemed like India was on the verge of civil war .

British resources were spread thin after the Second World War. The army and police were all woefully inadequate. The local state government, driven by party and religious loyalties and administrators lacking in experience, threw up their hands in despair. India was rapidly descending into chaos. Gandhi was going

through the darkest period of his life: his method of Satyagraha was looking largely like a failure, for although he had all his life preached and practiced nonviolence, now his people were tearing each other apart.

Gandhi had long ago withdrawn from politics on a national level. He had been quietly working in small villages, attempting to uplift them and remove the blot of untouchability, and bring about self-sufficiency. He was 77 years old and had become a famous man, revered at home and tremendously respected abroad. He had bequeathed to the world a new way of fighting for peace that used truth and love as powerful weapons. He had demonstrated that nonviolence; compassion and truth were not mere sentimental, sappy words or ideals that were "out of touch" with the real world, but rather powerful, palpable forces that were remarkably effective. But in August 1947, when India was celebrating her independence, Gandhi was not a happy man. He was in his ashram, observing a day of fasting and quiet. His mind was on the violence that was unfolding across the country. Finding very little reason for celebrating, he asked, *would it not be more appropriate to send condolences?*

Large parts of India were sliding into anarchy, and hate was threatening to engulf the nation. Gandhi would rise to the occasion — and magnificently so, albeit for the last time. The killings and violence around the country was continuing unabated. Gandhi arrived in Calcutta, where the violence was at its worst. Gandhi, unprotected, moved through riot-afflicted localities, and even took up residence amidst Muslim friends as a symbol of unity. He toured the riot-torn areas, and held prayer meetings where men and women — victims from both communities — turned out in large numbers to share their grievances. He told the crowd that his "head hung in shame at this recital of man's barbarism."

Gandhi became a "shoulder to cry on" for the men and women who had lost their loved ones. Slowly, Gandhi's presence began to bring about a calm, and within nine days, remarkably, a city torn by violence for so long was returning to normalcy. It would not be long, however, before violence would erupt again. Gandhi, who had seemingly exhausted all his resources, now resorted to his one last "infallible weapon." He announced that he would fast, and would not stop until complete peace, calm and sanity had returned to the city.

All the people around him dissuaded him. Gandhi was more than 77 years old now, and they felt that he would not be able to take the severe stress it placed on his body. Although he had fasted in the past for Hindu-Muslim unity and for the removal of untouchability and had been successful, many doubted if this fast would have any positive effect on the city. In fact, on the first day of the fast,

there was no change whatsoever, and the violence and riots persisted.

On the second day, however, peace and calm slowly returned. As the news of Gandhi's fasting and the deterioration of his health spread around the city, Calcutta would witness its most dramatic turnaround. A large mixed procession of Hindus and Muslims came and promised to reconcile their differences. Then peace demonstrations, with both communities involved, began to parade around the city. On the third day, gangs that had taken part in the violence showed up and admitted their complicity while surrendering their weapons and arms. By the end of the third day, all violence had ceased. Gandhi had once again prevailed.

Crowds began to throng Gandhi's residence and were pleading with him to stop the fast. Finally, after asking for and receiving a written pledge from all politicians, administrators and party leaders that they would do their utmost to ensure nonviolence and peace, Gandhi broke his fast to the relief and joy of the crowd. It came to be known as the "Calcutta miracle"; one historian called it Gandhi's "finest hour," and British historian E W.R. Lumby wrote many years later on that fast that

*His triumph was complete, and the peace that he brought was destined to endure.... He had in fact worked a miracle, perhaps the greatest of modern times.* <sup>4</sup>

Gandhi's appeal to the conscience had once again worked. But his work was far from done. With the rest of India still under a shroud of violence, Gandhi, 77 years old, embarked on a "village-a-day pilgrimage." He walked through some of the worst-affected areas, a walking tour of 116 miles that covered 47 villages. Village by village, he worked his wonders. Miscreants had thrown shattered glass on the streets, but Gandhi was not easily perturbed. As biographer Judith Brown writes,

*...He went into the eye of the storm, into places where violence was most terrifying; he became the sole satyagrahi [upholder of truth], a man who pitted himself totally against violence by personal demonstration as well as preaching and fasting...* <sup>5</sup>

People once again flocked to share with him their grievances. He was like an expert therapist, listening patiently to the grievances of the victims, holding prayer meetings, and exhorting them to uphold the higher standards of tolerance and love. Nicholas Mansergh, a renowned historian, writes that

*In this, the last year of his life, Gandhi's influence was transcendent.... It was*

*his preaching of the doctrine of nonviolence more than any other single factor that stood between India and bloodshed on a frightful scale.* [6](#)

As Buddha had said, "Hate does not cease by hate, by love alone it ceases. This is eternal law". Gandhi was proof of that law. The "Calcutta miracle" and the "village-a-day pilgrimage" would prove to be the last of his campaigns. On January 30, 1948, Gandhi was shot dead by a fanatic belonging to a Hindu extremist group.

**A Sense of Mystery and Miracle Explore everything around you, penetrate to the furthest limits of human knowledge, and always you will come up with something inexplicable in the end. It is called life.**

- Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) One of the core foundations of wisdom is the understanding that there is an inexplicable, inherent mystery to the nature of things. Some of the greatest saints, sages and mystics have lived in a state of awareness where they perceived all of life — *everything* — as a mystery and a miracle. The feeling that life is a mysterious and miraculous force pervaded their lives. Walt Whitman, the American poet wrote, *as to me, I know of nothing else but miracles*. We inhabit a profoundly mysterious universe. Many of the things that we most take for granted are often the most mysterious and miraculous. For these men and women a sunrise, a sunset, the sight of a newborn, the blooming of a flower, the changing of seasons, the flight of a bird, the smile of a child — these are all profoundly and inexplicably miraculous. They stand in awe and wonder at the beauty and mystery of this world. No less a figure than Albert Einstein wrote, The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and all science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead: his eyes are closed .

No matter how much we know about this universe and its origins, there is something inherently miraculous about it. No matter how much scientific data we gather, there is still a mystery at the heart of things. We have theories, facts, labels, explanations and concepts, yet behind it all there is something utterly inexplicable, profound and enigmatic. Take the case of "love": we have all felt it, we all yearn for it, and we can sense when it is present. We "know" what it is and yet ultimately, at its core, it is a phenomenon that is still very mysterious. Love is too deep, too vast and too profound to be limited or fitted within the framework of words, concepts and theories. Poets, philosophers and even

scientists have written reams and reams of pages on this topic, and yet it remains an enigma, utterly indefinable. The distinguished psychologist Carl Jung wrote in his famous book *Memories, Dreams, Reflections: Man can try to name love, showering upon it all the names at his command, and still he will involve himself in endless self-deceptions. If he possesses a grain of wisdom, he will lay down his arms and name the unknown by the more unknown — that is, by the name of God.* <sup>1</sup>

We have all had moments in our lives that were deeply moving and profoundly emotional — for example, the first time when we fell in love or when we first held a newborn in our hands or when we witnessed a sunset from the seashore. In such moments, we may have felt a profound sense of interconnectedness and belonging, however fleeting; something inside of us shifts, and perhaps we glimpse a more sacred reality. In such moments, there is often the feeling within us that we could not quite put into words, but yet we could sense a deeper mystery .

Throughout the ages, saints, sages and holy men and women have always understood that this mystery defies full understanding by our rational modes of thought. They are well aware that this reality cannot be quite captured with words and language. It can be sensed, intuited, felt, and maybe even expressed through a poem, painting or sculpture — but it is ultimately beyond language. Yet, in our modern era, we feel that anything can be explained and put into words. Paradoxically, poets who "have a way with words" understand the limits of language better than anybody else. As Rainer Maria Rilke, the celebrated German poet writes in *Letters to a Young Poet*, Things are not all so tangible and expressible as others would typically have us believe; most experiences are indefinable for they happen in a realm where no word has ever entered...

Most of us, however, are intolerant of ambiguity and mystery. We demand black and white guidelines, rules, and clear-cut formulae. We also tend to take the beauty and mystery around us for granted, and oftentimes we are too busy proving our knowledge or showing off our cleverness. A comfortable set of labels, theories and words take on the guise of "explanation," essentially blinding us to the deeper miracles of life. The Sufi mystic and poet extraordinaire Rumi advises us thus: Sell your cleverness and buy bewilderment; Cleverness is mere opinion, Bewilderment is intuition.

People like Gandhi, Thoreau and Emerson have all had this sense of the mysterious, or the miraculous. Their words and descriptions were couched in their respective cultural contexts and their times, but they all alluded to a greater

mystery. They sensed the presence of a greater power that both includes and transcends our material reality. They felt that there are more dimensions to our lives (and to us) than we usually comprehend. This spiritual feeling is at the very centres and cores of their lives. Here is how Gandhi described his feeling of the mysterious and miraculous: *There is an indefinable mysterious Power that pervades everything. I feel it, though I do not see it. It is this unseen Power, which makes itself felt and yet defies all proof, because it is so unlike all that I perceive through my senses. It transcends the senses.* <sup>2</sup>

Religion, in its truest sense, attempts to comprehend this mystery. It evokes a sense of oneness with life, and a sense of harmonious interconnectedness that results in a deep reverence and sanctity for all life. Religion and spirituality have a component of awe, wonder and amazement, but for many "religious" and "pious" people, religion is little more than a set of practices, rituals, beliefs and doctrines. The outer religion is followed, but this inward religious experience (of mystery) seems to be profoundly lacking. As Carl Jung remarked, for many religious people, *religion stands in the way of the religious experience.*

Life and its problems take on a depressing tone when we become blind to this sense of mystery. When we let the hustle and bustle of everyday, mundane existence take priority, we will invariably lose sight of this mystery. Abraham Maslow, the pioneering psychologist who studied the characteristics of self-actualising people, found that all highly creative and self-fulfilled people possess the ability to be to be awed and fascinated by things that others often take for granted. <sup>3</sup>

It is no accident that all those who feel this sense of mystery undergo a profound shift of consciousness. More often than not, these very same individuals also possess abundant compassion, radiate a loving kindness and have a sense that all beings are sacred. They find meaning not only in their own lives, but find the entire universe — all of life and the very cosmos — suffused with benevolent meaning and purpose. A deep sense of gratitude becomes apparent in their behaviour — a sense of gratitude for being able to experience the miracle called life. To them, even the seemingly mundane appears miraculous. They no longer search for miracles, for life *is the* miracle.

**The Importance of Problems and Challenges**  
**A gem cannot be polished without friction,**  
**nor a man perfected without**  
**trials...Difficulties strengthen the mind, as**  
**labour does the body.**

- Seneca (5 BC-65 AD) One of the major ways in which life teaches us is through the problems and challenges we face. It is in great part due to the challenges in our life that we grow, mature and become self-aware. The critical moments in our life hold the most valuable lessons for us. Although we would all like life to unfold in a linear, predictable, and smooth manner with no rude surprises, such a life would simply be too boring and unfulfilling.

Problems are our wake up calls. We seldom choose to learn, grow and mature voluntarily and of our own accord. We prefer instead to stay ensconced within our comfort zone, in our protective shell. In these moments, problems and challenges act as catalysts, shaking us out of our complacency and pushing us towards growth. As Benjamin Franklin once said, *those things that hurt, instruct*. Similarly, in the Chinese language, the symbol for "crisis" is a combination of the symbols for "danger" and "opportunity". The ancient Chinese, in developing the symbols of their language, seemed to have had an intuitive understanding that our stumbling blocks can also be our stepping stones towards maturity and wisdom .

By actively confronting and solving our problems, we grow mentally, emotionally and spiritually. It is through this process that we gain our wisdom. Yet, many of us actively attempt to avoid our problems, rather than face up to them. We would rather let things drift along, happy with the *status quo*. The process goes something like this: When the significant crisis or problem comes knocking at our door, our first line of defence is denial and/or distraction. Most of us, most of the time, attempt to deny, avoid or disown our problems. We refuse to take responsibility, or we attempt to downplay the depth and

seriousness of the problem. If we are forced to acknowledge the problem, we then hope that the problem will go away on its own — somehow miraculously disappear by itself. If that does not work, and the problem continues to exist, we then opt for short cuts, quick fixes, and easy solutions. We use the "band-aid and aspirin" approach, which treats the symptoms; this may give us a temporary respite, but it leaves the underlying cause untouched. We tend to "solve" the symptoms, and not the disease. Only when we realise that none of these really work, do we then seek genuine growth — and by facing up to the challenge, we take a serious step on the road to self-discovery.

The best example of boldly facing up to a challenge comes to us from the life of the Buddha. Before he was venerated with the title of "Buddha" (coming from the root word 'Budh' which means awakened), he was Prince Gautama, heir to the throne of a kingdom in northern India. He had been brought up amidst great wealth and opulence, and lived a protected life with every pleasure at his beck and call. He grew up within the palace walls, having no contact with the outside world. But on his first visit outside the palace gates, he came face-to-face with the harsh realities of death, disease and pain. He could not get these haunting sights out of his mind. They opened up some deep questions and doubts within him, but rather than ignoring them through distractions, he decided to deal with them at a fundamental level. Leaving the palace and his princely life behind, he wandered the jungles of India, meeting and practicing with wandering yogis, seeking and searching for the meaning of life. After six years of intensive and single-minded seeking and learning, he is said to have attained enlightenment beneath the Bodhi tree.

In fact, all the wisdom traditions have long recognised the invaluable contributions of pain and challenges to a person's spiritual growth towards greater maturity and self-awareness. Indeed, the clarion call that has issued forth from every one of the great traditions is to *know thyself*. This is the path to enlightenment, and it is often initiated through encountering problems, challenges and suffering. As the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard puts it, A man may perform astonishing feats and comprehend a vast amount of knowledge, and yet have no understanding of himself. But suffering directs a man to look within. If it succeeds, then there, within him, is the beginning of his learning.

Great people such as Gandhi understand intuitively the value of pain, problems and challenges. They see the intricate connection between pain and growth, and they see challenges as ideal opportunities for widening the consciousness.

Hence, we notice a consistent tendency among these people to welcome rather than avoid challenges. They put themselves in new situations, actively seek new experiences, meet with new people and try new things. They actively shoulder responsibilities, rather than shirking them.

**The Value of Role Models and Mentors Keep away from people who belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great.**

-Mark Twain (1835-1910) Gandhi sought and found mentors from whom he could learn, and with whom he could discuss his doubts and dilemmas. He proactively sought their guidance and counsel on spiritual and political issues. He learned valuable lessons from each of them, and they all added to his personal and spiritual development.

As a child, Gandhi was deeply affected by a fictional play called Harishchandra. The central character in this story is a truthful man, and although he goes through many ordeals, trials and tribulations, he never wavers from telling the truth. Gandhi was profoundly influenced by this story; this ideal of upholding the truth was one that inspired him greatly, and it became a central component in his own life. Although Gandhi knew that Harishchandra was a fictional character, he became a "living reality." <sup>1</sup> Harishchandra was Gandhi's first role model.

His first mentor was Raychandbhai, a diamond merchant by profession, but more importantly, a man of impeccable character and integrity — qualities that deeply appealed to Gandhi. He was also a deeply spiritual person, and his life revolved around spirituality rather than his business. He had a tremendous knowledge of the scriptures of Hinduism and Jainism. Gandhi went to him to clarify his doubts and have discussions on religious issues. Gandhi wrote that in times of spiritual crisis, Raychandbhai was his refuge. <sup>2</sup>

Similarly, in his early political life, Gandhi had a mentor named Gokhale from whom he learned much about politics. Once again, Gandhi was attracted to him mainly because Gokhale was a truthful, honest and sincere person. Gandhi writes in his autobiography that in their very first meeting, Gokhale had won his

heart. <sup>3</sup> When Gandhi returned to India from South Africa, it was Gokhale who suggested that Gandhi take an entire year off from politics and simply tour the country, so that he could know India more intimately. Gandhi accepted the advice and travelled the length and breadth of India by rail — and, in the process, learning much in that year.

Gandhi also corresponded with Leo Tolstoy of Russia, when Tolstoy was in the twilight of his life. Gandhi was deeply moved by Tolstoy's book, *The Kingdom of God is Within You*. In this book, Tolstoy detailed what was, according to him, the true message of Jesus. Tolstoy expressed his core philosophy thus: love is the "highest and indeed the only law of life." He also severely criticised the religious and social institutions which, in his opinion, were perverting and twisting the teachings of Jesus. He felt that nothing will really change in society until there is an inner moral revolution in each person. Gandhi was impressed by the "independent thinking, profound morality, and the truthfulness" of this book, and Gandhi credits Tolstoy's book for making him a firm believer in ahimsa (the power of non-violence). <sup>4</sup>

Gandhi wrote to Tolstoy, explaining that he had been profoundly affected by Tolstoy's book, and that he was now applying Tolstoy's teachings and suggestions to the non-violent struggle in South Africa. Gandhi's exposure to Tolstoy's ideas and their correspondence came at a pivotal time in Gandhi's life. Gandhi had just started the civil disobedience movement in South Africa; he lacked political experience and the whole method of Satyagraha was still in its embryonic stage. Tolstoy, through his letters, encouraged Gandhi and affirmed that Gandhi was headed along the right path. In Tolstoy's last letter to him, he stated, *Your activity (of non-violent resistance) is the most essential work, the most important of all the work now being done in the world.* <sup>5</sup>

Role models, guides and mentors play a crucial role in our growth and development. They are our reminders of greatness. They remind us that we can be bigger, larger and better than we currently are. Rather than hoard it, good mentors share their hard-won wisdom with their students. They are wise and trustworthy counsellors who can offer valuable advice when we feel stuck or confused, or are at a crossroads in life. Most importantly, they teach not solely through their words, but rather through their actions. They teach by *who they are*. In the above examples, Gandhi was deeply impacted not only by the advice that these men gave him but, more importantly, by the quality of their character.

## The Importance of a Sense of Humour

Gandhi had a sense of humour that allowed him to laugh at himself. This is one of the aspects of Gandhi that is lesser-known to the outside world. Those people who had the privilege of meeting him and working with him describe that he had an amazing sense of humour, and an ability to laugh at himself. People assume that because he was dealing with challenges of such overwhelming magnitude, that he would be a very serious person. On the contrary: he had a sense of humour that put others at ease and made him fun to be around. Here is one example of his sense of humour: when Gandhi was invited to Buckingham Palace to meet with the King, Gandhi went in his loincloth. Later, when he was asked if he was not a bit underdressed for the occasion, he replied with his characteristic wit, "His Majesty had on enough clothes for the both of us!".

Sense of humour, however, is not just about making witty remarks. It implies an ability to laugh at oneself, and to not take one's self too seriously all the time. It is said that laughter has a healing effect on us, because it releases endorphins that strengthen our immune system. The average child is said to laugh 300 times a day, but as we grow older, we tend to laugh less and less. (This is sad, because laughter relieves stress, smoothes tension and may even provide creative inspiration.)

Humour and laughter added to Gandhi's positive and hopeful attitude. He would poke fun at himself. He took his job and his mission very seriously, but not himself. It would not be a stretch to say that his sense of humour helped him to overcome adversity. As he himself said, *If I had no sense of humour, I would long ago have committed suicide.*

## **"Sarvodaya": "For the Welfare of All"**

We are increasingly becoming aware that economic growth, which comes at the cost and expense of leaving others behind, has negative consequences on all of us in the long run. The ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor of the world is alarming. The richest 20 percent of humanity has 82 times the income of the poorest 20 percent — and the top 20 percent consumes 86 percent of the world's resources. <sup>1</sup> The assets controlled by the 200 wealthiest individuals in the world are greater than the Gross Domestic Product of the entire continent of Africa. Just think about that: a mere 200 individuals collectively hold more wealth than an entire continent of 600 million people! Even within countries, there is a huge yawning gap between the rich and the poor. In America, for example, the gap between the wealthiest and the poorest is the highest it has been in 70 years. What is of increasing concern is that this gap is widening, and the trend shows no sign of reversing itself. It is not that the global economy has not grown — indeed, it has grown spectacularly, but the top 20 to 30 percent of income earners have enjoyed virtually all the benefits of that growth.

Gandhi was deeply saddened by these economic systems, which kept large numbers of people chained to poverty while a few enjoyed unparalleled economic wealth. But Gandhi's solution to this problem was not primarily economic. He was not intent upon merely changing the system from the outside by applying communism, capitalism or socialism. Gandhi's solution was primarily moral or spiritual. This is not to say that he neglected the practical side. In fact, he ceaselessly worked to socially uplift the poor and marginalised by helping open small village industries, cooperatives and so forth that encouraged self-sufficiency. But he felt, first and foremost, that effective change would have to come from within one's self, and not be imposed from the outside as a system. Such a revolution had to be in one's own heart and mind; one had to see deeply how a selfish grasping for possessions and moral complacency was contributing to this worldwide injustice, and how it was a violation of one's own deeper self.

In order for such an internal revolution to occur, one has to commit to growth

and maturity — emotionally, mentally, morally and spiritually. When thus committed, at some point there is a profound shift of consciousness: as one begins to grow through stringent self-examination and self-discipline, one begins to rid one's self of tendencies for personal aggrandisement, possessiveness, greed and exploitation. As compassion and sensitivity increases, people begin to understand deeply how actions motivated by greed, fear of not having enough or violence not only affect others, but are also hindrances to one's own sense of fulfilment and happiness. One thus begins to live in a way that honours others, the environment and the self. Gandhi called this way of living "Sarvodaya," which means "for the welfare of all." After having lived much of his life according to that principle, Gandhi in the last year of his life expressed his social thoughts thus:

*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 [or woman] whom you may have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him [or her] .*

*Will he [or she] gain anything by it? Will it restore him [or her] to a control over his [or her] own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj [freedom] for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and your self melt away. <sup>2</sup>*

# NOTES

## Chapter 2: Gandhi: A Brief Biography

1. Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Gandhi: An Autobiography, The Story of my Experiments with Truth*. Reprint Edition. (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press in arrangement with Navajivan Trust, 1993).

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. This quote is cited in Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*. Edited by R.K. Prabhu and U.R. Rao. (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing, 1996). The online version of this book can be viewed at [www.mkgandhi.org](http://www.mkgandhi.org)

8. Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Gandhi: An Autobiography, The Story of my Experiments with Truth*. Reprint Edition. (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press in arrangement with Navajivan Trust, 1993).

9. Ibid .

10. Ibid.

11. Shashi Tharoor cites this quotation by Nehru in his biography of Nehru, entitled *Nehru: The Invention of India*. (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2003), p. 39.

12. Albert Einstein penned this tribute after Gandhi's death. The complete tribute is available on the web page, [www.mkgandhi.org/tributes](http://www.mkgandhi.org/tributes)

## Chapter 3: A Strong Sense of Purpose

1. Abraham Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 42

[2.](#) George Bernard Shaw, *Man and Superman*, Preface (Penguin, 1950).

[3.](#) Viktor E. Frankl makes a similar assertion in the preface to his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*. (New York: Touchstone Books, 1984).

[4.](#) Ibid [5.](#) See Larry Dossey, *Meaning and Medicine: Lessons from a Doctor's tales of Breakthrough and Healing*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1991), pp 62-63.

[6.](#) Researchers initially attributed this finding to biochemical factors such as circadian rhythms. However, this factor alone could not account for the greater occurrences of heart attacks and chest pains on Monday. Larry Dossey suggests that the Black Monday syndrome occurs more due to emotional and psychological factors such as job dissatisfaction. See Larry Dossey, *Meaning and Medicine: Lessons from a Doctor's tales of Breakthrough and Healing*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1991), pp 62-63.

[7.](#) Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*. (New York: Touchstone books, 1984).

[8.](#) Ibid.

[9.](#) Psychologist Abraham Maslow found that all self-actualizers transcend the work-joy dichotomy. See Abraham Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1993).

## Chapter 4: The Importance of Character

1. Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. (New York: Fireside, Simon and Schuster, 1990), p. 18.

2. This assertion is made by the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders in the U.S.A. The information is posted on their web site, [www.anad.org](http://www.anad.org)

3. Deepak Chopra, *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*. (San Rafael, California: Amber Allen Publishing, 1994).

4. Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*. Edited by D.G. Tendulkar. Volume 2, 2nd Edition. (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1960), p. 37 6

## Chapter 5: The Power of Our Everyday Choices and Actions

1. Jim Collins in his study of how good companies become great found a similar principle at work. None of these companies became "great" overnight. These companies initiated and sustained a quiet, organic process of improvement and development — over a substantial period of time — in one consistent direction thus enabling them to make the leap from good to great. See Jim Collins, *Good to Great*. (New York: Harper Business, HarperCollins Publishers, 2001).

## Chapter 6: Intrinsic Sense of Satisfaction

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2. See Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Selections from Gandhi*. Edited by Nirmal Kumar Bose. Revised Edition. (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Trust, 1996). The online version of this book is available at [www.mkgandhi.org](http://www.mkgandhi.org)

3. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1990)

## Chapter 7: Channelizing Anger

1. The comparison of anger to electricity was made by Gandhi in a conversation he had with his grandson, Arun Gandhi. Arun Gandhi narrates this conversation in an article entitled *Grandfather Gandhi: Peace Was His Way*. The full article can be found on the web site: [www.gandhiinstitute.org](http://www.gandhiinstitute.org)

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### Chapter 8: The Power of a Dream

1. Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of Learning Organizations*. (New York: Currency Doubleday, 1994), p. 209

2. Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*. Edited by D.G. Tendulkar. Volume 4, 2nd Edition. (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1960), p. 165

### Chapter 9: The Importance of Risking Failure

1. Jim Collins and Jerry Porras, *Built to Last: The Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997).

### Chapter 10: The Value of Creative Tension

1. Robert Fritz calls this "structural tension" and explains this idea beautifully in his book, *The Path of Least Resistance* and it is a must-read for anyone who wants to better understand the creative process. See Robert Fritz, *The Path of Least Resistance: Learning to Become the Creative Force in Your Own Life*. Revised Edition. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989).

### Chapter 11: The Power of Spiritual over Material

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2. Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*. (New York: Touchstone

books, 1984).

[3](#). Ibid.

## Chapter 12: Choosing Growth over Fear

- [1.](#) Karen Horney, *Neurosis and Human Growth: The Struggle Toward Self-Realization*. Reissued. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1991), p. 17.
- [2.](#) Abraham Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1993).
- [3.](#) Ibid.

## Chapter 13: Stewardship: The Urge to Serve

- [1.](#) Shelley E. Taylor, *The Tending Instinct: Women, Men, and the Biology of Relationships*. (New York: Times Books, Henry Holt & Co, 2003), p. 6 .
- [2.](#) Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*. Edited by R.K. Prabhu and U.R. Rao. (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing, 1996).
- [3.](#) Larry Dossey, *Meaning and Medicine: Lessons from a Doctor's tales of Breakthrough and Healing*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1991).
- [4.](#) This study was done by David C. McClelland at Harvard University and he presented his findings in a paper titled, "Motivation and Immune Function in Health and Disease" at the meeting of the Society of Behavioral Medicine, New Orleans, March 1985. Larry Dossey cites it in his book entitled *Meaning and Medicine: Lessons from a Doctor's tales of Breakthrough and Healing*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1991), p. 176.
- [5.](#) Martin Seligman, *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment*. (New York: Simon and Schuster Publishing, 2002).
- [6.](#) Rabindranath Tagore, *Creative Unity*. (New York: The Macmillan Co, 1922).
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## Chapter 14: Beyond Competition

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- [2.](#) Alfie Kohn, *No Contest: The Case Against Competition*. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1986).
- [3.](#) Phil Jackson, *Sacred Hoops: Spiritual Lessons of a Hardwood Warrior*. (New York: Hyperion, 1996).
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2. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Mahatma Gandhi* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1965), pp. 61-63.

3. Webb Miller's report of the events at the Darsana salt works is cited in Louis Fischer's book *Mahatma Gandhi: His Life and Times*. (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2003), pp. 350-351.

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5. Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*. (London: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 360.

6. Nicholas Mansergh's perceptive comments on the Calcutta Fast and its aftermath is from his book, *The Commonwealth and The Nations*, p. 142; the comments are mentioned in Dennis Dalton's book, *Mahatma Gandhi: Non-violent Power in Action* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993, p. 159). Dalton's book provides a very detailed, well-written narration of events and analysis, of both the Salt March and the Calcutta Fast .

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- [1.](#) Carl Gustav Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. Edited by Aniela Jaffe. Translated by Richard Winston and Clara Winston. (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 354.
- [2.](#) Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*. Edited by R.K. Prabhu and U.R. Rao. (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing, 1996).
- [3.](#) Abraham Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1993) .

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- [1.](#) *The Republic of Plato*, translated by F.M. Cornford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 176.
- [2.](#) Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*. Edited by R.K. Prabhu and U.R. Rao. (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing, 1996).
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[2.](#) Ibid.

[3.](#) Ibid.

[4.](#) Ibid.

- [5.](#) Tolstoy's letter to Gandhi is cited in Louis Fischer, *Mahatma Gandhi: His Life and Times*. (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2003).

## Chapter 34: The Power of Prioritising

1. Business Week. October 12, 2004. *The Seed of Apple's Innovation*. This article can be accessed online at [www.businessweek.com](http://www.businessweek.com)

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## Chapter 35: Trusteeship

1. The words in italics appear in the mission statement of the Foundation for Deep Ecology. The whole text is present on their website, [www.deepecology.org](http://www.deepecology.org)

## Chapter 37: "Sarvodaya": "For the Welfare of All"

1. This is according to UNICEF. Please visit [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org) for full details.

2. Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*. Edited by R.K. Prabhu and U.R. Rao. (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing, 1996) Chapter 40: Conclusion: The Hero's Journey

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**Other Resources (for personal growth and change)**

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[www.peaceisthewayglobalcommunity.org](http://www.peaceisthewayglobalcommunity.org)

[www.robinsharma.com](http://www.robinsharma.com)

[www.franklincovey.com](http://www.franklincovey.com)

[www.drwaynedyer.com](http://www.drwaynedyer.com)

[www.integralnaked.org](http://www.integralnaked.org)

**Resources (for those interested in volunteering)**

[www.volunteer.ca](http://www.volunteer.ca)

[www.heartandstroke.ca](http://www.heartandstroke.ca)

The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada

[www.dcontario.org](http://www.dcontario.org)

Distress Centres Ontario

[www.davidsuzuki.org](http://www.davidsuzuki.org)

David Suzuki Foundation

[www.foecanada.org](http://www.foecanada.org)

Friends of the Earth Canada

[www.sierraclub.ca](http://www.sierraclub.ca)

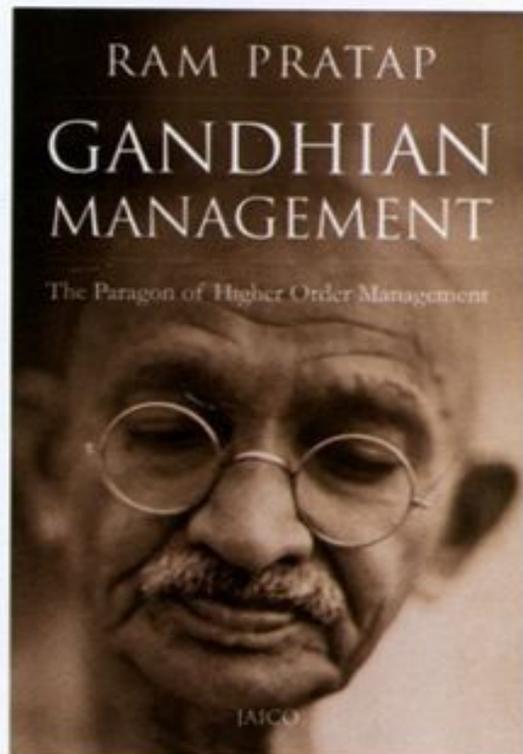
Sierra Club of Canada

[www.greenpeace.ca](http://www.greenpeace.ca)

[www.unicef.ca](http://www.unicef.ca)

[www.panda.org](http://www.panda.org)

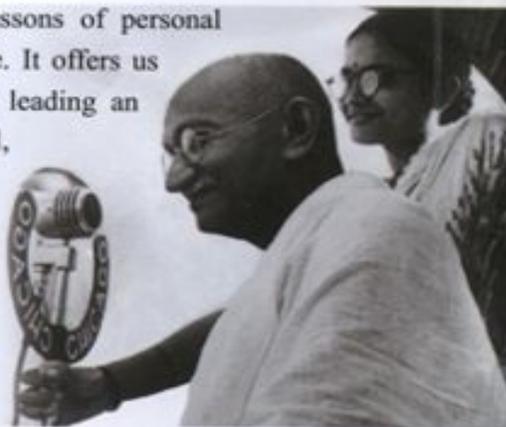
WWF - The Conservation Organization



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*The process of personal growth and transformation seldom happens "by accident"; it is the product of our conscious choices.*

**T**his book contains 39 powerful lessons of personal change, gleaned from Gandhi's life. It offers us invaluable advice on creating and leading an enlightened life — a more meaningful, purpose-driven, self-aware and socially responsible life. Drawing from a diverse range of fields such as psychology, management, leadership, philosophy and spirituality, Anand Kumarasamy explains and illustrates each of these lessons in language that is simple, vivid and highly interesting. These lessons are based on timeless principles which, if deeply reflected upon and integrated into our daily lives, can powerfully transform us while positively impacting the world around us.



#### About the Author

*Anand Kumarasamy* holds a Masters degree in Humanities and Social Sciences from the University of Technology, Sydney (Australia). He began his career in the field of advertising and public relations, and has worked with several multinational firms, such as McCann-Erickson, Ogilvy Public Relations and BASF; he has also done international stints in India, Germany and Australia. After seven years in this field, he sensed a calling in writing — especially on themes and topics dealing with psychology, philosophy and spirituality. This book is the starting point of the author's larger mission in life, which is to write and speak about ways of living that are more meaningful, fulfilling and harmonious with the environment. He currently makes his home in Toronto, Canada, and you can contact him at [sophiacentre@yahoo.ca](mailto:sophiacentre@yahoo.ca).

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