

But as yet I only see as through a glass darkly and therefore have to carry convictions by slow and laborious processes, and then too not always with success.⁷

The Congress aims at reaching *purna* [complete] *swaraj* through Truth and Non-violence. And it will fail in so far as the *kisans* [peasants] fail to observe these two cardinal principles. You are millions. When millions become untruthful and violent, it will mean self-destruction. You will therefore suffer injury without retaliation.⁸

... Whether I retain my hold on the youth of Bengal or any other province or I do not, I must proclaim my creed from the house-top. Freedom of India's starving millions is attainable only through Truth and Ahimsa.⁹

Gandhi's theory and practice of nonviolence is primarily a product of Hinduism, but Christianity reinforced it in vital respects. He relates in his Autobiography how the New Testament, "especially the Sermon on the Mount went straight to my heart. I compared it with the Gita," and "my young mind tried to unify the teaching" of these two religious texts.¹⁰ He found in both the central value of nonviolence. Among modern thinkers, he was drawn especially to Leo Tolstoy, whose influence proved unique because of his Christian anarchism, which emphasized nonviolence as an essential mode of everyday conduct. "Tolstoy's The Kingdom of God Is Within You," he says in the Autobiography, "overwhelmed me. It left an abiding impression on me."¹¹

Tolstoy died in 1910. He first corresponded with Indian nationalists in 1908, and later directly with Gandhi, who had sent him a copy of Hind Swaraj. The article that follows accompanied Gandhi's translation, from English to Gujarati, of Tolstoy's initial "Letter to a Hindoo" (dated December 14, 1908), which Gandhi had found so inspirational. This response was written at the same time that Gandhi composed Hind Swaraj, and the bibliography to that book confirms Tolstoy's substantial influence by citing five of his works, far more than any other author. When Gandhi answered him in August 1910, he mentioned that he had named his settlement in South Africa Tolstoy Farm.¹²

PREFACE TO LEO TOLSTOY'S "LETTER TO A HINDOO"

Count Tolstoy is a Russian nobleman. He has had his full share of life's pleasures, and was once a valiant soldier. He has no equal among European writers. After much experience and study, he has come to the conclusion

that the political policies generally followed in the world are quite wrong. The chief reason for that, according to him, is that we are vengeful, a habit unworthy of us and contrary to the tenets of all religions. He believes that to return injury for injury does harm both to ourselves and our enemy. According to him, we should not retaliate against anyone who may injure us, but reward him with love instead. He is uncompromising in his loyalty to the principle of returning good for evil.

He does not mean by this that those who suffer must seek no redress. He believes rather that we invite suffering on ourselves through our own fault. An oppressor's efforts will be in vain if we refuse to submit to his tyranny. Generally, no one will kick me for the mere fun of it. There must be some deeper reason for his doing so. He will kick me to bend me to his will if I have been opposing him. If, in spite of the kicks, I refuse to carry out his orders, he will stop kicking me. It would make no difference to me whether he did so or not. What matters to me is the fact that his order is unjust. Slavery consists in submitting to an unjust order, not in suffering ourselves to be kicked. Real courage and humanity consist in not returning a kick for a kick. This is the core of Tolstoy's teaching. . . .

To me Tolstoy's letter is of great value. Anyone who has enjoyed the experience of the Transvaal struggle will perceive its value readily enough. A handful of Indian satyagrahis have pitted love or soul-force against the might of the Transvaal Government's guns. That is the central principle of the Tolstoy's teaching, of the teaching of all religions. *Khuda-Ishwar* [God] has endowed our soul with such strength that sheer brute force is of no avail against it. We have been employing that strength against the Transvaal Government not out of hatred or with a view to revenge, but merely in order to resist its unjust order.

But those who have not known what a happy experience satyagraha can be, who have been caught up in the toils of this huge sham of modern civilization, like moths flitting round a flame, will find no interest in Tolstoy's letter all at once. Such men should pause for a moment and reflect.

Tolstoy gives a simple answer to those Indians who appear impatient to drive the whites out of India. We are [according to Tolstoy] our own slaves, not of the British. This should be engraved in our minds. The whites cannot remain if we do not want them. If the idea is to drive them out with firearms, let every Indian consider what precious little profit Europe has found in these.

Everyone would be happy to see India free. But there are as many views as men on how that can be brought about. Tolstoy points out a simple way to such men.

Tolstoy has addressed his letter to a Hindu and that is why it cites thoughts from Hindu scriptures. Such thoughts, however, are to be found in the scriptures of every religion. They are such as will be acceptable to all, Hindus, Muslims and Parsis. Religious practices and dogmas may differ, but the principles of ethics must be the same in all religions. I therefore advise all readers to think [only] of ethics. . . .

It is a mere statement of fact to say that every Indian, whether he own up to it or not, has national aspirations [for independence]. But there are as many opinions as there are Indian nationalists, as to the exact meaning of that aspiration and more especially as to the methods to be used to attain the end.

One of the accepted and "time-honored" methods to attain the end is that of violence. The assassination of Sir Curzon Wylie* was an illustration in its worst and [most] detestable form of that method. Tolstoy's life has been devoted to replacing the method of violence for removing tyranny or securing reform by the method of non-resistance to evil. He would meet hatred expressed in violence by love expressed in self-suffering. He admits of no exception to whittle down this great and divine law of Love. He applies it to all the problems that worry mankind.

When a man like Tolstoy, one of the clearest thinkers in the western world, one of the greatest writers, one who, as a soldier, has known what violence is and what it can do, condemns Japan for having blindly followed the law of modern science, falsely so-called, and fears for that country "the greatest calamities," it is for us to pause and consider whether, in our impatience of English rule, we do not want to replace one evil by another and a worse. India, which is the nursery of the great faiths of the world, will cease to be nationalist India, whatever else it may become, when it goes through the process of civilization in the shape of reproduction on that sacred soil of gun factories and hateful industrialism, which has reduced the people of Europe to a state of slavery and all but stifled among them the best instincts, which are the heritage of the human family.

If we do not want the English in India, we must pay the price. Tolstoy indicates it.

Do not resist evil, but also yourselves participate not in evil, in the violent deeds of the administration of the law courts, the collection of taxes and, what is more important, of the soldiers, and no one in the world will enslave you,

*Political aide-de-camp to the Secretary of State for India, shot dead in London by a Punjabi student, Madan Lal Dhillon, on July 1, 1909.

passionately declares the sage of Yasnaya Polyana. Who can question the truth of what he says?¹³

Gandhi's originality as a thinker and political leader appears most dramatically in his theory and practice of nonviolence. No one before in history had conceived of nonviolence and applied it to politics like him. Although Gandhi was inspired by the Hindu concept of ahimsa (literally, non-injury), as well as by Christianity and the writings of Tolstoy and Thoreau, none of these influences provided a blueprint for him to follow when he developed his conception of satyagraha. The following articles contain the basic elements in his idea of nonviolence as he formulated it in the first decade after he returned to India from South Africa. Conceptual connections between nonviolence and truth, swaraj and satyagraha, as well as a defense of nonviolent resistance as a courageous method capable of succeeding where violence must fail, appeared first in Hind Swaraj. Here they are sharpened as he applies them to the freedom struggle in India. The ancient idea of ahimsa assumes unprecedented forms.

ON AHIMSA

Though my views on ahimsa are a result of my study of most of the faiths of the world, they are now no longer dependent upon the authority of these works. They are a part of my life and if I suddenly discovered that the religious books read by me bore a different interpretation from the one I had learnt to give them, I should still hold the view of ahimsa as I am about to set forth here.

Our shastras seem to teach that a man who really practices ahimsa in its fullness has the world at his feet, he so affects his surroundings that even the snakes and other venomous reptiles do him no harm. This is said to have been the experience of St. Francis of Assisi.

In its negative form, it means not injuring any living being, whether by body or mind. I may not therefore hurt the person of any wrong-doer, or bear any ill will to him and so cause him mental suffering. . . .

In its positive form, ahimsa means the largest love, the greatest charity. If I am a follower of ahimsa, I must love my enemy. I must apply the same rule to the wrong-doer who is my enemy or a stranger to me, as I would to my wrong-doing father or son. This active *Ahimsa* necessarily includes truth and fearlessness. . . . A man cannot then practice ahimsa and be a coward at the same time. The practice of ahimsa calls forth the greatest courage.¹⁴

NON-VIOLENCE

When a person claims to be non-violent, he is expected not to be angry with one who has injured him. He will not wish him harm; he will wish him well; he will not swear at him; he will not cause him any physical hurt. He will put up with all the injury to which he is subjected by the wrongdoer. Thus non-violence is complete innocence. Complete non-violence is complete absence of ill will against all that lives. It therefore embraces even sub-human life not excluding noxious insects or beasts. They have not been created to feed our destructive propensities. If we only knew the mind of the Creator, we should find their proper place in His creation. Non-violence is therefore, in its active form, goodwill towards all life. It is pure Love. I read it in the Hindu scriptures, in the Bible, in the Koran.

Non-violence is a perfect state. It is a goal towards which all mankind moves naturally though unconsciously. Man does not become divine when he personifies innocence in himself. Only then does he become truly man. In our present state, we are partly men and partly beasts and, in our ignorance and even arrogance, say that we truly fulfill the purpose of our species when we deliver blow for blow and develop the measure of anger required for the purpose. We pretend to believe that retaliation is the law of our being, whereas in every scripture we find that retaliation is nowhere obligatory but only permissible. It is restraint that is obligatory. Retaliation is indulgence requiring elaborate regulating. Restraint is the law of our being. For, highest perfection is unattainable without highest restraint. Suffering is thus the badge of the human tribe.

The goal ever recedes from us. The greater the progress, the greater the recognition of our unworthiness. Satisfaction lies in the effort, not in the attainment. Full effort is full victory.

Therefore, though I realize more than ever how far I am from that goal, for me the Law of complete Love is the law of my being. Each time I fail, my effort shall be all the more determined for my failure. . . .

A drop of water must yield to the analyst the same results as a lakeful. The nature of my non-violence towards my brother cannot be different from that of my non-violence to the universe, it must still satisfy the same test. . . .

The political non-violence of the non-co-operator [in the civil disobedience campaign of 1920-22] does not stand this test in the vast majority of cases. Hence the prolongation of the struggle. Let no one blame the unbending English nature. The hardest "fibre" must melt in the fire of love.

I cannot be dislodged from the position because I know it. When British or other nature does not respond, the fire is not strong enough, if it is there at all.

Our non-violence need not be of the strong, but it *has* to be of the truthful. We must not intend harm to the English or to our co-operating countrymen if and whilst we claim to be non-violent. But the majority of us *have* intended harm, and we have refrained from doing it because of our weakness or under the ignorant belief that mere refraining from physical hurt amounted to due fulfillment of our pledge. Our pledge of non-violence excludes the possibility of future retaliation. Some of us seem, unfortunately, to have merely postponed the date of revenge.

Let me not be misunderstood. I do not say that the policy of non-violence excludes the possibility of revenge when the policy is abandoned. But it does most emphatically exclude the possibility of future revenge after a successful termination of the struggle. Therefore, whilst we are pursuing the policy of non-violence, we are bound to be actively friendly to English administrators and their co-operators. . . .

Swaraj by non-violent means can therefore never mean an interval of chaos and anarchy. Swaraj by non-violence must be a progressively peaceful revolution such that the transference of power from a close corporation to the people's representatives will be as natural as the dropping of a fully ripe fruit from a well-nurtured tree. I say again that such a thing may be quite impossible of attainment. But I know that nothing less is the implication of non-violence. And if the present workers do not believe in the probability of achieving such comparatively non-violent atmosphere, they should drop the non-violent program and frame another which is wholly different in character. If we approach our program with the mental reservation that, after all, we shall wrest the power from the British by force of arms, then we are untrue to our profession of non-violence. If we believe in our program, we are bound to believe that the British people are not unamenable to the force of affection as they are undoubtedly amenable to force of arms. For the unbelievers, the [alternative is] . . . a rapid but bloody revolution probably never witnessed before in the world. I have no desire to take part in such a revolution. I will not be a willing instrument for promoting it.¹⁵

MY PATH

I am conscious of the fact that the truth for which I stand has not yet been fully accepted by India. It has not yet been fully vindicated. My work in India is still in the experimental stage.

My path is clear. Any attempt to use me for violent purposes is bound to fail. I have no secret methods. I know no diplomacy save that of truth. I have no weapon but non-violence. I may be unconsciously led astray for a while but not for all time. I have therefore well-defined limitations, within which alone I may be used. . . .

I am yet ignorant of what exactly Bolshevism is. I have not been able to study it. I do not know whether it is for the good of Russia in the long run. But I do know that in so far as it is based on violence and denial of God, it repels me. I do not believe in short-violent-cuts to success. Those Bolshevik friends who are bestowing their attention on me should realize that however much I may sympathize with and admire worthy motives, I am an uncompromising opponent of violent methods even to serve the noblest of causes. There is, therefore, really no meeting ground between the school of violence and myself. But my creed of non-violence not only does not preclude me but compels me even to associate with anarchists and all those who believe in violence. But that association is always with the sole object of weaning them from what appears to me to be their error. For experience convinces me that permanent good can never be the outcome of untruth and violence.¹⁶

"ON THE VERGE OF IT"

I am your follower and have gone to jail under your leadership and guidance. . . . I now feel very much shaken in my faith in your reasoning and politics. I am not a revolutionary but I am on the verge of being a revolutionary. If you answer these questions satisfactorily, you may save me. . . .

What is more inhuman and terrible, rather what is more violent, to let 33 millions suffer, stagnate and perish, or a few thousand be killed [in a violent revolution]? What would you prefer, to see the slow death of a mass of 33 millions through sheer degeneration, or killing of a few hundred of people? If it is proved that by killing a few hundred, we can put a stop to the degeneration of 33 millions, will you object to violence on principle?

[Gandhi replied:] There is no principle worth the name if it is not wholly good. I swear by non-violence because I know that it alone conduces to the highest good of mankind, not merely in the next world but in this also. I object to violence because, when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent. I do not believe that the killing of even every Englishman can do the slightest good to India. The millions will be just as badly off as they are today, if someone made it possible to kill off every Englishman tomorrow. The responsibility is more ours than that of the English for the present state of things. The English

will be powerless to do evil if we will but do good. Hence my incessant emphasis on reform from within.

But, before the revolutionary, I have urged non-violence not on the highest ground of morality but on the lower ground of expedience. I contend that the revolutionary method cannot succeed in India. If an open warfare were a possibility, I may concede that we may tread the path of violence that the other countries have and at least evolve the qualities that bravery on the battlefield brings forth. But an attainment of swaraj through warfare I hold to be an impossibility for any time that we can foresee. Warfare may give us another rule for the English rule but not self-rule [swaraj] in terms of the masses. The pilgrimage to swaraj is a painful climb. It requires attention to details. It means vast organizing ability, it means penetration into the villages solely for the service of the villagers. In other words it means national education, i.e., education of the masses. It means an awakening of national consciousness among the masses. It will not spring like the magician's mango. It will grow almost unperceived like the banyan tree. A bloody revolution will never perform the trick. Haste here is most certainly waste. . . .

Tyrants are, indeed, obdurate. The English tyrant is obduracy personified. But he is a multi-headed monster. He refuses to be killed. He cannot be paid in his own coin, for he has left none for us to pay him with. I have a coin that is not cast in his mint and he cannot steal it. It is superior to any he has yet produced. It is non-violence. . . .

Let my friend understand the implications of non-violence. It is a process of conversion. I am convinced. I must be pardoned for saying it that my out-and-out non-violence has converted many more Englishmen than any amount of threats or deeds of violence. I know that when conscious non-violence becomes general in India swaraj will not be far.¹⁷

LETTER TO NARANDAS GANDHI

July 28/31, 1930

The path of Truth is as narrow as it is straight. Even so is that of ahimsa. It is like balancing oneself on the edge of a sword. By concentration an acrobat can walk on a rope. But the concentration required to tread the path of Truth and ahimsa is far greater. The slightest inattention brings one tumbling to the ground. One can realize Truth and ahimsa only by ceaseless striving. . . .

Thus step by step we learn how to make friends with all the world; we

realize the greatness of God, of Truth. Our peace of mind increases in spite of suffering; we become braver and more enterprising; we understand more clearly the difference between what is everlasting and what is not; we learn how to distinguish between what is our duty and what is not. Our pride melts away and we become humble. Our worldly attachments diminish and likewise the evil within us diminishes from day to day. . . .

Not to hurt any living thing is no doubt a part of ahimsa. But it is its least expression. The principle of ahimsa is hurt by every evil thought, by undue haste, by lying, by hatred, by wishing ill of anybody. . . .

. . . Without ahimsa it is not possible to seek and find Truth. Ahimsa and Truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like the two sides of a coin, or rather of a smooth unstamped metallic disc. Who can say which is the obverse and which is the reverse? Nevertheless, ahimsa is the means and Truth is the end. Means to be means must always be within our reach, and so ahimsa becomes our supreme duty and Truth becomes God for us. If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later. If we resolve to do this, we shall have won the battle. Whatever difficulties we encounter, whatever apparent reverses we sustain, we should not lose faith but should ever repeat one mantra: "Truth exists, it alone exists. It is the only god and there is but one way of realizing it; there is but one means and that is ahimsa. I will never give it up. May the God that is Truth, in whose name I have taken this pledge, give me the strength to keep it."¹⁸

LOVE NOT HATE

A telegram from Ailhabad says Pandit Motilal Nehru, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Pandit Shamlal Nehru and Mr. George Joseph, Editor of the *Independent*, have been arrested [for civil disobedience, as prominent leaders in the independence movement]. It was received at 11 o'clock last night. It positively filled me with joy. I thanked God for it. . . .

But my joy, which I hope thousands share with me, is conditional upon perfect peace being observed whilst our leaders are one after another taken away from us. Victory is complete if non-violence reigns supreme in spite of the arrests. Disastrous defeat is a certainty if we cannot control all the elements so as to ensure peace. We are out to be killed without killing. We have stipulated to go to prison without feeling angry or injured. We must not quarrel with the condition of our own creating.

On the contrary our non-violence teaches us to love our enemies. By non-violent non-co-operation we seek to conquer the wrath of the English

administrators and their supporters. We must love them and pray to God that they might have wisdom to see what appears to us to be their errors. It must be the prayer of the strong and not of the weak. In our strength must we humble ourselves before our Maker.

In the moment of our trial and our triumph let me declare my faith, I believe in loving my enemies. I believe in non-violence as the only remedy open to the Hindus, Mussulmans [Muslims], Sikhs, Parsis, Christians and Jews of India. I believe in the power of suffering to melt the stoniest heart. The brunt of the battle must fall on the first three. The last named three are afraid of the combination of the first three. We must by our honest conduct demonstrate to them that they are our kinsmen. We must by our conduct demonstrate to every Englishman that he is as safe in the remotest corner of India as he professes to feel behind the machine gun.

Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Judaism—in fact religion is on its trial. Either we believe in God and His righteousness or we do not. My association with the noblest of Mussulmans has taught me to see that Islam has spread not by the power of the sword but by the prayerful love of an unbroken line of its saints and fakirs. . . .

What must we then do? Surely remain non-violent and yet strong enough to offer as many willing victims as the Government may require for imprisonment. Our work must continue with clock-work regularity. Each province must elect its own succession of leaders. . . .

We must hold the Congress at any cost in spite of the arrest of everyone of the leaders unless the Government dissolve it by force. And if we are neither cowed down nor provoked to violence but are able to continue national work, we have certainly attained swaraj. For no power on earth can stop the onward march of a peaceful, determined and godly people.¹⁹

As Robert McNamara has suggested, the behavior of the civil resister matters: the more civil, the more effective. Gandhi emphasized the qualities of civil conduct in all respects, meaning that the satyagrahi must consistently show restraint, discipline, in the words of the article that follows, "good manners and humility." Intemperate and rude behavior revealed a lack of personal control, anger or "violence of the spirit," just as an absence of humility showed an arrogance of mind, a dogmatic outlook. Gandhi felt that he could not trust such attitudes under fire, and he usually required that those who accompanied him, as on the salt march, affirm that they believed in nonviolence not only as a tactic but also as a creed or way of life. Such people possessed an inner strength and firm self-discipline that would not allow them to strike back, or, in McNamara's apt words, to appear as "an uncontrolled