

GANDHI: SELECTIONS*

A: ON GOD

My own experience has led me to the knowledge that the fullest life is impossible without an immovable belief in a Living Law in obedience to which the whole universe moves. A man without that faith is like a drop thrown out of the ocean bound to perish. Every drop in the ocean shares its majesty and has the honour of giving us the ozone of life.—*H*, 25-4-36, 84.

GOD AS TRUTH AND LOVE

There is an indefinable mysterious power that pervades everything. I feel it, though I do not see it. It is this unseen power that makes itself felt and yet defies proof, because it is so unlike all that I perceive through my senses. It transcends reason. But it is possible to reason out the existence of God to a limited extent.—*Y*, 11-10-28, 340.

I have made the world's faith in God my own, and as my faith is ineffaceable, I regard that faith as amounting to experience. However, as it may be said that to describe faith as experience is to tamper with Truth, it may perhaps be more correct to say that I have no word for characterizing my belief in God.—*A*nto, 341.

God is that indefinable something which we all feel but which we do not know. To me God is Truth and Love, God is ethics and morality. God is fearlessness. God is the source of light and yet He is above and beyond all these. God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist. He transcends speech and reason. He is a personal God to those who need His touch. He is the purest essence. He simply is to those who have faith. He is long suffering. He is patient but He is also terrible. He is the greatest democrat the world knows. He is the greatest tyrant ever known. We are not. He alone is.—*Y*, 5-3-25, 81.

You have asked me why I consider that God is Truth. In my early youth I was taught to repeat what in Hindu scriptures are known as one thousand names of God. But these one thousand names of God were by no means exhaustive. We believe—and I think it is the truth—that God has as many names as there are creatures and, therefore, we also say that God is nameless and since God has many forms we also consider Him formless, and since He speaks to us through many tongues we consider Him to be speechless and so on. And when I came to study Islam I found that Islam too had many names for God. I would say with those who say God is Love, God is Truth, above all. If it is possible for the human tongue to give the fullest description, I have come to the conclusion that for myself God is Truth. But two years ago, I went a step further and said Truth is God. You

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*The following abbreviations are used for the sources in these selections: *A*nto: An Autobiography of The Story of My Experiments with Truth; *ABP*: Amrit Bazar Patrika; *H*: The Harijan; *IHR*: Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule; *IV*: Gandhiji in Indian Villages; *M*R: The Modern Review; *NAT*: Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi; *SA*: Satyagraha in South Africa; *T*agore: Young India, 1919–1922; and *Y*: Young India, 1919–1932.

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will see the fine distinction between the two statements, *viz.* that God is Truth and Truth is God. And I came to that conclusion after a continuous and relentless search after Truth which began nearly fifty years ago. I then found that the nearest approach to Truth was through love. But I also found that love has many meanings in the English language at least and that human love in the sense of passion could become a degrading thing also. I found, too, that love in the sense of *ahimsa* had only a limited number of votaries in the world. But I never found a double meaning in connection with truth and not even the atheists had demurred to the necessity or power of truth. But in their passion for discovering truth the atheists have not hesitated to deny the very existence of God—from their own point of view rightly. And it was because of this reasoning that I saw that rather than say God is Truth I should say Truth is God. I recall the name of Charles Bradlaugh who delighted to call himself an atheist, but knowing as I do something of him, I would never regard him as an atheist. I would call him a God-fearing man, though, I know, he would reject the claim. His face would redden if I would say, "Mr. Bradlaugh, you are a truth-fearing man and not a God-fearing man." I would automatically disarm his criticism by saying that Truth is God, as I have disarmed the criticism of many a young man. Add to this the difficulty that millions have taken the name of God and in His name committed nameless atrocities. Not that scientists very often do not commit cruelties in the name of truth. I know how in the name of truth and science inhuman cruelties are perpetrated on animals when men perform vivisection. There are thus a number of difficulties in the way, no matter how you describe God. But the human mind is a limited thing, and you have to labour under limitations when you think of a being or entity who is beyond the power of man to grasp. And then we have another thing in Hindu philosophy, *viz.* God alone is and nothing else exists, and the same truth you find emphasized and exemplified in the *Kalema* of Islam. There you find it clearly stated—that God alone is and nothing else exists. In fact the Sanskrit word for Truth is a word which literally means that which exists—*Sat*. For these and several other reasons that I can give you I have come to the conclusion that the definition—Truth is God—gives me the greatest satisfaction. And when you want to find Truth as God the only inevitable means is Love, *i.e.* non-violence, and since I believe that ultimately means and end are convertible terms, I should not hesitate to say that God is Love.

"What then is Truth?"

A difficult question, but I have solved it for myself by saying that it is what the voice within tells you. How, then, you ask, different people think of different and contrary truths? Well, seeing that the human mind works through innumerable media and that the evolution of the human mind is not the same for all, it follows that what may be truth for one may be untruth for another, and hence those who have made experiments have come to the conclusion that there are certain conditions to be observed in making those experiments. Just as for conducting scientific experiments there is an indispensable scientific course of instruction, in the same way strict preliminary discipline is necessary to qualify a person to make experiments in the spiritual realm. Everyone should, therefore, realize his limitations before he speaks of his inner voice. Therefore, we have the belief based upon experience, that those who would make individual search after truth as God, must go through several vows, as for instance, the vow of truth, the vow of *brahmacharya* (purity)—for you can not possibly divide your love for Truth and God with anything else—the vow of non-violence, of poverty and non-possession. Unless you impose on yourselves the five vows, you may not embark on the experiment at all. There are several other conditions prescribed, but I must not take you through all of them. Suffice it to say that those who have made these experiments know that it is not proper for everyone to claim to hear the voice of conscience and it is be-

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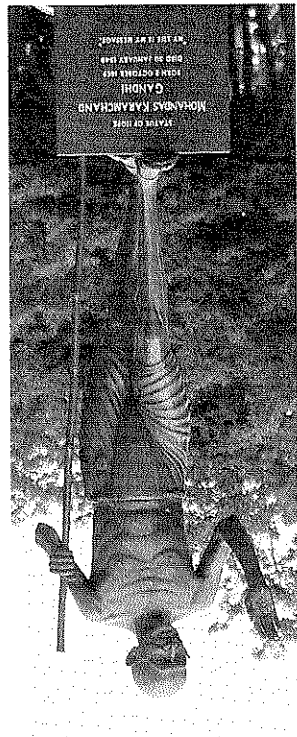
I do not regard God as a person. Truth for me is God, and God's Law and God are not different things or facts, in the sense that an earthly king and his law are different. Because God is an Idea, Law Himself. Therefore, it is impossible to conceive God as breaking the Law. He, therefore, does not rule our actions and withdraw Himself. When we say He rules our actions, we are simply using human language and we try to limit Him. Otherwise, He and His Law abide everywhere and govern everything. Therefore, I do not think that He answers in every detail every request of ours, but there is no doubt that He rules our action, and I literally believe that not a blade of grass grows or moves without His will. The tree will we enjoy is less than that of a passenger on a crowded deck.

"Do you feel a sense of freedom in your communion with God?"

I do. I do not feel cramped as I would on a boat full of passengers. Although I know that my freedom is less than that of a passenger, I appreciate that freedom as I

GOD AS TRUTH AND THE LAW

cause we have at the present moment everyone claiming the right of conscience without going through any discipline whatsoever that there is so much untruth being delivered to a bewildered world. All that I can in true humility present to you is that truth is not to be found by anybody who has not got an abundant sense of humility. If you would swim on the bosom of the ocean of Truth you must reduce yourselves to a zero. Further than this I cannot go along this fascinating path.—VI, 31-12-31, 427.



This statue of Mahatma Gandhi stands atop a square plinth in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa (Roger de la Harpe © Dorling Kindersley)

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have imbibed through and through the central teaching of the *Gita* that man is the maker of his own destiny in the sense that he has freedom of choice as to the manner in which he uses that freedom. But he is no controller of results. The moment he thinks he is, he comes to grief.—*H*, 23-3-40, 55.

Man was supposed to be the maker of his own destiny. It is partly true. He can make his destiny only in so far as he is allowed by the Great Power which overrides all our intentions, all our plans and carries out His own plans.

I call that Great Power not by the name of *Allah*, not by the name of *Khuda* or God but by the name of Truth. For me, Truth is God and Truth overrides all our plans. The whole truth is only embodied within the heart of that Great Power—Truth. I was taught from my early days to regard Truth as unapproachable—something that you cannot reach. A great Englishman taught me to believe that God is unknowable. He is knowable to the extent that our limited intellect allows.—*H*, 20-4-47, 113.

B: ON ACTION

HATRED CAN NEVER YIELD GOOD

Brute force has been the ruling factor in the world for thousands of years, and mankind has been reaping its bitter harvest all along, as he who runs may read. There is little hope of anything good coming out of it in the future. If light can come out of darkness, then alone can love emerge from hatred.—*SA*, 289.

It is my firm conviction that nothing enduring can be built upon violence.—*YI*, 15-11-28, 381.

NON-VIOLENCE

Non-violence implies as complete self-purification as is humanly possible.

Man for man the strength of non-violence is in exact proportion to the ability, not the will, of the non-violent person to inflict violence.

Non-violence is without exception superior to violence, i.e., the power at the disposal of a non-violent person is always greater than he would have if he was violent.

There is no such thing as defeat in non-violence. The end of violence is surest defeat.

The ultimate end of non-violence is surest victory if such a term may be used of non-violence. In reality where there is no sense of defeat, there is no sense of victory.—*H*, 12-10-35, 276.

The only condition of a successful use of this force is a recognition of the existence of the soul as apart from the body and its permanent nature. And this recognition must amount to a living faith and not mere intellectual grasp.—*Nat*, 166.

CONSEQUENCES OF NON-VIOLENCE

Q. Is love or non-violence compatible with possession or exploitation in any shape or form?

A. Love and exclusive possession can never go together.—*MR*, 1935, 412.

Military force is inconsistent with soul-force. Frigidity, exploitation of the weak, immoral gains, insatiable pursuit after enjoyments of the flesh are utterly inconsistent with soul-force.—*YL*, 6-5-26, 164.

The principle of non-violence necessitates complete abstention from exploitation in any form.

Rural economy as I have conceived it eschews exploitation altogether, and exploitation is the essence of violence.—*H*, 4-11-39, 331.

No man could be actively non-violent and not rise against social injustice no matter where it occurred.—*H*, 20-4-40, 97.

NON-VIOLENCE ALWAYS APPLICABLE AND IN ALL SPHERES OF LIFE

Non-violence is a universal principle and its operation is not limited by a hostile environment. Indeed, its efficacy can be tested only when it acts in the midst of and in spite of opposition. Our non-violence would be a hollow thing and nothing worth, if it depended for its success on the goodwill of the authorities. (Here, reference is made to the British Government in India.)—*H*, 12-11-38, 326.

Truth and non-violence are no cloistered virtues but applicable as much in the forum and the legislatures as in the market place.—*H*, 8-5-37, 98.

Some friends have told me that truth and non-violence have no place in politics and worldly affairs. I do not agree. I have no use for them as a means of individual salvation. Their introduction and application in everyday life has been my experiment all along.—*ABR*, 30-6-44.

We have to make truth and non-violence, not matters for mere individual practice but for practice by groups and communities and nations. That at any rate is my dream. I shall live and die in trying to realize it. My faith helps me to discover new truths every day. *Ahimsa* is the attribute of the soul, and therefore, to be practised by everybody in all the affairs of life. If it cannot be practised in all departments, it has no practical value.—*H*, 2-3-40, 23.

THE MEANING OF NON-RESISTANCE

Hitherto the word "revolution" has been connected with violence and has as such been condemned by established authority. But the movement of Non-co-operation, if it may be considered a revolution, is not an armed revolt: it is an evolutionary revolution, it is a bloodless revolution. The movement is a revolution of thought, of spirit. Non-co-operation is a process of purification, and, as such, it constitutes a revolution in one's ideas. Its suppression, therefore, would amount to co-operation by coercion. Orders to kill the movement will be orders to destroy, or interfere with, the introduction of the spinning wheel, to prohibit the campaign of temperance, and an incitement, therefore, to violence. For any attempt to compel people by indirect methods to wear foreign clothes, to patronize drink-shops would certainly exasperate them. But our success will be assured when we stand even this exasperation and incitement. We must not resort, inaction on our part will kill Government madness. For violence flourishes on response, either by submission to the will of the violator, or by counter-violence. My strong advice to every worker is to segregate this evil Government by strict non-co-operation, not even to talk or speak about it, but having recognized the evil, to cease to pay homage to it by co-operation.—*YL*, 30-3-21, 97.

Passive resistance is a method of securing rights by personal suffering; it is the reverse of resistance by arms. When I refuse to do a thing that is repugnant to my conscience, I use soul-force. For instance, the Government of the day has passed a law which is applicable to me. I do not like it. If by using violence I force the Government to repeal the law, I am employing what may be termed body-force. If I do not obey the law and accept the penalty for its breach, I use soul-force. It involves sacrifice of self.

Everybody admits that sacrifice of self is infinitely superior to sacrifice of others. Moreover, if this kind of force is used in a cause that is unjust, only the person using it suffers. He does not make others suffer for his mistakes. Men have before now done many things which were subsequently found to have been wrong. No man can claim that he is absolutely in the right or that a particular thing is wrong because he thinks so, but it is wrong for him so long as that is his deliberate judgment. It is therefore meet that he should not do that which he knows to be wrong, and suffer the consequence whatever it may be. This is the key to the use of soul-force.—*IHR*, 45.

The method of passive resistance adopted to combat the mischief is the clearest and safest, because, if the cause is not true, it is the resisters, and they alone, who suffer.—*NAT*, 305.

That is the way of *satyagraha* or the way of non-resistance to evil. It is the aseptic method in which the physician allows the poison to work itself out by setting in motion all the natural forces and letting them have full play.—*H*, 9-7-38, 173.

I accept the interpretation of *ahimsa*, namely, that it is not merely a negative state of harmlessness but it is a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil-doer. But it does not mean helping the evil-doer to continue the wrong or tolerating it by passive acquiescence. On the contrary, love, the active state of *ahimsa*, requires you to resist the wrongdoer by dissociating yourself from him even though it may offend him or injure him physically.—*YI*, 25-8-20.

In its negative form, it (*ahimsa*) means not injuring any living being whether by body or mind. It may not, therefore, hurt the person of any wrongdoer or bear any ill-will to him and so cause him mental suffering. The statement does not cover suffering caused to the wrongdoer by natural acts of mine which do not proceed from ill-will. It, therefore, does not prevent me from withdrawing from his presence a child whom he, we shall imagine, is about to strike. Indeed, the proper practice of *ahimsa* requires me to withdraw the intended victim from the wrongdoer, if I am in any way the guardian of such a child. It was therefore most proper for the passive resisters of South Africa to have resisted the evil that the Union Government sought to do to them. They bore no ill-will to it. They showed this by helping the Government whenever it needed their help. "Their resistance consisted of disobedience of the orders of the Government even to the extent of suffering death at their hands." *Ahimsa* requires deliberate self-suffering, not a deliberate injury of the supposed wrongdoer.—*NAT*, 346 (from *MR*, Oct. 1916).

If a man abused him, it would never do for him to return the abuse. An evil returned by another evil only succeeded in multiplying it, instead of leading to its reduction. It was a universal law that violence would never be quenched by superior violence but could only be quenched by non-violence or non-resistance. But the true meaning of non-resistance had often been misunderstood or even distorted. It never implied that a non-violent man should bend before the violence of an aggressor. While not returning the latter's violence by violence, he should refuse to submit to the latter's illegitimate demand even to the point of death. That was the true meaning of non-resistance.—*H*, 30-3-47, 85.

NON-VIOLENCE, MILITANT IN CHARACTER

Non-violence in its dynamic condition means conscious suffering. It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil-doer, but it means the putting of one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant. Working under this law of our being, it is possible for a single individual to defy the whole might of an unjust empire to save his honour, his religion, his soul and lay the foundation for that empire's fall or its regeneration.—*YL*, 11-8-20.

Yours should not merely be a passive spirituality that spends itself in idle meditation, but it should be an active thing which will carry war into the enemy's camp. Never has anything been done on this earth without direct action. I reject the word "passive resistance," because of its insufficiency and its being interpreted as a weapon of the weak.

What was the larger "symbiosis" that Buddha and Christ preached? Gentleness and love. Buddha fearlessly carried the war into the enemy's camp and brought down on its knees an arrogant priesthood. Christ drove out the money-changers from the temple of Jerusalem and drew down curses from heaven upon the hypocrites and the Pharisees. Both were for intensely direct action. But even as Buddha and Christ chastized, they showed unmistakable love and gentleness behind every act of theirs.—*YL*, 12-5-20.

Our aim is not merely to arouse the best in the Englishman but to do so whilst we are prosecuting our cause. If we cease to pursue our course, we do not evoke the best in him. The best must not be confounded with good temper. When we are dealing with any evil, we may have to ruffle the evil-doer. We have to run the risk, if we are to bring the best out of him. I have likened non-violence to aseptic and violence to antiseptic treatment. Both are intended to ward off the evil, and therefore cause a kind of disturbance which is often inevitable. The first never harms the evil-doer.—*H*, 30-3-40, 72.

NON-VIOLENCE, THE VIRTUE OF THE STRONG

Non-violence presupposes ability to strike. It is a conscious, deliberate restraint put upon one's desire for vengeance. But vengeance is any day superior to passive, effeminate and helpless submission. Forgiveness is higher still. Vengeance too is weakness. The desire for vengeance comes out of fear of harm, imaginary or real. A man who fears no one on earth would consider it troublesome even to summon up anger against one who is vainly trying to injure him.—*YL*, 12-8-26, 285.

Ahimsa is the extreme limit of forgiveness. But forgiveness is the quality of the brave. *Ahimsa* is impossible without fearlessness.—*YL*, 4-1-26, 384.

My creed of non-violence is an extremely active force. It has no room for cowardice or even weakness. There is hope for a violent man to be some day non-violent, but there is none for a coward. I have therefore said more than once in these pages that if we do not know how to defend ourselves, our women and our places of worship by the force of suffering, i.e., non-violence, we must, if we are men, be at least able to defend all these by fighting.—*YL*, 16-6-27, 196.

There are two ways of defence. The best and the most effective is not to defend at all, but to remain at one's post risking every danger. The next best but equally honourable method is to strike bravely in self-defence and put one's life in the most dangerous positions.—*YL*, 18-12-24, 414.

The strength to kill is not essential for self-defence: one ought to have the strength to die. When a man is fully ready to die, he will not even desire to offer violence. Indeed

I may put it down as a self-evident proposition that the desire to kill is in inverse proportion to the desire to die. And history is replete with instances of men who by dying with courage and compassion on their lips converted the hearts of their violent opponents.—*YI*, 23-1-30-27.

Non-violence and cowardice go ill together. I can imagine a fully armed man to be at heart a coward. Possession of arms implies an element of fear, if not cowardice. But true non-violence is an impossibility without the possession of unadulterated fearlessness.—*H*, 15-7-39, 201.

TRUE AND FALSE NON-VIOLENCE

Non-violence to be a potent force must begin with the mind. Non-violence of the mere body without the co-operation of the mind is non-violence of the weak or the cowardly, and has therefore no potency. If we bear malice and hatred in our bosoms and pretend not to retaliate, it must recoil upon us and lead to our destruction. For abstention from mere bodily violence not to be injurious, it is at least necessary not to entertain hatred if we cannot generate active love.

All the songs and speeches betokening hatred must be taboo.—*YI*, 2-4-31, 58.

The mysterious effect of non-violence is not to be measured by its visible effect. But we dare not rest content so long as the poison of hatred is allowed to permeate society. This struggle is a stupendous effort at conversion. We aim at nothing less than the conversion of the English. It can never be done by harbouring ill-will and still pretending to follow non-violence. Let those therefore who want to follow the path of non-violence and yet harbour ill-will retrace their steps and repent of the wrong they have done to themselves and the country.—*YI*, 2-4-31, 58.

If we are unmanly today, we are so, not because we do not know how to strike, but because we fear to die. He is no follower of Mahavira, the apostle of Jainism, or of Buddha or of the *Vedas* who, being afraid to die, takes flight before any danger, real or imaginary, all the while wishing that somebody else would remove the danger by destroying the person causing it. He is no follower of *ahimsa* who does not care a straw if he kills a man by inches by deceiving him in trade, or who would protect by force of arms a few cows and make away with the butcher or who, in order to do a supposed good to his country, does not mind killing off a few officials. All these are actuated by hatred, cowardice and fear. Here the love of the cow or the country is a vague thing intended to satisfy one's vanity or soothe a stinging conscience.

Ahimsa, truly understood, is in my humble opinion a panacea for all evils mundane and extra-mundane. We can never overdo it. Just at present we are not doing it at all. *Ahimsa* does not displace the practice of other virtues, but renders their practice imperatively necessary before it can be practised even in its rudiments. Mahavira and Buddha were soldiers, and so was Tolstoy. Only, they saw deeper and truer into their profession and found the secret of a true, happy, honourable and godly life. Let us be joint-sharers with these teachers, and this land of ours will once more be the abode of gods.—*NAT*, 348.

VIOLENCE, RATHER THAN COWARDICE

I do believe that, where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence. I would rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honour

than that she should, in a cowardly manner, become or remain a helpless witness to her own dishonour.

But I believe that non-violence is infinitely superior to violence, forgiveness is more manly than punishment. Forgiveness adorns the soldier. But abstinence is forgiveness only when there is the power to punish; it is meaningless when it pretends to proceed from a helpless creature. But I do not believe India to be helpless. I do not believe myself to be a helpless creature. Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will.—*VI*, 11-8-20.

The people of a village near Bettiah told me that they had run away whilst the police were looting their houses and molesting their womenfolk. When they said that they had run away because I had told them to be non-violent, I hung my head in shame. I assured them that such was not the meaning of my non-violence. I expected them to intercept the mightiest power that might be in the act of harming those who were under their protection, and draw without retaliation all harm upon their own heads even to the point of death, but never to run away from the storm centre. It was manly enough to defend one's property, honour or religion at the point of the sword. It was manly and noble to defend them without seeking to injure the wrongdoer. But it was unmanly, unnatural and dishonourable to forsake the post of duty and, in order to save one's skin, to leave property, honour or religion to the mercy of the wrongdoer. I could see my way of delivering the message of *ahimsa* to those who knew how to die, not to those who were afraid of death.—*VI*, 254.

The weakest of us physically must be taught the art of facing dangers and giving a good account of ourselves. I want both the Hindus and the Mussalams to cultivate the cool courage, to die without killing. But if one has not that courage, I want him to cultivate the art of killing and being killed, rather than in a cowardly manner flee from danger. For the latter in spite of his flight does commit mental *himsa*. He flees because he has not the courage to be killed in the act of killing.—*VI*, 20-10-21, 335.

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