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A Continuing Experiment in Love

by Nashid Fareed-Ma'at

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PREFACE

The impetus for this booklet is a workshop I offered titled *Love and Nonviolence*. It explored how the Christian understanding of love informs Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s social and political activism. The workshop also referenced how Traditional Yogic teachings guided Mohandas K. Gandhi to similar approaches in his *Satyagraha* work in India.

While in the early stages of writing the first draft of this booklet I was listening to a recorded speech by James Baldwin. Addressing the topic of racism, he spoke to the fact (and I'm paraphrasing) that racism is not the main problem. Neither is injustice or the various forms of oppression that continue to dominate the landscape of life in America, and perhaps the entire world. It is no coincidence that many gains in addressing these have either decayed or been overcome by new forms of these problems because we have not addressed their roots. These major problems emanate from a far more pressing problem that King explicitly acknowledges: humanity's inhumanity to humanity. (King says "man's inhumanity to man" but I intentionally use non-gender specific terms when speaking of all of humanity.)

So if inhumanity -- in deed, thought, life orientation, etc. -- is the main problem, we would be remiss to address its emanations without addressing the root itself. Although the work of King and

others in the Civil Rights Movement tends to be reduced to addressing social evils, at the root of their work is an explicit response to the root of inhumanity: an engaged commitment to love. Love in action, which various spiritual traditions describe in diverse ways, lays at the essence of what it means to be a human being. Some say the essence of humanity is love. Yet the significance of King's living example (actions) and calls for others to love are often diminished by reducing his life to mere addressing the outgrowths of inhumanity. For example, many describe his life in terms of just fighting racism, economic inequality, militarism -- not engaging these as part of a larger battle to have humans return to love.

This informs the purpose of this booklet: to use an article King wrote which presents a basic overview of Nonviolence to illustrate how his approach is rooted in the stream of love. And how this stream became the basis of addressing the outflows of humanity's inhumanity. I combine King's teaching with guidance from Gandhi. Between these two, we may see how Nonviolence emanates from spiritual traditions that seek to guide us to the realization of humanity's true purpose: Ultimate Reality itself. And surely, love in action plays an essential role in this purpose.

Since this booklet quotes extensively from King and Gandhi, some of the language and use of terms will lack uniformity. For example, whereas I capitalize and do not place a hyphen in the term "Nonviolence," King and Gandhi often do not capitalize it and sometimes place a hyphen in the term. There are also the literary

tendencies of their times: using male-gender terms to refer to humanity as a whole (e.g. man, mankind) or as a general singular pronoun (“he” for a person of male or female gender whereas I use the term “one.”) There is also King’s use of the term “Negro” which he uses to refer to Black people; a device I do not subscribe to. Therefore, there may be noticeable shifts in language between my words and the quotes. But I feel it is important to present King and Gandhi’s words as they are, particularly for those who wish to reference the sources of the quotes.

Also, in other writings and presentations I refer to Jesus by his Jewish name: Yeshua. But King and Gandhi use Jesus. To avoid confusion, in this writing I use Jesus for the sake of consistency.

nashid

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years there has been an increase in “non-violent protest.” Much of this has been sparked by mainstream attention to controversial killings of Blacks, notably unarmed males at the hands of police officers. While it is encouraging to see a rise in social activism, there is also concern about how grounded this activity is. Students of contemporary history will note that similar tides in activism have occurred before, sometimes with these very same issues, but often faded due to the lack of a solid foundation regarding the approach to activism. To this end, it may be helpful to reflect on the words of two stalwarts of Nonviolence, looking specifically at the guidance they offer regarding the foundation of this approach to social action and life. Thus, I turn to the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

In 1958, an article by King titled *An Experiment in Love* was published. It is an excerpt from his book *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*. The book reflects on the famous bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, which began in December 1955. In the article, he presents a basic overview of the approach of Nonviolence in the space of a few pages. I encourage readers to review this article in whole. This booklet uses King’s article as an outline, offering commentary and explanation to suit the particulars

of today -- with an explicit emphasis on applying (living) the components of this approach. To this, I augment additional references from the teachings of Gandhi.



A BASIC PHILOSOPHY

King opens the article stating: “From the beginning a basic philosophy guided the movement.”¹ One of the powerful qualities of Nonviolence is its simplicity: presenting an approach that can be embraced by kids to adults, persons of varying levels of education, and people with different temperaments. King states plainly what this basic guiding force is:

the phrase most often heard was “*Christian love.*” It was the Sermon on the Mount, rather than a doctrine of passive resistance, that initially inspired the Negroes of Montgomery to dignified social action. It was Jesus of Nazareth that stirred the Negroes to protest with *the creative weapon of love.*² (emphasis mine)

¹ I am utilizing a copy of the article *An Experiment in Love*, published in 1958, reprinted in the compilation *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 1991. The article is reprinted on pages 16 - 20 of the compilation. This quote is on p. 16.

² King, *Testament*, p. 16.

Later in the article, King goes into depth by what he means by love. But even if people have differing concepts of love, King acknowledges this is the starting point for Nonviolence. This can be a challenge given our culturally-learned inclination to respond to wrongs with anger, force, or even political calculation and mental might. This is often magnified with situations of extreme injustice. Responding in ways other than love may produce certain desired outcomes, but these usually recede and are often wrought with great dangers. Love lays the path to lasting change and transformation -- which is ultimately what is more beneficial. Those truly devoted to Nonviolence are not content to merely change components of an overall situation that continues to fuel and create oppression and injustice. Instead, Nonviolence looks to have the overall situation be transformed to one that establishes and fosters justice and true community, a transformation that begins with one's self. Few things are more powerful in facilitating such transformation than love.

The mention of "Christian love" has further relevance. Two things are of note: Montgomery, as well as much of the American South at the time, had a strong Christian presence. This clearly places love in a spiritual context -- as opposed to a worldly one. And, secondly, "Christian love" is tapping into a virtue already present in the community. Both factors are important.

One aspect of "Christian love" is that it provides clear guidance to Christians, not leaving them to devise something new and apply it as they wish. Jesus gives a clear orientation for love: one that

moves beyond selfishness, self-centeredness, and worldly pleasures toward peaceful relations that benefit one's self and others. Note these words from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount:

⁴³You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'⁴⁴But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,⁴⁵that you may be children of your Parent* in heaven. It causes Its sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.⁴⁶If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?⁴⁷And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?⁴⁸Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Parent is perfect.³
(*The translation states "Father" but I change it to "Parent" since traditional Judaism and Christianity say the Absolute is beyond gender.)

First, if one is not loving (or engaged in the journey of discovering love for) one's self, family, and friends, it will be extremely difficult (and possibly hypocritical) to love one's neighbor. Without this baseline of existing love we are unlikely to strive

³ *Today's New International Version of the Bible*, Book of Matthew, Chapter 5, Verses 43 - 48.

toward loving our “enemies:” those in opposition to us, those who do things that harm us. The deepening transformation of Nonviolence happens within the space of love, building on the love we are encouraged to nurture prior to engaging in social action.

Many Blacks in Montgomery were already living or aspiring to live this love prior to the arrest of Rosa Parks which sparked the year-long boycott. In this regard, Nonviolence looks to build on something already present in our lives. If we wait until an unfortunate event to attempt infusing love into our lives, we will find it extremely challenging to do so -- especially if anger is part of our reaction to the incident.

For those who are Christian, King points out pillars of guidance in the Sermon on the Mount regarding love. Those of other spiritual paths can look to their tradition of scriptures and teachings and I trust you will find guiding pillars similar to what the Sermon on the Mount offers. The language, how things are said and conveyed, may vary but the orientation of love looks to move beyond selfishness and self-centeredness toward peaceful relations that benefit one’s self and others. And Jesus states the ideal: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Parent is perfect.”⁴ That the scope of our love, or whatever else we may call it, expands to send

⁴ *Bible*, Book of Matthew, Chapter 5, Verse 48.

“rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”⁵ Every spiritual tradition I have studied acknowledges such an ideal.

For those without a spiritual tradition, I encourage you to find guiding pillars for yourself that direct and orient you toward cultivating love. The risk in formulating one’s own guiding pillars is that we pick things that cater to our self-centeredness, and we may do so unaware of this tendency. But if we are sincere, we will find and surrender to clear guiding pillars that move us beyond our own self-centeredness in the direction of universal beneficence. What this means in a practical sense will be addressed later in examining King’s definition of love.

King continues the article stating:

As the days [of the boycott] unfolded, however, the inspiration of Mahatma Gandhi began to exert its influence. I had come to see early that the Christian doctrine of love operating through the Gandhian method of nonviolence was one of the most potent weapons available to the Negro in his struggle for freedom.⁶

⁵ *Bible*, Book of Matthew, Chapter 5, Verse 45.

⁶ King, *Testament*, p. 16.

The orientation of love is the starting point. But as the momentum of this love in (social) action evolved, the boycotters looked to the work of Gandhi to apply proven lessons to their approach. This brings us to the three pillars of *Satyagraha*, which is what Gandhi called his work. These pillars are: *Ahimsa*, *Satya*, and *Brahmacarya*.

Satyagraha, a Sanskrit term, literally means “grasping to Truth” -- we will explore what Gandhi means by Truth below. Conceding to how people used language in his time, he often translated this term into English as “Nonviolence” or sometimes “Nonviolent Resistance.” But *Satyagraha* is an explicit description of his approach: grasping to Truth and, in this way, being moved (led by Truth) to deal with unjust situations. He looked to Indian spirituality for guidance on how to identify Truth as well as cultivate the means to grasp and live Truth. Within the vastness of ancient Indian spirituality, Traditional Yoga plays a major role in his approach. With this in mind, consider the following words of Gandhi:

Quite selfishly, as I wish to live in peace in the midst of a bellowing storm howling round me, I have been experimenting with myself and my friends by *introducing religion into politics*. Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not the

Hindu religion,⁷ which I certainly prize above all other religions, but *the religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and which ever purifies.*⁸ (emphasis mine)

Traditional Yoga is explicit about this changing of “ones’ very nature:” that the caterpillar that enters the cocoon of sincere and diligent spiritual practice emerges as a transformed being -- a butterfly. It is not enough to paste wings on the back of the caterpillar and reform how it crawls through the world. The butterfly does not crawl, it flies: a complete transformation of being and how it moves through life.

The *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* is one of the major scriptures of Traditional Yoga. It presents eight “limbs” of spiritual practice. The first limb is the *Yamas*, which are moral abstentions. Patanjali states five moral abstentions, three which are the pillars of *Satyagraha*. So even with Gandhi there is a pre-existing spiritual

⁷ Although Gandhi uses the terms “Hindu religion” and “Hinduism,” English terms used in his time, I refer to such as Indian spirituality. Hindu is the name of one the largest ethnic groups in India, but the religion / spirituality he refers to is not limited to just this ethnic group.

⁸ Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, 1961, p. 109, excerpt from *Young India*, May 12, 1920.

context being applied to the efforts to address British oppression (via colonization) and liberate India.

The first pillar is *ahimsa*, which is often translated as non-violence but a better translation is “no harm.” It is a sacred vow to, from this point forward, not harm others and not allow one’s self to be unnecessarily harmed. This second point has particular importance in relation to Nonviolent protest. When protests are utilized to expose existing tensions, particularly those created and sustained by continuing injustice, protesters may place themselves in situations where they will be harmed. A noted example of this was the Civil Rights campaign in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963: protesters knew they would be exposed to fierce police violence by engaging in organized marches. In this context, bearing the harm of police abuse was acceptable in the larger scheme of exposing the injustice -- part of a concerted effort to transform the social situation. But this same attitude to willingly bear harm would not be applicable to situations of domestic violence -- the vow of *ahimsa* calls for a person to utilize means to avoid and end any unnecessary, unredemptive harm.

Ahimsa is the foundation of *Satyagraha*; and on the larger scale of Traditional Yoga, it is the foundation of spiritual transformation. In fact, some go as far to say it is the foundation of all spirituality. *Ahimsa* begins with refraining from the more explicit and obvious harms, expanding to include the more subtle harms: usually beginning with the physical, then proceeding to restrain words and expressions, the thoughts we engage, and eventually encompassing

how we approach every aspect of life. One finds that as one deepens one's own living of *ahimsa*, the abstention from harm evolves by its own means to become love. When one rests in the state of complete harmlessness, one finds one's life immersed in abounding love. Therefore, Gandhi shares:

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 wrong-doer by dissociating yourself from him even though it may offend him or injure him physically.⁹ (bold emphasis mine)

The second pillar is *Satya*. This term means Truth, but as a moral abstention it begins as not lying, not being false. This abstention, when lived with sincerity and diligence, is a proven means that facilitates the realization of Absolute Truth. Gandhi explains what he means by Truth:

⁹ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 161, excerpt from *Young India*, August 25, 1920.

But for me, *truth is the sovereign principle*, which includes numerous other principles. This truth is not only truthfulness in word, but truthfulness in thought also, and not only the relative truth of our conception, but the Absolute Truth, the Eternal Principle, that is God. There are innumerable definitions of God, because His manifestations are innumerable. They overwhelm me with wonder and awe and for a moment stun me. But *I worship God as Truth* only. I have not yet found Him, but I am seeking after Him.¹⁰ (emphasis mine)

In understanding Truth as the Absolute, we may better understand why Gandhi sought and instructed others to grasp to Truth (*Satyagraha*) as a means of addressing injustice and seeking liberation. When we are moved (led) by the Absolute, we are moved by that All-Knowing, All-Powerful Reality: and victory is assured, even if it manifests through extended challenges that appear to be losses to the world. This orientation of movement differs from the more common approach of self-effort: moving by our own (limited) concepts and desires, even if these are altruistic.

Arrival at this assured victory demands that we live the vow of Truth with an uncompromising humility. Thus, Gandhi states:

¹⁰ Gandhi, *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, 1957, p. xxvii - xxviii.

A devotee of Truth may not do anything in deference to convention. He must always hold himself open to correction, and whenever he discovers himself to be wrong he must confess it at all costs and atone for it.¹¹

The seeker after truth should be humbler than the dust. The world crushes the dust under its feet, but the seeker after truth should so humble himself that even the dust could crush him. Only then, and not till then, will he have a glimpse of truth.¹²

And living truth cannot be done without *ahimsa*:

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. ... Nevertheless ***ahimsa is the means; Truth is the end.*** Means to be means must always be within our reach, and so *ahimsa* is

¹¹ Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, p. 350.

¹² Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, p. xxviii.

our supreme duty. If we take care of the means,
we are bound to reach the end sooner or later.¹³
(bold emphasis mine)

The third pillar is *brahmacharya*. This pillar literally means to be led by *Brahman*, the Absolute. It is often translated as “celibacy,” but Gandhi offers a more expansive definition: “*Brahmacharya* means control of the senses in thought, word and deed.”¹⁴ Instead of “control,” *restraint* might be a better word: restraining the pull of the senses. For most people, being led by the sense is the normal mode of functioning. The *Bhagavad Gita*, a Yogic scripture, describes the senses as violently carrying away the mind of even a wise person striving to restrain them (Chapter 2, Verse 60) -- then how much more for those who are not wise or even striving to restrain the senses? Gandhi addresses how such restraint must be comprehensive in scope:

Brahmacharya means control of all the organs of sense. He, [*sic*] who attempts to control only one organ, and allows all the others free play, is bound to find his effort futile. To hear suggestive stories with the ears, to see suggestive sights with the

¹³ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 42, excerpt from *From Yeravda Mandir*, 1932, Chapter II: Ahimsa Or Love.

¹⁴ Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, p. 210.

eyes, to taste stimulating food with the tongue, to touch exciting things with the hands, and then at the same time expect to control the only remaining organ is like putting one's hands in the fire, and expecting to escape being burnt. He therefore who is resolved to control the one must be likewise determined to control the rest. I have always felt, [sic] that much harm has been done by the narrow definition of *brahmacharya* [as celibacy]. If we practise simultaneous self-control in all directions, the attempt will be scientific and possible of success.¹⁵

On a practical level, if we are pulled through life by the senses, it will be extremely difficult -- if not impossible -- to live the sacred vows of *ahimsa* and *satya*. At the root of most harm and falsehood lays the pursuit of desires or aversion from what is unwanted -- the basis of such pursuit and aversion laying in one's senses. Therefore, Gandhi warns:

we must put forth a constant endeavour to bring the mind under control. We can do nothing more, nothing less. If we give way to the mind, the body

¹⁵ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 45, excerpt from *From Yeravda Mandir*, 1932, Chapter III: Brahmacharya Or Chastity.

and the mind will pull different ways, and we shall be false to ourselves.¹⁶

Of the three pillars, *brahmacarya* has been the least applied in Nonviolence in the West. Considering the full impact *brahmacarya* has on one's self and (through one's personal transformation) others, we can see how its restricted application has contributed to the limited success and shortcomings of many Nonviolent efforts in America. Gandhi offers poignant advice if we wish to realize the full transforming potential of Nonviolence:

Many aspirants after *brahmacharya* fail, because in the use of their other senses they want to carry on like those who are not *brahmacharis*. ... There should be a clear line between the life of a *brahmachari* and of one who is not. The resemblance that there is between the two is only apparent. The distinction ought to be clear as daylight. Both use their eyesight, but whereas the *brahmachari* uses it to see the glories of God [Truth], the other uses it to see the frivolity around him. Both use their ears, but whereas the one hears nothing but praises of God [Truth], the other feasts

¹⁶ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 44, excerpt from *From Yeravda Mandir*, 1932, Chapter III: Brahmacharya Or Chastity.

his ears upon ribaldry. Both often keep late hours, but whereas the one devotes them to prayer, the other fritters them away in wild and wasteful mirth. Both feed the inner man, but the one only to keep the temple of God [Truth] in good repair, while the other gorges himself and makes the sacred vessel a stinking gutter. Thus both live as the poles apart, and the distance between them will grow and not diminish with the passage of time.¹⁷

To return to King's point, let me state his quote again:

As the days [of the boycott] unfolded, however, the inspiration of Mahatma Gandhi began to exert its influence. I had come to see early that the Christian doctrine of love operating through the Gandhian method of nonviolence was one of the most potent weapons available to the Negro in his struggle for freedom.¹⁸

The use of the “Gandhian method” to carry out the call of Christian love proved powerful. There are clear points of common ground between the pillars of *Satyagraha* with the spirituality of

¹⁷ Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, p. 210.

¹⁸ King, *Testament*, p. 16.

Christianity, particularly in the Ten Commandments. “You shall not murder”¹⁹ (some translations say: “You shall not kill”) is essentially *ahimsa*. In the language of the ancient Jews, murder was regarded as the greatest form of harm. And if you can refrain from the greatest form of something, you can resist the lesser forms too. To use the metaphor of resistance of weight-lifting: if you can hold up 500 pounds then you can hold up 400 pounds, 300 pounds, 200 pounds, etc. So if you can refrain from murder, you can refrain from physical assaults, insults and harmful expressions, and even thoughts of harming others. And often, these lesser forms of harm plant seeds that escalate to greater forms of harm. The commandment, “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor”²⁰ (some translations say: “You shall not lie”) is identical to the moral abstention *satya*. And *brahmacarya* is reflected in the opening of the Ten Commandments: “I am the Lord your God.”²¹ In the ancient context, what you worship (i.e. your God) dictates how you live, what you are led by. Thus, to live the true meaning of “I am the Lord your God” requires abstaining from being led by the senses, which often pull in opposite directions than God.

¹⁹ *Bible*, Book of Exodus, Chapter 20, Verse 13.

²⁰ *Bible*, Book of Exodus, Chapter 20, Verse 16.

²¹ *Bible*, Book of Exodus, Chapter 20, Verse 1.

Instead of approaching love through lofty theories and idealism, Gandhi and King ground their approach to living love in practical moral abstentions that clearly guide our actions. When we sincerely and comprehensively live these abstentions, we come to realize these mature into powerful transforming agents. The maturity of *ahimsa*, no harm, becomes the living of and immersion into the endless depths of Absolute Love. The maturity of *satya* as refraining from lying and falsehood becomes a humble yet uncompromising honesty. And this honesty forms the basis of an unmovable courage to stand firm for Truth, a vital necessity for adherents of Nonviolence. The maturity of *brahmacharya* liberates one from the shackles of sense-based living to be guided and moved by the Absolute Itself.

Gandhi and King did not just throw these moral abstentions around as ideals to talk about. These were explicit determining factors in the day-to-day strategy and actions of Nonviolent efforts: these directly shaped the methods of organized marches and protests, boycotts, study sessions and trainings, non-retaliation to violence, creative exposure of existing social tension, guidelines for behavior while in jail, organizing tools, and more.

Thus, we may see why King went on to say:

Nonviolent resistance had emerged as the technique of the movement, while love stood as the

regulating ideal. In other words, Christ furnished the spirit and motivation, while Gandhi furnished the method.²²



²² King, *Testament*, p. 17.

THE POWER OF LOVE

King goes on in the article to address why violence and hatred had no place in the Montgomery Bus Boycott:

In my weekly remarks as president of the resistance committee, I stressed that the use of violence in our struggle would be both impractical and immoral. To meet hate with retaliatory hate would do nothing but intensify the existence of evil in the universe. Hate begets hate; violence begets violence; toughness begets a greater toughness. We must meet the forces of hate with the power of love; we must meet physical force with soul force.²³

When we look at the dynamics of oppression and injustice, we find hatred, violence, and toughness are major driving forces of these. And for the sake of clarity, I use the word ‘toughness’ as an apparent strength based on the exertion of physical and mental force, not a strength rooted in love that emanates from humility and spiritual surrender. If hatred, violence, and toughness are major factors in why we continue to suffer oppression and injustice, we

²³ King, *Testament*, p. 17.

would be wise to refrain from these. Especially since, particularly in Western culture, we are conditioned to respond to hatred with hatred, violence with violence, and toughness with toughness. In such responses, even if we have a seemingly temporary victory, we are sowing the seeds for future oppression and injustice -- whether we suffer these ourselves or leave them as unfortunate inheritances for future generations.

Gandhi saw this last point play out literally in India. For decades, Indians of various spiritual traditions worked together against the British colonization and oppression. During this time, there were constant efforts by Gandhi and others to restrain, if not eliminate, the burgeoning anger against the British that considered violence a viable means of resistance. Although most people upheld the standard of nonviolent behavior, the inclination to violence remained. And, as the dawn of the British departure from India became evident, this inclination toward violence shifted from the common opponent of the British to the different factions among Indians. One of the more prominent demonstrations of this was the friction that erupted between Muslim and non-Muslim Indians:

Look at the feud that is going on between Hindus and Muslims. Each is arming for the fight with the other. *The violence that we had harboured in our breasts during the non-co-operation days is now recoiling upon ourselves.* The violent energy that was generated among the masses, but was kept under check in the pursuit of a common objective,

has now been let loose and is being used among
and against ourselves.²⁴

As a result of this violence being turned “against ourselves,” the long-standing fight to establish a free, united India that openly embraced many religions disintegrated into a plan that divided the country -- establishing a separate Pakistan for the Muslims. This led to intense violence and displacement, since for centuries Muslims and non-Muslims lived together throughout India; but in the intensity of this conflict, many Muslims left India to relocate to Pakistan, and vice versa for non-Muslims. These two countries, who are siblings by a shared extended history, are still vehemently engaged in a continuing conflict -- including armed warfare. Similar tensions arose in the Civil Rights Movement and other modern social organizing movements: divisions that may have been prevented if people embraced the call to not allow hatred, violence, and toughness to have any place in their work and in their lives.

This call to refrain from hatred, violence, and toughness goes beyond matters of practicality to the moral essence of Nonviolence. Gandhi noted:

²⁴ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 298, excerpt from *Harijan*, July 8, 1939.

Only those who realize that there is *something* in man which is superior to the brute nature in him and that the latter always yields to it, can effectively be Satyagrahis.²⁵ (emphasis mine)

King spoke to this *something* in the context of Christianity. Let me share some words he delivered in an Easter Day sermon in 1957. He reflects on military figures and forces attributed great fame in history: Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, the Roman Empire, Charlemagne, and even Napoleon. Acknowledging their achievements, he notes that all of them -- who engaged in mass efforts of hatred, violence, and toughness -- fell. Using Napoleon as the prime example, King shares:

I could see Napoleon, with all of his military power, dying and faltering with his army at Waterloo. I said to myself, "This is the doom of every Napoleon. This is the doom of every man and every nation that feels that victory can ultimately come through force."²⁶

²⁵ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 35, excerpt from *Young India*, November 3, 1927.

²⁶ King, *Questions That Easter Answers*, a sermon delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, on April 27, 1957.

King then turns his attention to the life of Jesus:

I could see him at the age of thirty years old going out on his Galilean mission. He didn't have any armies with him. He didn't have many followers with him. He didn't even have a hundred percent cooperation from them, for one of them betrayed him and another went around and condemned, denied it, denied that he knew him. ... And I watched him as he walked around the hills of Galilee just doing good, just preaching the gospel to the brokenhearted, healing the sick and raising the dead. And I just watched him, I looked at him, and I said, "Now, he doesn't have a band following him. He has no great army! He has no great military power." Then I can see him go with another kind of army. I can hear him as he says somehow to himself, "I'm just going to put on the breastplate of righteousness. And I'm going to take the *ammunition of love* and the whole armor of God, and I'm just gonna march."²⁷ (italics mine)

In summation, King declares:

²⁷ King, *Questions That Easter Answers*.

This is the Easter message, this is the question that it answers. It says to us that *love is the most durable power in the world, more than all of the military giants, all of the nations that base their way on military power.* I wish this morning that you would go tell Russia, go tell America, go tell the nations of the world that atomic bombs cannot solve the problems of the universe. Go back and tell them that hydrogen bombs cannot solve the problems of the world. But it is *only through love and devotion to the justice of the universe that we can solve these problems.* And then we can go away saying in terms that cry out across the generations that “God reigns, He reigns supreme, the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.” He reigns because He established His universe on *moral principles.* And through the love that He revealed through Jesus Christ, things move on.²⁸ (italics mine)

Thus, King illustrates not only the connection between Christian love and morality, but the relationship between love and the moral principles upon which the universe is established. Herein lays a logic often overlooked: if we wish to address or change something, morality is a powerful means to do so since the universe is

²⁸ King, *Questions That Easter Answers.*

established upon such. Morality is a means to address and transform phenomena from their roots. And, love is a way of applying and putting into action these powerful moral principles.

Spiritual traditions utilize different language to name and describe this *something* which is superior to the brute nature in humanity. Thus, hatred, violence, and toughness -- attributes of brute nature -- are exposed to be weaker than this *something* upon which the universe is established. Knowing this, we would be wise to choose the greater means to address injustice. King frames this *something* as (Christian) love and morality: means that are more powerful to address injustice than hatred, violence, and toughness.

If we wish to realize the fullness of what Nonviolence offers, we must come to realize what this *something* is for ourselves -- each one, individually. Abiding by the standard of Nonviolence, with an open mind and heart, can lead to the realization of this *something*. King confesses:

It is probably true that most of them [Blacks in Montgomery] did not believe in nonviolence as a philosophy of life, but because of their confidence in their leaders and because nonviolence was presented to them as a simple expression of

Christianity in action, they were willing to use it as a technique.²⁹

There is value in those who have “the willingness to use nonviolence as a technique... For he who goes this far is more likely to adopt nonviolence later as a way of life.”³⁰ This brings us to one of the cornerstones of Nonviolence, as King explains:

Admittedly, nonviolence in the truest sense is not a strategy that one uses simply because it is expedient at the moment; nonviolence is ultimately a way of life that men live by because of the sheer morality of its claim.³¹

If approached with the precision of spiritual science, we can literally serve and transform the whole of the universe through the application of moral principles. The results may not be immediate but they are lasting (if not everlasting). Consider this: at the time of Jesus’ crucifixion it seemed to many that his work had come to a failing end. Most people thought he was dead, his disciples abandoned him and ran into hiding to avoid persecution and

²⁹ King, *Testament*, p. 17.

³⁰ King, *Testament*, p. 17.

³¹ King, *Testament*, p. 17.

potential death. Yet nowadays, billions of people continue to be touched by Jesus' love and teachings, even many who are not Christians. Is there any reason to think this will not continue to be the case for generations upon generations to come? Maybe until the end of time? Does Napoleon have the same widespread impact today? Did he have the same impact even when he was the military ruler of a large expanse of the earth? Or any great military leader or power: does their impact compare with the lasting impact of Jesus and other great spiritual figures whose grace and love-based service expand across the reaches of time?

In acknowledging the superiority of this *something* to hatred, violence, and toughness, we should not overlook the importance of courage. In fact, King and Gandhi are explicit in saying that choosing this *something* over hatred, violence, and toughness should not be used as a cover for cowardice. King states:

It must be emphasized that nonviolent resistance is not a method for cowards; it does resist. If one uses this method because he is afraid or merely because he lacks the instruments of violence, he is not truly non-violent. This is why Gandhi often said that if cowardice is the only alternative to violence, it is better to fight. ... This [nonviolence] is ultimately the way of the strong man.³²

³² King, *Testament*, p. 17.

Gandhi concurs:

Non-violence is a weapon of the strong. With the weak it might easily be hypocrisy. Fear and love are contradictory terms.³³

It [*Satyagraha*] is the weapon that adorns the strong. It can never adorn the weak. By weak is meant the weak in mind and spirit, not in body.³⁴

Gandhi elaborates on why he would choose violence over cowardice:

I do believe that where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence I would advise violence. Thus when my eldest son asked me what he should have done, had he been present when I was almost fatally assaulted in 1908, whether he should have run away and seen me killed or whether he should have used his physical force which he could and wanted to use, and defended me, I told him that it was his duty to defend me

³³ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 384, excerpt from *The Nation's Voice*, 1947, p. 109 - 110, Part II.

³⁴ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 381, excerpt from *Harijan*, March 17, 1946.

even by using violence. Hence it was that I took part in the Boer War, the so-called Zulu rebellion [in South Africa] and the late War [World War 1]. Hence also do I advocate training in arms for those who believe in the method of 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.³⁵

Two points are of particular importance in the above statement beyond the denouncement of cowardice. First, Gandhi encourages “those who believe in the method of violence”³⁶ to pursue that path. Even if such persons do not commit physical acts of violence while engaged in Nonviolent efforts, they can undercut the power of such efforts. Since moral principles form the foundation of Nonviolence, Gandhi warns: “the slightest use of violence often defeats a just cause. Satyagraha excludes the use of violence in any

³⁵ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 132 - 133, excerpt from *Young India*, August 11, 1920.

³⁶ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 132, excerpt from *Young India*, August 11, 1920.

shape or form, whether in thought, speech, or deed.”³⁷ Gandhi adhered to ancient, traditional Indian definitions of violence that do not limit such to just physical acts but include “every form of violence, direct or indirect, veiled or unveiled, and whether in thought, word or deed.”³⁸ To even have thoughts of harming another is violence. And to perform Nonviolent acts while harboring violent thoughts is hypocritical. Morality demands purity to be strong: a lie can include portions of truth and remain a lie but truth requires that it be one hundred percent true to be truth - excluding all lies, falsehood, exaggerations, etc.

So Gandhi made clear the terms of *Satyagraha*: “Indeed, violence is the negation of this great spiritual force [*Satyagraha*], which can only be cultivated or wielded by those who will entirely eschew violence.”³⁹ Those who would not uphold this standard were encouraged to embrace other means of addressing injustice, even if that included violence. But, and this brings us to the second point,

³⁷ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 56, excerpt from *Young India*, April 27, 1921.

³⁸ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 201, excerpt from *Harijan*, April 15, 1933.

³⁹ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 34, excerpt from *Young India*, November 3, 1927.

Gandhi stakes his claim on the fact that “that non-violence is infinitely superior to violence.”⁴⁰

When violence is used this only keeps cycles of violence alive, even if to address injustice and violence committed by others. And we should not assume that a cycle has ended simply because the conditions for the expression of violence may be unfavorable or dormant. For example, the side that losses a war may still be willing to commit violence against the victor but often lack the means to presently carry such out. If they acquire such means, we may see a return to violence -- such as Germany starting World War 2 after recuperating from defeat in World War 1.

Instead of continuing or repressing cycles of violence, Nonviolence looks to end such cycles through the transforming power of love. That the dynamics that fuel conflict and destruction are brought into the cocoon of love, tolerance, and redemptive suffering to emerge as a butterfly of shared beneficence, reconciliation, and cooperation. Gandhi explains:

The plan of civil disobedience has been conceived to neutralize and ultimately entirely to displace violence and enthrone non-violence in its stead, to

⁴⁰ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 133, excerpt from *Young India*, August 11, 1920.

replace hatred by love, to replace strife by concord.”⁴¹

This often requires patience and perseverance. To use a metaphor, if a car is going ninety miles per hour and you wish to turn it around, time is needed as the brakes are applied to slow down the car before it can be safely turned in the other direction. The car does not come to a sudden stop once the brakes are applied. Only in emergency situations is it wise to slam on the brakes; but even doing so then can be dangerous, especially in the presence of traffic. A steady, firm application of the brakes will suffice to slow down the car so it can be turned around. In the same way, cycles of violence and injustice speeding down the highway of life will still manifest expressions of these as the brakes of love, tolerance, and redemptive suffering are applied.

Understanding these dynamics, Gandhi taught: “A Satyagrahi has infinite patience, abundant faith in others, ample hope.”⁴² He reminded people that: “A chronic and long-standing social evil cannot be swept away at a stroke; it always requires patience and

⁴¹ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 240, excerpt from *Young India*, March 27, 1930.

⁴² Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 279, excerpt from *Young India*, March 19, 1931.

perseverance.”⁴³ And throughout the decades of his activism, he constantly implored that once people take up the mantles of Nonviolence, they should stay the course to realize its fruit:

I say what I mean and think. And I have been saying for the last fifteen years in India and outside for twenty years more [in South Africa] and repeat now that the only way to conquer violence is through non-violence pure and undefiled. I have said also that every violent act, word and thought interferes with the progress of non-violent action.⁴⁴

In the modern age, we tend to associate effort only with physical exertion and activity. Yet the scope of Nonviolence extends beyond this and may, at times, seem passive. King addresses this:

For while the non-violent resister is passive in the sense that he is not physically aggressive toward his opponent, his mind and emotions are always active, constantly seeking to persuade his opponent that he is wrong. The method is passive physically but *strongly active spiritually*. It is not passive

⁴³ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 344, excerpt from *Young India*, March 1, 1928.

⁴⁴ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 275, excerpt from *Young India*, May 8, 1930.

non-resistance to evil, it is active nonviolent
resistance to evil.⁴⁵ (italics mine)

First, let me state that the spiritual activity King refers to is not limited to efforts aimed at one's opponents. Maintaining and deepening one's own spiritual practice and growth are often more essential to this spiritual activity than efforts aimed toward others. In the same way a clean shirt is obviously clean when placed beside a dirty one, our own spiritual purity and righteousness will reveal, in ways beyond thoughts and concepts, others' wrongs and impurities. This remains one of the more powerful cornerstones of the transformative nature of Nonviolence.

I stress moving beyond thoughts and concepts of wrong, because many people will continue to do things they "conceptually" know are wrong. For example, how many people continue to engage in unhealthy eating habits knowing at the time that their actions are harmful? But when the culminating harm results in a health crisis, such as a heart attack, then people are often forced to face their actions in ways that go beyond concepts. Then, many will at least pause to look at how their eating contributed to the situation. Such reflections are often temporary if people do not establish an affirmative commitment to transformation, not merely react with changes that will regress back to the habits that contributed to the crisis. In this same manner, an affirmative commitment to ethics is

⁴⁵ King, *Testament*, p. 18.

required to embrace the patient and persevering path of Nonviolent transformation. By grace, the moral pillars of *ahimsa*, *satya*, and *brahmacarya* are already established as foundations that serve this purpose.

If we are looking to have others realize their wrongs, it helps if we are established in a cultivated morality that is free from or seriously addressing our own wrongs. As Jesus taught:

³Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in someone else's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴How can you say, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵You hypocrite, *first take the plank out of your own eye*, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from the other person's eye.⁴⁶ (emphasis mine)

Nonviolence looks to utilize incidents and the suffering (physical and mental) that accompanies them to bring social situations to a place of considering existing wrongs. This is often approached through planned creative tension that exposes the existing harms; comparable to exposing the existing unhealthy diet and other factors that contributed to the heart attack. Within this approach, activists willingly take suffering upon themselves. When engaged

⁴⁶ *Bible*, Book of Matthew, Chapter 7, Verses 3 - 5.

within a principled and moral framework, such suffering can be redemptive. Thus, the incidents and suffering become means to have those who commit and support (even passively) unjust and evil acts to realize such in a way that speaks beyond thoughts and concepts. In having these parties face these injustices in ways that can no longer be denied, they can be moved (not through coercion) to refrain from committing, supporting, or allowing such acts -- even if publicly they present a different social facade. This movement can occur through an “inner” shifting: it no longer feels comfortable or easy to continue to be part of such injustice. But it can also occur through the force of shifting conditions: when people are no longer willing to cooperate with or tolerate injustice, such injustice cannot continue as it was.

The Nonviolent campaign in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963 is a classic example of this. Brutality to Blacks was something everybody knew conceptually. In fact, Birmingham had a long reputation of such which included the regular bombings of Black homes and churches, lynchings, police brutality against Blacks, and a harsh upholding of public racial segregation. During the protests, many focused on the excessive police brutality exhibited: unarmed, peaceful protesters being beat with billy clubs, sprayed with fire hoses, attacked with vicious police dogs -- including young children. A lot of media attention fell upon Eugene “Bull” Connor, the chief of the police and fire departments, as a main protagonist of such. But, as was well known, Connor, the police force, and the fire department could not carry out such brutality without support from and acceptance by the local government, businesses, and

White community at-large. It should be noted the position Connor occupied, Commissioner of Public Safety, was a publicly elected position; and he was re-elected to this and other public positions many times despite his reputation of being a staunch supporter of racial segregation who would take a heavy-handed approach to protests.

As the crisis in Birmingham drew unfavorable media attention, nationally and internationally, it seemed that Connor and much of the police and fire departments remained unchanged: committed to brutal treatment of Blacks. But there was a shift among those who supported, even indirectly, Connor and his forces. They were forced to deal with the reality of the brutality beyond just concepts -- particularly local businesses. I stress this was not new information but a new realization. Thus, local businesses agreed to meet certain demands of the protesters which the protests to an end.

Lastly for this section, we should remember, as Gandhi eloquently stated:

‘Whatever a man sows, that shall he reap.’ The law of Karma is inexorable and impossible of evasion. There is thus hardly any need for God to interfere. He laid down the law and, as it were, retired.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, p. 242.

The opening words of this quote are reflected in the Bible: Galatians Chapter 6, Verse 7. If we sow hatred, violence, and toughness against those who are unjust toward us, we will reap these sooner or later. But if we sow love, tolerance, and redemptive suffering, we will reap these and the transforming fruit that emanates from these. What we do should not be obscured by what others do (or don't do). Gandhi, King, and others constantly remind of the importance of patience, since it may take time for what we sow to grow and mature into a harvest that can be reaped. But we would be wise to stay the course that unfailingly leads to these treasures which cannot be found in hatred, violence, and toughness.



A BELOVED COMMUNITY

After establishing the pillars and foundational approach, King turns our attention to cornerstone principles of Nonviolence:

A second basic fact that characterizes nonviolence is that it does not seek to defeat or humiliate the opponent, but to win his friendship and understanding.⁴⁸

This principle is rooted in the pillar of *ahimsa*, non-harm. Gandhi elaborates:

Then again, because underlying *ahimsa* is the **unity of all life**, the error of one cannot but affect all, and hence man cannot be wholly free from *himsa*. So long as he continues to be a social being, he cannot but participate in the *himsa* that the very existence of society involves.⁴⁹ (bold emphasis mine)

⁴⁸ King, *Testament*, p. 18.

⁴⁹ Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, p. 349.

King speaks to this same point of unity in his *Letter from Birmingham City Jail*:

Moreover, I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. ... Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. *Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.*⁵⁰ (emphasis mine)

In the context of this interconnectedness, friendship -- even among opponents -- is more in line with realizing and expanding the benefits of love.

To be clear, Gandhi is explicit that “In the dictionary of the non-violent there is no such word as an external enemy.”⁵¹ Definitions of the word enemy include phrases such as: “a person who hates another,” “who attacks or tries to harm and injure another,” “has hostility toward another” -- all which fall outside the fold of Nonviolence. But rejection of the enemy paradigm does not mean we must agree with or go along with the stance of others, including positions that are unjust. We can be opponents, oppose

⁵⁰ King, *Testament*, p. 290.

⁵¹ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 93, excerpt from *Harijan*, October 13, 1940.

others, where there are differences -- even if such leads to conflicts. Nonviolence approaches conflicts within morality, civility, and a genuine search for Truth. These become means by which peaceful cooperation and collective growth and maturity can be established or re-established.

To this end, Gandhi urges: “The Satyagrahi whilst he is ever ready for fight must be equally eager for peace. He must welcome any honourable opportunity for peace.”⁵² King arrived at the same premise through Christianity, of which one of the main pillars is unceasing forgiveness:

²¹Then Peter came to Jesus and asked,
“Lord, how many times shall I forgive someone
who sins against me? Up to seven times?”

²²Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven
times, but seventy-seven times [or can be
translated as seventy times seven times].⁵³

Jesus implores that we “forgive a brother or sister from your heart.”⁵⁴ And King regarded every human being -- despite how

⁵² Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 278,
excerpt from *Young India*, March 19, 1931.

⁵³ *Bible*, Book of Matthew, Chapter 18, Verses 21 - 22.

⁵⁴ *Bible*, Book of Matthew, Chapter 18, Verse 35.

unjust and evil one's actions may be -- as fellow sisters and brothers of God. Even if we have not yet reached this level of spiritual maturity as King did, we can surely look to take a more forgiving attitude toward others instead of one that is punitive and combative.

This call for genuine forgiveness goes beyond a superficial reconciliation in which continuing resentment is hidden. It calls for a complete release of negativity which allows all parties involved to truly be loving sisters and brothers. The one who adheres to Nonviolence lives this complete release even if the other parties involved do not; ever ready to embrace loving relations with others. When necessary, there is nothing wrong with embracing a process of healing and reconciliation to work toward this, which may include making amends and changing social dynamics to prevent a return to harm. To this end, Gandhi saw the importance of fostering understanding among differing parties: "it is my rule, as a Satyagrahi, to understand the viewpoint of the party I propose to deal with, and to try to agree with him as far as may be possible."⁵⁵ The "as far as possible" statement is a clear indication that mutual understanding does not mean compromising core values. In fact, with understanding certain disagreements may remain. But in examining what informs a person's position -- from that person's point of view, not my own view or conceptions of

⁵⁵ Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, p. 375

one's view -- parties may find common ground to negotiate points of peaceful cooperation even if disagreements continue.

It can certainly be a great challenge to work toward reconciliation, which Gandhi acknowledges:

“I know that this requires a detached state of mind, and it is a state very difficult to reach. Nevertheless for a Satyagrahi it is absolutely essential. Three-fourths of the miseries and misunderstandings in the world will disappear, if we step into the shoes of our adversaries and understand their standpoint. We will then agree with our adversaries quickly or think of them charitably.”⁵⁶

However difficult it is to work through and overcome misunderstandings, this does not diminish the call of Nonviolence to embrace “any honourable opportunity for peace”⁵⁷ and extend forgiveness to even our most brutal opponents. These principles are vital to realizing the goal of Nonviolence, which King addresses:

⁵⁶ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 193 - 194, excerpt from *Young India*, March 19, 1925.

⁵⁷ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 278, excerpt from *Young India*, March 19, 1931.

The end is redemption and reconciliation. The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community, while the aftermath of violence is tragic bitterness.⁵⁸



⁵⁸ King, *Testament*, p. 18.

WE ARE OUT TO DEFEAT INJUSTICE

Another key principle of Nonviolence is being clear about what one is fighting. King explains:

A third characteristic of this method [Nonviolence] is that the attack is directed against forces of evil rather than against persons who happen to be doing the evil. It is evil that the nonviolent resister seeks to defeat, not the persons victimized by evil.⁵⁹

Although often cited as a cliché, there are very practical aspects of the sentiment expressed in the above quote. It is essential to be adamantly clear that the enemy is evil and injustice: not those who commit it. In fact, as shall be addressed, those who commit evil are also victims of (victimized by) evil.

Definitions of evil are ranging, therefore, let us use a simple one for the sake of this booklet. We can look at evil as disobedience to the Absolute (God), which for Gandhi is disobedience to Truth. Scriptures and spiritual teachings delineate what obedience entails. This includes moral abstentions such as *ahimsa* (non-harm), *satya* (to not lie or commit falsehood), and *brahmacarya* (to not be led by

⁵⁹ King, *Testament*, p. 18.

the senses) -- pillars of *Satyagraha* which are also reflected in the Biblical Ten Commandments. Obedience also includes moral observances such as purity, patience, discipline, and decrees such as “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind... [and] Love your neighbor as yourself”⁶⁰ -- which Jesus declares to be the two greatest commandments.

Adherence to and application of obedience leads to a larger scope of one’s life dwelling within beneficence. In simple terms, beneficence means individual and collective well-being. Obedience also leads to justice: fair relations among living beings which facilitate peaceful cooperation, shared prosperity, and respect for all. Disobedience leads to injustice: clear symptoms of such being inequality, oppression, destructive conflict, and harm. Thus, Gandhi and King saw social conditions such as poverty, materialism, racial and ethnic discrimination, militarism, etc. as evil.

In this context, no person is absolutely good or evil: as long as we have free will, the potential for committing evil is always present because we can always choose disobedience over obedience. Often the choice between obedience and disobedience is strongly influenced by conditions, past and present: influences that

⁶⁰ *Bible*, Book of Matthew, Chapter 22, Verses 37 - 39.

sometimes overpower our best intentions. Therefore, Gandhi declares:

And after all no one is wicked by nature. And if others are wicked, are we the less so? That attitude is inherent in Satyagraha, and if you do not subscribe to it, even then I would ask you to leave me. For without a belief in my programme and without an acceptance of my condition you will ruin me, ruin yourself and ruin the cause.⁶¹

We should not minimize the influence of conditions and circumstances in committing sin, acts of disobedience to the Absolute. Realizing this, Nonviolence distinguishes the “forces of evil” from those who perform acts of evil. Gandhi is explicit in stating:

Man and his deed are two distinct things. Whereas a good deed should call forth approbation and a wicked deed disapprobation, the doer of the deed, whether good or wicked, always deserves respect or pity as the case may be. ‘Hate the sin and not the sinner’ is a precept which, though easy enough

⁶¹ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 305, excerpt from *Harijan*, March 30, 1940.

to understand, is rarely practised, and that is why the poison of hatred spreads in the world.⁶²

After making this distinction, Gandhi points out a means to address evil which, if addressed, can lead to a person shifting their acts from sin to piety (from disobedience to obedience) and possibly becoming a transformed person:

A Satyagrahi must never forget the distinction between evil and the evil-doer. He must not harbour ill-will or bitterness against the latter. He may not even employ needlessly offensive language against the evil person, however unrelieved his evil might be. For it should be an article of faith with every Satyagrahi that **there is none so fallen in this world but can be converted by love. A Satyagrahi will always try to overcome evil by good, anger by love, untruth by truth, *himsa* [harm] by *ahimsa* [non-harm]. There is no other way of purging the world of evil.** Therefore a person who claims to be a Satyagrahi always tries by close and prayerful self-introspection and self-analysis to find out whether he is himself completely free from the taint of anger, ill-will and such other human

⁶² Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, p. 276.

infirmities, whether he is not himself capable of those very evils against which he is out to lead a crusade. In self-purification and penance lies half the victory of a Satyagrahi.”⁶³ (bold emphasis mine)

Self-purification is essential within this approach: conversion from ‘evil (disobedience), anger, untruth, and harm’ to ‘good (obedience), love (compassion), truth, and ahimsa’ must happen within first. This calls for “prayerful self-introspection and self-analysis” -- which requires unflinching honesty. If we carry disobedient “conditions” within ourselves, it is very likely that when we encounter certain circumstances we will commit the same sins (evil acts) we stand against. But as you reap what you sow, if we sow ‘good, love, truth, and ahimsa’ within ourselves, as we reap these within we will see these overflow into the world through us, establishing and shaping circumstances that behold and reflect these blessings. Thus, when people who commit sin encounter these beneficial circumstances, their actions and possibly themselves can be transformed. King encounters this same point in the Bible, as the words of the Apostle Paul state:

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked.
People reap what they sow. Those who sow to
please their sinful nature, from that nature will reap

⁶³ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 77, excerpt from *Young India*, August 8, 1929.

destruction; those who sow to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.⁶⁴

The above words of Paul have a poignant connection to Jesus' words about loving your enemy. As stated earlier, Nonviolence does not embrace holding one as an enemy, but if we use the word "opponent" we will still see the immense value of Jesus' teaching. In the Sermon on the Mount, he shared:

⁴³You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴But I tell you, love your enemies [opponents] and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵that you may be children of your Parent in heaven. It causes Its sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?

⁶⁴ *Bible*, Book of Galatians, Chapter 6, Verses 7 - 10.

⁴⁸Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Parent is perfect.⁶⁵

If the Absolute sustains the lives of those who commit sin, which is a providence of love, should we not set our actions in accord with the Absolute and deal with those who commit evil through actions that behold ‘good, love, truth, and *ahimsa*’? Let me stress again that this does not mean we support or cooperate with evil. In fact, Gandhi is very clear:

In my humble opinion, rejection is as much an ideal as the acceptance of a thing. It is as necessary to reject untruth as it is to accept truth. All religions teach that two opposite forces act upon us and that the human endeavour consists in a series of eternal rejections and acceptances. *Non-co-operation with evil is as much a duty as co-operation with good.*⁶⁶ (emphasis mine)

“Non-cooperation with evil” can be done within the space of ‘good, love, truth, and *ahimsa*.’ The words of Paul affirm this when he writes:

⁶⁵ *Bible*, Book of Matthew, Chapter 5, Verses 43 - 48.

⁶⁶ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 165, excerpt from *Young India*, June 1, 1921.

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.⁶⁷

So we have righteous means, righteous weapons, by which to fight the forces of evil without attacking those who commit evil. This approach may be further substantiated if we remember that even those who commit evil are victims of evil too. We already addressed that you reap what you sow, so if you sow evil that is what you will reap. Thus, Jesus' call 'to pray for your enemies' is not an empty call. In realizing the dynamics of evil upon the sinner, and the harm one inflicts upon one's self by performing evil actions, we can be moved to have compassion for those who commit evil, even if we must fight against their actions. It is not just hyperbole that King describes those who commit evil as

⁶⁷ *Bible*, Book of Ephesians, Chapter 6, Verses 13 - 17.

“persons victimized by evil:”⁶⁸ no one commits evil without being unscathed, even if they present a facade that suggests otherwise.

When we explore these issues in regards to the racial injustice King fought against, he describes racism as a widespread disease:

It is an unhappy truth that racism is a way of life for the vast majority of white Americans, spoken and unspoken, acknowledged and denied, subtle and sometimes not so subtle -- the *disease of racism permeates and poisons* a whole body politic. And I can see nothing more urgent than for America to work passionately and unrelentingly -- to get rid of the disease of racism.⁶⁹ (emphasis mine)

Instead of viewing the White masses and power structure that carried out, supported, and allowed racism -- in subtle and not so subtle ways -- as enemies to be attacked, King engaged them as victims of a pernicious disease. He attacked the disease, not the sick persons just as a good doctor seeks to kill the cancer, not the patient. This does not mean the patient will not suffer some pain from the treatment, particularly intense treatment, but the focus is

⁶⁸ King, *Testament*, p. 18.

⁶⁹ King, *Testament*, p. 270, from the speech *Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution*, March 31, 1968.

always clear that the cancer is the target of the fight, not the patient. This was the explicit approach taken in the Montgomery Bus Boycott:

The tension in this city [Montgomery, Alabama] is not between white people and Negro people. The tension is, at bottom, between justice and injustice, between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. And if there is a victory, it will be a victory not merely for fifty thousand Negroes, but a victory for justice and the forces of light. *We are out to defeat injustice and not white persons who may be unjust.*⁷⁰ (emphasis mine)

In the end, if those who carry out, support, and allow evil; if those persons are transformed and turn to righteousness, the evil that is performed through them will have less means by which to manifest. And to the extent that this beneficent approach reaches others, evil (the performance of evil actions) can be purged from the world. But it is very rare that those who utilize this transforming approach can do so without taking on some suffering.



⁷⁰ King, *Testament*, p. 18.

SUFFERING WITHOUT RETALIATION

King then moves on to an uncompromising demand for those who embrace Nonviolence:

A fourth point that characterizes nonviolent resistance is a willingness to accept suffering without retaliation, to accept blows from the opponent without striking back. “Rivers of blood may have to flow before we gain our freedom, but it must be our blood,” Gandhi said to his countrymen. The nonviolent resister is willing to accept violence if necessary, but never to inflict it.⁷¹

Let me emphasize that King, as well as Gandhi, spoke to the willingness to embrace violence *if necessary*. This is not a call to seek out or provoke acts of violence against one’s self. In fact, the strategic approach of Nonviolence and *Satyagraha* is explicit and diligent in sincerely employing negotiation, reconciliation, and other peaceful means before embracing tactics that expose people to violence -- or, as King and Gandhi have said, embracing tactics that create tension to reveal the dynamics of violence already

⁷¹ King, *Testament*, p. 18.

present. It is also important to note that retaliation is not limited to merely physical acts. As addressed earlier, violence includes acts, words, and thoughts. For this reason, King and Gandhi were very measured in how they responded to the violence they endured, very selective about their choice of words as well as taking care to not do anything that encouraged harmful thoughts toward those they were resisting.

This complete abstention from violence is based in spiritual principles that are more practical than some realize. It is a clear choice to choose a greater and more effective strength over a weaker, less efficient force. Firstly, we cannot be violent and non-violent at the same time. And if we shift between these two approaches, we actually undercut the results of the other approach: violence undercuts the results of non-violence and vice versa. So, from a practical perspective, it makes sense to choose one approach and commit unwaveringly to that. Again, from a practical perspective, Gandhi and King choose what they deem to be the more powerful approach. Note the following quotes from Gandhi:

“Only those who realize that there is something in man which is superior to the brute nature in him and that the latter always yields to it, can effectively be Satyagrahis.”⁷²

⁷² Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 35, excerpt from *Young India*, November 3, 1927.

“We have hitherto feared them and their guns in our simplicity. The moment we realize our combined strength, we shall consider it unmanly to fear them and, therefore, ever to think of striking them. Hence am I anxious and impatient to persuade my countrymen to feel non-violent, not out of our weakness but out of our strength.”⁷³

The strength of violence is based in the mind and body: mental and physical aggression and force. But, as many spiritual traditions affirm, within the human there is a greater power than these. Although the choice of words may vary across traditions, they point to this same strength which Gandhi refers to as *the soul*:

“It is a fundamental principle of Satyagraha that the tyrant whom the Satyagrahi seeks to resist has power over his body and material possessions but he can have no power over the soul. The soul can remain unconquered and unconquerable even when the body is imprisoned. The whole science of Satyagraha was born from a knowledge of this fundamental truth.”⁷⁴

⁷³ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 129, excerpt from *Young India*, March 16, 1922.

⁷⁴ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 289, excerpt from *Young India*, May 21, 1931.

King encountered this fundamental truth in the life of Jesus, as well as other Abrahamic prophets and Christian apostles and saints. Throughout the ages, they encountered physical and mental persecution -- sometimes imprisonment and death. Yet this did not impede the soul-based work that continues to shine forth in the scriptures, testimonies, life stories and deeds that not only teach but also empower people to stay the course of righteousness: a course that unflinchingly leads to (eventual) victory.

Sometimes, for reasons the mind cannot comprehend, suffering is necessary to transform evil situations and serve goodness. For King, the life of Jesus is an explicit testimony of this. Note how these sentiments are reflected in the words of Jesus:

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.
³⁵For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶What good is it for you to gain the whole world, yet forfeit your soul? ³⁷Or what can you give in exchange for your soul?⁷⁵

Can anyone take up a cross, upon which humans were crucified in Jesus' time, and expect not to suffer? To sacrifice one's life for Jesus and the gospel, both which direct people to Truth and justice,

⁷⁵ *Bible*, Book of Mark, Chapter 8, Verses 34 - 37.

involves the willingness to suffer -- even to the point of losing one's earthly life (the body and mind). But such does not involve forfeiture of the soul, which is greater. This path has been treaded by many righteous people, even prophets:

¹¹Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.⁷⁶

Given that people use the term 'suffering' in a variety of ways, Gandhi clarifies what he means by it:

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 pitting 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

⁷⁶ *Bible*, Book of Matthew, Chapter 5, Verses 11 - 12.

religion, his soul and lay the foundation for that empire's fall or its regeneration.⁷⁷

In *Satyagraha*, suffering never entails a compromise of one's virtues and ethics, rather a courageous upholding of these that willingly endures whatever consequences come as a result. This stand is based primarily in the soul, even if one may bear the consequences of such with the body and mind. But neither is upholding blind: if we find we are in error we must seek correction and make appropriate amends.

Gandhi cautions that we should not be overly idealistic about suffering: "Those who rely upon self-suffering for redress of a grievance cannot afford to rate it higher than it actually is."⁷⁸ Suffering is painful. It may result in great loss. It involves lasting, sometimes life altering or life ending consequences. Sometimes it is excessive and may seem that it is not effective at all, especially in the face of continuing, long-standing injustice. To this, Gandhi states:

"The Satyagrahi on the other hand does not seek to carry out his reform by a system of punishments

⁷⁷ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 134, excerpt from *Young India*, August 11, 1920.

⁷⁸ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 213, excerpt from *Young India*, May 31, 1928.

but by penance, self-purification and suffering. Any resentment of the persecution, therefore, would be an interruption of the course of discipline he has imposed upon himself. It may be a prolonged course, it may even seem to be never-ending. A little bullying or even moral suasion or coercion may appear more expeditious. ... Indeed I have often shown in these pages that Satyagraha is, as a matter of fact and in the long run, the most expeditious course.”⁷⁹

Satyagraha is not a path of quick fixes but lasting transformation. If we are in a rush to affect changes, violence and coercion may seem more appealing: the results may come quicker but usually do not last. How many wars have been fought to address problems that continue even after military “victory?” Or problems of crime that continue after aggressive, sometimes excessive, policing tactics that achieved a temporary reduction in crime? Even in the political realm, where mental force is exuded through words, policies, and allocation of resources: have these non-physical “wars” alleviated long standing social ills such as poverty, social inequalities, various forms of bias and discrimination? Gandhi advocates that we address these challenges through the greater strength of the soul rather than the lesser forces of the mind and

⁷⁹ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 188 - 189, excerpt from *Young India*, September 18, 1924.

body. And where we have sought to address these through Nonviolence and yet these problems continue, we must ask: have we really deepened our own self-purification, morality, and piety to be as efficient and potent as possible in utilizing the strength of the soul?

The *Satyagraha* approach to suffering often requires lasting patience to realize the fruits of its transformative powers. Those embracing this path should be clear they are willing to endure this. Yet, Gandhi also points out factors to make the bearing of suffering more potent and effective. To this end, he constantly spoke of the importance of piety (moral character), purification, and courage:

The law of sacrifice is uniform throughout the world. To be effective it demands the sacrifice of the bravest and the most spotless.⁸⁰

the Satyagrahi seeks to convert his opponent by sheer force of character and suffering. The purer he is and the more he suffers, the quicker the progress.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 262, excerpt from *Young India*, April 24, 1930.

⁸¹ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 188, excerpt from *Young India*, September 18, 1924.

[Men] of stainless character and self-purification will easily inspire confidence and automatically purify the atmosphere around them.⁸²

But I am certain that Swaraj [self-rule] is unattainable this year if some of us have not the courage which enables us to stand firm like a rock without retaliating. The might of the tyrant recoils upon himself when it meets with no response, even as an arm violently waved in the air suffers dislocation.⁸³

Satyagraha means readiness to suffer and a faith that the more innocent and pure the suffering the more potent will it be in its effect.⁸⁴

The way to do better is to avoid, if we can, violence from our side and thus quicken the rate of progress and to introduce greater purity in the

⁸² Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 345, excerpt from *Young India*, September 6, 1928.

⁸³ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 57, excerpt from *Young India*, October 20, 1921.

⁸⁴ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 294, excerpt from *Harijan*, June 3, 1939.

methods of suffering. ... Progress is to be measured by the amount of suffering undergone by the sufferer. The purer the suffering, the greater is the progress.”⁸⁵

In addition to approaching suffering in ways that increase its transforming potency and efficiency, there may also be benefits to suffering. As much as we do not like it, sometimes profound change and growth occurs by enduring suffering. King certainly saw this in addressing long-standing racial injustice in America. For him, confronting such meant extreme personal hardships: numerous arrests and incarcerations for protesting, having his home bombed twice, a near-fatal stabbing, daily death threat phone calls and letters to his home and office, constant public criticism and harassment, excessive work hours and stress, constant separation from his family, and more. Yet note how he chose to endure these hardships:

My personal trials have also taught me the value of unmerited suffering. As my sufferings mounted I soon realized that there were two ways that I could respond to my situation: either to react with bitterness or seek to transform the suffering into a creative force. I decided to follow the latter

⁸⁵ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 113, excerpt from *Young India*, June 16, 1920.

course. Recognizing the necessity for suffering I have tried to make of it a virtue. If only to save myself from bitterness, I have attempted to see my personal ordeals as an opportunity to transform myself and heal the people involved in the tragic situation which now obtains. I have lived these last few years with the conviction that unearned suffering is redemptive.⁸⁶

This is not a new discovery on the part of King, it is actually reflected in the Bible. Paul shares:

And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.
³Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ King, *Testament*, p. 41, from the article *Suffering and Faith*, 1960.

⁸⁷ *Bible*, Book of Romans, Chapter 5, Verses 2 - 5.

These fruits of growth attained through the seasons of redemptive suffering are assets we can utilize in our continuing efforts toward truth and justice.



AT THE CENTER OF NONVIOLENCE

We now move to what is the core of Nonviolent engagement: the application of love. I stress the word *application* because many profess the accolades of love -- some even professing there is no greater force in the universe than love. Yet when it comes time to act, many choose or allow something other than love to be the determining force of their actions. King addresses this head-on, in a way that emphasizes a practical application of love to how we engage (in actions) the conditions we encounter.

King continues in the article:

A fifth point concerning nonviolent resistance is that it avoids not only external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit. The nonviolent resister not only refuses to shoot his opponent but he also refuses to hate him. *At the center of nonviolence stands the principle of love.*⁸⁸
(emphasis mine)

We have already explained how love, a maturity of *ahimsa*, is one of the pillars of *Satyagraha* and Nonviolence. In fact, Gandhi

⁸⁸ King, *Testament*, p. 19.

describes love as “the active state of *ahimsa*.”⁸⁹ But what does love really mean in a practical sense within the conditions of addressing injustice and oppression?

To begin answering this question, King first clearly delineates love from hatred. Even in situations of severe oppression, where the mental disposition of anger may be justified, he calls for adherents of Nonviolence to uphold the maturity that refrains from responding to hatred with hatred:

To retaliate in kind [with bitterness and hatred] would do nothing but intensify the existence of hate in the universe. Along the way of life, someone must have sense enough and morality enough to cut off the chain of hate. This can only be done by projecting the ethic of love to the center of our lives.⁹⁰

Many philosophical and ethical arguments have been made throughout human history that warn of the foolish danger of responding to hate with hate. The continuing predominance of conflict and suffering, even in a so-called “civilized age,” is proof

⁸⁹ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 161, excerpt from *Young India*, August 25, 1920.

⁹⁰ King, *Testament*, p. 19.

enough of the fallacy of seeking to eradicate hatred by hatred. (Remember the war to end all wars which was followed by more unending wars and armed conflicts.) In light of this, King says it is time for those who sincerely wish to overcome hatred to grow up: to be sensible and moral enough to not succumb to the destructive immaturity of hatred.

A sure way to transcend the immaturity of hatred is to have love be the defining means through which we live. To this point, Gandhi states:

The solitary Satyagrahi has to examine himself. If he has universal love and if he fulfills the conditions implied in such a state, it must find its expression in his daily conduct.⁹¹

When we literally live every single action -- including the small ones -- through love, we safeguard our lives from falling into the domain of hatred. This is a danger we should not underestimate since so much cultural and social conditioning orients us toward hatred -- sometimes in ways we are unaware of.

So, again emphasizing the practical application of this, a direct and obvious question arises: what is love? King addresses this question

⁹¹ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 376, excerpt from *Harijan*, August 4, 1940.

in precise and practical terms to be applied to the specific conditions we face. First, he clarifies:

In speaking of love at this point, we are not referring to some sentimental or affectionate emotion. It would be nonsense to urge men to love their oppressors in an affectionate sense.⁹²

Sentimentality and affectionate emotion can become means by which to be manipulated. This plays out even in situations where the parties involved have friendly relations, so how much more in oppressive conditions? Instead of this, King offers a working definition of what he means by love and then references three Greek terms to further explain:

Love in this connection means understanding, redemptive good will. When we speak of loving those who oppose us, we refer to neither *eros* nor *philia*; we speak of a love which is expressed in the Greek word *agape*.⁹³

In reflecting on what it means to engage those who oppress us with a good will that is understanding and redemptive, the clarity of the

⁹² King, *Testament*, p. 19.

⁹³ King, *Testament*, p. 19.

Greek terms offer valuable assistance. Greek is relevant because the books of the New Testament (of the Bible - mainstream versions) were written in Greek, including the four Gospels which give accounts of Jesus' life. In *An Experiment In Love*, King does not explain what *eros* and *philia* mean -- probably for the sake of keeping the article short. But he did so in another article titled *Nonviolence and Racial Justice*, which was published a year prior in 1957. He writes:

There are three words for love in the Greek New Testament. First, there is *eros*. In Platonic philosophy *eros* meant the yearning of the soul for the realm of the divine. It has come now to mean a sort of aesthetic or romantic love.⁹⁴

When confronting injustice and oppression, none of the above meanings of *eros* fit the approach of Nonviolence. To yearn for the realm divine while suffering injustice on earth can lead to avoidance, denial, and escapism. King was critical of those in the Black community who were willing to bear injustice without challenging it, having faith they will be rewarded for their hardships in heaven. Nor should we adore the beauty of our oppressors or engage them in romantic swooning as a remedy to

⁹⁴ King, *Testament*, p. 8, from the article *Nonviolence and Racial Justice*, 1957.

unjust treatment: such will rarely end injustice or lay the framework for beneficial community building.

King continues:

Second, there is *philia*. It meant intimate affectionateness between friends. *Philia* denotes a sort of reciprocal love: the person loves because he is loved.⁹⁵

Although Nonviolence works to establish healthy community (some may say friendliness) among all parties involved, *philia* is not appropriate where oppression and injustice prevail. When someone consistently oppresses you and treats you unjustly, such a person is not your friend despite what that one professes. This becomes more evident when notice is given of the oppression and injustice and yet the person continues to inflict these upon you. Such situations are not befitting to the intimate affections and reciprocal sharing that occurs among friends. The intimacy of such sharing requires some vulnerability which we should not expose to those who oppress and treat us unjustly. To engage *philia* in these circumstances can leave us exposed to further exploitation, abuse, and manipulation -- and sometimes through our own actions of offering benefits to those who take advantage of us.

⁹⁵ King, *Testament*, p. 8, from the article *Nonviolence and Racial Justice*, 1957.

So King is very clear:

When we speak of loving those who oppose us, we refer to neither *eros* nor *philia*; we speak of a love which is expressed in the Greek word *agape*. *Agape* means understanding, redeeming good will for all men.⁹⁶

Hopefully, it is clear by now how cultivating understanding (even if through creatively exposing existing tension) is a vital component of Nonviolence. So too are redemption (including forgiveness and reconciliation) and good will (beneficial intentions for and relations with others). To offer assistance in assessing whether we are truly imbibing these, King offers descriptions of what *agape* in action involves:

It is an overflowing love which is purely spontaneous, unmotivated, groundless, and creative. It is not set in motion by any quality or function of its object. *It is the love of God operating in the human heart.*⁹⁷ (emphasis mine)

⁹⁶ King, *Testament*, p. 19.

⁹⁷ King, *Testament*, p. 19.

The last sentence is key. Often, even if with good intentions, many seek to embody the qualities listed above through their own self-based (mind / ego-based) efforts. As noble as such efforts may be, these often fail; or in the rare instances where a person achieves such through these efforts, excessive energy and strain are often required to not only attain but also sustain these qualities. But when we surrender to a spiritual path, and tread what may be challenging transitions to drop who we hold ourselves to be (personal identification), the spiritual path reveals our genuine human nature. This lays beyond the mind in the heart -- the innermost essence of our being. Herein, “the love of God” operates powerfully yet effortlessly. And we find this love, with its amazing qualities, overflowing within and through us -- the overflows permeating our interactions with others. For Gandhi, King, and so many others, the means to arriving at this love is surrendering to and deepening within their spiritual traditions / religions to be transformed into a being that allows Absolute Love to operate within and through them.

But how should we proceed if we have not yet reached this depth of surrender and transformation? King’s continuing description of *agape* offers some guidance:

Agape is disinterested love. It is a love in which the individual seeks not his own good, but the good of his neighbor (1 Corinthians 10:24).⁹⁸

Or dare I say, seek the good of others since “*Agape* means understanding, redeeming good will for all men.”⁹⁹ One of the greatest barriers to being a vessel of *agape* is self-interest -- which often manifests as selfishness. Self-interest can sometimes play an useful role (that hopefully diminishes) in *eros* and *philia*. But with *agape*, we must restrain the self and allow it to be dissolved by “the love of God operating” through us. Thus, “*Agape* does not begin by discriminating between worthy and unworthy people, or any qualities people possess.”¹⁰⁰ If we are honest, we will see that most, if not all, such qualities and distinctions are made by the self and deemed favorable or unfavorable by one’s self-interest. We also will find that such distinctions are usually accompanied by expectations. And for most people, when our expectations are not met, we put the brakes on “love” (loving actions). King instead challenges us to turn away from a self-centered approach to love to a God-centered approach:

⁹⁸ King, *Testament*, p. 19.

⁹⁹ King, *Testament*, p. 19.

¹⁰⁰ King, *Testament*, p. 19.

When we love on the *agape* level we love men not because we like them, not because their attitudes and ways appeal to us, but because God loves them. Here we rise to the position of loving the person who does the evil deed while hating the deed he does.¹⁰¹

One practical way of doing this is having the (genuine) needs of others -- and eventually the needs of humanity and all of creation -- be the basis by which we engage in acts of love. King adds: “Another basic point about *agape* is that it springs from the *need* of the other person -- his need for belonging to the best in the human family.”¹⁰² When the needs of others become the impetus of our actions, we safeguard ourselves from having our own self-centeredness and self-interests be such. And what defines needs: spiritual teachings clearly give guidance to what are truly needs and what are “needs” clothed as desires. Our realization of genuine need evolves as we spiritually mature. For example, sometimes hardship is a “need” when humans neglect to fulfill their duties and opportunities to grow when circumstances are more pleasant. But even in the elementary stages, we can see that genuine need moves in the direction of collective benefit -- that which truly benefits all

¹⁰¹ King, *Testament*, p. 8 - 9, from the article *Nonviolence and Racial Justice*, 1957.

¹⁰² King, *Testament*, p. 19.

without the expense of anyone. And if any costs are involved, these are beared equally. To this end, King often discusses *agape* in the context of community: a “beloved community.”

One of the major pillars of King’s approach to community is the interrelatedness of all life. He states:

In the final analysis, *agape* means a recognition of the fact that all life is interrelated. All humanity is involved in a single process, and all men are brothers. To the degree that I harm my brother, no matter what he is doing to me, to that extent I am harming myself.¹⁰³

When a person truly comes to realize this, beyond mental concepts, it shifts the whole paradigm of how one engages others -- and eventually, all of creation. In many respects, this is the essence of community: that what I do to others I am actually doing to myself. And I will bear -- sometimes instantly, sometimes later -- the beneficial or destructive consequences of all my actions in a way so intimate that the actions of others usually cannot affect. This is why King and others sought community even in the presence of those who were clearly committing actions that impeded and destroyed community. Such seeking of community eventually reveals a community within that not even the opponents of

¹⁰³ King, *Testament*, p. 20.

community can harm. This is also why most “communities” that harm others steadily decay toward self-destruction -- even if they hide the increasing abuse and harm happening within such “communities,” within the individuals themselves. To this end, King saw the need to take determined, bold action in quest of community through acts of love:

Agape is not a weak, passive love. It is love in action. *Agape* is love seeking to preserve and create community. It is insistence on community even when one [another person] seeks to break it. *Agape* is a willingness to go to any length to restore community.¹⁰⁴

To be clear, any length does not mean going against one’s morals and virtues, rather applying these to their fullest (some say most infinite) measure. For example, with the virtue of being forgiving toward others, the *agape* approach embraces “a willingness to forgive, not seven times, but seventy times seven to restore community.”¹⁰⁵ This is a direct reference to what Jesus said (Matthew 18:22). In a practical sense, this:

¹⁰⁴ King, *Testament*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁵ King, *Testament*, p. 20.

begins by loving others [serving others' needs] *for their sakes*. It is an entirely “neighbor-regarding concern for others,” which discovers the neighbor in every man it meets. Therefore, *agape* makes no distinction between friends and enemy; it is directed towards both.¹⁰⁶

When we engage every single person in the context of creating and sustaining a beloved (beneficent) community, we are in the midst of *agape* -- of God's love operating through us. But until we get there, we can at least act in accord with this: not as a phony facade, but literally engaging acts of *agape* that are in line with community, and restraining from acts that are counter to this. King and Gandhi took this approach even when engaging opponents to love and community, and even toward the whole of creation:

He who works against community is working against the whole of creation. Therefore, if I respond to hate with a reciprocal hate I do nothing but intensify the cleavage in broken community. I

¹⁰⁶ King, *Testament*, p. 19.

can only close the gap in broken community by meeting hate with love.¹⁰⁷



¹⁰⁷ King, *Testament*, p. 20.

THE UNIVERSE IS ON THE SIDE OF JUSTICE

King then closes the article with a simple yet poignant point:

A sixth basic fact about nonviolent resistance is that it is based on the conviction that the universe is on the side of justice. Consequently, the believer in nonviolence has deep faith in the future.¹⁰⁸

This is not a blind faith. It is based on much of what has already been explored in the preceding pages: practical spiritual components, lessons, and practices that, when applied, yield forth fruits of the law of love and Truth. Gandhi shares this sentiment, as reflected in the following quotes:

Victory will be ours in the end, if we non-co-operate with the mind in its evil wanderings.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ King, *Testament*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁹ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 44, excerpt from *From Yeravda Mandir*, 1932, Chapter III: Brahmacharya Or Chastity.

every problem lends itself to solution if we are determined to make the law of truth and non-violence the law of life.¹¹⁰

The law of love will work, just as the law of gravitation will work, whether we accept it or not. Just as a scientist will work wonders out of various applications of the law of nature, even so a man who applies the law of love with scientific precision can work greater wonders. For the force of non-violence is infinitely more wonderful and subtle than the material forces of nature, like, for instance, electricity. The men who discovered for us the law of love were greater scientists than any of our modern scientists. Only our explorations have not gone far enough and so it is not possible for every one to see all its working.¹¹¹

Getting a sense of the marvelous workings of the spiritual laws of love (*ahimsa*), Truth (*satya*), and being guided by the Absolute (*brahmacarya*), establishes and then deepens our faith in the

¹¹⁰ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 384, excerpt from *The Nation's Voice*, 1947, p. 109 - 110, Part II.

¹¹¹ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 384, excerpt from *The Nation's Voice*, 1947, p. 109 - 110, Part II.

unfailing efficacy of *Satyagraha* and Nonviolence. With this faith, we open to realize:

that in [our] struggle for justice [we have] cosmic companionship. ... Whether we call it an unconscious process, an impersonal Brahman, or a Personal Being [God] of matchless power and infinite love, there is a creative force in this universe that works to bring the disconnected aspects of reality into a harmonious whole.¹¹²

May we remember this explicit encouragement to engage the particulars of our struggle against oppression and injustice as part of a larger purpose of working toward and realizing that harmonious whole. And do so in the nature of the title of King's article: *An Experiment in Love*. This is a direct reference to Gandhi describing his *Satyagraha* work as an ongoing experiment. In fact, he subtitled his autobiography *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* in which he explains:

Far be it from me to claim any degree of perfection for these experiments. I claim for them nothing more than does a scientist who, though he conducts his experiments with the utmost accuracy, forethought and minuteness, never claims any

¹¹² King, *Testament*, p. 20.

finality about his conclusions, but keeps an open mind regarding them. I have gone through deep self-introspection, searched myself through and through, and examined and analysed every psychological situation. Yet I am far from claiming any finality or infallibility about my conclusions.¹¹³

May we examine our present efforts in the context of the history of this work, including its ancient spiritual roots. May we proceed within the established spiritual pillars and principles, wisely applying what has proven to work and carefully adjusting to changing and new dynamics that call for innovative experimentation. May we proceed with “utmost accuracy, forethought and minuteness,” combined with “deep self-introspection.” And may we contribute to the expanding realization of this spiritual science we call *Satyagraha* and Nonviolence: not only addressing our situations but blossoming into the manifestation of a beloved community through our own individual growth and transformation.



¹¹³ Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, p. xxvii.

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