*Indian Freedom Struggle – Qualities (2.5)*

*Humanities 9 – Social Movements*

**Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., on Gandhi’s Influence**

**“His Influence Speaks To World Conscience”** January 1958

Martin Luther King, Jr.

New DeIhi, India

*This tribute, marking the tenth anniversary of the assassination of Mohandas Gandhi, appeared jointly in the Hindustan Times and Peace News.’ Martin Luther King, Jr. reveals Gandhi’s exceptional influence on his thinking about social change. King recalled, “when I was in theological school, I thought the only way we could solve our problem of segregation was an armed revolt” but later changed his mind after he studied Mahatma Gandhi.*

Mahatma Gandhi has done more than any other person of history to reveal that social problems can be solved without resorting to methods of violence. In this sense he is more than a saint of India. Gandhi belongs to the ages. In our struggle against racial segregation in Montgomery, Alabama, I came to see at a very early stage that Gandhi’s method of non-violence and the ethic of love is the best weapon available to for the struggle for freedom and human dignity. It may be that Gandhi’s approach will bring about a solution to the race problem in America. His spirit is a continual reminder to oppressed people that it is possible to resist evil and not resort to violence.

Gandhi’s influence still speaks to people throughout the world as nations struggle with international problems. If we fail to follow the Gandhian principle of non-violence, we may end up by destroying ourselves through the misuse of our own instruments. The choice is no longer between violence and non-violence. It is now either non-violence or non-existence.

Oppressed people can deal with oppression in three ways. They can accept willingly. Under segregation they can adjust to it. Yet not cooperating with evil is a moral obligation just like one is obligated to cooperate with good. The minute one accepts segregation, one cooperates with it. Oppressed people can also resort to physical violence. Violence is a method that nations and oppressed peoples have used. But violence brings about only a temporary victory and not permanent peace. It creates ever new problems. Gandhi has come on the scene of history with still another way. He would resist evil as much as a person who uses violence, but he resists it without physical violence or violence of the spirit. That is what Gandhism does. It is a method of the strong. If the only alternative is between cowardice and violence, it is better, as Gandhi said, to use violence, but there is another way.

I myself gained this insight from Gandhi. When I was in theological school, I thought the only way we could solve our problem of segregation was an armed revolt. I felt that the ethic of love was for individual relationships. I could not see how it could work in social conflict. Then I read Gandhi’s ethic of love as revealed in Jesus but raised to a social strategy for social change. This lifts love from individual relationships to the place of social change. This Gandhi helped us to understand and for this we are grateful a decade after his death.

*[Newspaper editor’s note:] A Baptist clergyman in Montgomery, Alabama, Dr. King has been called “the American Gandhi” for his leadership of the Montgomery Improvement Association in its successful campaign against bus segregation using non-violent methods.*

*Indian Freedom Struggle – Qualities (2.5–10th )*

*Humanities 9 – Social Movements*

**“My Pilgrimage to Nonviolence”**

Martin Luther King, Jr.

1 September 1958, New York, N.Y.

*PD. Hindustan Times*, 30 January 1958. The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

*This shortened version of chapter six from King’s book,* Stride Toward Freedom *appeared in the September issue of Fellowship. In the chapter, King traces his commitment to nonviolence. He stated, “Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale.” King also declares his conviction that nonviolent resistance is “one of the most potent weapons available to oppressed people in their quest for social justice.*

Often the question has arisen concerning my own intellectual pilgrimage to

nonviolence. In order to get at this question it is necessary to go back...

...One Sunday afternoon I traveled to Philadelphia to hear a sermon by Dr. Mordecai Johnson, president of Howard University. Dr. Johnson had just returned from a trip to India, and, to my great interest, he spoke of the life and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. His message was so [intense] and electrifying that I left the meeting and bought half a dozen books on Gandhi’s life and works.

Like most people, I had heard of Gandhi, but I had never studied him seriously. As I read I became deeply fascinated by his campaigns of nonviolent resistance. I was particularly moved by the Salt March to the Sea and his numerous fasts. The whole concept of “Satyagraha” was significant to me. [*Satyu* is truth which equals love, and *agraha* means force. “Satyagraha,” therefore, means truth-force or love force.] As I [studied] the philosophy of Gandhi my [doubts about] the power of love gradually diminished. I came to see for the first time the [power] of social reform. Prior to reading Gandhi, I had concluded that the ethics of Jesus were only effective in individual relationship. The “turn the other cheek” philosophy and the “love your enemies” philosophy were only valid when individuals were in conflict with other individuals. When racial groups and nations were in conflict a more realistic approach seemed necessary. But after reading Gandhi, I saw how utterly mistaken I was.

Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above just interacting between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale. Love, for Gandhi, was a potent instrument for social and collective transformation, [or change]. It was in this Gandhian emphasis on love and nonviolence that I discovered the method for social reform that I had been seeking for so many months. …I found [intellectual and moral fulfillment] in the Gandhi’s non-violent resistance. I came to feel that this was the only morally and practically method for oppressed people in their struggle for freedom.

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