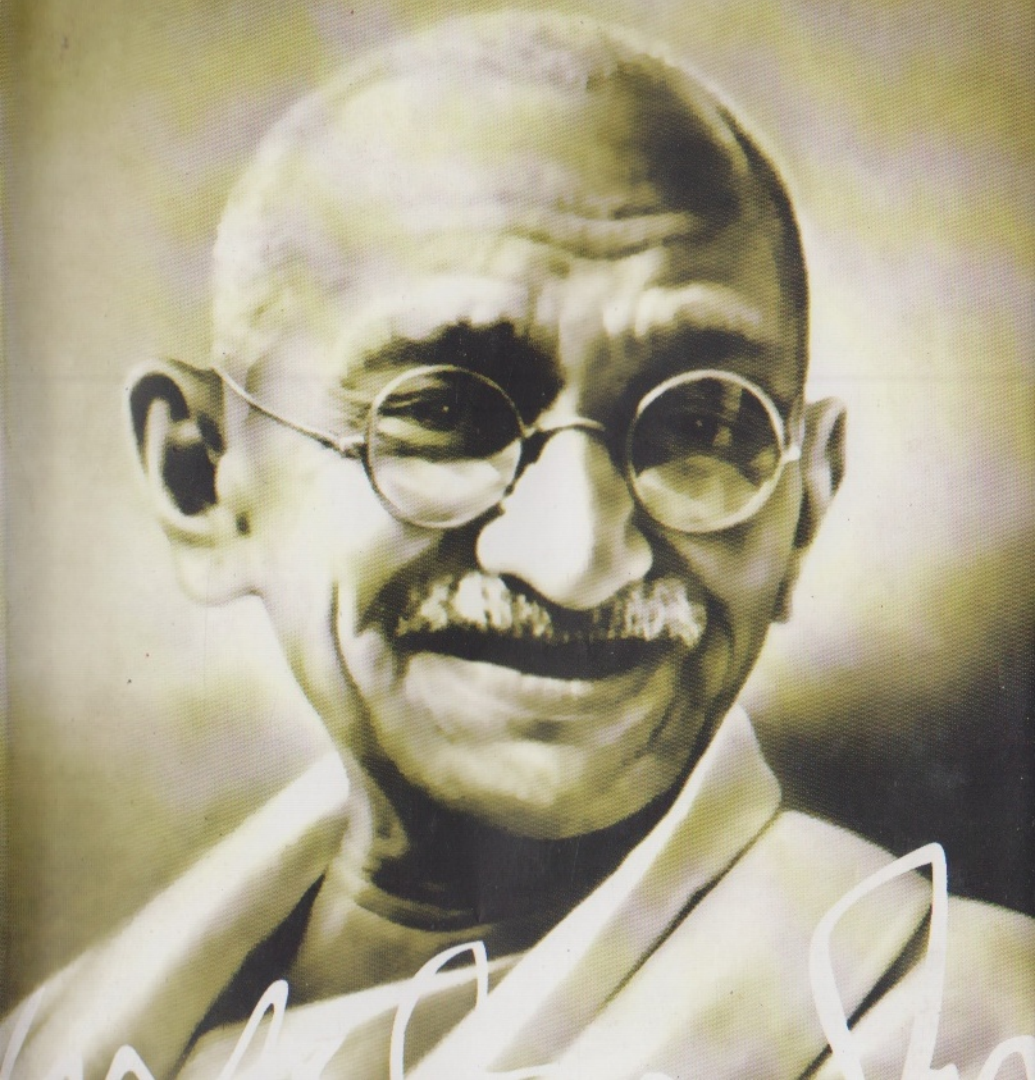


MAHATMA
GANDHI
ON RELIGION

Dr. Fr. Hemanto Pius Rozario CSC





Mahatma Gandhi is a name that will live throughout the ages. His says that "there is enough in the world for everyone's needs but not enough for everyone's greed's" will continue to inspire people to be helpful and generous to the poor. For those who know only a few characteristics of Gandhi this book will be a revelation of the richness of his thought. He expounds the idea of a global theology long before the term was coined. But not in the sense of the same theology for all. He wants all to keep their own faith but to have a tolerance for the faith of others, striving for the truth in peaceful ways.

Fr. R W Timm, CSC

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INTRODUCTION

Religion is as old as human history. It plays an important role in human life. It is through religion that humanity ponders its origin, looks to the promise of its future and lives in the present the convergence of the two. Religion makes human life meaningful and purposeful. In the history of humankind, many great persons who believed in God have lived meaningful lives. Their lives have been living examples to others, influencing others to themselves become truly religious.

In respect to the great persons of this century, Gandhi, as a political and spiritual leader, and also as a philosopher, may quickly come to mind. Considered as one of the greatest men of our time, Gandhi's teachings and *darshana* on religion can enlighten and give guidance to humanity as it faces and responds to the challenges of the next millennium.

There are many great philosophers and thinkers whose ideas have impacted humanity. However, unlike many of them, Gandhi did not think for the sake of thinking nor philosophize for philosophy's sake. What he thought as truth was incarnated in his life. His very life became his message.

Gandhi considered himself a "seeker of Truth". He was Hindu by birth and his life was deeply influenced by the teachings of his own religion. However, he never considered Hinduism as superior to other religions. He truly respected all religions. He deeply believed that the Essence of all religions leads to Truth. Moreover, he studied other religious scriptures, in order to find Truth in them. Consequently, dealing with people of other faiths was not problematic to him.

Gandhi was not a founder of any religion. When his religious *darshana* is analyzed, it is evident that he did not develop any new concepts of religion, dogma or doctrine. His

religious *darshana* was not to satisfy the human intellect, but rather, to satisfy the human heart. What he thought and said were thought and said long before him by the great religious founders: Lord Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, and those of his own Hindu religious tradition. All of these great founders of religions and traditions, with their teachings and life witness, showed humankind how to attain the Ultimate Truth. What is so unique in Gandhi's *darshana* is that, where the whole world tends to materialize these founders' religious teachings and values, Gandhi tries to spiritualize their religious teachings and values. Gandhi, by his life witness, reveals to others how to practice religion. Many things have been said about religion, its teachings and its values, but Gandhi showed how to put them into practice. This is Gandhi's unique contribution to religion.

Gandhi was not born a religious, spiritual person. However, all through his life he honestly tried to become one. Most people would say he succeeded in this endeavor. His family members, especially his parents, planted the seed of religion in his heart.

While being educated in the West, he came into direct contact with Christianity. In his search for Truth, he studied the religious scriptures of other faiths. He gathered Truth from them. This searching broadened his mind and deepened his respect for other religions. It enabled him to be deeply influenced by the person of Christ, as well as by Mohammed and Buddha, all for whom he held great respect. Ruskin and the Russian novelist, Leo the Tolstoy, also permanently enriched Gandhi's life. Their writings influenced him in acknowledging the dignity of every person and giving them due respect.

God and the human person were the central themes of Gandhi's *darshana*. Gandhi's articulation of God as Truth and Unchangeable Reality was greatly influenced by the Indian concept of God. He also saw the individual soul as one with God. Thus, for Gandhi, the aim or purpose of human life was to fulfill man's/woman's being one with God. Though religions were seen as the only means to reach God, to fulfill one's life, changing one's religion was not necessary. God was truly one and the same, even though different religions gave God different

names. Inner conversion of heart and self-purification were thus enough to unite one with God.

Gandhi was a man of principle. His whole life was a practice of spiritual and moral values. Truth was the central principle of his life. For him Truth meant God. *Ahimsa* or non-violence is the means to attain Truth. The end and its means were inseparable for Gandhi. Thus, Truth and non-violence were inseparable.

In practicing nonviolence in the attainment of Truth, Gandhi lived the three principles of *Brahmacharya* (Movement Toward Brahman), *Aporigraha* (non-possession) and *Asteyagraha* (Non-stealing); the three disciplines related to the practice of nonviolence. Truths, nonviolence, as well as, these three principles, were known to Gandhi as important Jain principles. He practiced them in his own life and invited others to practice them so as to be seekers of God.

Gandhi deeply believed that God was the cause and master of everything that exists. If God was one and creator, then all human beings are brothers, sisters by origin. We are brothers regardless of our religious affiliation. Once we can go beyond our own religious affiliation, we can experience the universal brotherhood under the Fatherhood of God. This is the vision that Gandhi had in mind regarding religion and its practice. He worked tirelessly until death to bring this universal brotherhood to fruition. Was he successful? This is not the question here. His life witness clearly reveals his trust in God and his sincerity in promoting brotherhood. His life is an example and an invitation to all men to live as brothers in order to be truly religious.

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CHAPTER ONE

GANDHI THE MAN

Early days

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on the 2nd of October 1869 in Porbandar, a small town of the western coast of India. He was the youngest of four children. There are four castes among the Hindus: Brahmin or priestly caste, Khatriya or warrior caste, Vaishya or commercial caste and Sudra or domestic caste. Gandhi's family belonged to "Vaishya-Caste", since they were originally grocers. The family's religion was Vaishnava.

For three generations, beginning with Gandhi's grandfather, family members had been Prime Ministers in several Kathiawad States. Gandhi's father, Karamchand Gandhi, was a principled, religious man; who knew the whole Gita by heart. It is said that the Thakore of Rajkot, after a long period of service, once asked him to take a piece of land, urging him to take as much as he desired. Thinking that this had the appearance of bribery, he rejected the offer. He lived a simple life; money having no fascination for him. He was a fearless man in speaking the truth. Gandhi was very much influenced by his father and the principles he lived. About his father Gandhi later wrote:

My father was a lover of his clan, truthful, brave and generous, but short-tempered. To a certain extent he might have been given to carnal pleasures. For he married for the fourth time when he was over forty. But he was incorruptible and earned a name for strict impartiality in his family as well as outside.⁶

Respect and duty toward parents were great virtues in Gandhi's life. When his father was on his deathbed it was Gandhi and his uncle who served him day and night. Gandhi desired that his

⁶ Autobiography, P. 3-4

father would die in his arms, but this desire was not to be fulfilled. He writes of the incident, thus:

So all was over! I had but to wring my hands. I felt deeply ashamed and miserable. I ran to my father's room. I saw that, if animal passion had not blinded me, I should have been spared the torture of separation from my father during his last moments. I should have been massaging him, and he would have died in my arms.⁷

Gandhi's mother, Putlibai, was the second wife of his father and very young when they married. She was very clear-sighted, intelligent and politically influential because of her friendship with the court ladies. Being a very religious woman, she attended temple service every day and never ate without prayer. Fasting was one of her great religious practices. She could fast for seven days at a time. She believed in a disciplined life, and at the same time, she had a great tenderness and sympathy for her children and the poor alike. About his mother he wrote:

The outstanding impression my mother has left on my memory is that of saintliness. She was deeply religious. She would not think of taking her meals without her daily prayers... She would take the hardest vows and keep them without flinching. Illness was no excuse for relaxing them.⁸

In the later part of Gandhi's life it was very clear that the truthfulness of his father and the saintliness of his mother had left great impressions on his life and mission.

Education and Religious Formation

Gandhi went to an elementary school in Porbander. He found it difficult to master the multiplication tables, as his intellect was sluggish and memory raw. When he was seven years old, his family moved to Rajkot where his father became *dewan*. There he attended primary school and later high school. He was a mediocre student, but very punctual. He was excessively shy and timid.

⁷ Autobiography, p. 30

⁸ Krishna Kripalani, (ed.), *All Men are Brothers, World without War* Publications, USA, 1958, p. 5

It was during his school days that two important events took place in his life. The first event was his early marriage and the second was his religious and moral crisis.

Early Marriage

Child marriage was a common practice in Indian Hindu tradition. In Kathiaward there are two kinds of rites regarding marriage; these are the betrothal and marriage rites. In the betrothal rite a preliminary promise is made between the boy and girl's parents joining them in a marriage that is not inviolable. Often boys and girls are not even informed that this rite has taken place. Gandhi was betrothed three times without his knowledge. He was told that two of the girls chosen for him had subsequently died. The third girl was betrothed to him when he was but seven years old.

Gandhi married Kasturbai while they were both thirteen. They married at this early age without understanding the real meaning of marriage. Gandhi wrote about his early marriage,

I do not think it (marriage) meant anything more than the prospect of good clothes to wear, drum beating, marriage procession, rich dinners and a strange girl to play with. The carnal desire came later.⁹

Marriage in the Hindu tradition is not a simple matter. The parents of both parties prepare for months, spending large sums of money. Gandhi, his second brother and one of his cousins were married on the same day. Gandhi describes the very first night after the marriage,

And oh! That first night. Two innocent children all unwittingly hurled themselves into the ocean of life.¹⁰

It is only after marriage that the couple begins to know each other and to speak freely to each other. However, getting acquainted is often delayed due to another custom in the Hindu tradition regarding marriage. Often parents do not allow the young couple to stay together for any length of time. More than

⁹ Autobiography, p.8

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 11

fifty percent of child-wives are required to stay in the house of the respective father. This was true of Kasturbai. During the first five years of Gandhi and Kasturbai's marriage they hardly spent six months together. Kasturbai was illiterate at the time, and Gandhi was anxious to teach her, but he confessed, "lustful love left no time"¹¹. Gandhi described her nature in these words,

By nature she was simple, independent, persevering and with me at least, reticent. She was not impatient of her ignorance and I do not recollect my studies having ever spurred her to go in for a similar adventure.¹²

Mrs. Gandhi was a good and heroic wife. During the troubled period she also suffered with her husband. Although she was unable to go to jail to suffer with him, she prayed, fasted and wept until her health broke due to the strain. Truly, she was a loyal Indian wife. Gandhi loved her very much.

His Religious and Moral Crisis

It was during his school days that Gandhi experienced a religious and moral crisis; he lost his faith in traditional Hindu religion. For some time he practically became an atheist. External religion of temple-worship became meaningless to him. He wrote,

Being born in the Vaishnava faith, I had often to go to the *Haveli*. But it never appealed to me. I did not like its glitter and pomp. Also I heard rumors of immortality being practiced there, and lost all interest in it. Hence I could gain nothing from the Haveli¹³.

Up to this time in his life Gandhi had worshipped the gods because he had been told to do so. Now he started to question how a stone, wood or metal image could be a god. Possessing a strong, natural, analytical mind he began to ask the "why" of everything. This doubting and questioning attitude brought him into conflict with the religious teachings of his mother.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 13

¹² Ibid, p.12

¹³ Ibid, p.31

His company and friends were a bad influence on him. His wife, mother and elder brother warned him about them. Gandhi was born and bred in a tradition where eating meat was not the practice. His company convinced him, however, to eat meat. They justified this practice by saying that the English ruled over India because they were stronger. They were stronger because they ate meat. To eat meat would be to deceive his parents. If they ever learned of his eating meat they would be shocked. Though he did not want to deceive them or shock them, he fell into temptation. For about one year he ate goat meat. Of this he wrote,

I wished to be strong and daring and wanted my countrymen also to be such, so that we might defeat the English and make India free¹⁴.

The same company led him to be unfaithful to his wife. He also became fond of smoking and even stole money from others to pay for this habit. There was a time when he even contemplated committing suicide.

While behaving in this manner his conscience left him no peace. Finally he recognized that only God could protect him from himself. Desiring peace in his heart, he came to the decision not to deceive his parents any longer; he asked his father's forgiveness. He not only asked forgiveness but also asked for an adequate punishment, promising never to fall into such behavior again. Through this confession Gandhi experienced his father's love and forgiveness:

I thought that he would be angry, say hard things, and strike his forehead. He was so wonderfully peaceful, and I believe this was due to my clean confession. A clean confession, combined with a promise never to commit the sin again, when offered before one who has the right to receive it, is the purest type of repentance. I know that my confession made my father feel absolutely safe about me, and increased his affection for me beyond measure¹⁵.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 21

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 28

Gandhi's formal education between the ages of six and sixteen did not teach him anything about religion. What he did learn was from his family, not from going to school. From the family nurse Rambha, Gandhi learned the power and efficaciousness of the *Ramanama*, the name of *Rama*. The religious conversations of his father and the many Jain monks, Muslim and Parsi friends who came to his house were instrumental in creating an atmosphere wherein Gandhi's spirit of tolerance, dialogue and interaction with other religions could grow.

Some Christians' activities left a negative impression on Gandhi. He came to know of Hindus baptized by the missionaries who were abusing their traditional religion and who had started eating beef and drinking liquor. This created a dislike in Gandhi for Christianity. Gandhi wrote,

Surely, thought I, a religion that compelled one to eat beef, drink liquor, and change one's own clothes did not deserve the name. I also heard that the new convert had already begun abusing the religion of his ancestors, their customs and their country. All these things created in me a dislike for Christianity¹⁶.

During this crisis his intellectual freedom was not hindered. He was a skeptic, asking the "why" of everything. He still searched for meaning. Temple worship appeared childish and demoralizing to him; he could sense that there was surely a better way to worship. He pondered and argued in the dark until slowly the light came. Even though he was experiencing a crisis, convictions were being rooted deeply in his life. He wrote,

But one thing took deep root in me – the conviction that morality is the basis of things, and the truth is the substance of all morality. Truth became my sole objective. It began to grow in magnitude every day, and my definition of it also has been widening¹⁷.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 34

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 34

Religious Experience in England

After matriculation from high school, Gandhi was admitted to *Samaldas* College in *Bhavnagar*. He found studies difficult and the atmosphere uncongenial. For these reasons he returned home at the end of the first semester. In 1885 his father died. A family friend suggested sending young Gandhi to England for three years to become a barrister. He then could return home to take his father's place in state service. Gandhi liked the idea very much, but his mother objected. Gandhi overcame his mother's objection by making a solemn vow not to touch wine, women and meat.

When Gandhi went to take the boat for England, the people of his caste in Bombay threatened to excommunicate him from the caste, for they looked upon crossing the ocean as contamination. But he was determined. Even though he was formally excommunicated by his caste, on September 4, 1888, Gandhi sailed for England. He was eighteen years old and the father of a newly-born first son.

He found it difficult to adjust to London in the beginning. Homesickness and dietary problems plagued him. Gandhi described his first days in London:

I would continually think of my home and country. Everything was strange – the people, their ways and even their dwellings. I was a complete novice in the matter of English etiquette, and continually had to be on my guard. There was the additional inconvenience of the vegetarian vow. Even the dishes that I could eat were tasteless and insipid.¹⁸

Immediately on his arrival in London Gandhi realized his costume and skin color drew the attention of people. He felt that he was a marked man. Dr. Mehta, an Indian, became a good friend of Gandhi. Dr. Mehta carefully instructed Gandhi in the way he should live in England. Even though Gandhi constantly remembered the vows he had made to his mother, the advice of Dr. Mehta often made him forget those very vows.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 44 - 45

Motivated by wrong ideals, he wasted money trying to become the perfect English gentleman during the first three months in England. He had new clothes made, bought a silk hat, costing nineteen shillings, spent ten pounds on an evening suit made in Bond Street, and flaunted a double gold watch-chain. He took lessons in French and learned ballroom dancing. He soon realized, however, that it was by the virtue of character that one becomes a gentleman, not by external appearances.

This realization motivated him to live simply and to cease wasting money and time on the pursuit of false ideals and foolish dreams. He returned to being a vegetarian, not just to fulfill the vow he had made to his mother, but because he chose to follow a vegetarian diet. He read books on vegetarianism and diets and delighted in seeing that even modern science confirmed the practice of his forefathers. He even formed and was secretary of a vegetarian club that became instrumental in converting meat eaters to vegetarianism. Spreading vegetarianism became a part of his mission in the world.

Found Hidden Treasures in Religions

While studying in England, Gandhi came to know two theosophist brothers who introduced him to Sir Edwin Arnold's English translation of the verses of the *Gita*. Reading the *Gita* for the first time, he was deeply impressed. He described his experience:

The book struck me as one of priceless worth. This opinion of the *Gita* has ever since been growing on me, with the result that I regard it today as the supreme book for the knowledge of Truth. It has afforded me invaluable help in my moments of gloom.¹⁹

Around this same time, one of his Christian friends, whom he met in a vegetarian boarding house, gave him a Bible. He found difficulty in reading the Old Testament, which put him to sleep, but he loved the New Testament, especially the Sermon on the Mount. He also read the life of Buddha *The Light of Asia*. He

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 67

learned of Muhammed's greatness, bravery and austere living by reading a chapter on the Hero as Prophet of Islam. He also read books on atheism. After reading these books on different religions Gandhi wrote,

My young mind tried to unify the teaching of the *Gita*, The Light of Asia and the Sermon on the Mount. That renunciation was the highest form of religion appealed to me greatly²⁰

Gandhi's respect for other religions and his desire to see value in different religions were nurture throughout this stage of his life.

Gandhi's three years of legal studies in England passed quickly. He passed his examination with credit, but without distinction. Called to the Bar on June 10, 1891, he sailed for India two days later.

These formative years marked his later life. His vegetarianism, free-thinking and encounters with Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism influenced his evolving philosophy.

Religious Experience in South Africa

Reaching Bombay in September 1891, Gandhi was shocked to learn that his mother had died in his absence. He was received back into his community with ceremonial, purification baths in Gujarat's sacred rivers.

After spending sometime in Rajkot, he decided to set up legal practice in Bombay. Bombay could offer him a venue for gaining High Court experience and for studying Indian law. But when he rose to argue in the court, his nerve failed him and he could not utter a word. As he failed to establish himself in Bombay, he returned to Rajkot to begin again. Here too his legal practice was a disaster.

Fortunately for Gandhi, the firm of Dada Abdulla & Company, made up of Porbandar Muslims, offered to send him to South Africa on their behalf to instruct their counsel in a

²⁰ Ibid, p. 69

lawsuit. Gandhi jumped at the offer and sailed for South Africa in April of 1893.

Gandhi's experiences in South Africa created a new chapter in his life. In South Africa every experience would help him to bring out his hidden moral resources. His misfortunes would be turned into creative spiritual experiences.

A shy, inexperienced twenty-four year old youth arrived at Natal Port in Durban. Soon after his arrival he witnessed that Indians were not afforded their proper dignity and respect. Indentured and freed laborers, the largest Indian group in number, came to Natal with an agreement to serve for five years; other Indians came as merchants and clerks. Englishmen called them 'coolies'. Gandhi himself was called 'coolie barrister'. The merchants were called 'coolie merchants'.²¹

One of the worst experiences Gandhi had was when he went to the capital of Transvaal, Pretoria, to work on a lawsuit. He boarded the train and seated himself in a first class compartment, where his first class ticket entitled him. A white man later entered the compartment, looked at him, the brown intruder, and then left to bring a railway official who ordered Gandhi to go to the third class compartment. Gandhi refused to go as he had a first class ticket. A policeman then arrived who threw Gandhi and his suitcases from the train onto the station platform.

Though Gandhi could have taken a seat in the third class compartment as instructed and continued on his journey, he chose to remain in the station waiting room. This was a pivotal experience in Gandhi's life. Gandhi reflected on his experience:

I began to think of my duty. Should I fight for my rights or go back to India, or should I go on to Pretoria without minding the insult, and return to India finishing the case? It would be cowardice to run back to India without fulfilling my obligation. The hardship to which I was subjected was superficial only a symptom of the deep disease of colour

²¹ Ibid, p. 107

prejudice. I should try, if possible, to root out the disease and suffer hardships in the process.²²

To accomplish this great work Gandhi began to organize the Indians to fight for their dignity and rights. He asked them to be truthful even in business and to forget distinction of religion and caste. He formed an association to look after the welfare of the Indians and offered his free time and service.

Tried to live as an English barrister, he now chose to live a simple lifestyle Gandhi underwent a big change in his personal life in South Africa. It was in South Africa that his desire to live a simple life matured. Where previously he had. He washed his own cloths and cut his own hair. Despite his busy schedule he gave two hours a day of free service in a charitable hospital. He thought deeply of the kind of life that he should live to give service to humankind. He felt the need of making a *brahmacharya* vow in order to free himself for service. The principles of Ahimsa and Satyagraha became firmly rooted in his life. Putting his faith in God, he applied the doctrine of *Bhagavad Gita* on 'non-possession' in his own life.

Gandhi was deeply influenced by Ruskin's 'Unto This Last', where the moral dignity of manual labor and the beauty of community living were the basis of equality.²³ To practice this type of life Gandhi bought a farm and founded the famous Phoenix colony. When duty called him to Johannesburg and he could no long stay with the Phoenix colony, he founded another one he named the Tolstoy Farm in Johannesburg. Both of these Ashrams were founded with spiritual ideals and extreme simplicity of life was observed. Gandhi read Tolstoy and Thoreau and was impressed by their writings. Gandhi became more and more convinced with his method of *Ahimsa* and *Satyagraha* to fight against injustices and color prejudices.

Gandhi went to South Africa in 1893 as a young inexperienced barrister and finally returned to India in 1915 an experienced man in his forties. For twenty years he gave service

²² Ibid, p. 112

²³ Mahatma Gandhi, His life in picture

to his countrymen who suffered extreme injustice and color prejudice in South Africa. All his South African experiences fuelled his future Mahatma-to-be.

Saint in Politics

People usually separate religion from politics. It is very rare to find persons who are deeply political and spiritual at the same time. But for Gandhi that was just how it was. His involvement with politics was precisely because of his religion. Since religion was central to his life, it followed that his political service for the common good of the people flowed from his spiritual values. He held that for one to consistently love and serve people, one's life had to be influenced by spiritual values. When Gandhi returned to India he had but one possession, an ambition to serve the people of his country.

He was well-known in South Africa, but he was a foreigner in his own country. He took about a year to study the country and he then opened a Satyagraha ashram in Ahmedabad in May 1915. About twenty-five men and women took the vows of truth, ahimsa, *Brahmacharya*, non-stealing and non-possession, dedicating themselves for the service of the people.²⁴ Then he started the Campaign for Satyagraha, during which he taught the people to fight for their rights. Gandhi worked tirelessly for this Campaign and within five years he became the leader of the Indian Nationalist Movement. In 1920 he became the master of the Indian Congress.

He led hundreds of people in nonviolent action to protest the British Salt Act. Under this law all people were required to buy salt only from the British government. Together with his followers, Gandhi walked two hundreds miles to the sea where they proceeded to make their own salt in protest of the Act.

British rule was insulted by Gandhi's independence movement of non-violence and non-cooperation. The government tried to curtail his movement by repeatedly jailing him. But this did not deter him for Gandhi was convinced that his struggle was

²⁴ Mahatma Gandhi, His life in pictures,

for the good of the nation. Moreover, prison was for Gandhi more of a luxury than a punishment. While in jail he could spend more time in prayer, study and spinning. Prayer and fasting were the sources of his spiritual strength.

Finally in 1947 independence was declared. Freedom came, but Gandhi's Motherland was divided into two, India and Pakistan. This division caused riots between Hindus and Muslims. Gandhi did not want bloodshed and separation in India because of religion. The riots, their displays of hatred and bloodshed, caused him great pain. He had worked so hard for unity, unity in spite of religious diversity. Gandhi started fasting unto death to stop the bloodshed and to convince people to live together in peace. On the sixth day of his fast Hindu and Muslim leaders agreed to stop the riots. Peace restored, Gandhi broke his fast. A fanatical Hindu assassinated Gandhi twelve days later. Not trustful of Gandhi's tolerance for all religions and creeds, the Hindu killed him while he was on his way to a prayer meeting.

Truly Gandhi was one of the greatest men of this century. The whole world grieved over his death. Prime Minister Nehru expressed his grief and the grief of the people via radio:

The light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere and I do not quite know what to tell you and how to say it. Our beloved leader, Bapu as we call him, the father of our nation, is no more... The light has gone out. I said, and yet I was wrong. For the light that shone in this country was no ordinary light. The light that has illumined this country for these many years will illumine this country for many more years, and a thousand years later that light will still be seen in this country, and the world will see it and it will give solace to innumerable hearts. For that light represented the living truth, and the eternal man was with us with his eternal truth reminding us of the right path, drawing us from error, taking this ancient country to freedom.²⁵

²⁵ Mahatma Gandhi, His Life in Pictures

Truly Gandhi believed in simple living and high thinking. While he had no desire for worldly power, position or wealth, he was able to command the respectful obedience of millions of people. He lived a saintly life through prayer, fasting and service of his people, especially the downtrodden. He raised his voice against the injustices done to people in the name of tradition, law and religion. For him God was Truth and nonviolence the means to attain the Truth. Love of Truth was his philosophy. Purity of heart, mind and body were his ornaments. Some Indians thought he was an incarnation of god Vishnu, others believed him to be a great holy man who was divinely inspired.²⁶ Gandhi introduced moral and spiritual values in politics and stressed that every politician should be religious. His love for India and its people were without measure. He was Hindu, yet he respected every religion. He dreamed of an India where everyone could live in peace and harmony with equal respect regardless of religion and caste. This was the man for whom Rabindranath Tagore, a great poet and the first Asian 'Nobel Prize' winner, gave the name *Mahatma*, "the Great Soul".²⁷ Truly, he was a great saint with a great soul.

²⁶ Madhu Bazaz Wangu, *Hinduism: World Religions, Facts On File*, N.Y. p.80-80

²⁷ *Hinduism: World Religions*, p. 80

CHAPTER TWO

RELIGIOUS CONCEPT OF GANDHI

Gandhi was a Hindu by birth. Thus his religious concept was deeply influenced by Hinduism and Hindu philosophy. Consequently, Gandhi has to be understood through the perspectives of Hinduism and Indian tradition.

Hinduism is one of the world's oldest religions; it ranks third largest among world religions. One person did not found this religion, but it was the result of the coming together of many religious beliefs and philosophical schools. Originally these beliefs and philosophical schools were not called Hindu, nor was there any religion called Hinduism. The name came into use when the Persians came to India. Attempting to label all non-Muslim people living beyond the Sindhu River, they named them Sindhu, but mistakenly mispronounced it Hindu.

In the Muslims' worldview all non-Islamic believers were seen as "the rest". For convenience sake in later centuries, all Muslims - Arabs, Turks, Afghans, and Mugha, used the term Hindu when referring to non-Muslims, or "the rest". Therefore, Hinduism was considered to be the religion of all non-Muslims. It is important to remember that all of those who were grouped together as "the rest" or Hindus were not homogeneous in their religion. The Hinduism we know today gradually developed as a particular religion among these Hindus or non-Muslims.¹

From the very beginning Hinduism has been understood as a polytheistic religion, because it's followers believe in many gods. Although Hindus believe in many gods, at the heart of the religion there is only one true "god"- Brahman. This Brahman is called the One, the World Soul, the Ultimate Reality, formless

¹ Wangu Madhu Bazaz, *Hinduism: World Religions, Facts On File*, N.Y., 1991, pp.6-7.

and everlasting. Hinduism also recognizes that many people need a personal god. People have a need to image the closeness of God in their lives and during their worship. The role of having many gods in Hinduism fills this need. Others also believe that many gods found in Hinduism really form part of Brahman.²

Hinduism is rooted in the Vedas; the oldest divine scriptures revealed by the creator-god Brahman to inspired sages. These sages were responsible for transmitting this gift to humankind. For many years teachers through oral tradition passed on the Vedas to students. During the Vedic period sacrifice became an important part of Hindu life and the Brahmins (priests) held a central place of power in the society.³

The Upanishads present the philosophical aspect of Hinduism. Upanishad means "sitting down near" *guru* (spiritual master); the one who passes the sacred teachings to his students.

The teachers or seers were philosophers who had a questioning attitude toward the world and human existence. They lived in the forest and spent their time in study, contemplation and in discussion of the puzzling questions of the universe. Young minds were attracted to these seers. Through the guru's teachings the youths could reach enlightenment.

All the gods of Vedic tradition are reduced to one, Brahman, in the Upanishads. The Upanishads focus on the concept of *atma* and Brahman. An individual soul is called *atma*. It is a separate part of Brahman or the Universal Soul. An individual soul is separated from the Universal Soul for only a time. It is united again with Brahman after achieving *moksha* or salvation.⁴

Hinduism believes in the incarnation of God in and through super-men who descended to humanity during the days of the darkest gloom. But it does not recognize the divine experience as

² Bahree Patricia, *The Hindu World*, Macdonald & Co., London, 1982, P. 8.

³ Wangu Madhu Bazaz, *Hinduism: World Religions, Facts On File*, N.Y., 1991, pp.20-21

⁴ [Wangu Madhu Bazaz, *Hinduism: World Religion, Facts On file*, N.Y. , 1991,] pp.33-37

exclusive to one single Messiah or Prophet. Truth is universal and it can be attained in diverse ways and by different seekers. God, the Ultimate Truth, reveals the truth to seers and teachers through meditation. They then communicate this truth to their disciples. Thus the foundation of Hinduism is universal and impersonal, because it was not man-made, but revealed by God Himself.

Bhagavad Gita, Mahabharata and Ramayana are also the holy books of Hinduism which influenced the philosophy of Hinduism for over two thousands years. It is important to note that Hinduism does not recognize the importance of one single writing, but several sacred books, which contribute to basic Hindu beliefs.⁵

Hinduism does not separate philosophy from religion as do some of the religions practiced in the West. In the Upanishads, religion and philosophy are blended. Moreover, for Hindus, religion is not just cultic ritual. Rather, it is a way, a means for the realization of God. A religion, therefore, is useless if it does not help a person realize the Ultimate.⁶

In the West, philosophy is a 'love of wisdom', but for Hindus it is much more. The Sanskrit word for philosophy is '*darshan*' which means 'seeing'. A philosopher is a person who has seen the Ultimate Reality. The aim of '*darshan*' is to find out the cause of the miseries of life, in much the same way religion does. It is a process to gain religious experience through knowledge. It is, therefore, blended with religion. Hindu philosophy seeks for the Ultimate Truth in order to escape from the miseries of existence.⁷

The Hindu religion is a religion of tolerance. The Truth sought in Hinduism is not exclusive to any particular person or religion. Since the realization of the Supreme Being is the goal of all religion, Hinduism does not denounce any other religion nor is it its practice to convert the followers of other faiths.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Basu Dr. Durga Das, *The Essence of Hinduism*, Bharat Sevashram Sangha, New Delhi, 1990, p. 3

⁷ [Basu Dr. Durga Das, *The Essence of Hinduism*, Bharat Sevashram Sangha, New Delhi, 1990,] p. 4-5

Buddhism and Jainism spring out of Hinduism. Buddha and Mahabir's actions could have been interpreted as revolts against Hinduism. Rather, they and their actions were never viewed as heretical. To the contrary, they were highly respected, for they were seekers of Truth.⁸ The teaching of Gita is very clear on the place of tolerance within Hinduism:

Whoever approaches me
In whatever manner
I accept him.
All paths men are struggling through
Lead unto Me." – The *Gita* (IV, 11).

Many might criticize the caste system of Hinduism. In its origin the caste system was not a class system. Its conceptualization was the division of labor whereby everyone could perform their respective duties in society. In Hinduism there was no favored race, no privileged persons or class. Gita teaches this in these words,

"Impartial and equal am I to all beings
None do I despise nor love more than any other."
-The *Gita* (IX, 29).

According to Hinduism, man is not a separate entity from the Universal Soul, but rather a part, separated only for some time due to ignorance. God is not the mere object of human worship and prayer, but the ideal and goal of every human being. God not only is near to humans, but he enters into each individual. For this reason Hinduism has no concept of hell. In Hinduism it is believed that every human person will attain salvation or 'muksha' through a process of rebirth and purification. This process will continue until the goal (Being One with God) is reached. Thus, no one need despair.⁹

A. Concept of God

As a follower of the Hindu religion, Gandhi believed in the One and Eternal God. His deep faith in God was the source of power,

⁸ The Essence of Hinduism, p. 5

⁹ The Essence of Hinduism, p. 13

strength and inspiration all through his life. His every action was motivated by this faith in God. His worship, prayer, fasting, and service to humanity were all expressions of his faith.

In Gandhi's philosophy 'experience' is a very important word. He came to the knowledge of God through personal experience. God is spiritual being; He is beyond our sense perception. God cannot be seen or perceived like an object or objects. Rather, God is a mysterious and unseen power, who, pervading everything, can be felt and experienced. Gandhi described the nature of God as follows:

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

For Gandhi, God is not an external entity. For His creatures God cannot be an object of proof, for God cannot be realized by human intellect. Human intellect is limited; it can lead one only to a certain extent. It is living faith and self-purification that ultimately lead one to the realization of God. For this reason Gandhi depended more on faith to prove the existence of God than intellectual reasoning. He believed that there are many eternal signs that point to the proof of God's existence, but one's self-existence is the best proof. Let Gandhi explain,

There are numerous phenomena from which you can reason out the existence of God, but I shall not insult your intelligence by offering you a rational explanation of that type. I would have you brush aside all rational explanations and begin with a simple child-like faith in God. If I exist, God exists. With me it is a necessity of my being, as it is with millions.¹¹

¹⁰ Rao Mohan U.S. (ed) The message of Mahatma Gandhi, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi, 1968, p. 1

Gandhi experienced life in the midst of death, light in the midst of darkness and truth in the midst of untruth. Looking at the world, Gandhi experienced everything as changing, dying. A power or spirit was behind this change, this dying. This power or spirit was itself changeless; it held everything together and was constantly creating and recreating. Gandhi called this power or spirit God. While God could not be defined or fully known, we could feel His power. To describe the nature of God Gandhi wrote,

To me God is Truth and Love; God is ethics and morality. God is fearlessness. God is the source of Light and Life and yet He is above and beyond all these. God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist... He transcends speech and reason... He is a personal God to those who need His personal presence. He is embodied in those who need His touch. He is the purest Essence. He simply is to those who have faith. He is all things to all men. He is in us and yet above and beyond us... He is patient but He is also terrible... With Him ignorance is no excuse. And with all He is ever forgiving for He always gives us the chance to repent. He is the greatest democrat the world knows, for He leaves us 'unfettered' to make our own choice between evil and good. He is the greatest tyrant ever known; for He often dashes the cup from our lips and under the cover of free will leaves us a margin so wholly inadequate as to provide only mirth for Himself... Therefore Hinduism calls it all His sport¹²

God as One

Earlier it was mentioned that even though there are many gods and goddesses in Hindu tradition, at the heart of the religion there is only one God. This God is one, formless and nameless. For this reason, there cannot be one God for Hindus, another for Muslims and yet another for Christians. Yet, within the limits of our human understanding, experience and religious language, we

¹² All Men are Brothers, p. 53

call this God by differing names. Too, all religions are means to attain this one, though differently named, God.

I laugh within myself when someone objects that Rama or the chanting of *Ramanama* is for the Hindus only, how can *Mussalmans* therefore take part in it? Is there one God for *Mussalmans* and another for the Hindus, *Parsis*, or Christian? No, there is only one omnipotent and omnipresent God. He is named variously and we number Him by the name which is most familiar to us.¹³

God as Truth

Gandhi described the Being of God as Truth. In Indian philosophy there is only one Reality, one Being that is God. Only God is; nothing else exists. As a typical Hindu, Gandhi described God in many different ways, but deep down in his heart, he experienced God as Truth, because God is the only True, Ultimate and Changeless Reality. Gandhi wrote,

I would say with those who say, "God is Love," God is Love. But deep down I used to say that though God may be love, God is Truth above all. If it is possible for the human tongue to give the fullest description of God, I have come to the conclusion that God is Truth. Two years ago I went a step further and said that Truth is God.¹⁴

One might wonder why Gandhi said Truth is God rather than God is Truth. Truth is the one and the only essential property of God *for Gandhi*. When we say, "God is Truth", we only describe one property of God, setting up no priorities among the properties of God. *We thus* give only a partial description of God. But when we say, "Truth is God", the identification of God with Truth becomes complete. Truth is no longer a partial description of God, one of many properties of God; Truth becomes the complete definition, the essence of God. Truth and God become convertible terms. Gandhi wrote,

¹³ Mind of Gandhi, p. 81

¹⁴ Mind of Gandhi, p.51

The word "Satya" (Truth) is derived from "Sat" which means being. And nothing is or exists in reality except Truth. That is why "Sat" or Truth is perhaps the most important name of God. In fact it is more correct to say that Truth is God than to say God is Truth. But as we cannot do without a ruler or a general, names of God such as King of Kings or the Almighty are and will remain more usually current. On deeper thinking, however, it will be realised that 'Sat' or "Satya" is the only correct and fully significant name of God.¹⁵

In view of this passage, we can say that Gandhi recognized the alternative names for God, but deep down in his heart he believed the best name for God was Truth.

There were many reasons for Gandhi why Truth was the best name for God. Firstly, *diverse believers, even nonbelievers, could be united in this name. Truth being the very essence of God, even people who did not believe in God's existence could be caught up in God's essence through their firm faith in the reality of Truth.* Atheists and skeptics, while not believing in the existence of God, still searched for Truth. *Because of their search for Truth, Gandhi could not consider them as true atheists. He saw them as God-fearing, since Truth is God and they were truth-fearing.*

Secondly, Gandhi believed that in the narrowing of one's concept of God a group of believers could begin to see their God as superior to another group's named God. This could lead believers to indulge in vicious name-calling with others being named nonbelievers, atheists and Kafirs. Heinous crimes, atrocities and fanatically, irreligious behavior of believers of one religion against believers of another religion were but escalated manifestations of a narrowed concept of God. Replacing the word 'God' with 'Truth', naming Truth as God, people could *have different concepts of God but could be tolerant of each other.* All religious people could be united and cooperate with each other in the name of Truth.

¹⁵ Selected writings of Mahatma Gandhi, Ronald Duncan, ed. (London: Faber & Faber), p. 46

God as Master of Life

Gandhi experienced God as Master of his life. He saw his life as a play and God as Master of the play. God ruled all his thoughts, decisions and actions. He did not separate the social and political aspects of his life from the spiritual and religious aspects. His life was not compartmentalized. Rather, his life was an integrated whole that was derived, sustained and nurtured from his religion. Gandhi wrote,

I go further and say that every activity of a man of religion must be derived from his religion, because religion means being bound to God, that is to say, God rules your every breath¹⁶

As a man of faith, Gandhi totally depended on the power and strength of God. He admitted that he trusted humans only because he trusted God. He knew the limits of his strength. He compared himself as a particle of dust, which had a place in God's creation. He experienced God as Supreme Potter and allowed himself to be used as God willed. He wrote of his reliance on God,

I am a man of faith. My reliance is solely on God. One step is enough for me. The next step He will make clear to me when the time for it comes.¹⁷

God as Person

Gandhi did not describe God as a person. Rather, *his description was* as Force, as Light, as Love, as Idea, as Essence of Life, as Pure and Undeified Consciousness, and as the Atheism of the Atheist. For Gandhi God was not only near us, but God was within us. *As Law and Law-Giver*, God, *living within us*, rules our lives. Of this he wrote,

I do not regard God as a person. Truth for me is God, and God's Law and God are not different things or facts, in the sense that an earthly king and his law are different. Because God is an Idea, Law Himself. Therefore, it is impossible to conceive God as breaking the Law. He, therefore, does not

¹⁶ Mind of Gandhi, p. 102

¹⁷ Ibid, p.19

rule our actions and withdraws Himself. When we say He rules our actions, we are simply using human language and we try to limit Him. Otherwise He and His Law abide everything and govern everything.¹⁸

Although Gandhi preferred to worship God as formless, nameless Absolute, he recognized *there are those who* need to feel *and experience* God as personal, to feel God's presence and to experience God's personal touch.

Hinduism believes that God speaks through super-men, *possibly many*, who are the incarnations of God Himself. Gandhi himself was regarded as the incarnation of god *Vishnu*.²⁰ *These super-men* appear to the world whenever *dharma* flourishes, declines or needs protecting. Hinduism does not, *however*, recognize incarnation of an exclusive, *unique*, single person or prophet.¹⁹ Gandhi had a similar concept of incarnation. For Gandhi, all embodied life in reality is the incarnation of God. *A person possessing divine qualities and realizing self, through proper practice of religion*, can be paid homage because that person does not reduce the greatness of God. Gandhi explains,

All embodied life is in reality an incarnation of God, but it is not usual to consider every living being an incarnation. Future generations pay this homage to one who, in his own generation, has been extraordinarily religious in his conduct. I can see nothing wrong in this procedure; it takes nothing from God's greatness, and there is no violence done to Truth....²¹

B. What is Religion for Gandhi?

If we read the writings of Gandhi we find that he was deeply a religious man. The truthfulness of his father and the saintliness of his mother made a deep impression in his life. While he was

¹⁸ *ibid*, p. 70-71

²⁰ A Gandhian Theology of Liberation, Jesudasan, S.J., Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Gujarati, 1987, p215.

¹⁹ The Essence of Hinduism, Basu Dr. Durga Das, Prentice- Hall of India, New Delhi, 1990, p. 1

²¹ Mind of Gandhi, p.76

in school he studied Ramayana, one of the greatest devotional books in Hindu literature. In England he had time to read about other religions. He read Gita for the first time and had direct contact with Christianity. In South Africa he spent a lot of time searching for God and reading about other religions. All these studies, experiences and searching helped Gandhi to develop his own religious concept.

For Gandhi religion meant to accept God for life and to be religious meant to be bound to God. When God rules one's ideals, thoughts, words, behavior, and one's very actions, that person becomes truly religious. Being bound to God and having God rule one's life, it followed that all one's activities must be derived from religion. Gandhi wrote,

You must watch my life how I live, eat, sit, talk, behave in general. The sum total of all those in me is my religion...Religion should pervade every one of our actions. (Harijan, Sept. 22, 1946, p. 321)

Gandhi did not favor any particular historical religion. By religion he did not mean any formal or customary religion, but that means in which we search and realize our oneness with the Creator God. He clarified his religious concept with the following words:

Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not the Hindu religion 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. It is the permanent element in human nature which counts no cost too great in order to find full expression and which leaves the soul utterly restless until it has found itself, known its Maker and appreciated the true correspondence between the Maker and itself. (Young India, May 12, 1920, p. 2)

Gandhi's religious idea harmonizes all religions. The living of his idea gave that harmony substance. That's why religious pluralism was not a problem for Gandhi. He saw there was one religion underneath many religions. This religion was the religion of humanity, which included the best of all religions.

For Gandhi morality had the central place in religion. Morality could not be separated from religion, because morality was the essence of religion. When morality incarnated in a person it became religion, because it bound, held and sustained the person in time of trials. If we wanted to judge whether a doctrine was religious or irreligious Gandhi's criterion was morality. Gandhi rejected any doctrine that was in conflict with reason and morality. A person who often violated moral laws could not be called religious. One who had a good, moral life, was truly religious no matter what one's faith was. Since Gandhi gave more emphasis on the role of morality to explain his religious concept, his religion would be classified as 'anethical religion'.

Gandhi considered all religions were means to attain the one and same God. It did not matter if some one took a different road as long as one reached the same goal. As all religions had some moral principles, they were more or less true, but none of them were perfect. Gandhi wrote,

My Hindu instinct tells me that all religions are more or less true. All proceed from the same God, but all are imperfect because they have come down to us through imperfect human instrumentality. (Young India May 29, 1924, p. 180)

As all religions were equal, no one could claim his religion as superior to others. For this reason what was needed was tolerance and mutual respect toward all religions. Equal respect for other religions was one's duty because one's own religion was equally imperfect as were others.

Importance of Religion

According to Gandhi no one could live without religion. (Young India, January 23, 1930, p. 30) Atheists, who said they had nothing to do with religion, Gandhi compared to men who said they breathe but do not have noses. (Young India, January 23, 1930, p. 30) Atheists admitted moral order and searched for truth, therefore, in Gandhi's mind they did live within religion. To prove the importance of religion in peoples' lives, Gandhi shared his personal experience:

I could not live for a single second without religion...I go further and say that every activity of a man of religion must be derived from his religion, because religion means being bound to God, that is to say God rules your every breath.

(Harijan, March 2, 1934, p. 23)

In his own land Gandhi saw Hindus and Muslims fighting each other in the name of religion. Gandhi made it clear that no religion taught to kill another who had a different faith. Gandhi's principles of truth, nonviolence, *Brahmacharya*, non-possession and non-stealing came from his religion. To keep a moral order in society, to live in mutual respect and bring peace and harmony in the world, religion was absolutely necessary for Gandhi.

Gandhi's Religious Practices

The religious practice of Mahatma Gandhi draws our special attention. In order to practice religion, Gandhi gave great importance to self-purification through prayer, fasting and consecration. It was impossible to practice nonviolence without self-purification through prayer and fasting. Fasting was a Hindu religious practice to control and discipline one's physical and carnal desires. Fasting was not just abstinence of food. When the physical body fasted the mind had to cooperate with it. For Gandhi fasting was a religious duty toward God. It was a means to discipline the self, purify the self and surrender to God. It was the truest prayer. Fasting helped one to be prepared for prayer because without fasting prayer was impossible. Through fasting of the palate, senses and passion, the soul could be united to God in prayer more easily.

Gandhi was a man of prayer. For him prayer was not just uttering or muttering God's name. It was the yearning of the soul to merge with the divine essence. There must be infinite faith and absolute surrender of the self in prayer. The prayer should come from the heart. For Gandhi effective prayer did not need any speech; perfect silence should be observed at the time of prayer. Gandhi experienced the power of prayer in his own life and told about the necessity of prayer:

As food is necessary for the body, prayer is necessary for the soul. A man may be able to do without food for a

number of days- as MacSwiney did for over 70 days - but believing in God, man cannot, should not live a moment without prayer. (Mind of Gandhi, p. 87)

The person who had strong conviction that God was within him could truly pray. God did not need our prayer, but Gandhi told us from his experience that the one who did not pray was a loser. God answered all prayers in His own way. No prayer was in vain, it bore fruit in a person's life. (Mind of Gandhi, p. 91)

For Gandhi prayer and service always went together. It was impossible to pray without serving the poor. In other words, for Gandhi to pray was to serve, and service was sincere prayer and worship. As he wrote,

A prayerful heart is the vehicle and service makes the heart prayerful. Those Hindus who in this age serve the 'untouchables' from a full heart truly pray, the Hindus and those others who spin prayerfully for the poor and the indigent truly pray. (Mind of Gandhi, p. 217)

Gandhi's spinning wheel was the religious practice of love and nonviolence. It served the poor, extended love to humanity and helped realize the truth. His political activities were also part of his religious practice. He was involved in politics because of his religion, to give greater service to his countrymen and the whole of humanity.

Gandhi's ashram vows, specially his five religious principles of nonviolence, truthfulness, non-stealing, *brahmacharya*, non-possession, were expressions of his religious faith. Gandhi's religious practice was not limited only to cultic rituals, but was in all his thoughts, words and deeds. Gandhi perceived religion not compartmentalized from all other aspects of his life, for life was an integrated whole.

C. Concept of Man

In *advaita* (non-dual) philosophy, the Indian philosopher Sankara described the human soul as being one with the Universal Soul. The individual soul takes a human body, which is perishable, while the soul is eternal. Man can exist apart from

his body. That is why man is not his body, yet he has a body that belongs to the material world. In other words, man is a spiritual being who takes on a material body. Since man is a spiritual being and one with the Ultimate, he has infinitely higher dignity.

While Gandhi was not an advaita philosopher like Sankara, he too saw man as an infinitely higher being. Thus, man was given proper dignity and due respect in his philosophy. Gandhi wrote,

Man is not all body but he is something infinitely higher. Of all the animal creation of God, man is the only animal who has been created in order that he may know his Maker. Man's aim in life is not therefore to add from day to day to his material prospects and to his material possessions, but his predominant calling is from day to day to come nearer his own Maker.²²

As part of the Universal Soul, man is also divine. We, however, cannot see our divinity because of our ignorance. It is because of our ignorance that we see things in terms of matter and consider ourselves as one with the material world. The fact is that we are in the world, but do not belong to the world. In the world, it is man's aim to come out of his ignorance and to realize his divinity. Gandhi proposed repentance and self-purification as two means to realize man's divinity:

Man is neither brute nor God, but a creature of God striving to realize his divinity, Repentance and self-purification are the means. The moment we repent and ask God for forgiveness for our lapse, we are purged of our sin and new life begins for us.²³

In his philosophy, Gandhi looked at man as an integrated whole. Unity and harmony should be in everything man thinks, says and does. Man cannot be true and untrue, moral and immoral at the same time. Gandhi saw that there is a tendency in man to look at life as compartmentalized. This could be seen in man's

²² The sayings of Mahatma Gandhi, Burgess Peter H.(ed), Singapore, 1984, p.27

²³ Mind of Gandhi, p. 492

separation of religious aspects from social and political aspects of his life.

Division in life cannot be. The principle Gandhi used to reach this conclusion was Truth. Being after Truth, we must seek it in all areas of our lives. Today we hear politicians making morally wrong statements but proclaiming them as politically correct. For Gandhi what was morally wrong could never be politically or socially correct. For it to be so would mean the division of man within himself. Gandhi reiterated,

Man cannot do right in one department of life whilst he is occupied in doing wrong in another department. Life is one indivisible whole.²⁴

Aim of Man

The individual human person is the center of Gandhi's philosophy. His philosophy's aim is the moral and spiritual development of the individual person. Gandhi believed that man, through ethical, moral and spiritual discipline, can reach a higher level of being. He saw human life's aim and purpose as the realization of God and consequently the self since God is present in every human being.

To realize God, one must be pure in heart. The person who is self-purified can see God in others and also within self; the real self can be seen as one with the Universal Self. The best means, therefore, to realize God is through service to people, because God is present in every human person. Serving people is serving God. Gandhi insists,

Man's ultimate aim is the realization of God, and all his activities, social, political, religious, have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God. The immediate service of all human beings becomes a necessary part of the endeavour simply because the only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and be one with it. This can only be

²⁴ The Message of Mahatma Gandhi, Rao Mohan U.S., Publications Division, India, 1968, p.116

done by service of all. I am a part and parcel of the whole and I cannot find Him apart from the rest of humanity.²⁵

In the above statement of Gandhi, it is important to note that man's aim is not only to be one with God, but because of that oneness, to be one with all humanity and creation. Man is to be a social being. Man is a social being not in the sense of socialization, but in the spiritual aspect that all comes from the one and same origin - God. Apart from others, apart from God's creation, one cannot fulfill oneself or realize God.

Men and Freedom

Freedom is essential to human beings, in Gandhi's view. Freedom is at the very center of the nature of man. Man cannot truly become man unless free. Freedom, Gandhi's "breath of life", is so essential that man would be content to die if he could not live as a free man.

Gandhi compared freedom with birth. It does not come in a slow process, but like birth, it comes in a moment. We are slaves until we are fully free. Freedom is a God given gift. This freedom is total, even to the point of making mistakes. Since God has trusted men with the gift of freedom no one can deprive man of this right. Man can lose freedom only through his own weakness. As Gandhi wrote,

In our new freedom we may make mistakes. Freedom is not worth having if it does not connote freedom to err and even to sin. If God has given the humblest of His creatures the freedom to err, it passes my comprehension how human beings, be they ever so experienced and able, can delight in depriving other human beings of that precious right.²⁶

Gandhi also reminded us that when individual freedom is used, we must remember that we are essentially social beings. We must be responsible in using our individual freedom for the good of others and for social progress. We are free to use our talents for the society of which we are a part, as well as for self.

²⁵ Mind of Gandhi, p.224

²⁶ *ibid*, p. 311

Individualism must be restricted by the society, because, as Gandhi put it, unrestricted individualism is the 'law of the beast of the jungle'. Man has to learn to accept social restraint willingly for the well being of the whole society. Only a free person can devote self to the service of society.

For Gandhi freedom and slavery are mental states. A person can choose freedom or slavery for self. To be free, one must not play the role of a slave. In order to live as a free person, one can disobey an order if it is in conflict with one's conscience.

This freedom is not the freedom of a few. Rather, everyone is equally free regardless of religion and caste. When Gandhi worked for the freedom of India, he wanted to guarantee equal freedom even to the lowliest, as well as India's freedom from foreign control. In another words, it was freedom for the welfare of the society.

The freedom Gandhi exercised came from inner discipline and humility. Likewise, we cannot exercise real freedom unless we humble and discipline our lives, exercising our freedom for the good of others. If we use our freedom to satisfy our selfish desires only, we will bring harm to ourselves and to others. Gandhi says,

The highest form of freedom carries with it the greatest measure of discipline and humility. Freedom that comes from discipline and humility cannot be denied, unbridled licence is a sign of vulgarity alike to self and one's neighbours.²⁷

Man and His Action

Gita teaches,

To work is your right
Not to the fruits thereof
Give up the desire for the fruits of your acts
But do not be given up to inactivity.²⁸

²⁷ Mind of Gandhi, p. 469

²⁸ Gita,(11,47)

Gita teaches that action is a moral and social duty of man. This action should be done as a selfless service to others. Man should not hanker after the fruit of his action; he should renounce the fruit of his action. Gita also teaches that in performing action without attachment, man shall attain the Supreme.

Gandhi's philosophy of action is based on the teaching of Gita. Gandhi's philosophy of action is action with detachment. Man cannot escape from his social service, because there is no happiness on earth apart from it. M. Ymunacharya, an admirer of Gandhi, commented on this beautifully by saying, "The philosophy of Gandhi is not life-negation but life-affirmation. It is participation in life armed with the spirit of detached action".²⁹ Gandhi experienced God in every human person; it is in serving man, that he realized God. As Gandhi wrote,

I endeavour to see God through service of humanity, for I know that God is neither in heaven, nor down below, but in every one.³⁰

Dignity of Man

We have seen that Hinduism believes that the individual soul is part of the Universal Soul. Believing this Gandhi also saw and experienced the presence of God in every human person. Since God dwells in every human person and the individual soul is part of the Universal Soul, every human person must thus be respected. If we disrespect an individual person, we also disrespect God and our own self.

In Gandhi's philosophy the supreme consideration is man. Gandhi experienced how materialism and modernization displaced the human person from his dignity and freedom, alienating him from his own true existence. Modern machinery especially displaced the human person, taking the place of persons. Many might mistakenly think that Gandhi was against modern machinery. Gandhi was not against machinery as such;

²⁹ Facets of Gandhi, Ahluwalia B.K., Lakshmi Book Store, New Delhi, 1968, p.147

³⁰ Mind of Gandhi, p.52

he was against the harm and evil it had on the human person. He voiced his objection,

What I object to is the craze for machinery, not machinery as such. The craze is for what they call labour-saving machinery. Men go on 'saving Labour' till thousands are without work and thrown on the open streets to die of starvation. I want to save time and labour, not for a fraction of mankind, but for all.³⁰

Gandhi has to be understood in the context of the Indian life situation. At that time in India the majority of the people were uneducated and lived in villages. While working for a living is the right of all humans, the craze for machinery and its use caused jobs and salaries to go only to a few people. Many people became jobless and poor to the point of starving to death.

Moreover, Gandhi thought that if the motive for machinery was only to save time and labor, it was a greedy motive. The majority of the people should be considered as the primary concern. Machinery should be put in its proper place. In order to do this, Gandhi proposed to improve cottage machines, such as the spinning wheel, so that millions could produce their own basic needs while remaining in their own villages. The value of the spinning wheel was not seen in mass production in any one place. Rather its value and that of its accessories was it's being available where the spinners lived. This way people could work and live with proper dignity.

In the philosophy of Gandhi all men are basically good. Man and his deeds are seen separately. Mistakes are made because of man's ignorance and selfish desires. Basically man is good, but some of his actions might be evil. Even though man does evil and commits sin, every human person should be respected. This is very similar to the Christian teaching of loving the sinner but not the sin. As Gandhi wrote,

Man and his deed are two distinct things. Whereas a good deed should call forth approbation and a wicked deed

³⁰ Ibid, p. 235

disapprobation, the doer of the deed, whether good or wicked, always deserves respect or pity as the case may be.³¹

Gandhi's principle of nonviolence is also based on love and dignity of the human person. If we love and respect the dignity to every human person, we cannot hate others even for their evil action. With love and patience we try to help the person change.

Equality of Man

Gandhi experienced the oppressive nature of Western colonization in Africa, as well as in his own homeland. In South Africa he witnessed how the whites enslaved the black majority. He, a man of color, had been thrown off of a train that had been for whites only. In India he saw the evil of the caste system and the religious hatred between Hindus and Muslims. All these sad experiences taught Gandhi to treat all men equally. No religion teaches one to hate others or makes some persons higher and others lower. For Gandhi, it was man who made the distinction between men. God created all men with equal dignity. It is only in men's eyes that a man becomes unequal. They remain equal in God's eyes. Gandhi wrote,

We are all His creatures; and just as in the eyes of parents all their children are absolutely equal, so also in God's eyes all His creatures must be equal.³²

Gandhi fought for equal rights for his native Indians who were enslaved by the whites of South Africa, for twenty years. In India one of Gandhi's most important missions was to eradicate untouchability. Out of love and compassion, Gandhi named the untouchables '*Harijans*', which means people of God. He experienced the evil in how these people, in the name of religion, were declared untouchable. Gandhi wrote,

What I want, what I am living for, and what I should delight in dying for is the eradication of untouchability root and branch.³³

Gandhi even refused to enter temples where *Harijans* were not allowed to enter. According to Gandhi untouchability was not a

³¹ The Message of Mahatma Gandhi, p. 116

³² The Sayings of Mahatma Gandhi, p. 30

³³ The Message of Mahatma Gandhi, p. xxi

product of the caste system, but a distinction of high and low. The caste system would be purified with the removal of untouchability. Gandhi saw some value in the caste system. Its origin being a division of labor so that all could perform their duty in the society.³⁴

Gandhi also gave equal dignity and rights to women. Women are not to be treated as inferior in status, because the souls of men and women are the same. They share the same life. Moreover, they complement one another. One cannot live without the active help of the other. It is unjust to consider women as the weaker sex. If strength is considered as moral strength then women are men's superiors. Women also have greater intuition, spirit of sacrifice, power of endurance and courage. It was Gandhi's strong conviction that if women ceased to believe they belonged to the weaker sex, ceased to consider themselves as only objects of men's lust and were properly educated, they would contribute greatly to the welfare of society. Gandhi wrote,

If only women will forget that they belong to the weaker sex, I have no doubt that they can do infinitely more than men against war. Answer for yourself what your great soldiers and generals would do, if their wives and daughters and mothers refused to countenance their participation in militarism in any shape or form.³⁵

D. Concept of Conversion

Meaning of Conversion

According to *Samsad English Dictionary*, "conversion" means to change from evil ways to goodness. It also means to change from one religion to another. Generally both meanings are used in the major religions of the world. Christianity looks at conversion as part of its mission in the world, for Christ commanded, "Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded".³⁶ This is why Christianity is a missionary

³⁴ Harijan Feb. 11, 1933, p. 3

³⁵ All Men are Brothers, p.148

³⁶ Mt. 28: 19-20

religion. Believers, through their preaching and teaching, bring people to faith in Jesus. Likewise, Islam is a missionary religion. Through Islamic teachings the non-believer is brought to the faith in Hazrat Muhammed, the prophet of God.

Traditionally the Hindu religion, however, is not a missionary religion in the sense of conversion (changing religion). Hinduism is open to all religions, for all religions search for truth. It believes God reveals His truth through all religions, not exclusively through one religion or one prophet. This is why Hindus tend to be more tolerant and respectful toward other faiths and do not try to convert others to Hinduism. At the end of the nineteenth century, however, Christianity's missionary spirit and idea of conversion started to influence Hinduism. Many Hindu reform movements subsequently began, as did the development of Hindu's concept of conversion.³⁷

Gandhi's View of Religion

In order to understand Gandhi's concept of conversion we need to know what Gandhi's view of religion was. Gandhi did not prize his own Hindu religion as superior to all other religions. Calling himself a 'seeker of Truth' he meant that he was a 'seeker of God', for Truth is God. Consequently, he was open to accept the truth of all religions. Buddhists and Jainas did not believe in God, but Gandhi had no reason to disrespect their faith because they also sought after truth.

After a long, careful study of all the major religions of the world, Gandhi concluded that the essence of all religions is one, that essence is to believe in the one God. Religions, with their external practice of rituals and their following of dogmas and doctrines, are not ends in themselves, but rather, different means to attain the same goal. All religions are true, but are imperfect due to the human touch. God revealed all religions and God's revelation is perfect. Our human understanding of religion and its practices are imperfect. Gandhi wrote,

³⁷ Hinduism: World Religions, p.118

By religion, I do not mean formal religion, or customary religion, but that religion which underlines all religions, which bring us face to face with our Maker.³⁸

Conversion as Changing Religion

It is evident from Gandhi's view of religion that the thought of conversion, understood as the need to change from one religion to another, was irrelevant. There was no need for one to change religion since God revealed all religions and all religions, though imperfect in our human understanding, were means to attain the same goal - God. Gandhi's view of religion called one to respect and accept truth from other religions, rather than to change one's religion. In his view, persons were to help one another to live according to the truth and values found in their own religion. Gandhi wrote,

Every religion is as precious to me as my own Hinduism ... No thought of conversion is permissible to me at all. We must help a Hindu to become a better Hindu, a Mussalman to become a better Mussalman and a Christian to become a better Christian ... We must eradicate from our midst the secret pride that our religion is more true and that another's is less so. Our attitude towards all other religions must be absolutely clear and sincere. Our prayer for others should never be, "Oh God, give him the light which Thou hast given me," but " Give him all the light and truth that he needs for his highest attainment."... Should some persons think of changing their religious label (converting themselves), I cannot hinder their freedom of action, but I will be sorry to see them act thus.³⁹

Conversion as Changing Heart

Gandhi's sense of conversion was interior not just a changing of religious affiliation or primarily exterior. For him conversion was the process wherein we become our real selves. Through ignorance and selfish desire we have lost our real selves.

³⁸ The Message of Mahatma Gandhi, p. 34

³⁹ Harijan, Feb. 22, 1942

Though God is within us, we have a need to purify ourselves, changing our hearts, so as to discover our real selves. This conversion takes place in and through the living of our lives according to the truth and values of our particular religion. This self-purification and changing of heart is a lifelong process in which we give up our old ways in order to be renewed. Gandhi insisted,

Conversion must not mean denationalization. Conversion should mean a definite giving up of the evil of the old, adoption of all the good of the new and a scrupulous avoidance of everything evil in the new. Conversion, therefore, should mean a life of great dedication to one's own country, greater surrender to God, greater self-purification.⁴⁰

Once one of Gandhi's friends, Mr. Polak, asked him if he believed in conversion, in changing from one faith to another. Gandhi answered him saying, "If a man reaches the heart of his own religion, he has reached the heart of the other, too. There is only one God, but there are many paths to Him".⁴¹

From the above statements of Gandhi, it is evident that Gandhi understood conversion as the constant giving up of our old sinful ways of life and the subsequent living of the faith and values of our particular religion. Surrender to God, self-purification to realize the God within and dedication to the service of the nation are the aims of conversion.

E. Concept of Salvation

Meaning of Salvation

The Sanskrit word for salvation is "*moksha*". In order to understand the concept of *mosksa*, we need to know two other Hindu concepts, *Karma* and *Samsara*. Originally Karma meant any correct activity or properly performed ritual. But later in the *Upanishadic* period, the religious philosophers expanded it to

⁴⁰ Young India, August 20, 1925

⁴¹ Gandhi On Christianity, Ellsberg Robert (Ed), Orbis Books, N.Y., 1991, p.12

mean that one's present actions determine one's future life. This expanded meaning became the law of *Karma*: one's thoughts, words and deeds fix one's lot in future existence. Therefore, everything man does determines his destiny. The power lies within the self to determine what the future will be; man builds his own future. A person becomes good through his good actions and bad through his bad actions. From this law of *Karma* the concept of the cycles of life, death, rebirth, and redeath was reinforced. These cycles were called *Samsara*.

The aim of all human beings is one and the same, to gain *moksha*: liberation from the conditional and temporary existence of the world and union with the Ultimate Reality. *Moksha* is a religious state for which all Hindus strive. One day or the other everyone is sure to reach the goal.⁴² *Moksha* cannot be gained by actions aimed at gaining something in this world. Rather, the person who wants salvation must seek to experience oneness with the Ultimate Reality.

How does a man find oneness with the Ultimate? Hinduism discovered four basic paths that lead man to realize God. They are the path of knowledge (*Jnana*), the path of selfless action (*Karma*), the path of devotion (*Bhakti*) and the path of Meditation (*Raja-Yoga*). The goal of all four paths is the same, to realize the identity of one's self with the Universal Self, which is *moksha* or salvation.

In the philosophy of Gandhi the idea of *moksha* or salvation played an important role. If we analyze his life and work we see Gandhi followed the path of karma. He gave highest importance to the service of God through the service of humanity. Some think Gandhi gave more importance to *dharma* than to salvation (*moksha*). He followed *dharma* in order to gain *moksha* or salvation. *Dharma* means the social duties and responsibilities of every Hindu. Without *dharma* there would be disorder in social life. Without *dharma* there is no salvation. For this reason Gandhi never treated these two, *dharma* and *moksha*, separately. He followed *dharma* in order to gain *moksha* or salvation.

⁴² The Essence of Hinduism, p.114

Salvation as Self-Realization

As we have said previously, the aim of the Hindu religion is self-realization; which is salvation. This also was true for Gandhi. The goal of his life was to achieve salvation, to realize his self. Self-realization means to realize one's self as one with the Ultimate Self, which is God. It means to see God within us and also within others. All Gandhi's activities, whether political, social or religious, were directed to this goal. One of his statements makes this clear,

What I want to achieve, - what I have been striving and pining to achieve...- is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain moksha. I live and move and have my being in pursuit of this goal. All that I do by way of speaking and writing and all my ventures in the political field are directed to this same end.⁴³

Salvation as Self-Purification

Self-purification is a very important concept in Gandhi's religious philosophy. A person must purify himself so that he can realize God and himself. Both Jainism and Christianity influenced Gandhi to develop this concept of self-purification. While believing in the liberation from the body through ascetic practices, Jainism also sees the body as temple of the soul. Gandhi used the Christian concept when he explained the body as the "temple of the Holy Ghost". For Gandhi our body is God's gift and we have to take care of it, as we have to discipline it. We cannot satisfy every desire of our body. If our body controls us, we become slaves of our body. Here the Jain influence persists, with Gandhi giving importance to self-purification through penance, in order to gain salvation. Gandhi wrote,

Moksha is liberation from impure thought. Complete extinction of impure thought is impossible without ceaseless penance. There is only one way to achieve this. The moment an impure thought arises, confront it with a

⁴³ Mind of Gandhi, p.54

pure one. This is possible only with God's grace, and God's grace comes throughout ceaseless communion with Him and complete self-surrender.⁴⁴

Salvation as Self-Surrender to God

According to Hindu belief man has to work for his own salvation. In Gandhi's view the work of salvation did not depend on man only; it also depended on God's grace. Man had to surrender himself completely to God in order for God's will and plan to be fulfilled in man's life. Gandhi's prayer and fasting were two means of surrendering himself to God. Prayer was the source of power to fulfill God's intention and plan in Gandhi's life. Through fasting Gandhi purified his heart in order to be the instrument of God. Gandhi wrote,

Man is supposed to be the maker of his own destiny. It is partly true. He can make his destiny only in so far as he is allowed by the Great Power who overrides all our intentions, all our plans and carries out His own plans.⁴⁵

Service as Means of Salvation

According to Hinduism, renunciation is essential for salvation, because renunciation alone can bring salvation.⁴⁶ All the branches of Hindu religion teach the principle that without giving up worldly attachment there is no salvation. From this follows the teaching of the law of Karma that one has not to abandon all activity, but the desire for the fruits of the work, so that work itself may not constitute any bondage. Gandhi as karma-Yogi also stressed selfless service. *Gita* played an important role in this life of his, particularly in building up his philosophy of service. *Gita* taught him to give selfless service to humanity without expecting the fruits. He looked at service as the means to attain salvation. Gandhi wrote,

⁴⁴ Harijan, Feb. 22, 1942, p. 47

⁴⁵ Mind of Gandhi, p. 463

⁴⁶ The Essence of Hinduism, p. 81

For me the road to salvation lies through incessant toil in the service of my country and there through of humanity. I want to identify myself with everything that lives.⁴⁷

During the last days of Gandhi's life some of his friends asked him to explain what he really meant by *moksha*. In reply, he made the following statement,

“The desire for *moksha* was indeed there, but it was not meant for anyone other than the individual himself. The world was interested in the fruits, not the root. For the tree itself, however, the chief concern should be not the fruit, but the root. It was in the depth of one's own being that the individual had to concentrate. He had to nurse it with the water of his labour and suffering. The root was his chief concern”.⁴⁸

In the above statement it is clear that the goal of his life was salvation. He saw, however, salvation as fruit with the root being God. It seems to be true that Gandhi had more concern for *dharma* than *moksha*. Faithfully following *dharma*, Gandhi sought God within himself and also in every living being, offering his selfless service and leaving *moksha* in the hand of the Giver.

Salvation through *Swaraj*

The word *Swaraj* is a sacred Vedic word which means self-rule. Gandhi's movement of *Swaraj* was also a means for salvation. It did not recognize any race or religious distinctions, but was felt by all - men, women and children. Its aims were not only political and economic independence but also moral and social in nature. Political and economical freedom could not be attained without faith in God. A man of faith must perform his moral and social duties, not as a slave, but as a free person. Gandhi put forth four important principles for *Swaraj* 1. It should be done in self-rule or self-control. 2. Its means is soul-force or love force. 3. In order to exert this force one has to be indigenous (*Swadeshi*) in every way. 4. What we want should be done in the

⁴⁷ Mind of Gandhi, p. 7

⁴⁸ Harijan, Sept. 28, 1947, p. 340

sense of duty. Gandhi put the aim of *Swaraj* in the following words,

... What we mean and want through Poorna Swaraj ... is an awakening among the masses, a knowledge among them of their true interest and ability to serve that interest against the whole world, ... harmony, freedom from aggression from within or without, and a progressive improvement in the economic condition of the masses...⁴⁹

Gandhi rejected the orthodox concept of salvation as in the life to come. For him salvation was not only a future reality but it was also in the present, here and now. Men have to fulfill necessary conditions to experience salvation. They have to purify themselves and be obedient to the Law. Through their daily struggle for truth, justice, and peace and harmony men work and experience salvation in the here and now. Gandhi made it clear when he said, " God did not bear the cross only 1990 years ago, but He bears it today, and He dies and is resurrected from day to day'.⁵⁰ This gives us the meaning of the redeeming reality of the incarnation of Jesus and opens and shows us the way to do the same.

⁴⁹ Mind of Gandhi p. 318

⁵⁰ Gandhi on Christianity, p. 96

CHAPTER THREE

RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES OF GANDHI

Mahatma Gandhi was a man of principle. His entire philosophy was based on fundamental principles such as truth and nonviolence. The principles, which he advocated devotedly, were not merely theoretical, but he practiced them in his own life and influenced many others to do likewise. These principles, applied in the social, economic, and political areas of his life, were moral and religious in nature. Gandhi did not invent these principles rather they are universal principles originating from Indian philosophical and religious traditions. Jainism specially teaches every Jaina to observe the five great vows in order to practice dharma meaningfully. Gandhi took these rules as his ashram vows. He had more ashram vows, but these five are the most basic.¹ Gandhi wrote,

They are the five rules of self-restraint... First, *brahmacharya*, celibacy; the second is *satya*, truth; the third is *ahimsa*, absolute innocence, not even hurting a fly; the next condition is *asteya*, non-stealing, not merely not stealing in the ordinary sense in which the word is understood, but if you appropriate or even cast your greedy eyes on anything that is not your own, it becomes stealing. Lastly, *aparigraha* - a man, who wants to possess worldly riches, or other things, won't be fit really to understand the spirit... These are the indispensable conditions. There are other conditions, but ... these are the fundamental ones...²

Gandhi's greatness was not grounded on what he said about these principles, but on his sincere practice of them in his own life.

¹ Singh Balbir, *The Conceptual Framework of Indian Philosophy*, The Macmillan Company of India Ltd, Delhi, 1976, p. 265

² CW. XXXV, p. 331

A. *Satyagraha* or Soul Force

Meaning of *Satyagraha*

The principle of *Satyagraha* is the basic and central concept in the philosophy of Gandhi. *Satyagraha* is a Sanskrit word. 'Sat' means truth, and 'agraha' means firmness. So, *Satyagraha* means 'firmness to truth' or 'holding on to truth'. It is a force of righteousness. Gandhi named it 'love force or 'soul force'.

The concept of *Satyagraha* came into being before the term was invented. When the concept was born in the heart of Gandhi, he was not able to name what it was. There was a similar movement preexisting in India by the name of 'Passive Resistance'. The passive opposition to evil, inherent in Indian philosophy, was the idea behind this 'passive resistance' and its movement. But, Gandhi did not like the articulation, 'passive resistance', because it did not convey all he meant. Gandhi's concept was not so much to resist evil passively, as to actively do good in reply to evil. Gandhi wrote, "It describes a method, but gives no hint of the system of which it is only part. Real beauty, and that is my aim, is in doing good against evil".³

Moreover, when Gandhi attended a meeting among Europeans, he found out the concept of passive resistance was narrowly described as a weapon of the weak. Also, resistance founded only on passivity to evil could create hatred and end in violence resulting in the meaning of the Indian struggle being lost. So, Gandhi clarified the meaning of passive resistance as vindication of truth. A vindication wherein suffering was not inflicted on the opponent, but rather, wherein one was willing to undergo suffering one's self.

In order to give an appropriate name to this movement, Gandhi ran a contest, through the "Indian Opinion", offering a nominal prize to the one having suggested the best name. The winning name was '*Sadagraha*' (firmness to truth). But to make it clearer, Gandhi changed it into '*Sataygraha*'. Thus, the term '*satyagraha*' came into existence and the movement was duly

³ Doke Joseph J., M. K. Gandhi, An Indian Patriot in South Africa, Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, Delhi, 1967, p. 101

named. Therefore, the person who holds on to the truth at the cost of self-suffering is called a '*Satyagrahi*'.

For Gandhi, *Satyagraha* was a relentless search for truth and a determination to reach truth. It was a force, which worked apparently slowly and silently, but in reality, worked most swiftly and directly.

Code of *Satyagraha*

- a. Fearlessness:** A *Satyagrahi* must say good-bye to fear. He must never be afraid to trust his opponent. Even if his opponent is unfaithful twenty times, he must be ready to trust his opponent twenty times. Because the essence of his creed is trusting in human nature.
- b. Force for all:** *Satyagraha* is a force that can be used by an individual person, as well as by communities. All, men, women and children, can use it. It can also be used in political and domestic affairs.
- c. It is gentle:** It is gentle because it never wounds or hates others. It does not come out of anger and malice. It never shouts at others' faults or is impatient with others. It comes out of love and even allows self-suffering.
- d. Does not count the number:** A *Satyagrahi* never counts the number, because his interest is not in quantity but in quality. A *Satyagrahi* does not follow a wrong path because the majority of people are following it. Rather, he follows a true path even if he is alone, because he is after truth.
- e. Works silently but most effectively:** Since *Satyagraha* comes out of love and is patient even to the evildoer, it works very silently and most effectively. Gandhi said, "In reality, there is no force in the world that is so direct or so swift in working".⁴
- f. Aims to convert the opponent:** Gandhi made it clear that the aim of *satyagraha* is not to embarrass the wrongdoer, but to convert him. A *Satyagrahi* should avoid artificiality in all

⁴ The Saying of Mahatma Gandhi, p. 72

his doings and should work with his inner conviction. When a *Satyagrahi* uses the means of non-cooperation, he should remember that it is only a means to secure the cooperation of the opponent based on truth and justice. His objective is transformation or purification of the relationship with the opponent.

- g. **No time limit:** *Satyagraha* believes that truth has its own time; it patiently waits. There is no time limit. As well, the capacity for suffering has no limit. It also believes that minimum is also maximum. There is no turning back and the only possible movement is to advance. There is no such thing as defeat in *satyagraha*.

Conditions for *Satyagraha*

According to Gandhi certain conditions are necessary for its proper implication.

- a. The *Satyagrahi* should not have any hatred in his heart against his opponent because the spirit of *Satyagraha* is to offer love in reply to evil. A hating heart cannot offer love to the opponent.
- b. The subject or issue for *Satyagraha*'s use should be true and substantial.
- c. A *Satyagrahi* must prepare himself to suffer until the end of his cause. Victory of *satyagraha* is impossible if there is ill-will, because one who has ill-will is unable to love and suffer. A *satyagrahi* should convince himself to conquer untruth by truth and take up suffering for that cause.

Qualifications of a *Satyagrahi*

Gandhi proposed the following essential qualifications for *satyagrahi*. These qualifications are not to be regarded as exhaustive, but only as illustrative.

- a. A *Satyagrahi* must have living faith in God. This is the most basic qualification of a *satyagrahi*. His faith has to be expressed in his thoughts, words and actions. He should

depend on God's care and protection against any tyranny and brute force.

- b. He must accept truth and nonviolence as his creed of life. He has to trust in the goodness of human nature and has to evoke that goodness by truth and love. This truth and love may be expressed through his suffering.
- c. He must live a chaste life. In order to do so, he has to be ready to give up his life and possessions.
- d. A *Satyagrahi* must be a teetotaler. He must avoid any kind of intoxicants, so that he can constantly use his mind and reason.
- e. He must have a willing heart to carry out the discipline and all the rules that are laid down from time to time.
- f. He must obey the rules of the jail unless they are contrary to the self-respect.

B. Ahimsa (Nonviolence)

The Meaning of Nonviolence

Nonviolence is not a new concept nor did it originate from Gandhi. Whenever we speak of nonviolence, however, Gandhi's name immediately springs to mind. Gandhi not only preached nonviolence; he practiced it in the private and public spheres of his life. His practice of nonviolence added to our understanding of the depth of the concept.

The word "Nonviolence" is the translation of the Sanskrit word "*Ahimsa*". "A" means non. "*Himsa*" means to kill, to injure, to harm and to damage. So, etymologically, '*Ahimsa*' means non-killing. For Gandhi, nonviolence has an infinitely deeper meaning. It does not mean only non-killing or not to offence to anyone, but the very renunciation of the wish to kill, to injure, to harm or to damage.

Even though nonviolence sounds negative, in its entirety it is a positive means of benevolence or love. It is the greatest force at the disposal of humankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man.

Gandhi believed that man lives freely by his readiness to die, if need be, at the hands of his brother, but never by killing his brother. Contrary to some people, Gandhi did not hold that destruction was the law of the human. He saw every murder,

every injury, no matter for what cause, committed or inflicted on another as a crime against humanity. He wrote,

Ahimsa 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 evildoer 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.⁵

For Gandhi, nonviolence was not mere resignation. Rather, nonviolence engaged in real fighting against wickedness. It did not, however, engage in retaliation, for retaliation in its very nature increases wickedness.

Nonviolence is a potent force and must begin with the mind. Without the cooperation of the mind, nonviolence of the mere body is nonviolence of the weak or the cowardly, and has, therefore, no potency. For Gandhi, nonviolence is not passivity in any shape or form. Rather, it is the most active force in the world. Let Gandhi speak,

My creed of nonviolence is an extremely active force. It has no room for cowardice or even weakness. There is hope for a violent man to be some day nonviolent, but there is none for a coward.⁶

Nonviolence does not admit running away from danger and leaving dear ones unprotected. It presupposes ability to strike. It is a conscious, deliberate restraint put upon one's desire for vengeance. Where vengeance is superior any day to passive, effeminate and helpless submission, forgiveness is higher still, for ultimately, vengeance is weak.

It is not nonviolence if we merely love those that love us. It is nonviolence only when we love those that hate us. Love of the hater is the most difficult of all. It becomes easier if we want to do it by the grace of God.

⁵ Andrews C: F., Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London, 1949, p. 5

⁶ Gandhi, All Men are Brothers p. 92

The comprehensive principle of nonviolence is “*Ahimsa*” (non-hurting; love) which necessitates complete abstention from exploitation in any form. If we want to be nonviolent, we must not wish for anything on this earth, which the meanest or the lowest of human beings cannot have.

The first condition of nonviolence is justice, justice in all aspects of life. One must learn the art of dying in training for nonviolence, similar to the training to violence where one must learn the ‘art’ of killing.

Discipline for Nonviolence

- a. **Patience:** A person who wants to practice nonviolence should have patience. He should be aware that to impregnate self and others with the good of *ahimsa* requires a long time. The path of *ahimsa* entails continuous suffering juxtaposed with the cultivation of endless patience. For Gandhi, “To lose patience is to lose the battle.”⁷
- b. **Fearlessness:** A person who cannot be fearless is a coward and is not able to practice nonviolence. The devotee of nonviolence must give up or free the self of all external fears, such as the fear of losing one’s nearest and dearest, losing one’s reputation, dispossession, giving offence, disease, bodily injury, and even death. Gandhi wrote, “For a nonviolent person, the whole world is one family. He will thus fear none, nor will others fear him.”⁸
- c. **Living Faith in God:** The method of nonviolence requires training. This training is much more difficult than the training for violence. The first essential of this training is a living faith in God. He who has a living faith in God will not do evil deeds with the name of God on his lips. He will not rely on the sword but will rely solely on God.
- d. **Harmony of the Mind, Body and Speech:** It takes a fairly strenuous course of training to attain a mental state of nonviolence. Unless there is hearty cooperation of the

⁷ The Sayings of Mahatma Gandhi, p. 19

⁸ Ibid, p. 19

person's mind, the outward observance will merely be a mask, harmful both to the person and to others. The perfect state is reached only when mind, body and speech are in proper coordination.

- e. **Willingness to Suffer:** Suffering is the law of human beings; war is the law of the jungle. But suffering is infinitely more powerful than war for converting the opponent, opening his ears, which are otherwise shut to the voice of reason. The purer he is and the more he suffers the quicker the progress.
- f. **Purity:** Gandhi posits that for us to see God or Truth face to face, one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. It is an impossibility for us to identify with everything that lives unless there is self-purification. Purity, like all other observances, must be observed in thought, word, and deed. One who is not pure in heart can never realize God.
- g. **Self-restraint:** Gandhi tells us that the sex urge is a fine and noble thing. There is nothing shameful about it. For him, sex was meant only for the act of creation. Any other use of sex is a sin against God and humanity.

It is a harmful mistake on our part to ascribe self-control exclusively to sex. Self-control suggests discipline of all the sense organs. Self-control of all the senses should be practiced. Moreover, perfect self-control comes only from God's grace.

Choice of Ahimsa over Himsa

- a. Gandhi objected to violence even when it appeared to do good. In reality, that good was only temporary; the evil of the violence was permanent. He said if we apply the principles of "eye for eye" and "tooth for tooth", there would be two blind, toothless men in the world. Ultimately, violence does more evil than good. Gandhi reiterated, "I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent."⁹

⁹ Ibid, p.15

b. Gandhi was so convinced about nonviolence that it became his creed. This conviction came through his personal experience. He applied it in every aspect of life whether domestic, religious, institutional, political or economic. He knew of no single case in which it had failed. Where it had seemed to fail in his life, he ascribed the failure to his imperfections. According to Gandhi,

I do not believe in short-violent-cuts to success... However much I may sympathize opponent of violent methods, even to serve the noblest causes...Experience convinces me that permanent good can never be the outcome of untruth and violence.¹⁰

- c. Gandhi did not claim perfection for himself, but he did claim to be a passionate seeker of Truth, which was but another name for God for him. In the course of this search he discovered nonviolence. He was so much in love with nonviolence that its spread became his life's mission. He said he had no interest in living except for the perfection of that mission.
- d. Gandhi said that man and his deeds were two distinct things. It was quite proper to resist and attack a system, but to resist and attack its author was tantamount to resisting and attacking oneself. This flowed from us being all children of the One and Same Creator.
- e. Nonviolence is a power which can be wielded equally by all, children, young men and women or grown up people, provided they have a living faith in the God of Love and have equal love for all humankind. When nonviolence is accepted as the law of life, it must pervade the whole being, not be applied just for isolated acts. He says,
- We have to make truth and nonviolence not matters for mere individual practice but for practice by groups and communities and nations. That, at any rate, is my dream. I

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 15

shall live and die in trying to realize it. My faith helps me to discover new truths every day.¹¹

Gandhi had at his disposal the nonviolent tool of “Satyagraha”. It had been found to be a complete substitute for violence whenever it had been applied honestly and in sufficient measure.

Violence is an expression of fear and anger that emerges when it tries to compensate for its own weakness. Violence only calls forth violence, further weakening the individual and others. Love, however, calls forth love, strengthening both self and others. This explains why Gandhi was completely convinced that truth and love expressed in nonviolent resistance to wrongdoing was bound to succeed; and why Gandhi opposed violence and proclaimed a creed of nonviolence with his whole being.

Effectiveness of Gandhi’s Nonviolence

Gandhi used the method of nonviolence in all areas of his life: domestic, political, social, religious and institutional. His success in integrating this method of non-violence within all aspects of his life had a remarkable impact on the thinking of modern man.

a. Nonviolence as Political Means

Gandhi was a true and ideal politician by the power of his prayer and spiritual insights. “Satyagraha” (self-willed and unyielding adherence to truth) and passive resistance through fasting were his rallying points for uniting the people of India against the gun power of their colonial ruler. His spiritual force unleashed the longest, nonviolent, political, freedom struggle the world has ever seen. When India finally was freed from the shackle of colonialism it became the world’s largest democratic nation.

Political leaders of today could learn from the witness of Gandhi what it means to be an ideal political leader. Currently many of our political leaders manifest a greed for power and wealth. They, at times, even use violence to keep their power positions to dominate and control the people. Gandhi’s mission was not to make utopian promises or to

¹¹ Ibid, p. 15

seek power and wealth, rather it was to love and serve his country and its people. After Independence, he did not cling to his political position of power, but rather, he left the administration of the nation to others and devoted his life to pray for peace and harmony.

One of the admirers of Gandhi was Albert Einstein, he saw in Gandhi's nonviolence a possible antidote to the massive violence unleashed by the fission of the atom.

We too have seen how the concept of nonviolence has played an important part in the revolutionary events in the USA, Philippines, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Russia, South Africa, Latin America, even in China. Truly, nonviolence has taken on a new and public face.

b. Nonviolence and Ecumenism

Gandhi was not only a political leader; he was a spiritual leader. Fasting, prayer, and actively striving for spiritual growth were integral to his lifestyle.

Gandhi's heart was energized by the spiritual visions of religions. The principles of religions, such as: '*Nishkama Karma*' of Bhagavad-Gita, *Ahimsa* of Buddhism, 'Love of Enemies' of Christianity, and 'Faith in Only One God' of Islam, contributed his philosophy of nonviolence.

In our present world, where we are menaced with so many religious wars, fanaticism, hatred, and intolerance among different religious groups, the nonviolence of Gandhi may indeed enlighten us. As a seeker of truth, Gandhi tried to bring the spirit of tolerance, acceptance, understanding and unity to people of all faiths. This spirit of truth inspired many people in the past to live in peace and harmony.

c. Nonviolence and Socio-Economic Reformation

Gandhi experienced the evil effects of the caste system of India and color prejudice in South Africa. He was thrown from the "White Only" carriage of a South African train. He was persecuted physically, but he never used violence. He spent twenty years in South Africa working to secure the

rights of the 'colored' Indian community. He was a contemplative, social worker: in eradicating erroneous traditions (the caste system and religious fanaticism) from society, in establishing social movements (labor associations) and in promoting economic programs founded on village-based industries. Everything he did was out of love (nonviolence) and only for love.

Gunner Myrdal, the Swedish economist, after his survey of the socioeconomic problems of the underdeveloped world, pronounced Gandhi "in practically all fields" an enlightened liberal. Truly, he said, Gandhi is the morning star of Asia shining in the east for the west.¹²

d. Nonviolence as Means for Human Dignity and Human Rights

Gandhi devoted his whole life in promoting human dignity and human rights; he sang the song of nonviolence. His respect for human dignity and human rights is demonstrated in his fight against color prejudice and the caste system. Gandhi fought against prejudicial and unjust systems. He never attacked their authors, however. He could see men and their deeds as two distinct things. Enlightened by his method of nonviolence, human rights workers in Asia, Latin America, and Africa are becoming more and more interested in using the method of nonviolence to attain their goals and contributing to world peace and harmony.

Nonviolence is not only a personal virtue; it is also a social virtue to be practiced by groups, countries, and nations. Furthermore, the practice of nonviolence in earthly matters, by means of distinguishing evil from the evil-doer, the overcoming of evil with good, hatred with love, anger with patience, untruth with truth, and violence with love, transforms this earthly existence.

¹² Chittilappilly, Fr. Vincent, MCBS, Man of the Millennium, Today, January 30, 1998, p. 11

Nonviolence is not easy for we are weak. Gandhi succeeded in it because of his great self-discipline and love for truth. Though Gandhi was largely successful in realizing his dream of a free India, his ideal of a society devoted to the principles of truth, nonviolence, cooperation and brotherhood among all its members has yet to be realized. The echo of his invitation to pray continually to God to open our eyes to better understand the importance of the role of nonviolence in our world still resounds.

e. Brahmacharya

Traditional Hinduism prescribes the schooling of every individual through a course of *asramas* or life stages. These stages are graded according to age, and for the common man, these stages are four in number: 1. *Brahmacharya* or the stage of the student 2. *Garhasthya* or householder 3. *Vanaprasthya* or the forest dweller and 4. *Sanyasa* or the stage of the ascetic.

During *Brahmacharya* the student-youth abstains from wine, meat, perfumes, garlands, and women. He disciplines his mind and body. He tells the truth and does no harm to living beings. He also studies the *Vedas*.¹³ Gandhi's view on *brahmacharya* is not limited only for the youth. He believed the schooling of this stage needed to be carried on in the lives of married men and women as well. He thus expanded the age boundary of *brahmacharya*.

C. Gandhi's Concept of Brahmacharya

From the beginning of his marriage, Gandhi intended to be truthful to his wife. It was in South Africa he realized the importance of observing *brahmacharya* in relation to his wife. Gandhi could not specifically recall what book or circumstances influenced him to set his thought in this direction, but he remembered a conversation he had once had with Raychandbhai, a spiritual friend, that might have been instrumental. Gandhi realized that he would remain a slave of lust and that he could

¹³ Essence of Hinduism, p. 83

not be faithful and truthful to his wife if he only made her an instrument of his lust. He discovered that the vow of *brahmacharya* was the only means to be faithful to his wife and overcome the obstacle of lust.

Brahmacharya, which is derived from truth and *ahimsa* is the third basic principle of Gandhi's life. *Brahmacharya* literally means to walk in the Lord's way; it consequently means total dedication of body, mind and soul to God, the Immanent Spirit, the Eternal, and Ultimate Reality. In common parlance, though a restricted sense, it also means chastity; which includes one's complete control over sense organs, specially the organ of regeneration.¹⁴ Gandhi defined *brahmacharya* in the following words:

It means that man and women should refrain from carnal knowledge of each other. That is to say, they should not touch each other with a carnal thought, they should not think of it even in their dreams. Their mutual glances should be free from all suggestion of carnality. The hidden strength that God has given us should be conserved by rigid self-discipline, and transmitted into energy and power - not merely of body, but also of mind.¹⁵

For Gandhi, the full and proper meaning of *brahmacharya* was to search for Brahman. Brahman dwells in every human being and can be searched by diving into and realizing the inner self. Self-realization was not, however, possible without the control of the senses. That is why *brahmacharya* called for total control of thought, word and action of all the senses, at all times and in the places.¹⁶

Gandhi looked at men as the trustees for the moral welfare of future generations. He believed that a large part of the miseries of the world could be avoided if we viewed the sexes in a healthy and pure manner. It followed for him that animals by nature did not know self-control but men knew. That was why without *brahmacharya* men became animal-like. Absolute *brahmacharya* in thought, word and action was necessary for reaching spiritual perfection.

¹⁴ Facets of Gandhi, p.72

¹⁵ The selected Writings of Mahatma Gandhi, p. 159

¹⁶ The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi, p. 272

Conditions for *Brahmacharya*

Living Faith in God: Gandhi defined *brahmacharya* as the searching for Brahman. Therefore, every *brahmachary* should have a living faith in God. Without living faith in Brahman, this principle was aimless and meaningless. A person who practiced *brahmacharya* perfectly was absolutely passion free. A passion free life was the way that led one to God.

a. Control of Palate: Gandhi saw sin in every sensual pleasure. That was why every *brahmachari* should control his senses. If the senses were not controlled, one became like a ship sailing without a rudder, bound to break into pieces on coming into contact with the very first rock.¹⁷

There is need to control not only one sense organ, but all the sense organs at the same time. Gandhi was convinced that if we practiced simultaneous control of all our senses, the attempt would be scientific and possible of success.

b. Control of Mind: It is the teaching of *Gita* that the man who tries to control his body, but is nursing evil thoughts in his mind, is foolish and his effort is in vain. That is why Gandhi said *brahmacharya* must be observed, in thought, word and deed. If we do not control our mind, yet suppress our body, it is harmful. Where our mind is our body will soon follow. Unless we control our body we cannot control our sense organs.

c. Fasting: Gandhi looked at fasting as an external aid, a helpful means to practice the principle of *brahmacharya*. It has to be undertaken, however, with a view to self-restraint. He learned the spirit of fasting from *Gita*, which taught:

“For a man who is fasting his senses
Outwardly, the sense objects disappear,
Leaving the yearning behind; but when
He has seen the Highest,
Even the yearning disappears.”¹⁸

(*Gita* Chapter II, 59)

¹⁷ The Sayings of Mahatma Gandhi, p.42

¹⁸ *Gita* Chapter II, 59

Our senses are very overpowering yet become powerless without food. That is why fasting is very helpful in controlling our senses. But Gandhi reminds us that physical fasting should be accompanied by mental fasting. Otherwise, it is bound to end in hypocrisy and disaster.¹⁹ When our physical body fasts our mind cannot feast while thinking about the delicacies of food and drink to be eaten after the fasting time is over. Fasting can help control our senses and lust. Since the human mind is the cause of our sensuality, mental fasting should be carried out while the physical body is fasting. Gandhi wrote,

Fasting is useful, when mind cooperates with starving body, that is to say, when it cultivates a distaste for the objects that are denied to the body.²⁰

Brahmacharya and Marriage

Gandhi's principle of *brahmacharya* was not only for young students but also for married men and women. Gandhi looked at marriage as a special friendship between man and woman; it was an unbreakable bond. When a man made a *brahmacharya* vow, he did not need to give up the friendship of his wife. Rather, the commitment was to give up the lustful desire for his wife. The lustful or carnal desire should not be the center of their bond. As Gandhi wrote,

Those who want to perform national service, or to have a gleam of the real religious life, must lead a celibate life, whether married or unmarried. Marriage only brings a woman closer to man, and they became friends in a special sense, never to be parted either in this life or in lives to come. But I not think that, in our conception of marriage, our lusts should enter. Be that as it may, this is what is placed before those who come to the *Ashram*.²¹

According to Gandhi a marriage is not marriage if it is only to satisfy sexual desire, because lustful desire is a denial of true friendship. The sex urge is a fine and noble thing and there is nothing shameful in it.

¹⁹ The Sayings of Mahatma Gandhi, p. 92

²⁰ Ibid, p.92

²¹ Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas, p.105

It has to be used, however, only for procreation. If it is used for any other purpose, it becomes a sin against God and humanity.²² Therefore, a *brahmacharya* man or woman should not use sex to satisfy their lustful desire. Gandhi wrote,

Married people should understand the true function of marriage and should not violate the law of *brahmacharya* except with a view to having a child for the continuation of the race.²³

***Brahmacharya* and Birth Control**

According to Gandhi the only moral means for birth control is self-control or *brahmacharya*.²⁴ All artificial means are immoral. It is wrong and immoral for men and women to escape the consequence of their actions by artificial means. Since sex is to be used only for procreation, the use of any artificial means makes men and women reckless and inspires their lustful and selfish motives in the use of sex. Gandhi's vow of self-control or *brahmacharya* is, therefore, a moral means for birth control. Where men and women control their lusts, using sex only for procreation in a responsible way, avoiding the danger of unwanted children.

It is important to note that the primary aim of *brahmacharya* is not to reduce the possibility of children in the family, but to exercise self-control or to control lustful desire. Once men and women learn the art of self-control, they use sex only for the purpose of procreation. With responsible parenting there might possibility be than opportunity for the real issues of over-population to be brought forth.

Gandhi did not believe that population, as such, was the real issue of over-population. Referring to India, Gandhi said that if there was a proper land system and better agriculture and supplementary industry, the country could support twice as many people as it did. Therefore, Gandhi's opinion differed from some as to the necessity of birth control for the nation's avoidance of

²² Mind of Gandhi, p.283

²³ The Message of Mahatma Gandhi, p. 120

²⁴ The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi, p. 284

the “over population” problem. As Gandhi said, “There is sufficient in the world for man’s needs but not for man’s greed”.²⁵

Brahmacharya and Freedom for Service

The vow of *brahmacharya* is a free act of a person. This freedom is not freedom ‘from’ but rather, freedom ‘for’. *Brahmachary* freely choose this for self-purification, higher spiritual attainment and for giving sincere public service. Gandhi felt that any person who wants to commit self to giving public service should observe this vow of *brahmacharya*. It was Gandhi’s conviction that procreation and consequent care of children were inconsistent with public service.²⁶ This was why Gandhi broke up his household during the Zulu “Rebellion” in Africa so that he could give service to the people. Of this experience he wrote:

... the idea flashed upon me that if I wanted to devote myself to the service of the community in this manner, I must relinquish the desire for children and wealth and live the life of a *vanaprastha* - of one retired from household cares.²⁷

One could say, therefore, that the *brahmacharya* vow does not limit the freedom of the person; rather it allows the person to use his for a higher level, that of the service of humanity; with inner joy and happiness being its results.

Brahmacharya and Diet

Gandhi conducted experiments to discover the diet best suited for a perfect observance of *brahmacharya*. He found it was very helpful for a *brahmachary* to consume limited, simple, unspiced, and if possible, uncooked food. The philosophy behind this diet was that man should eat food in order to live, not to satisfy his bodily desire. For the person who ate food to satisfy his desire, perfect observation of this vow would not be possible. Gandhi wrote:

²⁵ The sayings of Mahatma Gandhi, p.49

²⁶ Autobiography, p. 206

²⁷ Autobiography, p. 206

I eat to live, to serve and also, if it so happens, to enjoy, but I do not eat for the sake of enjoyment.²⁸

From his own experimentation, Gandhi found that ideal foods for *brahmacharya* were fresh fruits and nuts. Milk in the diet also makes the *brahmacharya* vow difficult to observe because milk is partly a stimulant. Gandhi considered vegetarianism as a priceless gift of Hinduism, as well as, very helpful in the living of *brahmacharya*. It is erroneous to think that vegetarianism makes one weak in mind and body. The greatest Hindu reformers who were most active in their generation were vegetarians.

D. The Principle of Non-possession

What is the Principle of Non-possession?

Non-possession means complete surrender of one's self, as well as, one's worldly goods for the service of humanity. It is an attitude that dictates that everything we have is a gift from God and bequeathed to us as a trust. According to Gandhi, civilization does not consist in the multiplication of wants, but in the deliberate and voluntary reduction of want. This brings real happiness and contentment. It promotes the capacity for service. Simple living, as Gandhi believed, means to possess what is needed for immediate use only. Gandhi clarifies further:

Just as one must not receive, so must one not possess anything one does not really need. It would be a breach of this principle to possess unnecessary foodstuffs, clothing, or furniture. For instance, one must not keep a chair if one can do without it. In observing this principle one is led to a progressive simplification of one's own life.²⁹

Gandhi reminds us that the principle of non-possession is applicable to thoughts, as well as, to things. In this sense, if we fill our brain with useless knowledge we break this principle. The knowledge that takes us away from God instead of bringing us closer to God, is not real knowledge, but ignorance; it does only

²⁸ The Sayings of Gandhi, p. 91

²⁹ Ibid, p. 39

harm to us. A person who consecrated his life to service should be devoted to truth in order to give single-minded service.³⁰

Non-possession as key to service

As a politician, Gandhi asked himself how he could be absolutely untouched by immorality and untruth, so as to give sincere service to humanity. His answer was to discard all wealth and possession. He confessed that in the beginning it was difficult and painful. Its progress was slow. As the time passed, however he experienced positive joy in giving up those unnecessary things. Gandhi wrote,

And, as I am describing my experiences, I can say a great burden fell off my shoulders, and I felt that I could now walk with ease and do my work also in the service of my fellow-men with great comfort and still greater joy. The possession of any thing then became a troublesome thing and a burden.³¹

The attitude of non-possession is not something negative; we do not lose something. For Gandhi it is a positive gain. The richest treasure is the joy and freedom one gets from dispossession. With that experience Gandhi wrote: "though, I preach poverty, I am a rich man".³²

Non-possession as Secret of Life

Gandhi believed that right living is derived from renunciation and dedication to God. Renunciation is also the secret of happiness. This renunciation is for the sake of service to God and man. It brings boundless joy. Anyone who wants to live a long life should totally dedicate him/herself to service without looking for the result. This does not mean that one who has wealth should throw it away. It simply means that one must give up the attachment to these things and dedicate self to God. God's gifts are to be used to

³⁰ Selected Writings of Mahatma Gandhi, p.48

³¹ The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi, p. 187

³² Ibid, p. 188

serve Him. We may have occasions to use or possess material things, but 'the secret of life lies in never missing them'.³³

Is Absolute Non-possession Possible?

Non-possession is not an easy thing, but it is some thing noble and golden. The ability of dispossession will not come to our lives automatically. We have to cultivate the mental attitude that we will not possess anything, then we must rearrange or discipline our lives with that mentality. It is generally believed that love and possession cannot go together. For perfect love we need perfect non-possession; our body is our 'last possession', as Gandhi put it. A man can offer perfect love and become absolutely dispossessed if he is prepared to embrace death. In other words, he has to renounce his body for the service of humanity. Gandhi recognized our human shortcomings and weakness. He knew that as long as we are in human flesh and blood, perfect non-possession is not possible. Still, we need to strive toward this end as long as we live. Gandhi acknowledges that,

In actual life we can hardly exercise perfect love, for the body as a possession will always remain imperfect and it will always be his part to try to be perfect. So that perfection in love or non-possession will remain an unattainable ideal as long as we are alive, but towards which we must ceaselessly strive.³⁴

Gandhi's principle of non-possession is also the teaching of great men of the world such as, Jesus, Mohammed and Buddha. They embraced poverty and influenced many people to non-possession. Our world is richer because they lived this principle.

E. The Principle of Non-stealing

Meaning of Non-stealing

The fifth and the final principle derived from the interaction of truth and non-possession is non-stealing. Non-stealing does not

³³ Ibid, p. 192

³⁴ Ibid, p. 191

mean the refraining from taking things from others without permission; which is the ordinary sense of the word. For Gandhi, non-stealing meant to possess and to keep things that one did not need for one's own immediate use, The person who kept things was stealing from someone else. Non-stealing also included spending more time than one needed. The time wasted could have been used for the service of others. Any kind of waste was, therefore, stealing.

In the third chapter of *Gita* it is said that he who eats without offering sacrifice eats stolen food, sacrifice meaning bread labor. Gandhi read Tolstoy's writing on bread labor and Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, which both gave a similar concept as the *Gita*. Inspired by the teaching of *Gita*, Tolstoy, and Ruskin, Gandhi believed that God created man to work for his bread and those who ate without work were thieving.³⁵

Code of the Principle of Non-stealing

a. Faith in God

Gandhi's belief in this principle arises from his deep faith in God. Gandhi believed that God, as Provider, provides for his people only what is needed at the moment. God never stores for tomorrow. So, a person who is a seeker of Truth should trust in God's providence. Be assure that God will give us our daily bread; He will provide everything we require.³⁶

b. Concern for Others

Gandhi believed that every man had an equal right to the necessities of life. God has provided enough in nature for human need, but not enough for human greed. From his own experience Gandhi said that human greed is the cause of much suffering, pain and starvation in the world. Gandhi believed that if each person possessed only what he needed, no one would be in want. Everyone would live in contentment. Greed makes people blind to the needs of others. For this reason the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. The rich store things superfluously which they

³⁵ Ibid, p. 198

³⁶ Ibid, P. 189

do not need and, therefore, waste. While millions are starving to death for want of sustenance. What is needed is to have concern for others and to open our eyes to the needs of others. Gandhi wrote,

God never creates more than what is strictly needed for the moment, with the result that if any one appropriates more than he really needs, he reduces his neighbour to destitution. The starvation of people in several parts of the world is due to many of us seizing very much more than they need.³⁷

c. To See the Beauty in Simple Living

To apply this principle of non-stealing, one has to believe in simple living. Simple living means to renounce everything and to keep full trust in God's providence. This does not mean that man should not earn; he should earn as much as possible but in a just way. He must understand that his wealth is not his; it belongs to the people. He should take only what he legitimately needs, using the remainder for the society. A person, who believes in simple living, does not use unnecessary things.

Non-stealing and Service to the Poor

When Gandhi talked about service, he always looked at those millions of people of India who were poor, half-starved and half-naked. For Gandhi, to serve them meant to be one with them.

It is self-contradictory to serve the poor while we remain rich. If we possess more than we need, we become the cause of the poverty of the poor. Moreover, love and exclusive possession cannot go together. If we want to love and serve the poor, we have to renounce all that is not needed. Applying this principle of non-stealing, Gandhi found God in the poor and he himself with the poor. Gandhi wrote,

I claim to know my millions. All the 24 hours of the day I am with them. They are my first care and last because I recognize no God except that God that is to be found in the

³⁷ Ibid p. 199

hearts of the dumb millions. They do not recognize His presence; I do. And I worship the God that is Truth or Truth which is God though the service of these millions.³⁸

It is important to note here that the principle of non-possession and non-stealing have to be practiced voluntarily. Gandhi did not force anyone to dispossess his or her possessions. Rather, he invited those who possess to see light out of darkness by following this principle. Furthermore, Gandhi did not force anyone to dispossess because it would lead him to depart from the principle of *ahimsa*.

Gandhi has to be understood in the economic context of India during his time, where millions of people had to be satisfied with only one meal a day. In that circumstance, Gandhi pointed out, people had no right to possess anything until the millions were clothed and better fed. People needed to adjust their need, so that the millions could eat and be clothed.³⁹

³⁸ Ibid, p. 197

³⁹ Gandhi, All Men are Brothers, p. 119

CHAPTER FOUR

BROTHERHOOD

Universal brotherhood is one of the important aspects of Hindu religious philosophy. It teaches that God permeates His entire creation and dwells in every being. For this reason there cannot be any clash or hatred between one being and another. This is the teaching of both the Upanishad and Gita.

The Gita reiterates-

“A Seer is he
Who sees the immutable
In the body of all mortals;
And, realising
That the same Being
Equally exists everywhere,
He attains salvation
As he does not slay others
Bringing death to his own Self.”¹ –

It is a difficult task to realize the divinity in every being. The one, who comes to this realization, realizing God Himself is in this mortal life, can see equality and unity in diversity. It is the constant teaching of Gita that the spiritual perfection of a Hindu is to realize the presence of God in every being and to be of service to all beings. This service is not done out of humanitarian or charitable reasons, but out of faith. Service to another being is the worship of God who is present in all beings whether the person is a foreigner, a neighbor or a friend. The one who believes in this truth, believes in universal brotherhood and

¹ The Gita, XIII 27-28

lives in harmony with every person regardless of religion, nationality, culture, color and caste.

Gandhi was deeply moved by this true teaching of Gita. All through his life he sincerely tried to realize God in every being. He experienced the presence of God in every human person and in his faithful service to humanity; he served and worshiped the living God who dwells in every one.² He truly believed in the unity and equality of persons and greatly contributed to the promotion of universal brotherhood.

1. Gandhi's Vision of Brotherhood

Mahatma is universally known as one of the greatest men of his time. His uniqueness was that he did not hold any high office nor was he a statesman ruling the destinies of countries. Rather, his greatness and unique leadership came from his universal love and faith in humankind.

In his lifetime Gandhi experienced the evil effects of two world wars. In his own country he saw the social sins of untouchability, the caste system, sex discrimination, an oppressive colonial mentality and extreme poverty where millions of people starved daily. In South Africa he experienced color prejudice. He experienced discrimination, hatred, disunity and division among men because of religion. He saw a tendency to root out the religious and moral values from the social, political, economical aspects of human life. Still, after all these experiences, Gandhi envisioned a world of tomorrow where there would be no violence, hatred or starvation. In his vision of the future, society would be totally liberated from sin and corruption and equality and freedom would be realities for all. For this to come to be men must have a deeper faith in God, remembering that God rules the hearts of every person.

Gandhi's vision of brotherhood has the following characteristics:

² Harijan, 11 March, 1939, p.44

a. Moral vision

Gandhi's vision of brotherhood was based on religious and moral principles. Freedom of thought and will are essential to morality. Everything that diminishes the freedom of man is immoral. Violence, anger, hatred, fear and fanaticism, in whatever shape or form, serve to diminish the freedom of choice and action; for this reason all these are immoral. This was why Gandhi fought with love and truth against cowardice, popular fear, violence, and fanaticism, to establish a liberated moral society.

All human activities must be guided by religious and moral principles. These principles help us to solve our day-to-day problems. Politicians should also be guided by moral principles so as to give sincere service to their countrymen. Even ethics should not be separated from the economy because an economy that hurts the moral well being of an individual and a nation is immoral and sinful. Gandhi's brotherhood based on moral vision is best expressed in the following statement,

I see no poverty in the world of tomorrow, no wars, no revolutions, no bloodshed. And in that world there will be faith in God greater and deeper than ever in the past. The very existence of the world, in a broad sense, depends on religion. All attempts to root it out will fail.³

b. Global Vision

Gandhi's brotherhood had also a global vision. The goal of his political activities was much higher than the independence of India. Gandhi saw India not as a land of enjoyment but as a land of duty, which had a mission in and for the world. India was rich in religious moral values such as truth and nonviolence. Gandhi struggled for the freedom of India so that India could fulfill her mission in the offering of herself for the betterment of the world. Gandhi wrote,

My mission is not merely brotherhood of Indian humanity. My mission is not merely freedom of India,

³ NWWP, pp. 49-51

though today it undoubtedly engrosses practically the whole of my life and whole of my time. But, through realization of freedom of India, I hope to realize and carry on the mission of brotherhood of man.⁴

This statement of Gandhi indicates that independence of India was not a matter of self-interested expediency. Rather, India's independence was to be a challenging sign of brotherhood and self-giving to every nation. Through the deliverance of India, Gandhi tried to deliver the so-called, weaker race of the world from exploitation. He was not only interested in freeing people from the English yoke, but from any yoke whatsoever.

His movement of *swaraj* was a spiritual movement of self-purification for the realization of the greater mission of the brotherhood of man. Gandhi wanted to serve the whole world, in giving service to India. Gandhi dreamed of the world as one. That world was his family, not an isolated India.⁵ His dream included inter-state relationships in the world based on internal values and domestic, social patterns. He wrote:

We want freedom for our country but not at the expense or exploitation of others, not so as to degrade other countries... I want freedom of my country so other countries may learn something from my free country, so the resources of my country might be utilized for the benefit of mankind... My love, therefore, of nationalism or my idea of nationalism is that my country may die so the human race may live. There is no room for race-hatred there. Let that be our nationalism.⁶

C. Communitarian vision

Gandhi's vision of brotherhood was vision of unity based on spiritual communion and identification with all men and all living things. That is why he could say that he believed in the essential unity of man and all that lived. This universal communion also includes one's enemies. Gandhi said,

⁴ Mind of Gandh, p. 28

⁵ Young India, 21 March, 1929

⁶ A Gandhian Theology of Liberation, p. 233

I do not help opponents without at the same time helping myself and my co-workers.⁷

Of course, Gandhi's vision was derived from his concept of God, who was seen as immanent and who bound everyone and everything together. It was God who was the source of all unity and communion. One who experienced this oneness with God, also found God in others. That person also devoted self to the service of others and found self related to the whole world. Gandhi wrote,

A truly religious person becomes a citizen of the world, but the service of one's own country is the stepping-stone to the service of humanity. And where service is rendered to the country consistently with the welfare of the world, it finally leads to self-realization.⁸

2. Basis for Brotherhood

a. We are One by Our Origin

According to Gandhi the first basis for brotherhood was that we are one by our origin. Gandhi accepted the common Hindu belief in the oneness of all that lives. All life comes from the One Universal Source, not just human beings. For this reason brotherhood in Hinduism pertains to all that lives, not just humanity. Though difficult, the first step towards this brotherhood of all that lives is the establishment of the real brotherhood of man. Gandhi's basis of brotherhood was the oneness of life. Gandhi wrote,

I believe in absolute oneness of God and therefore also of humanity. What though we have many bodies, we have but one soul. The rays of the sun are many through refraction. But they have the same source.⁹

It is important to note here that Gandhi deduced the oneness of life from the oneness of God. All life is one because it has come from the same Source or proceeds from the same God. Thus, the

⁷ Young India, 4 December, 1924

⁸ The Sayings of Gandhi, p. 30

⁹ Mind of Gandhi, p. 8

oneness of man means that the individual soul derives itself from the One Universal Source. And, consequently, all men are children of the one and same God. Thus, all men are, according to Gandhi, brothers because every man is a child of God. Because of our common origin we are also social beings. To live an isolated life, therefore, is against our human nature. Without interrelations with society, man cannot realize oneness with the universe.

The Bible and Koran also teach that all men are created in the likeness and image of God. This means Christianity and Islam also teach that all human beings come from same source, that same source being God. If all human beings come from the same divine Father, we are brothers to each other; we are one family. This is the dream Gandhi wanted to realize all through his life, that we are brothers by our origin.

b. All Religions are Meant to Bind Us Together

According to Gandhi our religion is the basis of brotherhood. He believed that religions are not meant to separate us one from another; they are meant to bind together.¹⁰ We are bound together because the same God reveals all religions and all religions lead us to the same God. None of the religions teach us to kill our fellow man because he is of a different religion, nor do they allow any ill-will or hatred for anyone even if he is a non-believer. Rather a true religion teaches man to love others as equals. Within this true spirit of religion Gandhi worked for one end, to bring about the broadest of toleration among different faiths so that all could live and work side by side as brothers. Gandhi wrote,

I should love all the men - not only in India but in the world - belonging to different faiths, to become better people by contact with one another, and if that happens the world will be a much better place to live in than it is today. I plead for the broadest toleration and I am working to that end. I ask people to examine every religion from the point of the religionists themselves.¹¹

¹⁰ The Message of Mahatma Gandhi, p. 37

¹¹ The Message of Mahatma Gandhi, p. 37

c. Unity in Diversity

It is important to remember that Gandhi was not concerned with the problem of religious pluralism, in the sense that Christian theologians struggle with it today. Pluralism never presented itself as an intellectual problem for Gandhi. He took it for granted that there was a diversity of gifts but the same spirit. Gandhi wrote,

Each religion has its own contribution to make to human evolution. I regard the great faiths of the world as so many branches of a tree, each distinct from the other though having the same source.¹²

Gandhi considered himself a practical idealist.¹³ He did not keep his philosophical ideas only on the level of thought. He was sincere in putting into practice the ideas he believed to be true. There is only one God, therefore, there is to be only one religion was a theoretical concept for Gandhi. In practice he did not expect there to be only one religion in the world, because religious experience was not exclusive to one person. Different people related differently with the one God. Religions were but different ways of relating, but they all had the same source and goal. Gandhi wrote,

Belief in one God is the corner-stone of all religions. But I do not foresee a time when there would be only one religion on earth in practice. In theory, since there is one God, there can be only one religion. But in practice, no two persons I have known have had the same identical conception of God. Therefore, there will, perhaps, always be different religions answering to different temperaments and climatic conditions.¹⁴

Gandhi's brotherhood of men of different religious creeds must be understood in the light of his experiments with truth and sacred duty. In religious matters, his own special gift was the ability to perceive, in people bearing diverse religious labels, a common human striving and human response to a power beyond all

¹² Harijan, 28 January, 1939, p. 448

¹³ Mind of Gandhi, p. 166

¹⁴ Mind of Gandhi, p. 67

understanding. Diversity of religion was not a sign of disunity. Rather, differing religions were complementary to one another. Gandhi experienced that at the heart of all religions there was oneness. The moment we discover this oneness we can forget our differences and embrace each other as brothers. Gandhi wrote,

We may call ourselves Christians, Hindus or Mohammedans. Whatever we may be, beneath that diversity there is an oneness, which is unmistakable and underneath many religions there is also one religion. As far as my experience goes, at one time or other, we, the Mohammedans, Christians or Hindus, discover that there are many points of contact and very few points of difference.¹⁵

Gandhi's own experience told him that within one and the same community there could be great inhumanity to man. A painful example of this for him was the condition of the untouchables; who were, in fact, members of the Hindu community. But, as far as the encounter between separate religious communities was concerned, it was the relation between Hindus and Muslims that concerned him the most. This situation led eventually to the partitioning of the country. The November 1946 campaign of Gandhi to promote brotherhood in Noakhali (a district of Bangladesh) saw him appealing to those who had been wronged to show courage. He encouraged them to build a new life after they had lost all at the hands of the other religious community. He urged people to realize their common concerns as weavers, fisherman and farmers rather than to think of religious labels. During the communal riots and India's independence from British rule, Gandhi deeply adhered to the importance of brotherhood through mutual respect and tolerance. Gandhi wrote,

The need of the moment is not one religion, but mutual respect and tolerance of the devotees of the different religions. We want to reach not the dead level, but unity in diversity. Any attempt to root out traditions, effects of heredity, climate and other surroundings is not only bound to fail, but it is a sacrilege.¹⁶

¹⁵ The Message of Mahatma Gandhi, p. 38

¹⁶ *ibid*, p. 37-38

3. How to Promote Brotherhood?

a. Forgetting “Religious Affiliation”

Gandhi considered all religions as means for the attainment of the one and same goal. Therefore, religious affiliation was not so important, as long as the same goal was reached. The goal and the sincerity expressed in reaching for it were more important, for people are religious not by their affiliation but by sincere practice of moral principles. If we place too much stress on religious affiliation instead of on religious living and practice hatred and violence will arise. Gandhi’s time in South Africa had been very beneficial in this regard, because it provided human conflict experience: laborers versus authorities, Britons versus Boers and Zulu versus white. These opportunities provided him with training in the concept of universality. He dealt with different people of different faiths, which also gave opportunity for mutual enrichment. He firmly believed that “no one has a monopoly of truth”.¹⁷ In order to learn from each other and promote brotherhood, we need to forget our religious affiliations by following these three steps:

Forgetting “Religious Affiliation” by Studying and Praying

We have seen that Gandhi grew up with an attitude of respect for other religions. When he was in England and South Africa, he came into contact with other religious faiths. He studied all the major religious scriptures with a prayerful attitude, in order to find truth in them. Sincere and prayerful study of other religious scriptures helped Gandhi to discover that the soul of religion is one. This truth helped him to hold dear other religions, as he did his own. Gandhi wrote,

I came to the conclusion long ago, after prayerful search and study and discussion with many people as I could meet, that all religions were true and also that all had some error in them, and that, whilst I hold by my own, I should hold others as dear as Hinduism, from which it logically follows

¹⁷ Harijan 29 September, 1940

that we should hold all as dear as our nearest kith and kin and that we should make no distinction between them.¹⁸

Often religious ignorance is the cause of fanaticism and violence. When we are ignorant of our own religion, we tend to emphasize only external religious affiliation. We think our religion is superior to other religions. This attitude causes communal conflict and violence. Prayerful study of our own religion, as well as, other religious scriptures can bring us out of the darkness of own little religious “cave”. Gandhi over the years emphasized having a respectful attitude towards scriptures of other traditions. Addressing missionaries in Calcutta he pointed out the importance of studying other religions and letting people be free in their choice. Towards the end of his life, he tried to introduce reading from the Koran into his prayer meetings.¹⁹

Forgetting “Religious Affiliation” by Eliminating One’s Own Excrecences

According to Gandhi, excrecences must be eliminated for one’s spiritual growth. For the Hindus the leading excrecence was ‘the sin of untouchability’. It was no one’s business, however, to remove the speck from another’s eye. Rather, one should try to find truth in other faiths. For example, instead of pointing out that the Islamic idea of brotherhood appears to be confined to those within the fold, one could try to apply the principle of brotherhood, emphasizing that all men are brothers and that there are really no outsiders. It is clear that Gandhi advocated the cultivation of an assimilative process. Hinduism is considered as a religion of ‘tolerance’, but what Gandhi pointed out was much more dynamic and far-reaching than mere tolerance.

Forgetting “Religious Affiliation” by Putting Together Reasoning and Hearts

Gandhi was a man of reason as well as of heart. He always stressed the importance of the appeal to reason. He would say

¹⁸ Mind of Gandh, p. 67

¹⁹ Harijan, 26 May, 1946

religion never suffered by reason of criticism, fair or foul; it suffered only from the laxity or indifference of its followers.²⁰ Reason did, however, have its limits because it sometimes was unable to move us. He brought this point out when he said,

I have come to this fundamental conclusion that if you want something really important to be done, you must not merely satisfy reason, you must move the heart also. The appeal of reason is more to the head but the penetration of the heart comes from suffering. It opens up the inner understanding in man.²¹

Gandhi believed that without faith our world would come to naught in a moment. For Gandhi faith did not contradict reason but transcended it. Faith was considered as a sixth sense, which worked in some cases, without the purview of reason. In these cases we would just have to accept in faith. If we put reason and faith together, the combination would lead us to unity and harmony. We would, therefore, forget our religious affiliations.

b. Truth as Object of Worship

Through his life, Gandhi lived a truthful life, and called himself a seeker of Truth. He defined God as Truth, which suggests to us that Truth is the object of our Worship. It does not matter if a person is Muslim, Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, theist or atheist, as long as he worships the Truth. The One God is the cornerstone of all religion. It does not matter if different people call him by different names. We may have different rituals as means for worship, but we worship the same Truth. For Gandhi, to worship Truth is to live a life of brahmacharya, sincerity, ahimsa, non-possession, non-stealing, and to give selfless service to humanity. The best way of worshiping God and the direct approach to God-realization are through the sincere quest for Truth in righteous living. If every person searches for Truth and worships Truth through right living, Truth will make all free and bring all together as brothers.

²⁰ *ibid*, 3 November, 1946

²¹ *Young India*, 5 November, 1931, p. 341

c. Non-violence as Means for Brotherhood

After sincere study of all the major religious scriptures, Gandhi concluded that all these scriptures teach non-violence. He said that Hinduism with its message of ahimsa is to him the most glorious religion in the world. Gautama, who founded Buddhism and taught ahimsa, was himself the Hindu of Hindus. The essence of Christ's teachings was love and forgiveness. Moreover, the message of the Sermon on the Mount, which Gandhi loved most, was also nonviolence. Similar teaching could also be found in the Koran. Gandhi said that the teaching of the Koran was essentially in favor of nonviolence, for nonviolence was better than violence. Consequently, this meant that the Koran taught nonviolence as duty and violence was permitted only when necessary.²² So, if the believers of all faiths followed the teachings of their own scriptures, accepting the creed of nonviolence, everyone could live in unity and harmony as brothers. But Gandhi also admonished that if any religion used violence; it would lose its existence in violence. As Gandhi wrote,

I have a deep conviction that no religion can be sustained by brute force. On the contrary, those who take the sword always perish by the sword.²³

A man who wants to become truly religious and who wants to realize himself should remain non-violent in every shape and form, for, as Gandhi believed, non-violence is the only means to attain truth. He believed ahimsa to be the law of the species and *himsa* to be the law of the jungle. In the beginning men practiced non-violence in their daily lives, but in the course of history they slowly gave up this habit and ahimsa was replaced by himsa. This is the cause of all ills in the world today. If we want peace, harmony and brotherhood in the world non-violence or love is the only means to attain it.

²² Mind of Gandhi, p. 100

²³ Mind of Gandhi, p. 65

d. Seeking and Cultivating Religious and Moral Values

According to Gandhi religion and morality could not be separated, because morality was the basis of all things and truth was the substance of all morality.²⁴ Gandhi's criterion for justifying a teaching or doctrine as religious or irreligious was morality. A person who often violated the moral laws could not be considered as religious. A person, however, who lived a good moral life was truly religious, no matter what his faith was. Gandhi said that when morality incarnated itself in a living man, it became religion, because it bound, it held, it sustained the man in the hour of trial.²⁵

The scriptures of all religions teach moral values. Gandhi, through his sincere study of different scriptures, accepted the moral teachings of all religions with an open heart. He learned the values of purity, truth, nonviolence, chastity, humility and simplicity from Hinduism, the single-heartedness of the Sermon on the Mount from the Christianity, peace and brotherhood from Islam, and nonviolence and renunciation from Buddhism. His five moral principles mentioned in the third chapter of this study came from Jainism. Sincere practice of all the moral values made Gandhi truly a religious person. With strong conviction Gandhi proposed that moral teachings of other religions be taught in the schools in order to promote tolerance and respect for other faiths. Gandhi wrote,

A curriculum of religious instruction should include a study of the tenets of faiths of other than one's own. For this purpose the students should be trained to cultivate the habit of understanding and appreciating the doctrines of various great religions of the world in a spirit of reverence and broad-minded tolerance.²⁶

According to Gandhi the aim of education was character building. Education should help students to develop courage, strength, and virtue. This was more important than literacy.

²⁴ Autobiography, p. 34

²⁵ C. Shukla, Gandhi's view of life, Bombay, 1954, p. 117

²⁶ Mind of Gandhi, p. 70

Academic learning was only a means to this great end.²⁷ If everyone's character could be built up through the living of his/her own religious values, then everyone could embrace one another as brothers.

e. Fasting as Means for Brotherhood

Fasting is an old religious practice for bodily purification and for the attainment of the spirit's supremacy over the flesh. Credit goes to Gandhi for using it to promote brotherhood while engaging in social and political reforms.

For Gandhi fasting unto death was the last weapon in the hands of a *satyagrahi*. In Satyagraha, a *satyagrahi* accepted suffering that came from the opponent, but in fasting, suffering was self-imposed. Satyagraha fasting was a means to resist injustice and convert the evildoer.

Two huge challenges faced Gandhi in his struggle to bring about political and social reforms while in the service of his country. One was untouchability and the other was Hindu-Muslim unity. To reform untouchability and to bring Hindu-Muslim unity Gandhi used Satyagraha fasting. In this regard, two fasts of Gandhi are very significant. In September 1932, Gandhi fasted 'unto death' in Poona against untouchability. The ultimate aim was to abolish all untouchability in all its gross forms.²⁸ His second significant fast, and his last fast, was in January of 1948. This fast was for the restoration of perfect, communal harmony between Hindus and Muslims.

Was Gandhi successful in using fasting in the abolition of untouchability from the Hindu community and restoring communal harmony between Hindu and Muslim? This is not the important question here. What's of importance is that Gandhi, through his sincere Satyagraha fasting, pointed out the evil of the two situations. The evil was the misconception of persons being other than brothers. People, Indians, should not be divided because of religion. Gandhi was sincere in the use of fasting as a

²⁷ The Message of Mahatma Gandhi, p. 112

²⁸ A Gandhian Theology of Liberation, p. 196

tool to bring unity and brotherhood within the Hindu community, as well as, between religions.

It is clear that Gandhi stressed the vital importance of harmony between different religious groups in the interest of national unity. He believed, however, that this harmony was not just for the sake of purpose. Rather, this harmony, his concept of brotherhood, was based on the commonality of humanity. Being all children of God, men had common access to Truth, for which all were searching. If we would accept this truth, we would find there was more commonality in our religions than differences; we would find unity in diversity of faith, in diversity of persons. Realizing that we all came from the same source and return to the same source, religions or other reasons could no longer divide us; rather we would be bound together in one human brotherhood.

CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY, CONCLUSION
AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Summary

This study has presented Gandhi's *darshana* on religion and his contributions to promote brotherhood. Chapter One served to state the problem, significance and methodology of the study. Chapter Two served as a background of Gandhi's religious formation. His father's truthfulness, mother's saintliness, family friends of other faiths, who came to converse with his family all contributed to his solid, religious foundation. They also helped him to grow in a spirit of respect for other religions.

While studying law in London, Gandhi found hidden treasure in religions. During this time, he came into direct contact with Christianity and he read the Bible. For the first time, he also read the Gita, the heroic life of the Prophet Mohammed, books on Buddhism and on atheism. All these studies on different religions helped Gandhi to develop his religious philosophy.

In South Africa Gandhi experienced the extreme injustice of color prejudice. This experience furthered the development of his philosophy of *satyagraha* and *ahimsa*, which were applied as religious principles in bringing justice to color prejudice victims. Later, when he entered Indian politics because of his religious faith, he used these same principles (*satyagraha* and *ahimsa*) in the struggle to free India from British rule.

Chapter Three explained the religious concepts of Mahatma Gandhi. After careful study of all the major religious scriptures, Gandhi concluded that God was the cornerstone of all religions. For Gandhi, Truth was God (*Truth is God*). As the atheists believed in truth, therefore, for Gandhi, in some manner they

believed in God though they did not call the truth God. Gandhi himself described God by different names: Master of Life, Inner Voice, Pure Conscience, Force, Light, Love, Law and Law-Giver.

Gandhi saw man as a social and spiritual being whose dignity came from his Source, the One. Man through ethical, moral and spiritual discipline reached a higher level of being. The aim of the human being was to realize God within himself through repentance and self-purification. All human beings were free, equal in the eye of God and deserved dignity and proper respect.

All religions were means to attain the same goal; God was the goal. God revealed all religions, yet all religions were more or less imperfect. Thus, no religion was the one, exclusive religion because all were imperfect. If all religions were true and yet imperfect, one religion could not be superior to another. A person did not have to change religion (conversion) because no one religion was superior to another.

Gandhi explained conversion as an inner process in which one gives up evil ways, undergoes self-purification, surrenders to God, dedicates self to the service of humanity and gradually becomes the real self.

For Gandhi salvation was not a future reality; salvation could be here and now. Selfless service to humanity was the only way to salvation. Selfless service was not possible, however, without self-purification. A self-purified person, dedicating himself to the service of humanity without expecting the fruits of that service, could attain salvation. Gandhi's movements of *swaraj* and spinning wheel were concrete means to give selfless service to humanity.

Chapter Four explained five basic religious or moral principles practiced by Mahatma Gandhi. These five principles were also known as Gandhi's ashram vows. The first principle was *Satya*, meaning Truth, the most important name of God. Truth, here, did not only mean truthfulness or speaking the truth, it was truthfulness in thoughts, words and actions. Gandhi was convinced that if a person observed this principle of Truth he

would be able to keep all the rules of correct living without effort. The second principle was *Ahimsa* or nonviolence. For Gandhi *Ahimsa* was the means to attain the Truth. *Ahimsa* did not mean only non-killing, or not to give offence to anyone, but rather it was the renunciation of the wish to kill, injure or harm. The principle of *Ahimsa* was violated by every evil thought, wishing ill on another and by hating another. Therefore the followers of this principle were bound to harm no one and to love everyone. The third principle was *Brahmacharya* or celibacy. Literally it meant to 'walk in the Lord's way, or in other words, complete dedication of body, mind and soul to God. For Gandhi *Brahmacharya* meant control of thought, word, action and of all the senses at all times, in all places. *Brahmacharya* was essential for the devotee of Truth and for the service of humankind. The fourth principle was *Aporigraha* or non-possession; the complete surrender of one's self, as well as, one's worldly possessions for the service of humanity. This principle forbade private property or the possession of anything that was not needed for simple living. According to Gandhi, absence of this principle was the root cause of poverty in the world. The fifth principle was non-stealing or *Asteyagraha*. According to this principle, one who took anything he did not need for his own immediate use stole it from someone else who was in need of it. This principle forbade the desire to possess things that belonged to others, or even the casting of a greedy eye on it. Gandhi enunciated these five principles to promote justice, peace and harmony in the world and to enable people to be truly religious.

Chapter Five explained how Gandhi's religious concepts contributed to promote universal brotherhood. Mahatma Gandhi believed that God was the Father and Creator of the universe. Universal brotherhood was the consequence of acceptance of the Fatherhood of God. If God was the Universal Father, we were the children of this Creator, Father God. We were all brothers by our origin, since we came from the same Father. Since God was one, humanity was also one. Man's endeavors to be in solidarity with the outcasts, downtrodden, Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and faithful of all religions were concrete signs of universal brotherhood flowing from oneness with their Creator God.

Gandhi's universal brotherhood was not an ideal but a living experience of his vision. With great hope and inner conviction Gandhi said, "The world is moving towards universal brotherhood when mankind will be one nation. Neither you nor I can stop the march towards our common destiny". (Collected Works, Vol. 71, p. 179)

B. Conclusion

In this study we have seen that Gandhi had deep faith in God. The examples of his father's truthfulness and his mother's religiosity took root deeply in his life. He sought God as Truth. Truth as God was the Master of his life and he knew that Truth dwelt in every human person. His whole life was committed to God. He served God in and through serving humankind. For him service was the only way for salvation. His five religious principles were signs of his dedication and commitment to God and man's service in love and purity of heart. His religion was not, therefore, limited only in cultic rituals. He saw that what underpinned all religion was the one, same God. As children of the One God, we were all brothers; we were one family. He dreamt of a world without war, violence, hunger, a world where everyone was respected, where there was mutual love and tolerance regardless of differences of color, race, caste, religion and nationality. Gandhi worked tirelessly until death to promote brotherhood. He influenced thousands of people to realize that dream of universal brotherhood.

Gandhi's philosophy is considered a comprehensive system, though not an abstract system of thought. He tried to unite philosophy with life, abstract principles with concrete reality and religion with politics. In other words, Gandhi combined different sciences into a comprehensive system and showed with his life example how to put them into daily practice. This is why Gandhi was not only a philosopher; he was also a politician, economist, social scientist and spiritual guru. He could be all of these because he was, above all else, a truly religious person. His religion influenced every aspect of his life. Gandhi was not trained as an academic philosopher. Yet he introduced his

philosophy to the world in a very simple and ordinary way, through the integrated living of his philosophical principles.

C. Recommendation

The researcher is pleased to recommend further research on Gandhi's philosophy, especially to be done in the following areas:

Political Philosophy

We are going through a worldwide political leadership crisis. We have many leaders but true leadership is in crisis. Politicians think politics is their sole possession and that it has little relationship to the common people that make up their constituencies. Often good, moral character is lacking in our politicians. Leaders seem often to be engaged in struggles for personal power and self-aggrandizement, rather than in struggles for the betterment of their countrymen. Mahatma Gandhi was one of the greatest political leaders of this century. Independence of India, the biggest democratic country of the world, was won without bloodshed following his leadership. Gandhi's political ideas, rich in moral values, can enlighten the politicians of the twenty-first century to promote unity and peace in the world as it moves into a new millennium. The researcher recommends that further research be done on the political philosophy of Gandhi.

Philosophy of Work

Every human person works, but not with the same attitude. Does man only work for self, or does he work so that he and others can live? It is important to determine the philosophy behind man's work. In this regard, Gandhi's philosophy of work can enlighten every human person to work in the spirit of service. Through service, man fulfills himself and also realizes God in self and every other human person. Therefore, work, particularly the work of service to humanity, for salvation is constitutive. The researcher recommends further study on Gandhi's philosophy of work.

Philosophy of Dialogue

This is the age of inter-religious dialogue. Gandhi's life was a model of dialogue with men of all faiths. Every religion was

equal to him and he regarded no believer as isolated from him or his enemy. Gandhi's philosophy of inter-religious dialogue with other faiths would be an excellent topic for further study.

Philosophy of Economics

In Asia, particularly in South Asia, the majority of the people are uneducated and live in villages. With little employable work in these villages, many people are moving to the overcrowded cities, where they, too are unemployable. Gandhi's philosophy of economics, specially his comprehensive programs of *Khadi* and *Charkha* (spinning wheel and bread labor) and *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi* movements could be good strategies for solving this problem. Further study on Gandhi's philosophy of economics is strongly recommended.

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Definition of Terms

Atma- this term literally means soul. The term means the soul of the individual. The essence within man, which is identical to the essence of the Universal Power, considered as the source of everything.

Ahimsa - this term literally translates as non-violence. It means renunciation of the wish to kill, to injure, to harm or to damage. It means to love and to suffer for others. It is also a means to attain Truth.

Asteyagraha- this term means non-stealing. This is a religious principle practiced by Gandhi. According to this principle, the one who takes anything that he does not need for his own immediate use, steals it from another. This also forbids the desire to possess something, which belongs to others.

Aporigraha- this term means no desire for others or non-possession. It is used here as a religious vow or religious principle practiced by

Gandhi. This vow forbids not only possessing anything as private property but also the keeping of something which is not needed for simple living.

Advaita- it is *the* Hindu philosophy of Monism, or non-dualism of God and the world, of God and man.

Brahman- this term means the One God of Hinduism, also known as the One, the Ultimate Reality and the World Soul. *God* is the self-existing Universal Power, believed to be the source of everything.

Brahmacharya- literally means a movement toward Brahman. It also means celibacy, code of conduct involving strict observance of chastity or continence in the pursuit of learning, philosophy and God. Here it is used as a religious vow or principle practiced by Gandhi.

Bhagavad Gita- literally means ‘Song of the Lord’. It is a Hindu scripture in Sanskrit verse, composed some centuries before the Christian era in which Sri Krishna sums up the essence of Hindu religion and philosophy.

Brotherhood- literary ‘Brotherhood’ means fellowship, community of feeling, or fraternity. In this research, brotherhood means to live in the society in mutual respect, tolerance, unity and harmony, regardless of sex, religion, caste, race, or nationality.

Darshana- this term literary translates as philosophy. But in the Indian concept, darshana is more than mere philosophy. It means, “vision” and also an “instrument of vision”, based on personal experience. It is the actual perception of Truth and a mean, which leads to this actualization.

Dharma- this term literally means religion. This term also means social duty or religious law. This is the principle of order in Hindu society and ultimately in the universe.

Mahatma- it means Great Soul. His countrymen gave this title to Gandhi.

Maya- this term literally means illusion. It is used here *in relation to* the world that is changeable, perishable, or erasable reality.

Satyagraha- this term means desire for truth. It is used here as a religious principle practiced by Gandhi to attain truth, which is God. Gandhi named it ‘soul force’.

Veda – it is the earliest Hindu texts, composed before, during, and after the Aryan invasion of the Indus Valley.



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