

Address at Lechayim of Jewish Services Association, Madison [WIS.] U. S.

I stand before you to speak on Gandhi who was shot dead some sixty years ago but who is still alive. He is still the most frequently mentioned individual in the world and is still the centre of the controversies some of which were raised by his actions and beliefs. Every year at least three or four books are written about him in some part of the world or other and he is being constantly discussed at several seminars and intellectual discourses all over the world. The date of his birth has been proclaimed as the Non-violence Day by the United Nations Organization. In our terror-stricken world of today, his teachings are even more relevant than they were when they were preached in the first half of the twentieth century.

The world to-day hails him as a Mahatma - a Great Soul - a Saint. Gandhi always resented the title and found it intensely painful. He never cared for any beatification and insisted that he was an ordinary man who was trying his level best for the realization of the Divine Presence.

Gandhi was not born a saint but chiseled himself into one by intensely agonizing experiments in austerity and discipline. He chose to call his biography "My experiments with Truth." It is very difficult, if not impossible, to project Gandhi in few minutes. Sixty years after his death, he still remains a sort of enigma. The flood of copious literature on Gandhi does nothing to solve the mystery.

Unlike most of us, Gandhi continued to grow and change till the last moment of his life and he never worried about contracting himself. "In my search for Truth, I have never cared about consistency." Like Emerson, he rejected consistency as the virtue of small minds. He was bold enough to proclaim that 'If my readers find any inconsistency in my views, they should reject the older ones and believe in the later as my views might have changed.'

Gandhi was a multiplex personality so full of contradictions. He was a shrewd politician who implicitly trusted all his enemies and who never aspired for any position of power or pelf. Gandhi was a revolutionary who was very conservative and a man of peace who was continuously making trouble all around him. He was an intensely religious person who rejected the rituals and ceremonials of all religions including his own. He prayed daily for Divine guidance and claimed to be led by an Inner Voice but that voice was always filtered through the razor sharp brain of a seasoned lawyer. He was a democrat whose companions often complained about the dictatorial style of his decision making. He never had any formal authority but held in his frail hands the fate of 300 millions of Indians who implicitly trusted his word. For thirty years Gandhi was the face of India.

He was many men in one. He was a political leader par excellence, a social reformer, an educationist, a dietician, a great environmentalist, a naturopath but above all a seeker for spiritual bliss. Gandhi never hesitated to practice what he preached and believed and was ever ready to experiment with any new idea. He was ever ready to meet those who disagreed with him and to carry on a dialogue with them.

Gandhi often said that his life is his message and his life and teachings can greatly contribute in finding the solutions to the problems that plague the world today. There are so many aspects and achievements of Gandhi but I am going to focus only on one of his contributions that I consider to be the most significant one.

All through his adult life Gandhi struggled hard to fight the Evil in personal and public life whenever and wherever he faced it. The problem of Evil and how to fight with it has been an age old problem faced by entire Humanity ever since the primordial period of the human history. The usual answer to the Evil as pronounced in all the ancient codes of Hindus and also in the code of Hammurabi was to do evil to the evil doers. Eye for an eye was and still remains the accepted policy of all civil societies and in international relations. The violence that we use against the criminals and the violence in war differ only in their quantitative dimensions; the quality is the same but the volume of violence seems to condone the crime. A murderer is punished with death whatever be his motive. But a killer on a massive scale is a hero in war. Ancient Indian texts advise to do evil to the evil doers.

Buddha advocated a policy of indifference to the problem of Evil. Do not participate in violence, do not support or approve of it but keep away from the evil act. Conquer evil with Good and anger with patience.

Christ chose the path of peace and reconciliation by tolerating or submitting to the evil, to turn the other cheek and to give away the coat to those who snatch away our shirt. We all are sinners and we have to seek forgiveness from God who is a kind and generous father of humanity. We ought to forgive the evil doer as when he is sincerely repentant of his evil deeds. Christ would leave it to the divine dispensation to do justice and he hoped for a kingdom of God where violence will disappear and when the meek shall inherit the earth.

Mahommed, the prophet of Islam agreed that God is a loving and generous father of humanity but he insisted that Evil must be countered with Justice that is impartial but stern and swift. No one is above justice and none ought to be allowed to escape it.

Hindus believe that good or evil is the Karma of the individual and will automatically lead to its reward or punishment. The iron law of Karma leaves no ground for any forgiveness. It is an inexorable process of nature and just as none can escape or evade the force of gravitation so also no one can evade or escape Karma. We need to do nothing for getting the guilty punished as he or she will be punished by Nature itself.

Gandhi was both a staunch Hindu and a good Christian. The Archbishop of Canterbury declared Gandhi to be the only Christian in the contemporary world even though he was a devout Hindu, Gandhi dared to think out of box and struck a different chord. Arguing that the policy of an eye for an eye would soon leave the whole world blind in no time and warning that submission would only multiply evil, he sought to fight against Evil but to love the Evil doer.

He chose to separate the act from the actor and the deed from the doer. He fought one without hating the other. He argued that to fight evil with evil will only multiply evil. The evil must be fought by love and eliminated by converting the evil doer from the bottom of his heart. Punishment is only external and physical suffering would not change the inner mind and heart of the evil doer.

Punishment and retaliation will not reform the evil doer. So the only way to fight the evil is by non-violence because violence can never totally eliminate evil from the mind and heart of the evil doer. What is needed is the change of heart and that can be done by resisting all evil with love and nonviolence. Even the worst of man has a particle of good in him and we must appeal to that innate goodness so that evil is transformed in to good.

Passionately convinced about the innate goodness of Man, of every man even of the evil doers, Gandhi sought to separate the act from the man, the evil from the evil doers. He fought against evil without fear but also without hatred. The evil is to be totally eradicated even from the heart and mind of the evil doers. Gandhi always laid very great stress on change of heart and adopted an amazing technique.

The technique was Satyagraha and the instrument was Ahimsa. He picked up the principle of Ahimsa as taught by ancient Indian thinkers and converted Ahimsa from a spiritual practice to a weapon of war against Evil. Though the term is the same, Ahimsa of Gandhi is as sharply different from the Ahimsa of Buddha and Mahavir as chalk is different from the cheese. Non-violence for Gandhi is not for the submitting cowards but a virtue of the resisting heroes. It needs sustained activism and a readiness to sacrifice one's all to challenge and fight the evil wherever one finds it.

This technique-Satyagraha is often translated as Passive resistance but there was nothing passive in the life or approach of Gandhi. A Satyagrahi strives to appeal to the better side of the oppressors and the exploiters. They can be made to see and feel the evil they are doing by witnessing the sufferings of their victims. Even the worst of the oppressors is a human being and is never totally devoid of goodness that can be touched and

We are celebrating the 141st birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi (October 2, 1869 - January 30, 1948) at a time when the nation continues to be perturbed by violence, corruption, communalism, exploitation and neo-colonial interventions. We thought we have done our part by printing his image on rupee notes, placing his statues in street corners and naming roads after him; but what we have done is to reduce Gandhi into symbols and comfortably allowed his words to fade into memory. Otherwise how could violence, inequality, corruption and all such evils grow root in the land where this man lived, fought and sacrificed his life?

Scientist Albert Einstein said, “Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this walked the earth in flesh and blood.” But, what has happened is that we have not fully succeeded in understanding this great visionary who said “My life is my message” and boldly laid bare his life before us to learn from his experiments, mistakes and findings. And when proudly calling him the ‘Father of the Nation’, how far are we acquainted with the ideas of this thinker



who continues to be a source of inspiration for people all around the world? In honour of his contributions for world peace Gandhi's birthday is celebrated worldwide as the International Day of Non-Violence. Many of us will be surprised to know that the Guinness world record for the biggest street party in the world is for the carnival organised by 'Filhos de Gandhi ' or "Sons of Gandhi", a group in the city of Salvador in north-eastern Brazil that drew inspiration from Gandhi's philosophy of equality and non-violence.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

He returned to India and soon was at the forefront of the freedom struggle. He empowered Indians with the powerful weapons of non-violence and Satyagraha; and called for mass participation in the civil disobedience movement that forced the British empire to bend its knees before the nationalist struggle for independence. The Dandi March, where Gandhi along with his followers made salt from sea water protesting against the taxation by the British government, caught worldwide attention as it emphasised the impact of civil disobedience against armed oppression. Finally, when we won Independence, Gandhi was disappointed by the partition of the country. Deeply pained by the bloodshed due to religious riots, Gandhi tried hard to bring peace and unity among people belonging to different religious groups, until he was killed by a religious fanatic.

Being a man far ahead of his times Gandhi's visions on health, education, politics, governance and development were revolutionary. He believed that self-reliance and self-sufficiency would lead us

towards Swaraj or 'Self-governance'. He said that the real India lies in its villages and progress can be attained only through their development. Through his life he showed us that everyone should do his share of physical labour; and craft, art, health and education should be integrated into one scheme for the holistic development of the individual. He was an efficient barrister, writer, journalist, teacher, and a great leader, yet he also utilised his time to make sandals, cook healthy but simple dishes, nurse and cure sick people; grow cotton, spin yarn, weave, and sew clothes out of it and for other domestic chores. What we can see in all this is his great respect for manual labour, curiosity to learn new things and absorb good values from all sources that he came across. He drew inspiration from the stories of Shrivana and Raja Harishchandra and from various religions ideologies; he was also influenced by the ideas of Socrates, Leo Tolstoy, Henry David Thoreau, John Ruskin, W.M.Salter, Edward Carpenter, Abraham Lincoln, Gokhale and many others.

On realising his mistakes, Gandhi confessed



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