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# The Tradition of Nonviolence and Its Underlying Forces

BY WILLIAM STUART NELSON

## HINDUISM

**B**ETWEEN 2000 and 1000 B.C., when the Greeks were still nomads, the oldest religious writings in history appeared in India. They were the *Vedas* in which we find what has been described as "the first outpourings of the human mind, the glow of poetry, the rapture of nature's loveliness and mystery."<sup>1</sup> Following the *Vedas* came the ritualistic *Brahmanas*, the *Laws of Manu*, and the philosophical *Upanishads*. Then followed the two great popular epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* and, as a part of the *Mahabharata*, the *Bhagavad Gita* called by Wilhelm von Humboldt "the most beautiful, perhaps the only true philosophical song existing in any known language."<sup>2</sup>

From the beginning, amidst prayers, philosophical speculation, commandments, poetry, and epics, the idea of nonviolence was present. In the *Upanishads*, *ahimsa* or nonviolence is one of the five moral virtues. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, *ahimsa* is a superior ethical virtue:

I foresee no good will come  
From killing my own kindred in war  
Even though they slay me, I wish not to strike them.  
How can we be happy, having slain our own kindred  
Though they, with hearts deadened with avarice,  
See not the evil that will come.<sup>3</sup>

The *Laws of Manu* prescribe that he who would teach others for their well-being must be guided by *ahimsa* and use sweet and gentle speech toward them.

From the *Mahabharata* comes the maxim that nonviolence is the greatest religion or duty.

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<sup>1</sup>Jawaharlal Nehru. Quoted by H. G. Wells, *Outline of History* (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1921), p. 252.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted by Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New York, The John Day Company, 1946), p. 99.

<sup>3</sup>*Bhagavad Gita* 1.31, 35, 37, 38.

Not only is nonviolence one of Hinduism's cardinal virtues and its cosmic outlook generally, there are also present those other qualities of the human spirit which are inseparable from nonviolence. So in the *Mahabharata* abstention from injury to all creatures in thought, word, and deed is admonished and kindness and generosity are called the permanent duties of the good. Enjoin the *Laws of Manu*: "Let him patiently bear hard words. Let him not insult anybody. Against an angry man let him not in return show anger. Let him bless when he is cursed."<sup>4</sup>

Throughout these thousands of years of scripture we find self-imposed suffering and the surrender of one's possessions to God both of which we shall discover to be the invariable accompaniments of genuine nonviolence.

#### BUDDHISM

Ancient Hinduism followed the course of most religions, and leaving behind its pristine years of pure worship, poetry, philosophic and ethical insight deteriorated into an inflexible cultus, other-worldliness, an heirarchical social order rigid in the extreme.

The great reform came five hundred years before Christ with Gautama Buddha who gave the world an early and extraordinarily great personal example of total commitment to the nonviolent way of life.

Breaking away from the ritualism of the Vedic religion he attacked the superstitions, ceremonies, and priestcrafts of popular religion and the related vested interests — metaphysics and theology, miracles and revelations, and everything related to the supernatural. He appealed to reason and experience. He emphasized ethics. Having thus described the Buddhist reformation, Mr. Nehru says of Buddha himself: "His whole approach comes like a breath of the fresh wind from the mountains after the stale air of metaphysical speculation."<sup>5</sup>

What of value accrues from violence? The answer of Buddhism is "hatreds are not quenched by hatred. Nay rather . . . hatreds are quenched by love";<sup>6</sup> and victory can always be relied upon to breed hatred, for the conquered are naturally unhappy.

The speech of men must be under the same rule, for to use harsh language to those who have committed a sin is to strew salt upon the wound of the error.

<sup>4</sup>*Laws of Manu* 6:47-48.

<sup>5</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>6</sup>*Vinaya* 1.342-349. Quoted by E. W. Burlingame, *Buddhist Parables* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1922), p. 27.

Buddha taught:

A brother ought not intentionally  
 to destroy the life of any being.<sup>7</sup>  
 Not for our life would we ever intentionally  
 kill a living being.<sup>8</sup>  
 A truth-finder laying aside cudgel and  
 sword, lives a life of innocence and  
 mercy,  
 . . . . .  
 He heals divisions, and cements friendship;  
 . . . . .  
 for, in peace is his delight . . .<sup>9</sup>

I have spoken of the total commitment of Buddha to the nonviolent way of life. Such a commitment must include a profound concern for the welfare of all. This indeed was a passion with Buddha. He preached to his disciples: "Go unto all lands and preach this gospel. Tell them that the poor and the lowly, the rich and the high, are all one, and that all castes unite in this religion as do the rivers of the sea."<sup>10</sup>

Live on,  
 for the good and the happiness of the  
 great multitudes,  
 Out of pity for the world,  
 for the good and the gain and the  
 weal of men.<sup>11</sup>

For Buddha, the outcastes were not of the traditional sort. He said:

The man who is angry and bears hatred,  
 who harms living beings, who speaks falsely,  
 who exalts himself and despises others,—  
 let one know him as an outcaste.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Mahavagga 1.78.4. *Sacred Books of the East*, 13.235.

<sup>8</sup>Mahavagga 6.31.13. *Sacred Books of the East*, 17.117.

<sup>9</sup>Cula-Hatthi-Padopama Sutta: *Sacred Books of the Buddhists*, 5:128, 129.

<sup>10</sup>Quoted by Nehru, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

<sup>11</sup>Maha-Parinibbana Sutta 3.4. *Sacred Books of the East*, 11.41.

<sup>12</sup>*Sacred Books of the East*, 10:2. 21-22.



The commitment to nonviolence involves also self-discipline and self-renunciation. Buddha rejected extreme asceticism and chose rather the "Middle Path" between self-indulgence and self-mortification coupled with rigid self-discipline. "Not even a God," he said, "could change into defeat the victory of a man who has vanquished himself, and always lives under restraint."<sup>13</sup>

Having gained sixty disciples, he sent them on their way, with this message: "Go ye now out of compassion for the world, for the welfare of gods and men. Let not two of you go the same way. Preach the doctrine which is glorious. Proclaim a consummate, perfect and pure life of holiness."<sup>14</sup>

If Buddha did not urge self-mortification, he did warn against the penalty of selfishness. He taught: "People grieve from selfishness; perpetual cares kill them";<sup>15</sup> and

The man who is possessed of much property  
Who has gold and food,  
And still enjoys his sweet things—  
This is the cause of loss.<sup>16</sup>

Later Buddhism in many ways has been apostate to the teachings of its founder and yet, departing from India after more than a thousand years, it has left an ineffaceable mark upon the life and thought of that country.

#### KING ASOKA

In India when men speak of the two or three supremely great figures of their past, King Asoka is always among them. He was called the "Beloved of the Gods" and his reign an Indian historian describes as "one of the brightest interludes in the troubled history of mankind."<sup>17</sup>

Asoka, model of gentleness, succeeded to his father's throne in 268 B.C. at the time the Romans were reviving the Etruscan sport of setting slaves to fight each other for their lives and only a few years before the first gladiatorial games were held in their capital city.

His kingdom was vast including all of present India, except the most southern portion, and great territories further north. He was a conquerer until his conversion.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 10:1. 31-32.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 13:112-113.

<sup>15</sup>Sutta Nipata 805: *Sacred Books of the East*, 12.2.150.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 101: *Sacred Books of the East*, 10.2.18.

<sup>17</sup>Quoted by Narendra Krishna Sinha and Anil Chandra Banerjee, *History of India* (Calcutta, A. Mukherjee and Company, 1947), p. 84.

Of this conversion Asoka himself tells. Grieved by the suffering born of one of his great victories involving the deportation of 150,000 persons, the killing of 100,000, and the death of many times that number, he resolved upon forgiveness and conciliation wherever possible and enjoined his ancestors not to seek new victories and, should they become engaged in conquest by arms, to take pleasure in patience and gentleness and to regard the only true conquest as that won by piety.

Although he did not renounce every use of force he undertook no war voluntarily, which led to the great weakening of his kingdom.

The conversion of Asoka was a conversion from the law of conquest to the "Law of Piety." What then was the "Law of Piety?" It was the law of good deeds, compassion, liberality, truthfulness, and purity. And so throughout his vast kingdom he ordered the planting of banyan trees to provide shade for both men and beasts, the digging of wells, the providing of watering places, and the erecting of rest houses.

He did not see fit to eliminate the death sentence but he ordered the novel rule—novel then and in some places novel now—that the condemned should have three days in which their relatives might come and meditate with them.

Animals were not forgotten. Hospitals were erected for them, animal sacrifice was forbidden and restrictions were placed upon the slaughter of animals for food, thereby giving impetus to the practice of vegetarianism. Hunting was abolished.

Asoka had no expressed faith in God and little enthusiasm for ceremonials. He complained at the trivial, worthless ceremonies performed by women at weddings, the birth of children, and upon departures on journeys and declared that it is the ceremonial of piety that bears great fruit. This ceremonial, he said, includes the proper treatment of slaves and servants, honor to teachers, gentleness toward living creatures, and liberality towards ascetics and Brahmans.

It is recalled that Asoka was Buddhist, and it is said that his missionaries went from his court as far west as Alexandria. But he was tolerant. Speaking of reverence he said: "the root of it is restraint in speech, to wit, a man must not do reverence to his own sect or disparage that of another man without reason . . . because the sects of other people all deserve reverence for one reason or another. . . . By acting contrawise, a man hurts his own sect, and does disservice to the sects of other people."<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup>*Rock Edict XII*, Vincent A. Smith, *Asoka* (Delhi, S. Chand and Company, 1957), p. 170.

This was King Asoka of the third century B.C. Of him H. G. Wells wrote: "For eight and twenty years Asoka worked sanely for the real needs of men. Amidst the tens of thousands of names of monarchs that crowd the columns of history, . . . the name of Asoka shines and shines almost alone, a star. From the Volga to Japan his name is still honoured. China, Tibet and even India, tho it has left his doctrine, preserve the tradition of his greatness. More men cherish his memory today than have ever heard the names of Constantine or Charlemagne."<sup>19</sup>

#### JAINISM

It will be profitable in discussing Jainism to recall that Mahavira, its founder, was a contemporary of Buddha, that Jainism and Buddhism developed side by side in sixth century B.C. India, and that they bore important similarities. As was true with Buddhism, Jainism also broke away from the Vedic religion. Neither is concerned with first cause and in both the emphasis is strongly ethical rather than transcendental.

The departure of Jainism from Buddhism in practice was in part largely a matter of degree. Self-discipline in Jainism was carried to a great extreme. Gandhi's early years were spent in Gujarat, Western India, where Jainism was very strong and he and his family fell heavily under its influence.

Described as perhaps the finest ethical feature of Jainism is the year-end penance in which Jains, including both monks and laymen, "are expected to confess their sins, pay their debts, and ask forgiveness of their neighbors for any offenses, whether intentional or unintentional."<sup>20</sup>

As in Buddhism, Jainism reveals a strong social concern, the difference being largely in the motivation. In Buddhism, escape from the round of suffering was at least the original motive. Charity in Jainism is good for the soul which is enabled to break the bonds of matter. Thus, often, it is not for love of others but for the love of one's own soul that good works should be performed. Later Jainism revealed a greater warmth and humanity.

As to certain more easily identifiable aspects of nonviolence, Jainism was of all religions in India their most fervent exponent. We read:

All beings hate pains.  
Therefore one should not kill them.  
This is the quintessence of wisdom not  
to kill anything.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup>*Outline of History* (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1921), p. 371.

<sup>20</sup>A. L. Basham, "Jainism and Buddhism" in *Sources of Indian Tradition* by Bary, Hay, Weiler, and Yarrow (New York, Columbia University Press, 1958), p. 53.

<sup>21</sup>*Sutra-Kritanga Sutra* 1.11.9-10. *Sacred Books of the East*, 45.311.

This doctrine has led to the most extraordinary practices, including the sweeping of paths as one walks along and the wearing of gauze over one's mouth to avoid the accidental killing of any creature. Moreover, in the Jain view, a good rebirth or salvation cannot be achieved in violence against earth or water for many souls are embodied in water and many creatures live in the earth.

Although *ahimsa* was emphasized as the greatest virtue in personal relations, warfare for Jains, as for most Indians, was legitimate and militarism was not strongly opposed. Practical astuteness in Jain thinking is revealed in the following observation:

The force of arms cannot do what peace  
does. If you can gain your desired end  
with sugar, why use poison?<sup>22</sup>

#### CHRISTIANITY

The Sermon on the Mount, said Gandhi, "went straight to my heart,"<sup>23</sup> and he records his delight in the verses which begin: "But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever smite thee on thy right cheek turn to him the other also."<sup>24</sup>

Gandhi was not concerned with the exegesis of what he read, with amassing supporting scriptural passages, or with the defense of his interpretation against a contrary one. When what he read went straight to his heart, that was sufficient. The reason for this is clear. What he read had confirmed his own deepest insights.

The believer in nonviolence, however, will find numerous defenses of the interpretation of Jesus as a Prophet of the nonviolent life. If the episode of Jesus casting the money changers out of the temple with a "scourge of cords" has troubled him he will learn that the verb used for "driving out" or "casting out" is the same as that employed to describe sending away a cured leper and sending forth workers to the harvest. He will find support in one scholar who writes that the essence of what Jesus taught is distilled in the "Golden Rule," and crystallized in the two great commandments of "complete love of God, and unfailing love of neighbour. His blessing is for the peace-makers. He holds it to be nearer His own spirit to suffer wrong than to inflict it, even when the suffering is undeserved. Instead of seeking revenge, He calls on His disciples to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute

<sup>22</sup>*Nitivakyamrta*, 344-56 *cento*. Quoted by Basham, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

<sup>23</sup>*Autobiography* (Washington, D. C., Public Affairs Press, 1948), p. 92.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

them. . . . Finally His acceptance of the Cross was a summary in action of all that He had taught in word."<sup>25</sup>

A second New Testament scholar speaks of that "ethical teaching of Jesus, which according to any natural and straightforward exegesis is obviously and flagrantly incompatible with intentional and organized bloodshed, and therefore with war."<sup>26</sup>

The lives and convictions of the early Christians also comprise convincing if not conclusive evidence that the intrinsic nature of the life and teachings of Jesus is persuasive testimony against violence and participation in violence. For more than two centuries Christians were preponderantly opposed to war, refusing to justify and to participate in it. A church order as late as the third century required soldiers to abandon the calling of soldiering before baptism and provided for the excommunication of Christians who joined the army. About one hundred and fifty years after Christ, Marcus Aurelius Antonius, pressed by the enemy, entreated Christians to join his forces and then threatened them only to be met by refusal "for the Cause and Name of their God, which they bear in their Consciences."<sup>27</sup> The answer of Martin to Julian the Apostate, three hundred years after Christ, was, "I am a Soldier of Christ, therefore I cannot fight."<sup>28</sup>

Then followed the great tragedy—the wedding of the Christian church to Rome. Says Cadoux of the great change: "Allowing for a little exaggeration, (it) is broadly speaking true" that "the Church as a whole definitely gave up her anti-military leanings, abandoned all her scruples, finally adopted the imperial point of view and treated the ethical problem involved as a closed question."<sup>29</sup>

At the time of the Protestant Reformation we see repeated a familiar historical pattern: revolt against long established religious authority and practices accompanied by a vigorous assertion or reassertion of the nonviolent temper. Thus came John Hus and the Moravians, the Mennonites and the Schwenkfelders, and later George Fox and the Quakers.

The Quakers are well known to us and they are known not only for their consistent testimony against war but for a commitment to a total way

<sup>25</sup>G. H. C. Macgregor, *The New Testament Basis of Pacifism* (London, James Clarke and Company, Ltd., 1938), p. 35.

<sup>26</sup>C. J. Cadoux, *The Early Church and the World* (Edinburgh, T. and T. Clark, 1925), p. 55.

<sup>27</sup>Robert Barclay, *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity* (Birmingham, John Baskerville, MDCCLXV), p. 495.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup>Cadoux, *op. cit.*, p. 588.

of life which is the invariable accompaniment of genuine nonviolence. Whatever deviation from the nonviolent way there may have been by individual Quakers, the record testifies that "no regularly constituted body of the Society of Friends has ever made a declaration contrary to the strict pacifist position."<sup>30</sup>

When Howard Brinton<sup>31</sup> describes the method of nonviolence in his society, he includes the Quaker testimony and action against the horrors of seventeenth century prison life which subjected these protesting Christians themselves to cruel suffering, for their pains. He describes the long and painful effort of Quakers to have substituted for the inhumane treatment of the insane the ways of sympathy and kindness. He quotes the admonition of George Fox to "Let your Light shine among Indians, the Blacks and the Whites that ye may answer the truth in them."<sup>32</sup> He records the program of Quaker relief of the distressed which began in 1690 during the Irish war when Quakers supplied war prisoners with food and clothing and which continues until this moment in the far and near places of the earth. And of course he describes the quiet, brave, novel and often fruitful labors of Quakers in the interest of international peace.

#### TOLSTOY

Gandhi expressed himself as being overwhelmed upon reading Leo Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You* and he called himself Tolstoy's humble follower. What did Gandhi find in this and other of Tolstoy's writing? He found, for one thing, that in Tolstoy's view a Christian is one who eschews violence, even avoids disputes with his neighbor and thus gains freedom for himself and helps to free the world. To the question as to whether those who resist nonviolently will be killed, Tolstoy answered, yes, but in numbers only a fraction of those who die in revolutionary wars.

In common with others who professed nonviolence Tolstoy was deeply offended by a religion of ecclesiasticism, of dogmas, of sacraments, fasts, and prayers. Religion, he held, gave meaning to life, but the church was an insult to his reason. "A life based on Christian truth was precious and indispensable to me, and the Church offered me rules completely at variance with the truth I loved."<sup>33</sup> He did believe in God. "I believe in God," he confessed, "whom I understand as Spirit, as love, as the Source of all. I believe that He is in me

<sup>30</sup>Howard Brinton, *Friends for 300 Years* (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1952), p. 160.

<sup>31</sup>*Op. cit.*, pp. 151 ff.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup>Lyof N. Tolstoy, "My Religion" in *My Confession, My Religion, The Gospel in Brief* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), p. 80.

and I in Him. I believe that the will of God is most clearly and intelligently expressed in the teaching of the man Jesus whom to consider God and to pray to, I consider the greatest blasphemy."<sup>84</sup> He also believed in faith, but a faith reconciled with reason. The result of Tolstoy's stricture against the church was his excommunication. Tolstoy's was the first public funeral held in Russia without religious rites.

Protesting against mysticism and revelation of any type, Tolstoy expressed his profound faith in morality. "Religion," he said, "is a certain relation established by man between his separate personality and the infinite universe of its Source. And morality is the ever-present guide to life which results from that relation."<sup>85</sup>

Tolstoy's nature was volcanic. Caught at the age of fifty-seven between the message of Christ and man's ways, he forsook the life of privilege, went barefoot, adopted plain attire, worked the fields at the side of peasants, forsook smoking, meat-eating, and hunting.

In Tolstoy the spirit of nonviolence found another logical expression, for he suffered with the suffering poor and strove with all his mighty energies to bring them relief. He petitioned the government to grant peasants an equal share with others, to forbid the disregard of common law, to remove all barriers to education, and remove all limitations on religious liberty. "A good deed," he said, "does not consist merely of feeding the hungry with bread, but of loving both the hungry and the satisfied. For it is more important to love than to feed because one may feed and not love, but it is impossible to love and not to feed."<sup>86</sup> Shortly, however, his diary carried the note: "I hardly slept all night. In the morning I said that this feeding the hungry is a serious matter."<sup>87</sup> The record shows that he plunged vigorously into the feeding of the famine sufferers.

It is obvious why Gandhi so willingly became Tolstoy's disciple and it is society's great fortune that Tolstoy found one who would bring to such magnificent flowering the seed he had sown.

#### THOREAU

United States Representative William H. Meyer of Vermont has opposed the draft of men into the armed services and expressed the non-conforming belief that Communist China should be a member of the United Nations.

<sup>84</sup>Ernest J. Simmons, *Leo Tolstoy* (Boston, Little Brown and Company, 1946), p. 599.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 499.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 467.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*



Apropos this a columnist of the *Washington Post* has commented that such obedience to conscience is in the tradition of Thoreau who went to jail for his belief in the abolition of slavery.<sup>38</sup>

In the first paragraph of his celebrated paper, *Civil Disobedience*, Thoreau protested against the United States' war against Mexico.<sup>39</sup> His more vigorous protest was the refusal to pay a tax in support of that war. He was thus seized and placed in jail. The story is told that Emerson visited Thoreau in his new quarters and inquired as to why he was there. The answer Thoreau is said to have given was, "Waldo, why are you *not* here?" As to Thoreau, Emerson was led to remark eloquently, "On him they could not calculate."<sup>40</sup>

In Thoreau we hear a familiar note. He was repelled by organized religion, "signed off" from the village church and refused to pay his tax for the support of the minister. He once lectured in an Amherst, New Hampshire, orthodox church and later expressed the hope that thereby he had helped to undermine it. He had no creed, we are told, yet he himself said: "Happy the man who . . . lives a balanced life, acceptable to nature and to God."<sup>41</sup> And Bronson Alcott, who knew him well, observed: "I should say he inspired love, if indeed the sentiment he awakens did not seem to partake of something yet purer, if that were possible, and as yet nameless from its rarity and excellence."<sup>42</sup>

In American history Thoreau's two years' sojourn alone in a cabin outside of Concord by Walden Pond is famous not that many understand fully Thoreau's "clearsighted view of a false economics and the perversion of values in American living." Only now has the full significance of *Walden* been felt, says Henry Seidel Canby. For, he continues, "It is only in our generation that the industrial revolution has reached a point where man is in real danger of becoming a machine thinking like a machine, . . . and it is only in our own time that bodily comfort and the satisfactions of pride have been elevated into what is frankly called the American standard of living."<sup>43</sup>

Thoreau bore one further mark of the nonviolent spirit. His heart bled at the sight of injustice and all human suffering. His house was a station on the underground railroad and he himself escorted a fugitive slave enroute to

<sup>38</sup>Marquis Childs, *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, July 17, 1959.

<sup>39</sup>Henry D. Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience" in *Yankee in Canada* (Boston, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1885), p. 123.

<sup>40</sup>George F. Whicher, *Walden Revisted* (Chicago, Packard and Company, 1945), p. 68.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>43</sup>Henry Seidel Canby, *Thoreau* (Boston, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1939), p. 293.



Canada. The death of John Brown stirred him to the depths of his being. Speaking to a Concord audience on this man recently hanged, he said, "For once we are lifted out of the trivialness and dust of politics into the region of truth and manhood"<sup>44</sup> and "the only government that I recognize . . . is that power that establishes justice in the land, never that which establishes injustice."<sup>45</sup>

Thoreau was not a pacifist. For him passive resistance was not enough where wrong was rampant. "I do not wish to kill or be killed," he said, "but I foresee circumstances in which both of these things would be by me unavoidable. In extremities I could even be killed." And yet he would not kill a bird despite his scientific interests or even hold it in his hands. "I would rather hold it in my affections," he said.<sup>46</sup>

Gandhi first read Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience* in prison. In reflecting upon this prison experience Gandhi quotes from Thoreau: "I say that if there was a wall of stone between me and my townsmen, there was a still more difficult one to climb or break through before they could get to be as free as I was. I did not feel for a moment confined, and the walls seemed a great waste of stone and mortar."<sup>47</sup>

Upon reading Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience* Gandhi began to call his movement "Civil Disobedience" for English readers instead of passive resistance. Later he adopted the phrase "Civil Resistance."

#### GANDHI

I hope that in this cursory, fragmentary survey of the nonviolent tradition certain unmistakable signs of the meaning and the underlying principles or forces of nonviolence have appeared. These forces I wish now to summarize and to examine in relation especially to the Gandhian philosophy of nonviolence.

First, *the origin and support of the spirit of nonviolence in a people or a person has no single explanation*. It may be given, that is, born of the culture, of one's religious heritage, at the mother's knee. Gandhi's nonviolence was in gestation for three thousand years, at the least, there in the land of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism. Kaba Gandhi, his father, was a man who knew his mind and stood by it. His mother could "take the hardest vows" without

<sup>44</sup>Whicher, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>46</sup>Canby, *op. cit.*, p. 325.

<sup>47</sup>Quoted by Louis Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1950), p. 87.

flinching. Again nonviolence is sometimes born of extremity, of one's own suffering or the sufferings of others. King Asoka could not bear the horror on the battle field of Kalinga and he was reborn. Gandhi could not bear the insults inflicted upon himself and upon his fellow dark-skinned people in South Africa and he began the search for an answer. This search ended in a religion of truth and nonviolence.

Whatever the origin of nonviolence it must be supported by reason. The Buddhist saw clearly that victory by force breeds hatred, for the conquered is always unhappy. Gandhi was inspired by the great tradition of *ahimsa* in India but he spent a life time elaborating a rational structure for his faith in which he reasoned: self sacrifice is superior to the sacrifice of others; if the cause is not right then only the resisters will suffer; nonviolence is the aseptic way of permitting the poison to work itself out by letting all the natural forces have full play; nonviolence arouses the best in others; apparent good from violence is temporary, while the evil is permanent; good brought through force destroys individuality, while nonviolent noncooperation preserves individuality.

Christian pacifists call upon the New Testament for support but they have reasons of their own. Quakers, for example, invoke the example of Christ but they also justify nonviolence as answering "that of God" in other men; in fighting, they explain, one side or the other loses while in the nonviolent way there is the possibility that both sides may win; they point out that force can produce a superficial unity such as exists in a machine but not organic unity born of an appeal to the "light" within.

Tolstoy reasoned that life lost through nonviolent resistance can be only a fraction of that lost in violent revolutions.

Manifestly the nonviolent spirit may be born in and, in respects, nurtured by the workings of all these forces: one's heritage, one's extremity, one's reason. But nonviolence lives and grows also by experimentation. Gandhi's life was an experiment with truth and the means to truth, nonviolence. His life, he said, consisted of nothing more than these experiments. In a sense he was a scientist, claiming no finality concerning his conclusions, accepting here and rejecting there, seeking always, as he said, to satisfy his reason and his heart.

Second, *nonviolence is not a single virtue or a single quality of life; it is a congeries of virtues, of qualities; it is a spirit, a way of life, a religion*, or as Gandhi would say, the law of one's being. In Gandhi's structure, there are two basic pillars, truth and *ahimsa* or nonviolence, or as he also called it, love. Truth is the end; nonviolence is the means. But the end and the means are bound irrevocably to each other for a vision of truth is dependent upon the

realization of nonviolence. As truth is God, so also love is God. Love surely is not a single virtue; it is a way of life, it is a religion. His life he considered as one indivisible whole. "What," he asks "was the larger 'symbiosis' that Buddha and Christ preached? Gentleness and love."<sup>48</sup>

Let us look, then, at those qualities of life which comprise the symbiosis which Gandhi called nonviolence. True nonviolence is religion for it is a total commitment to that which the individual regards as supreme in the world. In Gandhi, however, and in every authentic example of nonviolence there is a suspicion of and often a revolt against other-worldliness, excessive ritualism, insistence upon theology, and ecclesiasticism. Gandhi, however, was wise. Although he considered himself a true reformer he never permitted his zeal to lead him to the rejection of anything in Hinduism which he considered essential. Nowhere, indeed, was his genius more apparent than in the synthesis he achieved between the history, the language, and certain forms of his religious heritage on the one hand and a radical reinterpretation of religion on the other.

For Gandhi the essence of religion is morality. "I reject any religious doctrine that does not appeal to reason and is in conflict with morality."<sup>49</sup> Unreasonable religious sentiment he could tolerate but not when it was immoral. In his philosophy "there is no such thing as religion overriding morality."<sup>50</sup>

For Gandhi the golden rule of conduct, the conduct called nonviolence, was mutual toleration; for he realized that all men will never think as one and that truth will always appear in fragments.

For him all religions are true, all religions contain some error, all religions were almost as dear to him as his own Hinduism. His prayer for another was "NOT 'God, give him the light that Thou hast given me,' BUT 'Give him all the light and truth he needs for his highest development.'"<sup>51</sup> This did not mean an abandonment of what he believed and held dear. He said he would let the winds of doctrine blow through the windows and doors of his house but he would refuse to be swept off his feet. His own religion he would not abandon but he would do what he could to improve and purify it.

For Gandhi nonviolence is inconceivable without self-renunciation. "I must reduce myself to zero," he said, for "*Ahimsa* is the farthest limit of

<sup>48</sup>*Young India* 5-12-20, *Tagore*, 1072, and 1070. N. K. Bose, *Selections from Gandhi* (Ahmedabad, Navivan Pub. House, 1957), p. 159.

<sup>49</sup>*Young India*, July 7, 1920, *Tagore*, 173. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

<sup>50</sup>*Young India*, November 24, 1921, 385. *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup>*Sabarmati*—1928. *Ibid.*, p. 259.

humility."<sup>52</sup> In things material he did reduce himself to all but zero. Wherever I walked or talked with him, morning, afternoon, or evening, in a remote village or a great city, it was always the same—nothing of dress, of furniture, of house, of livery of any sort to distract. There was no hurry. When he walked into a woman's home and saw the miserable inadequacy of what she wore, he immediately reduced his own dress next to zero and continued to do this until he died.

Gandhi knew too well that men who are burdened with possessions they love are never really free. He warned, however, that renunciation of desire is far more important than the renunciation of objects. In abstention as in all other matters he emphasized that the spirit was the matter. "A man," he says, "over-scrupulous in diet is an utter stranger to *ahimsa* and a pitiful wretch if he is slave to selfishness and passions and is hard of heart."

Nonviolence is compassion. At midnight on August 15, 1947 I listened to Mr. Nehru as he spoke on the transfer of power from the British Government to India that was then taking place. He referred to Mr. Gandhi, who was absent, as one who if he could would wipe every tear from every eye. No where in our time, perhaps even for a thousand years, have men known one with greater compassion for his fellowmen. When he could not give them the clothes they needed he reduced his own to the barest minimum. When the removal of untouchable slums was beyond his power, he made his home in one. He dedicated his life to the breaking of the chains that bound his people. He died a martyr because he dared to fight the cause of a people called enemies by some of his own community. The innocent child and the convict, the harmless beggar at his door and his alien oppressor all alike were the objects of his compassion.

This was a compassion, moreover, that found expression in a great constructive program designed to free the body and lift the spirit—a program of spinning and other crafts, of village organization, of education. For him the spinning wheel became the symbol *par excellence* of nonviolence. It united the people peacefully and in common trust. It promised relief from degrading poverty.

Finally, nonviolence is a weapon of the strong. My final conversation with Mr. Gandhi was in Calcutta in August of 1947 when riots raged between Hindus and Muslims, the Hindus, now in authority, being the aggressors. I raised a question of the efficacy of the nonviolent technique in group relations. He declared that on that subject he was at the moment in darkness. He had

<sup>52</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 616.

spent almost a lifetime teaching that nonviolence was a weapon not of the weak but of the strong, of those who are able to strike back but will not. He realized then that his people did not understand. This is one of the most difficult aspects of nonviolence to fathom and accept and the explanation for the failure of so many efforts in its name. Nonviolence is not an expedient to be used when no other instrument is available and one is otherwise powerless. It is not a tactic, a strategy. It is a way of life, a religion. It begins in personal relations, in attitudes toward all men—the strong and the weak, it expresses itself in thought, in speech, as well as in action.

This does not mean that mass nonviolence should never be attempted until every participant has attained perfection. It does require that the ideal be clear, that there be commitment, that men shall be in candidacy for the quality of spirit and life exemplified in Jesus of Nazareth and which so lately was revealed among us in Mohandas K. Gandhi.