

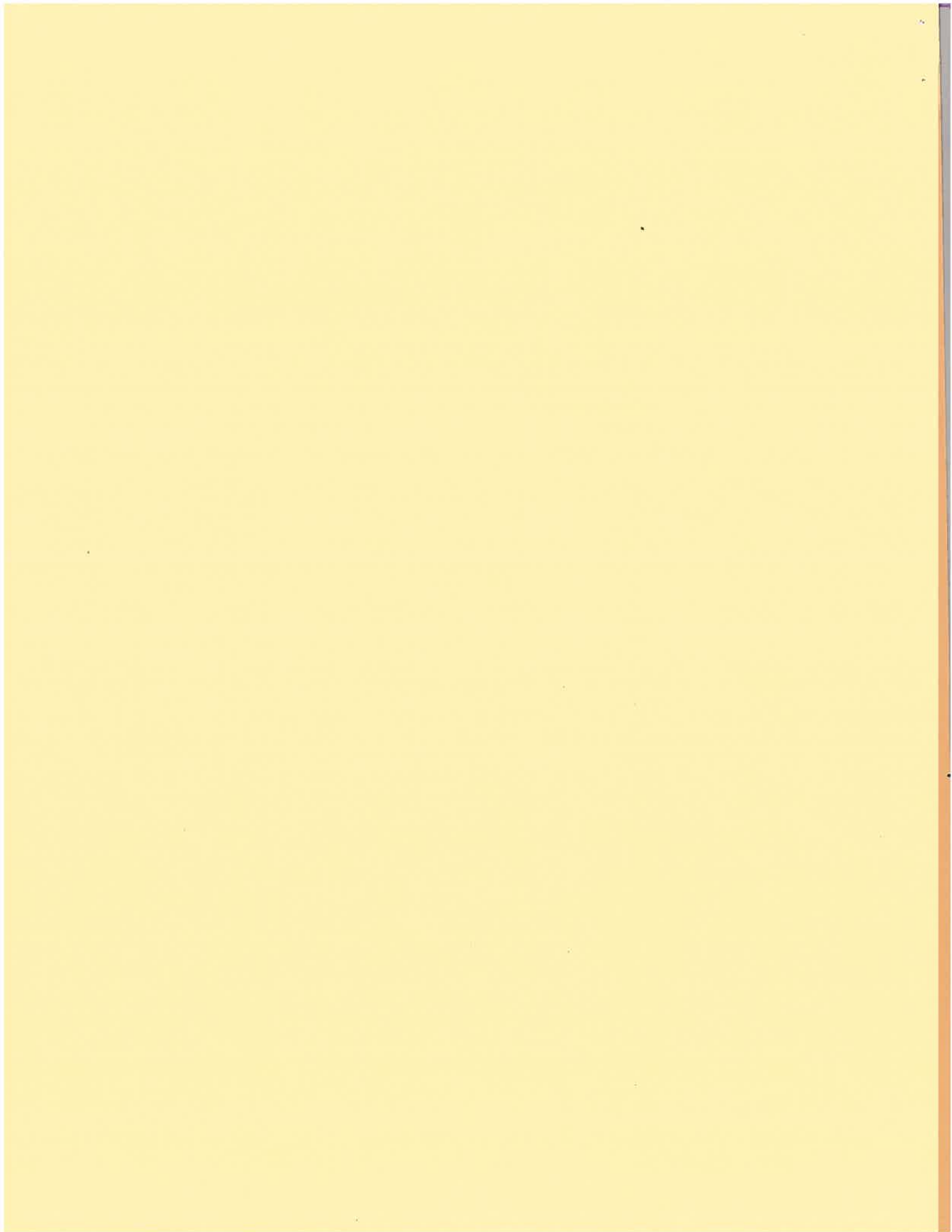
**TRUTH, NON-VIOLENCE, AND ECUMENISM
IN GANDHIAN THOUGHT**

by

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Search for Truth

The most remarkable aspect of Gandhi's life and work is his dedication to the search for Truth. "Truth became my sole objective", he said. "It began to grow in magnitude every day and my definition of it has been ever widening".¹ In his search of Truth, Gandhi saw no point in withdrawal from society. Even when Gandhi appeared to be engaged in struggles which were not purely religious in character or in movements connected with social reform and justice his dominant motive was still religious. "Man's ultimate aim is the realization of God, and all his activities, social and 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 done by service of all. I am part and parcel of the whole and I cannot find Him apart from the rest of humanity If I could persuade myself that I could find Him in a Himalayan cave, I would proceed there immediately; but I know that I cannot find Him apart from humanity".²

Gandhi started with the conviction that God is Truth, later he declared that Truth is God. For him, Truth meant more than mere truthfulness; it signified eternal being. It included what is true in knowledge, what is right in conduct, and what is just and fair in human relations. He firmly believed that "devotion to Truth is the sole reason for our existence. All our activities should be centered in Truth."³ He held that "without Truth, it would be impossible to observe any principles or rules of life."⁴ Life is an experiment in which human beings ought to discover the ever more comprehensive truth. The different ways through which human beings pursued Truth interested him exceedingly. He did not stop at seeking and discovering Truth;

he proceeded to establish it in terms of justice and fair play to all. He stressed, therefore, that the only means of attaining truth in life is ahimsa, non-violence, which is nothing less than the "liability to love the meanest of creation as oneself." It is in this unique way that Gandhi brought home everyone the religious spirit—not in heavy theological language, but in the language of daily life and truthful living.

Gandhi called his autobiography The Story of My Experiments with Truth. On the basis of his experiments, he deduced the principles by which he thought one should live in order to see God face to face, and while each would find his own path, he maintained that what is possible for one is possible for all, and so opened his life to public scrutiny that others might benefit from his experience. Gandhi would not claim any ultimate finality for his conclusions. Nevertheless, he found that Truth ". . . is what the voice within tells me."⁵ But the voice of conscience entails discipline: "those who would make a diligent search after Truth of God must go through these vows: the vow of truth-speaking and thinking of truth, the vow of brahmacharya, on non-violence, poverty and non-possession."⁶

Hindu Background

The religious impulse Gandhi sought to instill in his followers came from his own respect for the Hindu scriptures, particularly the Bhagavad-Gita. For Gandhi, the Gita was "an infallible guide of conduct" and "my dictionary of daily reference."⁷ Two of its ideas gripped him unshakably, those of non-possession and equability. One who would have "salvation" must accept these and give up all or hold his possessions as a "trustee" for the common good.⁸ Gandhi was very serious about the spirit and meaning of the religious precepts he accepted. He said: "There should be a limit to the means of keeping ourselves alive. Even for life itself we may not do certain things."⁹ This was the strength of Gandhi's religion—he would follow it to the death.

Gandhi drew his inspiration not only from Hinduism, but from other world religions as well; the important thing to note here is that he successfully instilled his followers with a sense of religious purpose by including religion in the daily routine. The quasi-monastic life at a Gandhian ashram, or community, was punctuated by morning and evening prayers. For forty minutes in the morning, Gandhi would sit under a pipal tree with the ashram members in a semi-circle around him, sisters on one side and brothers on another. They used their own prayerbook, the Ashram Bhajanaivali, for this purpose; it started with a Buddhist chant to a Japanese drum beat and included a short meditation, Hindu prayers, recitations from the Koran, Gandhi's own resolutions, Zoroastrian prayers, hymn singing, invocations of Hindu gods, and reading from the Gita.¹⁰ Together, all ashramites resolved in prayer:

We will be non-violent; we will be truthful; we will not steal; we will be continent; we will not hoard; we will all wear khadi clothes; we will work with our hands; we will eat simple foods; we will be fearless; we will treat peoples of all religions equally; and we will work for the eradication of untouchability.¹¹

Though these values were expected of all the satyagrahis who actually participated in Gandhi's freedom movements, Indians all over the sub-continent became aware of them and many tried to shape their lives accordingly. To what degree they were successful at the more difficult parts is less relevant than the fact that people felt they were acting in compliance with religion by participating in satyagraha. In practicing nonviolence, a Gandhian demonstrator felt himself elevated to a higher moral plane than his opponent, practically linked with the Divine, and so the act attained an internal dynamism, unknown to merely rational calculations.

The interjection of the religious element shifts the focus from ends to means. Thus, the satyagrahi's first concern is not the effect of his action, but its propriety, and he has enough faith in his cause and means to know that success will come in the end. All he needs but do is purify his means, through

his own self-purification. "To attain to perfect purity," Gandhi said, "One has to become absolutely passion-free in thought, speech, and action; to rise above the opposing currents of love and hatred, attachment and repulsion."¹² This was Gandhi's motive for reducing himself to zero by willfully putting himself last among his fellow creatures.

Indian Context

In India, the problem of interreligious relations has engaged the attention of thinking persons for over three thousand years. In his own day, Gandhi was confronted with strained relations between Hindus and Muslims. Hatred and suspicion had poisoned the atmosphere. Bloody religious riots were frequent. The growing tension between the two communities distressed Gandhi a great deal. He deplored these riots, and believed that both Hindus and Muslims could and should live and work together for the common good. He pleaded and prayed and fasted for religious harmony. In fact, during the last decades of his life, his major preoccupation was harmony between Hindus and Muslims. He was a Hindu who advocated the rights of the Muslims. He pleaded with the Hindu majority to treat the minority with justice and fairness. He went from place to place, meeting Hindus and Muslims and proclaiming the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. He said to the people: "God is one. Allah and Rama are His names".

In the midst of pervasive darkness, Gandhi served as a beacon light. He sought to heal the wounds that people, in their religious frenzy, were inflicting upon themselves. He worked miracles. Lord Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of India, described the situation in this way: "While the 55,000-man Boundary Force in the Punjab was swamped by riots, the one-man Boundary Force brought peace to Bengal".¹³ A fanatic Hindu, however, believing that Gandhi was disloyal to Hinduism, assassinated him. Even in his death he achieved something remarkable; his martyrdom shamed his people out of a hysteria of hatred and fratricide, and helped the country consolidate its constructive and democratic

forces.

Gandhi wanted harmony and friendship to be established not merely between the Hindus and Muslims of India, but among the adherents of all the great religions of the world. "Hindu-Muslim unity means not only unity between Hindus and Muslims but between all those who believe India to be their home - no matter to what faith they belong".¹⁴ The problem of the mutual relationship of religions is worldwide today. What is going on in Ireland, the Middle East, Cyprus, the Indian subcontinent, and elsewhere, in the name of religion is most distressing and depressing. The exaltation of terrorism in the name of religion is tragic. In the words of Gandhi, "To revile another's religion, to make reckless statements, utter untruth, to break the heads of innocent men, to desecrate temples or mosques is a denial of God".¹⁵

Inter-religious Relations

Gandhi's approach to inter-religious relations authentically represents the Hindu attitude of respect for all religions. The idea that "Truth is one: sages call it by different names" has been alive in Hinduism since the time of the Rgveda. Because of his great concern for Truth, Gandhi was inwardly receptive to the currents of truth coming from other religions. To ignore any of them meant to ignore God's infinite richness, and impoverish humanity spiritually. He wanted all religions to revive their pristine past and develop their traditions. "I ask no Hindu or Mussalman to surrender an iota of his religious principle. Only let him be sure that it is religion. But I do ask of every Hindu and Mussalman not to fight for an earthly gain".¹⁶

Gandhi advocated harmony among the world's religions instead of playing down the importance of any of them. The sciences, which study the natural world, do not claim "any monopoly of wisdom for their own particular branch of study nor quarrel about the superiority of one science over the others".¹⁷ In a similar way, Gandhi held, each religion must bring its individual contribution

to humanity's understanding of the spiritual world and not quarrel about the superiority of one religion over another. For God's love embraces the whole world. He believed that all the world religions are God-given and that they serve the people to whom they are revealed. They are allies engaged in the common cause of the moral and spiritual uplift of humanity. In the context of the emerging world community, all the great religions are useful, necessary, and complementary to one another as revealing different facets of one truth.

Interreligious Dialogue

Gandhi's purpose in dialogue was not elimination of religious differences, but appreciation of one another's faith and practice, leading to cooperation in the moral and social spheres. He sought to understand both the similarities and the differences. He was impressed by the fact that moral and spiritual values are stressed by all religions. The "Golden Rule" in one form or another and the injunction to transcend the ego are present in all of them. All preach that man's relation to man is more important than his relation to material things. All teach that service of the poor, the sick, the helpless, and the oppressed is service of God. In the eternal struggle of good and evil, all religions are called upon to take sides with the good and raise humanity to a higher moral level. In this sense, the success of any religion is the success of all religions. It is only natural to expect, therefore, that different religions should cooperate with one another in dealing with these problems.

Gandhi was aware, on the other hand, of the characteristic differences between the great religions arising from historical and cultural backgrounds. They do not all have the same beliefs and doctrines; nor do they prescribe the same rituals or prayers, or subscribe to the same kind of myths. He believed that any attempt to root out these differences not only is bound to fail but is a form of sacrilege. Since differences are important, and in some cases unbridgeable, he discouraged any sort of uncritical syncretism. Actually, he

welcomed the enrichment that comes with religious diversity. He wanted people from all religions to maintain their special symbols of identity. The need was not a new religion, but respectful dialogue among the adherents of different religions.

Gandhi did not look upon eclecticism with favour either. He did not approve of the abdication of one's own religion and its heritage. On the contrary, he advocated firm adherence to one's own religion. The eclectic does not go deeply into any religious tradition, and therefore lacks depth; his approach is superficial and he fails to grasp the distinctive message of any religious tradition, even his own. According to Gandhi, to call a person "eclectic" was to say that he had no faith. He advocated religious harmony, and not a blending of all religions into a uniformity of faith and practice.

Gandhi's focus in religious dialogue, therefore, was not myth or ritual, but the moral and spiritual resources of the different religious traditions. He was aware that religious practices often emphasized and developed sectarian trends and loyalties. He cautioned that it was dangerous to mankind as a whole today to overemphasize the parochial. He urged all people to look at things from a larger context and from a human perspective. For if the universal elements are released from their narrow settings, religions would become progressive and unifying forces in the world.

The problems that threaten the world community are not merely political or economic; they arise as well from certain basic religious and spiritual attitudes. If the faith and integrity of other persons are not respected, genuine communication and consequent world community will be at best a dream. Arnold Toynbee, after surveying the history of the entire human race, has made the following significant observation: "At this supremely dangerous moment in human history, the only way of salvation for mankind is the Indian way -- Emperor Ashoka's and Mahatma Gandhi's principle of non-violence and Shri Ramakrishna's testimony to the harmony of all religions. Here we have an attitude and spirit that can make it possible for the human race to grow into a single family -- and, in the Atomic Age, this is the only alternative to destroying ourselves".¹⁸

Truth and Nonviolence

Gandhi was firmly of the belief that the religions of the world, while they differ in other respects, unitedly proclaim that nothing endures in this world but the truth. He was once questioned: "If all religions are true, what do you do when there are conflicting counsels?" Gandhi answered, I have no difficulty in hitting upon the truth, because I am guided by certain fundamental maxims. Truth is superior to everything and I reject what conflicts with it. Similarly, that which is in conflict with nonviolence should be rejected. And on matters which can be reasoned out, that which conflicts with reason also must be rejected."¹⁹ Further, he maintained that by the employment of truth and nonviolence, it is possible to discover the underlying unity among all religions: "That master key is truth and nonviolence. When I unlock the chest of a religion with this master key, I do not find it difficult to discover its likeness with other religions."²⁰

To Gandhi Truth was of paramount importance. He frequently quoted a favorite Sanskrit verse which said: "There is no higher religion than Truth," (satyannasti paro dharmah). And the way to Truth is through nonviolence. He gave these religious principles a practical turn. He believed that the salvation of humanity depended on the practice of these principles. Truth is the ground of all existence and is also the goal of life. The whole universe is but the manifestation of that Truth and all beings are fragments thereof. Truth is the ultimate reality, the Supreme Spirit; it is called God by the theists. It may be difficult to define God; but "the definition of Truth is deposited in every human heart. Truth is that which you believe to be true at this moment, and that is your God. If a man worships this relative truth, he is sure to obtain the absolute Truth, i.e., God, in course of time."²¹ Gandhi was aware that the same Truth manifested itself in different forms to different individuals due to the imperfections and limitations of man. He saw consistency in thought, word, and action as an attribute of those men who valued truth above everything. He tried to unify all elements of himself by orientation toward the search for Truth.

For Gandhi, both politics and morality were an extension of the pursuit of Truth. He thought that Truth should penetrate and become manifest in every field of human action. His attitudes toward beauty and the arts illustrate this point: "I see and find beauty through truth. All truths, not merely true ideas, but truthful faces, truthful pictures, truthful songs, are highly beautiful. Whenever men begin to see beauty in Truth, then art will arise. There is no beauty apart from Truth. ... Jesus was to my mind a supreme artist because he saw and expressed Truth, and so was Muhammad. Because both of them strove first for Truth, therefore the grace of expression naturally came in. Yet neither Jesus nor Muhammad wrote on art. That is the Truth and beauty I crave for, live for,

and would die for."²²

Gandhi looked upon Truth as sat, cit, and ananda: "The word satya 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 that God is Truth. But as we cannot do without a ruler or 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 realized that sat or satya is the only correct and fully significant name of God."

"And where there is Truth there is also knowledge, pure knowledge, where there is no Truth there can be no true knowledge. That is why the word cit or knowledge is associated with the name of God. And where there is true knowledge, there is always bliss (ananda). Sorrow has no place there. And even as Truth is eternal, so is the bliss derived from it. Hence we know God as Sat-Cit-Ananda, one who combines in himself Truth, knowledge, and bliss."

"Devotion to this Truth is the sole reason for our existence. All our activities should be centered in Truth. Truth should be the very breath of our lives. When once this stage in the pilgrim's progress is reached, all other rules of correct living will come without effort, and obedience to them will be instinctive. But without Truth it would be impossible to observe any principles or rules of life."²³

All spiritual literature glorifies truthfulness as the most important cornerstone in the edifice of a perfect life. In the Upanisads, it is said, "To Truth the path lies through truth." It is this attitude of seeking Truth rather than imposing or blindly accepting dogmas, an attitude of experiencing the truths taught by religious scriptures, rather than simply criticizing them,

that guided Gandhi in his life. That is why he called his autobiography The Story of My Experiments with Truth. According to him, "Truth is like a vast tree which yields more and more fruit, the more you nurture it. The deeper the search in the mine of Truth, the richer the discovery of the gems buried there in the shape of opening for an ever greater variety of service."²⁴

Gandhi never used to affirm dogmatically that what he said was the only truth. He never claimed to know truth in any absolute sense, and he repeatedly reminded others that humanity's inability to know the Truth in all its fullness required that he maintain an open approach in its pursuit. He would not impose truth as he knew it on others. In all humility he would say, "For me, this is Truth as I see it now." He would also act in accordance with it with the same attitude of mind. He maintained that only when a person is not beguiled by the evanescent objects of the senses can he or she see Truth. Also, one has to be free from preconceptions and prejudices; only then can one hope to attain Truth. It is this factor that made him take to the vow of ahimsa. He wrote, "In the march towards Truth, anger, selfishness, hatred, etc., naturally give way, for otherwise Truth would be impossible to attain. A man who is swayed by passions may have good enough intentions, may be truthful in word, but he will never find Truth. A successful search for Truth means complete deliverance from the dual through such as love and hate, happiness and misery."²⁵ He also considered courage to be essential in the search for Truth, and regarded fear of anything as incompatible with the search.

Jawaharlal Nehru makes a significant statement which is very relevant at this point. "Truth as Ultimate Reality, if such there is, must be eternal, imperishable, unchanging. But that eternal, infinite, and unchanging Truth cannot be apprehended in its fullness by the finite mind of man, which can only

grasp, at the utmost, some small aspect of it limited by time and space and by the state of development of that mind and the prevailing ideology of that period. As the mind develops and enlarges its scope, as ideas change and new symbols are used to express that Truth, new aspects of it come to light, though the core of it may yet be the same. And so, truth has ever to be taught and renewed, reshaped and developed, so that, as understood by man, it might keep in line with the growth of his thought and the development of human life. Only then does it become a living Truth for humanity, supplying the essential need for which it craves and offering guidance in the present and for the future."²⁵

Those who think that Truth is in their exclusive keeping and that their religion is the only approach to God see only one of many sides of the infinite picture. In the words of Gandhi, "We cannot reach absolute Truth while we are in this body. Each one of us sees Truth from his own angle of vision, and hence only in fragments. It is commonly said that though God appears to different individuals in different aspects, he is still One. The same may be said of Truth, which is God. There is bound to be difference of opinion among us, finite beings, about Truth, which is infinite, for our individual notions of Truth are likely to be tainted by errors. Therefore there should be no compulsion or violence on our part in making others accept what we regard as Truth. On the other hand we should leave others free and bind only ourselves by our convictions."²⁶

Truth and nonviolence are inseparable: "Ahimsa is my God and Truth is my God. When I look for Ahimsa, Truth says 'Find it through me.' When I look for Truth, Ahimsa says 'Find it through me.'"²⁷ Gandhi lived a life of truth and nonviolence in a world riddled with evil and falsehood. He had to bear the hatred and calumny of those who could not purify their personal and

social lives. And yet he loved them all. For nonviolence, to Gandhi, was neither negative nor passive. It was a dynamic concept. Indeed it involved, necessarily, active dissociation with all that stood in the way of love -- greed, wealth, privilege, power, cruelty, corruption, and hypocrisy. Though nonviolence is as old as Buddhism and Jainism, it is Gandhi's genius that made it work in defense of truth on a scale unparalleled in the history of humanity. It was his firm belief that any injury even to the least of living beings was an offence against God and the Universal moral law.

Gandhi was a practical idealist. He knew that human beings are caught in the conflagration of violence. "The saying 'life lives on life' has a deep meaning in it. Man cannot for a moment live without consciously or unconsciously committing outward himsa, destruction of life. The very fact of his living -- eating, drinking, moving about -- necessarily involves some himsa, be it ever so minute. A votary of ahimsa, therefore, is true to his faith if the spring of all his actions is compassion, if he shuns to the best of his ability the destruction of the tiniest creature, tries to save it, and thus incessantly strives to be free from the deadly coil of himsa. He will be constantly growing in self-restraint and compassion, but he can never become entirely free from outward himsa." ²⁸

All the prophets of the great religions are one in recognizing the supremacy of the ahimsa, or love, and in proclaiming that mankind can sustain itself and progress only on the basis of ahimsa. If God is in all and thus all-pervasive, then all must be saved and no injury should be caused to any living being. Saving a being from pain is as important a duty as causing happiness. If God is Truth, then nonviolence is the way to realize Him. In the words of Gandhi, "Prophets and avataras have also taught the lesson of

ahimsa, more or less. Not one of them has professed to teach himsa. Himsa does not need to be taught. Human beings as animals are violent but as spirit are nonviolent. Either they progress towards ahimsa or rush to their doom. That is why the prophets and avatars have taught the lesson of truth, harmony, brotherhood, justice, etc. -- all attributes of ahimsa.²⁹

The highest spiritual goal, or perfection, can be attained only through nonviolence. Since perfection consists in realizing the spirit that is identical in all beings, and violence would involve a denial of this truth, the means to realize the goal of perfection is through nonviolence only. Nonviolence is an expression of Truth. The religious teachers of the world lay the greatest stress on the practice of this virtue. The Vedic command runs: "Do not injure any being." The Buddha taught: "Let a man overcome anger by love; let him overcome evil by good; let him overcome the greedy by liberality, the liar by truth." Jesus declared: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you." (Luke 6:27) An early Christian Father said, "Violence is not the attribute of God." The prophet of Islam declared. "He who digs a pit for his brother man falls into it himself." In the words of Gandhi, "Ahimsa and truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like the two sides of a coin, or rather a smooth unstamped metallic disc. Who can say which is the obverse and which the reverse? Nevertheless, ahimsa is the means; Truth is the end. Means, to be means, must always be within our reach, and so ahimsa is our supreme duty. If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later."³⁰

Ahimsa is compassion and self-sacrifice. It is inevitably fearlessness. It does not, of course, imply any bravado. It is meant to be the manifestation of a severely disciplined soul, disciplined in the spirit of righteousness.

Gandhi advocated "nonviolence of the strong, who would disdain to kill but would gladly die for the vindication of Truth." He adds, "Nonviolence to be a potent force must begin with the mind. Nonviolence of the mere body without the cooperation of the mind is nonviolence of the weak or the cowardly, and has therefore no potency. If we bear malice and hatred in our bosoms and pretend not to retaliate, it must recoil upon us and lead to our destruction."³¹

Since man is essentially spirit and he has to use his body only as expressing the spirit, any conduct that makes him brutal is evil. In fact the salvation of mankind rests in the employment of truth and nonviolence. Gandhi demonstrated that they can be employed as weapons of active political and social ends. If God is the Creator of all, as the world religions teach, then "Love your enemies" (Matt. 5:44) is its necessary corollary. If then we ignore the obligation of neighbourliness and do not serve the people, all our prayer and worship are in vain. "Religion of nonviolence is not meant merely for the rishis and saints. It is for the common people as well. Nonviolence is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute and he knows no law but that of physical might. The dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law, to the strength of the spirit. ... Nonviolence in its dynamic condition means conscious suffering. It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evildoer, but it means the putting of one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant. Working under this law of our being, it is possible for a single individual to defy the whole might of an unjust empire to save his honor, his religion, and lay the foundation for that empire's fall or its regeneration."³²

Gandhi objected to violence because it destroys truth. "When it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent."³³

Nonviolence or love is the only standard by which true action and social justice can be measured. "The essence of true religious teaching is that one should serve and befriend all. I learnt this in my mother's lap. You may refuse to call me a Hindu. I know no defense except to quote a line from Iqbal's famous song: Majhab nahinsikhata apas men bair rakhna, meaning, "Religion does not teach us to bear illwill towards one another." It is easy enough to be friendly to one's friends. But to befriend the one who regards himself as your enemy is the quintessence of true religion. The other is mere business."³⁴ Gandhi thought if one truly followed the practice of not being violent with others in thought, word, and deed, he would not only attain Truth for himself, but also spread the knowledge of Truth to others. For nonviolence is not only the means to Truth, but also part of Truth.

Reverence for World's Religions

Gandhi's study of world religions led him not only to the appreciation of the best in every tradition but also to the formulation of the concept of Sarvadharmasamabhava (reverence for all religions). According to Gandhi, every religion is, in essence, dharma, and includes a moral code and the whole range of man's duties and responsibilities. It helps the evolution of the soul to a higher level of life.

One's religion, in Gandhi's view, is like one's own mother, entitled to one's highest reverence. At the same time, he maintained that the moral and spiritual contents of the world's religions as equally valid to their respective followers. He saw no inconsistency in declaring that "he could, without in any way whatsoever impairing the dignity of Hinduism, pay equal respect to be best of Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Judaism."³⁵ He believed that God

is concerned with every person, whether Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, or Zoroastrian, etc. Just as all men are, in spite of their individual differences equal before the Law, so all the great religions are equal before God. For Gandhi, "all the principal religions are equal in the sense that they are all true. They are supplying a felt want in the spiritual progress of humanity."³⁶

The cultivation of tolerance for others' faiths was encouraged by Gandhi. It was for him a necessary corollary of his ahimsa (non-violence), without signifying any kind of "sufferance" or "condescension." Rather it sprang from his concern for truth, and expressed a positive recognition of all the great religions of the world. Gandhi wrote, "I have, of course, always believed in the principle of religious tolerance. But I have gone even further. I have advanced from tolerance to equal respect of all religions."³⁷

Respectful study of other religions broadened Gandhi's view of life and left "a deep mark on my understanding of the Hindu Scriptures." He was convinced that the study of other religions should be a necessary part of one's education, "I hold that it is the duty of every cultured man and woman to read sympathetically the scriptures of the world... For myself, I regard my own study of and reverence for the Bible, the Koran, and other scriptures to be wholly consistent with my claim to be a staunch sanatani or orthodox Hindu."³⁸

The different religions emphasize different facets of Truth, according to the genius of the respective peoples and requirements of society, although spiritual and moral values are embedded in every religion's tradition. One may, as a matter of fact, have preference for the particular framework within which one has chosen to live and act. Such preference need not imply that one looks down upon all those who do not follow that particular cultural or religious framework.

The prophets and seers of different religious traditions have brought mankind to a consciousness of unity underlying the whole universe, of the brotherhood of man and the moral government of the world. These are some of the most important contributions of religious prophets of humanity, and none of them can be denied without loss to the spiritual worth of man.

Reverence for world's religions runs throughout Indian thought and culture, and Gandhi embodied it more fully and clearly than before. This reverence for various forms of worship is animated by the conception that the Supreme Reality is ultimately One. Truth is one, and the sages call it by many names.

India has shown a remarkable spirit of accommodation to the followers of different religious traditions who sought shelter there, from time to time, to escape persecution in their own homelands. After the Second destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, Jews came to India and were received well; they were given lands and homes, and were allowed to live and practice their religion in their own way. Within a century of the death of Jesus Christ, the Syrian Church of Christianity could find a place and establish itself and carry on its activities freely in South India. And when Muslims invaded Persia, the remnants of the Zoroastrian community left their homes and came to India, who were provided with all the facilities to establish their own modes of religious worship. The Bhagavadgita gives classical expression to this attitude of understanding and reverence towards other traditions and faiths:

Whatever form one desires to worship in faith
and devotion, in that very form, I make that
faith of his secure. (VII. 21).

Even those who, devoted to other gods,
Worship them in full faith, they also
O Kaunteya, worship none but Me,
though not according to a recognized

form. (IX.23).

In Whatever way men resort to Me,
even so do I reward them. In every
way, O Partha, the path men follows
is mine (IV.23).

Some religions are strong in devotion (bhakti), some in knowledge (jnana), and some in action (karma). Diverse types of individuals require different types of spiritual discipline and teachings. All religions are, therefore, relevant in the context of the diversity of human needs. Gandhi observes, "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."⁴⁰ As Professor Radhakrishnan observes, "God wills a rich harmony, not a colorless uniformity."⁴¹

The great religions of the world, each in its own sphere, have sustained the hearts and minds of millions of people down the ages. Each of them has an individuality, a message, and each has attempted to solve life's problems in its own way, as per its own genius. All of them have supplied answers to the persisting questions pertaining to the mysteries of existence. They have lighted humanity on the path of right conduct and have given solace in the face of suffering and death. All religions teach adherence to certain human and spiritual values such as dedication to duty, self restraint, mercy, and above all devotion to truth and love. Gandhi readily welcomed the plurality of religions by which humans have sought to express their relation to the Supreme. "I believe that they are all God-given, and I believe that they were necessary to whom these religions were revealed."⁴²

Truth in religion meant to Gandhi contact with or vision of Reality or

God, not a dogma or doctrine; it pointed to him a commonly experienced Reality. He saw no reason to oppose one's experience with that of others. Understanding truth in this sense, Gandhi advocated that each individual should start from his own religious foundation. But this does not mean that other ways to God are wrong. Actually, it is not necessary to ask through which gate one enters the City of God. The important thing is communion with the Divine, the living contact with God. In the absence of this, all forms and formalities are of little avail.

World's religions, in cooperation with one another, can do a great deal to rehabilitate mankind and give to life meaning, purpose, and value. They can also do much for the establishment of peace in the world, provided they recognize their mutual worth and potentialities and channel their tremendous resources in the direction of peace. They can also help mankind to meet successfully the challenges of materialism, scientism, and nihilism.

The spiritual truths and values contained in all religions are the common heritage of mankind. Every human being has a right of access to them; they are there to be studied, admired, and followed. The prophets and saints of different religions have given their messages for the benefit of the entire humanity. Therefore, reverence for religions, in Gandhi's view, should culminate in mamabhava, i.e. conscious acceptance of the entire human religious heritage as one's own.

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