



MOHANDAS KARAMCHAND GANDHI
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THE
MORAL AND POLITICAL
WRITINGS OF
MAHATMA GANDHI

VOLUME II

Truth and Non-Violence

Edited by
RAGHAVAN IYER

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A. There is much confusion of thought in this question. The atom bomb has not stopped violence. People's hearts are full of it and preparations for a third world war may even be said to be going on. While it would be absurd to say that violence has ever brought peace to mankind it cannot either be said that violence never achieves anything.

That I shall have to repent if I cannot stop violence does not enter into the picture of non-violence. No man can stop violence, God alone can do so. Men are but instruments in His hands. Here material means cannot stop violence but this does not mean that material means should not be employed for the purpose. The deciding factor is God's grace. He works according to His law and, therefore, violence will also be stopped in accordance with that law. Man does not and can never know God's law fully. Therefore we have to try as far as lies in our power. I hold that our experiment in non-violence has succeeded to a fair extent in India. There is, therefore, no room for the pessimism shown in the question. Finally *ahimsa* is one of the world's great principles which no power on earth can wipe out. Thousands like myself may die in trying to vindicate the ideal but *ahimsa* will never die. And the gospel of *ahimsa* can be spread only through believers dying for the cause.

'How Can Violence Be Stopped?' (H.)
Harijan Sevak, 19 May 1946
Harijan, 19 May 1946

183. AHIMSA AND SANCTITY OF LIFE

A correspondent writes:

In the *Harijanbandhu* of the 5th May you have written that your non-violence contemplates destruction of animals dangerous to mankind, such as leopards, wolves, snakes, scorpions, etc.

You do not believe in giving food to dogs, etc. Several other people besides the Gujaratis look upon the feeding of dogs as a meritorious act. Such a belief may not be justifiable in times of food shortage like the present. Yet we must remember that these animals can be very useful to man. One can feed them and take work out of them.

You had put 27 questions to Shri Raichandbhai from Durban. One of these questions was: 'What should a seeker do when a snake attacks him?' His answer was: 'He should not kill the snake and, if it bites, he should let it do so.' How is it that you speak differently now?

I have written a lot on this subject in the past. At that time the topic was the killing of rabid dogs. There was much discussion on the subject but all that seems to have been forgotten.

My non-violence is not merely kindness to all living creatures. The emphasis laid on the sacredness of subhuman life in Jainism is understandable. But that can never mean that one is to be kind to this life in preference to human life. While writing about the sacredness of such life, I take it that the sacredness of human life has been taken for granted. The former has been over-emphasized. And, while putting it into practice, the idea has undergone distortion. For instance, there are many who derive complete satisfaction in feeding ants. It would appear that the theory has become a wooden, lifeless dogma. Hypocrisy and distortion are passing currently under the name of religion.

Ahimsa is the highest ideal. It is meant for the brave, never for the cowardly. To benefit by others' killing and delude oneself into the belief that one is being very religious and non-violent, is sheer self-deception.

A so-called votary of non-violence will not stay in a village, which is visited by a leopard every day. He will run away and when someone has killed the leopard, will return to take charge of his hearth and home. This is not non-violence. This is a coward's violence. The man who has killed the leopard has at least given proof of some bravery. The man who takes advantage of the killing is a coward. He can never expect to know true non-violence.

In life it is impossible to eschew violence completely. The question arises, where is one to draw the line? The line cannot be the same for everyone. Although essentially the principle is the same, yet everyone applies it in his or her own way. What is one man's food can be another's poison. Meat-eating is a sin for me. Yet, for another person, who has always lived on

meat and never seen anything wrong in it, to give it up simply in order to copy me will be a sin.

If I wish to be an agriculturist and stay in the jungle, I will have to use the minimum unavoidable violence in order to protect my fields. I will have to kill monkeys, birds and insects which eat up my crops. If I do not wish to do so myself, I will have to engage someone to do it for me. There is not much difference between the two. To allow crops to be eaten up by animals in the name of *ahimsa* while there is a famine in the land is certainly a sin. Evil and good are relative terms. What is good under certain conditions can become an evil or a sin under a different set of conditions.

Man is not to drown himself in the well of *shastras* but he is to dive into their broad ocean and bring out pearls. At every step he has to use his discrimination as to what is *ahimsa* and what is *himsa*. In this there is no room for shame or cowardice. The poet has said that the road leading up to God is for the brave, never for the cowardly.

Finally, Raichandbhai's advice to me was that if I had courage, if I wanted to see God face to face, I should let myself be bitten by a snake instead of killing it. I have never killed a snake before or after receiving that letter. That is no matter of credit for me. My ideal is to be able to play with snakes and scorpions fearlessly. But it is merely a wish so far. Whether and when it will be realized I do not know. Everywhere I have let my people kill both. I could have prevented them if I had wished. But how could I? I did not have the courage to take them up with my own hands and teach my companions a lesson in fearlessness. I am ashamed that I could not do so. But my shame could not benefit them or me.

If *Ramanama* favours me I might still attain that courage some day. In the meantime, I consider it my duty to act as I have stated above. Religion is a thing to be lived. It is not mere sophistry.

Mussoorie, May 29, 1946

'Religion v. no Religion' (G.)
Harijanbandhu, 9 June 1946
Harijan, 9 June 1946

184. EDUCATION IN AHIMSA

[After 28 May 1946]

'You have brought us to the threshold of independence, Gandhiji,' remarked another privileged friend who had a talk with him on an evening, 'and we cannot feel too grateful for it. You will, of course, give entire credit for it to *ahimsa*—that being your pet child. But we feel that we have derived more strength from truth than from your *ahimsa*.'

You are wrong in thinking that in my partiality for *ahimsa* I have given to truth the second place. You are equally wrong in thinking that the country has derived more strength from truth than from *ahimsa*. On the contrary, I am firmly convinced that whatever progress the country has made is due to its adoption of *ahimsa* as its method of struggle.

I mean the country has not understood your *ahimsa* but it has understood truth and that has filled it with strength.

It is just the contrary. There is so much of untruth in the country I feel suffocated sometimes. I am convinced, therefore, that it must be the practice of *ahimsa* alone, however faulty, that has brought us so far.

Moreover, I have not given truth the second place as you seem to think.

He continued and described how at a meeting at Geneva he had flabbergasted everybody by remarking that whereas he used to say that God is Truth, he had since come to hold that Truth is God.

'Nevertheless, your emphasis is always on *ahimsa*. You have made propagation of non-violence the mission of your life', argued the friend.

There again you are wrong. *Ahimsa* is not the goal. Truth is the goal. But we have no means of realizing truth in human relationships except through the practice of *ahimsa*. A steadfast pursuit of *ahimsa* is inevitably bound to truth—not so violence. That is why I swear by *ahimsa*. Truth came naturally to me. *Ahimsa* I acquired after a struggle. But *ahimsa* being the means we are naturally more concerned with it in our everyday life.

191. INEVITABLE HIMSA

148, Russa Road,
Calcutta,
August 1, 1925

Dear Friend,

I have your letter. A man who owns land which is haunted by wild beasts will be able to excuse himself for shooting them. It would be classed as inevitable *himsa*. It will be justified on the ground of necessity, but there is no doubt that, if one has a full perception of *ahimsa*, it would be well for him to let his land be overrun by wild beasts or be himself killed by them. *Ahimsa* is not a mechanical matter, it is personal to everyone. Moreover, possession of property against the whole world is inconsistent with *ahimsa*. A man who will follow the principle of non-violence to its uttermost limit has nothing in this world he can call his own. He must merge himself into the whole, which includes snakes, scorpions, tigers, wolves, etc. There are instances on record of innocent men whose innocence even wild beasts have recognized. We must all strive to reach that stage.

The same remark applies to your second question. It is *himsa* to kill the germs and the insects, but even as we commit *himsa* by taking vegetable food (for vegetables have life) but regard it as inevitable, so must we treat the germ life. You will recognize that the doctrine of necessity can be stretched so as to justify even man-eating. A man who believes in *ahimsa* carefully refrains from every act that leads to injury. My argument only applies to those who believe in *ahimsa*. The necessity that I have in mind is a universal necessity, hence it is not permissible to take *ahimsa* beyond a limit. That is why the Shastras of custom only permit *himsa* in certain cases. It is not only lawful but obligatory upon everyone to make the least use possible of the permission and relaxation. It is unlawful to go beyond the limitation.

Yours sincerely,
M. K. GANDHI

Letter to a Friend
SN 10595

192. DESTRUCTION OF LIFE

A *sannyasi* from Almora writes as follows:

In replying to a correspondent, you have said in *Young India* of 14th April last that, even if you were attacked by a snake, you would not wish to kill it. In my opinion, this would be improper; for in the first place, you would be thereby killing yourself, and secondly, by letting such a venomous reptile free, you would be instrumental in causing injury to others. Take another instance. If the owner of a house, in which a snake has entered, removed the snake without killing it from his house, it is sure to enter some other house and injure its inmates. Surely, the responsibility for the injury, it may be fatal, to the inmates of the other house, done by the snake that was let off, will be on the head of him who has under a false notion of pity let the snake off. There are many other reptiles, beasts and insects who injure human beings or spread disease. Surely, if the destruction of this life be considered *himsa*, then it is infinitely less than the destruction wrought by these creatures. Let it be granted that when a man kills for his own sake, it is *himsa*; but it cannot be when destruction is resorted to for the sake of saving many other precious lives. After all, the quality of an act is determined by the motive prompting it, and when the motive for destruction is the higher good, such destruction becomes a duty and ceases to be *himsa*. I would like you to answer this argument in the pages of *Young India*.

The *sannyasi's* argument is ages old. There is no doubt that there is very considerable force in it. Had it not been so, destruction would not have gone on as it has from ancient times. Few men are wantonly wicked. The most heinous and the most cruel crimes of which history has record have been committed under cover of religion or equally other noble motive. But in my opinion, we are no better off for the destruction that has gone on even under the highest sanction, that is, of religion. No doubt destruction in some form or other of some life is inevitable. Life lives upon life. Hence only is the highest bliss attainable ascribed by seers to a state, in which life is possible without the necessity of a perishable case, for whose sustenance destruction becomes at all necessary. And it is possible for man whilst in the body to hope to attain that state, only if he confines himself to the least possible destruction, such as is caused in his taking of vegetable life. The freer he

is, consciously and deliberately, from the necessity of living upon the destruction of other life, the nearer he is to Truth and God. That all mankind is not likely to accept what may appear to be an unattractive existence does not affect the validity of my argument. Men, who lead this life of utter selflessness and of pity for the meanest creature that lives, enable us to understand the power of God, and serve as leaven to lift up humanity, and light its path towards its goal.

We have no right to destroy life that we cannot create. It seems to me to be atheistical to think that God has created some life only to be destroyed by man, either for his pleasure or for sustaining a body, which he knows, is after all doomed to death any moment. We do not know what part the many so-called noxious creatures play in the economy of Nature. We shall never know the laws of Nature by destruction. We have records of men, whose love has travelled beyond their kind, living in perfect safety even in the midst of ferocious beasts. There seems to be so much affinity between all life, that tigers, lions and snakes have refrained from harming men, who have shed all fear of them and will approach them as friends.

The argument that if I do not destroy a snake known to be venomous, he will cause the death of many men and women is deceptive. It is no part of my duty to set about seeking out all the venomous creatures and destroying them. Nor need I take it for granted, that if I do not destroy a snake I encounter, it is bound to bite the next passer-by. I must not be the judge between the snake and my neighbours. I have sufficiently discharged my duty to my neighbours if I do unto them as I would that they should do unto me, and if I do not expose them to any greater risk than I do myself, and if I do not better my own condition in any way whatsoever at their expense. I may not therefore leave the snake in my neighbour's compound as is very often done. The utmost I can do is to leave the reptile as much out of harm's way as possible and warn my neighbours about its appearance in the neighbourhood and its disposal by me. I am aware that this is no comfort for my neighbours, nor any protection; but we are living in the midst of death, trying to grope our way to Truth. Perhaps it is as well that we are beset with danger at every

point in our life; for, in spite of our knowledge of the danger and of our precarious existence, our indifference to the Source of all life is excelled only by our amazing arrogance.

I am not satisfied with the answer given to the *sannyasi*. His letter, which is written in Hindi, shows that my correspondent is himself a fellow seeker after Truth. Hence only have I felt the call to answer his query in public. My own position is pitiable. My intellect rebels against the destruction of any life in any shape whatsoever. But my heart is not strong enough to befriend those creatures which experience has shown are destructive. The language of convincing confidence, which comes from actual experience, fails me, and it will continue to be so, so long as I am cowardly enough to fear snakes, tigers and the like. I have entered upon the reply with the greatest diffidence. But I felt that it would be wrong not to declare my belief for fear of losing caste and being regarded as a dangerous animal myself. I was once so regarded by friends in South Africa. We were all sitting at a table, and discussion turned upon the very topic I have here discussed. They were English missionary friends. They did not mind my views about transmigration, cow-protection, vegetarianism, though they all appeared to be very crude to them. But they could not help betraying their disgust, which was written in their faces, when I said that I would not, if God gave me the courage, kill a snake, even if I knew that not to kill would be certain death for me. Disgust was hidden by the suppressed laughter which accompanied, 'O! You are a dangerous man then!'

'Ages Old Problem'
Young India, 7 July 1927

193. HIMSA—ITS FORMS AND ITS REDUCTION

I. *When killing may be ahimsa*

An attempt is being made at the Ashram to run a small model dairy and tannery on behalf of the Goseva Sangha. Its work in this connection brings it up, at every step, against intricate moral dilemmas that would not arise but for the keenness to

realize the Ashram ideal of seeking Truth through the exclusive means of *ahimsa*.

For instance some days back a calf having been maimed lay in agony in the Ashram. Whatever treatment and nursing was possible was given to it. The surgeon whose advice was sought in the matter declared the case to be past help and past hope. The suffering of the animal was so great that it could not even turn its side without excruciating pain.

In these circumstances I felt that humanity demanded that the agony should be ended by ending life itself. I held a preliminary discussion with the Managing Committee, most of whom agreed with my view. The matter was then placed before the whole Ashram. At the discussion a worthy neighbour vehemently opposed the idea of killing even to end pain and offered to nurse the dying animal. The nursing consisted in co-operation with some of the Ashram sisters in warding the flies off the animal and trying to feed it. The ground of the friend's opposition was that one has no right to take away life which one cannot create. His argument seemed to me to be pointless here. It would have point if the taking of life was actuated by self-interest. Finally, in all humility but with the clearest of convictions I got in my presence a doctor kindly to administer the calf a quietus by means of a poison injection. The whole thing was over in less than two minutes.

I knew that public opinion especially in Ahmedabad would not approve of my action and that it would read nothing but *himsa* in it.

But I know too that performance of one's duty should be independent of public opinion. I have all along held that one is bound to act according to what to one appears to be right even though it may appear wrong to others. And experience has shown that that is the only correct course. I admit that there is always a possibility of one's mistaking right for wrong and vice versa but often one learns to recognize wrong only through unconscious error. On the other hand if a man fails to follow the light within for fear of public opinion or any other similar reason he would never be able to know right from wrong and in the end lose all sense of distinction between the two. That is why the poet has sung:

The pathway of love is the ordeal of fire,
The shrinkers turn away from it.

The pathway of *ahimsa*, that is, of love, one has often to tread all alone.

But the question may very legitimately be put to me: Would I apply to human beings the principle I have enunciated in connection with the calf? Would I like it to be applied in my own case? My reply is yes; the same law holds good in both the cases. The law of *yatha pinde thatha brahmande* ('as with one so with all') admits of no exceptions, or the killing of the calf was wrong and violent. In practice however we do not cut short the sufferings of our ailing dear ones by death because as a rule we have always means at our disposal to help them and because they have the capacity to think and decide for themselves. But supposing that in the case of an ailing friend I am unable to render any aid whatever and recovery is out of the question and the patient is lying in an unconscious state in the throes of fearful agony, then I would not see any *himsa* in putting an end to his suffering by death.

Just as a surgeon does not commit *himsa* but practises the purest *ahimsa* when he wields his knife on his patient's body for the latter's benefit, similarly one may find it necessary under certain imperative circumstances to go a step further and sever life from the body in the interest of the sufferer. It may be objected that whereas the surgeon performs his operation to save the life of the patient, in the other case we do just the reverse. But on a deeper analysis it will be found that the ultimate object sought to be served in both the cases is the same, *viz.*, to relieve the suffering soul within from pain. In the one case you do it by severing the diseased portion from the body, in the other you do it by severing from the soul the body that has become an instrument of torture to it. In either case it is the relief of the soul within from pain that is aimed at, the body without the life within being incapable of feeling either pleasure or pain. Other circumstances can be imagined in which not to kill would spell *himsa*, while killing would be *ahimsa*. Suppose, for instance, that I find my daughter—whose wish at the moment I have no means of ascertaining—is threatened with violation and there is no way by which I can

save her, then it would be the purest form of *ahimsa* on my part to put an end to her life and surrender myself to the fury of the incensed ruffian.

But the trouble with our votaries of *ahimsa* is that they have made of non-killing a blind fetish and put the greatest obstacle in the way of the spread of true *ahimsa* in our midst. The current (and in my opinion, mistaken) view of *ahimsa* has drugged our conscience and rendered us insensible to a host of other and more insidious forms of *himsa* like harsh words, harsh judgments, ill-will, anger and spite and lust of cruelty; it has made us forget that there may be far more *himsa* in the slow torture of men and animals, the starvation and exploitation to which they are subjected out of selfish greed, the wanton humiliation and oppression of the weak and the killing of their self-respect that we witness all around us today than in mere benevolent taking of life. Does anyone doubt for a moment that it would have been far more humane to have summarily put to death those who in the infamous lane of Amritsar were made by their torturers to crawl on their bellies like worms? If anyone desires to retort by saying that these people themselves today feel otherwise, that they are none the worse for their crawling, I shall have no hesitation in telling him that he does not know even the elements of *ahimsa*. There arise occasions in a man's life when it becomes his imperative duty to meet them by laying down his life; not to appreciate this fundamental fact of man's estate is to betray an ignorance of the foundation of *ahimsa*. For instance, a votary of truth would pray to God to give him death to save him from a life of falsehood. Similarly a votary of *ahimsa* would on bent knees implore his enemy to put him to death rather than humiliate him or make him do things unbecoming the dignity of a human being. As the poet has sung:

The way of the Lord is meant for heroes,
Not for cowards.

It is this fundamental misconception about the nature and scope of *ahimsa*, this confusion about the relative values, that is responsible for our mistaking mere non-killing for *ahimsa* and for the fearful amount of *himsa* that goes on in the name

of *ahimsa* in our country. Let a man contrast the sanctimonious horror that is affected by the so-called votaries of *ahimsa*, at the very idea of killing an ailing animal to cut short its agony with their utter apathy and indifference to countless cruelties that are practised on our dumb cattle world. And he will begin to wonder whether he is living in the land of *ahimsa* or in that of conscious or unconscious hypocrisy.

It is our spiritual inertia, lack of moral courage—the courage to think boldly and look facts squarely in the face that is responsible for this deplorable state of affairs. Look at our *pinjrapoles* and *goshalas*, many of them represent today so many dens of torture to which as a sop to conscience we consign the hapless and helpless cattle. If they could only speak they would cry out against us and say, 'Rather than subject us to this slow torture give us death.' I have often read this mute appeal in their eyes.

To conclude then, to cause pain or wish ill to or to take the life of any living being out of anger or a selfish intent is *himsa*. On the other hand after a calm and clear judgment to kill or cause pain to a living being with a view to its spiritual or physical benefit from a pure, selfless intent may be the purest form of *ahimsa*. Each such case must be judged individually and on its own merits. The final test as to its violence or non-violence is after all the intent underlying the act.

II. *When killing is himsa*

I now come to the other crying problem that is confronting the Ashram today. The monkey nuisance has become very acute and an immediate solution has become absolutely necessary. The growing vegetables and fruit trees have become a special mark of attention of this privileged fraternity and are now threatened with utter destruction. In spite of all our efforts we have not yet been able to find an efficacious and at the same time blameless remedy for the evil.

The matter has provoked a hot controversy in certain circles and I have received some angry letters on the subject. One of the correspondents has protested against the 'killing of monkeys and wounding them by means of arrows in the Ashram'. Let me hasten to assure the reader that no monkey has so far been killed in the Ashram, nor has any monkey been wounded

by means of 'arrows' or otherwise as imagined by the correspondent. Attempts are undoubtedly being made to drive them away and harmless arrows have been used for the purpose.

The idea of wounding monkeys to frighten them away seems to me unbearable though I am seriously considering the question of killing them in case it should become unavoidable. But this question is not so simple or easy as the previous one.

I see a clear breach of *ahimsa* even in driving away monkeys, the breach would be proportionately greater if they have to be killed. For any act of injury done from self-interest whether amounting to killing or not is doubtless *himsa*.

All life in the flesh exists by some *himsa*. Hence the highest religion has been defined by a negative word *ahimsa*. The world is bound in a chain of destruction. In other words *himsa* is an inherent necessity for life in the body. That is why a votary of *ahimsa* always prays for ultimate deliverance from the bondage of flesh.

None, while in the flesh, can thus be entirely free from *himsa* because one never completely renounces the will to live. Of what use is it to force the flesh merely if the spirit refuses to co-operate? You may starve even unto death but if at the same time the mind continues to hanker after objects of the sense, your fast is a sham and a delusion. What then is the poor helpless slave to the will to live to do? How is he to determine the exact nature and the extent of *himsa* he must commit? Society has no doubt set down a standard and absolved the individual from troubling himself about it to that extent. But every seeker after truth has to adjust and vary the standard according to his individual need and to make a ceaseless endeavour to reduce the circle of *himsa*. But the peasant is too much occupied with the burden of his hard and precarious existence to have time or energy to think out these problems for himself and the cultured class instead of helping him chooses to give him the cold shoulder. Having become a peasant myself, I have no clear-cut road to go by and must therefore chalk out a path for myself and possibly for fellow peasants. And the monkey nuisance being one of the multitude of ticklish problems that stare the farmer in the face, I must find out some means by which the peasant's crops can be safeguarded against it with the minimum amount of *himsa*.

I am told that the farmers of Gujarat employ special watchmen whose very presence scares away the monkeys and saves the peasant from the necessity of killing them. That may be but it should not be forgotten that whatever efficacy this method might have, it is clearly dependent upon some measure of destruction at some time or other. For these cousins of ours are wily and intelligent beings. The moment they discover that there is no real danger for them, they refuse to be frightened even by gun shots and only gibber and howl the more when shots are fired. Let nobody therefore imagine that the Ashram has not considered or left any method of dealing with the nuisance untried. But none of the methods that I have known up to now is free from *himsa*. Whilst therefore I would welcome any practical suggestions from the readers of *Navajivan* for coping with this problem, let the intending advisers bear in mind what I have said above and send only such solutions as they have themselves successfully tried and cause the minimum amount of injury.

'The Fiery Ordeal' (G.)
Navajivan, 30 Sept. 1928
Young India, 4 Oct. 1928

194. HIMSА AND SELF-DEFENCE

Satyagraha Ashram, Sabarmati,
October 12, 1928

Dear Friend,

I have your letter for which I thank you. Evidently we look at the same thing from opposite points of view. You think that killing in self-defence is not *himsa*, whereas the killing of the calf for its own good, no matter how mistaken it might afterwards be discovered to be, is *himsa*. Here I see no meeting ground. I regard even the killing of a snake to be *himsa*. That

I may not be able to avoid it, being afraid of the snake, does not make the act of destruction any the less *himsa*.

Yours sincerely,

Sjt. Rup Narayan Shrivastava
C/o Sheth Jamnadas, M.L.A., Jubbalpur, C.p.

Letter to R. N. Shrivastava
SN 13551

195. HIMS AND AHIMS

Some fiery champions of *ahimsa*, who seem bent upon improving the finances of the Postal Department, inundate me with letters full of abuse, and are practising *himsa* in the name of *ahimsa*. They would if they could prolong the calf controversy indefinitely. Some of them kindly suggest that my intellect has suffered decay with the attainment of sixtieth year. Some others have expressed the regret that the doctors did not diagnose my case as hopeless when I was sent to the Sassoon Hospital¹ and cut short my sinful career by giving me a poison injection in which case the poor calf in the Ashram might have been spared the poison injection and the race of monkeys saved from the menace of destruction. These are only a few characteristic samples from the sheaf-fuls of 'love-letters' that I am receiving daily. The more I receive these letters the more confirmed I feel in the correctness of my decision to ventilate this thorny question in the columns of *Navajivan*. It never seems to have struck these good people that by this unseemly exhibition of spleen they merely prove their unfitness to be votaries or exponents of *ahimsa* and strike it at the very root.

I turn however from these fulminations to one from among a batch of letters of a different order that I have received and I take the following from it:

Your exposition of the ethics of the 'calf-incident' has cleared up a lot of my doubts and shed valuable light on the implications of *ahimsa*. But unfortunately it raises a fresh difficulty. Suppose, for instance, that a man begins to oppress a whole people and there is no other way of putting a stop to his oppression; then proceeding on

the analogy of the calf, would it not be an act of *ahimsa* to rid society of his presence by putting him to death? Would you not regard such an act as an unavoidable necessity and therefore as one of *ahimsa*? In your discussion about the killing of the calf you have made the mental attitude the principal criterion of *ahimsa*. Would not according to this principle the destruction of proved tyrants be counted as *ahimsa*, since the motive inspiring the act is of the highest? You say that there is no *himsa* in killing off animal pests that destroy a farmer's crops; then why should it not be *ahimsa* to kill human pests that threaten society with destruction and worse?

The discerning reader will have already perceived that this correspondent has altogether missed the point of my argument. The definition of *ahimsa* that I have given cannot by any stretch of meaning be made to cover a case of manslaughter such as the correspondent in question postulates. I have nowhere described the unavoidable destruction of life that a farmer has to commit in pursuit of his calling as *ahimsa*. One may regard such destruction of life as unavoidable and condone it as such, but it cannot be spelt otherwise than as *himsa*. The underlying motive with the farmer is to subserve his own interest or, say, that of society. *Ahimsa* on the other hand rules out such interested destruction. But the killing of the calf was undertaken for the sake of the dumb animal itself. Anyway its good was the only motive.

The problem mentioned by the correspondent in question may certainly be compared to that of the monkey nuisance. But then there is a fundamental difference between the monkey nuisance and the human nuisance. Society as yet knows of no means by which to effect a change of heart in the monkeys and their killing may therefore be held as pardonable, but there is no evil-doer or tyrant who need be considered beyond reform. That is why the killing of a human being out of self-interest can never find a place in the scheme of *ahimsa*.

To come now to the question of motive, whilst it is true that mental attitude is the crucial test of *ahimsa*, it is not the sole test. To kill any living being or thing save for his or its own interest is *himsa* however noble the motive may otherwise be. And a man who harbours ill-will towards another is no less guilty of *himsa* because for fear of society or want of op-

portunity, he is unable to translate his ill-will into action. A reference to both intent and deed is thus necessary in order finally to decide whether a particular act of abstention can be classed as *ahimsa*. After all, intent has to be inferred from a bunch of correlated acts.

'A Conundrum' (G.)

Navajivan, 14 Oct. 1928

Young India, 18 Oct. 1928

¹ Where he was operated upon for appendicitis in January 1924.

196. HIMSAS, KILLING, AND EUTHANASIA

I

A correspondent writes:

I have read your article 'The Fiery Ordeal' over and over again but it has failed to satisfy me. Your proposal about the killing of monkeys has taken me aback. I believed that a person like you with his being steeped in *ahimsa* would never swerve from the right path even though the heavens fell. And now you say that you might kill off the monkeys to protect your Ashram against their inroads. Maybe that my first impression about you was wrong. But I cannot describe what a shock your proposal about the killing of the monkeys has given me, and may I also confess, how angry it has made me feel against you? Would you kindly help me out of my perplexity?

I have received several other letters too in the same strain. I am afraid people have formed an altogether exaggerated estimate of me. These good people seem to think that because I am trying to analyse and define the ideal of *ahimsa* I must have fully attained that ideal. My views regarding the calf and the monkeys seem happily to have shattered this illusion of theirs. Truth to me is infinitely dearer than the 'mahatmaship' which is purely a burden. It is my knowledge of my limitations and my nothingness which has so far saved me from the oppressiveness of the 'mahatmaship'. I am painfully aware of the fact that my desire to continue life in the body involves me in constant *himsa*, that is why I am becoming

growingly indifferent to this physical body of mine. For instance I know that in the act of respiration I destroy innumerable invisible germs floating in the air. But I do not stop breathing. The consumption of vegetables involves *himsa* but I find that I cannot give them up. Again, there is *himsa* in the use of antiseptics, yet I cannot bring myself to discard the use of disinfectants like kerosene, etc., to rid myself of the mosquito pest and the like. I suffer snakes to be killed in the Ashram when it is impossible to catch and put them out of harm's way. I even tolerate the use of the stick to drive the bullocks in the Ashram. Thus there is no end of *himsa* which I directly and indirectly commit.

And now I find myself confronted with this monkey problem. Let me assure the reader that I am in no hurry to take the extreme step of killing them. In fact I am not sure that I would at all be able finally to make up my mind to kill them. As it is, friends are helping me with useful suggestions and the adoption of some of them may solve the difficulty at least temporarily without our having to kill them. But I cannot today promise that I shall never kill the monkeys even though they may destroy all the crop in the Ashram. If as a result of this humble confession of mine, friends choose to give me up as lost, I would be sorry but nothing will induce me to try to conceal my imperfections in the practice of *ahimsa*. All I claim for myself is that I am ceaselessly trying to understand the implications of great ideals like *ahimsa* and to practise them in thought, word and deed and that not without a certain measure of success as I think. But I know that I have a long distance yet to cover in this direction. Unless therefore the correspondent in question can bring himself to bear with my imperfections I am sorry I can offer him but little consolation.

II

Another correspondent writes:

Supposing my elder brother is suffering from a terrible and painful malady and doctors have despaired of his life and I too feel likewise, should I in the circumstances put him out of life?

My reply is in the negative. I am afraid some of my correspondents have not even taken the trouble to understand my

198. VIOLENCE, RESTRAINT, AND RESISTANCE

[On or after 10 December 1931]

Q. Cruelty or wickedness in man is not caused by will, but by morbid taste. What would non-resistance do to preserve society from these half-responsible people?

A. I do not need to use violence at all. But I would need to keep them under restraint. I would use some social force. I would not call it violence. My brother becomes a lunatic and I put iron on his hands.

There is no use of violence when the motive is lacking. Nor would he feel the violence. On the contrary, when he comes to his senses, he would thank me for it. In his lunacy he would feel the violence, offer resistance to it. I would not mind the resistance because my action would be dictated by unadulterated love; there is not even the selfishness of loving behind it. If I am tying his hands, it is not in order to save myself from being hurt. If I felt that I should hurt myself by trying to save him, I should subject myself to being hurt. In the same way I should treat these half-crazy men, treat them as sick men, put them in an infirmary and put them not under heartless jailors but under medical men who have studied their conditions and surround them by kind nurses. That is only dealing with the system.

Discussion with Romain Rolland
Mahadev Desai's Diary (MSS)

199. VIOLENCE AND COWARDICE

April 18, 1932

Chi,

If ever our sister or any helpless person is assaulted by someone, we should try to save her even at the cost of our life. Whenever one can kill, one can also lay down one's own life instead. If, however, we do not have the strength to lay down our life, we should help even by using violence. Such violence

does not cease to be violence. It remains an evil. But cowardice is worse than violence.

Blessings from
BAPU

A Letter (G.)
CW 9037

200. AS LITTLE VIOLENCE AS POSSIBLE

April 18, 1933

Dear Friend,

I have your letter. The problem you have raised is not new, and because we are surrounded by death and destruction on all sides we have the positive word '*himsa*', and yet every religion that is known to mankind insists upon life as the law, but conduct prescribed has been designated by a negative word, that is, '*ahimsa*' or non-violence. That can only exist for a bodied life as an ideal to be reached, not to be realized in action in physical existence. Nevertheless if we recognize the law of *ahimsa* we would always shape our conduct so as to approach it as near as possible and therefore we would resort to as little violence as it is humanly possible, whereas if *himsa* was the law of our being, we would naturally do as much destruction as we could and rejoice in it. But we do not find many people rejoicing in doing violence, whereas we do find many people apologizing for what violence they did. To say that there is double law working, namely, violence and non-violence, would be to argue that two contrary laws can co-exist. This is hardly the right thing.

Yours sincerely,

Sjt. Krishna Chandra Mukherji
Magura P.O. (Jessore)
Bengal

Letter to Krishna Chandra Mukherji
SN 20982

§ 4. The Fundamentals of Non-Violence

213. NON-VIOLENCE—THE LAW OF OUR SPECIES

In this age of the rule of brute force, it is almost impossible for anyone to believe that anyone else could possibly reject the law of the final supremacy of brute force. And so I receive anonymous letters advising me that I must not interfere with the progress of non-co-operation even though popular violence may break out. Others come to me and assuming that secretly I must be plotting violence, inquire when the happy moment for declaring open violence will arrive. They assure me that the English will never yield to anything but violence secret or open. Yet others, I am informed, believe that I am the most rascally person living in India because I never give out my real intention and that they have not a shadow of a doubt that I believe in violence just as much as most people do.

Such being the hold that the doctrine of the sword has on the majority of mankind, and as success of non-co-operation depends principally on absence of violence during its pendency and as my views in this matter affect the conduct of a large number of people, I am anxious to state them as clearly as possible.

I do believe that where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence I would advise violence. Thus when my eldest son asked me what he should have done, had he been present when I was almost fatally assaulted in 1908, whether he should have run away and seen me killed or whether he should have used his physical force which he could and wanted to use, and defended me, I told him that it was his duty to defend me even by using violence. Hence it was that I took part in the Boer War, the so-called Zulu rebellion and the late War. Hence also do I advocate training in arms for those who believe in the method of violence. I would rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honour than that she should in a cowardly manner become or remain a helpless witness to her own dishonour.

But I believe that non-violence is infinitely superior to violence, forgiveness is more manly than punishment. *Kshama virasya bhushanam*. 'Forgiveness adorns a soldier.' But absti-

nence is forgiveness only when there is the power to punish; it is meaningless when it pretends to proceed from a helpless creature. A mouse hardly forgives a cat when it allows itself to be torn to pieces by her. I, therefore, appreciate the sentiment of those who cry out for the condign punishment of General Dyer and his ilk. They would tear him to pieces if they could. But I do not believe India to be helpless. I do not believe myself to be a helpless creature. Only I want to use India's and my strength for a better purpose.

Let me not be misunderstood. Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will. An average Zulu is any way more than a match for an average Englishman in bodily capacity. But he flees from an English boy, because he fears the boy's revolver or those who will use it for him. He fears death and is nerveless in spite of his burly figure. We in India may in a moment realize that one hundred thousand Englishmen need not frighten three hundred million human beings. A definite forgiveness would therefore mean a definite recognition of our strength. With enlightened forgiveness must come a mighty wave of strength in us, which would make it impossible for a Dyer and a Frank Johnson to heap affront upon India's devoted head. It matters little to me that for the moment I do not drive my point home. We feel too downtrodden not to be angry and revengeful. But I must not refrain from saying that India can gain more by waiving the right of punishment. We have better work to do, a better mission to deliver to the world.

I am not a visionary. I claim to be a practical idealist. The religion of non-violence is not meant merely for the *rishis* and saints. It is meant for the common people as well. Non-violence is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute. The spirit lies dormant in 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.

I have therefore ventured to place before India the ancient law of self-sacrifice. For *satyagraha* and its off-shoots, non-co-operation and civil resistance, are nothing but new names for the law of suffering. The *rishis*, who discovered the law of non-violence in the midst of violence, were greater geniuses than Newton. They were themselves greater warriors than

Wellington. Having themselves known the use of arms, they realized their uselessness and taught a weary world that its salvation lay not through violence but through non-violence.

Non-violence in its dynamic condition means conscious suffering. It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil-doer, 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 honour, his religion, his soul and lay the foundation for that empire's fall or its regeneration.

And so I am not pleading for India to practise non-violence because it is weak. I want her to practise non-violence being conscious of her strength and power. No training in arms is required for realization of her strength. We seem to need it because we seem to think that we are but a lump of flesh. I want India to recognize that she has a soul that cannot perish and that can rise triumphant above every physical weakness and defy the physical combination of a whole world. What is the meaning of Rama, a mere human being, with his host of monkeys, pitting himself against the insolent strength of ten-headed Ravana surrounded in supposed safety by the raging waters on all sides of Lanka? Does it not mean the conquest of physical might by spiritual strength? However, being a practical man, I do not wait till India recognizes the practicability of the spiritual life in the political world. India considers herself to be powerless and paralysed before the machine-guns, the tanks and the aeroplanes of the English. And she takes up non-co-operation out of her weakness. It must still serve the same purpose, namely, bring her delivery from the crushing weight of British injustice if a sufficient number of people practise it.

I isolate this non-co-operation from Sinn Feinism, for, it is so conceived as to be incapable of being offered side by side with violence. But I invite even the school of violence to give this peaceful non-co-operation a trial. It will not fail through its inherent weakness. It may fail because of poverty of response. Then will be the time for real danger. The high-souled men, who are unable to suffer national humiliation any longer, will want to vent their wrath. They will take to violence. So far as I know, they must perish without delivering

themselves or their country from the wrong. If India takes up the doctrine of the sword, she may gain momentary victory. Then India will cease to be the pride of my heart. I am wedded to India because I owe my all to her. I believe absolutely that she has a mission for the world. She is not to copy Europe blindly. India's acceptance of the doctrine of the sword will be the hour of my trial. I hope I shall not be found wanting. My religion has no geographical limits. If I have a living faith in it, it will transcend my love for India herself. My life is dedicated to service of India through the religion of non-violence which I believe to be the root of Hinduism.

Meanwhile I urge those who distrust me, not to disturb the even working of the struggle that has just commenced, by inciting to violence in the belief that I want violence. I detest secrecy as a sin. Let them give non-violent non-co-operation a trial and they will find that I had no mental reservation whatsoever.

'The Doctrine of the Sword'
Young India, 11 Aug. 1920

214. COMPLETE AND LIMITED NON-VIOLENCE

When a person claims to be non-violent, he is expected not to be angry with one who has injured him. He will not wish him harm; he will wish him well; he will not swear at him; he will not cause him any physical hurt. He will put up with all the injury to which he is subjected by the wrongdoer. Thus non-violence is complete innocence. Complete non-violence is complete absence of ill will against all that lives. It therefore embraces even sub-human life not excluding noxious insects or beasts. They have not been created to feed our destructive propensities. If we only knew the mind of the Creator, we should find their proper place in His creation. Non-violence is therefore, in its active form, goodwill towards all life. It is pure Love. I read it in the Hindu scriptures, in the Bible, in the Koran.

Non-violence is a perfect state. It is a goal towards which all mankind moves naturally though unconsciously. Man does

215. THE GREATEST FORCE IN THE WORLD

Delhi
November 14, 1924

To
The 'World Tomorrow'
396, Broadway
New York
U.S.A.

My study and experience of non-violence have proved to me that it is the greatest force in the world. It is the surest method of discovering the truth and it is the quickest because there is no other. It works silently, almost imperceptibly, but none the less surely. It is the one constructive process of Nature in the midst of incessant destruction going on about us. I hold it to be a superstition to believe that it can work only in private life. There is no department of life public or private to which that force cannot be applied. But this non-violence is impossible without complete self-effacement.

M. K. GANDHI

Message to *World Tomorrow*
Mahadev Desai's Diary (MSS)

216. CONSCIOUS NON-VIOLENCE AND THE FUTILITY OF VIOLENCE

After putting the questions he has, a correspondent thus concludes his letter:

I hope you will be courteous enough to throw light on these points and continue to discuss with me until I do not talk nonsense. I am your follower and have gone to jail under your leadership and guidance. I have never gone to see and talk to you even when I was very near to you and had ample opportunity, simply because I hated to encroach upon your time. I have not even touched your feet. I now feel very much shaken in my faith in your reasoning and politics. I am not a revolutionary but I am on the verge of being a revolutionary. If you answer these questions satisfactorily, you may save me.

I now take his questions seriatim.

1. What is non-violence, an attitude of the mind or non-destruction of life? If it be the latter, is it possible to translate it into practice and carry it to its logical consequences when we destroy numberless lives daily in taking our meals, etc.? We cannot even eat vegetables in that case.

Non-violence is both an attitude of mind and action consequent upon it. No doubt, there is life in vegetables. But the taking of vegetable life is inevitable. It is none the less destruction of life. Only it may be regarded as excusable.

The second question is:

2. If we cannot avoid destroying life, it certainly does not mean that we should recklessly destroy it; but then, in proved cases of necessity it cannot be objected to on principle. It may be objected to on expediency.

Even in proved cases of necessity, violence cannot be defended 'on principle'. It may be defended on grounds of expediency.

The third question is:

3. If non-violence is non-destruction of life, how can you consistently ask anybody to give up his own life in a cause howsoever holy and righteous it may be? Would that not be violence to one's own self?

I can consistently ask a person to give up his life for a cause and yet not be guilty of violence. For non-violence means refraining from injury to others.

The fourth is:

4. It is human nature to love one's own life. If one should sacrifice one's life when necessary for his country and people, why should he not sacrifice the lives of others when necessary? We have only to prove whether it was necessary. It is, therefore, a matter of expediency again.

'He that shall love his own life shall lose it. He that shall lose his own life shall find it.' Sacrifice of the lives of others

cannot be justified on grounds of necessity, for it is impossible to prove necessity. We may not be judges ourselves. The sole judges must be those whose lives we would take. One good reason for non-violence is our fallible judgment. The inquisitors implicitly believed in the righteousness of their deeds, but we now know that they were wholly wrong.

The fifth question is:

5. What is the difference between sacrifice and murder?

Sacrifice consists in suffering in one's own person so that others may benefit. Murder consists in making others suffer unto death so that the murderer, or those others for whom he murders, may benefit.

The sixth question is:

6. Is a doctor, who operates upon you, condemnable, for he is violent in giving you trouble temporarily? Do we not praise him all the more for that—looking not to his violent action but to his attitude of mind which is to give relief to the patient?

This is a misuse of the word violence, which means causing injury to another without his consent or without doing any good to him. In my case, the surgeon caused me temporary pain with my written and willing consent and for my sole good. A revolutionary murders or robs not for the good of his victims, whom he often considers to be fit only to be injured, but for the supposed good of society.

His seventh question is:

7. Is not physical force as much a potent factor of life as any other force? As non-violence can be taken by cowards as a garb to cover their cowardice, so can violence be misused by brutes and tyrants. It does not prove that violence of itself is bad.

Physical force undoubtedly is a potent factor of life. Violence has certainly been misused by tyrants, but in the sense in which I have defined violence, its good use is inconceivable. See the definition in the answer to the preceding question.

The eighth question is:

8. You will put lunatics and dangerous criminals who are a nuisance

to society in prisons. Will you allow us to capture those civilized criminals, who are functioning as government officials today, and deport or imprison them in some Himalayan caves instead of murdering them?

I am not sure that it is right to put lunatics or criminals, dangerous or otherwise, in prisons, i.e., for punishment. Lunatics are not so put even now. And we are reaching a time when even criminals will be put under restraint for their ultimate reform, not for their punishment. But I would gladly join any society for the confinement, under proper safeguards for their comfort, of the Viceroy and every civilian, English or Indian, who are today consciously or unconsciously bleeding India, provided that a scheme can be produced before me that is perfectly feasible from every point of view. And I would be prepared to join such a society even though it may be argued that such confinement might fall within my definition of violence.

The ninth question is:

9. What is more inhuman and terrible, rather what is more violent, to let 33 millions suffer, stagnate and perish, or a few thousand be killed? What would you prefer, to see the slow death of a mass of 33 millions through sheer degeneration, or killing of a few hundred of people? This certainly is to be proved that the killing of a few hundred will stop the degeneration of 33 millions. But then; it is a matter of detail and not principle. It may be later on discussed whether it is expedient or not. But if it is proved that by killing a few hundred, we can put a stop to the degeneration of 33 millions, will you object to violence on principle?

There is no principle worth the name if it is not wholly good. I swear by non-violence because I know that it alone conduces to the highest good of mankind, not merely in the next world but in this also. I object to violence because, when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent. I do not believe that the killing of even every Englishman can do the slightest good to India. The millions will be just as badly off as they are today, if someone made it possible to kill off every Englishman tomorrow. The responsibility is more ours than that of the English for the

present state of things. The English will be powerless to do evil if we will but do good. Hence my incessant emphasis on reform from within.

But, before the revolutionary, I have urged non-violence not on the highest ground of morality but on the lower ground of expedience. I contend that the revolutionary method cannot succeed in India. If an open warfare were a possibility, I may concede that we may tread the path of violence that the other countries have and at least evolve the qualities that bravery on the battlefield brings forth. But attainment of *swaraj* through warfare I hold to be an impossibility for any time that we can foresee. Warfare may give us another rule for the English rule but not self-rule in terms of the masses. The pilgrimage to *swaraj* is a painful climb. It requires attention to details. It means vast organizing ability, it means penetration into the villages solely for the service of the villagers. In other words it means national education, i.e., education of the masses. It means an awakening of national consciousness among the masses. It will not spring like the magician's mango. It will grow almost unperceived like the banyan tree. A bloody revolution will never perform the trick. Haste here is most certainly waste. The revolution of the spinning-wheel is the quickest revolution conceivable.

The tenth and the last question is:

10. Is not all logic and reason discarded where vital interests of life are concerned? Is it not a fact that a few selfish, tyrant and obdurate men may, as they do, refuse to listen to reason and continue to rule, tyrannize and do injustice to a mass of people? Lord Krishna failed to bring about a settlement peacefully between the obdurate Kauravas and the Pandavas. *Mahabharata* may be fiction. Poor Krishna may be less spiritual. But even you failed to persuade your judge to resign from his post and not convict you, whom even he, as everybody else, regarded innocent. How far can persuasion through self-sacrifice be successful in such cases?

It is sad but true that, where so-called vital interests are concerned, logic and reason are thrown to the wind. Tyrants are, indeed, obdurate. The English tyrant is obduracy personified. But he is a multi-headed monster. He refuses to be killed. He cannot be paid in his own coin, for he has left none

for us to pay him with. I have a coin that is not cast in his mint and he cannot steal it. It is superior to any he has yet produced. It is non-violence; and the symbol of it is the spinning-wheel. I have, therefore, presented it to the country with the fullest confidence. Krishna failed to do nothing he wished to do, so says the author of the *Mahabharata*. He was omnipotent. It is futile to drag Krishna from His heights. If He has to be judged as a mere mortal, I fear He will fare badly and will have to take a back seat. *Mahabharata* is neither fiction nor history commonly so called. It is the history of the human soul in which God as Krishna is the chief actor. There are many things in that poem that my poor understanding cannot fathom. There are in it many things which are obvious interpolations. It is not a treasure chest. It is a mine which needs to be explored, which needs to be dug deep and from which diamonds have to be extracted after removing much foreign matter. Therefore, I would urge my friends, the full-fledged revolutionaries, or those in the making, or on the verge of being such, to keep their feet firm on mother earth and not scale the Himalayan heights to which the poet took Arjuna and his other heroes. Anyway, I must respectfully refuse even to attempt the ascent. The plains of Hindustan are good enough for me.

To descend to the plains, then, let the questioner understand that I had not gone to the court to persuade the judge of my innocence. But on the contrary, I went there to plead fully guilty and ask for the highest penalty. For, the breach by me of the man-made law was deliberate. The judge did not, could not, believe me to be innocent. There was not much sacrifice in undergoing the imprisonment. True sacrifice is made of sterner stuff. Let my friend understand the implications of non-violence. It is a process of conversion. I am convinced. I must be pardoned for saying it that my out-and-out non-violence has converted many more Englishmen than any amount of threats of deeds or violence. I know that when conscious non-violence becomes general in India *swaraj* will not be far.

“On the Verge of It”

Young India, 21 May 1925

own inner voice. If he or she has no ears to listen to it, he or she should do the best he or she can. In no case should he or she imitate others sheep-like.

One more question has been and is being asked. If you are sure that India is going the wrong way, why do you associate with the wrong-doers? Why do you not plough your own lonely furrow and have faith that if you are right, your erstwhile friends and followers will seek you out? I regard this as a very fair question. I must not attempt to argue against it. All I can say is that my faith is as strong as ever. It is quite possible that my technique is faulty. There are old and tried precedents to guide one in such a complexity. Only, no one should act mechanically. Hence I can say to all my counsellors that they should have patience with me and even share my belief that there is no hope for the aching world except through the narrow and straight path of non-violence. Millions like me may fail to prove the truth in their own lives, that would be their failure, never of the eternal law.

'Non-Violence'¹
Harijan, 29 June 1947

¹ Gandhi's written message for the prayer meeting on 15 June 1947.

§ 5. The Discipline of Non-Violence

242. NON-VIOLENCE AND EGOISM

A gentleman writes as follows¹ . . .

Such questions are frequently raised. They cannot be brushed aside, either, as being trivial. These problems have been discussed both in the West and the East in books dealing with the deeper meaning of life. In my humble view, there is only one solution to these problems, since they all arise from the same cause. The actions mentioned above certainly involve violence, for every motion or action involves it and, therefore, no action is altogether innocent. The difference be-

tween one action and another lies only in the degree of violence involved in either. The very association of the *atman* with the body rests on violence. Every sin is a form of violence, and complete freedom from sin is possible only with the deliverance of the *atman* from the body. A human being, therefore, may keep perfect non-violence as his or her ideal and strive to follow it as completely as possible. But no matter how near it he reaches, he will find some degree of violence unavoidable, in breathing or eating, for instance.

There is life in each grain which we consume. When, therefore, we adopt a vegetarian diet and abstain from non-vegetarian food we cannot claim that we completely avoid violence. But we prefer the former and regard the violence involved in it as inescapable. This is why eating for pleasure must never be indulged in. We should eat only in order that we may live, and should live only to realize the self. If our living for this purpose involves any violence, we may be a party to it as being unable to escape it. We can now see that if, in spite of all our precautions, there are germs in the water and bugs in the furniture, we may do whatever we find necessary to get rid of them. I do not believe that it is a divine law that everyone should act in the same way at certain times and in certain circumstances.

Non-violence is a quality of the heart. Whether there is violence or non-violence in our actions can be judged only by reference to the spirit behind them. Everyone, therefore, who regards the observance of non-violence as a moral duty should guide his actions by the principle stated above. I know that there is a flaw in this reply. One may commit violence as much as one chooses and then, deceiving oneself and the world, justify one's actions with the plea of their being unavoidable. This article is not meant for such persons. It is addressed only to those who believe in the principle of non-violence and are assailed by moral doubts from time to time. Such persons will commit even unavoidable violence most hesitatingly, and limit, not expand, the scope of their activities, so much so that they will not use any of their powers for selfish ends. They will use all their energies for public service, dedicating to God everything they do. All the gifts and abilities of a good man, that is, a non-violent, compassionate man,

are for service to others. There is violence always in the attachment to one's ego. When doing anything, one must ask oneself this question: 'Is my action inspired by egoistic attachment?' If there is no such attachment, then there is no violence.

'Problem of Non-Violence' (G.)

Navajivan, 6 June 1926

¹ The letter is not published here. The correspondent had asked for Gandhi's views about the impossibility of observing perfect non-violence in practical life, since destruction of insects could never be completely avoided.

243. NON-VIOLENCE AND HUMILITY

Coimbatore,

October 17, 1927

I got all your three letters. The one about theft¹ reached me rather late, but even so it was three days ago. Since, however, your second letter, which was received before the first, did not ask for an immediate reply, I did not send a wire, and I could not get time before today to write. Your letter about truth was received yesterday. I saw from it that you were awaiting a reply to the letter about theft and, therefore, dispatched a wire today. You must have got it. I could not, of course, explain everything in the wire.

Though we live in society, there are matters in which we should not or cannot follow it. Society may punish a thief because it does not believe in non-violence or cannot follow it. But those who seek to follow it in their lives, who have the courage to follow it, should remain neutral in such cases. If they do not, they will learn nothing from their effort to follow non-violence and society will make no progress. If this view is correct, you certainly cannot go to the court to give evidence. You should go, however, if you are summoned. In this case, at any rate, you should courteously explain to the magistrate what you think to be your *dharma*, so that the latter will punish the thief independently of you or may even let him off for want of evidence.

So far the course seems clear to me. You have, however, no

right to ask for mercy to be shown to the thief. When did you feel compassion for him? If you had felt it when you found him, you and Gomati would not have felt afraid and run after him. You would have remained unconcerned if he had taken away anything. But we have not risen high enough for this. Fear has not left us nor the love of possessions. I, therefore, feel that compassion is out of place, because unnatural. We may strive, we have been striving to cultivate such compassion in us. But so long as compassion has not become a permanent sentiment in us, it cannot be regarded as springing from our heart and, therefore, genuine. If indeed it has become a permanent sentiment in our heart, we should take the thief in our hands, meet him and try to reform him. Nor can the court accede to such a plea for mercy. If the thief himself makes the request and promises to try to reform himself, the court may consider it. The court may accept our request too, if we offer to keep the thief with us so as to prevent him from being a danger to others. I do not feel inclined to go so far and ask for mercy towards him. I have not been able to think of a third alternative besides punishment and mercy. When compassion does not produce as much effect as even punishment, we should understand that it is not genuine or sufficiently strong. I have practically stopped taking interest in the Hindu-Muslim problem because I feel that the compassion in my heart is insufficient or is unnatural. Unnatural does not mean pretended, but only that it has not gone deeper than the intellect. If it had gone deeper than the intellect, I should have been able to discover an alternative to the method of reprisal. But I am not in such a condition as yet. I have been striving hard to cultivate that degree of intense *ahimsa* in my heart. I must admit that up to the present I have failed. I have not accepted defeat however.

I should like to correct an error you have made. I am sure it is due to oversight. You say that the present-day law does not regard theft itself as crime, but that theft is a crime only when the thief is caught; surely it is not so bad as that. You would be right if you said that the thief who was not caught escaped punishment. But then, this must have been so even in the golden age. God alone can visit every theft with punishment, and those who believe in God actually hold that man

but it is the only way if India and the world are to live. If therefore the young men who have launched upon the battle will follow it up honestly and non-violently, they deserve all sympathy, and it is well that the local Congress Committee has taken up the matter in earnest.

'The Neill Statue and Non-Violence'
Young India, 29 Sept. 1927

259. ACCEPTING THE CONSEQUENCES OF NON-VIOLENCE

Satyagraha Ashram,
Sabarmati,
January 31, 1928

Dear Friend,

I have your letter.¹ If you are absolutely clear in your mind about non-violence, it is your duty to make that statement before the judge and decline to give evidence and cheerfully suffer the consequence. You should believe that it would be the duty of a judge administering a penal judgment to punish those who do not obey laws of the country in which they live. And, in this instance, there can be no question of civil disobedience either, because the law of punishing witnesses who do not answer questions will be enforced even after *swaraj*.

Yours sincerely,

Sjt. D. N. Banerji
94, Baradeo
Benares City

Letter to D. N. Banerji
SN 13058

¹ The addressee had asked Gandhi's advice as to whether he should give evidence in a criminal case.

260. NON-VIOLENCE, DISORDER, AND MISRULE

An esteemed friend writes:

It is not often that I intrude upon your expressions of political opinion. But a sentence of yours in a recent editorial, repeating a heresy uttered by you long ago, compels me to ask you whether you have measured your words with the care that one expects of an expounder of moral issues. You declare that you would accept chaos in exchange for freedom from the English yoke. That an Indian should desire and work for freedom from any foreign yoke is perfectly natural, normal and healthy. That anyone in his senses should exchange any kind of orderly government for chaos is simply incomprehensible, for the one implies some sort of discipline, whether imposed or stimulated, whereas the latter is the very negation of self-discipline. . . .

If non-violence be, as you claim it to be, creative, purposeful, and divine in its nature, then chaos cannot be its consequence or characteristic. If you have used the term with deliberation, then I should comment that you have rendered no service to mankind, who need rather a reminder that they should acquire the cosmic vision rather than the chaotic one to which they are already prone. . . .

There is no mistaking the earnestness running through the letter. And I have so much regard for the friend's views, that if I could have suited mine to his, I would gladly have done so.

But I must say that my choice was deliberate. Chaos means no rule, no order. Rule or order can come, does come out of no rule or no order, but never directly out of misrule or disorder masquerading under the sacred name of rule or order. My friend's difficulty arises, I presume, out of his assumption that the present Government of India represents 'some sort of discipline whether imposed or stimulated'. It is likely that our estimates of the existing system differ. My own estimate of it is that it is an unmitigated evil. No good therefore can come out of this evil. I hold misrule to be worse than no rule.

Nor need my words cause any confusion in the minds of the ignorant or the violent. For I admit my correspondent's contention that chaos can be the result only of violence. Have I not often said in these pages that if I were compelled to choose between this rule and violence I would give my vote for the

latter though I will not, I could not, assist a fight based on violence? It would be a matter for me of Hobson's choice. The seeming quiescence of today is a dangerous form of violence kept under suppression by greater violence or rather readiness for it. Is it not better that those who, out of a cowardly fear of death or dispossession, whilst harbouring violence refrain from it, should do it and win freedom from bondage or die gloriously in the attempt to vindicate their birthright?

My non-violence is not an academic principle to be enunciated on favourable occasions. It is a principle which I am seeking to enforce every moment of my life in every field of activity. In my attempt, often frustrated through my own weakness or ignorance, to enforce non-violence, I am driven for the sake of the creed itself to countenance violence by way of giving mental approval to it. In 1921 I told the villagers near Bettiah that they had acted like cowards in that they had instead of resisting the evil-minded Amlas left their wives and homes on their approach. On another occasion I expressed myself ashamed of a priest who said he had quietly slipped away and saved himself when a ruffian band had entered his temple to loot it and break the idol. I told him that if he could not die at his post defending his charge non-violently, he should have defended it by offering violent resistance. Similarly do I hold that, if India has no faith in non-violence, nor patience for it to work its way, then it is better for her to attain her freedom from the present misrule even by violence than that she should helplessly submit to a continuing rape of her belongings and her honour.

Look at the shameless manner in which, for sustaining the spoliation of India, British statesmen(?) are setting one party against another. They have suddenly discovered the untouchables, for they seem to fear that the Hindu-Muslim dissensions alone might not prove enough security for retaining possession of the 'most glorious diadem in the British Crown'. They are trying to set the helpless princes against the people. Sir John Simon finds it necessary to play the same game. The penetrating intellect he is said to possess does not penetrate the very thin veil that covers the frauds that are set up for his edification and he finds nothing seriously amiss in the Indian atmosphere. This sort of 'orderly discipline' has unmanned

and unnerved the people as nothing in their previous history has ever done.

My own position and belief are clear and unequivocal. I neither want the existing rule nor chaos. I want true order established without having to go through the travail of chaos. I want this disorder to be destroyed by non-violence, i.e., I want to convert the evil-doers. My life is dedicated to that task. And what I have written in the previous paragraphs directly flows from my knowledge of the working of non-violence which is the greatest force known to mankind. My belief in its efficacy is unshakeable, so is my belief unshakeable in the power of India to gain her freedom through non-violent means and no other. But this power of hers cannot be evoked by suppressing truth or facts however ugly they may for the moment appear to be. God forbid that India should have to engage in a sanguinary duel before she learns the lesson of non-violence in its fullness. But if that intermediate stage, often found to be necessary, is to be her lot, it will have to be faced as a stage inevitable in her march towards freedom and certainly preferable to the existing order which is only so-called but which is like a whited sepulchre hiding undiluted violence underneath.

'Chaos v. Misrule'

Young India, 1 Mar. 1928

261. NON-VIOLENCE, VIOLENCE, AND DHARMA

A reader writes to say¹ . . .

This problem is worth giving a thought to. It is not only farmers who are harassed by monkeys. In places like Prayag, Vrindavan, etc., monkeys harass even the citizens a great deal. People who are thus troubled would not be displeased if the animals were killed or removed by someone.

Although I thus admit that monkeys are a nuisance, I cannot immediately suggest the remedy of killing them.

There can be no comparison between a rabid dog and monkeys. The former is bound to die from the disease itself. Anyone who kills it saves it from the torture and spares

is a transitional stage to the establishment of an order without violence. In the present state of our belief and practice it may be better to wind up the Sangh leaving each one to grow unfettered.

KISHORELAL MASHRUWALA: But the suggestion is being made that we may confine the membership to those who are engaged in constructive work.

That suggestion is good, and we can conceivably convert the Sangh into such a body and then try each of us in our individual capacity to purify ourselves as much as we can. For non-violence is impossible without self-purification. Let us therefore be members of a self-purification association, but no association is necessary for that purpose. Therefore let us try each in our own way to face difficulties and problems as they come and see how far we can go. In Hudli, two years ago, I asked you to help in the elections and in sending the best possible men to the legislatures. I gave advice in the atmosphere as it existed then. I cannot give you that advice today. In fact the time may have come when it becomes necessary for such of you as believe in the non-violence of the brave to retire from the Congress as I did in 1934.

How do you think that the masses can practise non-violence when we know that they are all prone to anger, hate, ill will? They are known to fight for the most trivial things.

They are, and yet I think they can practise non-violence for the common good. Do you think the thousands of women that collected contraband salt had ill will against anyone? They knew that the Congress or Gandhi had asked them to do certain things, and they did those things in faith and hope. To my mind the most perfect demonstration of non-violence was in Champaran. Did the thousands of *ryots* who rose up in revolt against the agrarian evils harbour the least ill will against the Government or the planters? Their belief in non-violence was unintelligent, even as the belief in the earth being round with many is unintelligent. But their belief in their leaders was genuine, and that was enough. With those who lead it is another matter. Their belief has got to be intelligent, and they have to live up to all the implications of the belief.

But then are not the masses the world over like that?

They are not, for others have not that background of non-violence.

But if there was non-violence ingrained in our masses, how should they have come to this state of slavery?

There indeed is what I flatter myself is going to be my contribution. I want that non-violence of the weak to become non-violence of the brave. It may be a dream, but I have to strive for its realization.

Discussion with Executive Members of Gandhi Seva Sangh, II
Harijan, 4 Nov. 1949

280. NON-VIOLENCE, HUMILIATION, AND ANARCHY

[On or before 19 February 1940]¹

Q. Supposing in the presence of superior brute force one feels helpless, would one be justified in using just enough force to prevent the perpetration of wrong?

A. Yes, but there need not be that feeling of helplessness if there is real non-violence in you. To feel helpless in the presence of violence is not non-violence but cowardice. Non-violence should not be mixed up with cowardice.

Suppose someone came and hurled insult at you, should you allow yourself to be thus humiliated?

If you feel humiliated, you will be justified in slapping the bully in the face or taking whatever action you might deem necessary to vindicate your self-respect. The use of force, under the circumstances, would be the natural consequence if you are not a coward. But there should be no feeling of humiliation in you if you have assimilated the non-violence spirit. Your non-violent behaviour would then either make the bully feel ashamed of himself and prevent the insult, or make you immune against it so that the insult would remain only in the bully's mouth and not touch you at all.

Supposing there is a person with a diseased mind—a lunatic run amuck, bent upon murder, or you arrive on the scene of trouble when the situation has already advanced too far. An infuriated mob has got out of hand, and you feel helpless, would you justify the use

of physical force to restrain the lunatic in the first case, or allow the use, say, of tear-gas in the latter?

I will excuse it for all time. But I would not say it is justified from the non-violent standpoint. I would say that there was not that degree of non-violence in you to give you confidence in purely non-violent treatment. If you had, your simple presence would be sufficient to pacify the lunatic. Non-violence carries within it its own sanction. It is not a mechanical thing. You do not become non-violent by merely saying, 'I shall not use force.' It must be felt in the heart. There must be within you an upwelling of love and pity towards the wrongdoer. When there is that feeling it will express itself through some action. It may be a sign, a glance, even silence. But such as it is it will melt the heart of the wrongdoer and check the wrong.

The use of tear-gas is not justified in terms of the non-violent ideal. But I would defend its use against the whole world if I found myself in a corner when I could not save a helpless girl from violation or prevent an infuriated crowd from indulging in madness, except by its use. God would not excuse me if, on the Judgment Day, I were to plead before Him that I could not prevent these things from happening because I was held back by my creed of non-violence. Non-violence is self-acting. A fully non-violent person is by nature incapable of using violence or rather has no use for it. His non-violence is all-sufficing under all circumstances.

Therefore, when I say that the use of force is wrong in whatever degree and under whatever circumstances, I mean it in a relative sense. It is much better for me to say I have not sufficient non-violence in me, than to admit exceptions to an eternal principle. Moreover my refusal to admit exceptions spurs me to perfect myself in the technique of non-violence. I literally believe in Patanjali's aphorism that violence ceases in the presence of non-violence.²

Can a State carry on strictly according to the principle of non-violence?

A Government cannot succeed in becoming entirely non-violent, because it represents all the people. I do not today conceive of such a golden age. But I do believe in the possibility of a predominantly non-violent society. And I am work-

ing for it. A Government representing such society will use the least amount of force. But no Government worth its name can suffer anarchy to prevail. Hence I have said that even under a Government based primarily on non-violence a small police force will be necessary.

Discussion with Pacifists

Harijan, 9 Mar. 1940

¹ A group of pacifists which included some Quaker friends, led by Dr. Amiya Chakravarty, met Gandhi at Santiniketan.

² *Yogasutra*.

281. POTENCY OF NON-VIOLENCE

A friend writing from America propounds the following two questions:

1. Granted that *satyagraha* is capable of winning India's independence, what are the chances of its being accepted as a principle of State policy in a free India? . . . Is *satyagraha* likely to be accepted only in an up-hill battle, when the phenomenon of martyrdom is fully effective, or is it also to be the instrument of a sovereign authority which has neither the need nor the scope of behaving on the principle of martyrdom?
2. Suppose a free India adopts *satyagraha* as an instrument of State policy, how would she defend herself against probable aggression by another sovereign State? . . . What would be the *satyagrahic* action-patterns to meet the invading army at the frontier? . . .

The questions are admittedly theoretical. They are also premature for the reason that I have not mastered the whole technique of non-violence. The experiment is still in the making. It is not even in its advanced stage. The nature of the experiment requires one to be satisfied with one step at a time. The distant scene is not for him to see. Therefore my answers can only be speculative.

In truth, as I have said before, now we are not having unadulterated non-violence even in our struggle to win independence.

no circumstance can India and England give non-violent resistance a reasonable chance whilst they are both maintaining full military efficiency. At the same time it is perfectly true that all military powers carry on negotiations for peaceful adjustment of rival disputes. But here we are not discussing preliminary peace parleys before appealing to the arbitrament of war. We are discussing a final substitute for armed conflict called war, in naked terms, mass murder.

Simla, May 2, 1946

'Certain Questions'
Harijan, 12 May 1946

290. NON-VIOLENCE AND SELF-DEFENCE

A friend sends the following questions:

Q. 1. You have all along held and expressed the view that persons should observe strict non-violence even when attacked by hooligans or others. Does this hold good when women are attacked or outraged? If people are unable to follow your lead regarding non-violence, would you advise them to die as cowards or resist aggression with violence?

Q. 2. Should you not unequivocally condemn the dual role that the Muslim League is playing today? While, on the one hand, its leaders are openly preaching violence and *jehad* against Hindus, the same men continue, on the other hand, to hold office as Ministers, having a controlling hand on all the threads of administration, including police and justice.

Q. 3. Is there no constituted authority in India which can put a stop to this grave anomaly which is unprecedented in history?

Q. 4. Do you realize that if the present happenings are allowed to continue, civil war will become inevitable? How would you advise your countrymen to face such a catastrophe, if it comes?

A. 1. In a society of my imagination, outrage posited by the questioner cannot take place. But in the society in the midst of which we are living, such outrages do take place. My answer is unequivocal. A non-violent man or woman will and

should die without retaliation, anger or malice, in self-defence or in defending the honour of his womenfolk. This is the highest form of bravery.

If an individual or a group of people are unable or unwilling to follow this great law of life, which is miscalled my lead, retaliation or resistance unto death is the second best, though a long way off from the first. Cowardice is impotence worse than violence. The coward desires revenge but being afraid to die, he looks to others, may be the Government of the day, to do the work of defence for him. A coward is less than man. He does not deserve to be a member of a society of men and women. Lastly, let me add that if women had followed or would now follow my advice, every woman would protect herself without caring or waiting for aid from her brother or sister.

A. 2. Of course, the dual role adverted to is unequivocally bad. It is a sad chapter in our national life. My condemnation is of universal application. Fortunately it is so bad that it cannot last long.

A. 3. The only constituted authority is the British. We are all puppets in their hands. But it would be wrong and foolish to blame that authority. It acts according to its nature. That authority does not compel us to be puppets. We voluntarily run into their camp. It is, therefore, open to any and every one of us to refuse to play the British game.

Let us also admit frankly that the British authority is struggling to quit India. It does not know how. It honestly wants to leave India but wants before leaving to undo the wrong it has been doing for so long. Being in the position of 'the toad under the harrow', I must know where it hurts. I have been telling the authority, if it will undo the wrong quickly, to leave India to her fate. But those who compose the British service cannot realize this obvious fact. They flatter themselves with the belief that they know India better than we do ourselves. Having successfully kept us under subjection for over a century, they claim the right to constitute themselves judges of our destiny. We may not grumble, if we are to come into our own through the way of peace. *Satyagraha* is never vindictive. It believes not in destruction but in conversion. Its failures are due to the weaknesses of the *satyagrahi* not to any defect in the

law itself. The British authority having decided to quit (whatever the reason), will show growing defects and weaknesses. Parties will find that it is more and more a broken reed. And, when parties quarrel as Hindus and Muslims do, let one or the other or both realize that, if India is to be an independent nation, one or both must deliberately cease to look to British authority for protection.

A. 4. This brings me to the last question. We are not yet in the midst of civil war. But we are nearing it. At present we are playing at it. War is a respectable term for goondaism practised on a mass or national scale. If the British are wise, they will keep clear of it. Appearances are to the contrary. Even the English members in the Provincial Assemblies refuse to see that they were given seats by the Act of 1935, not because it was right but in order that they might protect British interest and keep Hindus and Muslims apart. But they do not see this. It is a small matter. Nevertheless it is a straw showing the way the wind is blowing. Lovers and makers of *swaraj* must not be dismayed by these omens. My advice is *satyagraha* first and *satyagraha* last. There is no other or better road to freedom. Whoever wants to drink the ozone of freedom must steel himself against seeking military or police aid. He or they must ever rely upon their own strong arms or, what is infinitely better, their strong mind and will which are independent of arms, their own or other.

New Delhi, September 9, 1946

'What To Do?'

Harijan, 15 Sept. 1946

291. NON-VIOLENCE AND NON-RESISTANCE

A student writes:

It has become a fashion for all to pose as political workers. And politics consist in speeches and participation in election campaigns. You would be pained to know that the minute books of Congress Committees are entirely blank, except for proceedings of annual sittings. It is all power politics. Students also get drawn into its vortex. What is your ideal of a political worker?

I have all along stressed the need for constructive work and to that end, I drew up a list of items for the guidance of all workers. I hold that if the constructive programme were worked with vigour and understanding, the result would be far more than mere political *swaraj*. Speeches and election campaigns would be almost unnecessary if our workers established the Congress in the hearts of the people through service. Then there will be more service than power and the weekly or fortnightly meetings of Congress committees will be filled with a recital of the activities and achievements of committees in the wide field of work.

Q. Non-violence in your opinion is not cowardice, but it is a form of resistance to injustice. You have admitted that it is wrong to arrest and imprison innocent persons which civil resisters are. And you have cheerfully courted arrest and imprisonment. Is this not inconsistent and cowardly?

A. Evidently you do not know the working of non-violence. An unjust law is itself a species of violence. Arrest for its breach is more so. Now the law of non-violence says that violence should be resisted not by counter-violence but by non-violence. Any breach of a law carries with it a penalty. It does not become unjust merely because I say so. Nevertheless, in my opinion, it is unjust. The State has the right to enforce it, whilst it is on the statute-book. I must resist it non-violently. This I do by breaking the law and by peacefully submitting to arrest and imprisonment. I call such behaviour an act of bravery to the extent required. That imprisonment for a man like me today carries no suffering with it is irrelevant, if it may be assumed that ordinary prison-treatment would make no difference in my mental condition. Thus non-resistance in the case under discussion is an essential condition of non-violence, not a symptom of cowardice. Resistance in the shape of refusing to be arrested etc., on the other hand, will in this case be certainly blustering, thoughtless violence and might be classified as cowardly brag.

New Delhi, September 14, 1946

'Notes'

Harijan, 22 Sept. 1946

