Gandhi, the Man Study Guide

Gandhi, the Man by Eknath Easwaran

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

"Gandhi, The Man" by Eknath Easwaran is an examination of the beginnings, inspiration, work and public and private life of Mahatma Gandhi. Easwaran is from a background very like Gandhi's, and so finds particular inspiration in his self-transformation. The book opens with the story of Gandhi's early life, his dismal performance as a student and social awkwardness, and moves through his education in England when his evolution begins. He recognizes that there are excesses without which his life is simpler and happier, even if he does not fit into a cultural ideal. His work as a lawyer, although badly begun, brings him into circumstances in which he is able to arrange for resolutions that are equally beneficial to both parties in a dispute, and his reputation spreads throughout South Africa where he is working. It is there that he is struck with the idea of satyagraha as protest, when he sees the unjust treatment of his fellow Indians living there under cruel prejudice. He simplifies his life there even further, making himself like the people whose cause he adopts, reserving nothing for his own profit. Returning to India, he continues his work teaching the people how to stand up in peaceful protest against the tyrannical rule of England, and further refines his philosophy.

His ideas and their inspiration are described in great detail, as is the work he does in India in the second section, called "The Way of Love." Easwaran describes Gandhi's love for the Bhagavad Gita and his dedication to making those ideas manifest in all of his actions, indeed to let them transform his entire personality. He describes the concepts of satygraha, or dedication to truth, and ahimsa, or non-violence, and the ways he demonstrated and instilled those ideas both in the people who followed him and in the people whose leadership they were meant to reform. British leadership took notice of Gandhi's leadership to such a degree that they invited him to round-table discussions about the future direction of the British presence in India.

Next Easwaran shifts his attention to Gandhi's spiritual background, and the influence of his childhood nurse, Ramba on his spirituality. His lifelong mantram of rama, rama, rama, invoking joy, peace and love was given him by Ramba, and was meant to still his fear. He also describes the value and the method of meditation, and the reader is allowed a deeply touching insight into the value it served in Gandhi's life even in its final moments as Easwaran's description of Gandhi concludes with an intimate look at Gandhi in his most personal interactions. His daily activities were conducted in the presence of dedicated followers who were like family to Gandhi, and its beauty was due to its being infused in its every detail with the truths to which he had dedicated his life. Those ideas are examined closely for their practical applications in the appendix of the book, written by Timothy Flinders.

Forward/The Transformation

Forward/The Transformation Summary and Analysis

Michael N. Nagler of the University of California, Berkley provides the forward for the book, and opens by asking the reader to consider whether Gandhi might be the most significant historical figure of the 20th century. He cites all of the fields in which Gandhi inspired revolution, including economics, politics, philosophy and the science and art of living healthfully, and then points to his very inauspicious beginnings as an underachieving student with a bad temper and asks how his life was possible.

To direct the reader to the means to learning the answer, Nagler points to Eknath Easwaran as the perfect man to tell Gandhi's life story. He comes from Gandhi's home and ethos, and sees the world from a perspective very like Gandhi's instead of through any Westernized lens due to the influence of his grandmother who shaped her worldview after Gandhi's. Already inspired by her passionate example, Easwaran went to Sevagram, Gandhi's Ashram of service simply to watch him and to learn the secret of his power. As Mahadev Desai read the words of the Bhagavad Gita describing the man who has let selflessness and grace shape his being and shed all selfish desire to a gathering of followers, Easwaran was astonished to see the words become reality in the person of Mahatma Gandhi. From that moment, Easwaran's lifelong dedication to meditation took on a new life as he strove to embody the principals of the Bhagavad Gita in the same way he had seen them made real in the person of Gandhi.

Nagler refers to the Berkley documentary called Gandhi's India in which one of the women interviewed praised Gandhi's view as one from which there are no limits to human capacity, and Nagler praises the clarity with which Gandhi's life demonstrated the point. The remarkable thing about humanity, he says, is not its ability to shape our world, but the capacity in each individual to reshape themselves according to the highest ideals. Those transformations are the ends to which he invites readers as they embark on their reading of "Gandhi, The Man."

The Transformation

The first chapter of the book is called "The Transformation," and in it, Easwaran describes the contrast between Gandhi as a youth and Gandhi as the world-changing figure he was to become. He opens by pointing out that there was nothing remarkable about Gandhi as a boy, that he was simply a shy, underachieving student deeply devoted to his family growing up at the height of British rule in India. Gandhi himself described himself as a cowardly child with rather a weak mind, as he followed the example of his classmates as they goaded their grade-school teachers.

His marriage to Kasturbai was arranged by their parents, and the two of them were wed when Gandhi was but thirteen years old. While he loved her immediately, and prized her

as a companion, his childishness manifested itself in proud and oppressive rule over her until her tender and forgiving example made her one of his most effective teachers.

Having made a dismal performance in high school, Gandhi was in need of a new direction and was given a hint by his uncle who suggested he go to England to study law. He and his family scraped together the money, and he left for England as a self-conscious and socially unskilled eighteen-year-old boy. His early time in England was incredibly lonely, and he did little more than sulk in his homesickness until a fellow Indian pointed out to him that the thing to be learned in England was not as much law as English custom. Understanding the value of English mannerisms and social graces as a means to success in India, Gandhi threw himself at the task. Following a period of complete submission to all of the nuances of English dress and society, Gandhi concluded that the practice was making him more self-conscious and costing him more money, and broadened the chasm between his inner and outer selves. Instead, he resolved to make a project of his character and simplicity of living.

Gandhi found himself a solitary apartment and began by modeling himself after a fellow student whose poverty dictated that he cook his own meals and walk instead of paying for transportation. Finding himself happier and healthier for the change, Gandhi shifted his attention to his diet. Having promised his mother not to eat meat as the English did, Gandhi took up the scientific study of the vegetarian diet. Forgoing highly seasoned Indian cooking, he began eating purely for health with the help of the Vegetarian Society, and came to relish the purity and vitality he discovered.

As his education came to completion, Gandhi still struggled to find a direction, being continuously stymied by his social awkwardness and inability to speak coherently in front of a crowd. Also worried by news of his mother's illness, as soon as Gandhi passed the bar and was admitted to the High Court, he sailed for Bombay only to learn that she had already died.

Overwhelmed with grief, Gandhi tried to practice law in Rajkot, the town in which he attended high school, and also in Bombay, and found himself no more able to function in the role than he had been in England. It was not until the apparent intervention of fate that Gandhi was finally able to turn the page on the struggles of his youth. Through a connection of his brother's, Gandhi was given a year-long contract with a Muslim firm in South Africa to work what he thought would be a clerical position well below the dignity of his education. Leaving Kasturbai again, this time with two sons, Gandhi left for South Africa in the hopes of gaining some experience.

What he found, however, was that the position was as Dada Abdulla's lawyer, and was far more than simply the chance for preparation, but a role as legal advisor in a complicated financial case. He was also confronted with a form of prejudice against him for his race that he had never encountered before. Taking the lessons from the failures of his past, however, Gandhi determined not to run from failure again, but to throw himself at the task and try to shape himself to suit his environment, since changing his environment had failed him so miserably in the past.

Applying the same self-discipline he learned in London, Gandhi applied his independent knowledge of bookkeeping to the accounts in question and became the single most informed person on the case. Seeing that his client was clearly right, and a long court battle would benefit no one but the lawyers, Gandhi determined to find a solution that would serve both parties, and close the case quickly. Upon closing the case equitably, he realized with tremendous satisfaction that he had discovered the true use of law to unite the divided.

His discovery inspired him to finding more and more means to serve, and his reputation grew throughout South Africa as a man who was not looking for profit or prestige, but for justice and peaceful resolution to conflicts. His lifestyle soon grew to fit his successful career, and he was a thoroughly Westernized gentleman. He moved his reluctant family and taught them to abide by the same rules of European society, forcing them to Westernize as they adjusted to their newfound wealth.

At the same point at which most young men would settle in and simply enjoy their success, however, Gandhi continued to be moved by the injustices being done to his fellow Indians living in South Africa as more and more of them came to him for help. He even volunteered in a local hospital where a single English nurse was caring for those affected by the Black Plague. He began in the same period to begin eliminating unnecessary expenses from his world, learning to clean his own clothes and cut his own hair, even despite the mockery he endured in his early days of learning the tasks.

His volunteering satisfied him tremendously, and he found more and more ways of doing it. He started a newspaper called the "Indian Opinion" and recruited an ambulance corps to help the British when war broke in out in the Boer Colonies in 1899. His lifestyle was so infectious that a little family community, or ashram, began to grow up around him outside Durban, so that they could join him in his experiments on the art of living well. As his focus shifted off of himself, his spirituality increased, and he began to closely examine all three major scriptures, the Bhagavad Gita of the Hindu, the Bible of the Christians and the Koran of the Muslims to test their teachings against his own experiences.

The guideline he found to be common to all three scriptures was not to worry but to trust God in every category, serving selflessly and letting dedication to service turn to more dedication, and letting service increase one's faith. Service, Gandhi taught, reduces one's own need for personal comforts, and increases one's desire to give away everything one does not need. His once lavishly comfortable lifestyle and that of his family soon adjusted to fit that standard. Even Kasturbai was eventually persuaded to give away the jewels that had been given her in gratitude for her service, and they lived once again in the style of their simple Indian upbringings, Gandhi saying that life must be one indivisible whole in which one does right in every single compartment.

As reputation of his wisdom and service grew, he received a letter addressing him as equal with several other world leaders, and asking them to draw up a charter of human rights. In his response, he said that his experiences suggested it would be better to draw up a charter of human duties, a lesson he said he learned from his wife. In their

early marriage when Gandhi was demanding that she serve him in the manner he saw fit, even when it was oppressive to her, she finally called his bluff and asked where she would go if she did not stay and serve him. Recognizing that all of the storms of their marriage came from his unreasonable demands, and that her service to him had been patient and forgiving to the end, he determined that instead of demanding his own rights, he would strive to fulfill his responsibilities. Easwaran writes, "With Gandhi, to know was to feel, to feel was to act, and to act was to live." Gandhi had finally learned by Kasturbai's example that in order to transform others, one has to transform himself.

Having traveled to the most impoverished and primitive parts of society where the virtues of social success had no value at all, and having examined the works of writers whose edicts on how to live well had failed to transform their writers, Gandhi finally found a coherent guide in the scripture of his own homeland: the Bhagavad Gita. Its principals of non-possession giving up all he had and following God (aparigraha), and equability (samabhava) began to be his highest aspirations as he strove to turn everything that came into his possession as a means of serving those around him.

Easwaran explains that the Gita is written as a narrative of the inquiry of Prince Arjuna to the Lord Sri Krishna of how to live well, and so is a clear and practical handbook and dictionary of human ethics: a call to act with forgiveness and selfless love in every circumstance. He takes an excerpt to serve as an example of the clarity of its teaching in which Sri Krishna explains that those he loves are those who are incapable of ill-will, but return kindness for cruelty and love for hatred. They are not swayed or deterred by the struggles of life, but remain calm, patient, and ready to serve wherever they can. They are unconcerned with themselves to the extent that they neither depend on the praise of others, nor allow themselves to be deterred by their scorn, remaining consistently harmonious and full of faith in every single circumstance.

As he strove to embody those very ideals, Gandhi found himself serving again with his ambulance in aid to the British army and discovered that what they had been told was a rebellion was simply an excuse for a manhunt in which Zulu villagers were being cruelly abused and murdered by British soldiers, and Gandhi threw himself into meditation and prayer until he tapped into the source of strength itself. The Hindu call it Kundalini, the sexual life-force nestled at the base of the spine, and Gandhi determined that he would harness it and drive it instead of allowing it to drive him, and draw on that power in his life of service.

The Way of Love

The Way of Love Summary and Analysis

Easwaran opens his chapter describing the Way of Love by recounting the story of a transformative trip Gandhi took by train departing Maritzburg, South Africa. He was in his first year there in service to Dada Abdulla, and was riding in a first class compartment. When a British passenger discovered him there, he demanded that Gandhi move to third class. Gandhi refused, telling him that he had a ticket for this compartment and had every right to stay. The passenger summoned the police, and they left Gandhi sitting alone at Maritzburg Station, stunned at such overt racial abuse. He made the determination then and there that he would stay in South Africa and fight this injustice in whatever way he could.

It would be thirteen years from that day that Gandhi's determination would blossom into inspiration to organize his first mass non-violent resistance. Upon his return from his service to the British and witnessing the Zulu Rebellion, he discovered that the Transvaal government had proposed legislation that would eliminate the few civil rights the Indians of South Africa still had in something called the "Black Act", and he saw it as his opportunity to act. He instructed a group of Indians to gather in Johannesburg and determined that the most effective course would be for the whole Indian population simply to resolve not to submit to unfair treatment, but to demand fair and equal treatment, ready for any consequence, and refusing to resort to violence under any circumstances. Simply acting as if the change in law did not exist, they had struck upon the moral equivalent of war.

By acting without contempt or violence, and in perfect unity, the movement that spread throughout South Africa demanded the highest courage so that every setback encouraged them all the more until not even jail was a deterrent. When his rebellion brought Gandhi into the presence of the leader of the Transvaal government himself, Gandhi told him clearly what he was doing and why, and that he was going to win with his help. General Smuts admitted that that is exactly what happened, and by 1914, civil rights were written into law, and the General and Gandhi were friends.

Gandhi called the new form of resistance satyagraha, meaning holding fast to truth, since truth is the only universal thing, and when one clings to it whole-heartedly, one cannot also support evil or injustice. By demonstrating what truth looks like in action, one is also teaching his oppressor, until the two of you are no longer in a relationship of oppressor and oppressed, but are two people looking at the same truth. Gandhi determined that the whole British-Indian relationship could be transformed with such an approach of non-violence, or ahimsa. Even as historian J.B. Kripalani warned him that history had not one story of freedom being won without a violent struggle, Gandhi insisted that the mere fact that something had never been done did not mean it was not possible.

In Gandhi's view of human evolution, he saw ahimsa as the dharma of modern human beings—as the central law of their being—and violence as the dharma of the animals of the jungle. Thus he made it his message to call humanity to their highest form of existence, teaching themselves to rise above violence and live in love and forgiveness, hating corrupt systems and oppression, but acting in perfect love and grace toward those people who are still slaves to such systems. In order to bring about change in India in particular, the first such system he wanted to address was the one sanctioning the oppression of India's poorest classes. Addressing the concept of untouchability, Gandhi pled with the Indians that one cannot participate in such a system without becoming another of its victims and weakening the nation as a whole. He went into beautiful temples and told the people that as long as they were complicit in denying untouchables access, then God was not present there either. Gandhi coined the word harijan to describe the Dalits (the oppressed), to call them the children of God, in order to remind the higher classes that their actions toward the oppressed was a part of their worship of God.

He was such an irresistible fund-raiser for the oppressed in India that even children gave him money for his cause. Part of what made him so very winsome was the simplicity and poverty in which he continued to voluntarily live, adopting the same lifestyle as those for whom he advocated, riding third class in trains because, he said, there was no fourth. He was servant to the poorest and most afflicted, inspiring by example in even the tiniest details. Easwaran quotes an excerpt from a letter Gandhi wrote to an English follower saying that those who do not see how politics and religion are related to one another do not understand religion. For him, it permeated every thought, word and deed.

Perhaps one of his most potent moments on the world stage came when he was finally arrested for inciting sedition, as India was coming close to violent revolution during the First World War, and he stepped in to show the people how to protest by non-cooperation. Hundreds of satyagrahis were jailed, and Gandhi explained their cause clearly and eloquently in the only trial he was ever granted.

Imperialism itself was on trial as Gandhi told about how the streets were filled with the starving and sick who became poorer and poorer while the British got rich from the labor of the Indians. He called it an unnatural state, and said he acted out of compassion for both the British and the Indians to point out the flaws in their system. He also explained his commitment to truth and non-violence, saying that whatever the penalty for his crime, he was ready to take it, if the jury truly believed that their system existed for the good of the people, and he was in some way an obstacle to it. If they did not, then they must change the system until it was consistent with what they understood to be just.

Throughout these years of satyagraha in India, he continued to make friends and gain followers, including the wealthy and privileged Jawaharlal Nehru and his whole wealthy and conventional family, as they came to see the purity of his motivation and logic. The British were warned not to go near him, lest he get to them, as well. They struggled to understand as they watched from afar, baffled by his tactics and his success.

The Salt Satyagraha of 1930 demonstrates the perfection of his simple genius and the flexibility with which he approached a need, waiting to act until he sees the most potent course. In this case, Britain was tightening its grip on India in increasingly unreasonable ways, and the people were waiting to see for weeks what Gandhi would have them do. Finally, in a dream, Gandhi saw the answer. Britain had forbidden Indians to gather their own salt, requiring instead that they buy it at a premium from British sources. So, on Gandhi's signal, all of India would simply walk to the ocean and pick up the salt that laid there for the taking and buy and sell it locally from each other, as if the law had never been enacted. The police reaction was instant and violent, but the Indian people had thrown off their chains and were invigorated. Months later, Gandhi met with Lord Irwin to negotiate, and made a point of taking a tiny bag of salt from his cloak and told the viceroy that he would drink his tea with salt in remembrance of the Boston Tea Party. Lord Irwin was disarmed.

Weeks of more protest followed, as did hundreds more arrests, culminating at last with Gandhi's. The men who came to take him were astonished at the willingness with which he volunteered himself and the freedom and joy he maintained regardless of his circumstance, seeming more free than they were even as his body was in chains. Indeed jail was not problematic for Gandhi at all, nor did it slow his work or dampen his leadership in any way. He continued inspiring and nurturing those of his followers who were jailed with him, and continued actively writing letters from Yeravda Temple, as he came to call Yeravda Prison. When a man does everything in worship, Easwaran explains, everywhere he goes is a temple.

As India grew more and more angry, Gandhi's resolve for nonviolence remained steady, and he never strayed from his conviction that regardless of the tension or the oppression, positive change could only come from a consistent show of love and respect for the British people. Soon the British leadership came to see that Gandhi and his followers were right in pointing out that the British were degrading themselves the more they demanded from and imposed injustice on the Indian people, and more and more of them became Gandhi's friends in his cause of establishing Indian independence.

At last, Britain determined to hold a roundtable discussion of what to do with India. Gandhi's missionary friend Stanley Jones encouraged Lord Irwin that Gandhi so completely embodied and represented India that if he were not a part of the discussions, neither was India. For his return to England, this time as a guest of the crown, Gandhi dressed in khadi, the hand-spun cloth he encouraged the satyagrahis to wear to demonstrate their independence, and turned down the first-class accommodations offered to the other dignitaries participating in the talks.

While he was there, his attention was drawn to the unhappiness of the textile millworkers who were being laid off because of the decreased demand for fabric resulting from the Indian preference for khadi, and so he determined that he would go and talk with the workers at the mills. So tenderly compassionate was his demeanor, and so clearly did he communicate the plight of the Indian people under British rule, that

the people, who began listening to him while furious, were his ardent admirers and followers by the time he was done speaking.

Returning to another cord in the rope of Gandhi's philosophy, Easwaran explains the link Gandhi saw between cowardice and violence, and the bravery that is required of one who wishes to live a life of non-violence. Nonviolence, Gandhi explained, means the ability to return love for hatred even in the cases of the harshest abuse. That was just the kind of heroism that inspired the man who came to be called the Frontier Gandhi, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan. The frontier was a region around India's Khyber Pass, inhabited by a violently vengeful group of Muslims called the Pathans. Khan was also determined to throw off the brutal British rule, but turned from the violence of his tribesmen to establish a nonviolent army that came to be called the Khudai Khidmatgars, or Servants of God, to the astonishment even of Gandhi himself.

When Gandhi answered Khan's invitation to come and visit their region, hundreds of Pathans came to hear him speak, many of them still carrying rifles over their shoulders. He told them that fear is the only reason one should ever be armed, and that perfect love casts out all fear. True bravery means offering forgiveness in place of revenge, taking up nonviolence as the weapon of the brave. Only when the other person's welfare means more than one's own, Gandhi taught, can one say that he loves. Anything else is just commerce, give and take.

Throughout Gandhi's advancing years, the violence around him inspired him to deeper and more comprehensive experiments with the potential of human consciousness. He threw himself into meditation the more the conflicts grew, and was always given inspiration in the eleventh hour for a solution to the problem. Just as India was about to gain its independence from England, the inner conflict between the Muslim and Hindu of India was escalating in its violence. Gandhi gave himself to the task of walking from village to village as a one-man force for peace, depending on people who professed to be his enemy for food and shelter. Many of his followers went on identical missions, instructed simply to live their principals of love and respect for all persons, fearless and non-violent.

Those violent years were for Gandhi the acid test of ahimsa, as the violence increased and the necessity for a different strategy with it. His energy and productiveness climbed higher the more its need was felt. In Muslim communities, people risked giving him shelter, and even when attempts were made on his life, Gandhi looked lovingly into the eyes of his attackers and watched them fall weeping at his feet. Quoting the words of the Buddha, Gandhi said, "Hatred does not cease by hatred at any time; hatred ceases by love. This is an unalterable law."

Mother and Child

Mother and Child Summary and Analysis

Easwaran opens the chapter entitled Mother and Child by asking the question of how such a personal evolution could have come about, and how the evolution of a single person could effect such sweeping political and inter-personal change. When Gandhi was asked to explain in three words the secret of his life, he said "renounce and enjoy." Easwaran explains that he was quoting the Isha Upanishad from Hindu scripture. The idea was detachment from the result of one's actions, so that one's focus is on the spirit of his actions, and their results are laid at the feet of God. The Bhagavad Gita suggests that being caught up in the results of one's actions only leads to frustrated bursts of violence and despair. Detachment allows for peaceful focus on the goal, regardless of the difficulties in the way.

That detachment, Easwaran explains, was what allowed Gandhi to move with such energy through things like the Round Table conference and the months he marched through villages to quiet the conflict between the Hindus and Muslims in India. Unburdened by worry about what was to come, he could focus with peaceful joy on the work that was in front of him to do. He called the Bhagavad Gita his mother, and made it his continuous occupation to translate its truths into his daily life and character, and names that endeavor as the source of his joy and strength.

In addition to detachment, "undivided singleness of mind" was a guiding principle from the Gita to which Gandhi aspired. It is the goal of yoga and is the unification of mind, body and spirit to a single reintegrated whole. Gandhi's secretary Mahadev Desai answered the question of how Gandhi spoke so eloquently with no preparation or notes by explaining that everything Gandhi thinks, does and says are exactly the same, so all he has to do is to be, and the result is the truth in which he lives. Gandhi described the process as reducing oneself to zero, and that is when he becomes completely truthful, wise, and irresistibly powerful.

Easwaran explains that most people see life in terms of what people have, what they like, what they desire, and what they fear. That is the kind of thinking that fragments nation against nation and allows attachment to power and prestige. That is what creates the mask that people call their personalities, but that hides their fearlessness, unconditional love and abiding joy. When Gandhi reduced himself to zero, he found that all that remained were those eternal truths that were his essence. Patanjali, the ancient Indian teacher of meditation says that in a person who has defeated all fear, there is now nothing of which other people can ever be afraid.

Gandhi's process of learning to eliminate his fear started when he was a child and was afraid of the dark. His nurse, Rambha, taught him that the way to eliminate fear was to replace it in one's mind with a mantra of joy: Rama, rama, rama is the one she gave him. He used it his whole life, repeating it rhythmically as he breathed and walked.

Rambha also gave him the analogy of the elephants that walk through the market, and whose trunks would be constantly busy searching through the wares in the market and looking for things to put in their mouths, but for the single stalk of bamboo that their owners would give them to hold. The occupation of holding that piece of bamboo was enough to quiet their trunks the same way a mantra is enough to still the busy-ness of a wandering and restless mind. A mantra keeps a mind steady in every circumstance, and readies it for meditation, which is the key to transformation of character and consciousness. One becomes what he meditates on, according to Gandhi, driving the highest ideals deep into the consciousness and driving out and the small, distracting and petty things that distract the mind.

One of Gandhi's most treasured meditations was the last eighteen verses of the Second Chapter of the Gita. He called them the secret to the art of living. Easwaran explains that they describe the highest state of consciousness a human can attain. When one's love is deep enough, Sri Krishna explains to the eager Arjuna, selfish attachment, insecurity, fear and despair fall away. It is in those eighteen verses that Sri Krishna describes what such a person looks like.

Sri Krishna says that the wise person's love for the Lord of Love has consumed all of his selfishness and preoccupation with pleasing his own senses. Being thus focused on living in the spirit of love, he is no longer agitated by his circumstances, or angered by losing things he has been attached to, but is able to learn from his mistakes. A united mind, trained wholly to the same cause, is the only mind that is able to meditate and find peace and exercise judgment. Sri Krishna calls it the ego-cage that inspires selfish possession, and says they are free who have escaped it, united with the Lord of Love and assured immortality.

Gandhi the Man

Gandhi the Man Summary and Analysis

The final chapter Eknath Easwaran writes is focused on the daily habits and the things that defined the personality of Gandhi as an individual in his private life. Indeed one of the things that was most remarkable to Easwaran, and to Louis Fischer, the American journalist who followed Gandhi's campaigns in India for many years, was how not private Gandhi was, taking all of his solitude in the presence of his ashram family, and whomever wished to share time with him. Gandhi loved people of every variety, and kept his good humor and wisdom no matter the situation. His focus was on letting the wisdom, love, joy and peace he studied make up the very essence of his being, and the people who gravitated to him are testament to his success, being lighter and more joyful themselves just for being in his presence.

The process of his getting there was helped along a great deal by the example of his wife, Kasturbai, Easwaran explains, as she kept her faith in his character even when he did not display it, maintaining a standard he could live up to and never retaliating when he behaved unfairly. He saw that she was already living what he was studying, and began to emulate her example. The two of them became inspiration for men and women throughout India, and Gandhi always maintained patience with the long learning process through which they would each have to go, just as he did.

In order to make his teaching more accessible, Gandhi established ashrams in which people could gather to his leadership and establish communities. At Sevagram, people were so drawn to him, that there sprouted up a bustling community with a post office and a road worn by the people coming in and out. It was a place where people could watch him in every detail of his daily life, and see what in meant to live a life completely ruled by love. He meditated every morning at 3 or 4, and was energized and invigorated by the practice. His daily chores were always done in the company of others, his meals were a time of sharing and community, even while he experimented with variations on vegetarian dishes to make them nutritious in spite of taste, and his evening walks were a parade of adoring community members soaking in his wisdom and good humor.

Political leaders with problems of policy and local citizens with questions about family alike were welcomed to come and ask Gandhi for his advice. People came burdened and overwhelmed with their troubles, and left laughing and light-hearted, encouraged by their time with Gandhi. His ashram family, however, the ones who came to be called his "ashram menagerie," were the ones who knew best the man Gandhi was in his daily life. The fact that most of them were women led Gandhi to say in response to their gentle strength that if non-violence is the future of humanity, then the future is with woman. He was so intimately involved and concerned with the intimate details of the worlds of the people who surrounded him that not a single detail escaped his notice. He cared for the sick in the ashram, and filled every interaction with laughter.

Evenings for Gandhi were made up of meals taken communally with everyone gathered at the ashram followed by a long walk for which he would also be joined by a large group. During he walks, people would ask him for advice and Gandhi would answer every inquiry with equal consideration and patience, and when questions stopped, he would focus on making the children laugh. His body was so light and strong that he was hardly held down by it, and walked at such a pace that the crowd would eventually spread out to a long parade.

The attention of the people who came to listen to him was equally rapt, so that when he wanted to speak, all he had to do was hold up his hand, and the crowd fell silent to hear his clear, gentle voice. Prayer meetings featured readings from all three major scriptures, but the Gita was the source of the inspiration to which Gandhi clung, and after which he most precisely modeled his character. Even on the last day of Gandhi's life, he was embodying the spirit of compassion and forgiveness for which he had come to be known. When he was speaking against the violence between the Hindu and Muslims living in India, a young man came out of the crowd and greeted him with his hands at his heart before he shot him in the chest. Gandhi spoke his mantra, "rama, rama, rama" as he fell, telling the man, I forgive you, I love you, I bless you.

Easwaran closes this chapter with a few more quotes from Gandhi, in which he says that his life was his message, in its every detail, and that its inspiration is ancient, universal, and attainable by anyone who wishes to apply himself to the same standard.

How Nonviolence Works

How Nonviolence Works Summary and Analysis

In the final section, entitled "Self-Satyagraha", Flinders makes the point that satyagraha is an individual attitude, like love, and can maintain its power even when only one person is still holding to it, like a lamp in darkness pointing to what is true. It is also important, Flinders points out, to remember that satyagraha is a discipline that begins with the removal of self-interest. Gandhi taught that the process of striving for purification and ahimsa is as legitimate as arriving at the state itself, quoting Jesus' words that if one seeks first the kingdom of heaven, everything else will be added. The kingdom of heaven is ahimsa, Gandhi taught, so every effort at attaining it is time invested in the only eternal thing.

Gandhi's appeal to people to purge themselves of their self-interest is one he is uniquely qualified to make, having spent so many years practicing the very disciplines that result in selflessness. His first adversary as he strove for ahimsa was himself as he strove to cleanse his life of its excess and follow the example of his wife as she so closely emulated the words of the Bhagavad Gita.

Family Satyagraha is the next topic to which Flinders shifts his attention, and he points to Kasturbai as Gandhi's first teacher, using satyagraha against his domineering husband-hood. She quietly submitted to his unreasonable demands, and softened his heart as he came to see what he was making necessary for her. At a time in history when marriages are seldom outlasting even the most predictable struggles, Flinders appeals to families to look at the example of the Gandhi family for inspiration on patience, forgiveness and loving resistance without rancor whenever it might be necessary. The same principals can be applied to raising children, recognizing what is necessary for their good, and making those sacrifices willingly and selflessly so that adults are always an example to children of a life lived well. Gandhi's time with the children that surrounded him taught him that he had the responsibility to live in such a way that they would be able to learn the ideals to which he aspired by watching him live them.

From family, Flinders moves to the topic of work where the primary sources of friction are almost universally egos, when someone is insisting on his preference being adopted by the whole group. The satyagrahi, on the other hand, has learned to see beyond his own opinions to become able to learn from the perspectives of others and find the common ground. His responsibility, then, is to work quietly and steadily as the leavening and teach the whole group to foster trust and cooperation. Flinders closes with an encouragement that while the conflicts most people are confronted with today are much more interpersonal than intergovernmental, the same principals can be utilized to train each individual's thinking until the larger wholes of which each one is a part begin to reflect the values of which Gandhi was such a clear example.

Characters

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Mahatma Gandhi, Bapu

A native of India, raised in Hindu culture, Gandhi was an underachieving student in his youth. He married Kasturbai very young as the result of an arrangement between their parents, and became a lawyer. It was the combined influence of his patiently obedient wife and his experience finding equitably beneficial solutions to legal disputes that set him on the course to making a discipline of making peace by living truthfully. Gandhi made a continuous study of the Bhagavad Gita, the Koran and the Bible in order to find the commonalities that would reveal the truths by which men were meant to live. He prized the entirety of the Bhagavad Gita and the Bible's Sermon on the Mount most highly and used those principals of self-denying service and unconditional forgiveness to rule every facet of his life. He gave up the wealth from his career as a lawyer and lived among and like the very people whose causes he took up. In matters intra-personal, intra-racial and intra-governmental, he used the same principals of ahimsa (non-violence) and satyagraha (dedication to truth) to guide his actions and his counsel alike.

Kasturbai Gandhi

Married to Gandhi when the two of them were thirteen years old, Kasturbai was Gandhi's earliest teacher in the subject of one human's duty to the other humans around him. When he was young and believed that he ought to be able to impose his will on his wife and expect her unswerving devotion, she called his bluff and drew his demand that she obey or leave to its logical conclusion. It was her truthfulness and the unconditionality of her loving-kindness toward him that first allowed Gandhi to witness and empathize with the suffering caused by obedience to harsh rule. Kasturbai was beside Gandhi into very old age, both in wealth and in humble self-sacrificing service, supporting and encouraging him at every turn.

Mahedev Desai

Gandhi's secretary throughout his life, and quoted as saying that what Gandhi says, what he thinks and what he does are all the same, the expression and manifestation of what he is, as explanation of why he never needs to prepare or make notes before he speaks.

Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan

A Pathan Muslim who came to be known as the Frontier Gandhi, having forsaken his tribe's violence and mindset of revenge for Gandhi's philosophy of returning love for hatred and formed an army called the Khudai Khidmatgars. They would defend the wild and mysterious Frontier from Britain's brutal military governance.

Jawaharlal Nehru

A well-educated and traveled son of a lawyer who, upon returning to India from abroad wished to rebel against British domination, but had to be talked down from his desire for violence. He soon became one of Gandhi's closest followers. His family, wealthy and privileged, asked Gandhi for their son back, and instead he won them all to his cause one by one.

Dada Abdulla

The businessman who employed Gandhi as his lawyer for the formative assignment in which he so thoroughly acquainted himself with the facts and needs of both parties, and sought to find a means of pleasing both parties equally. The success of that case is what launched Gandhi on his first quest to find means of service in every case, and so began his very successful career as a lawyer.

The European on the Train to Maritzburg

The man who saw Gandhi, then a young lawyer, dressed as a gentleman, sitting in the first-class compartment of a train and insisted by way of calling the police that Gandhi sit in the third-class compartment. It was Gandhi's first acquaintance with the unreasonably harsh treatment of a group of people based solely on their race, and impassioned Gandhi with the cause of empowering and defending oppressed people wherever they could be found.

General Jan Smutz

The leader of the Transvaal government, responsible for the oppression of the Indians living in South Africa. Gandhi met with the general, a Boer soldier, and informed him calmly that he was going to fight against his government, and win with the general's help. General Smuts recounts later that Gandhi did just what he said he was going to do.

J.B. Kripalani

A historian and close follower of Gandhi's who informed him on first meeting him that he must know nothing of history, because no government has ever freed a people without violence. Gandhi said precedent is not necessary for something to be possible.

Sir Stafford Cripps

Sent by the British government to negotiate with Indian leaders during WWII.

British Governor of Bengal

Met with Gandhi on a day on which Gandhi was observing a day of silence, and so obliged him by communicating via notes as they sat together.

Mary Barr

An English woman to whom Gandhi wrote a letter explaining that he would remain loyal to the British empire if he must, but that he would continue to advocate for the rights of the poor, who are the most injured by the domination of the English. Barr also wrote a letter to Gandhi apologizing for disturbing his solitude to which Gandhi replied graciously that there was no offence: his solitude was always taken in the presence of many.

Lord Irwin

After Gandhi and his followers led all of India in rebellion against British oppression by gathering salt from the sea instead of buying it from them, Gandhi met with Lord Irwin to negotiate, and put salt in his tea to remind them both of the Boston Tea Party.

Lord Louis Mountbatten

India's last and most responsive viceroy before it gained its independence.

Rambha

A family servant in Gandhi's house as a youth who taught him not to let fear take him, but to repeat the mantra for abiding joy: "Rama, rama, rama." She compared a mantra to the stick of bamboo that, when held in an elephant's trunk, keeps the elephant's trunk calm and still instead of waving and sniffing around the crowded city markets. The mantra became his last words as he spoke them in forgiveness to his assassin.

Louis Fischer

American journalist who spent a week living with Gandhi, and wrote about how impressive Gandhi the man was in his humor, joy, and indefatigable good temper. He called Gandhi's appeal "the miracle of personality."

Sir Winston Churchill

British officer in India and then Prime Minister in the 1940s when Britain was still oppressing India with imperialist taxes and laws.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel

One of Gandhi's earliest companions in satyagraha who called the gathering of people always around Gandhi the "ashram menagerie."

Manubehn Gandhi and Mrs. Abha Gandhi

Gandhi's nieces, constant companions of Gandhi in his last days and as happy as everyone to revel in his presence.

Stanley Jones

Gandhi's missionary friend who said, when the British Lord Irwin asked whether Gandhi should be invited to negotiations, that Gandhi was India, and not having him there would mean not having India.

Objects/Places

Bhagavad Gita

The Hindu scripture in which the Prince Arjuna asks Sri Krishna for the wisdom to live well, and whose description of the perfect man was a cornerstone of Gandhi's life creed.

The Bible

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount from the Christian scripture was another guideline for Gandhi's approach, in which he returned love for hatred, and served others before he served himself.

The Koran

The central scripture of Islam, and another of the texts Gandhi studied as he strove to learn the best way to live.

Porbandar, aka Sudamapuri

Gandhi's birthplace and childhood home in India

England

The country to which Gandhi went for his legal training, and where he gained acquaintance with the habits of gentility of British culture. Also the country that oppressed Indians by way of imperialist taxes, laws and the anti-Indian prejudice of those British citizens who came to live in India.

Rajkot

The Indian town in which Gandhi attended high school and first attempted practicing law

Bombay

The second city in which Gandhi attempted law practice, still unable to get up the nerve to address a jury in the beginning. However, here he was given the case by Dada Abdulla in which he first applied himself and which was able to set the tone for his legal career.

Johannesburg, South Africa

The city in which Gandhi located his first independent practice when his reputation as a fair and wise lawyer was established and his prosperity grew. It was also the location of Gandhi's first organized satyagraha in 1906, this one against the Transvaal government and their "Black Act."

Kasturbai's Jewels

Gandhi requested that Kasturbai give up the expensive jewelry that had been gifted to their family in gratitude for their selfless work; she obliged after much resistance and reported later in her life that she never regretted the step.

South Africa

The site of the first domestic struggles to which Gandhi dedicated himself as he took up the cause of the Indians living there. He began his experiments of living for others rather than himself there, making the principals of the Bhagavad Gita the blueprint for his every action.

Natal

The location of the Zulu village in which the British armies were cruelly mistreating and killing the natives, where Gandhi had recruited an ambulance corps to help the British put down a reported rebellion. When he discovered the abuse the British were dealing the natives, his eyes were opened to the horrors of war, and he resolved to serve for its abolition in every way he could.

Train to Maritzburg

The location of the first overt racial discrimination to which Gandhi was subjected. He resolved, while sitting at the station after having been tossed off the train, to fight racial discrimination wherever he found it.

Salt

The British government made it illegal for Indians to get salt from any source but England, inspiring the 1930 Salt Satyagrahi in which Gandhi, then in Sabarmati, instructed Indians from all over the country simply to gather and sell their own salt, instead of doing business with the British.

Yeravda Jail

The jail to which Gandhi was sent when he was arrested as a satyagrahi, and in which he found himself so often that he continued his work and worship uninterrupted, signing correspondences from there as having come from Yeravda Mandir, or Yeravda Temple.

Khadi

Homespun cloth the Indians wore to demonstrate their refusal to depend on British rule and supply.

Lancashire, England

The location of the textile mill where workers were being laid off as a result of the decreased demand for cloth in India. They were furious until Gandhi went and explained the plight of the Indian people, and then the workers rallied behind Gandhi and the Indians' cause.

Khyber Pass

A region in the Northwest Frontier Province in India, and home of a violent Muslim tribe called the Pathans, and out of which came the man called the Frontier Gandhi, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan.

Bihar State and Noakhali

Villages through which Gandhi walked in his seventies as a one-man force for peace, depending for everything on his enemies and inspiring his followers to similar campaigns during the Hindu-Muslim riots.

Sevagram Ashram

Gandhi's retreat at which people came to learn and serve with the great teacher, and the population of which Gandhi called his family.

The Cobra

A snake common to India with a deadly bite that approached Gandhi one memorable day at the ashram. He responded with calm while people around him panicked, and recited the mantra for peace and joy to replace fear, "rama, rama, rama," until the snake left the group alone.

Elephant's Bamboo

The owners of elephants gave their elephants sticks of bamboo to hold in their trunks to keep them from sniffing around the crowded market streets, and Gandhi's nurse Rambha used this fact in Gandhi's childhood as a metaphor for mantras to calm the mind.

Delhi

The scene of Gandhi's assassination by a young man who greeted him with the same hands-at-heart greeting with which Gandhi greeted him before firing a gun point-blank into Gandhi's heart. As Gandhi fell, he forgave the man with the words, "Rama, rama, rama." Gandhi had been there to bring peace to the ongoing quarrel between Hindus and Muslims going on there.

Themes

Satyagraha

Satyagraha is a word Gandhi formed using two other Sanskrit words: "satya", which means truth, and "agraha" which means firmness or force. His idea was a steadfast adherence to truth that would not be deterred by threat of force or, in particular, law. His call was for the people of South Africa and India to so dedicate themselves to revealing the truths of fair treatment, just law, love, forgiveness and responsibility for one's fellow man that when those virtues were threatened, no amount of self-interest or threat from authority would make them give in to living anything less than a devoted and selfless life. He dedicated himself to disciplines that cleansed him of selfishness and attachment to his ego or his possessions as a first step, and called all of his followers to do likewise. From there, he gave himself to meditation on the Hindu book the Bhagavad Gita and its description of the perfect man. He is one who has not only cleansed himself from selfishness but who is so given to the spirit of love and hope that he retains his joy and his servant's heart regardless of circumstance. A united mind, trained wholly to the same cause, is the only mind that is able to meditate and find peace and exercise judgment. It is the same process to which he called his followers, urging everyone to live in search and defense of truth in every aspect of their lives.

Ahimsa

Ahimsa means simply, non-violence, but in its more nuanced and complex use, it means behaving peacefully in every circumstance, so that even one's attitudes are reigned into submission to the spirit of love and forgiveness. The concept is illustrated more than once in the book in the example of Kasturbai, Gandhi's wife, as she submits willingly to Gandhi's unreasonable and tyrannical rule early in their young marriage. It was her willing suffering that finally appealed to Gandhi's heart when he recognized that the only unhappiness in their union was there because he had created it with his unfairness to his wife. Ahimsa was the means by which truth could be demonstrated. He recognized her long-suffering from what he had been reading in the Bhagavad Gita and admired her generous love, determining to live out the same commitment to non-retaliation and patient, unconditional love. His other source of teaching was Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, in which he taught his followers to return love for hatred, forgive one's enemies, and reserve judgment. Gandhi so embodied the principle of ahimsa that at the moment of his assassination, he fell to the ground with forgiveness and blessing for his assassin on his lips.

The Importance of Decreasing the Ego

Gandhi long recognized the importance of decreasing the ego due to its interference with quality service to other people and with his own spiritual development. His earliest

lessons came from his wife, Kasturbai, who respected him for the man she saw he had the potential to be, but was too proud to become, so determined was he to dominate her and be lord of his manor. Her humility inspired humility in him, and it became the first step in his process of learning satyagraha and ahimsa. He began by shedding all of the trappings of wealth that his successful career as a lawyer had earned him and his family, and he took up instead the lifestyle of his follow Indians in South Africa who were sorely oppressed by the prejudice against them there. He maintained his humble lifestyle throughout his life, simplifying his life until everything that came to him went right back out to serve those around him. He was the least important person in his world, there to elevate and serve everyone who came across his path. Decreasing the ego is freedom, according to the Bhagavad Gita, since there is nothing inspiring greed or emotional attachment, competition or anger at not getting one's own way. His decreasing his ego is also what allowed Gandhi to teach so willingly, since he had both perfect faith that everyone could undergo the same transition as he, and the patience to allow them to go through the same struggles with the process of squashing the ego that he experienced.

Style

Perspective

Eknath Easwaran writes from the perspective of a follower and admirer of Mahatma Gandhi who is uniquely suited to identify with Gandhi's upbringing and the philosophy and perspective of his countrymen, having shared a very similar background. Easwaran tells his story as it happened historically, but interjects throughout with explanations of the spiritual truths that were guiding the revolutionary, and quotes from both Gandhi's own writing and the writings that inspired and guided him. Since Easwaran is also Indian, he knows both the psychology of the people whom Gandhi was trying to inspire and the spiritual tradition he was calling on. Living in turn of the century India, the British presence was very large, and its oppression of the Indians was overt and oppressive. The Indian people, even as they felt the injustice of British rule, were also demonstrating their own egos in their observation of the practice of untouchability, shunning the lowest caste of their society even from places of worship. Easwaran understood the distance Indians had to cross to come to the willingness to enter into the suffering of those lowest castes and not only take up their cause, but become servants to them to the extent that they willingly submitted to punishment at the hands of the British in their defense. Easwaran also speaks as one who admires Gandhi greatly, and studied him both as a spiritual leader and as a family member and individual, and so offers the perspective of a close friend, able to describe him in his most intimate relationships and moments, allowing for a thorough acquaintance with a truly remarkable historical figure.

Tone

Easwaran's tone is at once matter-of-fact and deeply admiring, as he delivers objective details with objectivity, and also makes clear why the things that most inspire him about Gandhi's story are remarkable. He also speaks with a note of reverence as he acknowledges that Gandhi's life follows more closely than any man before or since for generations the ideals set forth in the Hindu Bhagavad Gita. He talks with tempered awe about the influence such a transformation had on Gandhi's law practice, as he practiced with the revolutionary objective of equitably serving both parties, and on the military and government leaders with whom Gandhi was able to interact as a civilian. His admiration becomes particularly clear in the chapter called "Gandhi, the Man" when he talks about the continuity between Gandhi's thoughts, words and deeds, so that every one of his relationships and conversations was conducted according to the same principles of love, forgiveness, patience and adherence to truth with which he conducted his campaigns. The tone of reverence for the truths being offered carries over into both the forward by Michael Nagler and the Appendix by Timothy Flinders as both of them share in Easwaran's admiration of the man and his ideals, encouraging the reader to take them as examples and inspirations for their own lives.

Structure

The book is put together in layers, so instead of following a front-to-back chronology, Gandhi's life is examined one aspect at a time. The forward over-arches the book and serves as an invitation to inspiration, explaining why Easwaran is so perfectly suited to telling the story of Mohandas Gandhi's transformation into Mahatma Gandhi. Then the first chapter focuses on Gandhi's inauspicious beginnings and sets up his character, explaining what aspects of his personality and circumstances set him up for the transformation he would undergo. "The Way of Love" describes Gandhi's work and leadership as a satyagrahi, as he gathered others to him by his example and influenced world leaders by transforming his countrymen. Next, "Mother and Child" delves deeper into Gandhi's spirituality and the early childhood education in Hindu spirituality that would guide him toward his inspiration as an adult. The final chapter examines Gandhi in his private life, conducted still in service to others, at his ashrams, and as consummately selfless as was his public work, allowing the reader to see Gandhi as a whole instead of just a political figure. The book concludes with Timothy Flinders' explanation of how the concepts Gandhi demonstrated can be applied to the daily lives of modern people, and what lessons Gandhi's life's work can teach about the concepts he made famous.

Quotes

"As Easwaran watched, the small brown body seated in front of him grew motionless, absorbed in meditation on those verses. 'I was no longer hearing the Gita,' Easwaran recalls, 'I was seeing the transformation it describes.'" Forward, p. 7.

"Gandhi graduated from high school with a mediocre average and went doggedly to college.... Each subject seemed impossible to follow, and he felt acutely out of place wherever he turned. After five months of consistent failure he withdrew from school and came back home. He had not the slightest idea of where to turn." The Transformation, p. 16.

"Gandhi was ecstatic. 'I had learnt,' he exclaimed, 'the true practice of law. I had learnt to find out the better side of human nature and to enter men's hearts. I realized that the true function on a lawyer was to unite parties riven asunder.'" The Transformation, p. 22.

"'One who would serve will not waste a thought upon his own comforts, which he leaves to be attended to or neglected by his Master on high. He will not, therefore, encumber himself with everything that comes his way; he will take only what he strictly needs and leave the rest. He will be calm, free from anger and unruffled in mind even if he finds himself inconvenienced. His service, like virtue, is its own reward, and he will rest content with it.'" The Transformation, p. 29 .

"Writers and philosophers before him had written thick volumes on truth and happiness, but few of them had been able to change their lives. Gandhi was not interested in such abstract principles. He wanted to know how to live, and was willing to transform his whole personality, if necessary, to bring him closer to that goal." The Transformation, p. 35.

"We are born to fight, he tells Arjuna; there is no choice in the matter. Our every desire must bring us into conflict. But we can choose how and whom we will fight. We can turn our anger against others, or we can turn it against what is selfish and angry in ourselves. We can use our hands to strike at others or to wipe their tears away. It is a call to action, and that is why Sri Krishna describes the heroes and heroines of the Gita's 'way of love' in the language not of sentiment, but of war." The Transformation, p. 38.

"But in the midst of that passionate crowd, ready for any extreme of violence, the inspiration came to him to offer an even higher challenge: to refuse to obey such degrading legislation and accept the consequences without violent retaliation but without yielding an inch in their demand for fair and equal treatment under the law.... 'to put down civil disobedience is to attempt to imprison conscience.'" The Way of Love, p. 43.

"'Disobedience to be civil must be sincere, respectful, restrained, never defiant, must be based on some well-understood principle, must not be capricious and, above all, must have no ill will or hatred behind it.'" The Way of Love, p. 45.

"'Mr. Gandhi, you may know all about the Bible or the Bhagavad Gita, but you know nothing at all about history. Never has a nation been able to free itself without violence.' "Gandhi smiled. 'You know nothing about history,' he corrected gently. 'The first thing you have to learn about history is that because something has not taken place in the past, that does not mean it cannot take place in the future.'"
The Way of Love, p. 49.

"'But I can and do hate evil wherever it exists. I hate the system of government that the British people have set up in India. I hate the ruthless exploitation of India even as I hate from the bottom of my heart the hideous system of untouchability for which millions of Hindus have made themselves responsible. But I do not hate the domineering Englishmen as I refuse to hate the domineering Hindus. I seek to reform them in all the loving ways that are open to me. My noncooperation has its roots not in hatred, but in love.'" The Way of Love, p. 56.

"When a man does everything in a spirit of worship, everywhere he goes is sacred, and Gandhi used to mark his jail letters 'Yeravda Mandir', which means, 'Yeravda Temple.' He started each day before dawn in meditation and prayer, in which he found the strength to withstand the trials of his situation... 'Joy lies in the fight, in the attempt, in the suffering involved, not in the victory itself.'" The Way of Love, p. 72.

"'Mr. Gandhi,' an English reporter asked him later, 'don't you think you were a trifle under-dressed for the occasion?' 'His majesty', Gandhi answered, 'had enough clothes on for both of us.'" The Way of Love, p. 76.

"Many of them still carried rifles slung over their shoulders, for a Pathan man considers himself undressed without his gun and knife. 'Are you afraid?' Gandhi asked. 'Why else would you be carrying guns?' They stared at him. No one had ever dared to speak to them like this. 'I have taught myself not to be afraid of anyone,' Gandhi explained; 'that is why I am unarmed. This is what ahimsa means.'" The Way of Love, p. 87.

"'Nonviolence with a nonviolent man is not merit. In fact it becomes difficult to say whether it is nonviolence at all. But when it is pitted against violence, then one realizes the difference between the two. This we cannot do unless we are ever wakeful, ever vigilant, ever striving.'" The way of Love, p. 98.

"When Gandhi succeeded in taking off his mask and 'making himself zero' through many years of living for others rather than himself, he found that what he had eliminated from his personality was only his separateness, his selfishness, his fear. What remained was the love and fearlessness that had been hidden there all the time." Mother and Child, p. 115.

Topics for Discussion

Is Gandhi's message applicable to modern, western society? Why or why not?

Why do you think Gandhi's message had such a transformational effect on South Africa and India when he was there? Do you think such an effect could be realized on governments today? Why or why not?

Are there instances today in modern politics or world affairs in which you can imagine one or more of the people involved instituting Gandhi's principles and transforming the conflict? Describe how and why it might be effective.

Gandhi told the Pathans that he made it a practice never to be afraid, and for that reason, he never carried a weapon. How did Gandhi affect that change in himself, and is such a transformation possible in people who are a part of today's most violent cultures? Explain.

What were the commonalities between the Bhagavad Gita and the Bible that Gandhi found harmony in as he looked for inspiration? Are there ways in which you can see those two scriptures producing a harmonized vision for modern culture? Describe what that new culture might be like.

Compare and contrast Gandhi and Kasturbai's approach to marriage with that of most people in Western culture. What do you see as the strengths of each approach?

The consistency of Gandhi's thoughts, words and actions came from his disciplines of meditation on pictures of virtue and self-examination in light of his evolving acquaintance with it. Describe a time when you have made a difficult adjustment in order to more closely align yourself with a virtue in which you saw value.