



E
B
O
O
K

F
O
R
M
A
T

A Continuing Experiment in Love

by Nashid Fareed-Ma'at

A Continuing Experiment in Love
by Nashid Fareed-Ma'at

Copyright © 2016

Table of Contents

Preface . . . 4

Introduction . . . 7

A Basic Philosophy . . . 9

The Power Of Love . . . 27

A Beloved Community . . . 47

We Are Out To Defeat Injustice . . . 53

Suffering Without Retaliation . . . 63

At The Center Of Nonviolence . . . 75

The Universe Is On The Side Of Justice . . . 89

PREFACE

The impetus for this booklet is a workshop I offered titled *Love and Nonviolence*. It explored how the Christian understanding of love informs Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s social and political activism. The workshop also referenced how Traditional Yogic teachings guided Mohandas K. Gandhi to similar approaches in his *Satyagraha* work in India.

While in the early stages of writing the first draft of this booklet I was listening to a recorded speech by James Baldwin. Addressing the topic of racism, he spoke to the fact (and I'm paraphrasing) that racism is not the main problem. Neither is injustice or the various forms of oppression that continue to dominate the landscape of life in America, and perhaps the entire world. It is no coincidence that many gains in addressing these have either decayed or been overcome by new forms of these problems because we have not addressed their roots. These major problems emanate from a far more pressing problem that King explicitly acknowledges: humanity's inhumanity to humanity. (King says "man's inhumanity to man" but I intentionally use non-gender specific terms when speaking of all of humanity.)

So if inhumanity -- in deed, thought, life orientation, etc. -- is the main problem, we would be remiss to address its emanations without addressing the root itself. Although the work of King and

others in the Civil Rights Movement tends to be reduced to addressing social evils, at the root of their work is an explicit response to the root of inhumanity: an engaged commitment to love. Love in action, which various spiritual traditions describe in diverse ways, lays at the essence of what it means to be a human being. Some say the essence of humanity is love. Yet the significance of King's living example (actions) and calls for others to love are often diminished by reducing his life to mere addressing the outgrowths of inhumanity. For example, many describe his life in terms of just fighting racism, economic inequality, militarism -- not engaging these as part of a larger battle to have humans return to love.

This informs the purpose of this booklet: to use an article King wrote which presents a basic overview of Nonviolence to illustrate how his approach is rooted in the stream of love. And how this stream became the basis of addressing the outflows of humanity's inhumanity. I combine King's teaching with guidance from Gandhi. Between these two, we may see how Nonviolence emanates from spiritual traditions that seek to guide us to the realization of humanity's true purpose: Ultimate Reality itself. And surely, love in action plays an essential role in this purpose.

Since this booklet quotes extensively from King and Gandhi, some of the language and use of terms will lack uniformity. For example, whereas I capitalize and do not place a hyphen in the term "Nonviolence," King and Gandhi often do not capitalize it and sometimes place a hyphen in the term. There are also the literary

tendencies of their times: using male-gender terms to refer to humanity as a whole (e.g. man, mankind) or as a general singular pronoun (“he” for a person of male or female gender whereas I use the term “one.”) There is also King’s use of the term “Negro” which he uses to refer to Black people; a device I do not subscribe to. Therefore, there may be noticeable shifts in language between my words and the quotes. But I feel it is important to present King and Gandhi’s words as they are, particularly for those who wish to reference the sources of the quotes.

Also, in other writings and presentations I refer to Jesus by his Jewish name: Yeshua. But King and Gandhi use Jesus. To avoid confusion, in this writing I use Jesus for the sake of consistency.

nashid

March 2016



INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years there has been an increase in “non-violent protest.” Much of this has been sparked by mainstream attention to controversial killings of Blacks, notably unarmed males at the hands of police officers. While it is encouraging to see a rise in social activism, there is also concern about how grounded this activity is. Students of contemporary history will note that similar tides in activism have occurred before, sometimes with these very same issues, but often faded due to the lack of a solid foundation regarding the approach to activism. To this end, it may be helpful to reflect on the words of two stalwarts of Nonviolence, looking specifically at the guidance they offer regarding the foundation of this approach to social action and life. Thus, I turn to the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

In 1958, an article by King titled *An Experiment in Love* was published. It is an excerpt from his book *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*. The book reflects on the famous bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, which began in December 1955. In the article, he presents a basic overview of the approach of Nonviolence in the space of a few pages. I encourage readers to review this article in whole. This booklet uses King’s article as an outline, offering commentary and explanation to suit the particulars

of today -- with an explicit emphasis on applying (living) the components of this approach. To this, I augment additional references from the teachings of Gandhi.



A BASIC PHILOSOPHY

King opens the article stating: “From the beginning a basic philosophy guided the movement.”¹ One of the powerful qualities of Nonviolence is its simplicity: presenting an approach that can be embraced by kids to adults, persons of varying levels of education, and people with different temperaments. King states plainly what this basic guiding force is:

the phrase most often heard was “*Christian love.*” It was the Sermon on the Mount, rather than a doctrine of passive resistance, that initially inspired the Negroes of Montgomery to dignified social action. It was Jesus of Nazareth that stirred the Negroes to protest with *the creative weapon of love.*² (emphasis mine)

¹ I am utilizing a copy of the article *An Experiment in Love*, published in 1958, reprinted in the compilation *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 1991. The article is reprinted on pages 16 - 20 of the compilation. This quote is on p. 16.

² King, *Testament*, p. 16.

Later in the article, King goes into depth by what he means by love. But even if people have differing concepts of love, King acknowledges this is the starting point for Nonviolence. This can be a challenge given our culturally-learned inclination to respond to wrongs with anger, force, or even political calculation and mental might. This is often magnified with situations of extreme injustice. Responding in ways other than love may produce certain desired outcomes, but these usually recede and are often wrought with great dangers. Love lays the path to lasting change and transformation -- which is ultimately what is more beneficial. Those truly devoted to Nonviolence are not content to merely change components of an overall situation that continues to fuel and create oppression and injustice. Instead, Nonviolence looks to have the overall situation be transformed to one that establishes and fosters justice and true community, a transformation that begins with one's self. Few things are more powerful in facilitating such transformation than love.

The mention of "Christian love" has further relevance. Two things are of note: Montgomery, as well as much of the American South at the time, had a strong Christian presence. This clearly places love in a spiritual context -- as opposed to a worldly one. And, secondly, "Christian love" is tapping into a virtue already present in the community. Both factors are important.

One aspect of "Christian love" is that it provides clear guidance to Christians, not leaving them to devise something new and apply it as they wish. Jesus gives a clear orientation for love: one that

moves beyond selfishness, self-centeredness, and worldly pleasures toward peaceful relations that benefit one's self and others. Note these words from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount:

⁴³You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Parent* in heaven. It causes Its sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?⁴⁷ And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Parent is perfect.³
(*The translation states "Father" but I change it to "Parent" since traditional Judaism and Christianity say the Absolute is beyond gender.)

First, if one is not loving (or engaged in the journey of discovering love for) one's self, family, and friends, it will be extremely difficult (and possibly hypocritical) to love one's neighbor. Without this baseline of existing love we are unlikely to strive

³ *Today's New International Version of the Bible*, Book of Matthew, Chapter 5, Verses 43 - 48.

toward loving our “enemies:” those in opposition to us, those who do things that harm us. The deepening transformation of Nonviolence happens within the space of love, building on the love we are encouraged to nurture prior to engaging in social action.

Many Blacks in Montgomery were already living or aspiring to live this love prior to the arrest of Rosa Parks which sparked the year-long boycott. In this regard, Nonviolence looks to build on something already present in our lives. If we wait until an unfortunate event to attempt infusing love into our lives, we will find it extremely challenging to do so -- especially if anger is part of our reaction to the incident.

For those who are Christian, King points out pillars of guidance in the Sermon on the Mount regarding love. Those of other spiritual paths can look to their tradition of scriptures and teachings and I trust you will find guiding pillars similar to what the Sermon on the Mount offers. The language, how things are said and conveyed, may vary but the orientation of love looks to move beyond selfishness and self-centeredness toward peaceful relations that benefit one’s self and others. And Jesus states the ideal: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Parent is perfect.”⁴ That the scope of our love, or whatever else we may call it, expands to send

⁴ *Bible*, Book of Matthew, Chapter 5, Verse 48.

“rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”⁵ Every spiritual tradition I have studied acknowledges such an ideal.

For those without a spiritual tradition, I encourage you to find guiding pillars for yourself that direct and orient you toward cultivating love. The risk in formulating one’s own guiding pillars is that we pick things that cater to our self-centeredness, and we may do so unaware of this tendency. But if we are sincere, we will find and surrender to clear guiding pillars that move us beyond our own self-centeredness in the direction of universal beneficence. What this means in a practical sense will be addressed later in examining King’s definition of love.

King continues the article stating:

As the days [of the boycott] unfolded, however, the inspiration of Mahatma Gandhi began to exert its influence. I had come to see early that the Christian doctrine of love operating through the Gandhian method of nonviolence was one of the most potent weapons available to the Negro in his struggle for freedom.⁶

⁵ *Bible*, Book of Matthew, Chapter 5, Verse 45.

⁶ King, *Testament*, p. 16.

The orientation of love is the starting point. But as the momentum of this love in (social) action evolved, the boycotters looked to the work of Gandhi to apply proven lessons to their approach. This brings us to the three pillars of *Satyagraha*, which is what Gandhi called his work. These pillars are: *Ahimsa*, *Satya*, and *Brahmacarya*.

Satyagraha, a Sanskrit term, literally means “grasping to Truth” -- we will explore what Gandhi means by Truth below. Conceding to how people used language in his time, he often translated this term into English as “Nonviolence” or sometimes “Nonviolent Resistance.” But *Satyagraha* is an explicit description of his approach: grasping to Truth and, in this way, being moved (led by Truth) to deal with unjust situations. He looked to Indian spirituality for guidance on how to identify Truth as well as cultivate the means to grasp and live Truth. Within the vastness of ancient Indian spirituality, Traditional Yoga plays a major role in his approach. With this in mind, consider the following words of Gandhi:

Quite selfishly, as I wish to live in peace in the midst of a bellowing storm howling round me, I have been experimenting with myself and my friends by *introducing religion into politics*. Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not the

Hindu religion,⁷ which I certainly prize above all other religions, but *the religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and which ever purifies.*⁸ (emphasis mine)

Traditional Yoga is explicit about this changing of “ones’ very nature:” that the caterpillar that enters the cocoon of sincere and diligent spiritual practice emerges as a transformed being -- a butterfly. It is not enough to paste wings on the back of the caterpillar and reform how it crawls through the world. The butterfly does not crawl, it flies: a complete transformation of being and how it moves through life.

The *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* is one of the major scriptures of Traditional Yoga. It presents eight “limbs” of spiritual practice. The first limb is the *Yamas*, which are moral abstentions. Patanjali states five moral abstentions, three which are the pillars of *Satyagraha*. So even with Gandhi there is a pre-existing spiritual

⁷ Although Gandhi uses the terms “Hindu religion” and “Hinduism,” English terms used in his time, I refer to such as Indian spirituality. Hindu is the name of one the largest ethnic groups in India, but the religion / spirituality he refers to is not limited to just this ethnic group.

⁸ Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, 1961, p. 109, excerpt from *Young India*, May 12, 1920.

context being applied to the efforts to address British oppression (via colonization) and liberate India.

The first pillar is *ahimsa*, which is often translated as non-violence but a better translation is “no harm.” It is a sacred vow to, from this point forward, not harm others and not allow one’s self to be unnecessarily harmed. This second point has particular importance in relation to Nonviolent protest. When protests are utilized to expose existing tensions, particularly those created and sustained by continuing injustice, protesters may place themselves in situations where they will be harmed. A noted example of this was the Civil Rights campaign in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963: protesters knew they would be exposed to fierce police violence by engaging in organized marches. In this context, bearing the harm of police abuse was acceptable in the larger scheme of exposing the injustice -- part of a concerted effort to transform the social situation. But this same attitude to willingly bear harm would not be applicable to situations of domestic violence -- the vow of *ahimsa* calls for a person to utilize means to avoid and end any unnecessary, unredemptive harm.

Ahimsa is the foundation of *Satyagraha*; and on the larger scale of Traditional Yoga, it is the foundation of spiritual transformation. In fact, some go as far to say it is the foundation of all spirituality. *Ahimsa* begins with refraining from the more explicit and obvious harms, expanding to include the more subtle harms: usually beginning with the physical, then proceeding to restrain words and expressions, the thoughts we engage, and eventually encompassing

how we approach every aspect of life. One finds that as one deepens one's own living of *ahimsa*, the abstention from harm evolves by its own means to become love. When one rests in the state of complete harmlessness, one finds one's life immersed in abounding love. Therefore, Gandhi shares:

I accept the interpretation of *ahimsa*, namely, that it is **not merely a negative state of harmlessness but it is a positive state of love**, of doing good even to the evil-doer. But it does not mean helping the evil-doer to continue the wrong or tolerating it by passive acquiescence. On the contrary, love, the active state of *ahimsa*, requires you to resist the wrong-doer by dissociating yourself from him even though it may offend him or injure him physically.⁹ (bold emphasis mine)

The second pillar is *Satya*. This term means Truth, but as a moral abstention it begins as not lying, not being false. This abstention, when lived with sincerity and diligence, is a proven means that facilitates the realization of Absolute Truth. Gandhi explains what he means by Truth:

⁹ Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 161, excerpt from *Young India*, August 25, 1920.

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

