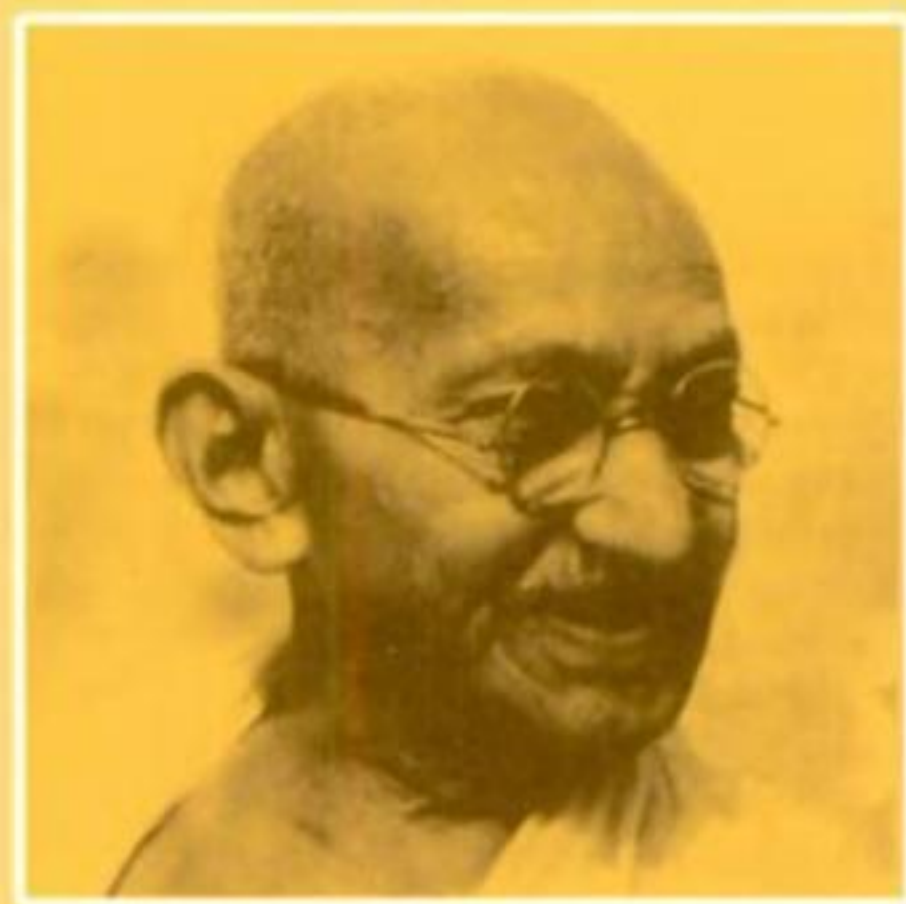


*The*  
WORDS  
*of*  
GANDHI



SELECTED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
RICHARD ATTENBOROUGH

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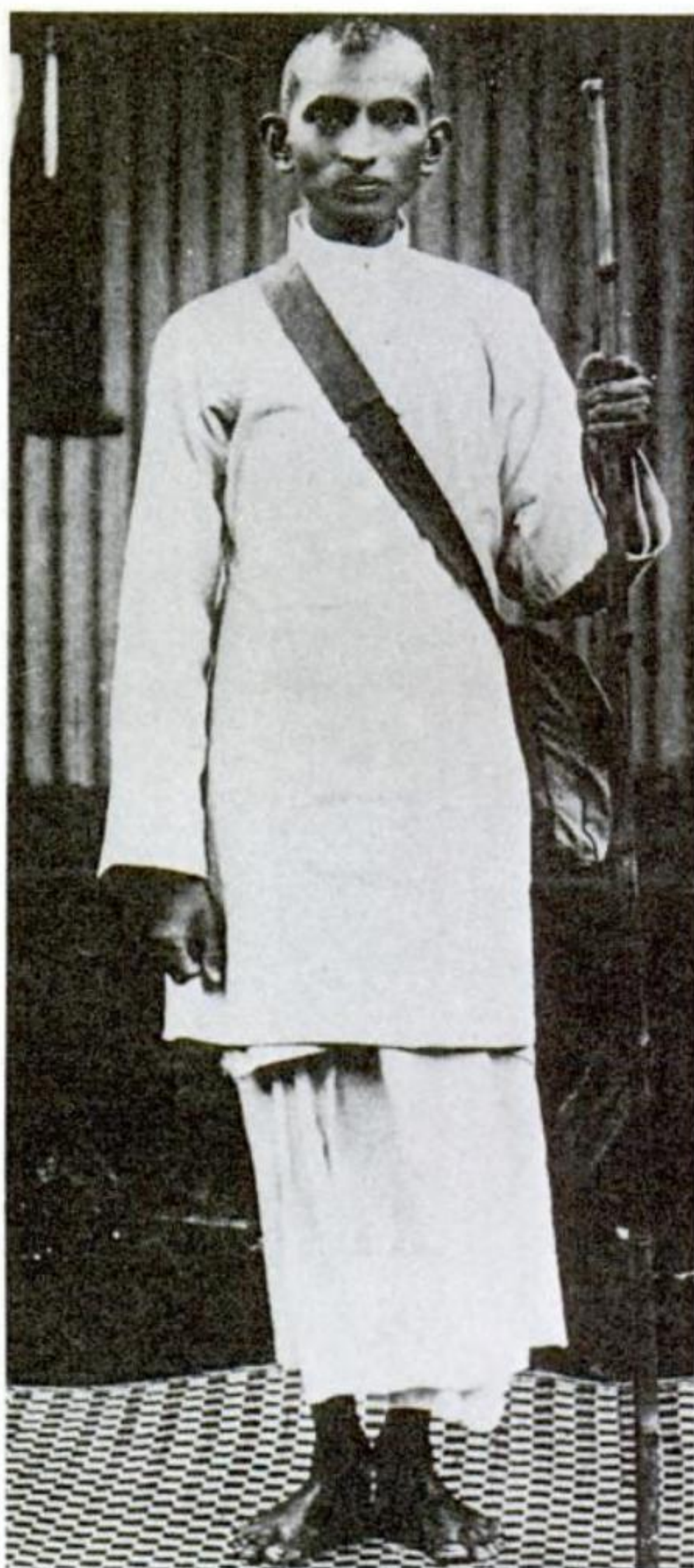
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Gandhi as barrister, Johannesburg, South Africa.



Gandhi as satyagrahi at the beginning of his civil disobedience campaign in South Africa.



# INTRODUCTION

In 1962 Mortilal Kothari, a London-based Indian civil servant, asked me to make a film on the life of the Mahatma. I had only a rudimentary schoolboy's knowledge of Gandhi as the leader of the Indian people's struggle for independence from Britain. I therefore agreed to read a biography and some of his own writings.

At the age of twenty-three, in 1893, shortly after he had arrived in South Africa as an attorney to conduct a case for an Indian trading company, he wrote one sentence which knocked me off my feet. "It has always been a mystery to me how men can feel themselves honoured by the humiliation of their fellow beings." He had just witnessed Indians forced to walk in the gutter so that whites could pass unimpeded along the sidewalk.

His words struck me so forcibly that there and then I committed myself to an attempt to make a film about Mahatma Gandhi—a commitment that changed the subsequent twenty years of my life. Since then, every career decision I have made has been tempered by my love affair with this one project.

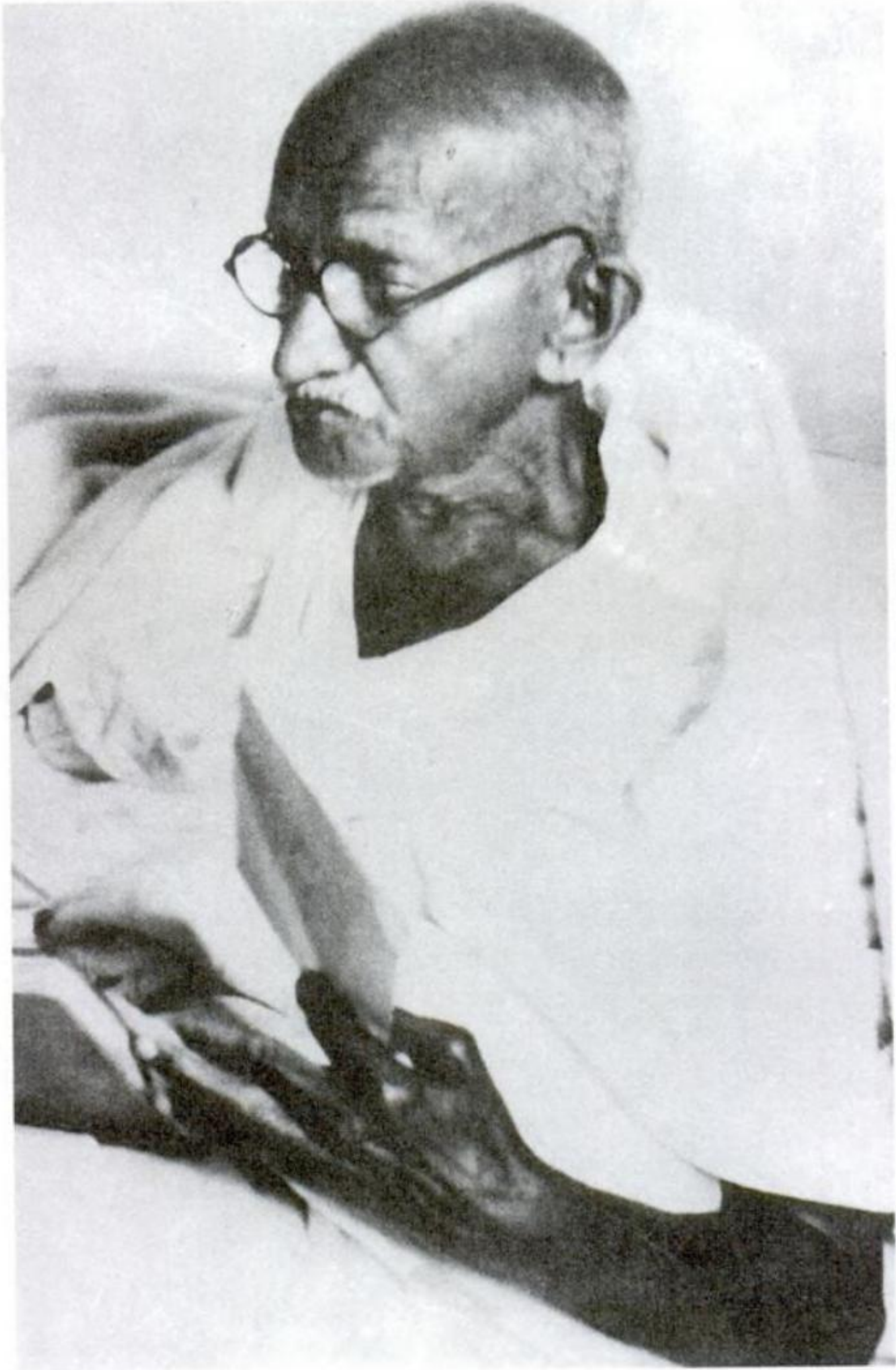
*Gandhi* had its world premiere in New Delhi on 30 November 1982.

## *The Words of Gandhi*

Mohandas K. Gandhi was born in 1869 to Hindu parents in the state of Gujerat in western India. He entered an arranged marriage with Kasturbai Makanji when both were thirteen years old. His family later sent him to London to study law, and in 1891 he was admitted to the Inner Temple, and called to the bar. In Southern Africa he worked ceaselessly to improve the rights of immigrant Indians. It was there that he developed his creed of passive resistance against injustice, *satyagraha*, meaning "truth force," and was frequently jailed as a result of the protests that he led. Before he returned to India with his wife and children in 1915, he had radically changed the lives of Indians living in Southern Africa.

Back in India, it was not long before he was taking the lead in the long struggle for independence from Britain. He never wavered in his unshakable belief in nonviolent protest and religious tolerance. When his Muslim and Hindu compatriots committed acts of violence, whether against the British who ruled India, or against each other, he fasted until the fighting ceased. Independence, when it came in 1947, was not a military victory, but a triumph of human will. To Gandhi's despair, however, the country was partitioned into Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan. The last months of his life were spent trying to end the appalling violence which ensued, leading him to fast to the brink of





# NONVIOLENCE



“Nonviolence and cowardice go ill together. I can imagine a fully armed man to be at heart a coward. Possession of arms implies an element of fear, if not cowardice. But true nonviolence is an impossibility without the possession of unadulterated fearlessness.”

“Nonviolence should never be used as a shield for cowardice. It is a weapon for the brave.”

“I see neither bravery nor sacrifice in destroying life or property for offence or defence.”

“It is no nonviolence if we merely love those that love us. It is nonviolence only when we love those that hate us. I know how difficult it is to follow this grand law of love. But are not all great and good things difficult to do? Love of the hater is the most difficult of all. But by the grace of God even this most difficult thing becomes easy to accomplish if we want to do it.”

## NONVIOLENCE

“It is the acid test of nonviolence that in a nonviolent conflict there is no rancor left behind and, in the end, the enemies are converted into friends. That was my experience in South Africa with General Smuts.\* He started with being my bitterest opponent and critic. Today he is my warmest friend . . .”

“This is in essence the principle of nonviolent non-cooperation. It follows therefore that it must have its root in love. Its object should not be to punish the opponent or to inflict injury upon him. Even while non-cooperating with him, we must make him feel that in us he has a friend and we should try to reach his heart by rendering him humanitarian service whenever possible.”

“That is the beauty of *satyagraha*. It comes up to oneself; one has not to go out in search for it.”

---

\*Smuts, Jan Christian, 1870–1950: South African Boer General. Gandhi’s principal adversary during his time in South Africa.



“Truth {*satya*} implies love, and Firmness {*agraha*} engenders and therefore serves as a synonym for force. I thus began to call the Indian movement ‘*satyagraha*’; that is to say, the force which is born of truth and love or nonviolence . . .”

“*Ahimsa* is the attribute of the soul, and, therefore, to be practiced by everybody in all the affairs of life. If it cannot be practiced in all departments, it has no practical value.”

“*Ahimsa* is not the crude thing it has been made to appear. Not to hurt any living thing is no doubt a part of *ahimsa*. But it is its least expression. The principle of *ahimsa* is hurt by every evil thought, by undue haste, by lying, by hatred, by wishing ill to anybody. It is also violated by our holding on to what the world needs.”

“*Ahimsa* and Truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like two sides of a coin, or rather a smooth unstamped metallic disc. Who can say which is the obverse and which the reverse? Nevertheless, *ahimsa* is the means; Truth is the end.”

“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-cooperation 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-cooperation 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 nonviolence is infinitely superior to violence, forgiveness is more manly than punishment. ‘Forgiveness adorns a soldier.’ But abstinence 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<sup>†</sup> and his ilk. They would tear him to

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\*Boer War: War in South Africa, 1899–1902, in which Great Britain defeated the settlers of Dutch ancestry (Boers).

Zulu rebellion: Clash in 1904 in the South African province of Natal between Zulu tribesmen and the white government. Gandhi led an ambulance corps for the British.

<sup>†</sup>Dyer, Brigadier General Reginald E.: British officer responsible for the massacre of Indian civilians in Amritsar, 1919.



pieces if they could. But 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 day 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 loses his nerve 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 nonviolence is not meant merely for the *rishis* and saints. It is meant for the common people as well. Nonviolence 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 offshoots, non-cooperation and civil resistance, are nothing but new names for the law of suffering. The *rishis* who discovered the law of nonviolence in the midst of violence were greater geniuses than Newton. They were themselves greater warriors than Wellington. Although knowledgeable in the use of arms, they realized their uselessness and taught a weary world that its salvation lay not through violence but through nonviolence.

“Nonviolence in its dynamic condition means conscious suffering. It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evildoer, but it means the pitting 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 nonviolence because she is weak. I want her to practise nonviolence 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 airplanes of the English. And she takes up non-cooperation out of her weakness. It must still

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\**Rama*: Any of the three avatars (incarnations) of the Hindu god Vishnu: Balarama, Parashurama, or Ramachandra.

*Ravana*: In the Hindu epic *Ramayana*, the King of Sri Lanka who abducts Sita, the wife of Ramachandra, and is later defeated by him.

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-cooperation 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-cooperation 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

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\*Sinn Feinism: Irish nationalist organization, founded in 1905, advocating complete political separation from Britain.



service of India through the religion of nonviolence 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 nonviolent non-cooperation a trial and they will find that I had no mental reservation whatsoever.”

“The force of nonviolence is infinitely more wonderful and subtle than the material forces of nature, like electricity.”

“The force generated by nonviolence is infinitely greater than the force of all the arms invented by man’s ingenuity.”

“Although non-cooperation is one of the main weapons in the armory of *satyagraha*, it should not be forgotten that it is, after all, only a means to secure the cooperation of the opponent consistently with trust and justice . . .

Avoidance of all relationships with the opposing power, therefore, can never be a *satyagrahi's* object, but transformation or purification of that relationship."

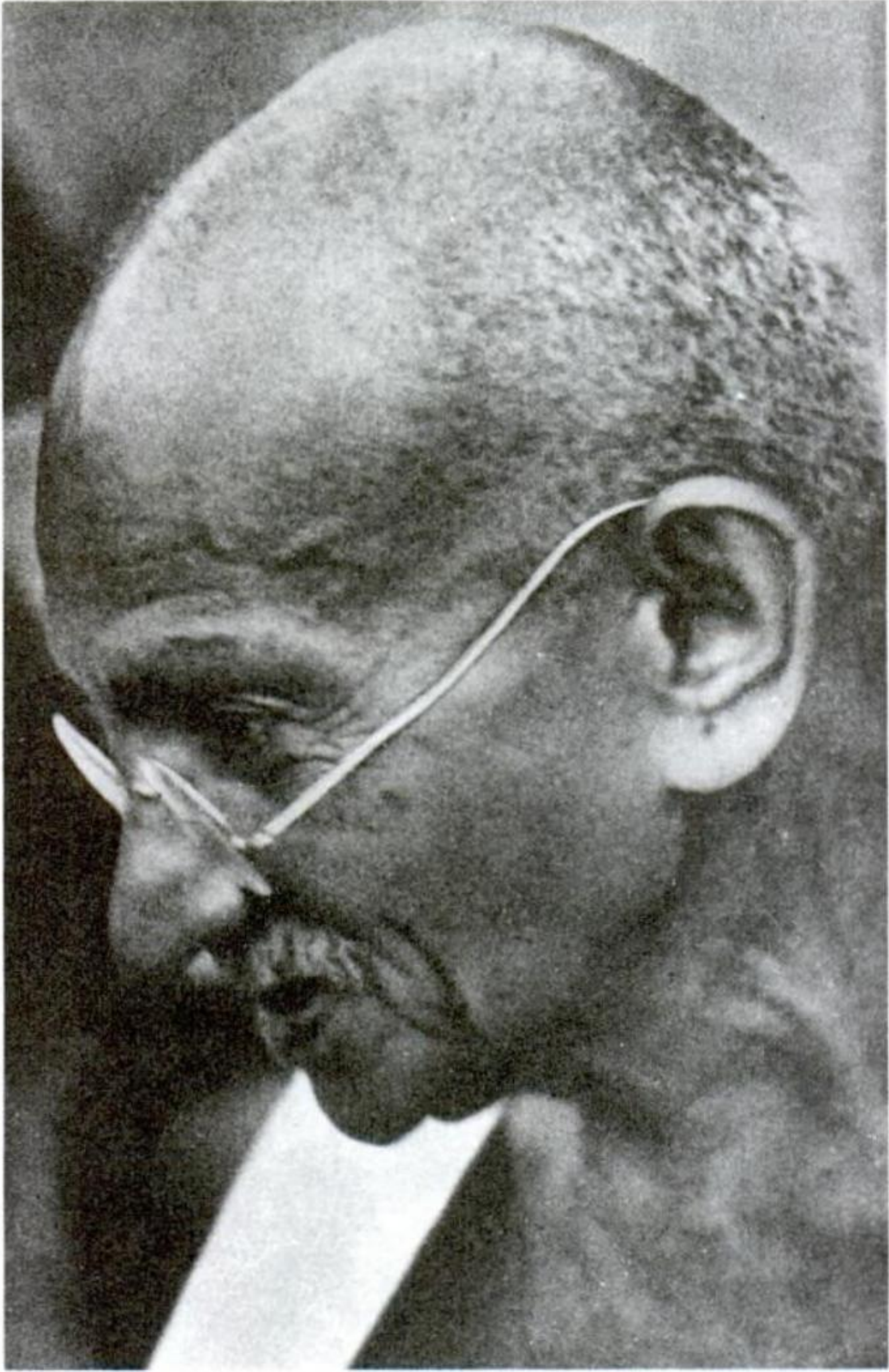
"Strength of numbers is the delight of the timid. The valiant in spirit glory in fighting alone."

"Disobedience to be civil has to be open and nonviolent."

"Disobedience, to be civil, implies discipline, thought, care, attention."

"Civil disobedience is the inherent right of a citizen. He dare not give it up without ceasing to be a man. Civil disobedience is never followed by anarchy. Criminal disobedience can lead to it. Every state puts down criminal disobedience by force. It perishes, if it does not. But to put down civil disobedience is to attempt to imprison conscience."





“Nonviolence succeeds only when we have a real living faith in God.”

“I do not believe in short-violent-cuts to success . . . However much I may sympathize with and admire worthy motives, I am an uncompromising opponent of violent methods even to serve the noblest of causes . . . Experience convinces me that permanent good can never be the outcome of untruth and violence.”

“Nonviolence implies voluntary submission to the penalty for non-cooperation with evil.”

“We must (then) evolve order out of chaos. And I have no doubt that the best and speediest method is to introduce the people’s law instead of mob law.

“One great stumbling block is that we have neglected music. Music means rhythm, order. Its effect is electrical. It immediately soothes. I have seen, in European countries, a resourceful superintendent of police by starting a popular song control the mischievous tendencies of mobs. Unfortunately,



like our Shastras,\* music has been the prerogative of the few, either the barter of prostitutes or high-class religious devotees. It has never become nationalized in the modern sense. If I had any influence with volunteer boy scouts and {other} organizations, I would make compulsory a proper singing in company of national songs. And to that end I should have great musicians attending every Congress or Conference and teaching mass music.

“Much greater discipline, method and knowledge must be exacted from volunteers and no chance comer should be accepted as a full-fledged volunteer. He only hinders rather than helps. Imagine the consequences of one untrained soldier finding his way into an army at war. He can disorganize it in a second. My great anxiety about non-cooperation is not the slow response of the leaders, certainly not the well-meant and ill-meant criticism, never unadulterated repression. The movement will overcome these obstacles. It will even gain strength from them. But the greatest obstacle is that we have not yet emerged from the *mobocratic* stage. But my consolation lies in the fact that nothing is so easy as to train mobs, for the simple reason that they have no mind, no premeditation. They act in a frenzy. They repent quickly. Our

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\*Shastras: The sacred books of Hinduism.



organized government does not repent of its fiendish crimes at Jallianwala, Lahore, Kasur, Akalgarh, Ram Nagar, etc.\* But I have drawn tears from repentant mobs at Gujranwala<sup>†</sup> and everywhere a frank acknowledgment of repentance from those who formed the mob during that eventful month of April. Non-cooperation I am therefore now using in order to evolve democracy. And I respectfully invite all the doubting leaders to help by refusing to condemn, in anticipation of a process of national purification, training and sacrifice.

“{Next week} I hope to give some illustrations of how in a moment order was evolved out of mob disorder. My faith in the people is boundless. Theirs is an amazingly responsive nature. Let not the leaders distrust them. This chorus of condemnation of non-cooperation when properly analysed means nothing less than distrust of the people’s ability to control themselves. For the present I conclude this

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\*Jallianwala Bagh: Public square in the city of Amritsar, site of the 1919 massacre of Indian civilians by British troops under General Dyer. Lahore: Capital city of Punjab. In a famous case in 1931, three young men were executed here by the British on the basis of very flimsy evidence of wrongdoing. Today Lahore is in Pakistan.

<sup>†</sup>Gujranwala: City presently located in northeast Pakistan.

somewhat lengthy article by suggesting some rules for guidance and immediate execution.

“1. There should be no raw volunteers accepted for big demonstrations. Therefore none but the most experienced should be at the head.

“2. Volunteers should have a general instruction book on their persons.

“3. At the time of demonstrations there must be a review of volunteers at which special instructions should be given.

“4. At stations, volunteers should not all be centered at one point, namely, where the reception committee should be. But they should be posted at different points in the crowd.

“5. Large crowds should never enter the station. They cannot but inconvenience traffic. There is as much honour in staying out as in entering the station.

“6. The first duty of the volunteers should be to see that other passengers' luggage is not trampled upon.

“7. Demonstrators ought not to enter the station long before the notified time for arrival.

“8. There should be a clear passage left in front of the train for the passengers.

“9. There should be another passage if possible half way through the demonstrators for the heroes to pass.



“10. There should be no chain formed. It is humiliating.

“11. The demonstrators must not move till the heroes have reached their coach or till they receive a prearranged signal from an authorized volunteer.

“12. National cries must be fixed and must be raised not anyhow, at any time or all the time, but just on the arrival of the train, on the heroes reaching the coach and on the route at fair intervals. No objections need be raised to this on the score of the demonstration becoming mechanical and not spontaneous. The spontaneity will depend on numbers, the response to the cries above all the general look of the demonstrators, not in the greatest number of noises or the loudest. It is the training that a nation receives which characterizes the nature of its demonstrations. A Mohammedan silently worshipping in his mosque is no less demonstrative than a Hindu temple-goer making a noise either through his voice or his gong or both.

“13. On the route the crowd must line and not follow the carriages. If pedestrians form part of the moving procession, they must noiselessly and in an orderly manner take their places and not at their own will join or abstain.

“14. A crowd should never press towards the heroes but should move away from them.

“15. Those on the last line or the circumference should never press forward but should give way when pressure is directed towards them.

“16. If there are women in the crowd they should be specially protected.

“17. Little children should never be brought out in the midst of crowds.

“18. At meetings volunteers should be dispersed among the crowd. They should learn flag and whistle signaling in order to pass instructions from one to another when it is impossible for the voice to carry.

“19. It is not up to the audience to preserve order. They do so by keeping motionless and silent.

“20. Above all, everyone should obey volunteers’ instructions without question.

“This list does not pretend to be exhaustive. It is merely illustrative and designed to stimulate thought and discussion.”

*(When Gandhi arrived at Durban from Bombay on 13 January 1897, he was besieged and assaulted by an excited crowd. But Gandhi was rescued by the resourcefulness of a police superintendent. Among the devices he employed for saving Gandhi’s life was singing the very tune that the mob was repeating against Gandhi.)*

“When a man submits to another through fear, he does not follow his nature but yields to brute force. He who has no desire to dominate others by brute force will not himself submit to such force either. Recognizing, therefore, that man who fears brute force has not attained self-knowledge at all, our *Shastras* allowed him the use of brute force while he remains in this state.

“Forgiveness is the virtue of the brave. He alone who is strong enough to avenge a wrong knows how to love (and forgive). He alone who is capable of enjoying pleasures can qualify to be a *brahmachary* by restraining his desires. There is no question of the mouse forgiving the cat. It will be evidence of India’s soul-force only if she refuses to fight when she has the strength to do so.

“It is necessary to understand what the phrase ‘strength to fight’ means in this context. It does not mean only physical strength. Everyone who has courage in him can have the strength to fight, and everyone who has given up fear of death has such strength. I have seen sturdy Negroes cowering before white boys, because they were afraid of the white man’s revolver. I have also seen weaklings hold out against robust persons. Thus, the day India gives up fear we shall be able to say that she has the strength to fight. It is not at all true to say that, to be able to fight, it is essential to acquire the ability to use arms; the moment, therefore, a



man wakes up to the power of the soul, that very moment he comes to know the strength he has for fighting. That is why I believe that he is the true warrior who does not die killing but who has mastered the *mantra* of living by dying.

“The sages who discovered the never-failing law of nonviolence were themselves great warriors. When they discovered the ignoble nature of armed strength and realized the true nature of man, they discerned the law of nonviolence pervading this world all full of violence. They then taught us that the *atman* can conquer the whole world, that the greatest danger to the *atman* comes from itself and that conquest over it brings us the strength to conquer the entire world.

“But they did not think, nor have they affirmed or taught anywhere, that because they had discovered that law they alone could live according to it. On the contrary, they declared that even for a child the law is the same, and that it can act upon it too. It is not true that only *sannyasis* abide by it; all of us do so more or less, and a law which can be followed partially can be followed perfectly.

“I have been striving to live according to this law. For many years past, I have been consciously trying to do so and have been exhorting India to do the same.

“I believe myself to be an idealist and also a practical man. I do not think that a man can be



“The only tyrant I’ll accept in this world is the ‘still, small voice’ within.”

—MAHATMA GANDHI

The words of one of the greatest men of the twentieth century, Mahatma Gandhi, chosen by the award-winning director Richard Attenborough from Gandhi’s letters, speeches, and published writings, explore the prophet’s timeless thoughts on daily life, cooperation, nonviolence, faith, and peace. This bestselling volume includes an introduction by Attenborough and an afterword by *Time* magazine Senior Foreign Correspondent Johanna McGeary that places Gandhi’s life and work in the historical context of the twentieth century.

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—RICHARD ATTENBOROUGH, in his Introduction



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