

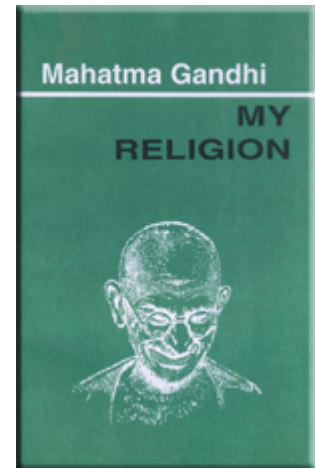
# My Religion

By: M. K. Gandhi

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

As Gandhiji's life consisted in nothing but seeking to practise his religion to the best of his ability, an attempt has been made in this volume to present to the reader extracts from Gandhiji's writings and speeches, which will give a fairly full picture of Gandhiji's religion.

The task has not been easy. The very fact that religion was the mainspring of Gandhiji's activities means that all that he said and did throughout his public career, not only in the realm of religion proper but also in the spheres of politics, economics and social life, become relevant to this volume. For him a religion which did not concern itself with every side of life was no religion at all. That being the case, no account of his religion can be adequate which does not present his entire philosophy of conduct, whether in individual or social life.

Consequently, we have had a very wide field to cover. At the same time to keep this volume small, we have had to select very carefully, seeking however in the process of elimination not to leave out anything of significance.

Gandhiji was born a Hindu. But his Hinduism was his own. It had its roots firm in ancient Hinduism, but it grew and developed in the light of his contact with other religions, more especially Christianity, as will be seen from Section Two of this volume. He sought to drink at the spring of all religions, and therefore he felt that he belonged to every religion. And yet, if he had to have a label, the label he preferred and which was his not only by right of birth but also intrinsically, was Hinduism, the religion of his forefathers. In learning from every religion with which he came in contact, Gandhiji was not by any means doing injustice to Hinduism or departing from its essential teachings. For the genius of Hinduism itself through all its long history has always been to assimilate and synthesize whatever new element it came up against. Not being tied down to a creed or to a founder, it was thus free to learn, grow and develop. Gandhiji illustrates in himself this youthful spirit of Hinduism, which

has kept it ever fresh, ever living and ever growing. Indeed, it may be truly said that in this respect in Gandhiji Hinduism found its own soul.

Hinduism had in the past, together with Buddhism, its offspring, influenced all the known countries of the then civilized world, from India to China and Japan. Today through Gandhiji Hinduism is undergoing rebirth, and India's message of peace and non-violence is listened to with respect by all the nations. There is no doubt that if the religion of Gandhiji could spread throughout the length and breadth of this land, India could still be a powerful factor in weaning the world from materialism, avarice and strife, which are threatening mankind with complete destruction.

Gandhiji's message, however, is not only for India but for all the world. As he himself said, he did not seek to recapture only the spirit of Hinduism but the spirit of all religions, which, according to him, is love of God expressing itself in love of fellow-beings. His call is therefore not that others should become Hindus, but that Christians, Buddhists, Muslims and others should live up to the best teachings of their own religion. Only thus, he expected, man can live in peace with his fellowman and promote each other's welfare. Both Hindus and non-Hindus should therefore find a challenge, inspiration and guidance in the living of the good life, from a study of this book.

Owing to limitations of space we could give but a bare outline of Gandhiji's views on social affairs. Those who would like fuller details may turn to other books published by the Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad-14, such for example as *Sarvodaya*, *Towards Non-violent Socialism*, *Women and Social Injustice*, *Removal of Untouchability*, *For Pacifists* and *Hindu Dharma*.

The arrangement of the material in this book is altogether ours, as well as the titles of chapters and articles. A glossary of non-English words is added for the benefit of readers unfamiliar with them. Dates<sup>1</sup> are attached to the writings quoted here from the *Young India*<sup>1</sup> and the *Harijan*<sup>1</sup> Gandhiji's weeklies. In regard to quotations from books by Gandhiji, it may be of interest to know that the *Hind Swaraj* was written in 1908, *From Yeravda Mandir* in 1930, *Unto This Last: a paraphrase* was first published in book-form in Gujarati in 1908 and in

English in 1951, and the *Autobiography* in 1927 and 1929. *Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* was published by Natesan & Co., Madras, first edition in 1917 and fourth edition in 1933.

BHARATAN KUMARAPPA

Bombay, November, 1955

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1. The *Young India* was published from 1919-1931 and the *Harijan* was published from 1933-1956 with two breaks.

## TO THE READER

I would like to say to the diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh. What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment, and, therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject.

M. K. GANDHI

*Harijan*, 29-4-'33, p. 2

**SECTION ONE: WHAT I MEAN BY RELIGION**

## 01. DEFINITION OF RELIGION

By religion, I do not mean formal religion or customary religion, but that religion which underlies all religions, which brings us face to face with our Maker.

*M. K. Gandhi, By Joseph J. Doke, 1909, p. 7*

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Religion should pervade every one of our actions. Here religion does not mean sectarianism. It means a belief in ordered moral government of the universe. It is not less real because it is unseen. This religion transcends Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, etc. It does not supersede them. It harmonizes them and gives them reality.

*Harijan, 10-2-'40 p. 445*

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Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not the Hindu religion 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 whichever purifies. It is the permanent element in human nature which counts no cost too great in order to find full expression and which leaves the soul utterly restless until it has found itself, known its Maker and appreciated the true correspondence between the Maker and itself.

*Young India, 12-5-'20, p. 2*

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No man can live without religion. There are some who in the egotism of their reason declare that they have nothing to do with religion. But it is like a man saying that he breathes but that he has no nose. Whether by reason, or by instinct, or by superstition, man acknowledges some sort of relationship with the divine. The rankest agnostic or atheist does acknowledge the need of a moral principle, and associates something good with its observance and something bad with its non-observance. Bradlaugh, whose atheism is well-

known, always insisted on proclaiming his innermost conviction. He had to suffer a lot for thus speaking the truth, but he delighted in it and said that truth is its own reward. Not that he was quite insensible to the joy resulting from the observance of truth. This joy however is not at all worldly, but springs out of communion with the divine. That is why I have said that even a man who disowns religion cannot and does not live without religion.

*Young India*, 23-1-'30, p. 25



## 02. THE CENTRAL PLAGUE OF MORALITY

I reject any religious doctrine that does not appeal to reason and is in conflict with morality. I tolerate unreasonable religious sentiment when it is not immoral.

*Young India, 21-7-'20 p. 4*

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As soon as we lose the moral basis, we cease to be religious. There is no such thing as religion overriding morality. Man, for instance, cannot be untruthful, cruel and incontinent and claim to have God on his side.

*Young India, 24-11-'21, p. 385*

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Religion which takes no account of practical affairs and does not help to solve them, is no religion.

*Young India, 7-5-'25, p. 164*

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Every activity of a man of religion must be derived from his religion, because religion means being bound to God, that is to say, God rules your every breath.

*Harijan, 2-3-'34, p. 23*

**SECTION TWO: THE SOURCES OF MY RELIGION**

### 03. AT HOME

My father was a lover of his clan, truthful, brave and generous, but short-tempered.

Of religious training he had very little, but he had that kind of religious culture which frequent visits to temples and listening to religious discourses make available to many Hindus. In his last days he began reading the Gita at the instance of a learned Brahmana friend of the family, and he used to repeat aloud some verses every day at the time of worship.

The outstanding impression my mother has left on my memory is that of saintliness. She was deeply religious. She would not think of taking her meals without her daily prayers. Going to *Haveli*—the Vaishnava temple—was one of her daily duties. As far as my memory can go back, I do not remember her having ever missed the *Chaturmas*.<sup>1</sup> She would take the hardest vows and keep them without flinching. Illness was no excuse for relaxing them. I can recall her once falling ill when she was observing the *Chandrayana*<sup>2</sup> vow, but the illness was not allowed to interrupt the observance. To keep two or three consecutive fasts was nothing to her. Living on one meal a day during *Chaturmas* was a habit with her. Not content with that she fasted every alternate day during one *Chaturmas*. During another *Chaturmas* she vowed not to have food without seeing the sun. We children on those days would stand, staring at the sky, waiting to announce the appearance of the sun to our mother. Everyone knows that at the height of the rainy season the sun often does not condescend to show his face. And I remember days when, at his sudden appearance, we would rush and announce it to her. She would run out to see with her own eyes, but by that time the fugitive sun would be gone, thus depriving her of her meal.

"That does not matter," she would say cheerfully, "God did not want me to eat today." And then she would return to her round of duties.

*Autobiography, 1948, pp. 12-13*

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1. Lit. a period of four months. A vow of fasting and semi-fasting during the four months of the rains. The period is a sort of long Lent.
2. A sort of fast in which the daily quantity of food is increased or diminished according as the moon waxes or wanes.

#### 04. WHILE AT SCHOOL

From my sixth or seventh year up to my sixteenth I was at school, being taught all sorts of things except religion. I may say that I failed to get from the teachers what they could have given me without any effort on their part. And yet I kept on picking up things here and there from my surroundings. The term 'religion' I am using in its broadest sense, meaning thereby self-realization or knowledge of self.

Being born in the Vaishnava faith, I had often to go to the *Haveli*. But it never appealed to me. I did not like its glitter and pomp. Also I heard rumours of immorality being practised there, and lost all interest in it. Hence I could gain nothing from the *Haveli*.

But what I failed to get there I obtained from my nurse, an old servant of the family, whose affection for me I still recall. I have said before that there was in me a fear of ghosts and spirits. Rambha, for that was her name, suggested, as a remedy for this fear, the repetition of Ramanama. I had more faith in her than in her remedy, and so at a tender age I began repeating Ramanama to cure my fear of ghosts and spirits. This was of course short-lived, but the good seed sown in childhood was not sown in vain. I think it is due to the seed sown by that good woman Rambha that today Ramanama is an infallible remedy for me.

What, however, left a deep impression on me was the reading of the Ramayana before my father. During part of his illness my father was in Porbandar. There every evening he used to listen to the Ramayana. The reader was a great devotee of Rama. He had a melodious voice. He would sing the *Dohas* (couplets) and *Ckopais* (quatrains), and explain them, losing himself in the discourse and carrying his listeners along with him. I must have been thirteen at that time, but I quite remember being enraptured by his reading. That laid the foundation of my deep devotion to the Ramayana. Today I regard the Ramayana of Tulsidas as the greatest book in all devotional literature.

A few months after this we came to Rajkot. There was no Ramayana reading there. The Bhagavat, however, used to be read on every *Ekadashi*<sup>1</sup> day. Sometimes, I attended the reading, but the reciter was uninspiring. Today I see that the Bhagavat is a book which can evoke religious fervour. I have read it in Gujarati with intense interest. But when I heard portions of the original read by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya during my twenty-one days' fast. I wished I had heard it in my childhood from such a devotee as he is, so that I could have formed a liking for it at an early age. Impressions formed at that age strike roots deep down into one's nature, and it is my perpetual regret that I was not fortunate enough to hear more good books of this kind read during that period.

In Rajkot, however, I got an early grounding in toleration for all branches of Hinduism and sister religions. For my father and mother would visit the *Haveli* as also Shiva's and Rama's temples and would take or send us youngsters there. Jain monks also would pay frequent visits to my father, and would even go out of their way to accept food from us—non-Jains. They would have talks with my father on subjects religious and mundane.

He had, besides, Mussalman and Parsi friends, who would talk to him about their own faiths, and he would listen to them always with respect, and often with interest. Being his nurse, I often had a chance to be present at these talks. These many things combined to inculcate in me a toleration for all faiths.

Only Christianity was at the time an exception. I developed a sort of dislike for it. And for a reason. In those days Christian missionaries used to stand in a corner near the high school and hold forth, pouring abuse on Hindus and their gods. I could not endure this. I must have stood there to hear them once only, but that was enough to dissuade me from repeating the experiment. About the same time, I heard of a well-known Hindu having been converted to Christianity. It was the talk of the town that, when he was baptized he had to eat beef and drink liquor, that he also had to change his clothes, and that thenceforth he began to go about in European costume including a hat. These things got on my nerves. Surely, thought I, a religion that compelled one to eat beef, drink liquor, and change one's own clothes did not deserve the name. I

also heard that the new convert had already begun abusing the religion of his ancestors, their customs and their country. All these things created in me a dislike for Christianity.

But the fact that I had learnt to be tolerant to other religions did not mean that I had any living faith in God.

But one thing took deep root in me—the conviction that morality is the basis of things, and that truth is the substance of all morality. Truth became my sole objective. It began to grow in magnitude every day and my definition of it also has been ever widening.

A Gujarati didactic stanza likewise gripped my mind and heart. Its precept—return good for evil—became my guiding principle. It became such a passion with me that I began numerous experiments in it. Here are those (for me) wonderful lines:

For a bowl of water give a goodly meal;  
For a kindly greeting bow thou down with zeal;  
For a simple penny pay thou back with gold;  
If thy life be rescued, life do not withhold.  
Thus the words and actions of the wise regard;  
Every little service tenfold they reward.  
But the truly noble know all men as one,  
And return with gladness good for evil done.

*Autobiography, 1948, pp. 47-51*

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1. Eleventh day of the bright and the dark half of a lunar month

## 05. AS A STUDENT IN ENGLAND

Towards the end of my second year in England, I came across two Theosophists, brothers, and both unmarried. They talked to me about the Gita. They were reading Sir Edwin Arnold's translation—*The Song Celestial*—and they invited me to read the original with them. I felt ashamed, as I had read the divine poem neither in Sanskrit nor in Gujarati. I was constrained to tell them that I had not read the Gita, but that I would gladly read it with them, and that though my knowledge of Sanskrit was meagre, still I hoped to be able to understand the original to the extent of telling where the translation failed to bring out the meaning. I began reading the Gita with them. The verses in the second chapter

If one

Ponders on objects of the sense, there springs  
Attraction; from attraction grows desire,  
Desire flames to fierce passion, passion breeds  
Recklessness; then the memory—all betrayed—  
Lets noble purpose go, and saps the mind,  
Till purpose, mind, and man are all undone.

made a deep impression on my mind and they still ring in my ears. The book struck me as one of priceless worth. The impression has ever since been growing on me with the result that I regard it today as the book *par excellence* for the knowledge of Truth. It has afforded me invaluable help in my moments of gloom.

The brothers also recommended *The Light of Asia* by Sir Edwin Arnold, whom I knew till then as the author only of *The Song Celestial*, and I read it with even greater interest than I did the Bhagavadgita. Once I had begun it I could not leave off.

I recall having read, at the brothers' instance, Madame Blavatsky's *Key to Theosophy*. This "book stimulated in me the desire to read books on Hinduism,



and disabused me of the notion fostered by the missionaries that Hinduism was rife with superstition.

About the same time I met a good Christian from Manchester in a vegetarian boarding house. He talked to me about Christianity. I narrated to him my Rajkot recollections. He was pained to hear them. He said, I am a vegetarian. I do not drink. Many Christians are meat-eaters and drink, no doubt; but neither meat-eating nor drinking is enjoined by Scripture. Do please read the Bible'. I accepted his advice, and he got me a copy.

I read the book of Genesis, and the chapters that followed invariably sent me to sleep. But just for the sake of being able to say that I had read it, I plodded through the other books with much difficulty and without the least interest or understanding. I disliked reading the book of Numbers.

But the New Testament produced a different impression, especially the Sermon on the Mount which went straight to my heart. I compared it with the Gita. The verses, 'But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man take away thy coat let him have thy cloak too,' delighted me beyond measure and put me in mind of Shamal Bhatt's 'For a bowl of water, give a goodly meal' etc. My young mind tried to unify the teaching of the Gita, the *Light of Asia* and the Sermon on the Mount. That renunciation was the highest form of religion appealed to me greatly.

This reading whetted my appetite for studying the lives of other religious teachers. A friend recommended Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero-Worship*. I read the chapter on the Hero as a prophet and learnt of the Prophet's (Mahammad) greatness and bravery and austere living.

Beyond this acquaintance with religion I could not go at the moment, as reading for the examination left me scarcely any time for outside subjects. But I took mental note of the fact that I should read more religious books, and acquaint myself with all the principal religions.

And how could I help knowing something of atheism too? Every Indian knew Bradlaugh's name and his so-called atheism. I read some book about it, the name of which I forget. It had no effect on me, for I had already crossed the Sahara of atheism.

*Autobiography, 1948, pp. 90-93*

## 06. RAYCHANDBHAI

Raychandbhai's commercial transactions covered hundreds of thousands. He was a connoisseur of pearls and diamonds. No knotty business problem was too difficult for him. But all these things were not the centre round which his life revolved. That centre was the passion to see God face to face. Amongst the things on his business table there were invariably to be found some religious book and his diary. The moment he finished his business he opened the religious book or the diary. Much of his published writings are a reproduction from his diary. The man who immediately on finishing his talk about weighty business transactions, began to write about the hidden things of the spirit could evidently not be a businessman at all but a real seeker after Truth. And I saw him thus absorbed in godly pursuits in the midst of business, not once or twice but very often. I never saw him lose his state of equipoise. There was no business or other selfish tie that bound him to me and yet I enjoyed the closest association with him. I was but a briefless barrister then, and yet whenever I saw him he would engage me in conversation of a seriously religious nature. Though I was then groping and could not be said to have any serious interest in religious discussion, still I found his talk of absorbing interest. I have since met many a religious leader or teacher. I have tried to meet the heads of various faiths, and I must say that no one else has ever made on me the impression that Raychandbhai did. His words went straight home to me. His intellect compelled as great a regard from me as his moral earnestness, and deep down in me was the conviction that he would never willingly lead me astray and would always confide to me his innermost thoughts. In my moments of spiritual crisis, therefore, he was my refuge.

And yet in spite of this regard for him I could not enthrone him in my heart as my Guru. The throne has remained vacant and my search still continues.

Three moderns have left a deep impression on my life, and captivated me: Raychandbhai by his living contact; Tolstoy by his book, *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*; and Ruskin by his *Unto This Last*.

*Autobiography*, 1948, pp. 112-14

## 07. IN SOUTH AFRICA

Mr. Baker was getting anxious about my future. He took me to the Wellington Convention. The Protestant Christians organize such gatherings every few years for religious enlightenment or, in other words, self-purification. One may call this religious restoration or revival. The Wellington Convention was of this type. Mr. Baker had hoped that the atmosphere of religious exaltation at the Convention, and the enthusiasm and earnestness of the people attending it, would inevitably lead me to embrace Christianity.

This Convention was an assemblage of devout Christians. I was delighted at their faith. I saw that many were praying for me. I liked some of their hymns, they were very sweet.

The Convention lasted for three days. I could understand and appreciate the devoutness of those who attended it. But I saw no reason for changing my belief—my religion. It was impossible for me to believe that I could go to heaven or attain salvation only by becoming a Christian. When I frankly said so to some of the good Christian friends, they were shocked. But there was no help for it.

My difficulties lay deeper. It was more than I could believe that Jesus was the only incarnate son of God, and that only he who believed in him would have everlasting life. If God could have sons, all of us were His sons. If Jesus was like God, or God Himself, then all men were like God and could be God Himself. My reason was not ready to believe literally that Jesus by his death and by his blood redeemed the sins of the world. Metaphorically there might be some truth in it. Again, according to Christianity only human beings had souls, and not other living beings, for whom death meant complete extinction; while I held a contrary belief. I could accept Jesus as a martyr, an embodiment of sacrifice, and a divine teacher, but not as the most perfect man ever born. His death on the cross was a great example to the world, but that there was anything like a mysterious or miraculous virtue in it my heart could not accept. The pious lives of Christians did not give me anything that the lives of men of

other faiths had failed to give. I had seen in other lives just the same reformation that I had heard of among Christians. Philosophically there was nothing extraordinary in Christian principles. From the point of view of sacrifice, it seemed to me that the Hindus greatly surpassed the Christians. It was impossible for me to regard Christianity as a perfect religion or the greatest of all religions.

I shared this mental churning with my Christian friends whenever there was an opportunity, but their answers could not satisfy me.

Thus if I could not accept Christianity either as a perfect, or the greatest religion, neither was I then convinced of Hinduism being such. Hindu defects were pressingly visible to me. If untouchability could be a part of Hinduism it could but be a rotten part or an excrescence. I could not understand the *raison d'etre* of a multitude of sects and castes. What was the meaning of saying that the Vedas were the inspired Word of God? If they were inspired, why not also the Bible and the Koran?

As Christian friends were endeavouring to convert me, even so were Mussalman friends. Abdulla Sheth had kept on inducing me to study Islam, and of course he had always something to say regarding its beauty.

I expressed my difficulties in a letter to Raychandhbai. I also corresponded with other religious authorities in India and received answers from them. Raychandhbai's letter somewhat pacified me. He asked me to be patient and to study Hinduism more deeply. One of his sentences was to this effect: 'On a dispassionate view of the question I am convinced that no other religion has the subtle and profound thought of Hinduism, its vision of the soul or its charity.'

Though I took a path my Christian friends had not intended for me, I have remained for ever indebted to them for the religious quest that they awakened in me. I shall always cherish the memory of their contact.

*Autobiography 1948, pp. 169-72*

I had gone to South Africa for travel, for finding a escape from Kathiawad intrigues and for gaining my own livelihood. But as I have said, I found myself in search of God and striving for self-realization.

Christian friends had whetted my appetite for knowledge, which had become almost insatiable, and they would not leave me in peace, even if I desired to be indifferent.

My religious correspondence continued. Raychand bhai was guiding me. I read with interest Max Mullens book *India—What Can It Teach Us?* and the translation of the Upanishads published by the Theosophical Society. All this enhanced my regard for Hinduism, and its beauties began to grow upon me. It did not, however, prejudice me against other religions. I read Washington Irving's *Life of Mahomet and His Successors* and Carlyle's panegyric on the Prophet. These books raised Mahammad in my estimation. I also read a book called *The Sayings of Zarathustra*.

Thus I gained more knowledge of the different religions. The study stimulated my self-introspection and fostered in me the habit of putting into practice whatever appealed to me in my studies. Thus I began some of the Yogic practices, as well as I could understand them from a reading of the Hindu books. But I could not get on very far, and decided to follow them with the help of some expert when I returned to India. The desire has never been fulfilled.

I made too an intensive study of Tolstoy's books. *The Gospels in Brief What to Do?* and other books made a deep impression on me. I began to realize more and more the infinite possibilities of universal love.

*Autobiography, 1948, pp. 197-98*

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When, in 1893, I came in close contact with Christian friends, I was a mere novice. They tried hard to bring home to me, and make me accept, the message of Jesus,, and I was a humble and respectful listener with an open

mind. At that time I naturally studied Hinduism to the best of my ability and endeavoured to understand other religions.

In 1903 the position was somewhat changed. Theosophist friends certainly intended to draw me into their society, but that was with a view to getting something from me as a Hindu. Theosophical literature is replete with Hindu influence, and so these friends expected that I should be helpful to them. I explained that my Sanskrit study was not much to speak of, that I had not read the Hindu scriptures in the original, and that even my acquaintance with the translations was of the slightest. But being believers in *sanskara* (tendencies caused by previous births) and *punarjanma* (rebirth) they assumed that I should be able to render at least some help. And so I felt like a Triton among the minnows. I started reading Swami Vivekananda's *Raja-yoga* with some of these friends and M. N. Divedi's *Rajayoga* with others. I had to read Patanjali's *Taga Sutrās* with one friend and the Bhagavadgita with quite a number. We formed a sort of Seekers' Club where we had regular readings. I already had faith in the Gita, which had a fascination for me. Now I realized the necessity of diving deeper into it. I had one or two translations, by means of which I tried to understand the original Sanskrit. I decided also to get by heart one or two verses every day. For this purpose I employed the time of my morning ablutions. The operation took me thirty-five minutes, fifteen minutes for the tooth brush and twenty minutes for the bath. The first I used to do standing in Western fashion. So on the wall opposite I stuck slips of paper on which were written the Gita verses and referred to them now and then to help my memory. This time was found sufficient for memorizing the daily portion and recalling the verses already learnt. I remember having - thus committed to memory thirteen chapters.

What effect this reading of the Gita had on my friends only they can say, but to me the Gita became an infallible guide of conduct. It became my dictionary of daily reference. Just as I turned to the English dictionary for the meanings of English words that I did not understand, I turned to this dictionary of conduct for a ready solution of all my troubles and trials. Words like *aparigraha* (non-

possession) and *samabhava* (equability) gripped me. How to cultivate and preserve that equability was the question. How was one to treat alike insulting, insolent and corrupt officials, co-workers of yesterday raising meaningless opposition, and men who had always been good to one? How was one to divest oneself of all possessions? Was not the body itself possession enough? Were not wife and children possessions? Was I to destroy all cupboards of books I had? Was I to give up all I had and follow Him? Straight came the answer: I could not follow Him unless I gave up all I had. My study of English law came to my help. Snell's discussion of the maxims of Equity came to my memory. I understood more clearly in the light of the Gita teaching the implication of the word 'trustee'. My regard for jurisprudence increased, I discovered in it religion. I understood the Gita teaching of non-possession to mean that those who desired salvation should act like the trustee who, though having control over great possessions, regards not an iota of them as his own. It became clear to me as daylight that non-possession and equability presupposed a change of heart, a change of attitude. I then wrote to Revashankarbai to allow the insurance policy to lapse and get whatever could be recovered, or else to regard the premium already paid as lost, for I had become convinced that God, who created my wife and children as well as myself, would take care of them. To my brother, who had been as father to me, I wrote explaining that I had given him all that I had saved up to that moment, but that henceforth he should expect nothing from me, for future savings, if any, would be utilized for the benefit of the community.

*Autobiography, 1948, pp. 322-24*

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I left for Natal. I had taken Mr. Polak into my fullest confidence. He came to see me off at the station, and left with me a book to read during the journey, which he said I was sure to like. It was Ruskin's *Unto This Last*.

The book was impossible to lay aside, once I had begun it. It gripped me. Johannesburg to Durban was a twenty- four hours' journey. The train reached



there in the evening. I could not get any sleep that night. I determined to change my life in accordance with the ideals of the book.

I translated it later into Gujarati, entitling it *Sarvodqya* (the welfare of all).

I believe that I discovered some of my deepest convictions reflected in this great book of Ruskin, and that is "why it so captured me and made me transform my life. A poet is one who can call forth the good latent in the human breast. Poets do not influence all alike, for everyone is not evolved in an equal measure.

The teachings of *Unto This Last* I understood to be:

1. That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all.
2. That a lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's inasmuch as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.
3. That a life of labour, i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman is the life worth living.

The first of these I knew. The second I had dimly realized. The third had never occurred to me. *Unto This Last* made it as clear as daylight for me that the second and the third were contained in the first. I arose with the dawn, ready to reduce these principles to practice.

*Autobiography*, 1948, pp. 364-65

**SECTION THREE: I RESPECT ALL RELIGIONS**

## 08. ALL RELIGIONS LEAD TO GOD

My Hindu instinct tells me that all religions are more or less true. All proceed from the same God, but all are imperfect because they have come down to us through imperfect human instrumentality.

*Young India*, 29-5-'24, p. 180

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Religions are different roads converging to the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads, so long as we reach the same goal? In reality, there are as many religions as there are individuals.

*Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*, 1939, pp. 35 & 36

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In theory, since there is one God, there can be only one religion. But in practice, no two persons I have known have had the same identical conception of God. Therefore, there will, perhaps, always be different religions answering to different temperaments and climatic conditions.

*Harijan*, 2-2-'34, p. 8

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I do not share the belief that there can or will be on earth one religion. I am striving, therefore, to find a common factor and to induce mutual tolerance.

*Young India*, 31-7-'24, p. 254

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I do not like the word tolerance, but could not think of a better one. Tolerance may imply a gratuitous assumption of the inferiority of other faiths to one's own, whereas Ahimsa teaches us to entertain the same respect for the religious faiths of others as we accord to our own, thus admitting the imperfection of the latter. This admission will be readily made by a seeker of Truth, who follows the law of Love. If we had attained the full vision of Truth, we would no longer be mere seekers, but have become one with God, for Truth is God. But being only seekers, we prosecute our quest, and are conscious of our

imperfection. And if we are imperfect ourselves, religion as conceived by us must also be imperfect. We have not realized religion in its perfection, even as we have not realized God. Religion of our conception, being thus imperfect, is always subject to a process of evolution and re-interpretation. Progress towards Truth, towards God, is possible only because of such evolution. And if all faiths outlined by men are imperfect, the question of comparative merit does not arise. All faiths constitute a revelation of Truth, but all are imperfect, and liable to error. Reverence for other faiths need not blind us to their faults. We must be keenly alive to the defects of our own faith also, yet not leave it on that account, but try to overcome those defects. Looking at all religions with an equal eye, we would not only not hesitate, but would think it our duty, to blend into our faith every acceptable feature of other faiths.

Even as a tree has a single trunk, but many branches and leaves, so there is one true and perfect Religion, but it becomes many, as it passes through the human medium. The one Religion is beyond all speech. Imperfect men put it into such language as they can command, and their words are interpreted by other men equally imperfect. Whose interpretation is to be held to be the right one? Everybody is right from his own standpoint, but it is not impossible that everybody is wrong. Hence the necessity for tolerance, which does not mean indifference to one's own faith, but a more intelligent and purer love for it. Tolerance gives us spiritual insight, which is as far from fanaticism as the north pole from the south. True knowledge of religion breaks down the barriers between faith and faith.

*From Yeravda Mandir, 1945, pp. 38-40*

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It has been my experience that I am always true from my point of view, and am often wrong from the point of view of my honest critics. I know that we are both right from our respective points of view. And this knowledge saves me from attributing motives to my opponents or critics. The seven blind men who gave seven different descriptions of the elephant were all right from their respective points of view, and wrong from the point of view of one another,

and right and wrong from the point of view of the man who knew the elephant. I very much like this doctrine of the manyness of reality. It is this doctrine that has taught me to judge a Mussalman from his own standpoint and a Christian from his. Formerly I used to resent the ignorance of my opponents. Today I can love them because I am gifted with the eye to see myself -as others see me and vice versa. I want to take the whole world in the embrace of my love.

*Young India, 21-1 -'26, p. 30*

## 09. MY ATTITUDE TO THE SCRIPTURES OF OTHER RELIGIONS

It is no business of mine to criticize the scriptures of other faiths, or to point out their defects. It is and should be, however, my privilege to proclaim and practise the truths that there may be in them. I may not, therefore, criticize or condemn things in the Koran or the life of the Prophet that I cannot understand. But I welcome every opportunity to express my admiration for such aspects of his life as I have been able to appreciate and understand. As for things that present difficulties, I am content to see them through the eyes of devout Mussalman friends, while I try to understand them with the help of the writings of eminent Muslim expounders of Islam. It is only through such a reverential approach to faiths other than mine that I can realize the principle of equality of all religions. But it is both my right and duty to point out the defects in Hinduism in order to purify it and to keep it pure. But when non-Hindu critics set about criticizing Hinduism and cataloguing its faults they only blazon their own ignorance of Hinduism and their incapacity to regard it from the Hindu view-point. It distorts their vision and vitiates their judgment. Thus my own experience of the non-Hindu critics of Hinduism brings home to me my limitations and teaches me to be wary of launching on a criticism of Islam or Christianity and their founders.

*Harijan, 13-3-37, p. 34*

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We have regular readings of the Bhagawadgita (in the Ashram) and we have now reached a stage when we finish the Gita every week by having readings of appointed chapters every morning. Then we have hymns from the various saints of India, and we therein include hymns from the Christian hymn-book. As Khansaheb is with us, we have readings from the Koran also. I derive the greatest consolation from my reading of Tulsidas's Ramayana. I have also derived solace from the New Testament and the Koran. I don't approach them with a critical mind. They are to me as important as the Bhagawadgita, though everything in the former may not appeal to me—everything in the Epistles of

Paul for instance,—nor everything in Tulsidas. Therefore there is no question of selection.

I exercise my judgment about every scripture, including the Gita. I cannot let a scriptural text supersede my reason. Whilst I believe that the principal books are inspired, they suffer from a process of double distillation. Firstly, they come through a human prophet, and then through the commentaries of interpreters. Nothing in them comes from God directly. Matthew may give one version of one text, and John may give another. I cannot surrender my reason whilst I subscribe to divine revelation. And above all, 'the letter killeth, the spirit giveth life.' But you must not misunderstand my position. I believe in faith also, in things where reason has no place.

*Harijan*, 5-12-'36, pp. 339 & 345

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I am not a literalist. Therefore, I try to understand the *spirit* of the various scriptures of the world. I apply the test of Truth and Ahimsa laid down by these very scriptures for interpretation. I reject what is inconsistent with that test, and I appreciate all that is consistent with it.

Knowledge cannot be the prerogative of any class or section. But I can conceive the impossibility of people assimilating higher or subtler truths unless they have undergone preliminary training, even as those who have]not made preliminary preparations are quite unfit to breathe the rarefied atmosphere in high altitudes, or those who have no preliminary training in simple mathematics are unfit to understand or assimilate higher geometry or algebra.

*Young India*, 27-8-'25, p. 293

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I hold that it is the duty of every cultured man or woman to read sympathetically the scriptures of the world- If we are to respect others' religions as we would have them to respect our own, a friendly study of the world's religions is a sacred duty. My respectful study of other religions has not abated my reverence for, or my faith in, the Hindu scriptures. They have indeed left their deep mark upon my understanding of the Hindu scriptures.

They have broadened my view of life. They have enabled me to understand more clearly many an obscure passage in the Hindu scriptures.

Let me own this. If I could call myself, say, a Christian, or a Mussalman, with my own interpretation of the Bible or the Koran, I should not hesitate to call myself either. For the Hindu, Christian and Mussalman would be synonymous terms. I do believe that in the other world there are neither Hindus, nor Christians nor Mussaimans. They all are judged not according to their labels or professions but according to their actions irrespective of their professions. During our earthly existence there will always be these labels. I therefore prefer to retain the label of my forefathers so long as it does not cramp my growth and does not debar me from assimilating all that is good anywhere else.

*Young India. 2-9-'26, p. 308*



## 10. ONE'S OWN RELIGION

The closest, though very incomplete, analogy for religion I can find is marriage. It is or used to be an indissoluble tie. Much more so is the tie of religion- And just as a husband does not remain faithful to his wife, or wife to her husband, because either is conscious of some exclusive superiority of the other over the rest of his or her sex but because of some indefinable but irresistible attraction, so does one remain irresistibly faithful to one's own religion and find full satisfaction in such adhesion. And just as a faithful husband does not need in order to sustain his faithfulness, to consider other women as inferior to his wife, so does not a person belonging to one religion need to consider others to be inferior to his own. To pursue the analogy still further, even as faithfulness to one's wife does not presuppose blindness to her shortcomings, so does not faithfulness to one's religion presuppose blindness to the shortcomings of that religion. Indeed, faithfulness, not blind adherence, demands a keener perception of shortcomings and therefore a livelier sense of the proper remedy for their removal. Taking the view I do of religion, it is unnecessary for me to examine the beauties of Hinduism. The reader may rest assured that I am not likely to remain Hindu if I was not conscious of its many beauties. Only for my purpose they need not be exclusive. My approach to other religions, therefore, is never as a fault-finding critic but as a devotee hoping to find the like beauties in other religions and wishing to incorporate in my own the good I may find in them and miss in mine.

*Harijan, 12-8-'33, p. 4*

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In spite of my being a staunch Hindu I find room in my faith for Christian and Islamic and Zoroastrian teaching, and, therefore, my Hinduism *seems* to some to be a conglomeration and some have even dubbed me an eclectic. Well, to call a man eclectic is to say that he has no faith, but mine is a broad faith which does not oppose Christians— not even a Plymouth Brother—not even the most fanatical Mussalman. It is a faith based on the broadest possible

toleration. I refuse to abuse a man for his fanatical deeds, because I try to see them from his point of view. It is that broad faith that sustains me. It is a somewhat embarrassing position I know—but to others, not to me.

*Young India*, 22-12-'27, p. 425

## 11. CHRISTIANITY

The New Testament gave me comfort and boundless joy, as it came after the repulsion that parts of the Old had given me. Today supposing I was deprived of the Gita and forgot all its contents but had a copy of the Sermon (on the Mount), I should derive the same joy from it as I do from the Gita.

*Young India*, 22-12-'27, p. 426

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Jesus expressed, as no other could, the spirit and will of God. It is in this sense that I see Him and recognize Him as the Son of God. And because the life of Jesus has the significance and the transcendency to which I have alluded, I believe that He belongs not solely to Christianity, but to the entire world, to all races and people—it matters little under what flag, name or doctrine they may work, profess a faith, or worship a God inherited from their ancestors.

*The Modern Review*, October 1941, p. 406

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On seeing a painting of the crucified Christ in Rome, Gandhiji remarked: 'What would not I have given to be able to bow my head before the living image at the Vatican of Christ Crucified? It was with a wrench that I could tear myself away from the scene of living tragedy. I saw there at once that nations like individuals could only be made through the agony of the Cross and in no other way. Joy comes not out of infliction of pain on others but out of pain voluntarily borne by oneself.'

*This Was Bafiu*, By R. K. Prabhu, 1954. p. 29

## 12. BUDDHISM

I have heard it contended times without number and I have read in books also claiming to express the spirit of Buddhism that Buddha did not believe in God. In my humble opinion such a belief contradicts the very central fact of Buddha's teaching. . . . The confusion has arisen over his rejection and just rejection of all the base things that passed in his generation under the name of God. He undoubtedly rejected the notion that a being called God was actuated by malice, could repent of His actions and like the kings of the earth could possibly be open to temptations and bribes and could possibly have favourites. His whole soul rose in mighty indignation against the belief that a being called God required for His satisfaction the living blood of animals in order that He might be pleased –animals who were His own creation. He, therefore, reinstated God in the right- place and dethroned the usurper who for the time being seemed to occupy that White Throne. He emphasized and re-declared the eternal and unalterable existence of the moral government of this universe. He unhesitatingly said that the Law was God Himself.

God's laws are eternal and unalterable and not separable from God Himself. It is an indispensable condition of His very perfection. And hence the great confusion that Buddha disbelieved in God and simply believed in the moral law, and because of this confusion about God Himself, arose the confusion about the proper understanding of the great word *nirvana*. *Nirvana* is undoubtedly not utter extinction. So far as I have been able to understand the central fact of Buddha's life, *nirvana* is utter extinction of all that is base in us, all that is vicious in us, all that is corrupt and corruptible in us. *Nirvana* is not like the black, dead peace of the grave, but the living peace, the living happiness of a soul which is conscious of itself, and conscious of having found its own abode in the heart of the Eternal.

*Young India*, 24-11-'27, p. 393

### 13. ISLAM

I do regard Islam to be a religion of peace in the same sense as Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism are. No doubt there are differences in degree, but the object of these religions is peace. I have given my opinion that the followers of Islam are too free with the sword. But that is not due to the teaching of the Koran. This is due, in my opinion, to the environment in which Islam was born. Christianity has a bloody record against it not because Jesus was found wanting, but because the environment in which it spread was not responsive to his lofty teaching.

*Young India, 20-1-'27, p. 21*

#### 14. THEOSOPHY

Asked whether he had ever been a member of the Theosophical Society, Gandhiji is reported to have stated that he had never been a member, but he was and had ever been in sympathy with its message of Universal Brotherhood and consequent toleration.

He added: 'I owe much to the Theosophical friends among whom I have many. Whatever critics may say against Madame Blavatsky, or Col. Olcott or Dr. Besant, their contribution to humanity will always rank high. What has been a bar to my joining the society is its secret side—its occultism. It has never appealed to me.'

*This Was Bapu*, By R. K. Prabhu, 1954, p. 13

## 15. SPIRITUALISM

I never receive communications from the spirits of the dead. I have no evidence warranting a disbelief in the possibility of such communications. But I do strongly disapprove of the practice of holding or attempting to hold such communications. They are often deceptive and are products of the imagination. The practice is harmful both to the medium and the spirits, assuming the possibility of such communications. It attracts and ties to the earth the spirit so invoked, whereas its effort should be to detach itself from the earth, and rise higher. A spirit is not necessarily purer because it is disembodied. It takes with it most of the frailties to which it was liable when on earth. Information or advice, therefore, given by it need not be true or sound. That the spirit likes communications with those on earth is no matter for pleasure. On the contrary it should be weaned from such unlawful attachment. So much for the harm done to the spirits.

As for the medium, it is a matter of positive knowledge with me that all those within my experience have been deranged or weak-brained and disabled for practical work whilst they were holding, or thought they were holding, such communications. I can recall no friend of mine who having held such communications had benefited in any way.

*Young India*, 12-9-'29, p. 302

## 16. SUPERIORITY AND INFERIORITY OF RELIGIONS

So long as there are different religions, everyone of them may need some outward distinctive symbol. But when the symbol is made into a fetish and an instrument of proving the superiority of one's religion over others', it is fit only to be discarded.

*Autobiography, 1948, p. 480*

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God has created different faiths just as He has the votaries thereof. How can I even secretly harbour the thought that my neighbour's faith is inferior to mine and wish that he should give up his faith and embrace mine? As a true and loyal friend, I can only wish and pray that he may live and grow perfect in his own faith. In God's house there are many mansions and they are equally holy.

*Harijan, 20-4-'34, p. 83*

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My fear is that though Christian friends nowadays do not say or admit that Hindu religion is untrue, they must harbour in their breasts the belief that Hinduism is an error and that Christianity as they believe it is the only true religion. Without some such thing it is not possible to understand, much less to appreciate, the G.M.S. appeal<sup>1</sup> from which I reproduced in these columns some revealing extracts the other day. One could understand the attack on untouchability and many other errors that have crept into Hindu life. And if they would help us to get rid of the admitted abuses and purify our religion, they would do helpful constructive work which would be gratefully accepted. But so far as one can understand the present effort, it is to uproot Hinduism from the very foundation and replace it by another faith. It is like an attempt to destroy a house which though badly in want of repair appears to the dweller quite decent and habitable. No wonder he welcomes those who show him how to repair it and even offer; to do so themselves. But he would most decidedly resist those who sought to destroy that house that had served well him and his ancestors for ages, unless he, the dweller, was convinced that the house was



beyond repair and unfit for human habitation. If the Christian world entertains that opinion about the Hindu house, 'Parliament of Religions' and 'International Fellowship' are empty phrases. For both the terms presuppose equality of status, a common platform. There cannot be a common platform as between inferiors and superiors, or the enlightened and unenlightened, the regenerate and the unregenerate, the high-born and the low-born, the casteman and the outcaste. My comparison may be defective, may even sound offensive. My reasoning may be unsound. But my proposition stands.

*Harijan*, 13-3-'37, p. 36

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The aim of the Fellowship (of Faiths) should be to help a Hindu to become a better Hindu, a Mussalman to become a better Mussalman, and a Christian a better Christian. The attitude of patronizing toleration is false to the spirit of International Fellowship. If I have a suspicion in my mind that my religion is more or less true, and that others' are more or less false, instead of being more or less true, then, though I may have some sort of fellowship with them, it is of an entirely different kind from the one we need in the International Fellowship. Our prayer for others must be NOT 'God, give him the light that Thou hast given me/ BUT 'Give him all the light and truth he needs for his highest development.' Pray merely that your friends may become better men, whatever their form of religion.

Nevertheless, your experience may become a part of their experience, without your knowing it.

*Sabarmati*, A Report of the First Annual Meeting of the Federation of International Fellowship] 1928, pp. 17-19.

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1 The appeal issued by the Church Missionary Society of England, extracts wherefrom were reproduced in the *Harijan* issue of 26-12-'36.

## 17. CONVERSION

C. F. Andrews: What would you say to a man who after considerable thought and prayer said that he could not have his peace and salvation except by becoming a Christian ?

Gandhiji: I would say if a non-Christian (say a Hindu) came to a Christian and made that statement, he should ask him to become a good Hindu rather than find goodness in change of faith.

C.F.A: I cannot in this go the whole length with you, though you know my own position. I discarded the position that there is no salvation except through Christ long ago. But supposing the Oxford Group Movement people changed the life of your son, and he felt like being converted, what would you say ?

Gandhiji: I would say that the Oxford Group may change the lives of as many as they like but not their religion. They can draw their attention to the best in their respective religions and change their lives by asking them to live according to them. There came to me a man, the son of Brahmana parents, who said his reading of your book had led him to embrace Christianity. I asked him if he thought that the religion of his forefathers was wrong. He said, 'No.' Then I said: 'Is there any difficulty about your accepting the Bible as one of the great religious books of the world and Christ as one of the great teachers?' I said to him that you had never through your books asked Indians to take up the Bible and embrace Christianity, and that he had misread your book—unless of course your position is like that of the late M. Mahommed Ali's, viz., that a believing Mussalman, however bad his life, is better than a good Hindu.'

C.F.A.: I do not accept M. Mahommed Ali's position at all. But I do say that if a person really needs a change of faith I should not stand in his way.

Gandhiji: But don't you see that you do not even give him a chance? You do not even cross-examine him. Supposing a Christian came to me and said he was captivated by a reading of the Bhagawat and so wanted to declare himself a Hindu, I should say to him: 'No. What the Bhagawat offers the Bible also offers.

You have not yet made the attempt to find it out. Make the attempt and be a good Christian.'

C.F.A.: I don't know. If someone earnestly says that he will become a good Christian, I should say, 'You may become one', though you know that I have in my own life strongly dissuaded ardent enthusiasts who came to me. I said to them, 'Certainly not on *my* account will you do anything of the kind.' But human nature does require a concrete faith.

Gandhiji: If a person wants to believe in the Bible let him say so, but why should he discard his own religion? This proselytization will mean no peace in the world. Religion is a very personal matter. We should by living the life according to our lights share the best with one another, thus adding to the sum total of human effort to reach God.

"Consider," continued Gandhiji, "whether you are going to accept the position of mutual toleration or of equality of all religions. My position is that all the great religions are fundamentally equal. We must have innate respect for other religions as we have for our own. Mind you, not mutual toleration, but equal respect."

*Harijan*, 28-11-'36, p. 330

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Conscience is not the same thing for all. Whilst, therefore, it is a good guide for individual conduct, imposition of that conduct upon all will be an insufferable interference with everybody else's freedom of conscience.

*Young India*, 23-9-'26, p. 334

## 18. THE BETTER WAY

The propagation of truth and non-violence can be done less by books than by actually living those principles. Life truly lived is more than books.

*Harijan*, 13-5-'39 p. 122

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After long study and experience, I have come to the conclusion that (1) all religions are true; (2) all religions have some error in them; (3) all religions are almost as dear to me as my own Hinduism, in as much as all human beings should be as dear to me as one's own close relatives. My own veneration for other faiths is the same as that for my own faith.

*Sabarmati*, 1928, p. 17

## SECTION FOUR: MY FAITH IN GOD

## 19. GOD IS

If we exist, if our parents and their parents have existed, then it is proper to believe in the Parent of the whole creation. If He is not we are nowhere. He is one and yet many; He is smaller than an atom, and bigger than the Himalayas. He is contained even in a drop of the ocean, and yet not even the seven seas can compass Him. Reason is powerless to know Him. He is beyond the reach or grasp of reason. But I need not labour the point. Faith is essential in this matter. My logic can make and unmake innumerable hypotheses. An atheist might floor me in a debate. But my faith runs so very much faster than my reason that I can challenge the whole world and say, 'God is, was and ever shall be.'

But those who want to deny His existence are at liberty to do so. He is merciful and compassionate. He is not an earthly king needing an army to make us accept His sway. He allows us freedom, and yet His compassion commands obedience to His will. But if any one of us disdain to bow to His will, He says \* 'So be it. My sun will shine no less for thee, my clouds will rain no less for thee. I need not force thee to accept my sway.' Of such a God let the ignorant dispute the existence. I am one of the millions of wise men who believe in Him and am never tired of bowing to Him and singing His glory.

*Young India, 21-1-'26. pp. 30-31*

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There is an indefinable mysterious Power that pervades everything. I feel it, though I do not see it. It is this unseen Power which makes itself felt and yet defies all proof, because it is so unlike all that I perceive through my senses. It transcends the senses.

But it is possible to reason out the existence of God to a limited extent. Even in ordinary affairs we know that people do not know who rules or why, and how he rules. And yet they know that there is a power that certainly rules. In my tour last year in Mysore I met many poor villagers and I found upon inquiry that

they did not know who ruled Mysore. They simply said some god ruled it. If the knowledge of these poor people was so limited about their ruler I who am infinitely lesser than God, than they than their ruler, need not be surprised if I do not realize the presence of God, the King of kings. Nevertheless I do feel as the poor villagers felt about Mysore that there is orderliness in the Universe, there is an unalterable Law governing everything and every being that exists or lives. It is not a blind law, for no blind law can govern the conduct of living beings, and thanks to the marvelous researches of Sir J. CL Bose, it can now be proved that even matter is life. That Law then which governs all life is God. Law and the Law-giver are one. I may not deny the Law or the Law-giver, because I know so little about It or Him. Even as my denial or ignorance of the existence of an earthly power will avail me nothing, so will not my denial of God and His Law liberate me from its operation, whereas humble and mute acceptance of divine authority makes life's journey easier even as the acceptance of earthly rule makes life under it easier.

I do dimly perceive that whilst everything around me is ever changing, ever dying, there is underlying all that change a living power that is changeless, that holds all together, that creates, dissolves and re-creates. That informing power or spirit is God. And since nothing else I see merely through the senses can or will persist, He alone is.

And is this power benevolent or malevolent? I see it as purely benevolent. For I can see that in the midst of death life persists, in the midst of untruth truth persists, in the midst of darkness light persists. Hence I gather that God is Life, Truth, Light. He is Love. He is the Supreme Good.

But He is no God who merely satisfies the intellect, if He ever does. God to be God must rule the heart and transform it. He must express Himself in even the smallest act of His votary. This can only be done through a definite realization more real than the five senses can ever produce. Sense perceptions can be, often are, false and deceptive, however real they may appear to us. Where there is realization outside the senses it is infallible. It is proved not by

extraneous evidence but in the transformed conduct and character of those who have felt the real presence of God within.

Such testimony is to be found in the experience of an unbroken line of prophets and sages in all countries and climes. To reject this evidence is to deny oneself.

This realization is preceded by an immovable faith. He who would in his own person test the fact of God's presence can do so by a living faith. And since faith itself cannot be proved by extraneous evidence, the safest course is to believe in the moral government of the world and therefore in the supremacy of the moral law, the law of Truth and Love. Exercise of faith will be the safest where there is a clear determination summarily to reject all that is contrary to Truth and Love.

I cannot account for the existence of evil by any rational method. To want to do is to be coequal with God. I am therefore humble enough to recognize evil as such. And I call God long suffering and patient precisely because He permits evil in the world. I know that He has no evil. He is the author of it and yet untouched by it.

I know too that I shall never know God if I do not wrestle with and against evil even at the cost of life itself. I am fortified in the belief by my own humble and limited experience. The purer I try to become, the nearer I feel to be to God. How much more should I be, when my faith is not a mere apology as it is today but has become as immovable as the Himalayas and as white and bright as the snows on their peaks? Meanwhile I invite the correspondent to pray with Newman who sang from experience Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom, Lead Thou me on;

The night is dark and I am far from home, Lead Thou me on;

Keep Thou my feet, I do not ask to see

The distant scene; one step enough for me.

*Young India*, 11-10-'28. pp. 340-41



Rationalists are admirable beings, rationalism is a hideous monster when it claims for itself omnipotence. Attribution of omnipotence to reason is as bad a piece of idolatry as is worship of stock and stone believing it to be God. I plead not for the suppression of reason, but for a due recognition of that in us which sanctifies reason.

*Young India*, 14-10-'26, p. 359

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It is easy enough to say, 'I do not believe in God.' For God permits all things to be said of Him with impunity. He looks at our acts. And any breach of His Law carries with it, not its vindictive, but its purifying, compelling punishment.

*Young India*, 23-9-26, p. 333

## 20. THE NATURE OF GOD

I do not regard God as a person. Truth for me is God, and God's Law and God are not different things or facts, in the sense that an earthly king and his law are different. Because God is an Idea, Law Himself. Therefore, it is impossible to conceive God as breaking the Law. He, therefore, does not rule our actions and withdraw Himself. When we say He rules our actions, we are simply using human language and we try to limit Him. Otherwise, He and His Law abide everywhere and govern everything. Therefore I do not think that He answers in every detail every request of ours, but there is no doubt that He rules our actions, and I literally believe that not a blade of grass grows or moves without His will. The free will we enjoy is less than that of a passenger on a crowded deck.

"Do you feel a sense of freedom in your communion with God?"

I do. I do not feel cramped as I would on a boat full of passengers. Although I know that my freedom is less than that of a passenger, I appreciate that freedom as I have imbibed through and through the central teaching of the Gita that man is the maker of his own destiny in the sense that he has freedom of choice as to the manner in which he uses that freedom. But he is no controller of results. The moment he thinks he is, he comes to grief.

*Harijan, 23-3-'40, p. 55*

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Perfection is the attribute of the Almighty, and yet what a great democrat He is! What an amount of wrong and humbug He suffers on our part! He even suffers us, insignificant creatures of His, to question His very existence, though He is in every atom about us, around us and within us. But He has reserved to Himself the right of becoming manifest to whomsoever He chooses. He is a Being without hands and feet and other organs, -yet he can see Him to whom He chooses to reveal Himself.

*Harijan, 14-11-'36, p. 316*

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In a strictly scientific sense God is at the bottom of both good and evil. He directs the assassin's dagger no less than the surgeon's knife. But all that good and evil are, for human purposes, from each other distinct and incompatible, being symbolical of light and darkness, God and Satan.

*Harijan, 20-2-'37, p. 9*

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The laws of Nature are changeless, unchangeable, and there are no miracles in the sense of infringement or interruption of Nature's laws. But we, limited beings, fancy all kinds of things and impute our limitations to God.

*Harijan, 17-4-'37, p. 87*

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To me God is Truth and Love; God is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness. God is the source of Light and Life and yet He is above and beyond all these. God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist. For in His boundless love God permits the atheist to live. He is the searcher of hearts. He transcends speech and reason. He knows us and our hearts better than we do ourselves. He does not take us at our word for He knows that we often do not mean it, some knowingly and others unknowingly. He is a personal God to those who need His personal presence. He is embodied to those who need His touch. He is the purest essence. He simply is to those who have faith. He is all things to all men. He is in us and yet above and beyond us. One may banish the word 'God', but one has no power to banish the Thing itself. And surely conscience is but a poor and laborious paraphrase of the simple combination of three letters called God. He cannot cease to be because hideous immoralities or inhuman brutalities are committed in His name. He is long suffering. He is patient but He is also terrible.. He is the most exacting personage in the world and the world to come. He metes out the same measure to us as we mete out to our neighbours – men and brutes. With Him ignorance is no excuse. And withal He is ever forgiving for He always gives us the chance to repent. He is the greatest

democrat the world knows, for He leaves us 'unfettered' to make our own choice between evil and good. He is the greatest tyrant ever known, for He often dashes the cup from our lips and under cover of free will leaves us a margin so wholly inadequate as to provide only mirth for Himself at our expense, therefore it is that Hinduism calls it all His sport – *Lila*, or calls it all an illusion – *Maya*. We are *not*, He alone *Is*. And if we will be, we must eternally sing His praise and do His will. Let us dance to the tune of His *bansi* (flute), and all would be well.

*Young India*, 5-3-'25, p. 81

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[Replying to a question asked of him at a meeting in Switzerland on his way back from the Round Table Conference in London, Gandhiji said:]

You have asked me why I consider that God is Truth. In my early youth I was taught to repeat what in Hindu scriptures are known as one thousand names of God. But these one thousand names of God were by no means exhaustive. We believe – and I think it is the truth – that God has as many names as there are creatures and, therefore, we also say that God is nameless and since God has many forms we also consider Him formless, and since He speaks to us through many tongues we consider Him to be speechless and so on. And so when I came to study Islam I found that Islam too had many names for God. I would say with those who say God is Love, God is Love. But deep down in me used to say that though God may be Love, God is Truth, above all. If it is possible for the human tongue to give the fullest description of God, I have come to the conclusion that for myself, God is Truth. But two years ago I went a step further and said that Truth is God. You will see the fine distinction between the two statements, viz., that God is Truth and Truth is God. And I came to that conclusion after a continuous and relentless search after Truth which began nearly fifty years ago. I then found that the nearest approach to Truth was through Love. But I also found that love has many meanings in the English language at least and that human love in the sense of passion could become a degrading thing also. I found too that love in the sense of Ahimsa had only a limited number of votaries in the world. But I never found a double meaning in

connection with truth and even atheists had not demurred to the necessity or power of truth. But in their passion for discovering truth the atheists have not hesitated to deny the very existence of God—from their own point of view rightly. And it was because of this reasoning that I saw that rather than say that God is Truth I should say that Truth is God. I recall the name of Charles Bradlaugh who delighted to call himself an atheist but knowing as I do something of him, I would never regard him as an atheist. I would call him a God-fearing man, though I know that he would reject the claim. His face would redden if I would say " Mr Bradlaugh, you are a truth-fearing man, and so a God-fearing man. " I would automatically disarm his criticism by saying that Truth is God, as have I disarmed criticisms of many a young man. Add to this the great difficulty that millions have taken the name of God and in His name committed nameless atrocities. Not that scientists very often do not commit cruelties in the name of Truth. I know how in the name of truth and science inhuman cruelties are perpetrated on animals when men perform vivisection. There are thus a number of difficulties in the way, no matter how you describe God. But the human mind is a limited thing, and you have to labour under limitations when you think of a being or entity who is beyond the power of man to grasp.

And then we have another thing in Hindu philosophy, viz., God alone is and nothing else exists, and the same truth you find emphasized and exemplified in the Kalma of Islam. There you find it clearly stated that God alone is and nothing else exists. In fact the Sanskrit word for Truth is a word which literally means that which exists — *Sat*. For these and several other reasons that I can give you I have come to the conclusion that the definition, 'Truth is God', gives me the greatest satisfaction. And when you want to find truth as God the only inevitable means is Love, i.e., non-violence, and since I believe that ultimately the means and the end are convertible terms, I should not hesitate to say that God is Love.

'What then is Truth?'

A difficult question, (said Gandhiji), but I have solved it for myself by saying that it is what the voice within tells you. How, then, you ask, do different

people think of different and contrary truths? Well, seeing that the human mind works through innumerable media and that the evolution of the human mind is not the same for all, it follows that what may be truth for one may be untruth for another, and hence those who have made these experiments have come to the conclusion that there are certain conditions to be observed in making those experiments. Just as for conducting scientific experiments there is an indispensable scientific course of instruction, in the same way strict preliminary discipline is necessary to qualify a person to make experiments in the spiritual realm. Everyone should, therefore, realize his limitations before he speaks of his Inner Voice. Therefore we have the belief based upon experience, that those who would make individual search after truth as God, must go through several vows, as for instance, the vow of truth, the vow of Brahmacharya (purity) – for you cannot possibly divide your love for Truth and God with anything else—, the vow of nonviolence, of poverty and non-possession. Unless you impose on yourselves the five vows you may not embark on the experiment at all. There are several other conditions prescribed, but I must not take you through all of them. Suffice it to say that those who have made these experiments know that it is not proper for everyone to claim to hear the voice of conscience, and it is because we have at the present moment everybody claiming the right of conscience without going through any discipline whatsoever and there is so much untruth being delivered to a bewildered world, all that I can, in true humility, present to you is that truth is not to be found by anybody who has not got an abundant sense of humility. If you would swing on the bosom of the ocean of Truth you must reduce yourself to a zero. Further than this I cannot go along this fascinating path.

*Young India* 31-12-'31, pp. 427-28

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There are innumerable definitions of God, because His manifestations are innumerable. They overwhelm me with wonder and awe and for a moment stun me. But I worship God as Truth only- I have not yet found Him, but I am seeking after Him. I am prepared to sacrifice the things dearest to me in pursuit of this quest. Even if the sacrifice demanded be my very life, I hope I may be prepared

to give it. But as long as I have not realized this Absolute Truth, so long must I hold by the relative truth as I have conceived it. That relative truth must, meanwhile, be my beacon, my shield and buckler. Though this path is straight and narrow and sharp as the razor's edge, for me has it been the quickest and easiest. Even my Himalayan blunders have seemed trifling to me because I have kept strictly to this path- For the path has saved me from coming to grief, and I have gone forward according to my light. Often in my progress I have had faint glimpses of the Absolute Truth, God, and daily the conviction is growing upon me that He alone is real and all else is unreal.

The further conviction has been growing upon me that whatever is possible for me is possible even for a child, and I have sound reasons for saying so. The instruments for the quest of Truth are as simple as they are difficult. They may appear quite impossible to an arrogant person, and quite possible to an innocent child. The seeker after Truth should be humbler than the dust. The world crushes the dust under its feet, but the seeker after Truth should so humble himself that even the dust could crush him.

Let hundreds like me perish, but let Truth prevail.

From Introduction to *Autobiography*, pp. 6-7

## 21. GOD IN MY EXPERIENCE

I am surer of His existence than of the fact that you and I are sitting in this room. Then I can also testify that I may live without air and water but not without Him. You may pluck out my eyes, but that cannot kill me. You may chop off my nose, but that will not kill me. Bu' blast my belief in God, and I am dead. You may call this a superstition, but I confess it is a superstition that I hug, even as I used to do the name of Rama in my childhood when there was any cause of danger or alarm.

*Harijan, 14-5-'38 p. 109*

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I learnt to rely consciously upon God before I was fifteen years old.

*Harijan, 11-3-'39, p. 46*

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When I admire the wonder of a sunset or the beauty of the moon, my soul expands in worship of the Creator. I try to see Him and His mercies in all these creations.

*Young India 13-11 -'24, p. 378*

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What I want to achieve, – what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years, –is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain *Moksha*<sup>1</sup>. I live and move and have my being in pursuit of this goal. All that I do by way of speaking and writing, and all my ventures in the political field, are directed to this same end.

From Introduction to *Autobiography*, pp. 4-5

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It is an unbroken torture to me that I am still so far from Him, who, as I fully know, governs every breath of my life, and whose offspring I am. I know that it is the evil passions within that keep me so far from Him, and yet I cannot get away from them.



From Introduction to *Autobiography*, p. 8

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I must go with God as my only guide. He is a jealous Lord. He will allow no one to share His authority. One has, therefore, to appear before Him in all one's weakness, empty-handed and in a spirit of full surrender, and then He enables you-, to stand before a whole world and protects you from all harm.

*Young India*, 3-9-'31, p. 247

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I do not want to foresee the future. I am concerned with taking care of the present. God has given me no control over the moment following.

*Young India*, 26-12-'24, p. 427

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Do not seek to protect me. The Most High is always there to protect us all. You may be sure that when my time is up, no one, not even the most renowned in the world, can stand between Him and me.

*Young India*, 2-4-'31, p. 54

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God saves me so long as He wants me in this body. The moment His wants are satisfied, no precautions on my part will save me.

*Bapu's Letters to Mira*, 1949, p. 91

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God is the hardest taskmaster I have known on earth, and He tries you through and through. And when you find that your faith is failing or your body is failing you, and you are sinking, He comes to your assistance somehow or other, and proves to you that you must not lose your faith and that He is always at your beck and call, but on His terms, not on your terms.

*Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, 4th ed., p. 1069

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He (a votary of the Gita) takes note of things as they happen and reacts naturally to them, fulfilling his part as if propelled by the great Mechanic, even

as a piece of machine in good order responds automatically to the call of the machinist. It is the most difficult thing for an *intelligent* being to be like a machine. And yet, if one is to become a zero, that is precisely what one desiring perfection has to become. The vital difference between the machine and the man is that the machine is inert, the man is all life and consciously becomes like a machine in the hands of the Master Mechanic. Krishna says in so many words that God moves all beings as if they were parts of a machine.

*Bapu's Letters to Mira, 1949, pp. 238-39*

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I have been a willing slave to this most exacting Master for more than half a century. His voice has been increasingly audible as years have rolled by. He has never forsaken me even in my darkest hour. He has saved me often against myself and left me not a vestige of independence. The greater the surrender to Him, the greater has been my joy.

*Harijan, 6-5-'33, p. 4*

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God is with us and looks after us as if He had no other care besides. How this happens I do not know. That it does happen I do know. Those who have faith have all their cares lifted from off their shoulders.

*Bapu's Letters to Mira, 1949, p. 267*

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Defeat cannot dishearten me. It can only chasten me. I know that God will guide me.

*Young India, 3-7-'24, p. 218*

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There is not a moment when I do not feel that presence of a Witness whose eye misses nothing and with whom I strive to keep in tune.

I cannot recall a moment in my life when I had a sense of desertion by God.

*Harijan, 24-12-'38, p. 395*

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If I did not feel the presence of God within me, I see so much of misery and disappointment every day that I would be a raving maniac and my destination would be the Hooghli.

*Young India*, 6-8-'25, p. 272

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As days pass I feel this Living Presence in every fibre of my veins. Without that feeling I should be demented. There are so many things that are calculated to disturb my peace of mind. So many events happen that would, without the realization of that Presence, shake me to the very foundation. But they pass me by leaving me practically untouched.

*Bapu's Letters to Mira*, 1949, p. 268

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I believe it to be possible for every human being to attain that blessed and indescribable sinless state in which he feels within himself the presence of God to the exclusion of everything else.

*Young India*, 17-11-'21, p. 368

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1 Lit. freedom from birth and death. The nearest English equivalent is salvation.

## 22. THE INNER VOICE

My claim to hear the Voice of God is no new claim. Unfortunately there is no way that I know of proving the claim except through results.

*Harijan, 6-5-'33, p. 4*

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The first question that has puzzled many is about the Voice of God. What was it? What did I here? Was there any person I saw? If not, how was the Voice conveyed to me ? These are pertinent questions.

For me the Voice of God, of Conscience, of Truth or the Inner Voice or 'the still small Voice' mean one and the same thing. I saw no form. I have never tried, for I have always believed God to be without form. But what I did hear was like a Voice from afar and yet quite near. . It was as unmistakable as some human voice definitely speaking to me, and irresistible. I was not dreaming at the time I heard the Voice. The hearing of the Voice was preceded by a terrific struggle within me. Suddenly the Voice came upon me. I listened, made certain that it was the Voice, and the struggle ceased. I was calm. The determination was made accordingly, the date and the hour of the fast were fixed. Joy came over me. This was between 11 and 12 midnight. I felt refreshed and began to write the note about it which the reader must have seen.

Could I give any further evidence that it was truly the Voice that I heard and that it was not an echo of my own heated imagination? I have no further evidence to convince the sceptic. He is free to say that it was all self- delusion or hallucination. It-may well have been so. I can offer no proof to the contrary. But I can say this that not the unanimous verdict of the whole world against me could shake me from the belief that what I heard was the true Voice of God.

But some think that God Himself is a creation of our own imagination. If that view holds good, then nothing is real, everything is of our own imagination. Even so, whilst my imagination dominates me, I can only act under its spell.

Realist things are only relatively so. For me the Voice was more real than my own existence. It has never failed me, and for that matter, anyone else.

And every one who wills can hear the Voice. It is within every one. But like everything else, it requires previous and definite preparation.

*Harijan, 8-7-'33, p. 4*

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I shall lose my usefulness the moment I stifle the 'still small Voice within'.

*Young India, 3-12-'25, p. 422*

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Nobody has to my knowledge questioned the possibility of the Inner Voice speaking to some, and it is a gain to the world even if one person's claim to speak under the authority of the Inner Voice can be really sustained. Many may make the claim, but not all will be able to substantiate it. But it cannot and ought not to be suppressed for the sake of preventing false claimants. There is no danger whatsoever if many people could truthfully represent the Inner Voice. But, unfortunately, there is no remedy against hypocrisy. Virtue must not be suppressed because many will feign it. Men have always been found throughout the world claiming to speak for the Inner Voice. But no harm has yet overtaken the world through their short-lived activities. Before one is able to listen to that Voice, one has to go through a long and fairly severe course of training, and when it is the Inner Voice that speaks, it is unmistakable. The world cannot be successfully fooled for all time. There is, therefore, no danger of anarchy setting in because a humble man like me will not be suppressed and will dare to claim the authority of the Inner Voice, when he believes that he has heard it.

*Harijan, 18-3-'33, p. 8*

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Man is a fallible being. He can never be sure of his steps. What he may regard as answer to prayer may be an echo of his pride. For infallible guidance man has to have a perfectly innocent heart incapable of evil. I can lay no such claim. Mine is a struggling, striving, erring, imperfect soul.

*Young India*, 25-9-'24, p. 313

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Having made a ceaseless effort to attain self-purification, I have developed some little capacity to hear correctly and clearly the 'still small Voice within.

*The Epic Fast* By Pyarelal, 1933, p. 34

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My firm belief is that He reveals Himself daily to every human being, but we shut our ears to the 'still small Voice'.

*Young India*, 25-5-'21, p. 162

**SECTION FIVE: MY RELIGION IN PRACTICE**

### 23. RELIGION OF LOVE

Where love is, there God is also.

*Satyagraha in South Africa, 1950, p. 360*

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Non-violence is an active force of the highest order. It is soul-force or the power of Godhead within us. We become Godlike to the extent we realize non-violence.

*Harijan, 12-11-'38 p. 326*

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Scientists tell us that without the presence of the cohesive force amongst the atoms that comprise this globe of ours, it would crumble to pieces and we would cease to exist; and even as there is cohesive force in blind matter, so must there be in all things animate, and the name for that cohesive force among animate beings is Love. We notice it between father and son, between brother and sister, friend and friend. But we have to learn to use that force among all that lives, and in the use of it consists our knowledge of God.

*Young India, 5-5-'20, p. 7*

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Man's highest endeavour lies in trying to find God, said Gandhiji. He cannot be found in temples or idols or places of worship built by man's hands, nor can He be found by abstinences. God can be found only through love, not earthly, but divine.

*Harijan, 23-11-'47, p. 425*

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I claim that even now, though the social structure is not based on a conscious acceptance of non-violence, all the world over mankind lives and men retain their possessions on the sufferance of one another. If they had not done so, only the fewest and the most ferocious would have survived. But such is not the case. Families are bound together by ties of love, and so are groups in the so-



called civilized society called nations. Only they do not recognize- the supremacy of the law of non-violence. It follows, therefore, that they have not investigated its vast possibilities. Hitherto out of sheer inertia, shall I say, we have taken it for granted that complete non-violence is possible only for the few who take the vow of non-possession and the allied abstinences. Whilst it is true that the votaries alone can carry on research work and declare from time to time the new possibilities of the great eternal law governing man, if it is the law, it must hold good for all. The many failures we see are not of the law but of the followers, many of whom do not even know that they are under that law willy nilly. When a mother dies for her child she unknowingly obeys the law. I have been pleading for the past fifty years for a conscious acceptance of the law and its zealous practice even in the face of failures. Fifty years' work has shown marvellous results and strengthened my faith.

*Harijan, 22-2-'42, p. 48*

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I have suggested in these columns that woman is the incarnation of Ahimsa. Ahimsa means infinite love, which again means infinite capacity for suffering. Who but woman, the mother of man, shows this capacity in the largest measure? She shows it as she carries the infant and feeds it during nine months and derives joy in the suffering involved. What can beat the suffering caused by the pangs of labour? But she forgets them in the joy of creation. Who again suffers daily so that her babe may wax from day to day ? Let her transfer that love to the whole of humanity, let her forget that she ever was or can be the object of man's lust. And she will occupy her proud position by the side of man as his mother, maker and silent leader. It is given to her to teach the art of peace to the warring world thirsting for that nectar.

*Harijan, 24-2-'40, p. 13*

## 24. LOVE EXPRESSING ITSELF IN SELF-SACRIFICING SERVICE

### A. SERVICE

The only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and be one with it. This can only be done by service of all. I am a part and parcel of the whole, and I cannot find Him apart from the rest of humanity. My countrymen are my nearest neighbours. They have become so helpless, so resourceless, so inert that I must concentrate myself on serving them. If I could persuade myself that I should find Him in a Himalayan cave I would proceed there immediately. But I know that I cannot find Him apart from humanity.

*Harijan, 29-8-'36, p. 226*

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God having cast my lot in midst of the people of India, I should be untrue to my Maker if I failed to serve them. If I do not know how to serve them I shall never know how to serve humanity.

*Young India, 18-6-'25, p. 211*

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And as I know that God is found more often in the lowliest of His creatures than in the high and mighty, I am struggling to reach the status of these. I cannot do so without their service. Hence my passion for the service of the suppressed classes. And as I cannot render this service without entering politics, I find myself in them.

*Young India, 11-9-'24, p. 298*

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If I am to identify myself with the grief of the least in India, aye, if I have the power, the least in the world,, let me identify myself with the sins of the little ones who are under my care. And so doing in all humility, I hope someday to see God—Truth—face to face.

*Young India, 3-12-'25, p. 422.*

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I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, try the following expedient:

Recall the face of the poorest and the most helpless man whom you have seen and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to *him*. Will he be able to gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words will it lead to Swaraj or self-rule for the hungry and also spiritually starved millions of our countrymen?

Then you will find your doubts and yourself melting away.

[From a letter to a friend]

*This Was Bapu*, by R. K. Prabhu, 1954, p. 48

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While he was engaged with Mahatmaji, a young American missionary asked him what religion he professed and what shape the future religion of India was likely to assume.

His reply was very brief. Pointing to the two sick persons in the room, he said 'To serve is my religion. I do not worry about the future.'

*This Was Bapu*, by R. K. Prabhu, 1954, p. 4

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Religion is service of the helpless. God manifests Himself to us in the form of the helpless and the stricken.

I have certainly regarded spinning superior to the practice of denominational religions. But that does not mean that the latter should be given up. I only mean that a Dharma which has to be observed by the followers of all religions transcends them, and hence I say that a Brahmana is a better Brahmana, a Mussalman a better Mussalman, a Vaishnava a better Vaishnava, if he turns the (spinning) wheel in the spirit of service.

If it was possible for me to turn the wheel in my bed and if I felt that it would help me in concentrating my mind on God, I would certainly leave the rosary aside and turn the wheel. If I am strong enough to turn the wheel, and I have to make a choice between counting beads or turning the wheel, I would certainly

decide in favour of the wheel, making it my rosary, so long as I found poverty and starvation stalking the land. I do look forward to a time when even repeating the name of Rama will become a hindrance. When I have realized that Rama transcends even speech, I shall have no need to repeat the name. The spinning wheel, the rosary and the Ramanama are the same to me. They subserve the same end, they teach me the religion of service. I cannot practise Ahimsa without practising the religion of service, and I cannot find the truth without practising the religion of Ahimsa. And there is no religion other than truth.

*Young India, 14-8-'24, p. 267*

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Hand-spinning does not, it is not intended that it should, compete with, in order to displace, any existing type of industry; it does not aim at withdrawing a single able-bodied person, who can otherwise find a remunerative occupation from his work. The sole claim advanced on its behalf is that it alone offers an immediate, practicable, and permanent solution of that problem of problems that confronts India, viz., the enforced idleness for nearly six months in the year of an overwhelming majority of India's population, owing to lack of a suitable supplementary occupation to agriculture and the chronic starvation of the masses that results there from.

*Young India, 21-10-'26, p. 368*

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We should be ashamed of resting, or having a square meal, so long as there is one able-bodied man or woman without work or food.

*Young India, 5-2-'25, p. 48.*

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Imagine, therefore, what a calamity it must be to have 300 million unemployed, several millions becoming degraded every day for want of employment, devoid of self-respect, devoid of faith in God. I may as well place before the dog over there the message of God as before those hungry millions who have no lustre in their eyes and whose only God is their bread. I can take

before them a message of God only by taking the message of sacred work before them. It is good enough to talk of God whilst we are sitting here after a nice breakfast and looking forward to a nicer luncheon, but how am I to talk of God to the millions who have to go without two meals a day ? To them God can only appear as bread and butter.

*Young India*, 15-10-'31, p. 310

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Self-realization I hold to be impossible without service of an identification with the poorest.

*Young India*, 21-10-'26, p. 364

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## B. SACRIFICE

The human body is meant solely for service, never for indulgence. The secret of happy life lies in renunciation. Renunciation is life. Indulgence spells death. Therefore, everyone has a right and should desire to live 125 years *while performing service without an eye on result*. Such life must be wholly and solely dedicated to service. Renunciation made for the sake of such service is an ineffable joy of which none can deprive one, because that nectar springs from within and sustains life. In this there can be no room for worry or impatience. Without this joy, long life is impossible and would not be worthwhile even if possible.

*Harijan*, 24-2-'46, p. 19

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This body, therefore, has been given us, only in order that we may serve all creation with it.

And even as a bond slave receives food, clothing and so on from the master whom he serves, so should we gratefully accept such gifts as may be assigned to us by the Lord of the universe. What we receive must be called a gift; for as debtors we are entitled to no consideration for the discharge of our obligations. Therefore we may not blame the Master, if we fail to get it. Our body is His to

be cherished or cast away according to His will. This is not a matter for complaint or even pity; on the contrary, it is natural and even a pleasant and desirable state, if only we realize our proper place in God's scheme. We do indeed need strong faith, if we would experience this supreme bliss. "Do not worry in the least about yourself, leave all worry to God,"—this appears to be the commandment in all religions.

This need not frighten any one. He who devotes himself to service with a clear conscience will day by day grasp the necessity for it in greater measure, and will continually grow richer in faith. The path of service can hardly be trodden by one, who is not prepared to renounce self-interest, and to recognize the conditions of his birth. Consciously or unconsciously every one of us does render some service or other. If we cultivate the habit of doing this service deliberately, our desire for service will steadily grow stronger, and will make not only for our own happiness, but that of the world at large.

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Again, not only the good, but all of us are bound to place our resources at the disposal of humanity. And if such is the law, as evidently it is, indulgence ceases to hold a place in life and gives way to renunciation. The duty of renunciation differentiates mankind from the beast.

Some object that life thus understood becomes dull and devoid of art, and leaves no room for the householder. But renunciation here does not mean abandoning the world and retiring into the forest. The spirit of renunciation should rule all the activities of life. A householder does not cease to be one if he regards life as a duty rather than as an indulgence. A merchant, who operates in the sacrificial spirit, will have crores passing through his hands, but he will therefore not cheat or speculate, will lead a simple life, will not injure a living soul and will lose millions rather than harm anybody. Let no one run away with the idea that this type of merchant exists only in my imagination. Fortunately for the world, it does exist in the West as well as in the East. It is true, such merchants may be counted on one's fingers' ends, but the type ceases to be imaginary, as soon as even one living specimen can be found to

answer to it. No doubt these sacrificers obtain their livelihood by their work. But livelihood is not their objective, but only a by-product of their vocation. A life of sacrifice is the pinnacle of art, and is full of true joy.

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.

Voluntary service of others demands the best of which one is capable, and must take precedence over service of self. In fact, the pure devotee consecrates himself to the service of humanity without any reservation whatever.

*From Yeravda Mandir, 1945, pp. 54-60*

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Sacrifices may be of many kinds. One of them may well be bread labour. If all laboured for their bread and no more, then there would be enough food and enough leisure for all. Then there would be no cry of over-population, no disease and no such misery as we see around. Such labour will be the highest form of sacrifice. Men will no doubt do many other things either through their bodies or through their minds, but all this will be labour of love for the common good. There will then be no rich and no poor, none high and none low, no touchable and no untouchable.

This may be unattainable ideal. But we need not, therefore, cease to strive for it. Even if without fulfilling the whole law of sacrifice, that is, the law of our being, we performed physical labour enough for our daily bread, we should go a long way towards the ideal.

If we did so, our wants would be minimized, our food would be simple. We should then eat to live, not live to eat. Let anyone who doubts the accuracy of this proposition try to sweat for his bread, he will derive the greatest relish

from the production of his labour, improve his health and discover that many things he took were superfluities.

May not men earn their bread by intellectual labour ? No. The needs of the body must be supplied by the body. 'Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's' perhaps applies- here well.

Mere mental, that is, intellectual labour is for the soul and is its own satisfaction. It should never demand payment. In the ideal state, doctors, lawyers and the like will work solely for the benefit of society, not for self. Obedience to law of bread labour will bring about a silent revolution in the structure of society. Men's triumph will consist in substituting the struggle for existence by the struggle for mutual service. The law of the brute will be replaced by the law of man.

*Harijan, 29-6-'35 p. 156*

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In India there is a particular type of man who delights in having as few needs as possible. He carries with him only a little flour and a pinch of salt and chillies tied in his napkin. He has a *lota* and a string to draw water from the well. He needs nothing else. He walks on foot covering 10-12 miles a day. He makes the dough in his napkin, collects a few twigs to make a fire and bakes his dough on the embers. It is called *bati*. Its relish does not lie in itself but in the appetite that honest toil and contentment of mind give. Such a man has God as his companion and friend and feels richer than any king or emperor. God is not the friend of those who inwardly covet other's riches. Everyone can copy this example and enjoy ineffable peace and happiness himself and radiate it to others. On the other hand, if one hankers after riches, one has to resort to exploitation, by whatever name it may be called. Even then the crores cannot become millionaires. True happiness lies in contentment and companionship with God only.

*Harijan, 21-7-'46, p. 232*

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The true connotation of humility is self-effacement. Self-effacement is *moksha*. (salvation). Service without humility is selfishness and egotism.

*Autobiography*, 1948, p. 483

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When self-satisfaction creeps over a man, he has ceased to grow and therefore has become unfit for freedom. He who offers a little sacrifice from a lowly and religious spirit quickly realizes the littleness of it. Once on the path of sacrifice, we find out the measure of our selfishness and must continually wish to give more and not be satisfied till there is a complete self-surrender.

*Young India*, 29-9-'21, p. 306

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Not until we have reduced ourselves to nothingness can we conquer the evil in Us. God demands nothing less than complete self-surrender as the price for the only real freedom that is worth having. And when a man thus loses himself he immediately finds himself in the service of ail that lives. It becomes his delight and his recreation. He is - a new man, never weary of spending himself in the service of God's creation.

*Young India*, 20-12-'28, p. 420

## 25. LOVE IN OPPOSITION TO WRONG

### A. THE LAW OF LOVE AGAINST HATE

Having flung aside the sword, there is nothing except the cup of love which I can offer to those who oppose me. It is by offering that cup that I expect to draw them close to me.

*Young India*, 2-4-'31, p. 54

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It is easy enough to be friendly to one's friends. But to befriend the one who regards himself as your enemy, is the quintessence of true religion.

*Harijan*, 11-5-'47, p. 146

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It is no non-violence if we merely love those that love us. It is non-violence only when we love those that hate us.

[From a private letter dated 31-12-'34]

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In its positive form, Ahimsa means the largest love, greatest charity. If I am a follower of Ahimsa, I *must love* my enemy. I must apply the same rules to the wrong-doer who is my enemy or a stranger to me, as I would to my wrong-doing father or son.

*Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, G. A. Natesan, Madras, 1933, p. 346

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My appeal to you is to cleanse your hearts and to have charity. Make your hearts as broad as the ocean.... Do not judge others lest you be judged. There is that supreme Judge who can hang you, but He leaves you alive. There are so many enemies within you and around you, but He protects and looks upon you with a kindly eye.

*Young India*, 1-1-'25, p. 8

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The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.

*Young India*, 2-4-'31, p. 59

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They say 'means are after all means'. I would say \*means are after all everything'. As the means so the end. There is no wall of separation between means and end. Indeed the Creator has given us control (and that too very limited) over means, none over the end. Realization of the goal is in exact proportion to that of the means. This is a proposition that admits of no exception

*Young India*, 17-7-'24, p. 236

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I have therefore concerned myself principally with the conservation of the means and their progressive use. I know if we can take care of them, attainment of the goal is assured. I feel too that our progress towards the goal will be in exact proportion to the purity of our means.

This method may appear to be long, perhaps too long, but I am convinced that it is the shortest.

*The Amrit Bazar Patrika*, 17-9-'33

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You need not be afraid that the method of non-violence is a slow long-drawn but process- It is the swiftest the world has seen, for it is the surest.

*Young India*, 30-4-'25, p. 153

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It (resistance by love) is a force that may be used by individuals as well as by communities. It may be used as well in political as in domestic affairs. Its universal applicability is a demonstration of its permanence and invincibility. It can be used alike by men, women and children. It is totally untrue to say that it is a force to be used only by the weak so long as they are not capable of meeting violence by- violence... This force is to violence, and therefore to all tyranny, all injustice, what light is to darkness.

*Young India*, 3-11-'27, p. 369

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In the application of the method of non-violence, one must believe in the possibility of every person, however depraved, being reformed under humane and skilled treatment.

*Harijan, 22-2-'42, p. 49*

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It is against my creed to punish even a murderer, a thief or a decoit.

*Young India, 2-4-'31, p. 55*

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

Non-violence is a perfect state. It is a goal towards which all mankind moves naturally though unconsciously. Man does not become divine when he personifies innocence in himself. Only then does he become truly man. In our present state we are partly men and partly beasts, and in our ignorance and even arrogance say that we truly fulfill the purpose of our species, when we deliver blow for blow and develop the measure of anger required for the purpose. We pretend to believe that retaliation is the law of our being, whereas in every scripture we find that retaliation is nowhere obligatory but only permissible. It is restraint that is obligatory. Retaliation is indulgence requiring elaborate regulating. Restraint is the law of our being. For, highest perfection is unattainable without highest restraint. Suffering is thus the badge of the human tribe.

The goal ever recedes from us. The greater the progress, the greater the recognition of our unworthiness. Satisfaction lies in the effort, not in the attainment. Full effort is full victory.

*Young India*, 9-3-'22, p. 141

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If we turn our eyes to the time of which history has any record down to our own time, we shall find that man has been steadily progressing towards Ahimsa. Our remote ancestors were cannibals. Then came a time when they were fed up with cannibalism and they began to live on chase. Next came a stage when man was ashamed of leading the life of a wandering hunter. He therefore took to agriculture and depended principally on mother earth for his food. Thus from being a nomad he settled down to civilized stable life, founded villages and towns, and from member of a family he became member of a community and a nation. All these are signs of progressive Ahimsa and diminishing Himsa. Had it been otherwise, the human species should have been extinct by now, even as many of the lower species have disappeared.

Prophets and *avatars* have also taught the lesson of Ahimsa more or less. Not one of them has professed to teach Himsa. And how should it be otherwise? Himsa does not need to be taught. Man as animal is violent, but as Spirit is non-violent. The moment he awakes to the Spirit within, he cannot remain violent. Either he progresses towards Ahimsa or rushes to his doom. That is why the prophets and *avatars* have taught the lessons of truth, harmony, brotherhood, justice, etc.—all attributes of Ahimsa.

And yet violence seems to persist, even to the extent of thinking people like the correspondent regarding it as the final weapon. But as I have shown history and experience are against him.

If we believe that mankind has steadily progressed towards Ahimsa, it follows that it has to progress towards it still further. Nothing in this world is static, everything is kinetic. If there is no progression then there is inevitable retrogression. No one can remain without the eternal cycle, unless it be God Himself.

I have found that life persists in the midst of destruction and therefore there must be a higher law than that of destruction. Only under that law would a well ordered society be intelligible and life worth living. And if that is the law of life, we have to work it out in daily life. Whenever there are jars, whenever you are confronted with an opponent conquer him with love. In this crude manner I have worked it out in my life. That does not mean that all my difficulties are solved. Only I have found that this law of love has answered as the law of destruction has never done. The more I work at this law, the more I feel delight in life, delight in the scheme of this universe. It gives me a peace and a meaning of the mysteries of nature that I have no power to describe.

*Young India*, 1-10-'31, pp. 286-87

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I know how difficult it is to follow this grand law of life. 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.

[From a private letter dated 31-12-'34]

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In this age of wonders no one will say that a thing or idea is worthless because it is new. To say it is impossible because it is difficult, is again not in consonance with the spirit of the age. Things undreamt of are daily being seen, the impossible is ever becoming possible. We are constantly being astonished these days at the amazing discoveries in the field of violence. But I maintain that far more undreamt of and seemingly impossible discoveries will be made in the field of non-violence.

*Harijan*, 25-8-'40 p. 260

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I am an irrepressible optimist. My optimism rests on my belief in the infinite possibilities of the individual to develop non-violence. The more you develop it

in your own being, the more infectious it becomes till it overwhelms your surroundings and by and by might over sweep the world.

*Harijan, 28-1-'39, p. 443*

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## B. DIRECT ACTION

### No passiveness

Never has anything been done on this earth without direct action. I reject the word 'passive resistance' because of its insufficiency and its being interpreted as a weapon of the weak.

*Young India, 12-5-'20, p. 3*

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My goal is friendship with the whole world and I can combine the greatest love with the greatest opposition to wrong.

*Young India, 10-3-'20, p. 5*

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Non-violence is 'not a resignation from all real fighting against wickedness'. On the contrary, the non-violence of my conception is a more active and real fight against wickedness than retaliation whose very nature is to increase wickedness. I contemplate a mental and therefore a moral opposition to immoralities. I seek entirely to blunt the edge of the tyrant's sword not by putting up against it a sharper-edged weapon, but by disappointing his expectation that I would be offering physical resistance. The resistance of the soul that I should offer would elude him. It would at first dazzle him and at last compel recognition from him, which recognition would not humiliate him but would uplift him.

*Young India, 8-10-'25, p. 346*

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Non-violence in its dynamic condition means conscious suffering. It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil-doer, but it means the 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.

*Young India*, 11-8-'20, p. 3

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### **No Room for Cowardice**

My creed of non-violence is an extremely active force. It has no room for cowardice or even weakness. There is hope for a violent man to be some day non-violent, but there is none for a coward. I have therefore said more than once in these pages that if we do not know how to defend ourselves, our women and our places of worship by the force of suffering, i.e. non-violence, we must, if we are men, be at least able to defend all these by fighting.

*Young India*, 16-6-'27, p. 196

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Non-violence 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 non-violence is an impossibility without the possession of unadulterated fearlessness.

*Harijan*, 15-7-'39, p. 201

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Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will.

*Young India*, 11-8-'20, p. 3

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A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history.

*Harijan*, 19-11-'38 p. 343

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The votary of non-violence has to cultivate the capacity for sacrifice of the highest type in order to be free from fear. He wrecks not if he should lose his



land, his wealth, his life. He who has not overcome all fear cannot practise Ahimsa to perfection. The votary of Ahimsa has only one fear, that is of God.

*Harijan*, 1-9-'40, p. 268

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Where there is fear there is no religion.

*Young India*, 2-9-'26, p. 308

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Nothing whatever in this world is ours. Even we ourselves are His. Why then should we entertain any fear?

*Young India*, 11-9-'20, p. 2

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Let us fear God and we shall cease to fear man.

*Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, G. A. Natesan, Madras, 1933, p. 330

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Spirituality is not a matter of knowing scriptures and engaging in philosophical discussions. It is a matter of heart culture, of unmeasurable strength. Fearlessness is the first requisite of spirituality. Cowards can never be moral.

*Young India*, 13-10-21, p. 323

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A Satyagrahi bids good-bye to fear. He is, therefore, never afraid of trusting the opponent. Even if the opponent plays him false twenty times, the Satyagrahi is ready to trust him the twenty-first time, for an implicit trust in human nature is the very essence of his creed.

*Satyagraha in South Africa*, 1950, p. 246

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Let our first act every morning be to make the following resolve for the day: 'I shall not fear any one on earth. I shall fear God only. I shall not bear ill-will towards any one. I shall not submit to injustice from any one. I shall conquer untruth by truth and in resisting untruth I shall put up with all suffering.'

### **Dare to Stand Alone**

That something in me which never deceives me tells me now: 'You have to stand against the whole world although you may have to stand alone. You have to stare the world in the face although the world may look at you with blood-shot eyes. Do not fear. Trust that little thing in you which resides in the heart and says: Forsake friends, wife, all; but testify to that for which you have lived and for which you have to die.'

*The Bombay Chronicle, 9-8-'42*

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

*Young India, 17-6-'26, p. 217*

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The greatest men of the world have always stood alone. Take the great prophets, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed – they all stood alone like many others whom I can name. But they had living faith in themselves and their God, and believing as they did that God was on their side, they never felt lonely.

*Young India, 10-10-'29, p. 330*

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### **Reliance on God**

Non-violence succeeds only when we have a living faith in God.

*Harijan, 28-1-'39, p. 443*

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In a righteous struggle, God himself plans campaigns and conducts battles. A *dharmayuddha* can be waged only in the name of God, and it is only when the Satyagrahi feels quite helpless, is apparently on his last legs and finds utter darkness all round him, that God comes to the rescue.

*Satyagraha in South Africa, 1950, p. 5*

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I have learned this one lesson – that what is impossible with man is child's play with God, and if we have faith in that Divinity which presides on the destiny of the meanest of His creation, I have no doubt that all things are possible and in that final hope I live and pass my time and endeavour to obey His will.

*Young India, 19-11-'31, p. 361*

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I *know* the path. It is straight and narrow. It is like the edge of a sword. I rejoice to walk on it. I weep when I slip. God's word is: 'He who strives never perishes'. I have implicit faith in that promise. Though, therefore, from my weakness I fail a thousand times, I will not lose faith.

*Young India, 17-6-'26, p. 215*

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He (the Satyagrahi) must know that relief will come when there is least hope for it. For such is the way of the cruelly-kind Deity who insists upon testing His devotee through a fiery furnace and delights in humbling him to the dust.

*Young India, 4-6-'25, p. 189*

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### **Appeal Through Self-suffering**

Love never claims, it ever gives. Love ever suffers, never revenges itself.

*Young India, 9-7-'25, p. 240*

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I have come to this fundamental conclusion that if you want something really important to be done, you must not merely satisfy reason, you must move the heart also. The appeal of reason is more to the head but the penetration of the heart comes from suffering. It opens up the inner understanding in man.

*Young India, 5-11-'31, p. 341*

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The conviction has been growing upon me, that things of fundamental importance to the people are not secured by reason alone but have to be purchased with their suffering. Suffering is the law of human beings; war is the law of the jungle. But suffering is infinitely more powerful than the law of the jungle for converting the opponent and opening his ears, which are otherwise shut, to the voice of reason.

*Young India*, 5-11-'31, p. 341

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The religion of Ahimsa consists in allowing others maximum of convenience at the maximum of inconvenience to us, even at the risk of life.

*Young India*, 2-12-'26, p. 422

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The hardest heart and the grossest ignorance must disappear before the rising sun of suffering without anger and without malice.

*Young India*, 19-2-'25, p. 61

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### **Aim to Convert the Opponent**

It is often forgotten that it is never the intention of a Satyagrahi to embarrass the wrongdoer. The appeal is never to his fear, it is, must be, always to his heart. The Satyagrahi's object is to convert, not to coerce, the wrongdoer.

*Harijan*, 18-3-'39, p. 53

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The Satyagrahi seeks to convert his opponent by sheer force of character and suffering. The purer he is and the more he suffers, the quicker the progress.

*Young India*, 18-9-'24, p. 306

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The aim of the non-violent worker must ever be to convert. He may not however wait endlessly. When therefore the limit is reached, he takes risks and conceives plans of active Satyagraha which may mean civil disobedience and the like.

*Young India*, 6-2-'30, p. 44

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### **Satyagraha<sup>1</sup>**

Since Satyagraha is one of the most powerful methods of direct action, a Satyagrahi exhausts all other means before he resorts to Satyagraha. He will, therefore, constantly and continually approach the constituted authority, he will appeal to public opinion, educate public opinion, state his case calmly and coolly before everybody who wants to listen to him, and only after he has exhausted all these avenues will he resort to Satyagraha. But when he has found the impelling call of the Inner Voice within him and launches out upon Satyagraha he has burnt his boats and there is no receding.

*Young India*, 20-10-'27, p. 353

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Joy lies in the fight, in the attempt, in the suffering involved, not in the victory itself.

*Harijan*, 23-12-'39 p. 386

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It is not because I value life low that I countenance with joy thousands voluntarily losing their lives in Satyagraha, but because I know that it results, in the long run, in the least loss of life and, what is more, it ennobles those who lose their lives and morally enriches the world for their sacrifice.

*Young India*, 8-10-'25, p. 365

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### **My Fasts**

I may say that I began my experiments in fasting on any large scale as an instrument of reform in 1913. I had fasted often enough before, but not in the manner of 1913. My definite opinion is that the general result of my numerous fasts was without doubt beneficial. They invariably quickened the conscience of the people interested in, and sought to be influenced by those fasts. I am not aware of any injustice having been perpetrated through those fasts. In no case

was there any idea of exercising coercion on any one. Indeed, I think that the word coercion would be a misnomer for the influence that was exerted by the fasts, under criticism. Coercion means some harmful force used *against* a person who is expected to do something desired by the user of the force. In the fasts in question, the force used was against myself. Surely, force of self-suffering cannot be put in the same category as the force of suffering caused to the party sought to be influenced. If I fast in order to awaken the conscience of an erring friend whose error is beyond question, I am not coercing him in the ordinary sense of the word.

The fact is that all spiritual fasts always influence those who come within the zone of their influence. That is why spiritual fasting is described as *tapas*. And all *tapas* invariably exerts purifying influence on those in whose behalf it is undertaken.

Of course, it is not to be denied that fasts can be really coercive. Such are fasts to attain a selfish object. A fast undertaken to wring money from a person or for fulfilling some such personal end would amount to the exercise of coercion or undue influence. I would unhesitatingly advocate resistance of such undue influence. I have myself successfully resisted it in the fasts that have been undertaken or threatened against me. And if it is argued that the dividing line between a selfish and an unselfish end is often very thin, I would urge that a person who regards the end of a fast to be selfish or otherwise base should resolutely refuse to yield to it, even though the refusal may result in the death of the fasting person. If people will cultivate the habit of disregarding fasts which in their opinion are taken for unworthy ends, such fasts will be robbed of the taint of coercion and undue influence. Like all human institutions, fasting can be both legitimately and illegitimately used. But as a great weapon in the armoury of Satyagraha, it cannot be given up because of its possible abuse. Satyagraha has been designed as an effective substitute for violence. This use is in its infancy and, therefore, not yet perfected. But as the author of modern Satyagraha I cannot give up any of its manifold uses without forfeiting my claim to handle it in the spirit of a humble seeker.

### **Non-co-operation**

My non-co-operation, though it is part of my creed, is a prelude to co-operation. My non-co-operation is with- methods and systems, never with men.

*Young India*, 12-9-'29, p. 300

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Behind my non-co-operation there is always the keenest desire to co-operate on the slightest pretext even with the worst of opponents.

*Young India*, 4-6-'25, p. 193

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My non-co-operation has its root not in hatred, but in love. My personal religion peremptorily forbids me to hate anybody. I learnt this simple yet grand doctrine when I was twelve years old through a school book and the conviction has persisted up to now. It is daily growing on me. It is a burning passion with me-

*Young India*, 6-8-'25, p. 272

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### **Civil Disobedience against an Evil State**

Civil disobedience is the inherent right of a citizen. He does 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.

*Young India*, 5-1-'22. p. 5

An out-and-out civil resister simply ignores the authority of the State. He becomes an outlaw claiming to disregard every unmoral State law. Thus, for instance, he may refuse to pay taxes, he may refuse to recognize the authority of the State in his daily intercourse. He may refuse to obey the law of trespass and claim to enter military barracks in order to speak to the soldiers, he may

refuse to submit to limitations upon the manner of picketing and may picket within the prescribed area. In doing all this he never uses force and never resists force when it is used against him.

*Young India*, 10-11-'21, p. 362

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I hold the opinion firmly that civil disobedience is the purest type of constitutional agitation. Of course, it becomes degrading and despicable, if it's civil, i.e., nonviolent character is a mere camouflage.

*Young India*, 15-12-'21, p. 419

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Disobedience to be civil must be sincere, respectful, restrained, never defiant, must be based upon some well-understood principle, must not be capricious, and, above all, must have no ill-will or hatred behind it.

*Young India*, 24-3-'20, p. 4

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It requires the fewest number of soldiers. Indeed one *perfect* civil resister is enough to win the battle of Right against Wrong.

*Young India*, 10-11-'21, p. 362

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### C. IN PLACE OF WAR

#### Not the Sword for Defence

I am not a visionary. I claim to be a practical idealist. The religion of non-violence is not meant merely for the Rishis and saints. It is meant for the common people as well. Non-violence is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute. The spirit lies dormant in the brute and he knows no law but that of physical might. The dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law – to the strength of the spirit.

I have therefore ventured to place before India the ancient law of self-sacrifice. For Satyagraha and its offshoots, non-co-operation and civil resistance, are nothing but new names for the law of suffering. The Rishis, who



discovered the law of non-violence in the midst of violence, were greater geniuses than Newton. They were themselves greater warriors than Wellington. Having themselves known the use of arms, they realized their uselessness and taught a weary world that its salvation lay not through violence but through non-violence.

And so I am not pleading for India to practise nonviolence because it 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? 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 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 the service of India through the religion of non-violence which I believe to be the root of Hinduism.

- *Young India*, 11-8-'20, pp. 3, 4

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### Participation in War

Being a confirmed war resister I have never given myself training in the use of destructive weapons in spite of opportunities to take such training. It was perhaps thus that I escaped direct destruction of human life. But so long as I lived under a system of Government based on force and voluntarily partook of the many facilities and privileges it created for me, I was bound to help that

Government to the extent of my ability when it was engaged in a war unless I non-co-operated with that Government and renounced to the utmost of my capacity the privileges it offered me.

Let me take an illustration. I am a member of an institution which holds a few acres of land whose crops are in imminent peril from monkeys. I believe in the sacredness of all life and hence I regard it a breach of Ahimsa to inflict any injury on the monkeys. But I do not hesitate to instigate and direct an attack on the monkeys in order to save the crops. I would like to avoid this evil. I can avoid it by leaving or breaking up the institution. I do not do so because I do not expect to be able to find a society where there will be no agriculture and therefore no destruction of some life. In fear and trembling, in humility and penance, I therefore participate in the injury inflicted on the monkeys, hoping some day to find a way out.

Even so did I participate in the three acts of war. I could not, it would be madness for me to sever my connection with the society to which I belong. And on those three occasions I had no thought for non-co-operating with the British Government. My position regarding the Government is totally different today and hence I should not voluntarily participate in its wars, and I should risk imprisonment and even the gallows if I was forced to take up arms or otherwise take part in its military operations.

But that still does not solve the riddle. If there was a national Government, whilst I should not take any direct part in any war, I can conceive occasions when it would be my duty to vote for the military training of those who wish to take it. For I know that all its members do not believe in non-violence to the extent I do. It is not possible to make a person or a society non-violent by compulsion.

Non-violence works in a most mysterious manner. Often a man's actions defy analysis in terms of non-violence; equally often his actions may wear the appearance of violence when he is absolutely non-violent in the highest sense of the term and is subsequently found so to be. All I can then claim for my

conduct is that it was, in the instance cited, actuated in the interests of non-violence. There was no thought of sordid national or other interest.

*Young India*, 13-9-'28, p. 308

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### **Disarmament**

Before general disarmament in Europe commences, as it must some day, unless Europe is to commit suicide, some nation will have to dare to disarm herself and take large risks. The level of non-violence in that nation, if that ever happily comes to pass, will naturally have risen so high as to command universal respect. Her judgments will be unerring, her decisions firm, her capacity for heroic self-sacrifice will be great, and she will want to live as much for other nations as for herself.

*Young India*, 8-10-'25, P. 345

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Like opium production, the world manufacture of swords needs to be restricted. The sword is probably responsible for more misery in the world than opium.

*Young India*, 19-11-'25, p. 397

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If there were no greed, there would be no occasion for armaments.

*Harijan*, 12-11-'38, p. 328

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### **World peace**

If the recognized leaders of mankind who have control over the engines of destruction were wholly to renounce their use, with full knowledge of its implications, permanent peace can be obtained. It is my conviction that the root of the evil is want of a living faith in a living God. It is a first class human tragedy that peoples of the earth who claim to believe in the message of Jesus whom they describe as the Prince of Peace show little of that belief in actual practice. It is painful to see sincere Christian divines limiting the scope of Jesus'

message to select individuals. I have been taught from my childhood and tested the truth by experience that the primary virtues of mankind are possible of cultivation by the meanest of the human species. It is this undoubted universal possibility that distinguishes the humans from the rest of God's creation. If even one nation were unconditionally to perform the supreme act of renunciation, many of us would see in our lifetime visible peace established on earth.

*Harijan*, 18-6-'38, p. 153

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I reiterate my conviction that there will be no peace for the Allies or the world unless they shed their belief in the efficacy of war and its accompanying terrible deception and fraud and are determined to hammer out real peace based on freedom and equality of all races and nations.

*The Bombay Chronicle*, 18-4-'45

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1 Satyagraha or non-violent direct action took in the case of Gandhiji the forms of fasting, non-co-operation and civil disobedience, dealt with briefly below.—Ed.

## 26. LOVE IN RELATION TO THE ANIMAL WORLD

### A. NON-KILLING OF ANIMALS

Ahimsa is a comprehensive principle. We are helpless mortals caught in the conflagration of Himsa. The saying that life lives on life has a deep meaning in it. Man cannot for a moment live without consciously or unconsciously committing outward Himsa. The very fact of his living— eating, drinking, and moving about—necessarily involves some Himsa, destruction of life, be it ever so minute. A votary of Ahimsa therefore remains true to his faith if the spring of all his actions is compassion, if he shuns to the best of his ability the destruction of the tiniest creature, tries to save it, and thus incessantly strives to be free from the deadly coil of Himsa. He will be constantly growing in self-restraint and compassion, but he can never become entirely free from outward Himsa.

Then again because underlying Ahimsa is the unity of all life, the error of one cannot but affect all, and hence man cannot be wholly free from Himsa. So long as he continues to be a social being, he cannot but participate in the Himsa that the very existence of society involves.

*Autobiography, 1948, pp. 427-29*

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Taking life may be a duty. Let us consider this position.

We do destroy as much life as we think is necessary for sustaining the body. Thus for food we take life, vegetable and other, and for health we destroy mosquitoes and the like by the use of disinfectants, etc. and we do not think that we are guilty of irreligion in doing so.

This is as regards one's own self. But for the sake of others, i.e., for the benefit of the species we kill carnivorous beasts. When lions and tigers pester their villages, the villagers regard it as a duty to kill them or have them killed.

Even manslaughter may be necessary in certain cases. Suppose a man runs amuck and goes furiously about sword in hand, and killing any one that comes

his way, and no one dares to capture him alive. Anyone who dispatches this lunatic will earn the gratitude of the community and be regarded a benevolent man.

From the point of view of Ahimsa it is the plain duty of every one to kill such a man. There is indeed one exception if it can be so called. The *yogi* who can subdue the fury of this dangerous man may not kill him. But we are not here dealing with beings who have almost reached perfection; we are considering the duty of a society of ordinary erring human beings.

There may be a difference of opinion as regards the appositeness of my illustrations. But if they are inadequate, others can be easily imagined. What they are meant to show is that refraining from taking life can in no circumstances be an absolute duty.

The fact is that Ahimsa does not simply mean non-killing. Himsa means causing pain to or killing any life out of anger, or from a selfish purpose, or with the intention of injuring it. Refraining from so doing is Ahimsa.

The physician who prescribes bitter medicine causes you pain but does no Himsa. If he fails to prescribe bitter medicine when it is necessary to do so, he fails in his duty of Ahimsa. The surgeon who, from fear of causing pain to his patient, hesitates to amputate a rotten limb is guilty of Himsa. He who refrains from killing a murderer who is about to kill his ward (when he cannot prevent him otherwise) earns no merit, but commits a sin, he practises no Ahimsa, but Himsa out of a fatuous sense of Ahimsa.

Let us now examine the root of Ahimsa. It is uttermost selflessness. Selflessness means complete freedom from a regard for one's body. When some sage observed man killing numberless creatures, big and small, out of a regard for his own body, he was shocked at his ignorance. He pitied him for thus forgetting the deathless soul, encased within the perishable body, and for thinking of the ephemeral physical pleasure in preference to the eternal bliss of the spirit. He there from deduced the duty of complete self-effacement. He saw that if man desires to realize himself, i.e. Truth, he could do so only by

being completely detached from the body, i.e. by making all other beings feel safe from him. That is the way of Ahimsa.

A realization of this truth shows that the sin of Himsa consists not in merely taking life, but in taking life for the sake of one's perishable body. All destruction therefore involved in the process of eating, drinking, etc. is selfish and therefore Himsa. But man regards it to be unavoidable and puts up with it. But the destruction of bodies of tortured creatures being for their own peace cannot be regarded as Himsa, or the unavoidable destruction caused for the purpose of protecting one's wards cannot be regarded as Himsa.

This line of reasoning is liable to be most mischievously used. But that is not because the reasoning is faulty, but because of the inherent frailty of man to catch at whatever pretexts he can get to deceive himself to satisfy his selfishness or egoism. But that danger may not excuse one from defining the true nature of Ahimsa. Thus we arrive at the following result from foregoing:

1. It is impossible to sustain one's body without the destruction of other bodies to some extent.
2. All have to destroy some life
  - a) for sustaining their own bodies;
  - b) for protecting those under their care; or
  - c) sometimes for the sake of those whose life is taken.
3. (a) and (b) in (2) mean -Himsa to a greater or lesser extent, (c) means no Himsa, and is therefore Ahimsa. Himsa in (a) and (b) is unavoidable.
4. A progressive Ahimsa-ist will therefore commit the Himsa contained in (a) and (b) as little as possible only when it is unavoidable, and after full and mature deliberation and having exhausted all remedies to avoid it.

*Young India*, 4-11-'26, pp. 384-85

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To cause pain or wish ill to or to take the life of any living being out of anger or a selfish intent is Himsa. On the other hand, after a calm and clear judgment to kill or cause pain to a living being with a view to its spiritual or physical benefit from a pure, selfless intent may be the purest form of Ahimsa. Each such case

must be judged individually and on its own merits. The final test as to its violence or non-violence is after all the intent underlying the act.

*Young India*, 4-10-'28, p. 331

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Whilst it is true that mental attitude is the crucial test of Ahimsa, it is not the sole test. To kill any living being or things save for his or its own interest is Himsa, however noble the motive may otherwise be. And a man who harbours ill-will towards another is no less guilty of Himsa because for fear of society or want [of opportunity he is unable to translate his ill-will into action. A reference to both intent and deed is thus necessary in order finally to decide whether a particular act or abstention can be classed as Ahimsa.

*Young India*, 18-10-'28 p. 352

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I am painfully aware of the fact that my desire to continue life in the body involves me in constant Himsa, that is why I am becoming growingly indifferent to this physical body of mine. For instance, I know that in the act of respiration I destroy innumerable invisible germs floating in the air. But I do not stop breathing. The consumption of vegetables involves Himsa, but I find that I cannot give them up. Again, there is Himsa in the use of antiseptics, yet I cannot bring myself to discard the use of disinfectants like kerosene, etc. to rid myself of the mosquito pest and the like. I suffer snakes to be killed in the Ashram when it is impossible to catch and put them out of harm's way. I even tolerate the use of the stick to drive the bullock in the Ashram. Thus there is no end of Himsa which I directly and indirectly commit. And now I find myself confronted with this monkey problem. Let me assure the reader that I am in no hurry to take the extreme step of killing them. In fact, I am not sure that I would at all be able finally to make up my mind to kill them. As it is, friends are helping me with useful suggestions and the adoption of some of them may solve the difficulty at least temporarily without our having to kill them. But I cannot today promise that I shall never kill the monkeys even though they may destroy all the crops in the Ashram. If as a result of this humble confession of



mine, friends choose to give me up as lost, I would be sorry, but nothing will induce me to try to conceal my imperfections in the practice of Ahimsa, All I claim for myself is that I am ceaselessly trying to understand the implications of great ideals like Ahimsa and to practise them in thought, word and deed, and that not without a certain measure of success as I think. But I know that I have a long distance yet to cover in this direction.

*Young India*, 1-11-'28, p. 361

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The rule of not killing venomous reptiles has been practised for the most part at Phoenix<sup>1</sup>, Tolstoy Farm<sup>1</sup> and Sabarmati.<sup>2</sup> At each of these places we had to settle on waste lands, we have had, however, no loss of life occasioned by snakebite. I see, with the eye of faith, in this circumstance the hand of the God of Mercy. Let no one cavil at this, saying that God can never be partial, and that He has no time to meddle with the humdrum affairs of men. I have no other language to express the fact of the matter, to describe this uniform experience of mine. Human language can but imperfectly describe God's ways. I am sensible of the fact that they are indescribable and inscrutable. But if mortal man will dare to describe them, he has no better medium than his own inarticulate speech. Even if it be a superstition to believe that complete immunity from harm for twenty-five years in spite of a fairly regular practice of non-killing is not a fortuitous accident but a grace of God, I should still hug that superstition.

*Autobiography*, 1948, pp. 524-25

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My Ahimsa is my own. I am not able to accept in its entirety the doctrine of non-killing of animals. I have no feeling in me to save the life of those animals who devour or cause hurt to man. I consider it wrong to help in the increase of their progeny. Therefore, I will not feed ants, monkeys, or dogs. I will never sacrifice a man's life in order to save theirs.

Thinking along these lines I have come to the conclusion that to do away with monkeys where they have become a menace to the well-being of man is

pardonable. Such killing becomes a duty. The question may arise as to why this rule should not also apply to human beings. It cannot because, however bad, they are as we are. Unlike the animal, God has given man the faculty of reason.

*Harijan*, 5-5-'46, p. 123

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## **B. VEGETARIANISM**

To my mind the life of a lamb is no less precious than that of a human being. I should be unwilling to take the life of lamb for the sake of the human body. I hold that the more helpless a creature, the more entitled it is to protection by man from the cruelty of man.

*Autobiography*, 1948, p. 290

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Rightly or wrongly it is a part of my religious conviction that man may not eat meat, eggs, and the like. There should be a limit even to the means of keeping ourselves alive. Even for life itself we may not do certain things.

*Autobiography*, 1948, pp. 302-03

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I do not regard flesh-food as necessary for us at any stage and under any clime in which it is possible for human beings ordinarily to live. I hold flesh-food to be unsuited to our species. We err in copying the lower animal world if we are superior to it. Experience teaches that animal food is unsuited to those who would curb their passions.

But it is wrong to overestimate the importance of food in the formation of character or in subjugating the flesh. Diet is a powerful factor not to be neglected. But to sum up all religion in terms of diet, as is often done in India, is as wrong as it is to disregard all restraint in regard to diet and to give full reins to one's appetite. Vegetarianism is one of the priceless gifts of Hinduism. It may not be lightly given up. It is necessary therefore to correct the error that vegetarianism has made us weak in mind or body, or passive or inert in action.

The greatest Hindu reformers have been the activist in their generation and they have invariably been vegetarians. Who could show greater activity than say Shankara or Dayananda in their times ?

The choice of one's diet is not a thing to be based on faith. It is a matter for everyone to reason out for himself. There has grown up especially in the West an amount of literature on vegetarianism which any seeker after truth may study with profit. Many eminent medical men have contributed to this literature. Here, in India, we have not needed any encouragement for vegetarianism. For it has been hitherto accepted as the most desirable and the most respectable thing.

*Young India*, 7-10-'26, p. 347

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It should be remembered that mere *Jivadaya* (kindness to animals) does not enable us to overcome the 'six deadly enemies' within us, namely lust, anger, greed, infatuation, pride and falsehood. Give me the man who has completely conquered self and is full of goodwill and love towards all and is ruled by the law of love in all his actions, and I for one will offer him my respectful homage, even though he be a meat-eater. On the other hand, the *Jivadqya* of a person who is steeped in anger and lust but daily feeds the ants and insects and refrains from killing has hardly anything in it to recommend itself. It is a mechanical performance without any spiritual value. It may even be worse—a hypocritical screen for hiding the corruption within.

*Harijan*, 15-9-'40, p. 285

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### C. MILK

'I cannot rebuild your body unless you take milk. If in addition you would take iron and arsenic injections, I would guarantee fully to renovate your constitution.'

'You can give me the injections', I replied, 'but milk is a different question; I have a vow against it.'

'What exactly is the nature of your vow ?' the doctor inquired.

I told him the whole history and the reasons behind my vow, how, since I had come to know that the cow and the buffalo were subjected to the process of *phooka*, I had conceived a strong disgust for milk. Moreover, I had always held that milk is not the natural diet of man. I had therefore abjured its use altogether. Kasturba was standing near my bed listening all the time to this conversation.

'But surely you cannot have any objection to goat's milk then,' she interposed.

The doctor too took up the strain\* 'If you will take goat's milk, it will be enough for me,' he said.

I succumbed. My intense eagerness to take up the Satyagraha fight had created in me a strong desire to live, and so I contented myself with adhering to the letter of my vow only, and sacrificed its spirit. For although I had only the milk of the cow and the she-buffalo in mind when I took the vow, by natural implication it covered the milk of all animals. Nor could it be right for me to use milk at all, so long as I held that milk is not the natural diet of man. Yet knowing all this I agreed to take goat's milk. The will to live proved stronger than the devotion to truth, and for once the votary of truth compromised his sacred ideal by his eagerness to take up the Satyagraha fight. The memory of this action even now rankles in my breast and fills me with remorse, and I am constantly thinking how to give up goat's milk. But I cannot yet free myself from that subtlest of temptations, the desire to serve, which still holds me.

My experiments in dietetics are dear to me as a part of my researches in Ahimsa. They give me recreation and joy. But my use of goat's milk today troubles me not from the view-point of dietetic Ahimsa so much as from that of truth, being no less than a breach of pledge. It seems to me that I understand the ideal of truth better than that of Ahimsa, and my experience tells me that, if I let go my hold of truth, I shall never be able to solve the riddle of Ahimsa. The ideal of truth requires that vows taken should be fulfilled in the spirit as well as in the letter. In the present case I killed the spirit—the soul of my vow—by adhering to its outer form only, and that is what galls me. But in spite of this

clear knowledge I cannot see my way straight before me. In other words, perhaps, I have not the courage to follow the straight course. Both at bottom mean one and the same thing, for doubt is invariably the result of want or weakness of faith. 'Lord, give me faith' is, therefore, my prayer day and night.

*Autobiography, 1948, pp. 556-58*

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#### **D. VIVISECTION**

I abhor vivisection with my whole soul. I detest the unpardonable slaughter of innocent life in the name of science and humanity so-called, and all the scientific discoveries stained with innocent blood I count as of no consequence. If the circulation of blood theory could not have been discovered without vivisection, the human kind could well have done without it. And I see the day clearly dawning when the honest scientist of the West will put limitations upon the present methods of pursuing knowledge. Future measurements will take note not merely of the human family but of all that lives, and even as we are slowly but surely discovering that it is an error to suppose that Hindus can thrive upon the degradation of a fifth of themselves or that peoples of the West can rise or live upon the exploitation and degradation of the Eastern and African nations, so shall we realize in the fullness of time that our domination over the lower order of creation is not for their slaughter, but for their benefit equally with ours. For I am as certain that they are endowed with a soul as that I am.

*Young India, 17-12-'25, p. 440*

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Bowing to the Earth we learn or ought to learn to be humble even as the Earth is humble. She supports the beings that tread upon her. She is therefore rightly the consort of Vishnu. This conception, in my opinion, does no violence to truth. On the contrary, it is beautiful and is wholly consistent with the idea that God is everywhere. There is nothing inanimate for Him. We are of the Earth earthy. If Earth is not, we are not. I feel nearer God by feeling Him through the Earth. In bowing to the Earth, I at once realize my indebtedness to

Him and if I am a worthy child of that Mother, I shall at once reduce myself to dust and rejoice in establishing kinship with not only the lowliest of human beings, but also with the lowest forms of creation whose fate—reduction to dust—I have to share with them. The lowest form of creation is just as imperishable as my soul is.

*Bapu's Letters to Mira, 1949, pp. 147-48*

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1 Ashrams founded by Gandhiji in South Africa.

2 An Ashram founded by Gandhiji in Gujarat, India.

**SECTION SIX: AIDS TO THE PRACTICE OF MY RELIGION**

## 27. FASTING AND PRAYER

This is a hoary institution. A genuine fast cleanses body, mind and soul. It crucifies the flesh and to that extent sets the soul free. A sincere prayer can work wonders. It is an intense longing of the soul for its even greater purity. Purity thus gained when it is utilized for a noble purpose becomes a prayer. Fasting and prayer therefore are a most powerful process of purification, and that which\* purifies necessarily enables us the better to do our duty and to attain our goal. If therefore fasting and prayer seem at times not to answer, it is not because there is nothing in them but because the right spirit is not behind them.

A fast to be true must be accompanied by a readiness to receive pure thoughts and determination to resist all Satan's temptation. Similarly a prayer to be true has to be intelligible and definite. One has to identify oneself with it. Counting beads with the name of Allah on one's lips whilst the mind wanders in all directions is worse than useless.

*Young India, 24-3-'20, p. 1*

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My religion teaches me that whenever there is distress which one cannot remove, one must fast and pray.

*Young India, 25-9-'24, p. 319*

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### A. FASTS

It is my firm belief that the strength of the soul grows in proportion as you subdue the flesh.

*Young India, 23-10-'24, p. 354*

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For the seeker who would live in fear of God, and who would see Him face to face, restraint in diet both as to quantity and quality is as essential as restraint in thought and speech.



Fasting has to be of the widest character possible. Fasting of the body has to be accompanied by fasting of *all* the senses. And the meagre food of the Gita, is also a fasting of the body. The Gita enjoins not temperance in food but 'meagreness'; meagreness is a perpetual fast. Meagreness means just enough to sustain the body for the service for which it is made. The test is again supplied by saying that food should be taken as one takes medicine in measured doses, at measured times and as required, not for taste but for the welfare of the body. 'Meagreness' is perhaps better rendered by 'measured quantities'. I cannot recall Arnold's rendering. A 'full' meal is therefore a crime against God and man—the latter because the full-mealers deprive their neighbours of their portion. God's economy provides from day to day just enough food for all in just medicinal doses. We are all of the tribe of full mealers. Instinctively to know the medicinal dose required is a Herculean task, for by parental training we are gluttons. Then, when it is almost too late, it dawns upon some of us that food is made not to enjoy but to sustain the body as our slave. It becomes from the moment a grim fight against the inherited and acquired habit of eating for pleasure. Hence the necessity for a complete fast at intervals and partial fasts forever. Partial fast is the meagre or measured food of the Gita.

*Bapu's Letters to Mira, 1949, pp. 241-42*

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"Spare diet" is a good expression, अल्प means less than enough. What is enough is a matter of conjecture, therefore our own mental picture. The man of truth, knowing that man is always indulgent to the body, said, in order to counteract the indulgence, that he should take less food than what he would think was enough; then there was likelihood of his taking what in fact was enough. So what we often think is spare or meagre is likely even to be more than enough. More people are weak through over-feeding or wrong feeding than through

underfeeding. It is wonderful, if we chose the right diet, what an extraordinarily small quantity would suffice.

*Bapu's Letters to Mir a, 1949, p. 254*

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The mere fact of the body is nothing without the will behind it. It must be a genuine confession of the inner fast, an irrepressible longing to express truth and nothing but truth.

*Harijan, 6-5-'33*

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My austerities, fastings and prayers are, I know, of no value, if I rely upon them for reforming me. But they have an inestimable value, if they represent, as I hope they do, the yearnings of a soul striving to lay his weary head in the lap of his Maker.

*Harijan, 18-4-'36, p. 77*

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Mortification of the flesh is a necessity when the flesh rebels against one; it is a sin when the flesh has come under subjection and can be used as an instrument of service. In other words, there is no inherent merit in mortification of the flesh.

*Harijan, 2-11-'35 p. 299*

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Hindu religious literature is replete with instances of fasting, and thousands of Hindus fast even today on the slightest pretext. It is the one thing that does the least harm. There is no doubt that, like everything that is good, fasts are abused. That is inevitable. One cannot forbear to do good, because sometimes evil is done under its cover.

Mortification of the flesh has been held all the world over as a condition of spiritual progress. A complete fast is a complete and literal denial of self. It is the truest prayer. "Take my life and let it be always, only, all for Thee" is not, should not be, a mere lip or figurative expression. It has to be a reckless and

joyous giving without the least reservation. Abstention from food and even water is but the mere beginning, the least part of the surrender.

I have a profound belief in the method of the fast, both private and public.

*Harijan, 15-4-'33, p. 4*

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I know now more fully than ever that there is no prayer without fasting, be the latter ever so little. And this fasting relates not merely to the palate, but to all the senses and organs. Complete absorption in prayer must mean complete exclusion of physical activities till prayer possesses the whole of our being and we rise superior to, and are completely detached from, all physical functions. That state can only be reached after continual and voluntary crucifixion of the flesh. Thus all fasting, if it is a spiritual act, is an intense prayer or a preparation for it. It is a yearning of the soul to merge in the divine essence.

*Harijan, 8-7-'33, p. 4*

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## **B. PRAYER**

Prayer is the very soul and essence of religion, and, therefore, prayer must be the very core of the life of man, for no man can live without religion.

*Young India, 23-1-'30, p. 25*

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God has a thousand names, or rather, He is Nameless. We may worship or pray to Him by whichever name that pleases us. Some call Him Rama, some Krishna, others call Him Rahim, and yet others call Him God. All worship the same spirit, but as all foods do not agree with all, all names do not appeal to all. Each chooses the name according to his associations, and He being the In-Dweller all-Powerful and Omniscient knows our innermost feelings and responds to us according to our deserts.

Worship or prayer, therefore, is not to be performed with the lips, but with the heart. And that is why it can be performed equally by the dumb and the stammerer, by the ignorant and the stupid. And prayers of those whose tongues

are nectared but whose hearts of full of poison are never heard. He, therefore, who would pray to God, must cleanse his heart. It is faith that steers us through stormy seas, faith that moves mountains and faith that jumps across the ocean. That faith is nothing but a living, wide-awake consciousness of God within. He who has achieved that faith wants nothing. Bodily diseased he is spiritually healthy, physically pure, he rolls in spiritual riches.

'But how is the heart to be cleansed to this extent?' one might well ask. The language of the lips is easily taught but who can teach the language of the heart ? Only the *bhakta*— the true devotee—knows it and can teach it. The Gita has defined the *bhakta* in three places, and talked of him generally everywhere. But knowledge of the definition of a *bhakta* is hardly a sufficient guide. They are rare on this earth. I have therefore suggested the Religion of Service as the means. God of Himself seeks for His seat the heart of him who serves his fellow-men.

A prayerful heart is the vehicle and service makes the heart prayerful. Those Hindus who in this age serve the "untouchables" from a full heart truly pray; the Hindus and those others who spin prayerfully for the poor and the indigent truly pray.

*Young India*, 24-9-25, pp. 331-32

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What is it that millions of Hindus, Mussalmans, Christians, Jews and others do every day during the time set apart for the adoration of the Maker ? It seems to me that it is a yearning of the heart to be one with the Maker, an invocation for His blessing. It is in this case the attitude that matters, not words uttered or muttered. And often the association of words that have been handed down from ancient times has an effect which in their rendering into one's mother-tongue they will lose altogether. Thus the Gayatri translated and recited in, say, Gujarati, will not have the same effect as the original. The utterance of the word Rama will instantaneously affect millions of Hindus, when the word God, although they may understand the meaning, will leave them untouched. Words after all acquire a power by long usage and sacredness associated with

their use. There is much therefore to be said for the retention of the old Sanskrit formulae for the most prevalent *mantras* or verses. That the meaning of them should be properly understood goes without saying.

There can be no fixed rule laid down as to the time these devotional acts should take. It depends upon individual temperament. These are precious moments in one's' daily life. The exercises are intended to sober and humble us and enable us to realize that nothing happens without His will and that we are but 'clay in the hands of the Potter.' These are moments when one reviews one's immediate past, confesses one's weakness, asks for forgiveness and strength to be and do better. One minute may be enough for some, twenty-four hours may be too little for others. For those, who are filled with the presence of God in them, to labour is to pray. Their life is one continuous prayer or act of worship. For those others who act only to sin, to indulge themselves, and live for self, no time is too much. If they had patience and faith and the will to be pure, they would pray till they feel the definite purifying presence of God within them. For us ordinary mortals there must be a middle path between these two extremes. We are not so exalted as to be able to say that all our acts are a dedication, nor perhaps are we so far gone as to be living purely for self. Hence have all religions set apart times for general devotion. Unfortunately these have nowadays become merely mechanical and formal, where they are not hypocritical. What is necessary therefore is the correct attitude to accompany these devotions.

For definite personal prayer in the sense of asking God for something, it should certainly be in one's own tongue. Nothing can be grander than to ask God to make us act justly towards everything that lives.

*Young India*, 10-6-'26, p. 211

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Man's destined purpose is to conquer old habits, to overcome the evil in him and to restore good to its rightful place. If religion does not teach us how to achieve this conquest, it teaches us nothing. But there is no royal road to success in this the truest enterprise in life. Cowardice is perhaps the greatest

vice from which we suffer and is also possibly the greatest violence, certainly far greater than bloodshed and the like that generally go under the name of violence. For it comes from want of faith in God and ignorance of His attributes. I can give my own testimony and say that a heartfelt prayer is undoubtedly the most potent instrument that man possesses for overcoming cowardice and all other bad old habits, Prayer is an impossibility without a living faith in the presence of God within.

We have to make our choice whether we should ally ourselves with the forces of evil or with the forces of good. And to pray to God is nothing but that sacred alliance between God and man whereby he attains his deliverance from the clutches of the prince of darkness. But a heartfelt prayer is not a recitation with the lips. It is yearning from within which expresses itself in every word, every act, nay, every thought of man. When an evil thought successfully assails him, he may know that he has offered but a lip prayer and similarly with regard to an evil word escaping his lips or an evil act done by him. Real prayer is an absolute shield and protection against this trinity of evils. Success does not always attend the very first effort at such real living prayer. We have to strive against ourselves, we have to believe in spite of ourselves, because months are as our years. We have therefore to cultivate illimitable patience if we will realize the efficacy of prayer. There will be darkness, disappointment and even worse; but we must have courage enough to battle against all these and not succumb to cowardice. There is no such thing as retreat for a man of prayer.

What I am relating is not a fairy tale. I have not drawn an imaginary picture. I have summed up the testimony of men who have by prayer conquered every difficulty in their upward progress, and I have added my own humble testimony that the more I live, the more I realize how much I owe to faith and prayer which is one and the same thing for me.. And I am quoting an experience not limited to a few hours, or days or weeks, but extending over an unbroken period of nearly 40 years. I have had my share of disappointments, uttermost darkness, counsels of despair, counsels of caution, subtlest assaults of pride, but I am able to say that my faith,—and I know that it is ' still little enough, by

no means as great as I want it to be,—has ultimately conquered every one of these difficulties up to now. If we have faith in us, if we have a prayerful heart, we may not tempt God, may not make terms with Him. We must reduce ourselves to a cipher.

Not until we have reduced ourselves to nothingness can we conquer the evil in us. God demands nothing less than complete self-surrender as the price for the only real freedom that is worth having. And when a man thus loses himself, he immediately finds himself in the service of all that lives. It becomes his delight and his recreation. He is a new man, never weary of spending himself in the Service of God's creation.

*Young India, 20-12-'28, p. 420*

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God never answers the prayers of the arrogant, nor the prayers of those who bargain with Him. If you would ask Him to help you, you would go to Him in all your nakedness, approach Him without reservations, also without fear or doubts as to how He can help a fallen being like you. He who has helped millions who have approached Him, is He going to desert you? He makes no exceptions whatsoever and you will find that every one of your prayers will be answered. The prayer of even the most impure will be answered. I am telling this out of my personal experience. I have gone through the purgatory. Seek first the Kingdom of Heaven and everything will be added unto you.

*Young India, 4-4-'29, p. 111*

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On all occasions of trial He has saved me. In all my trials—of a spiritual nature, as a lawyer, in conducting institutions, and in politics—I can say that God saved me. When every hope is gone, 'when helpers fail and comforts flee/ I find that help arrives somehow, from I know not where. Supplication, worship, prayer are no superstition; they are acts more real than the acts of eating, drinking, sitting or walking. It is no exaggeration to say that they alone are real, all else is unreal.

Such worship or prayer is no flight of eloquence; it is no lip-homage. It springs from the heart. If, therefore, we achieve that purity of the heart when it is 'emptied of all but love', if we keep all the chords in proper tune, they 'trembling pass in music out of sight'. Prayer needs no speech. It is in itself independent of any sensuous effort. I have not the slightest doubt that prayer is an unailing means of cleansing the heart of passions. But it must be combined with the utmost humility.

*Autobiography, 1948, p. 96*

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Prayer has been the saving of my life. Without it I should have been a lunatic long ago. My autobiography will tell you that I have had my fair share of the bitterest public and private experience. They threw me into temporary despair, but if I was able to get rid of it, it was because of prayer. Now I may tell you that prayer has not been part of my life in the sense that truth has been. It came out of sheer necessity, as I found myself in a plight when I could not possibly be happy without it. And the more my faith in God increased, the more irresistible became the yearning for prayer. Life seemed to be dull and vacant without it. I had attended the Christian service in South Africa, but it had failed to grip me. I could not join them in prayer. They supplicated God, but I could not do so, I failed egregiously. I started with disbelief in God and prayer, and until at a late stage in life I did not feel anything like a void in life. But at that stage I felt that as food was indispensable for the body, so was prayer indispensable for the soul. In fact food for the body is not so necessary as prayer for the soul. For starvation is often necessary in order to keep the body in health, but there is no such thing as prayer-starvation – In spite of despair staring me in the face on the political horizon, I have never lost my peace. In fact I have found people who envy my peace. That peace, I tell you, comes from prayer. I am not a man of learning but I humbly claim to be a man of prayer. I am indifferent as to the form. Everyone is law unto himself in that respect. But there are some well-marked roads, and it is safe to walk along the beaten tracks, trod by the ancient teachers. I have given my personal



testimony. Let everyone try and find that as a result of daily prayer he adds something new to his life, something with which nothing can be compared.

*Young India*, 24-9-'31, p. 274

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[The following is a summary of the discourse given in Gujarati by Gandhiji at Sabarmati to a conference of hostel boys from Gujarat:]

I am glad that you want me to speak to you on the meaning of and the necessity for prayer.

Prayer is the very core of man's life, as it is the most vital part of religion. Prayer is either petitional or in its wider sense is inward communion. In either case the ultimate result is the same. Even when it is petitional, the petition should be for the cleansing and purification of the soul, for freeing it from the layers of ignorance and darkness that envelop it. He therefore who hungers for the awakening of the divine in him must fall back on prayer. But prayer is no mere exercise of words or of the ears, it is no mere repetition of empty formula. It is better in prayer to have a heart without words than words without a heart. It must be in clear response to the spirit which hungers for it. And even as a hungry man relishes a hearty meal, a hungry soul will relish a heartfelt prayer. And I am giving you a bit of my experience and that of my companions when I say that he who has experienced the magic of prayer may do without food for days together but not a single moment without prayer. For without prayer there is no inward peace.

If that is the case, someone will say, we should be offering our prayers every minute of our lives. There is no doubt about it, but we erring mortals, who find it difficult to retire within ourselves for inward communion even for single moment, will find it impossible to remain perpetually in communion with the divine. We therefore fix some hours when we make a serious effort to throw off the attachments of the world for a while, we make a serious endeavour to remain, so to say, out of the flesh. You have heard Suradas's hymn. It is the passionate cry of a soul hungering for union with the divine. According to our standards he was a saint, but according to his own he was a proclaimed sinner.

Spiritually he was miles ahead of us, but he felt the separation from the divine so keenly that he has uttered that anguished cry in loathing and despair.

I have talked of the necessity for prayer, and there-through I have dealt with the essence of prayer. We are born to serve our fellowmen, and we cannot properly do so unless we are wide-awake. There is an eternal struggle raging in man's breast between the powers of darkness and of light, and he who has not the sheet-anchor of prayer to rely upon will be a victim to the powers of darkness. The man of prayer will be at peace with himself and with the whole world; the man who goes about the affairs of the world without a prayerful heart will be miserable and will make the world also miserable. Apart therefore from its bearing on man's condition after death, prayer has incalculable value for man in this world of the living. Prayer is the only means of bringing about orderliness and peace and repose in our daily acts.

Begin therefore your day with prayer, and make it so soulful that it may remain with you until the evening. Close the day with prayer so that you may have a peaceful night free from dreams and nightmares. Do not worry about the form of prayer. Let it be any form, it should be such as can put us into communion with the divine. Only, whatever be the form, let not the spirit wander while the words of prayer run on out of your mouth.

If what I have said has gone home to you, you will not be at peace until you have compelled your hostel superintendents to interest themselves in your prayer and to make it obligatory. Restraint self-imposed is no compulsion. A man, who chooses the path of freedom from restraint, i.e. self-indulgence, will be a bond slave of passions, whilst the man who binds himself to rules and restraints releases himself. All things in the universe, including the sun and the moon and the stars, obey certain laws. Without the restraining influence of these laws the world will not go on for a single moment. You, whose mission in life is service of your fellowmen, will go to pieces if you do not impose on yourselves some sort of discipline, and prayer is necessary spiritual discipline. It is discipline and restraint that separates us from the brute. If we will be men

walking with our heads erect and not walking on all fours, let us understand and put ourselves under voluntary discipline and restraint.

*Young India*, 23-1-'30, pp. 25-26

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Why pray at all ? Does not God, if there be one, know what has happened ? Does He stand in need of prayer to enable Him to do His duty ?

No, God needs no reminder. He is within every one. Nothing happens without His permission. Our prayer is a heart search. It is a reminder to ourselves that we are helpless without His support. No effort is complete without prayer,—without a definite recognition that the best human endeavour is of no effect if it has not God's blessings behind it. Prayer is a call to humility. It is a call to self-purification, to inward search.

*Harijan*, 8-6-'35, p. 132

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Dr. Fabri, a follower of Buddha, called on Gandhiji at Abbottabad, and enquired:

"Gould the Divine Mind be changed by prayer? Could one find it out by prayer?"

"It is a difficult thing to explain fully what I do when I pray," said Gandhiji. "But I must try to answer your question. The Divine Mind is unchangeable, but that Divinity is in everyone and everything—animate and inanimate. The meaning of prayer is that I want to evoke that Divinity within me. Now I may have that intellectual conviction, but not a living touch. And so when I pray for Swaraj or Independence for India I pray or wish for adequate power to gain that Swaraj or to make the largest contribution I can towards winning it, and I maintain that I can get that power in answer to prayer."

"Then you are not justified in calling it prayer. To pray means to beg or demand," said Dr. Fabri.

"Yes, indeed. You may say I beg it of myself, of my Higher Self, the Real Self with which I have not yet achieved complete identification. You may,

therefore, describe it as a Constitutional longing to lose oneself in the Divinity which comprises all."

"What about the people who cannot pray?" asked Dr. Fabri.

"Be humble", said Gandhiji, "I would say to them, and do not limit even the real Buddha by your own conception of Buddha. He could not have ruled the lives of millions of men that he did and does today if he was not humble enough to pray. There is something infinitely higher than intellect that rules us and even the sceptics. Their scepticism and philosophy do not help them in critical periods of their lives. They need something better, something outside them that can sustain them. And so if someone puts a conundrum before me, I say to him, 'You are not going to know the meaning of God or prayer unless you reduce yourself to a cipher. You must be humble enough to see that in spite of your greatness and gigantic intellect you are but a speck in the universe. A merely intellectual conception of the things of life is not enough. It is the spiritual conception which eludes the intellect, and which alone can give one satisfaction. Even moneyed men have critical periods in their lives. Though they are surrounded by everything that money can buy and affection can give, they find themselves at certain moments in their lives utterly distracted. It is in these moments that we have a glimpse of God, a vision of Him who is guiding every one of our steps in life. It is prayer.' "

"You mean what we might call a true religious experience which is stronger than intellectual conception," said Dr. Fabri.

"That is prayer," repeated Gandhiji with an insistence that could not but have gone home.

*Harijan, 19-8-'39, pp. 237-38*

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Q. Would it not be better for a man to give the time he spends on the worship of God to the service of the poor? And should not true service make devotional worship unnecessary for such a man?

A. I sense mental laziness as also agnosticism in this question. The biggest of *karmayogis* never give up devotional songs or worship. Idealistically it may be said that true service of others is itself worship and that such devotees do not need to spend any time in songs etc. As a matter of fact, *bhajans* etc. are a help to true service and keep the remembrance of God fresh in the heart of the devotee.

*Harijan*, 13-10-'46 p. 357

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### C. RAMANAMA

I am a stranger to *yogic* practices. The practice I follow is a practice I learnt in my childhood from my nurse. I was afraid of ghosts. She used to say to me: 'There are no ghosts, but if you are afraid, repeat Ramanama (the name of God).' What I learnt in my childhood has become a huge thing in my mental firmament. It is a sun that has brightened my darkest hour. A Christian may find the same solace from the repetition of the name of Jesus, and a Muslim from the name of Allah. All these things have the same implications and they produce identical results under identical circumstances. Only the repetition must not be a lip expression, but part of your very being.

*Harijan*, 5-12-'36, p. 339

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It (repetition of Ramanama) has been second nature with me with growing knowledge and advancing years. I may even say that the Word is in my heart, if not actually on my lips, all the twenty-four hours. It has been my saviour and I am ever stayed on it.

*Harijan*, 17-8-'34, p. 213

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God's grace shall descend on those who do His will and wait upon Him, not on those who simply mutter 'Rama Rama'.

*Young India*, 8-4-'26, pp. 131-32

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He and His Law are one. To observe His Law is, therefore, the best form of worship. A man who becomes one with the Law does not stand in need of vocal recitation of the name. In other words, an individual with whom contemplation on God has become as natural as breathing is so filled with God's spirit that knowledge or observance of the Law becomes second nature, as it were, with him.

*Harijan, 24-3-'46, p. 56*

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A true devotee of God faithfully obeys the five elemental forces of nature. If he so obeys, he will not fall ill. If perchance he does, he will cure himself with the aid of the elementals. It is not for the dweller in the body to get the body cured anyhow—he who believes that he is nothing but body will naturally wander to the ends of the earth in order to cure the body of its ills. But he who realizes that the soul is something apart from, though in the body, that it is imperishable in contrast to the perishable body, will not be perturbed nor mourn if the elementals fail. On the contrary he will welcome death as a friend- He will become his own healer instead of seeking for medical men. He will live in the consciousness of the soul within and look to the care, first and last, of the in- dweller.

Such a man will take God's name with every breath. His Rama will be awake even whilst the body is asleep. Rama will always be with him in whatever he does. The real death for such a devoted man will be the loss of this sacred companionship.

As an aid to keeping his Rama with him, he will take what the five elementals have to give him. That is to say, he will employ the simplest and easiest way of deriving ; all the benefit he can from earth, air, water, sunlight and ether. This aid is not complementary to Ramanama. It is but a means of its realization. Ramanama does not in fact require any aid. But to claim belief in Ramanama and at the same time to run to doctors do not go hand in hand.

A friend versed in religious lore who read my remarks on Ramanama sometime ago wrote to say that Ramanama is an alchemy such as can transform the body.

The conservation of the vital energy has been likened to accumulated wealth, but it is in the power of Ramanama alone to make it a running stream of ever increasing spiritual strength ultimately making a fall impossible.

Just as the body cannot exist without blood, so the soul needs the matchless and pure strength of faith. This strength can renovate the weakness of all man's physical organs. That is why it is said that when Ramanama is enshrined in the heart, it means the rebirth of man. This law applies to the young, the old man and woman alike.

This belief is to be found in the West too. Christian Science gives a glimpse of it.

India needs no outside support for a belief which has been handed down to her people from time immemorial.

*Harijan, 29-6-'47, p. 212*

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There is no connection between Ramanama of my conception and *jantar mantar* (magic). I have said that to take Ramanama from the heart means deriving help from an incomparable power. The atom bomb is as nothing compared with it. This power is capable of removing all pain. It must, however, be admitted that it is easy to say that Ramanama must come from the heart, but to attain the reality is very difficult. Nevertheless, it is the biggest thing man can possess.

*Harijan, 13-10-'46, p. 357*

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My Rama, the Rama of our prayers is not the historical Rama, the son of Dasharatha, the King of Ayodhya. He is the eternal, the unborn, the one without a second. Him alone I worship. His aid alone I seek, and so should you. He belongs equally to all. I, therefore, see no reason why a Mussalman or anybody should object to taking His name. But he is in no way bound to recognize God as Rama. He may utter to himself Allah or Khuda so as not to mar the harmony of the sound.

Q. While in conversation or doing brain work or when one is suddenly worried, can one recite Ramanama in one's heart? Do people do so at such times and, if so, how?

A. Experience shows that man can do so at any time, even in sleep, provided Ramanama is enshrined in his heart. If the taking of the name has become a habit, its recitation through the heart becomes as natural as the heart beat. Otherwise, Ramanama is a mere mechanical performance or at best has touched the heart only on the surface. When Ramanama has established its dominion over the heart, the question of vocal recitation does not arise. Because then it transcends speech. But it may well be held that persons who have attained this state are few and far between.

There is no doubt whatsoever that Ramanama contains all the power that is attributed to it. No one can, by mere wishing, enshrine Ramanama in his heart. Untiring effort is required as also patience. What an amount of labour and patience have been lavished by man to acquire the non-existent philosopher's stone? Surely, God's name is of infinitely richer value and always existent.

Q. Is it harmful if, owing to stress or exigencies of work, one is unable to carry out daily devotions in the prescribed manner? Which of the two should be given preference? Service or the rosary?

A. Whatever the exigencies of service or adverse circumstances may be, Ramanama must not cease. The outward form will vary according to the occasion. The absence of the rosary does not interrupt Ramanama which has found an abiding place in the heart.

*Harijan*, 17-2-'46, pp. 12-13



## 28. ASHRAM VOWS

[Gandhiji sent to members of his Ashram at Sabarmati during 1930 a series of weekly discourses from the Yeravda Jail (which he called *mandir* or temple). Those discourses dealing with the Ashram vows of Truth, Non-violence, Brahmacharya or Chastity, Non-possession and Non-stealing are given hereunder. The remaining vows of the Ashram are: Control of the Palate, Fearlessness, Removal of Untouchability, Bread Labour, Equality of Religions and Swadeshi. Gandhiji's discourses on these also will be found in the booklet *From Yeravda Mandir*.<sup>1</sup> Some of them have been treated in other parts of this present volume.]

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### Importance of Vows

Taking vows is not a sign of weakness, but of strength. To do at any cost something that one ought to do constitutes a vow. It becomes a bulwark of strength. A man who says that he will do something 'as far as possible', betrays either his pride or his weakness. I have noticed in my own case, as well as in the case of others, that the limitation 'as far as possible' provides a fatal loophole. To do something 'as far as possible' is to succumb to the very first temptation. There is no sense in saying that one would observe truth 'as far as possible'. Even as no businessman will look at a note in which a man promises to pay a certain amount on a certain date 'as far as possible', so will God refuse to accept a promissory note drawn by one, who will observe truth 'as far as possible'.

God is the very image of the vow. God would cease to be God if He swerved from His own laws even by a hair's breadth. The sun is a great keeper of observances; hence the possibility of measuring time and publishing almanacs. All business depends upon men fulfilling their promises. Are such promises less necessary in character-building or self-realization? We should therefore never doubt the necessity of vows for the purpose of self-purification and self-realization.

## A. TRUTH

The word *Satya* (Truth) is derived from *Sat*, which means 'being'. Nothing is or exists in reality except Truth. That is why *sat* or Truth is perhaps the most important name of God. In fact it is more correct to say that Truth is God, than to say that God is Truth.

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

Generally speaking, observation of the law of Truth is understood merely to mean that we must speak the truth. But we in the Ashram should understand the word *Satya* or Truth in a much wider sense. There should be Truth in thought, Truth in speech, and Truth in action.

But Truth is the right designation of God. Hence there is nothing wrong in every man following Truth according to his lights. Indeed it is his duty to do so. Then if there is a mistake on the part of any one so following Truth, it will be automatically set right. For the quest of Truth involves *tapas*— self-suffering, sometimes even unto death. There can be no place in it for even a trace of self-interest. In such selfless search for Truth nobody can lose his bearings for long. Directly he takes to the wrong path he stumbles, and is thus redirected to the right path. Therefore the pursuit of Truth is true *bhakti* (devotion). It is the path that leads to God.

How beautiful it would be, if all of us, young and old, men and women, devoted ourselves wholly to Truth in all that we might do in our waking hours, whether working, eating, drinking or playing, till dissolution of the body makes us one

with Truth ? God as Truth has been for me a treasure beyond price; may He be so to every one of us.

*From Yeravda Mandir, 1945, pp. 1-4*

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He who would go in for novel experiments must begin with himself. That leads to a quicker discovery of Truth, and God always protects the honest experimenter.

*Autobiography, 1948, p. 376*

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A devotee of Truth may not do anything in deference to convention. He must always hold himself open to correction, and whenever he discovers himself to be wrong he must confess it at all costs and atone for it.

*Autobiography, 1948, p. 429*

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A clean confession, combined with a promise never to commit the sin again, when offered before one who has the right to receive it, is the purest type of repentance.

*Autobiography, 1948, p. 42*

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Experience has taught me that silence is part of the spiritual discipline of a votary of Truth. Proneness to exaggerate, to suppress or modify the truth, wittingly or unwittingly, is a natural weakness of man and silence is necessary in order to surmount it. A man of few words will rarely be thoughtless in his speech; he will measure every word.

*Autobiography, 1948, p. 84*

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Silence is a great help to a seeker after Truth like myself. In the attitude of silence the soul finds the path in a clearer light, and what is elusive and deceptive resolves itself into crystal clearness. Our life is a long and arduous

quest after Truth, and the soul requires inward restfulness to attain its full height.

It (silence) has now become both a physical and spiritual necessity for me. Originally it was taken to relieve the sense of pressure. Then I wanted time for writing. After, however, I had practised it for some time, I saw the spiritual value of it. It suddenly flashed across my mind that that was the time when I could best hold communion with God. And now I feel as though I was naturally built for silence.

*Harijan, 10-12-'38, pp. 373-74*

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## **B. AHIMSA OR LOVE**

It is impossible for us to realize perfect Truth so long as we are imprisoned in this mortal frame. We can only visualize it in our imagination. We cannot, through the instrumentality of this ephemeral body, see face to face Truth which is eternal. That is why in the last resort we must depend on faith.

It appears that the impossibility of full realization of Truth in this mortal body led some ancient seeker after Truth to the appreciation of Ahimsa. The question which confronted him was: "Shall I bear with those who create difficulties for me, or shall I destroy them?" The seeker realized that he who went on destroying others did not make headway but simply stayed where he was, while the man who suffered those who created difficulties marched ahead, and at time even took the others with him. The first act of destruction taught him that the Truth which was the object of his quest was not outside himself but within. Hence the more he took to violence, the more he receded from Truth. For in fighting the imagined enemy without, he neglected the enemy within.

We punish thieves, because we think they harass us. They may leave us alone; but they will only transfer their attentions to another victim. This other victim however is also a human being, ourselves in a different form, and so we are caught 'in a vicious circle. The trouble from thieves continues to increase, as

they think it is their business to steal. In the end we see that it is better to endure the thieves than to punish them. The forbearance may even bring them to their senses. By enduring them we realize that thieves are not different from ourselves, they are our brethren, our friends, and may not be punished. But whilst we may bear with the thieves, we may not endure the infliction. That would only induce cowardice. So we realize a further duty. Since we regard the thieves as our kith and kin, they must be made to realize the kinship. And so we must take pains to devise ways and means of winning them over. This is the path of Ahimsa. It may entail continuous suffering and the cultivating of endless patience. Given these two conditions, the thief is bound in the end to turn away from his evil ways. Thus step by step we learn how to make friends with all the world; we realize the greatness of God—of Truth. Our peace of mind increases in spite of suffering; we become braver and more enterprising; we understand here clearly the difference between what is everlasting and what is not; we learn how to distinguish between what is our duty and what is not. Our pride melts away, and we become humble. Our worldly attachments diminish, and the evil within us diminishes from day to day.

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 violated 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. But the world needs even what we eat day by day.

Realizing the limitations of the flesh, we must strive day by day towards the idea with what strength we have in us.

It is perhaps clear from the foregoing, that without Ahimsa it is not possible to seek and find Truth. Ahimsa and Truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like the two sides of a coin, or rather of a smooth unstamped metallic disc. Who can say, which is the obverse, and which is the reverse? Nevertheless Ahimsa is the means; Truth is the end. Means to be means must always be within our reach, and so Ahimsa is our supreme duty- If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end

sooner or later. When once we have grasped this point, final victory is beyond question. Whatever difficulties we encounter, whatever apparent reverses we sustain, we may not give up the quest for Truth which alone is being God Himself.

*From Yeravda Mandir, 1945, pp. 5-9*

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### **C. BRAHMACHARYA OR CHASTITY**

The man, who is wedded to Truth and worships Truth alone, proves unfaithful to her, if he applies his talents to anything else. How then can he minister to the senses? A man, whose activities are wholly consecrated to the realization of Truth, which requires utter selflessness, can have no time for the selfish purpose of begetting children and running a household. Realization of Truth through self-gratification should, after what has been said before, appear a contradiction in terms.

If we look at it from the standpoint of Ahimsa, we find that the fulfillment of Ahimsa is impossible without utter selflessness. Ahimsa means Universal Love. If a man gives his love to one woman, or a woman to one man, what is there left for all the world besides? It simply means, "we two first, and the devil take all the rest of them." As a faithful wife must be prepared to sacrifice her all for the sake of her husband, and a faithful husband for the sake of his wife, it is clear that such persons cannot rise to the height of Universal Love or look upon all mankind as kith and kin. For they have created a boundary wall round their love. The larger their family, the farther are they from Universal Love. Hence one who would obey the law of Ahimsa cannot marry, not to speak of gratification outside the marital bond.

Then what about people who are already married ? Will they never be able to realize Truth? Can they never offer up their all at the altar of humanity? There is a way out for them. They can behave as if they were not married. Those who have enjoyed this happy condition will be able to bear me out. Many have to my knowledge successfully tried the experiment. If the married couple can think of each other as brother and sister, they are freed for universal service.

The very thought that all the women in the world are his sisters, mothers or daughters will at once ennoble a man and snap his chains. The husband and wife do not lose anything here, but only add to their resources and even to their family. Their love becomes free from the impurity of lust and so grows stronger. With the disappearance of this impurity, they can serve each other better, and the occasions for quarrel become fewer. There are more occasions for quarrelling where the love is selfish and bounded.

If the foregoing argument is appreciated, a consideration of the physical benefits of chastity becomes a matter of secondary importance. How foolish it is intentionally to dissipate vital energy in sensual enjoyment ! It is a grave misuse to fritter away for physical gratification that which is given to man and woman for the full development of their bodily and mental powers. Such misuse is the root cause of many a disease.

*Brahmacharya*, like all other observances, must be observed in thought, word and deed. We are told in the Gita, and experience will corroborate the statement, that the foolish man, who appears to control his body, but is nursing evil thoughts in his mind, makes a vain effort. It may be harmful to suppress the body, if the mind is at the same time allowed to go astray. Where the mind wanders, the body must follow sooner or later.

It is necessary here to appreciate a distinction. It is one thing to allow the mind to harbour impure thoughts; it is a different thing altogether if it strays among them in spite of ourselves. Victory will be ours in the end, if we non-co-operate with the mind in its evil wanderings.

We experience every moment of our lives, that often while the body is subject to our control, the mind is not. This physical control should never be relaxed, and in addition, we must put forth a constant endeavour to bring the mind under control. We can do nothing more, nothing less. If we give way to the mind, the body and the mind will pull different ways, and we shall be false to ourselves. Body and mind may be said to go together so long as we continue to resist the approach of every evil thought.

The observance of *brahmacharya* has been believed to be very difficult, almost impossible. In trying to find a reason for this belief, we see that the term *brahmacharya* has been taken in a narrow sense. Mere control of animal passion has been thought to be tantamount to observing *brahmacharya*. I feel that this conception is incomplete and wrong. *Brahmacharya* means control of all the organs of sense. He who attempts to control only one organ, and allows all the others free play, is bound to find his effort futile. To hear suggestive stories with the ears, to see suggestive sights with the eyes, to taste stimulating food with the tongue, to touch exciting things with the hands, and then at the same time expect to control the only remaining organ is like putting one's hands in a fire and then expecting to escape being burnt. He therefore who is resolved to control the one must be likewise determined to control the rest. I have always felt that much harm has been done by the narrow definition of *brahmacharya*. If we practise simultaneous self-control in all directions, the attempt will be scientific and possible of success.

Let us remember the root meaning of *brahmacharya*. *Charya* means course of conduct; *brahmacharya* conduct adapted to the search of *Brahma*, i.e., Truth. From this etymological meaning arises the special meaning, viz., control of all the senses. We must entirely forget the incomplete definition which restricts itself to the sexual aspect only.

*From Yeravda Mandir, 1945, pp. 10-14*

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The knowledge that a perfect observance of *brahma charya* means realization of *Brahma*, I did not owe to a study of the Shastras. It slowly grew upon me with experience. The Shastric texts on the subject I read only later in life.

Realization of God is impossible without complete renunciation of the sexual desire.

*Young India, 24-6-'26, p. 230*

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The conquest of lust is the highest endeavour of a man or woman's existence. Without overcoming lust man cannot hope to rule over self. And without rule



over self there can be no Swaraj or Ramaraj. Rule of all without rule of oneself would prove to be as deceptive and disappointing as a painted toy-mango, charming to look at outwardly but hollow and empty within. No worker who has not overcome lust can hope to render any genuine service to the cause of Harijans, communal unity, Khadi, cow protection or village reconstruction. Great causes like these cannot be served by intellectual equipment alone, they call for spiritual effort or soul-force. Soul-force comes only through God's grace, and God's grace never descends upon a man who is a slave to lust.

*Harijan*, 21-II-'36 p.321

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Remember my definition of *brahmacharya*. It means not suppression of one or more senses but complete mastery over them all. The two states are fundamentally different. I can suppress all my senses today but it may take aeons to conquer them. Conquest means *using* them as my willing slaves. I can prick the ear drum and suppress the sense of hearing by a simple, painless operation. This is worthless. I must train the ear so that it refuses to hear gossip, lewd talk, blasphemy, but it is open to the celestial music, it will hear the most distant cry for succour from thousands of miles. Saint Ramdas is said to have done so. Then how to use the organs of generation? By transmitting the most creative energy that we possess from creating counterparts of our flesh into creating constructive work for the whole of life.

*Bapu's Letters to Mir a*, 1949, pp. 257-58

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### **Aids to Brahmacharya**

A friend writes :

'I am miserable. I am haunted by carnal thoughts even whilst I am in my office, on the road, by night and day, whilst reading and working, even whilst I am praying. How is a wandering mind to be controlled? How is one to learn to look upon every woman as one's mother? How is the eye to radiate forth purest love? How can evil thoughts be eradicated? I have before me your article on *brahmacharya* (written years ago), but it has failed to help me.'

This condition is heart rending. Many suffer from it. But so long as the mind is engaged in a perpetual struggle against evil thoughts, there is no reason to despair. When the eye offends, it should be closed. When the ears offend they should be stopped. It is best always to walk with downcast eyes. They will then have no occasion to go astray. All haunts of filthy talk or unclean music should be avoided. There should be full control of the palate. I know that he who has not mastered his palate cannot master the carnal desire. It is difficult I know to master the palate. But mastery of the palate means automatic mastery of the other senses. One of the rules for control of the palate is to abjure completely or, as much as possible, all condiments. A more difficult rule is to cultivate the feeling that the food we eat is to sustain the body, never to satisfy the palate. We take air not for the pleasure of it but to breathe. We drink water to quench our thirst; and so should we take food to satisfy our hunger. But from childhood upwards we are brought up to a different habit. Our parents make us cultivate all sorts of tastes, not with a view to our nourishment, but for indulging their affection for us. We thus get spoiled. We have therefore to struggle against the results of our own upbringing.

There is however a golden rule for gaining control of the carnal desire. It is the repetition of the divine word Rama or such other *mantra*.

Everyone must select the *mantra* after his heart. I have suggested the word Rama because I was brought up to repeat it in my childhood and I have ever got strength and sustenance out of it. Whichever *mantra* is selected one should be identified with it whilst repeating it. I have not the least doubt of ultimate success as a result of repetition of some such *mantra* incomplete faith, even though other thoughts distract the mind. The *mantra* will be the light of one's life and will keep one from all distress. Such holy *mantras* should obviously never be used for material ends. If their use is strictly restricted to the preservation of morals, the result attained will be startling. Of course a mere repetition of such *mantra* parrot-wise would be of no avail. One should throw his whole soul into it. The parrot repeats it like a machine. We should repeat it

with a view to preventing the approach of unwelcome thoughts and with full faith in the efficacy of the *mantra* that end.

*Young India*, 5-6-'24, pp. 186-87

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Control of the palate is the first essential in the observance of the vow. I found that complete control of the palate made the observance very easy, and so I now pursued my dietetic experiments not merely from the vegetarian's but also from the *brahmachari's* point of view. As the result of these experiments I saw that the *brahmachari's* food should be limited, simple, spiceless, and, if possible, uncooked.

Six years of experiment have showed me that the *brahmachari's* ideal food is fresh fruit and nuts. The immunity from passion that I enjoyed when I lived on this food was unknown to me after I changed that diet. *Brahmacharya* needed no effort on my part in South Africa when I lived on fruits and nuts alone. It has been a matter of very great effort ever since I began to take milk.

As an external aid to *brahmacharya*, fasting is as necessary as selection and restriction in diet. So overpowering are the senses that they can be kept under control only when they are completely hedged in on all sides, from above and from beneath. It is common knowledge that they are powerless without food, and so fasting undertaken with a view to control of the senses is, I have no doubt, very helpful. With some, fasting is of no avail, because assuming that mechanical fasting alone will make them immune, they keep their bodies without food, but feast their minds upon all sorts of delicacies, thinking all the while what they will eat and what they will drink after the fast terminates. Such fasting helps them in controlling neither palate nor lust. Fasting is useful, when mind cooperates with starving body, that is to say, when it cultivates distaste for the objects that are denied to the body. Mind is at the root of all sensuality. Fasting, therefore, has a limited use, for a fasting man may continue to be swayed by passion. But it may be said that extinction of the sexual passion is as a rule impossible without fasting, which may be said to be indispensable for the observance of *brahmacharya*.

Every day I have been realizing more and more the necessity for restraints of the kind I have detailed above. There is no limit to the possibilities of renunciation, even as there is none to those of *brahmacharya*. Such *brahmacharya* is impossible of attainment by limited effort. For many it must remain only as an ideal. An aspirant after *brahmacharya* will always be conscious of his shortcomings, will seek out the passions lingering in the innermost recesses of his heart and will incessantly strive to get rid of them. So long as thought is not under complete control of the will, *brahmacharya* in its fullness is absent. Involuntary thought is an affection of the mind, and curbing of thought, therefore, means curbing of the mind which is even more difficult to curb than the wind. Nevertheless the existence of God within makes even control of the mind possible. Let no one think that it is impossible because it is difficult. It is the highest goal, and it is no wonder that the highest effort should be necessary to attain it.

But it was after coming to India (from South Africa) that I realized that such *brahmacharya* was impossible to attain by mere human effort. Until then I had been labouring under the delusion that fruit diet alone would enable me to eradicate all passions, and I had flattered myself with the belief that I had nothing more to do.

But I must not anticipate the chapter of my struggle. Meanwhile let me make it clear that those who desire to observe *brahmacharya* with a view to realizing God need not despair, provided their faith in God is equal to their confidence in their own effort. His name and His grace are the last resources of the aspirant after *moksha*.

*Autobiography*, 1948, pp. 256-60

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Experience teaches that animal food is unsuited to those who would curb their passions. But it is wrong to overestimate the importance of food in the formation of character or in subjugating the flesh. Diet is a powerful factor not to be neglected. But to sum up all religion in terms of diet, as is often done in

India, is as wrong as it is to disregard all restraint in regard to diet and to give full reins to one's appetite.

*Young India*, 7-10-'26, p. 347

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### Steps to Brahmacharya

The first step is the realisation of its necessity.

The next is gradual control of the senses. A *brahmachari* must needs control his palate. He must eat to live, and not for enjoyment. He must see only clean things and close his eyes before anything unclean. It is thus a sign of polite breeding to walk with one's eyes towards the ground and not wandering about from object to object. A *brahmachari* will likewise hear nothing obscene or unclean, smell no strong, stimulating things. The smell of clean earth is far sweeter than the fragrance of artificial scents and essences. Let the aspirant to *brahmacharya* also keep his hands and feet engaged in all the waking hours in healthful activity. Let him also fast occasionally.

The third step is to have clean companions—clean friends and clean books.

The last and not the least is prayer. Let him repeat Ramanama with all his heart regularly everyday, and ask for divine grace.

None of these things are difficult for an average man or woman. They are simplicity itself. But their very simplicity is embarrassing. Where there is a will, the way is simple enough. Men have not the will for it and hence vainly grope. The fact that the world rests on the observance, more or less, of *brahmacharya* or restraint, means that it is necessary and practicable.

*Young India*, 29-4-'26, pp. 157-58

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Patanjali has described five disciplines. And for this age the five have been expanded into eleven. They are: non-violence, truth, non-stealing, *brahmacharya*, non-possession, bread labour, control of the palate, fearlessness, equal regard for all religions, Swadeshi and removal of untouchability.

It is well to bear in mind that all the disciplines are of equal importance. If one is broken all are. Therefore, it is essential that all the disciplines should be taken as one. This enables one to realize the full meaning and significance of *brahmacharya*.

*Harijan*, 8-6-'47, p. 180

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### Birth-control

There can be no two opinions about the necessity of birth-control. But the only method handed down from ages past is self-control or *brahmacharya*. It is an infallible sovereign remedy doing good to those who practise it. And medical men will earn the gratitude of mankind, if instead of devising artificial means of birth-control, they will find out the means of self-control. The union is meant not for pleasure but for bringing forth progeny. And union is a crime when the desire for progeny is absent.

Artificial methods are like putting a premium upon vice. They make man and woman reckless. And respectability that is being given to the methods must hasten the dissolution of the restraints that public opinion puts upon one. Adoption of artificial methods must result in imbecility and nervous prostration. The remedy will be found to be worse than the disease. It is wrong and immoral to seek to escape the consequences of one's acts. It is good for a person who overeats to have an ache and a fast. It is bad for him to indulge his appetite and then escape the consequences by taking tonics or other medicines. It is still worse for a person to indulge in his animal passions and escape the consequences of his acts. Nature is relentless and will have full revenge for any such violation of her laws. Moral results can only be produced by moral restraints. All other restraints defeat the very purpose for which they are intended. The reasoning underlying the use of artificial methods is that indulgence is a necessity of life. Nothing can be more fallacious. Let those who are eager so see the births regulated explore the lawful means devised by the ancients and try to find out how they can be revived. An enormous amount of spade work lies in front of them. Early marriages are a fruitful source of adding

to the population. The present mode of life has also a great deal to do with the evil of unchecked procreation. If these causes are investigated and dealt with, society- will be morally elevated. If they are ignored by impatient zealots and if artificial methods become the order of the day, nothing but moral degradation can be the result. A society that has already become enervated through a variety of causes will become still further enervated by the adoption of artificial methods. Those men therefore who are light-heartedly advocating artificial methods cannot do better than study the subject afresh, stay their injurious activity and popularize *brahmacharya* both for the married and the unmarried. That is the only noble and straight method of birth-control.

*Young India*, 12-3-'25, pp. 88-89

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#### **D. NON-POSSESSION OR POVERTY**

Possession implies provision for the future. A seeker after Truth, a follower of the law of Love, cannot hold anything against tomorrow. God never stores for the morrow: He never creates more than what is strictly needed for the moment. If therefore we repose faith in His providence, we should rest assured that He will give us every day our daily bread, meaning everything that we require. Saints and devotees, who have lived in such faith, have always derived a justification for it from their experience. Our ignorance or negligence of the Divine Law, which gives to man from day to day his daily bread and no more, has given rise to inequalities with all the miseries attendant upon them. The rich have a superfluous store of things which they do not need, and which are therefore neglected and wasted, while millions are starved to death for want of sustenance. If each retained possession only of what he needed, no one would be in want, and all would live in contentment. As it is, the rich are discontented no less than the poor. The poor man would fain become a millionaire, and the millionaire a multimillionaire. The rich should take the initiative in dispossession with a view to a universal diffusion of the spirit of contentment. If only they keep their own property within moderate limits, the starving will be easily fed, and will learn the lesson of contentment along with

the rich. Perfect fulfillment of the ideal of Non-possession requires that man should, like the birds, have no roof over his head, no clothing and no stock of food for the morrow. He will indeed need his daily bread, but it will be God's business, and not his, to provide it. Only the fewest possible, if any at all, can reach this ideal. We ordinary seekers may not be repelled by the seeming impossibility. But we must keep the ideal constantly in view, and in the light thereof, critically examine our possessions, and try to reduce them. Civilization, in the real sense of the term, consists not in the multiplication, but in the deliberate and voluntary reduction of wants. This alone promotes real happiness and contentment, and increases the capacity for service.

We thus arrive at the ideal of total renunciation, and learn to use the body for the purpose of service so long as it exists, so much so that service, and not bread, becomes with us the staff of life. We eat and drink, sleep and wake, for service alone. Such an attitude of mind brings us real happiness, and the beatific vision in the fullness of time. Let us all examine ourselves from this standpoint.

We should remember that Non-possession is a principle applicable to thoughts, as well as to things. A man who fills his brain with useless knowledge violates that inestimable principle. Thoughts, which turn us away from God, or do not turn us towards Him, constitute impediments in our way.

*From Yeravda Mandir, 1945, pp. 23-26*

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A certain degree of physical harmony and comfort is necessary, but above that level, it becomes a hindrance instead of help. Therefore the ideal of creating an unlimited number of wants and satisfying them seems to be a delusion and a snare. The satisfaction of one's physical needs, even the intellectual needs of one's narrow self must meet at a point a dead stop, before it degenerates into physical and intellectual voluptuousness. A man must arrange his physical and cultural circumstances so that they may not hinder him in his service of humanity, on which all his energies should be concentrated.



I own no property and yet I feel that I am perhaps the richest man in the world. For I have never been in want either for myself or for my public concerns. God has always and invariably responded in time. I can recall several occasions when almost the last penny had been spent for my public activities. Moneys then came in from the most unexpected quarters. These responses have made me humble and filled me with a faith in God and His goodness that will stand the strain of utter distress if it ever becomes my lot in life. It is open to the world, therefore, to laugh at my dispossessing myself of all property. For me the dispossession has been a positive gain. I would like people to compete with me in my contentment. It is the richest treasure I own. Hence it is perhaps right to say that though I preach poverty, I am a rich man.

*This Was Bapu*, R. X. Prabhu, 1954, p. 120

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I doubt if the Steel Age is an advance on the Flint Age. I am indifferent. It is the evolution of the soul to which the intellect and all our faculties have to be devoted.

*Young India*, 13-10-'21, p. 325

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## **E. NON-STEALING**

It is impossible that a person should steal, and simultaneously claim to know Truth or cherish Love. Yet every one of us is consciously or unconsciously more or less guilty of theft.

It is theft to take something from another even with his permission if we have no real need of it. We should not receive any single thing that we do not need. Theft of this description generally has food for its object. It is theft for me to take any fruit that I do not need, or to take it in a larger quantity than is necessary. We are not always aware of our real needs, and most of us improperly multiply our wants, and thus unconsciously make thieves of ourselves. If we devote some thought to the subject, we shall find that we can

get rid of quite a number of our wants. One who follows the observance of Non-stealing will bring about a progressive reduction of his own wants. Much of the distressing poverty in this world has arisen out of breaches of the principle of Non-stealing.

There is besides another kind of theft subtler and far more degrading to the human spirit. It is theft mentally to desire acquisition of anything belonging to others, or to cast a greedy eye on it.

One, who observes the principle of Non-stealing, will refuse to bother himself about things to be acquired in the future. This evil anxiety for the future will be found at the root of many a theft. Today we only desire possession of a thing; tomorrow we shall begin to adopt measures, straight if possible, crooked when thought necessary, to acquire its possession.

Ideas may be stolen no less than material things. One who egotistically claims to have originated some good idea, which, really speaking, did not originate with him, is guilty of a theft of ideas. Many learned men have committed such theft in the course of world history.

One who takes up the observance of Non-stealing has therefore to be humble, thoughtful, vigilant and in habits simple.

*From Yeravda Mandir, 1945, pp. 19-22*

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I suggest that we are thieves in a way. If I take anything that I do not need for my own immediate use, and keep it, I thieve it from somebody else. I venture to suggest that it is the fundamental law of Nature, without exception, that Nature produces enough for our wants from day to day, and if only everybody took enough for himself and nothing more, there would be no pauperism in this world, there would be no man dying of starvation in this world. But so long as we have got this inequality, so long we are thieving. I am no socialist and I do not want to dispossess those who have got possessions; but I do say that, personally, those of us who want to see light out of darkness have to follow this rule. I do not want to dispossess anybody. I should then be departing from the

rule of Ahimsa. If somebody else possesses more than I do, let him. But so far as my own life has to be regulated, I do say that I dare not possess anything which I do not want. In India we have got three millions of people having to be satisfied with one meal a day. You and I, who ought to know better, must adjust our wants, and even undergo voluntary starvation in order that they may be nursed, fed and clothed.

*Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 384

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If we are to be non-violent, we must not wish for anything on this earth which the meanest or the lowest of human beings cannot have.

*With Gandhiji in Ceylon*, 1928, by Mahadev Desai, p. 132

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**SECTION SEVEN: THE GOALS OF MY RELIGION**

## 29. RELIGION TO PERVADE ALL SPHERES OF LIFE

The whole gamut of man's activities today constitutes an indivisible whole. You cannot divide social, economic, political and purely religious work into watertight compartments. I do not know any religion apart from human activity. It provides a moral basis to all other activities which they would otherwise lack, reducing life to a maze of sound and fury signifying nothing'.

*Harijan, 24-12-'38, p. 393*

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We have to make truth and non-violence, not matters for mere individual practice but for practice by groups and communities and nations. That at any rate is my dream. I shall live and die in trying to realize it. My faith helps me to discover new truths every day. Ahimsa is the attribute of the soul, and therefore, to be practised by everybody in all the affairs of life. If it cannot be practised in all departments, it has no practical value.

*Harijan, 2-3-'40, p. 23*

### 30. IN THE SOCIAL SPHERE

#### All Men Are Equal

In my opinion there is no such thing as inherited or acquired superiority. I believe in the rock-bottom doctrine of *advaita* (non-duality or oneness) and my interpretation of *advaita* excludes totally any idea of superiority at any stage whatsoever. I believe implicitly that all men are born equal. All—whether born in India or in England or America or in any circumstances whatsoever—have the same soul as any other. And it is because I believe in this inherent equality of all men that I fight the doctrine of superiority which many of our rulers arrogate to themselves. I have fought this doctrine of superiority in South Africa inch by inch, and it is because of that inherent belief, that I delight in calling myself a scavenger, a spinner, a weaver, a farmer and a labourer. And I have fought against the Brahmanas themselves wherever they have claimed any superiority for themselves either by reason of their birth, or by reason of their subsequently acquired knowledge. I consider that it is unmanly for any person to claim superiority over a fellow-being. He who claims superiority at once forfeits his claim to be called a man. That is my opinion.

*Young India*, 29-9-'27, p. 329

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The forms are many, but the informing spirit is one. How can there be room for distinctions of high and low where there is this all-embracing fundamental unity underlying the outward diversity? For that is a fact meeting you at every step in daily life. The final goal of all religions is to realize this essential oneness.

*Harijan*, 15-12-'33, p. 3

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#### Individualism v. Social Responsibility

I value individual freedom but you must not forget that man is essentially a social being. He has risen to his present status by learning to adjust his individualism to the requirements of social progress. Unrestricted individualism

is the law of the beast of the jungle. We have to learn to strike the mean between individual freedom and social restraint. Willing submission to social restraint for the sake of the well-being of the whole society, enriches both the individual and the society of which he is a member.

*Harijan*, 27-5-'39, p. 144

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There is not a single virtue which aims at, or is content with, the welfare of the individual only. Conversely, there is not a single moral offence which does not, directly or indirectly, affect many others besides the actual offender. Hence, whether an individual is good or bad is not merely his own concern, but really the concern of the whole community, nay, of the whole world.

*Ethical Religion*, By M. K. Gandhi, p. 55

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I believe in the essential unity of man and for that matter of all that lives. Therefore, I believe that if one man gains spiritually, the whole world gains with him and, if one man falls, the whole world falls to that extent.

*Young India*, 4-12-'24 p. 398

## 31. IN THE ECONOMIC SPHERE

### Love to be the Basis

Man is an engine whose motive power is the soul. The largest quantity of work will not be done by this curious engine for pay or under pressure. It will be done when the motive force, that is to say, the will or spirit of the creature, is brought to its greatest strength by its own proper fuel, namely by the affections. The universal law of the matter is that, assuming any given quantity of energy and sense in master and servant, the greatest material result obtainable by them will be not through antagonism to each other, but through affection for each other. Unselfish treatment will produce the most effective return. Treat the servant kindly with the idea of turning his gratitude to account, and you will get, as you deserve, no gratitude nor any value for your kindness; but treat him kindly without any economical purpose, and all economical purposes will be answered; here as elsewhere whoever will save his life shall lose it, who so loses it shall find it.

In most cases a youth entering a commercial establishment is withdrawn altogether from home influence; his master must become his father; else he has, for practical and constant help no father at hand. So that the only means which the master has of doing justice to the men employed by him is to ask himself sternly whether he is dealing with such subordinates as he would with his own son, if compelled by circumstances to take such a position.

And as the captain of a ship is bound to be the last man to leave his ship in case of wreck and to share his last crust with the sailors in case of famine, so the manufacturer, in any commercial crisis, is bound to take the suffering of it with his men, and even to take more of it for himself than he allows his men to feel; as a father would in a famine, shipwreck or battle, sacrifice himself for his son.

All this sounds very strange; the only strangeness in the matter being, nevertheless, that it should so sound. For all this is true everlastingly and practically.



### **The Economics of Justice**

True economics never militates against the highest ethical standard, just as all true ethics to be worth its name, must at the same time be also good economics. An economics that inculcates Mammon worship, and enables the strong to amass wealth at the expense of the weak, is a false and dismal science. It spells death. True economics, on the other hand, stands for social justice, it promotes the good of all equally including the weakest, and is indispensable for decent life.

*Harijan*, 9-10-'37, p. 292

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Under the new outlook we shall cease to think of getting what we can, but we shall decline to receive what all cannot get.

*Young India*, 3-9-'25, p. 304

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If I pay due wages to a man, I shall not be able to amass unnecessary riches, to waste money on luxuries and to add to the mass of poverty in the world. The workman who receives due wages from me will act justly to his I subordinates. Thus the stream of justice will not dry up, but gather strength as it flows onward. And the nation with such a sense of justice will be happy and prosperous.

We thus find that the economists are wrong in thinking that competition is good for a nation. Competition only enables the purchaser to obtain his labour unjustly cheap, with the result that the rich grow richer and the poor poorer. In the long run it can only lead the nation to ruin. A workman should receive a just wage according to his ability. Even then there will be competition of a sort, but the people will be happy and skilful, because they will not have to underbid one another, but to acquire new skills in order to secure employment. This is the secret of Government services in which salaries are fixed according

to the gradation of posts. The candidate for it does not offer to work on a lower salary but only claims that he is abler than his competitors. But in trade and manufacture there is oppressive competition, which results in fraud, chicanery and theft. Rotten goods are manufactured. The manufacturer, the labourer, the consumer,—each is mindful of his own interest. This poisons all human intercourse.

Labourers starve and go on strike. Manufacturers become rogues and consumers too neglect the ethical aspect of their own conduct. One injustice leads to many others, and in the end the employer, the operative and the customer are all unhappy and go to rack and ruin. The very wealth of the people acts among them as a curse.

True economics is the economics of justice. People will be happy in so far as they learn to do justice and be righteous. Ail else is not only vain but leads straight to destruction. To teach the people to get rich by hook or by crook is to do them an immense disservice.

Gandhiji's Paraphrase of Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, 1951, pp.50-53

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### **Economic Equality**

My idea of society is that while we are born equal, meaning that we have a right to equal opportunity, all have not the same capacity. It is, in the nature of things, impossible. For instance, all cannot have the same height or colour or degree of intelligence etc.; therefore, in the nature of things, some will have ability to earn more and others less. People with talents will have more and they will utilize their talents for this purpose. If they utilize their talents kindly, they will be performing the work of the State. Such people exist as trustees, on no other terms. I would allow a man of intellect to earn more, I would not cramp his talent. But the bulk of his greater earnings must be used for the good of the State, just as the income of all earning sons of the father go to the common family fund.

*Young India*, 26-11-'31, p. 368

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The real implication of equal distribution is that each man shall have the wherewithal to supply all his natural wants and no more. For example, if one man has a weak digestion and requires only a quarter of a pound of flour for his bread and another needs a pound, both should be in a position to satisfy their wants. To bring this ideal into being the entire social order has got to be reconstructed. A society based on non-violence cannot nurture any other ideal. We may not perhaps be able to realize the goal, but we must bear in mind and work unceasingly to near it. To the same extent as we progress towards our goal we shall find contentment and happiness, and to that extent too, shall we have contributed towards the bringing into being of a non-violent society.

Now let us consider how equal distribution can be brought about through non-violence. The first step towards it is for him who has made this ideal part of his being to bring about the necessary changes in his personal life. He would reduce his wants to a minimum, bearing in mind the poverty of India. His earnings would be free of dishonesty. The desire for speculation would be renounced. His habitation would be in keeping with the new mode of life. There would be self-restraint exercised in every sphere of life. When he has done all that is possible in his own life, then only will he be in a position to preach this ideal among his associates and neighbours.

Indeed at the root of this doctrine of equal distribution must lie that of the trusteeship of the wealthy for superfluous wealth possessed by them. For according to the doctrine they may not possess a rupee more than their neighbours. How is this to be brought about? Non-violently? Or should the wealthy be dispossessed of their possessions? To do this we would naturally have to resort to violence. This violent action cannot benefit society. Society will be the poorer, for it will lose the gifts of a man who knows how to accumulate wealth. Therefore the nonviolent way is evidently superior. The rich man will be left in possession of his wealth, of which he will use what he reasonably requires for his personal needs and will act as a trustee for the remainder to be used for the society. In this argument, honesty on the part of the trustee is assumed.

If, however, in spite of the utmost effort, the rich do not become guardians of the poor in the true sense of the term and the latter are more and more crushed and die of hunger, what is to be done? In trying to find out the solution of this riddle I have lighted on non-violent non-cooperation and civil disobedience as the right and infallible means. The rich cannot accumulate wealth without the cooperation of the poor in society. If this knowledge were to penetrate to and spread amongst the poor, they would become strong and would learn how to free themselves by means of non-violence, from the crushing inequalities which have brought them to the verge of starvation.

*Harijan, 25-8-'40, pp. 260-61*

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### **A Non-violent Economic Structure**

I suggest that if India is to evolve along non-violent lines, it will have to decentralize many things. Centralization cannot be sustained and defended without adequate force.

*Harijan, 30-12-'39, p. 391*

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You cannot build non-violence on a factory civilization, but it can be built on self-contained villages. Rural economy, as I have conceived it, eschews exploitation altogether and exploitation is the essence of violence. You have, therefore, to be rural-minded before you can be nonviolent.

*Harijan, 4-11-'39, p. 331*

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Industrialization on a mass scale will necessarily lead to passive or active exploitation of the villagers as the problems of competition and marketing come in. Therefore we have to concentrate on the village being self-contained, manufacturing mainly for use. Provided this character of the village industry is maintained, there will be no objection to villagers using even the modern machinery and tools that they can make and can afford to use. Only they should not be used as a means of exploitation of others.

*Harijan*, 29-8-'36, p. 226

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Industrialization and large scale production are only of comparatively recent growth. We do not know how far they have contributed to the development of our happiness, but we know this much that they have brought in their wake the recent world wars (for raw materials and markets).'

*The Hindustan Standard*, 6-12-'44

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### **The Good of All, the Goal**

A votary of Ahimsa cannot subscribe to the utilitarian formula (of the greatest good of the greatest number). He will strive for the greatest good of all and die in the attempt to realize the ideal. He will therefore be willing to die, so that the others may live. He will serve himself with the rest, by himself dying. The greatest good of all inevitably includes the good of the greatest number, and therefore, he and the utilitarian will converge in many points in their career, but there does come a time when they must part company and even work in opposite directions. The utilitarian to be logical will never sacrifice himself. The absolutist will even sacrifice himself.

*Young India*, 9-12-'26, p. 432

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Not the good of the few, not even the good of the many, but it is the good of all that we are made to promote, if we are made in His own image'.

*Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, 1933, p. 350

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<sup>1</sup>Words in brackets are ours.—Ed.

## 32. IN THE POLITICAL SPHERE

### Freedom through Love

In the democracy which I have envisaged, a democracy established by non-violence, there will be equal freedom for all. Everybody will be his own master.

*Gandhiji's Correspondence with the Government, 1942-44, p. 173*

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True democracy or the Swaraj of the masses can never come through untruthful and violent means, for the simple reason that the natural corollary to their use would be to remove all opposition through the suppression or extermination of the antagonists. That does not make for individual freedom. Individual freedom can have the fullest play only under a regime of unadulterated Ahimsa.

*Harijan, 27-5-'39, p. 143*

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### No All-powerful State

Political power means capacity to regulate national life through national representatives. If national life becomes so perfect as to become self-regulated, no representation becomes necessary. There is then a state of enlightened anarchy. In such a State everyone is his own ruler. He rules himself in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbour. In the ideal State, therefore, there is no political power because there is no State. But the ideal is never fully realized in life. Hence the classical statement of Thoreau that that government is best which governs the least.

*Taxing India, 2-7-'31, p. 162*

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I look upon an increase of the power of the State with the greatest fear, because, although while apparently doing good by minimizing exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality which lies at the root of all progress.

*The Modern Review*, 1935, p. 413

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I have therefore endeavoured to show both in word and deed, that political self-government—that is self-government for a large number of men and women—is no better than individual self-government, and therefore, it is to be attained by precisely the same means that are required for individual self-government or self-rule.

*With Gandhiji in Ceylon*, by Mahadev Desai, 1928, p. 93

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### **A Non-violent Political Structure**

True democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village.

*Harijan*, 18-1-'48, p. 519

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In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever widening, never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.

Therefore, the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it. I may be taunted with the retort that this is all Utopian and, therefore, not worth a single thought. If Euclid's point, though incapable of being drawn by human agency, has an imperishable value, my picture has its own for mankind to live. Let India live for this true picture, though never realizable in its completeness. We must have a proper picture of what we want, before we can have something approaching it. If there ever is to be a republic of every village in India, then I claim verity for my picture in which the last is equal to the first, or in other words, no one is to be the first and none the last.

*Harijan, 28-7-'46, p. 236*

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Under Swaraj based on non-violence nobody is anybody's enemy, everybody contributes his or her due quota to the common good, all can read and write, and their knowledge keeps growing from day to day. Sickness and disease are reduced to the minimum. No one is a pauper and labour can always find employment. There is no place under such a government for gambling, drinking and immorality or for class hatred.

*Harijan, 25-3-'39, p. 65*

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### **Nationalism and Internationalism**

My patriotism is not exclusive; it is calculated not only not to hurt another nation but to benefit all in the true sense of the word. India's freedom as conceived by me can never be a menace to the world.

*Young India, 3-4-'24 p. 109*

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Just as the cult of patriotism teaches us today that the individual has to die for the family, the family has to die for the village, the village for the district, the district for the province and the province for the country, even so, a \* country has to be free in order that it may die, if necessary, for the benefit of the world. There is no room for race-hatred there.

*Gandhiji in Indian Villages, by Mahadev Desai, 1927, p. 170*

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There is no limit to extending our services to our neighbours across State-made frontiers. God never made those frontiers.

*Young India, 31-12-'31, p. 427*

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I believe in absolute oneness of God and therefore also of humanity. What though we have many bodies? We have but one soul. The rays of the sun are many through refraction. But they have the same source.



*Young India*, 25-9-'24, p. 313

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My religion and my patriotism derived from my religion embrace all life. I want to realize brotherhood or identity not merely with the beings called human, but I want to realize identity with all life, even with such things as crawl upon earth. I want, if I don't give you a shock, to i realize identity with even the crawling things upon earth, because we claim descent from the same God, and that being so, all life in whatever form it appears must be essentially one.

*Young India*, 4-4-'29, p. 107

**SECTION EIGHT: MY HINDUISM**

### 33. RENUNCIATION AND DEDICATION ITS ESSENCE

[For the first time at the public meeting in Quilon Gandhiji summed up the credal belief of Hinduism in an Upanishadic *mantra*, and thereafter at every meeting gave lucid and simple commentaries on the numerous implications of that all-comprehensive *mantra*. The pure exposition without much of a commentary was given on the previous day at Quilon and is reproduced below :]

I have fixed upon one *mantra* that I am going to recite to you, as containing the whole essence of Hinduism. Many of you, I think, know the Ishopanishad. I read it years ago with translation and commentary. I learnt it by heart in Yeravda Jail. But it did not then captivate me, as it has done during the past few months, and I have now come to the final conclusion that if all the Upanishads and all the other scriptures happened all of a sudden to be reduced to ashes, and if only the first verse in the Ishopanishad were left in tact in the memory of Hindus, Hinduism would live forever.

Now this *mantra* divides itself in four parts. The first part is ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं | यत्किं च जगत्यां जगत् | It means, as I would translate, all this that we see in this great Universe is pervaded by God. Then come the second and third parts which read together, as I read them : तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथाः| I divide these into two and translate them thus: Renounce it and enjoy it. There is another rendering which means the same thing : Enjoy what He gives you. Even so you can divide it into two parts. Then follows the final and most important part, मा गृधः कस्यस्विद् धनम् | which means: Do not covet anybody's wealth or possession. All the other *mantras* of that ancient Upanishad are a commentary or an attempt to give us the full meaning of the first *mantra*.

It seems to me to satisfy the craving of the socialist and the communist, of the philosopher and the economist. I venture to suggest to all who do not belong to the Hindu faith that it satisfies their cravings also. And if it is true— and I hold it to be true—you need not take anything in Hinduism which is inconsistent with

or contrary to the meaning of this *mantra*. What more can a man in the street want to learn than this, that the one God and Creator and Master of all that lives pervades the Universe? The three other parts of the *mantra* follow directly from the first. If you believe that God pervades everything that He has created, you must believe that you cannot enjoy anything that is not given by Him. And seeing that He is the Creator of His numberless-children, it follows that you cannot covet anybody's possession. If you think that you are one of His numerous creatures, it behoves you to renounce everything and lay it at His feet. That means that the act of renunciation of everything is not a mere physical renunciation but represents a second or new birth. It is deliberate act, not done in ignorance. It is therefore a regeneration. And then since he who holds the body must eat and drink and clothe himself, he must naturally seek all that he needs from Him. And he gets it as a natural reward of that renunciation. As if this was not enough the *mantra* closes with this magnificent thought: Do not covet anybody's possession. The moment you carry out these precepts you become a wise citizen of the world living at peace with all that lives. It satisfies one's highest aspirations on this earth and hereafter.

[It is this *mantra* that Gandhiji described at another meeting as the golden key for the solution of all the difficulties and doubts that may assail one's heart.]

Remember that one verse of the Ishopanishad and forget all about the other scriptures. You can of course drown yourselves and be suffocated in the ocean of scriptures. They are good for the learned if they will be humble and wise, but for the ordinary man in the street nothing but this *mantra* is necessary to carry him across the ocean: "God the Ruler pervades all there is in this Universe. Therefore renounce and dedicate all to Him, and then enjoy or use the portion that may fall to thy lot. Never covet anybody's possession."

*Harijan*, 30-1-'37, p, 405

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At this meeting<sup>1</sup> I would love to detain you for a few minutes on the message of Hinduism I gave to the meeting in Quilon last night.

In this verse the seer has chosen no other epithet for the Deity but that of the Ruler, and he has excepted nothing from His jurisdiction. He says everything that we see is pervaded by the Deity, and from that naturally the other parts of the *mantra* follow. Thus he says, 'Renounce everything', i.e. everything that is on this Universe, the whole of the Universe, and not only this tiny globe of ours, renounce it. He asks us to renounce it as we are such insignificant atoms that if we had any idea of possession it would seem ludicrous. And then, says the Rishi, the reward of the renunciation is भुञ्जीथाः enjoyment of all you need. But there is a meaning in the word translated 'enjoy', which may as well be translated as 'use', 'eat', etc. It signifies, therefore, that you may not take more than necessary for your growth. Hence this enjoyment or use is limited by two conditions. One is the act of renunciation or, as the author of the Bhagawat would say, enjoy in the spirit of कृष्णार्पणमस्तु सर्वम् | (or offering all to God). And every day in the morning everyone who believes in the Bhagawat Dharma has to dedicate his thoughts, words and deeds to Krishna, and not until he has performed that daily act of renunciation or dedication has he the right of touching anything or drinking even a cup of water. And when a man has performed that act of renunciation and dedication, he derives from that act the right of eating, drinking, clothing and housing himself to the extent necessary for his daily life. Therefore take it as you like, either in the sense that the enjoyment or use is the reward of renunciation, or that the renunciation is the condition of enjoyment, renunciation is essential for our very existence, for our soul. And as if that condition given in the *mantra* was incomplete, the Rishi hastened to complete by adding : 'Do not covet what belongs to another. Now I suggest to you that the whole of the philosophy or religion found in any part of the world is contained in this *mantra*.

Now I should like to apply this *mantra* to present-day conditions. If all that there is in the Universe is pervaded by God, that is to say, if the Brahmana and the *bhangi*, the learned man and scavenger, the Ezhava and the Pariah—no matter what caste they belong to—if all these are pervaded by Lord God, in the

light of this *mantra*, there is none that is high and none that is low, all are absolutely equal, equal because all are the creatures of that Creator.

I would like the *mantra* I have recited to be enshrined in the hearts of all our men and women and children, and if this contains, as I hold, the essence of Hinduism, it should be inscribed on the portals of every temple.

*Harijan*, 30-1-'37, pp. 407-08

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The seer to whom this *mantra* or verse was revealed was not satisfied with the magnificent statement that God was to be found everywhere. But he went further and said : 'Since God pervades everything nothing belongs to you, not even your own body. God is the undisputed, unchallengeable Master of everything you possess.' And so when a person who calls himself a Hindu goes through the process of regeneration or a second birth, as Christians would call it, he has to perform a dedication or renunciation of all that he has in ignorance called his own property. And then when he has performed this act of dedication or renunciation, he is told that he will win a reward in the shape of God taking good care of what he will require for food, clothing or housing. Therefore the condition of enjoyment or use of the necessaries of life is their dedication or renunciation. And that dedication or renunciation has got to be done from day to day, lest we may in this busy world forget the central fact of life. And to crown all, the seer says: 'Covet not anybody's riches.' I suggest to you that the truth that is embedded in this very short *mantra* is calculated to satisfy the highest cravings of every human being—whether they have reference to this world or the next. I have in my search of the scriptures of the world found nothing to add to this *mantra*. Looking back upon all the little I have read of the scriptures—it is precious little I confess—I feel that everything good in all the scriptures is derived from this *mantra*. If it is universal brotherhood—not only brotherhood of all human beings, but of all living beings—I find it in this *mantra*. If it is unshakable faith in the Lord and Master—and all the adjectives you can think of—I find it in this *mantra*. If it is the idea of complete surrender to God and of the faith that He will supply all that I need

then again I say I find it in this *mantra*. Since He pervades every fibre of my being and of all of you, I derive from it the doctrine of equality of all creatures on earth and it should satisfy the cravings of all philosophical communists. This *mantra* tells me that I cannot hold as mine anything that belongs to God, and if my life and that of all who believe in this *mantra* has to be a life of perfect dedication, it follows that it will have to be a life of continual service of our fellow creatures.

This, I say, is my faith and should be the faith of all who call themselves Hindus. And I venture to suggest to my Christian and Mussalman friends that they will find nothing more in their scriptures if they will search them.

I do not wish to hide from you the fact that I am not unaware of many superstitions that go under the name of Hinduism. I am most painfully conscious of all the superstitions that are to be found masquerading as Hinduism, and I have no hesitation to call a spade a spade. I have not hesitated to describe untouchability as the greatest of these superstitions. But in spite of them all, I remain a Hindu. For I do not believe that these superstitions form part of Hinduism. The very canons of interpretation laid down by Hinduism teach me that whatever is inconsistent with the truth I have expounded to you, and which is hidden in the *mantra* I have named, must be summarily rejected as not belonging to Hinduism.

*Harijan*, 30-1-'37, p. 410

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A follower of the Gita Dharma trains himself to do without things *with happiness* called equanimity in the Gita language, for happiness of the Gita is not the opposite of unhappiness. It is superior to that state. The devotee of the Gita is neither happy nor unhappy. And when that state is reached, there is no pain, no pleasure, no defeat, no deprivation, no possession.

*Bapu's Letters to Mira*, 1949, p. 250

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We must learn the art of never grieving over death, no matter when and to whom it comes. I suppose that we shall do when we have really learnt to be

utterly indifferent to our own, and the indifference will come when we are every moment conscious of having done the task to which we are called.

*Bapu's Letters to Mira, 1949, p. 301*

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1 From a speech delivered by Gandhiji at Haripad in Travancore on 17-1-'37.



### 34. TEMPLE AND IDOL-WORSHIP

An idol does not excite any feeling of veneration in me. But I think that idol-worship is part of human nature. We hanker after symbolism. Why should one be more composed in a church than elsewhere? Images are an aid to worship. No Hindu considers an image to be God. I do not consider idol-worship a sin.

*Young India*, 6-10-'21, p. 318

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I am both an idolator and an iconoclast in what I conceive to be the true senses of the terms. I value the spirit behind idol-worship. It plays a most important part in the uplift of the human race. And I would like to possess the ability to defend with my life the thousands of holy temples which sanctify this land of ours.

I am an iconoclast in the sense that I break down the subtle form of idolatry in the shape of fanaticism that refuses to see any virtue in any other form of worshipping the Deity save one's own. This form of idolatry is more deadly for being more fine and evasive than the tangible and gross form of worship that identifies the Deity with a little bit of a stone or a golden image.

*Young India*, 28-8-'24, p. 284

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Whether the temples should contain images or not is a matter of temperament and taste. I do not regard a Hindu or a Roman Catholic place of worship containing images as necessarily bad or superstitious, and a mosque or a Protestant place of worship as good or free of superstition merely because of their exclusion of images. A symbol such as a Cross or a book may easily become idolatrous, and therefore superstitious. And the worship of the image of Child Krishna or Virgin Mary may become ennobling and free of all superstition. It depends upon the attitude of the heart of the worshipper.

*Young India*, 5-11-'25, p. 378

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'If Hinduism became monotheistic,' suggested the Father, 'Christianity and Hinduism can serve India in co-operation.'

'I would love to see the co-operation happen', said Gandhiji. 'I have my own solution, but in the first instance, I dispute the description that Hindus believe in many gods and are idolators. I believe that I am a thorough Hindu but I never believe in many gods. Never even in my childhood did I hold that belief, and no one ever taught me to do so.'

'As for idol-worship, you cannot do without it in some form or other. Why does a Mussalman give his life for defending a mosque which he calls a house of God? And why does a Christian go to a church, and when he is required to take an oath he swears by the Bible? Not that I see any objection to it. And what is it if not idolatry to give untold riches for building mosques and tombs? And what do the Roman Catholics do when they kneel before Virgin Mary and before saints—quite imaginary figures in stone or painted on canvas or glass?'

'But', objected the Catholic Father, 'I keep my mother's photo and kiss it in veneration of her. But I do not worship it, nor do I worship saints. When I worship God, I acknowledge Him as Creator and greater than any human being.'

'Even so, it is not the stone we worship, but it is

God we worship in images of stone or metal however crude they may be.'

'But villagers worship stones as God.'

'No, I tell you they do not worship anything that is less than God. When you kneel before Virgin Mary and ask for her intercession, what do you do? You ask to establish contact with God through her. Even so a Hindu seeks to establish contact with God through a stone image. I can understand your asking for the Virgin's intercession. Why are Mussalmans filled with awe and exultation when they enter a mosque? Why, is not the whole universe a mosque? And what about the magnificent canopy of heaven that spreads over you? Is it any less than a mosque? But I understand and sympathize with the Muslims. It is their way of approach to God. The Hindus have their own way of approach to the same

Eternal Being. Our media of approach are different, but that does not make Him different.'

*Harijan*, 13-3-'37, pp. 39-40

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Image-worship in the sense of investing one's ideal with a concrete shape is inherent in man's nature, and even valuable as an aid to devotion. Thus we worship an image when we offer homage to a book which we regard as holy or sacred. We worship an image when we visit a temple or a mosque with a feeling of sanctity or reverence. Nor do I see any harm in all this. On the contrary endowed as man is with a finite, limited understanding, he can hardly do otherwise.

The offering of vows and prayers for selfish ends, whether offered in churches, mosques, temples or before trees and shrines, is a thing not to be encouraged. Making a selfish request or offering of vows is not related to image worship as effect and cause. A personal selfish prayer is bad whether made before an image or an unseen God.

*Young India*, 26-9-'29, p. 320

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### **Temple-worship**

It is not necessary for any Hindu to go to a temple to worship (the image of) Ramachandra. But it is for him who cannot contemplate his Rama without looking at his image in a temple. It may be unfortunate, but it is true that his Rama resides in that temple as nowhere else. I would not disturb that simple faith.

Krishna of the Hindu devotee is a perfect being. He is unconcerned with the harsh judgement of the critics. Millions of devotees of Krishna and Rama have had their lives transformed through their contemplation of God by these names. How this phenomenon happens I do not know. It is a mystery. I have not attempted to prove it. Though my reason and heart long ago realized the highest attribute and name of God as Truth, I recognize Truth by the name of

Rama. In the darkest hour of my trial, that one name has saved me and is still saving me. It may be the association of childhood, it may be the fascination that Tulsidas has wrought on me. But the potent fact is there, and as I write these lines, my memory revives the scenes of my childhood when I used daily to visit the Ramji Mandir adjacent to my ancestral home. My Rama then resided there. He saved me from many fears and sins. It was no superstition for me. The custodian of the idol may have been a bad man. I know nothing against him. Misdeeds might have gone on in the temple. Again I know nothing of them. Therefore, they would not affect me. What was and is true of me is true of millions of Hindus. Temple-worship supplies the felt spiritual want of the human race. It admits of reform. But it will live as long as man lives.

*Harijan, 18-3-'33 p. 6*

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Temples are to Hindus what churches are to Christians. Thousands of Hindus who visit temples in simple faith derive precisely the same spiritual benefit that Christians visiting churches in simple faith do. Deprive a Hindu of his temple, and you deprive him of the thing he generally prizes most in life. That superstition and even evil have grown round many Hindu temples is but too true. That, however, is an argument for temple reform, not for lowering their value.

*Harijan, 11-2-'33, p. 2*

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I know of no religion or sect that has done or is doing without its House of God, variously described as a temple, a mosque, a church, a synagogue or an *agiar*. Nor is it certain that any of the great reformers including Jesus destroyed or discarded temples altogether. All of them sought to banish corruption from temples as well as from society. Some of them, if not all, appear to have preached from temples. I have ceased to visit temples for years, but I do not regard myself on that account as a better person than before. My mother never missed going to the temple when she was in a fit state to go there. Probably her faith was far greater than mine, though I do not visit temples. There are

millions whose faith is sustained through these temples, churches and mosques. They are not all blind followers of a superstition, nor are they fanatics. Superstition and fanaticism are not their- monopoly. These vices have their root in our hearts and minds.

To reject the necessity of temples is to reject the necessity of God, religion and earthly existence.

*Harijan, 11-3-'33, p. 5*

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What a reformer should be concerned with is a radical change more in the inward spirit than in the outward form. If the first is changed, the second will take care of itself. If the first remains unchanged, the second, no matter how radically changed, will be like a whited sepulchre. A mausoleum, however beautiful, is a tomb and not a mosque, and a bare plot of consecrated ground may be a real Temple of God.

*Harijan, 29-4-'33, p. 6*

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She (Miss Mayo in her book *Mother India*) says that the Vaishnava mark has an obscene meaning. I am a born Vaishnavite. I have perfect recollection of my visits to Vaishnava temples. Mine were orthodox people. I used to have the mark myself as a child, but neither I nor anyone else in our family ever knew that this harmless and rather elegant-looking mark had any obscene significance at all. . I asked a party of Vaishnavites in Madras where this article is being written. They knew nothing about the alleged obscene significance. I do not therefore suggest that it never had such significance. But I do suggest that millions are unaware of the obscenity of many practices which we have hitherto innocently indulged in. It was in a missionary book that I first learnt that Shivalingam had any obscene significance at all, and even now when I see a Shivalingam neither the shape nor the association in which I see it suggests any obscenity. It was again in a missionary book that I learnt that the temples in Orissa were disfigured with obscene statues. When I went to Puri it was not without an effort that I was able to see those things. But I do know that the

thousands who flock to the temple know nothing about the obscenity surrounding these figures. The people are unprepared and the figures do not obtrude themselves upon your gaze.

*Young India*, 15-9-'27, p. 311

### 35. INCARNATION

My Krishna has nothing to do with any historical person. I would refuse to bow my head to the Krishna who would kill because his pride is hurt, or the Krishna whom 'non-Hindus portray as a dissolute youth. I believe in Krishna of my imagination as a perfect incarnation, spotless in every sense of the word, the inspirer of the Gita and the inspirer of the lives of millions of human beings. But if it was proved to me that the Mahabharata is history in the same sense that modern historical books are, that every word of the Mahabharata is authentic and that the Krishna of the Mahabharata actually did some of the acts attributed to him, even at the risk of being banished from the Hindu fold, I should not hesitate to reject that Krishna as God incarnate. But to me, the Mahabharata is a profoundly religious book, largely allegorical, in no way meant to be a historical record. It is the description of the eternal duel going on within ourselves, given so vividly as to make us think for the time being, that the deeds described therein were actually done by the human beings. Nor do I regard the Mahabharata as we have it now as a faultless copy of the original. On the contrary I consider that it has undergone many emendations.

*Young India*, 1-10-'25, p. 336

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In Hinduism, incarnation is ascribed to one who has performed some extraordinary service of mankind. All embodied life is in reality incarnation of God, but it is not usual to consider every living being an incarnation. Future generations pay this homage to one who, in his own generation, has been extraordinarily religious in his conduct. I can see nothing wrong in this procedure; it takes nothing from God's greatness, and there is no violence done to Truth. There is an Urdu saying which means, "Adam is not God but he is a spark of the Divine." And therefore he who is the most religiously behaved has most of the divine spark in him. It is in accordance with this train of thought that Krishna enjoys, in Hinduism, the status of the most perfect incarnation.

This belief in incarnation is a testimony of man's lofty spiritual ambition. Man is not at peace with himself till he has become like unto God. The endeavour to reach this state is the supreme, the only ambition worth having. And this is self-realization.

*Young India*, 6-8-'31, pp. 205-06

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God is not a person. To affirm that He descends to earth every now and again in the form of a human being is a partial truth which merely signifies that such a person lives near to God. In as much as God is omnipresent, He dwells within every human being and all may, therefore, be said to be incarnations of Him. But this leads us nowhere. Rama, Krishna, etc., are called incarnations of God because we attribute divine qualities to them. In truth they are creations of man's imagination. Whether they actually lived or not does not affect the picture of them in men's minds. The Rama and Krishna of history often present difficulties which have to be overcome by all manner of arguments.

*Harijan*, 22-6-'47, p. 200



## 36. VARNA AND CASTE

### The Law of Varna

*Varna* means pre-determination of the choice of man's profession. The law of *varna* is that a man shall follow the profession of his ancestors for earning his livelihood. *Varna* therefore is in a way the law of heredity. *Varna* is not a thing that is superimposed on Hindus, but men who were trustees for their welfare discovered the law for them. It is not a human invention, but an immutable law- of nature—the statement of tendency that is ever present and at work like Newton's law of gravitation. Just as the law of gravitation existed even before it was discovered so did the law of *varna*. It was given to the Hindus to discover that law. By their discovery and application of certain laws of nature, the people of the West have easily increased their material possessions. Similarly, Hindus by their discovery of this irresistible social tendency have been able to achieve in the spiritual field what no other nation in the world has achieved.

*Varna* has nothing to do with caste. Down with the monster of caste that masquerades in the guise of *varna*. It is this travesty of *varna* that has degraded Hinduism and India. Our failure to follow the law of *varna* is largely responsible both for our economic and spiritual ruin. It is one cause of unemployment and impoverishment, and it is responsible for untouchability and defections from our faith.

The Rishis after incessant experiment and research arrived at this fourfold division, that of teaching, of defending, of wealth-producing, and of manual service.

In ancient times there were automatic trade guilds, and it was an unwritten law to support all the members of the profession. A hundred years ago, a carpenter's son never wanted to become a lawyer. Today he does, because he finds the profession the easiest way to steal money.

In ages gone by there was not the ambition of encroaching on another's profession and amassing wealth. In Cicero's time, for instance, the lawyer's was

an honorary profession. And it would be quite right for any brainy carpenter to become a lawyer for service, not for money. Later, ambition for fame and wealth crept in. Physicians served the society and rested content with what it gave them, but now they have become traders and even a danger to society. The medical and the legal professions were deservedly called liberal when the motive was purely philanthropic.

When I follow my father's profession, I need not even go to a school to learn it, and my mental energy is set free for spiritual pursuits, because my money or rather livelihood is ensured. *Varna* is the best form of insurance for happiness and for real religious pursuit. When I concentrate my energy on other pursuits, I sell away my powers of self-realization or sell my soul for a mess of pottage.

We are talking with crooked notions of *varna*. When *varna* was really practised, we had enough leisure for spiritual training. Even now, you go to distant villages and see what spiritual culture villagers have as compared to the town-dwellers. These know no self-control.

We need not, ought not, to seek new avenues for gaining wealth. We should be satisfied with those we have inherited from our forefathers so long as they are pure. If my father is a trader and I exhibit the qualities of a soldier, I may without reward serve my country as a soldier but must be content to earn my bread by trading.

*Young India*, 24-11-'27, pp. 390, 391 & 395

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*Varnashrama*, as I interpret it, satisfies the religious, social and economic needs of a community. It satisfies the religious needs, because a whole community accepting the law is free to devote ample time to spiritual perfection. Observance of the law obviates social evils and entirely prevents the killing economic competition. And if it is regarded as a law laying down, not the rights or the privileges of the community governed by it, but their duties, it ensures the fairest possible distribution of wealth, though it may not be an ideal, i.e. strictly equal, distribution. Therefore, when people in disregard of the law mistake duties for privileges and try to pick and choose occupations for

self-advancement, it leads to confusion of *varna* and ultimate disruption of society. In this law, there is no question of compelling any person to follow the parental occupation against his or her aptitude; that is to say, there can be no compulsion from without as there was none for, perhaps, several thousand years, during which the law of *varnashrama* worked without interruption. By training, the people had recognized the duty and the justice of the law, and they voluntarily lived under it. Today, nations are living in ignorance and breach of that law and they are suffering for it. The so-called civilized nations have by no means reached a state which they can at all regard with equanimity and satisfaction.

*Harijan*, 4-3-'38, p. 5

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As I have interpreted *Varna Dharma*, there is no bar in any shape or form to the highest mental development. The bar altogether normal is against change of hereditary occupation for the sake of bettering one's material condition, and thus setting up a system of unhealthy and ruinous competition which is today robbing life of all its joy and beauty.

*Harijan*, 29-7-'33, p. 8

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*Varna* is determined by birth, but can be retained only by observing its obligations. One born of Brahmana parents will be called a Brahmana, but if his life fails to reveal the attributes of a Brahmana when he comes of age, he cannot be called a Brahmana. He will have fallen from Brahmanahood. On the other hand, one who is born not a Brahmana but reveals in his conduct the attributes of a Brahmana will be regarded as a Brahmana, though he will himself disclaim the label.

*Varna* thus conceived is no man-made institution but the law of life universally governing the human family. Fulfillment of the law would make life livable, would spread peace and content, end all clashes and conflicts, put an end to starvation and pauperization, solve the problem of population and even end disease and suffering.

But if *varna* reveals the law of one's being and thus the duty one has to perform, it confers no right, and the idea of superiority or inferiority is wholly repugnant to it. All *varnas* are equal, for the community depends no less on one than on another. Today *varna* means gradation of high and low. It is a hideous travesty of the original. The law of *varna* was discovered by our ancestors by stern austerities. They sought to live up to the law to the best of their capacity. We have distorted it today and have made ourselves the laughing-stock of the world.

Though the law of *varna* is a special discovery of some Hindu seer, it has universal application. Every religion has some distinguishing characteristic, but if it expresses a principle or law, it ought to have universal application. That is how I look at the law of *varna*. The world may ignore it today but it will have to accept it in the time to come. It ordains that every one shall fulfil the law of one's being by doing in a spirit of duty and service that to which one is born.

*Harijan*, 28-9-'34 p. 261-62

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### Talks with an American Clergyman

Gandhiji: "Why should my son not be a scavenger if I am one?"

"Indeed? Do you go so far?"

"I do, because I hold a scavenger's profession in no way inferior to a clergyman's."

"I grant that, but should Lincoln have been a wood-chopper rather than President of the U.S.A.?"

"But why should not a wood-chopper be a President of the United States? Gladstone used to chop wood."

"But he did not accept it as his calling."

"He would not have been worse off if he had done so. What I mean is, one born a scavenger must earn his livelihood by being a scavenger, and then do whatever else he likes. For a scavenger is as worthy of his hire as a lawyer or

your President. That, according to me is Hinduism. There is no better communism on earth. *Varna Dharma* acts even as the law of gravitation. I cannot cancel it or its working by trying to jump higher and higher day by day till gravitation ceases to work. That effort will be vain. So is the effort to jump over one another. The law of *varna* is the antithesis of competition which kills."

*Harijan*, 6-3-'37, p. 27

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### Caste<sup>1</sup> v. Class

Man being a social being has to devise some method of social organization. We in India have evolved caste; they in Europe have organized class. Neither has the solidarity and naturalness of a family which perhaps is a God-ordained institution. If caste has produced certain evils, class has not been productive of anything less.

If class helps to conserve certain social virtues, caste does the same in equal, if not greater, degree. The beauty of the caste system is that it does not base itself upon distinctions of wealth possessions. Money, as history has proved, is the greatest disruptive force in the world. Even the sacredness of family ties is not safe against the pollution of wealth,—says Shankaracharya. Caste is but an extension of the principle of the family. Both are governed by blood and heredity. Western scientists are busy trying to prove that heredity is an illusion and that *milieu* is everything. The solid experience of many lands goes against the conclusion of these scientists; but even accepting their doctrine of *milieu*, it is easy to prove that *milieu* can be conserved and developed more through caste than through class.

The spirit behind caste is not one of arrogant superiority; it is the classification of different systems of self-culture. It is the best possible adjustment of social stability and progress. Just as the spirit of the family is inclusive of those who love each other and are wedded to each other by ties of blood and relation, caste also tries to include families of a particular way of purity of life (not

standard of life, meaning by this term, economic standard of life). Only it does not leave the decision, whether a particular family belongs to a particular type, to the idiosyncrasies or interested judgment of a few individuals. It trusts to the principle of heredity, and being only a system of culture does not hold that any injustice is done if an individual or a family has to remain in a particular group in spite of their decision to change their mode of life for the better. As we all know, change comes very slowly in social life, and thus, as a matter of fact, caste has allowed new groupings to suit the changes in lives. But these changes are quiet and easy as a change in the shapes of the clouds. It is difficult to imagine a better harmonious human adjustment.

Caste does not connote superiority or inferiority. It simply recognizes different outlooks and corresponding modes of life. But it is no use denying the fact that a sort of hierarchy has been evolved in the caste-system.

*Young India, 29-12-'20, p. 3*

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I have frequently said that I do not believe in caste in the modern sense. It is an excrescence and a handicap on progress. Assumption of superiority by any person over any other is a sin against God and man. Thus caste, in so far as it connotes distinctions in status, is an evil.

*Young India, 25-3-'33, p. 3*

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In the eye of religion all men are equal. Learning, intellect or riches do not entitle one to claim superiority over those who are lacking in these.

*The Hindu, 19-9-'45*

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1 Gandhiji here uses the word caste in the same sense as *varna*. When he condemns caste, he condemns only the idea of superiority and inferiority which it came later to acquire and not the principle of following hereditary occupation which he calls *varna* and of which he thoroughly approves.—Ed.

### 37. UNTOUCHABILITY

Love of the people brought the problem of untouchability early into my life. My mother said, 'You must not touch this boy, he is an untouchable.' 'Why not?' I questioned back, and from that day my revolt began.

*Harijan, 24-12-'38, p. 393*

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Untouchability is not a sanction of religion, it is a device of Satan. The devil has always quoted scriptures.. But scriptures cannot transcend reason and truth.

The spirit of the Vedas is purity, truth, innocence, chastity, humility, simplicity, forgiveness, godliness and all that makes a man or woman noble and brave. There is neither nobility nor bravery in treating the great and uncomplaining scavengers of the nation as worse than dogs to be despised and spat upon.

*Young India, 19-1-'21 p. 22*

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I have never been able to reconcile myself to untouchability. I have always regarded it as an excrescence. It is true that it has been handed down to us from generations, but so are many evil practices even to this day. I should be ashamed to think that dedication of girls to virtual prostitution was a part of Hinduism. Yet it is practised by Hindus in many parts of India. I consider it positive irreligion to sacrifice goats to Kali and do not consider it a part of Hinduism. Hinduism is a growth of ages. The very name, Hinduism, was given to the religion of the people of Hindustan by foreigners. There was, no doubt, at one time sacrifice of animals offered in the name of religion. But it is not religion, much less is it Hindu religion. And so also it seems to me, that when cow-protection became an article of faith with our ancestors, those who persisted in eating beef were excommunicated. The civil strife must have been fierce. Social boycott was applied not only to the recalcitrant, but their sins were visited upon their children also. The practice which had probably its origin

in good intentions hardened into usage, and even verses crept into our sacred books giving the practice a permanence wholly undeserved and still less justified. Whether my theory is correct or not, untouchability is repugnant to reason and to the instinct of mercy, pity or love. A religion that establishes the worship of the cow cannot possibly countenance or warrant a cruel and inhuman boycott of human beings. And I should be content to be torn to pieces rather than disown the suppressed classes. As I love Hinduism dearer than life itself, the taint has become for me an intolerable burden.

*Young India*, 6-10-'21, p. 318-19

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We are all tarred with the same brush, and are children of one and the same Creator, and as such the divine powers within us are infinite. To slight a single human being is to slight those divine powers and thus to harm not only that being but with him the whole world.

*Autobiography*, 1948, p. 337

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It is my certain conviction that, if the Hindu heart is completely purged of the taint of untouchability, the event will have its inevitable influence not only upon all the communities in India but on the whole world. This belief is daily becoming stronger. I cannot remove from my heart untouchability regarding several millions of human beings and harbour it towards some other millions. The very act of the Hindu heart getting rid of distinctions of high and low must cure us of mutual jealousies and distrust of and among other communities. It is for that reason that I have staked my life on this issue. In fighting this battle against untouchability, I am fighting for unity not only among Hindu 'touchables' and Hindu 'untouchables' but among Hindus, Muslims, Christians and all other different religious communities.

*Harijan*, 17-11-'33, p. 4

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There should be not only no untouchability as between Hindus and Hindus, but there should be no untouchability whatsoever between Hindus, Christians,



Mussalmans, Parsis and the rest. I am convinced that if this great change of heart can be brought about, we should live in India as one people trusting each other and without any mutual distrust or suspicion. It is untouchability with all its subtle forms that separates us from one another and makes life itself unlovely and difficult to live.

*Harijan, 26-1-34, p. 4*

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Removal of untouchability means love for, and service of, the whole world, and thus merges into Ahimsa. Removal of untouchability spells the breaking down of barriers between man and man, and between the various orders of Being. We find such barriers crected everywhere in the world.

*From Yeravda Mandir, 1945, pp. 33-34*

### 38. COW PROTECTION

Cow protection is the dearest possession of the Hindu heart. No one who does not believe in cow protection can possibly be a Hindu. It is a noble belief. Cow worship means to me worship of innocence. For me, the cow is the personification of innocence. Cow protection means the protection of the weak and the helpless. As professor Vaswani truly remarks, cow protection means brotherhood between man and beast. It is a noble sentiment that must grow by patient toil and *tapasya*.

*Young India*, 8-6-'21 p. 182

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Cow protection to me is one of the most wonderful phenomena in human evolution. It takes the human being beyond his species. The cow to me means the entire subhuman world. Man through the cow is enjoined to realize his identity with all that lives. Why the cow was selected for apotheosis is obvious to me. The cow was in India the best companion. She was the giver of plenty. Not only did she give milk but she also made agriculture possible. The cow is a poem of pity. One reads pity in the gentle animal. She is the mother to millions of Indian mankind. Protection of the cow means protection of the whole dumb creation of God. The ancient seer, whoever he was, began with the cow. The appeal of the lower order of creation is all the more forcible because it is speechless. Cow protection is the gift of Hinduism to the world. And Hinduism will live so long as there are Hindus to protect the cow.

*Young India*, 6-10-'21, p. 318

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Our Rishis made the startling discovery, (and everyday I feel more and more convinced of its truth) that sacred texts and inspired writings yield their truth only in proportion as one has advanced in the practice of Ahimsa and truth. The greater the realization of truth and Ahimsa the greater the illumination. These same Rishis declared that cow protection was the supreme duty of a Hindu and that its performance brought one *moksha*, i.e. salvation. Now I am not ready to

believe that by merely protecting the animal cow, one can attain *moksha*. For *moksha* one must completely get rid of one's lower feelings like attachment, hatred, anger, jealousy, etc. It follows, therefore, that the meaning of cow protection in terms of *moksha* must be much wider and far more comprehensive than is commonly supposed. The cow protection which can bring one *moksha* must, from its very nature, include the protection of everything that feels. Therefore, in my opinion, every little breach of the Ahimsa principle, like causing hurt by harsh speech to any one, man, woman or child, to cause pain to the weakest and the most insignificant creature on earth would be a breach of the principle of cow protection, would be tantamount to the sin of beef-eating, differing from it in degree, if at all, rather than in kind.

*Young India*, 29-1-'25, p. 39

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A Hindu who protects the cow should protect every animal. But taking all things into consideration, we may not cavil at his protecting the cow because he fails to protect the other animals. The only question therefore to consider is whether he is right in protecting the cow. And he cannot be wrong in so doing if non-killing of animals generally may be regarded as a duty for one who believes in Ahimsa. And every Hindu, and for that matter every man of religion, does so. The duty of not killing animals generally and therefore protecting them must be accepted as an indisputable fact. It is then so much to the credit of Hinduism that it has taken up cow protection as a duty. And he is a poor specimen of Hinduism who stops merely at cow protection when he can extend the arm of protection to other animals. The cow merely stands as a symbol, and protection of the cow is the least he is expected to undertake.

The motive that actuates cow protection is not 'purely selfish', though selfish consideration undoubtedly enters into it. If it was purely selfish, the cow would be killed as in other countries after it had ceased to give full use. The Hindus will not kill the cow even though she may be a heavy burden. The numberless *goshalas* that have been established by charitably-minded people for tending disabled and useless cows is in a way an eloquent testimony of the effort that is

being made in the direction. Though they are today very poor institutions for the object to be achieved the fact does not detract from the value of the motive behind the act.

The philosophy of cow protection, therefore, is in my opinion sublime. It immediately puts the animal creation on the same level with man so far as the right to live is concerned.

*Young India*, 11-11-'26, p. 391-92

### 39. WHAT I VALUE IN HINDUISM

Just as in the West they have made wonderful discoveries in things material, similarly Hinduism has made still more marvelous discoveries in things of religion, of the spirit, of the soul. But we have no eye for these great and fine discoveries. We are dazzled by the material progress that Western science has made. I am not enamoured of that progress. In fact, it almost seems as though God in His wisdom had prevented India from progressing along those lines, so that it might fulfill its special mission of resisting the onrush of materialism. After all, there is something in Hinduism that has kept it alive up till now. It has witnessed the fall of Babylonian, Syrian, Persian and Egyptian civilizations. Cast a look round you. Where are Rome and Greece? Can you find today anywhere the Italy of Gibbon, or rather the ancient Rome, for Rome was Italy? Go to Greece. Where is the world-famous Attic civilization? Then come to India, go through the most ancient records and then look round you and you would be constrained to say, 'Yes, I see here ancient India still living.' True, there are dung-heaps, too, here and there, but there are rich treasures buried under them. And the reason why it has survived is that the end which Hinduism set before it was not development along material but spiritual lines.

Among its many contributions the idea of man's identity with the dumb creation is a unique one. To me cow-worship is a great idea which is capable of expansion. The freedom of Hinduism from the modern proselytization is also to me a precious thing. It needs no preaching. It says, 'Live the life.' It is my business, it is your business to live the life, and then we shall leave its influence on ages. Then take its contribution in men: Ramanuja, Chaitanya, Ramakrishna, not to speak of the more modern names, have left their impress on Hinduism. Hinduism is by no means a spent force or a dead religion.

Then there is the contribution of the four *ashramas*<sup>1</sup>, again a unique contribution. There is nothing like it in the whole world. The Catholics have the order of celibates corresponding to *brahmacharis*, but not as an institution, whereas in India every boy had to go through the first *ashrama*. What a grand

conception it was! Today our eyes are dirty, thoughts dirtier and bodies dirtiest of all, because we are denying Hinduism.

There is yet another thing I have not mentioned. Max Muller said forty years ago that it was dawning on Europe that transmigration is not a theory, but a fact. Well, it is entirely the contribution of Hinduism.

Today *varnashrama dharma* and Hinduism are misrepresented and denied by its votaries. The remedy is not destruction, but correction. Let us reproduce in ourselves the true Hindu spirit, and then ask whether it satisfies the soul or not.

*Young India*, 24-11-'27, p. 396

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An American professor in Comparative Theology on a visit to India to study Indian religions intelligently, asked Gandhiji to tell her in a nutshell the chief value of Hinduism.

Replying to her Gandhiji said : "The chief value of Hinduism lies in holding the actual belief that *all* life (not only human beings, but all sentient beings) is one, i.e. all life coming from the One Universal Source.

"This unity of *all* life is a peculiarity of Hinduism which confines salvation not to human beings alone but says that it is not possible for all God's creatures. It may be that it is not possible, save through the human form, but that does not make man the lord of creation. It makes him the servant of God's creation. Now when we talk of brotherhood of man, we stop there, and feel that all other life is there for man to exploit for his own purposes. But Hinduism excludes all exploitation. There is no limit whatsoever to the measure of sacrifice that one may make in order to realize this oneness with all life, but certainly the immensity of the ideal sets a limit to your wants. That, you will see, is the antithesis of the position of modern civilization which says: 'Increase your wants.' Those who hold that belief think that increase of wants means an increase of knowledge whereby you understand the Infinite better. On the

contrary Hinduism rules out indulgence and multiplication of wants as these hamper one's growth to ultimate identity with the Universal Self."

*Harijan, 26-12-'36, p. 365*

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In the purest type of Hinduism a Brahmana, an ant, an elephant and a dog-eater (*shwapacha*) are of the same status. And because our philosophy is so high, and we have failed to live up to it, that very philosophy today stinks in our nostrils. Hinduism insists on the brotherhood not only of all mankind but of all that lives. It is a conception which makes one giddy, but we have to work up to it. The moment we have restored real living equality between man and man, we shall be able to establish equality between man and the whole creation. When that day comes we shall have peace on earth and goodwill to men.

*Harijan, 28-3-'36, p. 51*

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### Sanatana- Hinduism

I call myself a *Sanatani* Hindu, because,

1. I believe in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Pu-ranas and all that goes by the name of Hindu scriptures, and therefore in *avatars* and rebirth;
2. I believe in the *varnashrama dharma* in a sense, in my opinion, strictly Vedic but not in its present popular and crude sense;
3. I believe in the protection of the cow in its much larger sense than the popular;
4. I do not disbelieve in idol-worship.

The reader will note that I have purposely refrained' from using the word divine origin in reference to the Vedas or any other scriptures. For I do not believe in the exclusive divinity of the Vedas. I believe the Bible, the Koran, and the Zend Avesta to be as much divinely inspired as the Vedas. My belief in the Hindu scriptures does not require me to accept every word and every verse as divinely inspired. Nor do I claim to have any first-hand knowledge of these wonderful books. But I do claim to know and feel the truths of the essential teaching of

the scriptures. I decline to be bound by any interpretation, however learned it may be, if it is repugnant to reason or moral sense.

I believe implicitly in the Hindu aphorism, that no one truly knows the Shastras who has not attained perfection in Innocence (Ahimsa), Truth (Satya) and self-control (*Brahmacharya*), and who has not renounced all acquisition or possession of wealth. I believe in the institution of *gurus*, but in this age millions must go without a *guru*, because it is a rare thing to find a combination of perfect purity and perfect learning. But one need not despair of ever knowing the truth of one's religion, because the fundamentals of Hinduism, as of every great religion, are unchangeable, and easily understood. Every Hindu believes in God and His oneness, in rebirth and salvation.

I can no more describe my feeling for Hinduism than for my own wife. She moves me as no other woman in the world can. Not that she has no faults. I dare say she has many more than I see myself. But the feeling of an indissoluble bond is there. Even so I feel for and about Hinduism with all its faults and limitations. Nothing elates me so much as the music of the Gita or the Ramayana by Tulsidas, the only two books in Hinduism I may be said to know. When I fancied I was taking my last breath the Gita was my solace. I know the vice that is going on today in all the great Hindu shrines, but I love them in spite of their unspeakable failings. There is an interest which I take in them and which I take in no other. I am a reformer through and through. But my zeal never takes me to the rejection of any of the essential things of Hinduism.

Hinduism is not an exclusive religion. In it there is room for the worship of all the prophets of the world. It is not a missionary religion in the ordinary sense of the term. It has no doubt absorbed many tribes in its fold, but this absorption has been of an evolutionary, imperceptible character. Hinduism tells everyone to worship God according to his own faith or *dharma*, and so it lives at peace with all religions.

*Young India*, 6-10-'21, pp. 317-18



## Hinduism Is Ever Growing

Hinduism is like the Ganga pure and unsullied at its source, but taking in its course the impurities in the way. Even like the Ganga it is beneficent in its total effect. It takes a provincial form in every province, but the inner substance is retained everywhere. Custom is not religion. Custom may change, but religion will remain unaltered.

Purity of Hinduism depends on the self-restraint of its votaries. Whenever their religion has been in danger, the Hindus have undergone rigorous penance, searched the causes of the danger and devised means for combating them. The Shastras are ever growing. The Vedas, the Upanishads, the Smritis, the Puranas, and the Itihasas did not arise at one and the same time. Each grew out of the necessities of particular periods, and therefore they seem to conflict with one another. These books do not enunciate anew the eternal truths but show how these were practised at the time to which the books belong. A practice which was good enough in a particular period would, if blindly repeated in another, land people into the 'slough of despond'. Because the practice of animal-sacrifice obtained at one time, shall we revive it today? Because at one time we used to eat beef, shall we also do so now? Because at one time, we used to chop off the hands and feet of thieves, shall we revive that barbarity today? Shall we revive polyandry? Shall we revive child-marriage? Because we discarded a section of humanity one day, shall we brand their descendants today as outcastes ?

Hinduism abhors stagnation. Knowledge is limitless and so also the application of truth. Everyday we add to our knowledge of the power of Atman, and we shall keep on doing so. New experience will teach us new duties, but truth shall ever be the same. Who has ever known it in its entirety?

*Young India*, 8-4-'26, pp. 131-32

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I have endeavoured in the light of a prayerful study of the other faiths of the world and, what is more, in the light of my own experiences in trying to live the teaching of Hinduism as interpreted in the Gita, to give an extended but in

no way strained meaning to Hinduism, not as buried in its ample scriptures, but as a living faith speaking like a mother to her aching child. What I have done is perfectly historical. I have followed in the footsteps of our forefathers. At one time they sacrificed animals to propitiate angry gods. Their descendants, but our less remote ancestors, read a different meaning into the word 'sacrifice' and they taught that sacrifice was meant to be of our baser self, to please not angry gods but one living God within.

*Harijan, 3-10-'36, p. 266*

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It is wrong to call me an ascetic. The ideals that regulate my life are presented for acceptance by mankind in general. I have arrived at them by gradual evolution. Every step was thought out, well-considered, and taken with the greatest deliberation. Both my continence and non-violence were derived from personal experience and became necessary in response to the calls of public duty. The isolated life I had to lead in South Africa whether as a householder, legal practitioner, social reformer or politician, required, for the due fulfilment of these duties, the strictest regulation of sexual life and a rigid practice of non-violence and truth in human relations, whether with my own countrymen or with the Europeans. I claim to be no more than an average man with less than average ability. Nor can I claim any special merit for such nonviolence or continence as I have been able to reach with laborious research. I have not the shadow of a doubt that any man or woman can achieve what I have, if he or she would make the same effort and cultivate the same hope and faith.

*Harijan, 3-10-'36, p. 268*

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My uniform experience has convinced me that there is no other God than Truth. And if every page of these chapters does not proclaim to the reader that the only means for the realization of Truth is Ahimsa, I shall deem all my labour in writing these chapters to have been in vain. And, even though my efforts in this behalf may prove fruitless, let the readers know that the vehicle, not the great principle, is at fault. After all, however sincere my strivings after Ahimsa may

have been, they have still been imperfect and inadequate. The little fleeting glimpses, therefore, that I have been able to have of Truth can hardly convey an idea of the indescribable lustre of Truth, a million times more intense than that of the sun we daily see with our eyes. In fact what I have caught is only the faintest glimmer of that mighty effulgence. But this much I can say with assurance, as a result of all my experiments, that a perfect vision of Truth can only follow a complete realization of Ahimsa.

To see the universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creations as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to truth has drawn me into the field of politics; and I can say without the slightest hesitation, and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.

Identification with everything that lives is impossible without self-purification; without self-purification the observance of the law of Ahimsa must remain an empty dream; God can never be realized by one who is not pure of heart. Self-purification therefore must mean purification in all the walks of life. And purification being highly infectious, purification of oneself necessarily leads to the purification of one's surroundings.

But the path of self-purification is hard and steep. To attain to perfect purity one has to become absolutely passion-free in thought, speech and action to rise above the opposing currents of love and hatred, attachment and repulsion. I know that I have not in me as yet that triple purity, in spite of constant, ceaseless striving for it. That is why the world's praise fails to move me, indeed it very often stings me. To conquer the subtle passions seems to me to be harder far than the physical conquest of the world by the force of arms. Ever since my return to India I have had experiences of the dormant passions lying hidden within me. The knowledge of them has made me feel humiliated though not defeated. The experiences and experiments have sustained me and given me great joy. But I know that I have still before me a difficult path to traverse. I must reduce myself to zero. So long as a man does not of his own free will put

himself last among his fellow creatures, there is no salvation for him. Ahimsa is the farthest limit of humility.

*Autobiography*, 1948, pp. 614-16

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1 The four stages in a man's life—that of a student pledged to chastity (*brahmacharya*), a householder, a meditator in the forest, ending up finally as a wandering teacher.—Ed.

#### 40. CONCLUSION

The opinions I have formed and the conclusions I have arrived at are not final. I may change them tomorrow; I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and nonviolence are as old as the hills. All I have done is to try experiments in both on as vast a scale as I could do. In doing so I have sometimes erred and learnt by my errors. Life and its problems have thus become to me so many experiments in the practice of truth and non-violence.

*Harijan, 28-3-'36, p. 49*

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My faith in truth and non-violence is ever growing, and as I am ever trying to follow them in my life I too am growing every moment. I see new implications about them. I see them in a newer light every day and read in them a newer meaning.

*Harijan, 1-5-'37, p. 94*

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At the time of writing I never think of what I have said before. My aim is not to be consistent with my previous statements on a given question; but to be consistent with truth as it may present itself to me at a given moment. The result has been that I have grown from truth to truth; I have saved my memory an undue strain; and what is more, whenever I have been obliged to compare my writing even of fifty years ago with the latest, I have discovered no inconsistency between the two. But friends who observe inconsistency will do well to take the meaning that my latest writing may yield unless, of course, they prefer the old. But before making the choice they should try to see if there is not an underlying and abiding consistency between the two seeming inconsistencies.

If I can say so without arrogance and with due humility, my message and methods are, indeed, in their essentials for the whole world.

*Harijan, 30-9-'39, p. 288*

I believe in thought-power more than in the power of the word, whether written or spoken. And if the movement that I seek to represent has vitality in it and has divine blessing upon it, it will permeate the whole world without my physical presence in its different parts.

*Young India, 17-9-'25, p. 320*

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I lay claim to nothing exclusively divine in me. I do not claim prophetship. I am but a humble seeker after Truth and bent upon finding It. I count no sacrifice too great for sake of seeing God face to face,

*Harijan, 6-5-'33, p. 4*

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A persistent correspondent from Simla asks me whether I intend to found a sect or claim divinity. I have answered him by a private letter. But he would have me make a public declaration for the sake of posterity. I should have thought that I had in the strongest terms repudiated all claim to divinity. I claim to be a humble servant of India and humanity and would like to die in the discharge of such service. I have no desire to found a sect. I am really too ambitious to be satisfied with a sect for a following, for I represent no new truths. I endeavour to follow and represent truth as I know it. I do claim to throw a new light on many an old truth. I hope that this declaration will satisfy my inquirer and others like him.

*Young India, 25-8-'21, p. 267*

## NON-ENGLISH WORDS WITH THEIR MEANINGS

*Agiari*—a Zoroastrian temple; Parsi place of fire-worship

*Ahimsa*—non-violence; love

*Allah*—a Muslim term for God

*Ashram* —a place for spiritual retirement; Gandhiji's colony of workers

*Ashrama*—one of the four stages in a man's life (student, householder, meditator in the forest, and wandering teacher), as enjoined by Hinduism

*Avatar*—incarnation

*Bati*—a thick bread

*Bhatti*—a. small open furnace

*Bhagavat*— a Purana or devotional book containing the life-history of Lord Krishna and other ancient stories

*Bhagavad Gita* - Hindu scripture, often regarded as the New Testament of Hinduism

*Bhajan*— a religious service consisting of devotional songs; devotional song

*Bhangi*—a scavenger; an 'untouchable'

*Brahmachari*—one pledged to chastity; student

*Brahmacharya*—chastity; continence *Brahman*—God; Supreme Being

*Brahmana*—the highest Hindu caste, consisting of priests

*Dharma* —religious duty

*Dharmayuddha*—righteous war

*Ezhavo*—an outcaste of Malabar

*Gayatri* —Vedic prayer addressed to the Sun God

*Gita*—See *Bhagavad Gita*

*Goshala*—a dairy-, cattle farm

*Guru*—religious teacher

*Himsa*—violence

*Itihasa*—Ancient Hindu Book of History

*Kali*—a Hindu goddess of destruction; name of goddess Durga

*Kalma*— a Muslim prayer formula

*Karmayogi*—religious person devoted to the path of action

*Khuda*—a Muslim term for God

*Koran*—a sacred book of Muslims

*Lota*—a small vessel for water

*Mahabharata*—a Hindu epic

*Mandir*—a Hindu temple

*Mantra*—a Vedic hymn or sacred prayer

*Moksha*—salvation; liberation

*Nirvana*—lit. extinction; extinction of desire; Buddhist conception of salvation

*Pariah*—an outcaste of the Tamils of South India

*Phooka*—process of inserting a rod or pipe into the reproductive organ of the cow and blowing air into it to make the cow yield its last drop of milk

*Quran*—See Koran

*Rama*—a Hindu incarnation of God; God

*Ramanama*—name of Rama or God

*Ramayana*—a Hindu epic, describing the life-history of King Rama

*Rama Raj*—Kingdom of Rama or God; the ideal political and social order

*Rishi*—seer

*Sanatana*—ancient; orthodox

*Sanatani*—one who follows the ancient faith



*Satyagraha*—lit. clinging to Truth; non-violent resistance to untruth

*Satyagrahi*—non-violent resister of untruth

*Shastra*—Hindu sacred book

*Shivalingam*—a stone idol or short pillar representing Shiva, a Hindu god

*Shudra*—the fourth or lowest Hindu caste consisting of manual labourers

*Smriti*—ancient book embodying Hindu law and tradition

*Swadeshi*—the duty to serve one's neighbours and therefore to use articles produced by them only

*Swaraj*—self-government

*Tapas, Tapasya*—austerity

*Upanishads*—ancient philosophical treatises of Hinduism

*Varna*—social groups numbering four based on pursuit of hereditary occupations

*Varna Dharma*—specific duties of the different social groups

*Varnashrama*—four social groups and four stages of man's life

*Varnashrama Dharma*—specific duties of four social groups and of four stages of man's life

*Vedas*—earliest Hindu scriptures

*Vishnu*—a Hindu god

*Yogi*—one practising Yoga

*Zend Avesta*—scriptures of the Parsis or Zoroastrians