



EARTH ETHICS

of

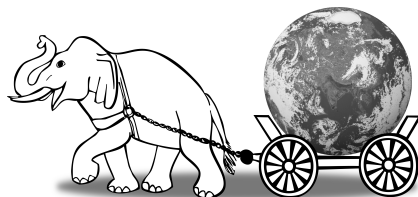
M. K. GANDHI

with teachings from

HOLY MOTHER AMMA

AN INTRODUCTION

P. K A M A L A W I L L E Y, *Ph. D.*



WISE EARTH PUBLISHERS



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That said, Wise Earth Publishers encourages the dissemination of Mahatma Gandhi’s and Holy Mother Amma’s Earth Ethics, through educational, non-profit, and humanitarian means.

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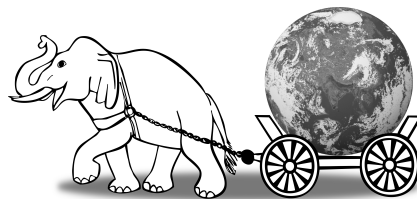
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To My Daughter, and All Our Daughters.
May our children rise
to fearlessly face the coming Dawn,
Knowing they are part of Life, Unending.



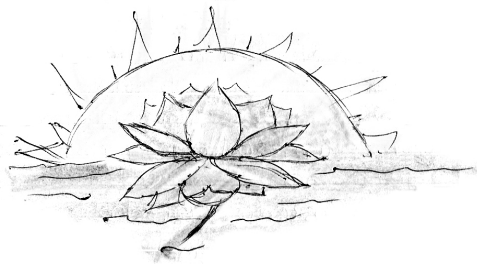
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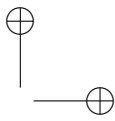
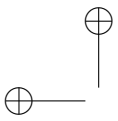
Green Grass, Blue Skies,
In this Beautiful World,
One Lord, One Love,
Has Created it So...
Can't we Love each other?
Fill this place with Harmony?
One Time, Everywhere,
Let's Try! Make it happen today...

Mountains, Valleys,
On our sweet planet Earth.
One Love, One God,
Has Created it So.
Everywhere beauty abides,
Singing aloud the Glory of Thee.
Flowers, Fields and Rivers,
Alive with your sweet song of Day...

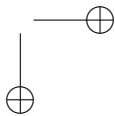
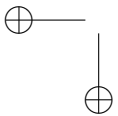
Strive for
The Wonder of Wonders,
Who has made it So.
Love Her, With All your Heart,
And All the People will Know...

-Anni





The song “Green Grass, Blue Skies” was written and tuned by Anni during the last day she spent in University. The sketch of the Lotus on the dedication page was one among many found in her diaries.





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work has only been possible due to the Grace of Truth and Love in all aspects of our lives and through all people and agencies of support and seeming adversity. Ever present in Nature, this Grace asks nothing from us, yet we mention it only as we hope to be of service. We are grateful to have experienced this Grace through Holy Mother Amma.

We are deeply thankful to Amma, known as Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, and through her the M.A. Mission Trust and the M.A. Center for permission to use the photographs of her person, Ashram scenes, as well as extensive quotations of her translated words from books published by her Ashram. We are deeply grateful for the privilege and opportunity to live in her Ashram, with our fellow community family members, each one of whom has contributed to our growth and understanding of these Earth ethics.

We are thankful to Amma’s Father, Sri Sugunanandan-Acchan, for his kind permission to use the photographs of his family members.

We thank the people at Gandhi’s Sabarmati Ashram, Mr. Amrut Modhi, and Navajivan Press, Mr. K. Rawal, for their kind assistance, permissions and licence to use the extensive quotations and photographs of Gandhiji included herein. We deeply appreciated the kindness and helpful assistance given to scholars at the Gandhi Sabarmati Ashram.

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This book has been a family project. As a mother, it is difficult to speak of the devotion and selfless service of one’s children. Mother’s feel so close to their children that to separate oneself from them in order to give objective acknowledgement even, seems almost unnatural, for we work as one. Nonetheless, without the help of my daughter Anni and son, Linkesh, also known as Lincoln, this work would not have happened. Their unceasing efforts, support, and respect for this project is why it is here today. While she was with us, Anni poured over its pages, making corrections, and gave beautiful suggestions for the cover, which have been incorporated. Over the years, both children listened endlessly and critically to innumerable renditions of each chapter, as bedtime reading.

After Anni left her form, Linkesh started Wise Earth Publishers to bring out our books. He and his heart-brother Brahmachari Rishikesh (Matthew Petrilla), voluntarily carried out most of the initial proof-reading and editing for this tome.

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

Linkesh also saw the placement of the book into an open-source dtp application, tweaked the photographs, did all of the run-around, pursued the printing, companion web-site construction, and innumerable other tasks associated with the project. He assisted in interviews as well. This process has provided him with a valuable and practical crash-course education into innumerable forms of research and media for document preparation, as well the business of the publishing sphere. He has managed all this during a time of deep sorrow about his sister, with zeal and courageousness, in addition to his regular full-time college program in Mechanical Engineering at Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Amritapuri Campus.

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My late parents, my Father, C. Francis Willey, Mother, G. Indira Willey and brother, Jefferson Mohandas Willey. May the noble intentions of our great father who named my brother Mohandas after Gandhi, come through in our lives.

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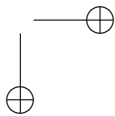
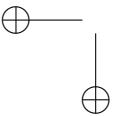
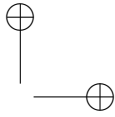
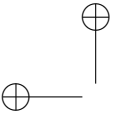
There are many whose humble presence in this undertaking goes seemingly unnoticed: librarians, paper-makers (the trees, the birds, the bees! the oceans of air and water), printers, taxi and bus drivers, cooks, and you, the reader who makes it all worthwhile. Our reflection upon this endless intricate web of interdependence, shows us that it is incumbent upon us to acknowledge the whole of the Creation, the stream of life, here with us, today, yesterday and tomorrow, we thank you, we are deeply grateful.

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P. Kamala Willey, Ph.D.
and Linkesh Diwan (Lincoln)
Wise Earth Publishers





CONTENTS

DEDICATION	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
LIST OF IMAGES	xix
FOREWORD BY DR. JOSEPH ELDER	xxi
INTRODUCTION	xxv
Evolving to Earth Ethics	xxv
Gandhi and Holy Mother Amma	xxvi
Uniqueness of India to Earth Ethics	xxviii
Duty of America	xxxii
About this Book	xxxvi
Format of this Book	xxxix
Amends	xli

I The Mandala of India’s Earth Ethics

1 RELEVANCE OF GANDHI TO EARTH ETHICS	3
1.1 About Gandhi	4
1.2 Gandhi from Outside Eyes	10
2 RELEVANCE OF HOLY MOTHER AMMA TO EARTH ETHICS	17
2.1 The Rose of Awareness	22
2.2 Views of Amma	36
3 OPENING THE DOOR TO EARTH ETHICS	41
3.1 Defining Terms	42
3.2 The Role of Our Thoughts	53
3.2.1 <i>Changing Our Self-Identification</i>	56
3.3 Universal Motherhood and Ahimsa	59
4 EARLY FRAMEWORK OF GANDHI’S EARTH ETHICS	67
4.1 Factors in the 19 th Century	67
4.2 Early Ethical Responses	78
4.3 Early Use of the Vow	81

CONTENTS

4.4	Becoming Aware of India’s Earth Ethics	83
4.5	Jail’s Effect on Gandhi	88
5	THE INFLUENCE OF HINDUISM	93
5.1	The Spirit of India	93
5.2	A Quick look at Hinduism	96
5.3	Foundation Stones of Hinduism	102
5.3.1	<i>Vedanta</i>	104
5.3.2	<i>The Shad Darshana</i>	108
5.3.3	<i>Angamas</i>	109
5.3.4	<i>Sutras Past and Present</i>	110
5.3.4.1	Formats of Sutra Interpretation	111
5.3.5	<i>Vedanga</i>	112
5.3.5.1	Jyotish—Vedic Astrology	112
5.3.6	<i>Smritis and Shastras</i>	113
5.3.7	<i>Itihasa, Purana and Secular Literatures</i>	115
5.3.8	<i>Three Philosopher Sons</i>	118
	Adi Shankaracharya	118
	Ramanuja	119
	Madhava	119
5.4	Gandhi and Hindu Literature	121
6	SECULAR LIFE AND VEDIC RITES	125
6.1	Folklore, Melas, and Pilgrimage in Secular Life	126
6.2	Use of Idols or Pratishtas	128
6.2.1	<i>Gandhi and Idols</i>	130
6.2.2	<i>Beyond Idols</i>	131
6.3	Meanings Behind Temples	132
6.3.1	<i>Holy Mother Amma’s Brahmasthanams</i>	134
6.4	Rituals and Pujas	137
6.5	Home Life and Vedic Rites	139
7	LOVE, LAW, AND GANDHI	143
7.1	Spiritual Love	143
7.2	What is Karma?	154
7.3	About Reincarnation	157
7.4	Gandhi’s God: Law is Truth	160
7.5	Gandhi and Nature—Live and Let Live	163

CONTENTS

8	ASHRAMA SYSTEM: ETHICAL FAMILY LIFE	169
8.1	Natural Stages of Life	169
8.2	Grihasta Ashrama—The Family	174
8.2.1	<i>The Feminine Mystique</i>	174
8.2.2	<i>Ethical Preparation for Marriage</i>	179
8.2.2.1	Pati Vrata Dharma	181
8.2.2.2	The Gandhis and Pati Vrata Dharma	186
8.2.2.3	Kasturba’s Thanks	187
9	MARRIAGE REFORM	189
9.1	New Ideals for Family Life Today	192
9.2	Marital and Sexual Relations	199
9.3	Ethical Development in Children	206
9.4	Home Life Ethics	209
9.5	Ethical Considerations for Children Today	214
10	RETIRING TO FREEDOM	219
10.1	Vanaprastha	219
10.2	Sannyasa	222
10.3	What is a Guru	226
10.4	Gandhi and Guru	232
11	VARNA IS DHARMA, NOT CASTE	237
11.1	The Three Gunas and Varna Ashrama	240
11.2	Varna Ashrama Dharma	244
11.2.1	<i>A Hereditary System</i>	247
11.2.2	<i>Varna and the Goal of Life</i>	249
11.3	Women and Varna Ashrama for Today	252
11.4	Caste problems now—Indian apartheid	256
11.5	New Sounds For Varna	262
11.6	Gandhi and His Religion	265
12	GANDHI’S EVOLVING VEGETARIANISM	269
12.1	An Ethical Platform	269
12.2	Vegetarianism for Caring Reform	275
13	AHIMSA IS LOVE IS TRUTH	287
13.1	Ideal of Ahimsa	288
13.2	Nuts and Bolts of the Practice of Ahimsa	292
13.3	Examples of Ahimsa	295
13.4	Fruits of Ahimsa	300

C O N T E N T S

13.5 Sakshi Bhava: the Witness State of Truth	302
13.6 Amma's Response to the Tsunami	304

II Awareness, Practices, and Observances

14 AWARENESS OF MIND AND THE ROLE OF DEATH	311
14.1 Orderliness of the Mind	315
14.1.1 <i>Cleanliness</i>	315
14.1.2 <i>Concentration</i>	317
14.1.3 <i>Practice of the Present Moment</i>	320
14.1.4 <i>Three Metaphysical Tools</i>	322
14.1.4.1 <i>Shraddha—Vigilance</i>	322
14.1.4.2 <i>Viveka—Discrimination</i>	324
14.1.4.3 <i>Vairagya—Dispassion</i>	325
14.2 The Role of Death	329
14.2.1 <i>About Suicide</i>	331
14.2.2 <i>On Mourning</i>	334
15 AWARENESS OF HEART, HUMILITY, DUTY, AND SACRIFICE	339
15.1 Developing Awareness of Heart or Hridaya	339
15.2 Humility	344
15.2.1 <i>Approaching Humility</i>	346
15.3 Duty or Dharma	349
15.3.1 <i>Awakening to Duty</i>	351
15.3.2 <i>Dutiful Fruits</i>	356
15.4 Yajna	356
15.4.1 <i>Ritual and YAJNA</i>	360
16 THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER	363
16.1 The Exercise of Prayer	369
16.2 Prayer and Food	373
16.3 Public Prayer	374
16.4 Bhajan or Hymn Singing	378
16.5 Japa or Rama-nama	379
16.5.1 <i>Ideal of Rama-Nama and Japa</i>	386
16.5.2 <i>The Practice of Japa</i>	387
16.5.3 <i>The Results of Japa</i>	389
16.5.4 <i>Mantras, Japa and Guru</i>	390

CONTENTS

17	SELFLESS SERVICE, SIMPLICITY AND REPENTANCE	393
17.1	Selfless Service	393
17.1.1	<i>The Ideal of Selfless Service</i>	396
17.1.2	<i>The Practice of Selfless Service</i>	397
17.1.3	<i>Joy, the Fruit of Selfless Service</i>	401
17.2	Simplicity	402
17.3	Repentance and Forgiveness	404
18	THE PRACTICE OF SILENCE AND THE USE OF VOW	409
18.1	Silence—Maunam	409
18.1.1	<i>Speech, from Interior Silence</i>	411
18.1.2	<i>The Ideal of Silence</i>	413
18.1.3	<i>The Practice of Silence</i>	414
18.2	Vow or Observance	416
18.2.1	<i>The Ideal of Vow</i>	419
18.2.2	<i>Taking a Vow</i>	420
18.2.3	<i>The Results of Taking Vows</i>	422
18.2.4	<i>The Use of Vows in Gandhi’s Earth Ethics</i>	423
19	THE VOWS OF TRUTH, AHIMSA, AND FEARLESSNESS	425
19.1	Truth	428
19.1.1	<i>The Ideal of Truthfulness</i>	428
19.1.2	<i>The Observance of Truthfulness</i>	430
19.2	Ahimsa	434
19.2.1	<i>The Ideal of AHIMSA</i>	435
19.2.2	<i>The Observance of AHIMSA</i>	435
19.2.3	<i>Ahimsa and the Vows</i>	437
19.3	Fearlessness	439
19.3.1	<i>The Ideal of Fearlessness</i>	440
19.3.2	<i>The Cause of Fear</i>	441
19.3.3	<i>The Observance of Fearlessness</i>	443
20	THE VOWS OF TOLERANCE AND TOUCHABILITY	447
20.1	Tolerance	447
20.1.1	<i>The Ideal of Tolerance</i>	448
20.1.2	<i>The Observance of Tolerance</i>	448
20.2	Touchability	451
20.2.1	<i>The Ideal of Touchability</i>	453
20.2.2	<i>The Observance of Touchability</i>	454

C O N T E N T S

21	THE VOWS OF NON-POSSESSION AND NON-STEALING	461
21.1	Evolving to Non-possession and Non-stealing	462
21.1.1	<i>The Ideals of Non-possession and Non-stealing</i>	462
21.1.2	<i>The Observance of Non-possession and Non-stealing</i>	464
22	STARTING TOWARDS BRAHMACHARYA	473
22.1	Control of the Palate	475
22.2	Celibacy	483
22.2.1	<i>Gandhi Turns to Celibacy</i>	485
22.3	Warnings for Beginners	497
23	WOMEN AND BRAHMACHARYA	505
23.1	Awakening World Sisters	505
23.2	The Path of the Female Sadhak	509
23.2.1	<i>Women and Violence</i>	511
23.2.1.1	Women and Rape	512
23.3	Gandhi and Women	514
23.3.1	<i>Gandhi and Purdah</i>	517
23.4	Brahmacharya in the Communities	520
24	GANDHI’S POLITICS	525
24.1	Politics	527
24.2	Original Democracy	528
24.3	Swaraj—Refined Democracy	531
24.4	Socialism and Communism	536
24.4.1	<i>Resource Management</i>	536
24.4.2	<i>Class Conflicts</i>	538
25	MORAL ECONOMICS	541
25.1	India’s Rural Civilisation	542
25.2	Balancing the Role of Machinery	546
25.3	Defining Moral Economics	553
25.4	Applying Moral Economics	556
26	ETHICS OF CAPITAL AND LABOUR	559
26.1	Towards Moral Power Structures	561
26.2	The Obligations of Management	564
26.3	The Rights and Duties of Labour	568
26.4	On Unions	572
26.5	The Use of the Strike	574
26.6	Directions for Labour Now	576


CONTENTS

27	THE VOWS OF TRUSTEESHIP AND BREAD LABOUR	579
27.1	Trusteeship	579
27.1.1	<i>The Ideal of Trusteeship</i>	585
27.1.2	<i>The Observance of Trusteeship</i>	587
27.1.3	<i>Amma and Trusteeship</i>	596
27.2	Bread labour	601
27.2.1	<i>The Ideal of Bread labour</i>	603
27.2.2	<i>The Observance of Bread labour</i>	604
27.2.3	<i>Bread labour and Earth Ethical Economics</i>	605
27.2.4	<i>Machinery and Bread labour</i>	607
28	THE VOW OF SWADESHI	611
28.1	Defining Swadeshi	611
28.2	Observance of <i>SWADESHI</i>	620
28.3	Swadeshi and Swaraj	625
28.4	Swadeshi Spirit Abroad	629
29	SATYAGRAHA	633
29.1	A Natural Law in Human Evolution	634
29.2	Defining Satyagraha	634
29.3	Arriving at Satyagraha	638
30	THE WAY OF THE SATYAGRAHI	647
30.1	Internal Dedication	647
30.2	External View of the Satyagrahi	652
30.3	National Ethical Education Through Satyagraha	653
30.4	Women and Satyagraha	655
30.5	Response of Satyagraha	658
30.6	Personal Applications of Satyagraha	665
30.6.1	<i>Dr. King and Changes in Satyagraha</i>	667
31	THE FAST	671
31.1	Why Gandhi used the Fast	672
31.2	How to use the Fast	677
31.2.1	<i>Cesar Chavez and the Fast</i>	684

III Earth Ethics in Communities and Education

32	COMMUNITY AND EDUCATION	687
32.1	The Concept of an Ashram Community	689

C O N T E N T S

		
32.2	Gandhi’s Love of Ashram Life	692
32.3	Ideals in Education	695
32.3.1	<i>Ideals for Teachers</i>	698
32.3.2	<i>Holy Mother Amma’s Ideals for Education</i>	700
33	A PATTERN FOR BASIC EDUCATION	707
33.1	Gandhi’s Educational Philosophy	707
33.2	Champaran’s Effect on Gandhi’s Basic Education	713
33.3	Evolving National Education	715
33.4	Patterns for Schools	720
33.4.1	<i>Sexual Science Education</i>	722
33.4.2	<i>Arts and Music</i>	724
33.5	School Cooperatives in Harmony with Nature	727
34	QUIT-SCHOOL MOVEMENT	731
34.1	Awakening the Need	731
34.2	Quit-School Rebounds: Constuctive Programme	739
34.3	Rise of a New University System	742
34.4	Post-Basic Education & Constructive Programme	744
35	GANDHI’S NATIONAL WORK IN SOUTH AFRICA	747
35.1	Factors in South African History	747
35.2	Gandhi Gets Involved	755
35.3	The Start of Satyagraha	766
35.4	Mandela and Gandhi	775
36	PHOENIX	777
36.1	The Spirit of Phoenix	777
36.2	Becoming an Inmate	780
36.3	The Newspaper for Earth Ethical Education	788
36.4	Life at Phoenix	793
36.5	Children’s Education at Phoenix	796
36.6	Diet and the Fast at Phoenix	800
36.7	Gandhi, Post-Phoenix	801
37	TOLSTOY FARM	807
37.1	Life on the Farm	811
37.2	Children’s Education at the Farm	820
37.3	Post-Tolstoy Farm	825

CONTENTS

38	SABARMATI	829
38.1	Back in India	829
38.2	Satyagraha Ashram at Sabarmati	831
38.3	Ashram Vows	833
38.4	Becoming an Inmate	837
39	ASHRAM EDUCATIONAL PATTERN FOR CHILDREN	845
39.1	Goal of Ashram education	845
39.2	Daily-Doings in School	849
39.3	Montessori Influence	855
39.4	Co-education Issues	857
40	DIFFICULTIES IN ASHRAM LIFE	859
40.1	Women in the Ashram	862
40.2	The Change to Udyoga Mandir	866
40.3	Ashram Break-up	869
41	SEVAGRAM AND BEYOND	873
41.1	Satyagraha Ashram at Wardha	873
41.2	Considering Segaoon	875
41.3	The Shift to Segaoon	877
41.4	Earth Ethics in Segaoon	880
41.5	Sevagram Ashram	885
41.6	Sevagram in Gandhi's Absence	888
41.7	Rising Communal Disturbances	889
41.8	Gandhi's Last Fast	891
42	AMRITAPURI	893
42.1	Holy Mother Amma's Ashram Work	893
42.2	Formal Ashram Begins	895
42.3	Advent of the Brahmacharinis or Nuns	901
42.4	Amritapuri Today	907
42.5	An Unlimited Mother	908
43	EXPANDING ETHICAL REACHES	911
43.1	Nation Souls	911
43.1.1	<i>National Dharmas</i>	918
43.2	Ethical Care our Planet's Soul	921
43.3	Caring for the Earth Commons	927
43.3.1	<i>The Precautionary Principle</i>	928
43.4	Ahimsa for Eco-justice	929

C O N T E N T S

43.4.1 <i>Chipko</i>	930
43.4.2 <i>Dr. Vandana Shiva and the IFG</i>	932
43.4.3 <i>Captain Paul Watson and Sea Shepard</i>	933
43.4.4 <i>Medha Patkar and the NBA</i>	934
43.5 Moving towards the Beloved Community	936
43.6 Onward and Upward	939

Addenda

A GANDHI'S CHRONOLOGY	947
B HOLY MOTHER AMMA'S CHRONOLOGY	961
C THE WAY OF THE SATYAGRAHI IN CORINTHIANS	965
D GANDHI'S TEN COMMANDMENTS ON PICKETING	966
E GANDHI'S THEORY OF TRUSTEESHIP	968
F GANDHI'S VIEWS ON EDUCATION	969
G MY INDIA BY PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA	971
H YUGA THEORY DISCUSSION BY LINKESH DIWAN	973
I THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS	980
GLOSSARY OF TERMS	986
BIOGRAPHICAL GLOSSARY	1015
BIBLIOGRAPHY	1058
INDEX	1061

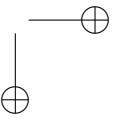
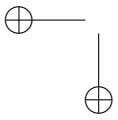
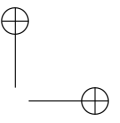
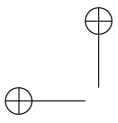
SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Supplementary materials to this book are available online at EarthEthics.org.in for free download. EarthEthics.org.in also hosts more information, projects related to Earth Ethics, and discussions related to the contents of this book.



LIST OF IMAGES

1	Griha-Lakshmi	183
2	Ahimsa—Vows Diagram	438
3	Early Map of South Africa	748
4	The Yuga Theory	975





FOREWORD BY DR. JOSEPH ELDER

I first met Kamala Willey in 1983, when she went to Varanasi (Benares), India with the University of Wisconsin’s College Year in India Program, with which I was associated as Faculty Coordinator. During her academic year in Varanasi Kamala studied (and became quite good at) Hindi. She also wrote her field work project on Pandey Ghat—one of the many stone stairways leading down through the city street to the flowing Ganges river.

Kamala completed her B.G.S. degree from Eastern Connecticut State University in 1985 and gave herself the ninety-three volume *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* as a graduation present. For several years the 50,000 pages of *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* remained virtually unread on her shelves as young-adult life intervened. Kamala married and gave birth to two children, a son Lincoln and a daughter, Annika. Combining motherhood with advanced education, Kamala earned her M.A. from the University of Connecticut in 1990 to be followed by her Ph.D. from the same University. For her Ph.D. dissertation Kamala chose “The Ecological Mandala of M.K. Gandhi.” Beginning in 1995, the ninety-three volumes of *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* began to come off Kamala’s shelf one-by-one as Kamala sought to discover Gandhi’s views on the environment and ecology. Kamala’s search was hindered by the fact that neither “environment” nor “ecology” appeared in the index of *The Collected Works*. To the best of her ability she selected index terms that might provide relevant ecological information—terms such as nonviolence, equality, trusteeship, self-reliance, service, bread labor, latrines, night-soil, capitalism, city, education, basic education, industrialization, justice, populations, duty, rights, self-sufficiency, work, cow protection, and vegetarianism. She discovered that approaching the ecological topic piecemeal through indexed words failed to provide her with the chronological thought-development she wanted. To quote from the first chapter of her dissertation:

There was no choice but total immersion into the subject, by chronologically perusing the volumes page by page in order to glean the subtle processual and interrelationship connections that the environmental aspects of Gandhi’s thought and life demanded.

So Kamala read each volume (averaging over 550 pages) of *The Collected Works* in chronological order. This took her seventeen months. To quote again from her dissertation:

FOREWORD

This approach had great advantages, despite the time factor. It provided a base for empathy with the life of Gandhi on an extended daily basis...Relationships stood bared in their contextual remains. There was space between and during readings to process and grow in understanding...The time factor allowed a ‘companionate’ relationship to develop...

After reading all 93 volumes of *The Collected Works*, Kamala photocopied 8,000 pages chosen for their relevant data. She then spent another six months analyzing, coding, and categorizing those data. As she began writing her dissertation, Kamala faced another problem:

Looking for consistency was challenged by Gandhi who...adamantly insist[ed] on the right to revise his opinions or change them outright. He saw himself as being helpless to go counter to his vision of truth, which was liable to change even beyond his own expectations...Gandhi wanted all his writings to be burnt along with him upon his death. He wished that people would say of him: “He fearlessly placed before us what he thought to be the truth *at that time* [Kamala’s italics].”

In its final form, Kamala’s dissertation was an “explication of Gandhi’s ecological education within the eco-communities and educational dimension of the constructive program.” Kamala focussed on Gandhi’s “eco-communities” or ashrams: Phoenix and Tolstoy ashrams in South Africa, and Satyagraha Ashram in Sabar-mati and Wardha in India and finally Gandhi’s ashram at Sevagram, a small village near Wardha. Kamala studied these ashrams’ purposes, how they were established and maintained, and what their membership requirements were. She focussed on their constructive programs and especially on their eco-educational experiments involving spinning, *Khadi* (hand-spun and hand-woven cloth), diet, celibacy, fearlessness, abolition of untouchability, tolerance, equality, non-possession, trusteeship, bread labor, nonviolence, and *Satyagraha* (the application of truth-force for change).

In 1991 in the United States, Kamala first met Mata Amritanandamayi (or “Amma,” mother). Amma had been born in a small village near Kollam in the state of Kerala in the southwestern corner of India in 1953. At the age of five, Amma began composing devotional songs. As she grew older, she increasingly experienced moments of inner bliss in the presence of the Divine Mother. One day she heard a voice within her calling her to move beyond her inner bliss and to give solace to suffering humanity. Following her call, Amma’s home became a pilgrimage place for people asking her advice and seeking her blessing—often in the form of a motherly hug. In time, Amma founded the Mata Amritanandamayi

BY DR. JOSEPH ELDER

Mission Trust that started an orphanage, free medical dispensaries, a vocational-training center, a computer-training institute, and a hospice for terminally ill patients. In 1987, some of Amma’s followers asked her to come to the West to meet people who could not come to India. In 1989 Amma started the Mata Amritanandamayi Center in San Francisco for followers wishing to live in an ashram. Amma went on to found a university, an institute of medical science and research, hospitals and medical training centers, eye clinics and speech centers, homes for the aged and community aid centers, women’s shelters and pensions for widows—supported by voluntary financial contributions. In the United States many of Amma’s followers regularly prepared vegetarian meals for the poor.

Amma had a world wide reputation as the “hugging saint.” She hugged anyone who wished to be hugged. Many whom Amma hugged reported a deep sense of being loved. In 1993, Amma represented Hinduism in Chicago Parliament of World Religions.

There were many reasons why Kamala was attracted to Amma. In Amma’s presence, Kamala felt in touch with India’s ancient heritage and relieved of the cynicism and materialism of the West. Kamala concluded that Amma’s ashram in India provided the kind of spiritual setting where she could happily raise her children. Therefore, in 1999, she, her son Lincoln (age 12), and her daughter Anika (age 10) moved from the United States to begin their new life in Amritapuri, Kerala.

Even before Kamala moved to Amritapuri, Amma had suggested that Kamala produce a book from her research on Gandhi’s earth ethics. After Kamala arrived in Amritapuri, Kamala recognized that Amma’s teachings and the eco-community life in Amma’s ashrams both reproduced and enriched what she had learned while studying Gandhi’s ecological education and earth ethics. So Kamala began to write this book. Kamala noted that Gandhi established his ashrams to engender rural community development in India. Amma established her ashrams in response to the “deluging oceanic love within her.” Her ashrams existed for service to the world. As such they extended beyond Gandhi’s ashrams.

During the years Kamala was writing this book, Amma’s mission raised millions of dollars to relieve the victims of the 2004 tsunami that devastated parts of southeast and south Asia. In 2005 Amma’s mission donated one-million dollars to the hurricane-Katrina victims in the United States. In 2006 Amma received the James Park Morton Interfaith award in New York. All of these reflected Amma’s ashram activities extended beyond the ashram activities of Mahatma Gandhi.

This book includes two unique components: (1) It contains an exhaustively-researched, carefully-aggregated, series of observations by Mahatma Gandhi regarding ecological education within eco-communities (ashrams) and educational

FOREWORD

dimensions of his constructive program. For Gandhi, a major purpose of his ashrams was to develop a model community that could be replicated and adapted throughout the world. (2) It contains observations from Amma drawing on her own experiences with her ashrams. For Amma, a major purpose of her ashrams was to provide golden opportunities for participants to concentrate on the ethical life. To the extent Amma’s observations repeat those of Gandhi, Kamala points out the remarkable parallels reflecting the fact that both of them draw upon India’s ancient heritages. To the extent Amma’s observations go beyond those of Gandhi, Kamala suggests that this may be through Amma’s greater sensitivity to the role of Mother, her application of that sensitivity to her ashrams, and her awareness of the heritage of the Divine Mother. Those everywhere in the world interested in enhancing women’s roles will find these observations particularly valuable.

India, Gandhi, and Amma have provided unique contributions to worldwide earth ethics. Their contributions are well worth reading—and contemplating. We are indebted to Kamala for having made them available.

Joseph W. Elder

23 January, 2009

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INTRODUCTION

In the relations of man with the animals, with the flowers, with the objects of Creation, there is a great ethic scarcely perceived as yet which will at length break forth into light.

Victor Hugo

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

I don't want to be a great leader, I want to be a man who goes around with a little oil can and when he sees a breakdown offers his help. To me, the man who does that is greater than any holyman in saffron-coloured robes. The mechanic with the oil can, that is my ideal in life.

Baba Amte



EVOLVING TO EARTH ETHICS

Earth ethics are the ideals that we use to light our way into harmony with the Earth and the qualities they inspire in us to nourish that relationship. It is not a new realm, but one that is natural to us all and as old as the hills. Its importance appears new, as we dress it in language that relates to our time and conditions. The hope for unity and planetary healing lies in the admission of our common human dignity and interdependence with the life sustaining systems all around us. It is through responsible personal and community life that Earth ethics demonstrate their social and ecologically transforming power.

Earth ethics are part a budding global recognition of the necessity for a world philosophy. We need to develop a humane human civilisation as we face the climate crisis together—as we face the desecration of our planet, and the systems within her that have commonly sustained humanity for thousands of years. With each breath we touch our common gifts from the Earth: the ocean of air we breathe, the waters that surround us, the soils which bear our activities upon

INTRODUCTION

them. As we begin to turn to a universal consensus, we must ask ourselves many questions and seek many answers from one another.

In this process, the spirit and voice of India, through M.K. Gandhi, and Holy Mother Amma have eternal veracities to teach and tell us. We are evolving to an awareness of our shared life which will ultimately bring about consensus on what the ideals of our ethics and morals are, what we all know and hold to be the Truth. This Truth will include the whole of the Creation here with us. Gaining an understanding of India’s contribution to this philosophical accord of ideals is essential for the establishment of a global consensus on ethics in practical terms.

GANDHI AND HOLY MOTHER AMMA

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi lived from 1869–1948, yet today there is greater interest world-wide than ever before in his teachings and thinking. His ethical awareness was unconsciously born in India and initially honed in South Africa. Through his ideals he was to develop new economic patterns for social action in India, working through communities and environmental upliftment. He was not alone in his efforts, nor were his ideas new. He took his inspiration wherever he found it. Yet Gandhi pierced through to the ethical core of each ideal, and presented that to himself, his communities, and to the nations, by the means he employed to actualise them.

Gandhi’s effort towards realizing his ideals, towards actualising his Love, has touched millions, regardless of culture, clime and time. In a world abounding with false prophets, teachers and self-acclaimed healers, with the blind leading the blind, he stands as a beacon of hope for many as to the innate sanctity of the human heart, knowable through sincere integrity and effort. Somehow we regard him with reverence and awe; for he demanded of himself and went within that Self where we all know we ought to go, but haven’t yet mustered up the gumption to go to, for whatever reason.

Holy Mother Amma’s birthday is celebrated on September 27, 1953. She was named Sudhamani (nectar’s pure jewel) at birth. As a child, she used to write a prayer *Amrita jyotir mayame*—a short, sweet call to God as the One who is the pure nectar and light of bliss.* Later, some disciples renamed Holy Mother Amma as *Amritanandamayi*—the Mother of Nectarous bliss. In India, versed as it is linguistically in terminologies that reflect an ancient metaphysical understanding and heritage, such a name readily conveys her spiritual stature to those who hear it. In other countries, ‘nectar’ conjures to mind a thick, sweet

* As told by Holy Mother Amma in *The Week*. September 21, 2003.

GANDHI AND HOLY MOTHER AMMA

juice or syrup. In order to keep the import of the Indian terminology in mind, here she is referred to as Holy Mother Amma, or simply Amma as she is known to her millions of children.*

In her youth, Amma was surrounded by the natural tropical splendour of coastal Kerala. It was an atmosphere that was largely politically untouched, with traditional rural life, steeped in India’s glorious spiritual heritage. She has often spoken of the deep kinship and caring that the villagers had collectively towards one another in her youth. High standards existed despite the lack of material opulence. As a woman, who was bearing and self-identified with a consciousness that cannot be shackled to gender-bound, social or cultural and caste-minded conditioning, Amma has risen and continues to rise above tremendous obstacles to hold the Truth of our being aloft before us, inviting us all to join her in an opening and out-pouring of our hearts in Love for the Creator and Creation, as being one another, the great consciousness of which we are all a part. Hers is the way of unconditional, merciful Love. In the Holy Mother we see the living biblical precept: “Love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, with all thy mind, with all thy strength, and thy neighbour as thyself.”

The inspiration behind countless humanitarian projects in India and abroad, in 2002 Amma was given the Gandhi-King award in Geneva, Switzerland for her efforts to promote peace and harmony on Earth. In 2006, her unique ability to impart deep philosophical understanding in down-to-earth ways was again publicly acclaimed with the award of the *Philosopher Saint Shree Dnyaneshwara World Peace Prize* in Pune, India. Of both Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Amma said:

✿ Both Mahatma Gandhi and Reverend Martin Luther King dreamt of a world in which human beings are recognised and loved as human beings, without prejudice of any kind. Remembering them, Amma also places a vision of the future before you.

Amma too, has a dream. It is a vision of a world in which women and men progress together, a world in which all men respect the fact that, like the two wings of a bird, women and men are of equal value. For without the two in perfect balance, humanity cannot progress.

Dr. King was courageous like a lion, yet in his heart he was as soft as a flower. He risked his life for the sake of Love, equality and the other noble

*She is also called ‘Ammachi’—a more formal version of ‘Amma’ which means ‘Respected Mother’ in her language, Malayalam. In the media, she is often referred to as the ‘Hugging Saint.’

INTRODUCTION

ideals he upheld. He had to struggle with great perseverance against the people of his own country.

And Mahatma Gandhi didn't just preach. He put his words into action. He dedicated his whole life to peace and nonviolence. Even though he could have been the prime minister or president of India, Gandhi declined because he had no desire whatsoever for fame or power. In fact, at the stroke of midnight, when India was declared independent, Gandhi was found consoling the victims of a riot-affected area.¹

Both Gandhi and Holy Mother Amma were and are dedicated to the actualisation of ethical ideals on personal and societal levels. Both are national leaders and global figures, whose inspiration alone has generated numerous other social and environmental uplift projects. In Gandhi's time, these works were known as the Constructive Programme. Holy Mother Amma has established the Mata Amritanandamayi Mission Trust (1981) and the Mata Amritanandamayi Math (1984), which work in numerous avenues for social uplift and betterment, not unlike the widespread umbrella of the Constructive Programme. These works include: widow and disabled people's pension programs, homes for the homeless, cancer and AIDS hospices, job creation, addressing farmer's issues, tribal outreach and uplift, legal aid cells for the poor, soup kitchens, youth fellowships, schools, scholarships, hospitals, medical camps, disaster relief, a stream of projects and services too numerous to include here. The paths for social welfare are mushrooming fast as her simple message of Love and service to all inflames willing hearts across the planet. Much of the humanitarian and charitable efforts that Amma is making are at a very basic level—food, shelter, clean water, clothes, medical attention, a chance at education, job training, etc. The scope of these works alone is too vast to see clearly, but it is evident that ceaseless service to all is the intention behind them. The wonderful aspect of her work at present is that it is under her living inspiration, and exists for all to participate in now, or to take inspiration from to start their own.

As a student of Love and Truth, I have found that Gandhi's ideals, works and words were directed to the same source that Amma identifies herself wholly with. The effort that one makes to gain oneness with the Creator and Creation requires the Earth ethics that Gandhi strove for and thereby elucidated in his own life, the practice of which naturally adheres to the teachings of Holy Mother Amma.

UNIQUENESS OF INDIA TO EARTH ETHICS

Both Gandhi and Amma have proclaimed that India has special gifts to offer to the development of human philosophical thought and civilisation that will

UNIQUENESS OF INDIA TO EARTH ETHICS

enhance the beauty of collective life. The original name of India is *Bharat*. *Bharat* means to honour, guard, protect. The ancient seers of India gave this name to inspire her people to protect India’s true wealth, her ethical principles that have infused and pervaded every aspect of life. Amma tells us:

✿ Our country and its soil have a unique fragrance: the fragrance of principles like sacrifice, Love, austerities and spirituality. The deep bond of Love between parents and children, the reverence towards teachers and elders, the loving relationship between neighbours—these are our wealth. Similarly, even our art forms were means of worshipping God. What we need are entertainment and knowledge that have been sanctioned by this tradition and culture. That is the only way for us to build a society of excellence.²

In the above quote, Amma refers to India’s soil as also being a bearer of ethical principles. It is a point to bear in mind when one is overwhelmed by the present day problems India is facing, and confronted with the erosion of ethical thinking and corruption in her present social, municipal, educational, medical, legal and political institutions. At present, India has only shreds of her former ethical glory, the sanctity of which has been regaled in historical records. Yet still, India is the home of great qualities that we often liken to one who is called ‘Mother’—qualities of absorption, synthesis and integration. India exalts the principle of motherhood leading to Universal Motherhood. Most of India was invaded time and again by rulers who ruled the roost far from the lives of the ‘common man’, yet, for the people, India has gone on unchanged in many ways long before the dawn of human memory, centuries of centuries past. Modern archaeological evidence* is finally arriving at the conclusion which the common man is already aware of—that there has been a continuous, unbroken stream of an advanced rural civilisation in India which predates our earliest expectations.

This continuity has produced a honing, a fine tuning in the fabric of human life and interaction, in the consciousness that is distinctly Indian—but not limited to being Indian. For life is a crucible, which relentlessly grinds us all gradually into a more subtle awareness of ourselves, before our inevitable exit from this stage. In the ancient and withered stacks of human history, one sees India’s indelible imprint on countless civilisations as archaeological records throughout Eurasia, Africa, the Americas demonstrate. These are a people whose massively ancient ancestors devised and practised ways of *being on* and *with* the Earth; ways which

*Interestingly, a recent archaeological discovery in what is now Pakistan found that skilled dentistry was being practised over 9000 years ago in that area.

INTRODUCTION

are inherently harmonious with the rest of the Creation. Lacking harmony with the natural Creation, the civilisation along with other beings in the Creation would have died out, but as yet, they haven't. However, the bomb-blast of economic globalisation, intense pollution, and consumer-oriented media is upon it now, successfully divorcing people from awakening to a moral dialogue with the environment around them, snowing ethical ideals under a flurry of short-sighted ones.

Wherever my family has gone in this holy land, we have met people, from those forced to beg in order to live, to Chief Ministers, and the richest of the rich, from all religious backgrounds, who could talk intelligently to us about the highest principles of noble life and who seem to have an awareness of at least *some* of them. Even in deep poverty, we have seen great human dignity here. We have seen extremely poor children who happily gave away their last bangles to a friend, the joy of their friend being of more value to those children than the bangles. We have seen children, who having begged their food, shared it with hungry puppies around them. There is a great patience here, a great acceptance of being. Yet from the outside, it appears that apathetic and stifling poverty reigns. I believe Gandhi saw the same thing when he said:

☉ Yes, so long as you look on the surface. But the moment you talk to them and they begin to speak, you will find that wisdom drops from their lips. Behind the crude exterior, you will find a deep reservoir of spirituality. I call this culture. You will not find such a thing in the West. In the case of the Indian villager, an age-old culture is hidden under an encrustment of crudeness. Take away the encrustation, remove his chronic poverty and his illiteracy, and you have the finest specimen of what a cultured, cultivated, free citizen should be.³

All countries have their archetypal ideals of noble human aspiration, by which they are known. In this sense, India practises real democracy. The genuine individual freedom to follow—at all cost—one's internal Truth, even it means giving up all physical comforts including your clothing, hearth and home, leaving conventional life is acceptable, so long as you are not harming others. I know that if Holy Mother Amma had been born and brought up in the USA, my country of birth, she would have been locked up in a mental institution during the years she gave an example of intense *tapas* and *sadhana*, exhibiting no care or thought for her body, in her unswerving dedication to the ideal. My country, espousing true democracy, would not have been able to absorb her actions in a *live and let live* way of being. The evolutionary process of creating Saints

xxx

UNIQUENESS OF INDIA TO EARTH ETHICS

and *Mahatmas** is not part of the social experience in the USA Nor was it an experience her family and village could understand for many years, yet, with the inherent gifts of India—synthesis, acceptance and absorption, they allowed her to be what she was and is. Even religious institutions in the West which admit of the phenomenon of great beings, usually have immense distrust of them while they are alive. The toleration and patience for genuine individuality has yet to be developed. Tolerance and individuality are a lot deeper than hairstyles, sexual preferences and outer garb—including skin.

In India, nearly every piece of cultural fabric that one can find, brings the mind up, and up again to an awareness of a Supreme Being. In every aspect of life, one can see and find this message steeped: “Remember, respect, and Love thy Maker!” This lesson is imbibed through even seemingly minor aspects of life. Dance is sacred dance, as well as being highly artistic and skilled. What to eat, when and in which season, even while applying traditional make-up, where to take one’s shoes off, how to treat one’s school books, teachers, pens, pencils, paper, the various objects in a kitchen—the mind is drawn into continual remembrance of a larger existence and intelligence of which we are all a part.

India has a great deal to offer in developing a clearer idea of how we, as individuals, families and societies can begin to rethink ourselves and seek to live in greater harmony with all that is here with us. Ethics are intrinsically interwoven with the environment of India, and are deeply a part of her. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. noted these qualities on his trip to India in 1959, and said:

Today, India is a tremendous force for peace and nonviolence at home and abroad. It is a land where the idealist and the intellectual are yet respected. We should want to help India preserve her soul and thus help save our own.⁴

Both Gandhi and Amma are recognised as part of the universal spirit and consciousness of India. Gandhi is called the “Father of the Nation.” Amma is considered an “Incarnation of the Divine Mother.”[†] I have found that it is only in India that such recognition of people on the basis of their spirituality takes place. Outside of isolated pockets of communities dotting the planet, I have seen no other place that exalts the metaphysical over the material and honours Love

*From: *Maha* (great) + *atma* (Soul), meaning a personage of great spiritual realization, whose life is solely for the benefit of others. A title also given to Gandhi by Rabindranath Tagore, but customarily used as well to honour people who have distinguished themselves through ethical and practical public service.

[†]A public acknowledgement of her spiritual stature.

INTRODUCTION

above all, to the extent that is done in India. Nowhere else does one so feel the acknowledgement of the deeper reality of the human being.

India is the land of *dharma* or duty, and is quick to love and adore those who cling to the supreme human duty: to know and Love our Maker with all our heart, mind and strength. Hence, Albanian born Catholic Mother Theresa, was acknowledged, loved and cherished by the nation at large, a Love and respect that transcended conceptual religious walls. Had her work been in another country, it is unlikely the world would know of her as it does today.

At the same time, India is a vast and clashing mix of a zillion human tendencies and traits facing the tremendous ecological and cultural challenges of industrial globalisation. Despite her obvious failings, the great light of India illumines the path of human *dharma* or righteousness for all peoples to walk. In my being is an untold fathomless Love for what I call the Soul of India. I experience this as Truth. I feel it in Nature and naturalness. Although at present there is a widespread decline in the encouragement of ethical life, still behind and deeper than this, is the Soul of India. I will forever be a student of this great land, peoples and truths.

DUTY OF AMERICA

The United States of America has given the planet priceless and practical jewels of ethical awareness and understanding that I see in no other country. My brother, Jefferson Mohandas* and I grew up in a small rural community in northeastern Connecticut. The archetypal ideals of America deposited at our feet ethics of inestimable spiritual worth, which we unconsciously imbibed like the air around us and they became part of our being. Ethics like: All people are inherently equal...All people have the capacity to become more than what they presently are...There is always hope for a better tomorrow...Self-reliance and independence are virtues...If you can do it yourself, do it yourself...No work is higher or lower, and everybody has to clean up...Hard work and sweat are nothing to be afraid of...Girls and boys have equal rights to the same opportunities...Nothing is impossible...Don't treat anyone like your servant—even if they work as one...Try and try again...Let's work together and get the job done...It is our duty to help the less fortunate...If someone needs a hand, give them one...What happened in the past is over—carry on...What you make of yourself today is what counts...What you dream, you can become...These are some of the great gifts that my country

*My late father, Charles F. Willey was a great admirer of Gandhi and gave his son Gandhi's name — Mohandas.

DUTY OF AMERICA

offers the world community.

A melting pot of peoples from all around the planet, America today is made up of millions of genetic combinations of people, of which I am also one.* The noble ethics of that land bind the people together and make them ‘American’. Yet while growing up, I was aware that my country’s government was travelling, with more and more momentum, down a road counter to these basic principles of human brotherhood. A road that went counter to the ethics I felt were the essential American fabric. A road the politics of some elections have shown as counter to the will of the American people. It seemed as though another force—big business, international resource-grabbing and hand-in-glove relationships to the production of the implements of war—was taking over, and it didn’t care about little people, or the Earth, or anyone save a very few. Back in the 1950’s, “A military-industrial complex,” as President Eisenhower had warned, “employed its considerable economic and political influence to encourage American military involvements around the globe.”⁵ And the results are there for us to see, to live with, to recover from, to help heal and overcome—now, for we cannot hurt others without traumatising our own selves.

Public urban and suburban education in the late 60’s and 70’s began changing from open environments, to schools built to withstand riots, with less recess time, and more emphasis on following the letter and form than the spirit of things. Fear of ‘safety’ has become such an issue that children can no longer climb trees in peace—most have been conditioned out of the natural desire to do so. The relations between big business and education thickened. The situation has reached a point now that many high school graduates cannot calculate simple multiplication and division problems. Many are graduating unable to read well or locate their own position on a geographical map. Fear of horrific violence—shoot-outs and bombs—and the use of drugs is a reality today in many schools across the country.

Sexual openness has eroded the family structure and life, causing deep wounds in the psyches of many people. The role of sexuality in our lives has become based upon a media induced imbalance, rather than coming from a place of ethical balance. Sex does have an ethical place in our life and human relations, one which is lost to us at present. The means and methods used in the struggle for gender equality have brought about mass confusion on what it means to be male or female, without bringing gender respect.

As a young child, from what I could see and understand, everything Dr. Martin

*My maternal grandparents were in the second shipment of indentured labourers from India to Trinidad, West Indies, making roads and doing plantation work. My paternal grandparents were from England and Canada.

INTRODUCTION

Luther King Jr. was doing made sense. Great commonsense. While he lived, there was for me a feeling of joy and jubilation, that he was walking with us all, a true son of America, a man of God. He called us to think things through, until they rung clear. He said intelligent things, like: “Through our scientific genius, we have made the world a neighbourhood: Now through our moral and spiritual genius we must make it a brotherhood. We are all involved in the single process, what affects one directly, affects all indirectly. We are all links in the great chain of humanity.”⁶

I sometimes wonder: had King been born in India, would he have been hailed as another ‘Vivekananda’ or an *Avatar* of *Dharma*, a *Mahatma*, or a *Bodhisattva*? He certainly was, although unrecognised, for America. In his quest for civil rights, Dr. King included all human rights. Back in the 1950’s, he could see that the USA government was not representing the people when he said: “I knew I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today—my own government.”⁷

Children often intepret events in ways unexpected. The deaths of J.F. Kennedy, Dr. King and then Robert Kennedy, in quick succession in the 1960’s, made me, as a child, feel that there was an inhuman ruthlessness at the core of this turn down the dark road, that would choke and kill the spirit of what it meant to be an American; kill those ethical ideals in order to dumb us down into consenting consumers and guinea pigs. A force that really did not care about our constitution, about democracy, about the American people or, for that matter, about any people.

I believe King saw the results for the American people over 45 years ago when he prophetically said, “A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defence than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.”⁸ And about the Soul of America: “It can never be saved so long as it destroys the hopes of men the world over.”⁹ America does indeed have a soul, it is a great soul, it can be found in the noblest aspirations and ideals of her peoples. In the community of nations, my country has always represented hope, justice, and a new opportunity, a new chance at life and freedom from social patterns of human limitation. In 1958, there was an international demand for world peace and disarmament. The world looked to America to lead the way, being the wealthiest and most powerful militarily and economically. America at that time, represented the hope and dream of a genuine world brotherhood arising in the hearts of human beings. It was paradoxical, considering the issues of civil rights in the USA then.

I grew up in revolutionary times, and when I look at American youth today, I

D U T Y O F A M E R I C A

see that same spirit—wiser and more informed in many ways than I was—but at the same time suffering the damaging legacy of what has become a de-civilising society with global influence. The desperation of youth in America is so intense, I am confident that a massive, united and new dawn is fast approaching the horizon, soon to rise. Dr. King said: “Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism and militarism.”¹⁰ We can now add to that list: eternal hostility to the rape and destruction of our Earth, sky and waters, to the squanderous sucking up of resources that sustain life for the whole of Creation; eternal hostility to greed. As Dr. King said: “The question is not whether we will be extremist but what kind of extremist will we be.”¹¹

America, like India, has the universal within her. It has been nurtured through genuine tolerance and freedom from caste- and status-stuck eyes, by her mixed population of peoples. It is there in the deep spirituality of those she has crushingly oppressed within her. In 1954, Dr. King stated: “Discrimination is a hellhound that gnaws at Negroes in every waking moment of their lives to remind them that the lie of their inferiority is accepted as truth in the society dominating them.”¹² It is always those who have *endured* and *still* love that gain wisdom. The United States of America will rise, with humility and grace to shine the light of joyous human brotherhood upon this Earth. Earth ethics are part of her awakening to her own self and her duty in the sphere of nations.

The misunderstood phrase from the USA’s Declaration of Independence, “Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” has become a byword for uncaring, unresponsive individualism, economics that are entirely immoral, selfish, destructive and exploitative to human society and the Earth as a whole, to overall ethical unaccountability. It was Abe Lincoln who saw that the greatness of the United States lay not in the *material* pursuit of individual happiness, but in the people’s participation in a working democracy, as they pursued knowledge of Truth, their ethical instincts, the only real happiness possible. The trend of the last 100-odd years is a departure from the spirit of those ideals first put forth by our founding fathers.

Despite obvious failings, American optimism, enthusiasm and willingness to change is still strong. I am proud of the ethics that can be found in America, her generous, caring and open-hearted people. I am intensely grateful for being born in her atmosphere, for having the opportunity to imbibe the great spiritual qualities that she offers as freely as the air. I know that my country, the United States of America, contains a message of Love, energy and hope for this Earth. The terrible and tragic mismanagement of almost seven decades; the rise of the brutal military and industrial complex, the materialism, racism, and global self-

INTRODUCTION

ishness of individuals and companies receiving legal sanction there—none of these will be able to crush the spirit of her people, despite education that has dumbed them down, despite media indoctrination that teaches them not to think. As they awaken and rise to their own heart’s way, to the inherent ideals of America, the great people of the United States will assist in the ushering of a new dawn for mankind. I have the faith that this is a Truth. It is for sure, a duty.

The election of the 44th USA President, Barak Obama, has brought tremendous hope to billions of people on the planet. Words like duty and social responsibility have come out of the dusty closet. It is for us, the people, to lead our leaders and make good the promises of our age, otherwise as Dr. King said: “We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people.”¹³

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book has developed out of my research on M.K. Gandhi’s ecological ethics, which in 1997 Holy Mother Amma advised me to make into a book. Since then, the book has grown to include understandings gleaned from *satsangs*, and her teachings from publicly available books and documents. The experience of meeting Amma has been one of the most profound in my life. I am very thankful for her guiding light in our lives. In 1999, our small family of three moved from the USA to Amritapuri, Kerala, India to be closer to her. My two children were 10 and 12 years old then. We are among the thousands living in her main ashram. By grace, each person, among the many, feels her special and personal Love and caring. The experience of ashram life has demonstrated to me that these Earth ethical principles are not only universal, but the most important factors in our lives.

Following Gandhi’s death, Indian scholars did an astounding amount of work to gather every piece of writing, every scrap of paper that Gandhi had ever produced, culminating in the voluminous *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (CWMG). These have comprised the base ground for the gleaning of Gandhi’s ethics. This exhaustive work has left the literary world much richer, and well deserves our gratitude. Without the aid of computers, telephones and other forms of multi-media and often without typewriters, Gandhi kept up a daunting load of domestic and international correspondence. He was a prolific writer, establishing newspapers, penning articles, pamphlets and books. Many of the days when he was in jail, he would handwrite over 80 letters to people. He trained himself to use both hands, and would write with his right hand until it was exhausted, then shift to his left, and keep going. He used his body to serve the interests of his

ABOUT THIS BOOK

soul.

His legal training as a lawyer is reflected in the tenor of his writings. As a lawyer, he never sought to hide the fault of his client, but encouraged them to be completely truthful with him, and responsibly bear the penalty of their actions if they had done wrong. He gathered a reputation as an honest lawyer. As a *Sadhak*, a spiritual aspirant, he takes the side of his soul, the side of conscience felt in his heart, eloquently stating the case to his own mind and to the hearts and minds around him.

He kept his personal liberty sharp-edged, for its best purpose—his search for Truth. At age 75 he stated: “Man moves either forward or backwards. He never stands still. Such being the universal law, I need scarcely say that I am not today where I was yesterday or where I shall be tomorrow.”¹⁴

Of his written works, Gandhi said:

☉ 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 latter of the two on the same subject.¹⁵

To facilitate his request, for those who are interested, I have put an endnote for each quotation with the date, his age and occasion *as available*. However, it must be noted that in 1939 Gandhi was asked to revise *Hind Swaraj*, a pamphlet he wrote in 1908 with his ideas for an independent India. He commented: “The reader may know that I could not revise a single idea.”¹⁶ The ideals that gripped his vision in 1908 were unchanged 30 years later. While there may have been shades of a deepened understanding and exposition, particularly noticeable in the ideal of *varna ashrama* (India’s ancient social and economic order which is no longer practised today) Gandhi’s ideals and his expressions of them remained clear and consistent throughout his life. As far as possible, I rely upon Gandhi’s own words to aid in the description and demonstration of his Earth ethics. His words will do the job better than any interpretation could.

Ethics are intrinsically tied to education and community development. Gandhi’s community work in South Africa receives its first examination in this

INTRODUCTION

regard here. It was in South Africa that Gandhi passed the meridian of his life, returning to India at age 45. In South Africa, Gandhi found space and willing co-workers to assist him as he began honing his ethical awarenesses into ideals, then forging them into practical means for social upliftment. The importance of the communities he forged—Phoenix and Tolstoy Farm—cannot be underestimated in these ethics. The strong moral stamp of Gandhi’s ethics in action have historically impacted the way that South Africa has risen and broken the choke-chain of apartheid there. It is the inherent humility and greatness of the native South African that saw the wisdom and long-term gains in utilising Gandhi’s ideas for political and social emancipation for over 40 years in that struggle.

Amma’s community work has developed organically, from right where she was born. While Gandhi’s communities arose out of his effort to create an organ for rural community development in India, Amma’s community or ashram arose in response to the deluging oceanic Love within her, the response to that Love by those who met her. Her ashram exists for the service of the world. As such, from its inception her community work is different from Gandhi’s. Using the establishment of schools to assist in influencing pre-existent community life, over 50 English Medium schools and higher institutions of education have been founded in Amma’s name throughout India. Almost half have attached ‘*Brahmasthanams*’ or small temples dedicated to the Principle of Oneness in diversity. These places have become ‘branch ashrams’ — hubs for social upliftment and inspiration in the areas they are located, with a skeletal staff of either monks *or* nuns, but they are not communities as such. In the future, they most probably will become so. The M.A. Math has also established centres on every continent, innumerable *satsang** groups, all of which have a serviceful approach to their local communities.

Amma’s teachings on each and every aspect mentioned herein are far more profound than I have been able to express. Her work and life are still unfolding before us. We conducted research and interviews into Amma’s life and history, and found a wealth of information about Amma yet to come to light. We encourage people to make their own discoveries while the invaluable sources, the people who lived and worked with Amma from her childhood are still alive. Through books available Amma’s constant message to us—that we are pure consciousness, we are the Love and the Truth that we seek—comes through. I have found the experience of delving into them for clarifying her Earth ethics similar to that of the study of the *Upanishads*† in its soul-stretching upliftment. Amma speaks from a profound and subtle understanding of the self and the universe. She some-

* *Satsang*—gathering of Truth seekers.

† The Hindu scriptures that comprise what is called *Vedanta*.

FORMAT OF THIS BOOK

times refers to herself as ‘Mother’ or ‘Amma’ when speaking. It is as though she is a witness to That which is in her. Her invaluable expansive insights and instructions clear the path for sincere *sadhaks*.* I have only been able to include a peripheral explication of Amma’s teachings to Gandhiji’s Earth ethics, but it will, I hope, suffice to encourage the discussion further. Gandhi and Amma are not at odds. From all sides that we can see, they appear to have the same reference point.

FORMAT OF THIS BOOK

Earth ethics work internally and externally. The discussion in this book seeks to demonstrate this. The subject matter has been divided into three parts, which are subdivided into chapters.

Part One, the Ethical Mandala of India begins the discussion of Earth ethics, defining terms, and probing aspects and relevant views of Gandhi’s and Amma’s lives and Indian philosophy and culture. This is first carried out through presenting views of Gandhi and Amma from writings, as well as other’s perceptions of them. It provides an overall framework of Hinduism and Hindu literature with Amma’s insights and places Gandhi within that cultural and philosophical environment through his own words. This discussion includes the ideal concepts of *ashrama* (or life stages), with the corresponding ethical components of each stage of life and *varna ashrama* (the ancient ideal for social order) both of which are naturally and universally pertinent to the ordering of human society. These are concepts that Gandhi sought to live his life by, and from which many of his observances came forth. This provides views of some of the practical social supports for living ethical life. The present day caste system or Indian apartheid is also discussed in light of *varna*. This section further examines the role of vegetarianism on Gandhi’s Earth ethics and how, through it, he arrived at *Ahimsa* or Love and Truth as a way of being. The discussion on Truth includes Holy Mother Amma’s description of one angle to its perception, as well as an example of her response of *Ahimsa* to a natural disaster—the Tsunami of 2005.

Part Two, Awarenesses, Practices and Observances elucidates the ‘nuts and bolts’ of Earth Ethics, that Gandhi personally observed. Enhancements of these principles with Amma’s teachings make the explications comprehensive to our present times and situation as well as provides depth to understanding them. It also discusses his concepts of refined democracy, or *swaraj*, the moral relations between capital and labour and the use of the strike and picketing. It exam-

**Sadhak*—spiritual aspirant.

INTRODUCTION

ines Gandhi’s perceptions of the political, economic and community systems he wanted to see established in India through the Earth ethical vows of Trusteeship, Bread labour and *Swadeshi** It defines and explains the comprehensive role of *brahmacharya* to Earth ethics, for it was out of his need to respond *totally* to the needs and issues of the hour that he undertook the vow of *brahmacharya*, beginning with the practice of Control of the Palate and celibacy, both of which he never stopped working on.

Satyagraha and the use of the *Fast* as a means and weapon for transformation in Earth ethics grew out of Gandhi’s *ahimsa* and perception of Truth. Gandhi had a clear conception as to how these powerful weapons can be used. His use of the fast, was always a last resort, done in response to “lethargic Love.” By these discussions the foundation and elemental basis of the ideals of Earth ethics are given.

Part three, Education and Community, examines the practical ways that Gandhi applied his ethics through the creation of community, village uplift and national educational reform. It was in South Africa that he first began political reform in through ethics. He later sought to create communities—Phoenix and Tolstoy Farm that could influence as well as respond ethically to the environment there. A brief history of South Africa and Gandhi’s involvement with it is included. Gandhi’s experiments in South Africa included ethical education for adults as well as youth. He gained insight into new definitions for the role of women. He began to find joy in self-reliance through community industry, with a new focus on Earth-wise economics. These were successful forerunners to his later national and community work in India, including his two decades long Quit-School movement. Village industries became heralds of the urgent moral and economic pertinence of his vows of trusteeship, *Swadeshi* and Bread labour to the global community.

An overview of Amma’s own community development concludes the discussion on ethical education and community. Amma has likewise begun national and international work through her humanitarian and charitable institutions. As the constructive and charitable works of both Gandhi and Amma are too broad for this student to examine in their entirety, the examination has been limited to focusing on community development through education. It’s an ongoing work. The last chapter discusses the expanding directions for Earth ethics now.

A chronological table for Gandhi has been included that not only contains references to the dates and events mentioned in the text, but also his major Satyagraha campaigns and Fasts. Holy Mother Amma’s chronological table in-

**Swadeshi*—economic and ethical self-reliance.

A M E N D S

cludes the facts herein, as well as some aspects of institutional growth. It is not possible to give the entire picture of her mushrooming social, political, educational and humanitarian work without exhaustive research, which is not germane to this discussion. Also included is an extensive glossary of terms that are not explained or are less defined in the text, a biographical glossary, containing snippets of personages mentioned, appendices as indicated and index.

For the ease of visual reference, we have put a small lotus sketched by Anni near every block quote from Holy Mother Amma, and a *charkha* wheel near those from Gandhi, drawn by Sukanya R. of Amritapuri ashram.

A M E N D S

Any presentation of history is always questionable in its distortions. It is said that just to master the ocean of Hindu literature would take 70 lifetimes; clearly I can give only the briefest framework of it here. Even to truly understand one living human being may take more than one full life time. One often hears, ‘I never knew he had it in him’—what to say of one who has passed beyond the mortal coil such as Gandhi? To truly understand Holy Mother Amma requires that we understand deeply our own self, to know our conscious and eternal existence, as she does. It is a knowledge that we know and have, but don’t know that we know and have. I know that my glaring ignorance in many areas will irritate or dismay those who know more or see things differently. For this, I seek your kind understanding in advance.

In this book I assume a philosophically ethnographic stance—which is to say that I do not seek to prove or disprove the ‘rightness’ or ‘wrongness’ of Gandhi and Holy Mother Amma’s perceptions of Truth and Love. Paramahansa Yogananda (1893–1952) once said, “Ideas are universally, not individually rooted.” We all have a stake in the oneness that carries us each as a part of it. This book seeks to inspire practical means to apply ethics in our daily lives. It will therefore resonate with the ideas and works of all people making a similar effort. This work is also an introduction to each ideal mentioned. We hope that sincere aspirants and scholars of Earth ethical life will deepen our collective human awareness by their own subjective indepth inquiry into each ideal.

Gandhi took liberties with the English language and created many of his own words to convey a meaning: ‘unfructuous’ and ‘equiminded’ being some that my computer dictionary refuses to recognise. I believe this is an appropriate use of language, and have done the same in certain circumstances. I feel language is meant to help us express ourselves to one another. On occasion, we may need to alter the format of certain words to enable them to express other shades

INTRODUCTION

of meaning. For example: ‘squanderous’. I reserve this artistic right of self expression. Furthermore, he wrote in British English. To simplify things, I have kept that style in the narrative text as well.

We are concerned with ethics and principles here. Gandhi, being the man that he was—through his sincerity, honesty, effort, his Love and prolificness, has given us means to arrive at a necessary view of the eternal Earth ethics that lit his path. Amma’s contemporary spiritual authority assists in their meaningful explication to our own efforts. Through Gandhi’s life and Amma’s pearls of wisdom, behind the glamour of personality, cultures and history, is a glimpse of a sense of consciousness common to all. It is in seeking to know the Truth within ourselves that we stand a chance of understanding one another. Both speak through their actual experience—Gandhi of the ideal as it was becoming real for him, Amma of the ideal that is the real for her.

The path of the sincere aspirant—the *sadhak*—is striving for oneness with Love or Truth, seeking the full measure of being human *sans* all but that inner guidance, that voice within. The path or way sounds itself in ethical and moral discourse throughout every particle in the universe and each and every action one makes, small or great. As a fellow aspirant, who has not yet achieved the harmony and oneness my heart longs for, I am and will ever be in awe of Gandhi’s honest effort and Amma’s certain authority. I am still a beginner; hence, this can only be an introduction. An English woman, Ms. Maude Royden, the first woman to be ordained an Anglican minister, who had never met Gandhi said of him, “To read the words of Gandhi...is to be lifted above this senseless noise and confusion into a purer and a cleaner air—clearer, for it enables us to see above the dust of battle, and purer, because it is inspired by such utter fidelity to Truth.”¹⁷

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to study the principles of Earth ethics; they have filled my mind with fragrant buds of being that I pray one day will blossom within me. The path of one employing Earth ethics echoes across all faiths, efforts, struggles, and time. The eternal striving of the soul towards the One Beloved unleashes intensities of strength, passion and sudden uprisings of joy unknowable in mundane life.

It is in a spirit of service, as well as part of my own personal *sadhana** that these words are offered. My small family suffered a devastating loss with the passing of my beautiful 19 year old daughter, Anni, in June 2007 to an undiagnosable disease that appeared to doctors in the USA as cancer. As my son and I struggle to go on with our lives on this Earth, the principles discussed here have been invaluable. Particularly useful to us has been the discussion of *yajna*

*Means employed to grow towards Love and Truth.

A M E N D S

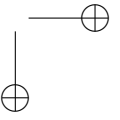
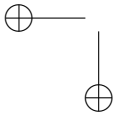
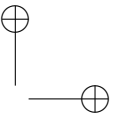
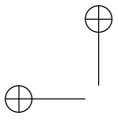
or sacrifice. In keeping my mind on these higher principles—as part of myself and environment, as being the subtle moral fibre of what I perceive to be life, I have gained much solace in dark hours. Holy Mother Amma has often used the example of a glass of salt water. If we keep on adding sweet water to it, it will eventually become sweet. It is to make my own mind and heart sweet, so that nothing but pure Truth and Love will be the constant companion of my inner skies, and so that I may eventually be of better service to humanity that I have studied in these directions. I leave it to the reader to take what is useful and applicable to her or him in their own lives and efforts.

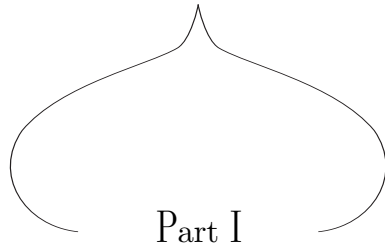
We will all have our last day here. It has been said that a life not contemplated, is perhaps not worth living. Earth ethics are a quintessential part of that contemplation and essential to making a life worth living, they touch Love and Truth itself, within and without us. To all of you who have the interest in India’s contribution to Earth ethics through Gandhi and Amma, *Pranaam*.*

With Love from India,
P. Kamala Willey, Ph. D.

Amritapuri, 2009

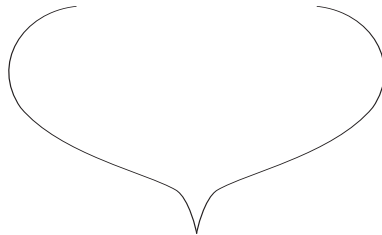
*I bow to the Truth in You.





Part I

The Mandala of India's Earth Ethics





Chapter 13

AHIMSA IS LOVE IS TRUTH

I decided early to give my life to something eternal and absolute. Not to these little gods that are here today and gone tomorrow, but to God who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

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 more 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.

Gandhi

Children, *Ahimsa* should become the vow of our lives. *Ahimsa* is refraining from causing pain to anyone through thought, word or deed.

Amma



Ahimsa is a state of total connectedness with Truth, with our consciousness, a state of perfect harmony. It has no opposite nor metaphor, but perhaps in order to clarify its perception to our minds which as yet cannot comprehend such a state, the ancient sages clothed the experience of *Ahimsa* with the word. From the Sanskrit *himsa* meaning ‘harm’ ‘violence,’ *Ahimsa* is harmlessness, that which is ‘not harming,’ ‘not violence.’ Gandhi found that: “In its essence, *Ahimsa* is a powerful emotion of the heart which finds expression in numerous forms of service.”¹ He saw that: “Love, otherwise *Ahimsa*, sustains this planet of ours. This much must be admitted. The precious grace of life has to be strenuously cultivated, naturally so because it is uplifting. Descent is easy, not so ascent.”²

Gandhi viewed *Ahimsa* as the precious crowning diadem that India has to offer to Earth ethics on the world platform. He said: “*Ahimsa* which to me is the chief glory of Hinduism has been sought to be explained away by our people as being meant for *sannyasis* only. I do not share that view. I have held that it is the way of life and India has to show it to the world.”³

Ahimsa can be seen in the practice of the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount by Jesus Christ; it is what is called the Great Compassion in Buddhism; it is Amma’s Universal Motherhood. *Ahimsa* is Love. *Ahimsa* is compassion in action.

Gandhi defined *Ahimsa* both as an inherent reality, the law of life, and as life’s Principle. He gave this example of the relation between compassion and *Ahimsa*:

☉ There is as much difference between *Ahimsa* and compassion as there is between gold and the shape given to it, between a shoot and the tree which sprouts from it. Where there is no compassion, there is no *Ahimsa*. The concrete form of *Ahimsa* is compassion... True endeavour consists in seeing that one’s daily conduct follows *Ahimsa*.⁴

13.1 IDEAL OF AHIMSA

Gandhi had expanded from the level of empathic food choice to the identification of *Ahimsa* as the expression of Love itself. For Gandhi, the conscious blossoming of *Ahimsa* within him became his natural goal. It is easy to love those who also love us. But the principle of Love is never actually tested under these conditions. Gandhi was to seek to test his own capacity to love, again and again, in confronting those who disagreed or even violently opposed his actions in light of his view of Truth. As such, Gandhi found that: “*Ahimsa* is the highest ideal, it is meant for the brave—never for the cowardly.”⁵

Gandhi gained his understanding of *Ahimsa* primarily through the spirit and ore of the Indian psyche and his studies of Jain works. He felt particularly close to Chand Kavi, a Jain philosopher and poet, whom he loved so dearly that he felt his living presence despite his deceased state:

☉ By birth I am a Vaishnavite and was taught *Ahimsa* in my childhood. I have derived much religious benefit from Jain religious works, as I have from scriptures of the other great faiths of the world. I owe much to the living company of the deceased philosopher Raja Chand Kavi who was a Jain by birth. Thus though my views on *Ahimsa* are a result of my study of most of the faiths of the world, they are now no longer dependent upon the authority of these works. They are a part of my life and if I suddenly discovered that the religious books read by me bore a different interpretation from the one I had learnt to give them, I should still hold to the view of *Ahimsa* [that I have gained].⁶

Gandhi found the awakening of *Ahimsa*—really the awakening of the heart—to be a natural and spontaneous happening, and said “...[it] is not a mechanical matter, it is personal to everyone.”⁷ He saw that *Ahimsa* is known through the heart alone.

☉ Real *Ahimsa* or Love originates in one’s heart and is known by one’s conduct even as gold is known by its qualities. A man who is full of Love never forgets that the world is full of life like his and takes great care that he does not harm any living thing. He sees his Love reflected in the eyes of those whom he meets. He is the friend of all...These are but the outward signs of the inner abiding Love...⁸

Ahimsa came to be known in the West by the less sublime translation of ‘non-violence.’ Gandhi was to struggle against the limitations of this terminology to hold the sacred understanding of *Ahimsa* up before the masses: “*Ahimsa* is not the crude thing it has been made to appear. Not to hurt any living thing is no doubt a part of *Ahimsa*. But it is its least expression. The principle of *Ahimsa* is hurt by every evil thought, by undue haste, by lying, by hatred, by wishing ill to anybody. It is also violated by our holding on to what the world needs.”⁹

The ideal of *Ahimsa* sees the sacredness of all life. The exercise of *Ahimsa* is the ideal relationship to the Earth or entire Creation, based upon ethics. It bears the attitude of ‘live and let live’ with active support as well. Gandhi said:

☉ Non-Violence is a perfect state. It is a goal towards which all mankind moves naturally though unconsciously. Man does not become divine [until] he personifies innocence in himself. Only then does he become truly man...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.¹⁰

Out of seeing the sacredness of all life, simultaneously and automatically come deep reverence and compassion for all. As Gandhi pondered on the ideal of *Ahimsa* he noted:

☉ It seems to me to be atheistical to think that God has created some life only to be destroyed by man, either for his pleasure or for sustaining a body, which he knows, is after all doomed to death any moment. We do not

know what part the many so-called noxious creatures play in the economy of Nature. We shall never know the laws of Nature by destruction.¹¹

With his legally trained mind, Gandhi gave valuable developmental analysis of *Ahimsa*, as he gazed resolutely at the ideal. He found that *Ahimsa* can be seen as having ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ expressions:

☉ In its negative form, it means not injuring any living being, whether by body or mind. I may not therefore hurt the person of any wrong doer, or bear any ill-will to him and so cause him mental suffering. This statement does not cover suffering caused to the wrong-doer by natural acts of mine which do not proceed from ill-will. It, therefore, does not prevent me from withdrawing from his presence a child who he, we shall imagine, is about to strike. Indeed the proper practice of *Ahimsa* requires me to withdraw the intended victim from the wrong-doer, if I am in any way whatsoever the guardian of the child...

In its positive form, *Ahimsa* means the largest Love, the greatest charity. If I am a follower of *Ahimsa*, I must love my enemy. I must apply the same rule to the wrong-doer who is my enemy or a stranger to me, as I would to my wrong-doing father or son. This active *Ahimsa* necessarily includes Truth and fearlessness. A man cannot deceive the loved ones; he does not fear or frighten him or her. The gift of life is the greatest of all gifts. A man who gives it in reality disarms all hostility. He has paved the way for an honourable understanding. And none who is himself subject to fear can bestow that gift...The practice of *Ahimsa* calls forth the greatest courage. It is the most soldierly of a soldier’s virtues.¹²

In Holy Mother Amma, the ideal of *Ahimsa* stands as living principle. Amma teaches that *Ahimsa*, compassion, is an attribute of our consciousness. It becomes manifested in ways that we can see and understand when the connection with consciousness is complete, when there is perfect ethical harmony within us with the moral fibres of the universe:

☉ Compassion is Pure Consciousness expressed through your words and actions. Compassion is the art of *Ahimsa*, non-hurting, for compassion cannot hurt. Compassion cannot hurt anyone because compassion is the manifestation of consciousness and consciousness cannot hurt anyone. Just as open space of the infinite sky cannot hurt anyone, compassion, the manifestation of consciousness cannot hurt anyone. One who has compassion can only be compassionate.



...Compassion does not see the faults of others. It does not see the weaknesses of people. It makes no distinction between good and bad people. Compassion cannot draw a line between two countries, two faiths or two religions. Compassion has no ego thus there is no fear, lust or passion. Compassion simply forgives and forgets. Compassion is like a passage. Everything moves through it. Nothing can stop there. Compassion is Love expressed in all its fullness.¹³

The practice of the ideal of *Ahimsa* is only possible for one in whom the Great Compassion or principle of Universal Motherhood is present. Amma tells us how this state of being feels and is:

✿ As long as there is the feeling of ‘I’ there is also the feeling of ‘you’. This love always has a personal touch. It occurs between two people. In order to love there must be two. Love becomes impersonal only when the two disappear. In that state of Oneness there is a constant flow of Love. From then on, Love starts flowing from its very source. As it flows, it does not think of the other end. The flow of Love is unobstructed, just like the flow of the river...Likewise, the sun just shines. It does not think about touching the Earth with its rays, the contact just happens.¹⁴

The experience that Holy Mother describes of herself above, a state of awakened Divine or Unconditional Love, is that wherein one gains the capability and capacity to take actual responsibility for all. In such cases, the power of Love through compassion is so strong that the environment is automatically altered towards harmony and peacefulness. The experience of *Ahimsa* is beyond our logical intellectual understanding. It seems to be like a burst dam—all the barriers we have placed in our heart—hatred, shame, grief, fear, condemnation, pride of pedigree, concepts of social respectability and racial prejudice* are thrown asunder. We become what we really are designed to be—an ever-present flow of Love for all. Amma gives this insight:

✿ When two lovers meet and fall in love, they don’t talk about terms or conditions before they begin to love each other. If any such exchange were to take place, love couldn’t happen. When the lovers see each other their hearts spontaneously overflow; they are irresistibly drawn to each other. There is no force or effort involved; no words or conditions. Love happens when you don’t force anything, when you are fully present without any sense of ‘I and mine’ blocking the flow. The slightest use of force will destroy the beauty of Love, so that Love cannot happen.¹⁵

* As suggested by Sri Yukteswar in *The Holy Science*: 50.

13.2 NUTS AND BOLTS OF THE PRACTICE OF AHIMSA

To exercise and practise *Ahimsa*, the qualities of forbearance and fearlessness are essential. Empathy is the beginning key to *Ahimsa*. Trying to know another’s perspective—their pains, joys and sorrows, to walk a mile and more in their shoes, through sympathetic understanding in the heart, brings instant self-forgetfulness and the dawning of compassion within us. It is universally do-able by all. Gandhi saw that the cultivation of *Ahimsa* was true human duty: “Violence is never an independent *dharma*. There is only one such *dharma* and that is non-violence. Violence is a measure of the degradation of man; non-violence is his highest achievement.”¹⁶

The first requisite for *Ahimsa* is to grow beyond the sense of ‘I’ and ‘mine’. Amma gives us a simple and profound example:

☸ There is love and Love. You love your family, but you do not love your neighbour. You love your son or daughter but you do not love all children. You love your father and mother, but you do not love everyone the way you love your father and mother. You love your religion, but you do not love all religions. Likewise, you have love for your country, but you do not love all countries. Hence, this is not true Love, it is only limited love. The transformation of the limited love into Divine Love is the goal of spirituality. In the fullness of Love blossoms the beautiful fragrant flower of compassion.¹⁷

In the natural Creation, the human being is unique. We see that all nature is at the mercy of instinctual life. In urban areas in India, one sees half-starved dogs, cats and cattle forced into the cycle of reproduction again and again through obedience to bodily instincts. Only the human being is gifted with the capacity to transcend instinctual reaction on the physical sensory plane through discriminative use of the intellect and the heart, through listening to conscience, awakening to ethical instincts. Gandhi found examination of his motivation and intention to be the deciding judge of whether an action was based upon *Ahimsa* or not. Referring to his perception of the ideal of *Ahimsa* to guide his actions, he said:

☉ To kill any living being or thing save for his or its own interest is *himsa* however noble the motive may otherwise be...A reference to both intent and deed is thus necessary in order finally to decide whether a particular act of abstention can be classed as *Ahimsa*...Intent has to be inferred from a bunch of correlated acts.¹⁸

Amma teaches that we first need to develop inner skills in guiding ourselves to respond rather than react to the situations that our daily life presents us with. These skills are natural, we already have them, we only have to exercise them:

✿ Response is possible if one tries. It is a positive mental attitude you develop towards others, whether friend or enemy.

Response is to stand aside and be untouched, unaffected and detached. But usually, if you get into a disagreement or quarrel with someone, or when you try to discipline someone, you react because you are involved and identified with it. When you get angry, you become identified with your anger and cannot be detached. You cannot see the anger rising in you. Instead, you become the anger...

Reactions occur because people are attached to their actions. Attachment to the work and its fruit creates ego, which will destroy the ability to respond. Detachment from the work and its fruit destroys the ego, which will help one to respond. Attachment fills the mind with more thoughts and desires, which will only cause reactions. Detachment empties the mind of all thoughts and desires, which allows response to take place.¹⁹

Learning to respond gives us the inner space to become a more silent witness to our own minds. As we learn to withdraw our minds from the reactive pool of our quick fire emotions, our incorrect perceptions based upon false impressions, conditioning, attractions, aversions and knee-jerk reactions, we increase our awareness and self-identification with our consciousness, rather than our individualistic self. Thus Amma says: “Children, try to perform your work with detachment. In this way, you will learn to respond. You can scold someone and still be detached. You can discipline someone and yet remain detached...response is a mental attitude, that is purely subjective.”²⁰

Through the beginning keys of empathy and response, we grow into greater tolerance and patience. Response leads to personal expansion. Amma tells us: “A genuine response takes place only when you become completely free from the grip of the ego, when you become nothing or nobody.* Until then, the ego is hidden behind all your actions, reactions, and seeming responses.”²¹ What blocks our awareness of our ability to start the outer exercise of *Ahimsa*, is our level of inner greed and our fear on some level. Amma addresses this:

✿ Son, now we live with the attitude of ‘I’ and ‘mine’. As long as this attitude persists, we will not be able to find the power within us. When

*The actualisation of deep humility before Truth, emphasised by Christian, Sufi, Hindu and other mystics.

there is a curtain across the window, we cannot see the sky. Pull the curtain aside and the sky will be visible. By the same token, if we remove the sense of ‘I’ from our minds, we will be able to see the light within us. That sense cannot be removed without humility and dedication.²²

Amma teaches that only through understanding and respect for where each person stands in relation to their own consciousness, can we learn to respond:

☸ Likewise, each person has his own nature. Through your anger you cannot change the nature of other people. Only Love can change them. Understand this, and try to feel Love and sympathy for all. Be compassionate, even toward those who bother you. Pray for them. Such an attitude will also help your mind remain calm and peaceful. This is genuine response.²³

Gandhi’s struggling, evolving and candid observations as he thoughtfully pursued the Truth of his ideal made him keenly observe his reactions. As with duty, he saw that the response of *Ahimsa* must be tailored to each and every ever-changing circumstance. With his keenly inquiring mind, Gandhi tells us: “It is *himsa* to kill the germs and the insects, but even as we commit *himsa* by taking vegetable food (for vegetables have life) but regard it as inevitable, so must we treat the germ life.”²⁴ He gave this elaboration for assistance in defining limits of *Ahimsa*:

☉ You will recognise that the doctrine of necessity can be stretched so as to justify even man-eating. A man who believes in *Ahimsa* carefully refrains from every act that leads to injury. [The] argument only applies to those who believe in *Ahimsa*. The necessity that I have in mind is a universal necessity, hence it is not permissible to take *Ahimsa* beyond a limit. That is why the *Shastras* of custom only permit *himsa* in certain cases. It is not only lawful but obligatory upon everyone to make the least use possible of the permission and relaxation.²⁵

Gandhi appealed to the Indian consciousness to apply the principle of *Ahimsa* in dealings with their foreign rulers. In an environment of reverence, there is no fear. It has been said that ‘perfect Love casteth out all fear’. To truly meet all around us, holding each one in our hearts with Love, makes us a friend of all and genuine communication and communion can take place. He saw that this would be the beginning of greater and better understanding, leading to cooperation and ultimately, *swaraj* or self-rule:

☉ Consider what our relations would be with our rulers if we gave absolute security of life to them. If they could feel that, no matter what we might feel about their acts, we would hold their bodies as sacred as our own, there would immediately spring up an atmosphere of mutual trust, and there would be such frankness on either side as to pave the way for an honourable and just solution of many problems that worry us today.²⁶

Gandhi experimented with the cultivation of *Ahimsa* all his life. He found that it is the moment to moment application of *Ahimsa* that is its reality in one's life. The individual is responsible for carrying out their own capacity to express their awareness of the ideal. As purest Love, it is transcendent. It is part of the great education received through adherence to Truth within. He was to state:

☉ For me if *Ahimsa* is not applicable to all walks of life, it is no use. My experiment therefore must have that end in view. I may correct myself a thousand times but I am not likely to give up an experiment in which visible results have been attained. This earthly life is a blend of the soul and the body, spirit and matter. We know the soul only through the body and so shall we know true *Ahimsa* through its action in the daily life.²⁷

13.3 EXAMPLES OF AHIMSA FROM GANDHI AND HOLY MOTHER AMMA

Through his newspapers Gandhi brought the Earth ethic of *Ahimsa* into the public mind. In this way the definition and detailing of *Ahimsa* was revealed for all to reflect on for personal as well as national and international ethical consideration and awareness. In the following examples of how Gandhi saw and tried to practise *Ahimsa*, along with experiences of Amma, the aspect of the inner perception of *Ahimsa* and its practice are evident.

In 1926, a mill owner in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, ordered the destruction of rabid dogs that were hanging around his factory premises. Gandhi agreed with his decision, and consequently for nearly 2 months, intense social controversy raged about the issue. He defended his support of the decision: “Imperfect, erring mortals as we are, there is no course open to us but the destruction of rabid dogs. At times we may be faced with the unavoidable duty of killing a man who is found in the act of killing people.”²⁸ The principle of *Ahimsa*, “...is the expression of a perfection, and as imperfect beings like us cannot practise perfection, we devise at every moment limits of its compromise in practice.”²⁹

This brings to mind a legendary and true story in the Amritapuri ashram about *Ahimsa* working in Amma. Once, a dog who had befriended her in her

days of exemplifying intense *sadhana*, became afflicted with rabies. As it neared its last stages, foaming and convulsing, it came into the ashram. Being in a remote, rural area, for centuries far from medical care, the simple villagers lived in fear of rabid dogs. People ran in panic. Someone told Amma it was there. Immediately, Amma went near the dog, called to it. It came to her. She lovingly stroked it, fed it by hand, then instructed some *brahmacharis* to tie the dog to a tree so that the terrified human beings could relax. In a few moments, the dog convulsed, and died. *Ahimsa* is part and parcel of Amma’s being; in true *Ahimsa*, there is no sense of separation between oneself and others.

For Gandhi, the ideal of *Ahimsa* that he held gave him a framework within which to operate, under the guidance of its light. At another point Gandhi urged the destruction of some monkeys who were becoming a nuisance and danger to people in the environment they shared.

☉ People get weary of the trouble caused to them by monkeys. In their hearts they wish them dead. They are inwardly pleased if anyone kills them. At the same time they will oppose their slaughter...monkeys ruin the crops, they even kidnap children, carry away articles, and eat up fruit, etc. Their number is daily increasing. I am asked as to what non-violence dictates in the matter.

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 lives of animals which 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...man has been given the faculty of reason.³⁰

This brings to mind an anecdote about Amma regarding the ways in which a person in whom *Ahimsa* is awake and flowing has total harmony with Creation and is able to communicate with the non-human world. Once on a North Indian tour with her, in 2001, the 5 ashram buses stopped in a forest in north Kerala for lunch.

Monkeys were abounding. Many devotees felt a certain amount of fear about monkeys due to previous personal experiences, their loud ‘chee-chee-ing’ caused a tremor of trepidation in the assembled picnic. Amma said they were hungry. She called to them, “Come, come!” and said they should be given some plates of food.

The monkeys very calmly came out of their arbour passageways, and descended to quietly eat their idlis (a steamed rice cake) and rice and sambar (a watery spicy sauce with some vegetables), near the picnicking group of humans as though such repasts were their natural diet, out in those jungles.

When they were done, they again made loud noises. Amma said, “OK? You can go.” And they left.*

Had Gandhi been able to perfect that level of *Ahimsa* in himself, as Amma demonstrated, he would have been able to tell the monkeys where to go. Nonetheless, it is very clear that *Ahimsa* was dawning within him, and he recognised that true *Ahimsa*, developed fully in an individual would have such expressions as found in Holy Mother Amma, St. Francis, Jesus, Yogananda, Buddha, Mahavira and others. Gandhi took the concepts held out by the great teachers and strove ceaselessly to actualise them in his life, where most people would say that such effort was beyond them. His example shows us that we can too. Through our own inner reflections we can arrive at a picture of the ideal of *Ahimsa*, and from the light of that ideal begin to fashion our lives and actions accordingly.

In yet another situation, in 1928, Gandhi gave permission for an ashram calf who was ailing to be killed. These incidences raised a furor in the Hindu public mind, which held the cow to be sacred (but did not recognise that the cow, as a symbol, also referred to the entire Creation as well). This time he received a flurry of emotional correspondence. He opened the discussion to the public through his newspaper, thus also bringing a greater awareness of *Ahimsa* back into Indian consciousness:

☉ They would if they could prolong the calf controversy indefinitely. Some of them kindly suggest that my intellect has suffered decay with the attainment of sixtieth year. Some others have expressed the regret that the doctors did not diagnose my case as hopeless when I was sent to the Sassoon Hospital [for an operation for appendicitis] and cut short my sinful career by giving me a poison injection in which case the poor calf in the ashram might have been spared the poison injection and the race of monkeys saved from the menace of destruction. These are only a few characteristic samples from a sheaf-fulls of ‘love-letters’ that I am receiving daily. The more I receive these letters the more confirmed I feel in the correctness of my decision to ventilate this thorny question in the columns of *Navajivan*. It never seems to have struck these good people that by this unseemly exhibition of spleen they merely prove their unfitness to be votaries or exponents of *Ahimsa* and strike it at the very root.³¹

*This was witnessed by the author’s own eyes and ears.

The issue was dealt with in several more articles through which Gandhi further elucidated the applications of *Ahimsa*. In the raging controversy, the opposite of *Ahimsa*—*himsa*, became clearer. “...it is difficult to decide what is *Ahimsa*. Even the use of disinfectants is *himsa*. Still we have to live a life of *Ahimsa* in the midst of a world full of *himsa*, and we can do so only if we cling to Truth. That is why I can derive *Ahimsa* from Truth. Out of Truth emerge Love and tenderness.”³²

In a letter to a relative who also questioned his actions with the ashram calf he replied in such a way that shows how he understood *Ahimsa*, having not yet had the full experience of it within. Through this discussion he also elucidates his understanding of the relationship of *Ahimsa* to duty, to the right understanding of the role of death, to vigilance over the mind and introspection:

☉ Perfect *Ahimsa* is possible only in the *atman* in its disembodied state. But when the atman takes on a body, *Ahimsa* manifests itself in one as the feeling of compassion...my mercy-killing of the calf was an expression of the purest *Ahimsa*.

To endure suffering in one’s own person is the very nature of the *atman*, but it is contrary to its nature to let others suffer. If the mercy-killing of the calf had been prompted by a desire to relieve my own pain [at the cost of the calf’s suffering], the act was not *Ahimsa*, but to end the calf’s pain was *Ahimsa*. Indeed, *Ahimsa* implies the inability to endure other creatures suffering pain. From such inability arise compassion, heroism and all other virtues associated with *Ahimsa*...

When killing the calf, it was not necessary for me to know all the possible consequences of my action. If it was certain that the calf would never die in any other manner, I should of course have paused before killing it. In other words, if it were the case that nobody but I could have ended the calf’s life, it would have been necessary for me to think of all the possible consequences of my action. But the fact is that all creatures, calves as much as we, live with the possibility of death always hanging over us. Therefore, the utmost that could have happened was that the calf would have lived for a few days or months or a year more...We may, therefore, say that even if there was any error in my reasoning, no harmful consequence to the calf followed which would never have followed but for my action. Ask me again and again till you have understood the point. The subject is an important one and the explanation deserves to be carefully grasped. It is easy to grasp, and once it is grasped you will be able to deduce many other consequences from it.³³

☉ ...I see *dharma* in applying to human beings, in similar circumstances,



the rule which I apply to other creatures. There are fewer occasions of acting in that way towards human beings because we have more means of helping them and more knowledge for doing so. But history tells of occasions, and we can imagine others in which there might be non-violence in killing a person, in the same way that there is non-violence in an operation performed by a surgeon.

It is necessary to bear three points in mind in order to understand the non-violence of the act in question. (1) It is ignorance to believe that every act of killing is violence. (2) As there is violence in killing, so also there is violence in inflicting what we regard as lesser suffering. (3) Violence and non-violence are mental attitudes. They concern the feelings in our heart. A slap given through anger is pure violence, whereas a slap given to a person bitten by a snake to keep him awake is pure non-violence.³⁴

Indeed life is made of such compromises. *Ahimsa*, simply because it is purest, unselfish Love, often demands such compromises. The conditions are imperative. There should be no self in one's action, no fear, no untruth...The compromise must be natural to oneself, not imposed from without.³⁵

Later in life Gandhi was to come to feel that if faced with a dangerous animal, he would personally rather be killed by it than kill it.

☉ But that is a personal position, not to be put forward for adoption by others. If I had the fearless power to tame these dangerous creatures by the force of my Love and my will, and could show others how to do likewise, then I should have the right to advise other people to follow my example...But I have not that power. I must, therefore, advise others to kill all creatures, dangerous to human life, such as tigers, bears, snakes, scorpions, etc. and also vermin such as fleas, flies and mosquitoes as well as rats and other crop-destroying vermin.³⁶

Eye-witness accounts have told another beautiful story of Amma who embodies such fearlessness and Love: One night, sand-seva (service) in Amritapuri was going on. Residents were moving an extensive pile of rubble from one end of the ashram to the other. As ever, the area around Amma's person was densely crowded with people. Amma was seated on a small *chak* (empty cement sack) amidst the crowd. While she was sitting there, a huge rodent, the kind that infest public kitchens—special to the subcontinent—suddenly appeared out of somewhere. In that crowd of people clustered almost in a knot, the rat began running around Amma. It circled her three times, then ran up one side of her

body, over her head, and down the other, before high-tailing itself away into the night. Amma giggled, like a personal intimate friend of the rat, enjoying a good joke.

In one in whom the precious wine of *Ahimsa* flows, all understanding, all ways of communication, all knowingness is there. The stories of Amma with animals and nature are innumerable. In all of them, one sees the principle of pure *Ahimsa* as Universal Motherhood and utmost compassion, in action.

13.4 FRUITS OF AHIMSA

As the aforementioned stories about Amma have indicated, in one whom pure *Ahimsa* has bloomed, there is an environmental effect. Gandhi was painfully aware that he had not achieved the breadth of *Ahimsa* that his inner lights showed to be the reality of his ideal:

☉ Our *Shastras* seem to teach that a man who really practices *Ahimsa* in its fullness has the world at his feet, he so affects his surroundings that even the snakes and other venomous reptiles do him no harm. This is said to have been the experience of St. Francis of Assisi.³⁷

He recognised that fear still blocked full moral dialogue with his own heart. “My intellect rebels against the destruction of any life in any shape whatsoever. But my heart is not strong enough to befriend those creatures which experience has shown are destructive.”³⁸

It is the beauty of the effort that one makes, striving to manifest and perfect our own Earth ethics, that perhaps draws a mysterious Grace to unfold itself within us. Even if the total effect of full-bloomed *Ahimsa* has not been attained, there is still a bountiful yield of positive fruit in the awakening and developmental harmonising of the individual. Gandhi found that just starting to make efforts opened awareness to ethical instincts within:

☉ ...actuated by the ideal of non-violence, we would grow more compassionate. In assuring, as it were, every animal or living thing that it need have no fear on our account, we entertain compassion—Love—for it. A man who entertains such Love will not find any living being inimical to him, not even in thought.³⁹

Gandhi’s heart burned for the intolerable conditions of the poor, brought about at that time by the blind greed of Britain and the Indian apartheid. The

crimes against humanity in India even at that time were monstrous. In his political work, Gandhi tried to sensitively read the signs of the public mind seen through actions—cooperation, peacefulness, self-restraint or violence, etc. as being indicators and symbolic of his own inner *Ahimsa*. For he knew that to *be Ahimsa*, to *become* Love, is to have direct effect on the environment. He queried himself and his associates: “Do I represent this *Ahimsa* in my person? If I do, then deceit and hatred that poison the atmosphere should dissolve.”⁴⁰ To inmates in his communities he stated: “If I have true *Ahimsa* in me, it will shine out in any one of you at the right moment. But if I don’t have it, how will it show itself in you all?”⁴¹

Ahimsa is civilising. The effort to practice *Ahimsa* brought about an attitude of increasingly equal vision in Gandhi, to be able to see the humanity—the equal spark of Truth or God, in those who opposed and oppressed him. It made him ceaselessly and lovingly strive to the utmost to relate to that humanity within his opponents from a footing of equality and respect. By doing so, he transcended the fears in other’s minds as well. These efforts enabled all the players involved in the scene to sit down at the table together, so to speak, and talk it out rather than resort to yelling, hitting and war.

Ahimsa helps the oppressor or opposition recognise that they are denying true human relationship based upon the Truth of our shared oneness and equality. It is the power of this underlying feeling that was able to create dialogue in seemingly untenable circumstances. Edward Thompson, a professor at Oxford University and contemporary of Gandhi reflected this understanding, saying: “He has kept the quarrel between England and India what it is in essentials, a quarrel inside a family. Families often behave very badly, but their quarrels are rarely implacable.”⁴²

It was through the self-suffering nature of *Ahimsa* only, that the British could come to slowly recognise the equal humanity of those they oppressed. Prior to India’s independence, a judge in England (V. Samuel) was to state:

The British are a self-respecting people. For that very reason we respect self-respect in others. I do not hesitate to say that—in spite of the controversy and all the conflict of recent years—there is more true esteem among the British people for the Indian people to-day than at any previous time in all the centuries of their contact.⁴³

The exercise of *Ahimsa* ultimately establishes a relationship of Love and selfless service to one another. The British were to recognise their own very brutal and embarrassing role in India, and would eventually want to get out of the

situation as urgently as those who wanted them out. Becoming able to see the humanity in those they had ignorantly oppressed, they began to touch it within themselves. Gandhi noted: “...in practising *Ahimsa*, there need not be any reciprocation, though, as a matter of fact in its final stages, it commands reciprocation.”⁴⁴

Ahimsa is the way of Universal Motherhood, of the wise, responsible, deeply caring Mother who suffers our ignorance and tantrums until, tired of the mess and noise we have made for ourselves, we turn and see what She has been bearing in our unconscious self-indulgence and how we could have been instead. Self-suffering is at the transformative core of one striving to open the heart into pure *Ahimsa*.

13.5 SAKSHI BHAVA: THE WITNESS STATE OF TRUTH

The spiritual teachings of India hold that Truth and Love are the core of our being. Besides experiencing and manifesting *Ahimsa* through non-violence and Universal Motherhood, Holy Mother Amma offers another view of touching the eternal within us, through utter attention to the present moment with a sense of detachment. *Sakshi bhava*, literally ‘attitude of witness,’ is the establishment of a person in the law of Truth within themselves. One process of arriving at *Sakshi bhava* is known as *Jnana yoga*—contemplation of Truth through the door of wisdom. *Sakshi bhava* can be understood as the state of Truth, whereas *Ahimsa* corresponds to the state of Love. Just as *Ahimsa* is both a practice as well as an ideal condition, *Sakshi bhava* has this quality also. Both *Sakshi bhava* and *Ahimsa* are states of being that are knowable within our normative abilities. Amma teaches us that in fact, *Sakshi bhava* is another part of our inner dimensions, perhaps unknown, yet completely natural to us. She tells us:

✿ The experience of witnessing actually does occur in our day-to-day lives. It is just a question of being aware of it. And once that awareness comes, when you taste its flavour, its joy and bliss, you are on the right track.⁴⁵

Sakshi bhava can be both a practice and a permanent state. When you are permanently established in that state, then it will become spontaneous and completely natural to you. Witnessing will not happen unless you are ever wakeful. The dream world created by the past has no place in that state. The past must die. The mind has to dissolve, so that *sakshi bhava* can take place.⁴⁶

As with many other aspects in the rich pantheon of Hindu metaphysics, *Sakshi bhava* is an end unto itself. Amma tells us:

✿ Children, getting established in *Sakshi bhava* is the real purpose of life. That supreme state of witnessing is the pivot around which all of life and the whole universe revolves. Once you are established in *Sakshi bhava*, in the real Centre, you can do anything without moving even an inch out of that Centre.⁴⁷

Amma gives this analogy:

✿ While enacting the role of a villain in a movie, the actor may be seen to be shooting his enemy, getting angry, being cruel and treacherous. But within himself, does the actor really become angry or cruel? Is he really committing these acts? No, he is not. He is just a witness to all that he does. He stands aside and watches without becoming involved or touched by it. He is not identified with the external expressions of his body. Likewise [is] one in *Sakshi bhava*...there will be a natural charisma about them.⁴⁸

As with the ideal of *grihasta ashrama*, *Sakshi bhava* gives one the quintessence of dispassion amidst intense activity. Amma tells us:

✿ Being in the state of *Sakshi bhava* does not mean that you will remain idle without taking care of your duties. You may be concerned about your children’s studies, the health of your parents and your wife and so on, yet in the midst of all these external problems you remain a *Sakshi*, a witness, to all that happens, to all that you do. Within, you are perfectly still and undisturbed.⁴⁹

Why do we not yet have this awareness? Amma reasons: “The unintelligent attachment, the feeling of ‘I’ and ‘mine,’ is the problem. Once you learn the art of withdrawing your attachment and being a witness, then something changes in the way you see everything.”⁵⁰ Amma gives these insights as to how to become mindful of this state of awareness:

✿ Can you see a thought rising in our mind? Can you see how the thought works and how it dies? Once you are able to see a thought clearly, that very thought becomes impotent. Identification with a thought gives it power and the thought will then culminate into action. When you are

not identified with a thought, it has no power. It becomes weak and inactive. When you see a thought and you are not identified with it, you are witnessing it. When you witness, you are fully conscious. In witnessing there is no thinking, which means that you do not identify with any thoughts. In witnessing there is only consciousness.⁵¹

Amma discusses a major flaw in the mental health field:

✿ There are psychotherapists, counsellors and healers all over the world, who try to cure people’s mental and physical problems. They may be experts in their fields, but they are professionals who are doing a job, and they are attached to it and to many other things. Witnessing cannot happen when you are attached. A person with many attachments cannot really help others. Only a person who knows the art of witnessing, who is established in the Self, in the real Centre, can truly help others.⁵²

Gandhi accepted and sought to surmount the supreme challenge that true human duty demanded of him. He saw that duty as being to know and Love our Maker with all our heart, mind and strength, to Love our neighbour as our Self. In doing so, life unfolded as a fantastic adventure for him. It was on a trip to Rajkot once, in the 1930’s that he commented to a friend in public, that he had witnessed himself announcing that he would go to Rajkot, and was continuing to witness himself in the act of going. His tenor was one of delight and amazement. As news of this travelled in the press, the great south Indian Saint, Ramana Maharshi noted that Gandhi had achieved communion with his own Self, the *Sakshi* within.

Amma has often said that knowing the Self is pure gold, but manifesting that Love to all, is like giving gold an exquisite fragrance which makes it ever so much more valuable. The aching needs of our Earth and times need the response of Love from our hearts, more than anything else. Both Truth and Love are part and parcel of awakening ethical instincts. In giving that Love, we ourselves will gradually become more and more aware of that still centre within, known in *Sakshi bhava*.

13.6 AMMA’S RESPONSE TO THE TSUNAMI: THE SAKSHI’S AHIMSA

Gandhi repeatedly stated that in one whom *Ahimsa* was manifested, its positive effect on the environment would be seen. From the light shed by his ideal of

Ahimsa alone, he gained certainty in his understanding of it. In a very practical way, Holy Mother Amma illustrated how a person with full *Ahimsa* in him, and one who is established in *Sakshi bhava*, would respond to a calamity.

On December 26, 2004, there was a huge Tsunami that struck the southern areas of India on the east and western shores. It resulted in the deaths of over 250,000 people in Asia and Indonesia. The southern coasts of India, both east and west (including the island that Amma’s ashram is on) were badly hit. Prior to this event, Amma, who had for a few years stopped holding *Devi Bhava* in Kerala, curiously enough announced the evening before, that she would hold it the following night at the ashram. As the decision had been made late, a notice was only put on the gate; still the news spread like wildfire among the local villagers. As a result of Amma’s announcement to hold *Devi Bhava* on the 26th, fifteen to twenty thousand local villagers thronged the ashram, for the joyous activities of the day.

When the Tsunami struck, houses were knocked down, people washed away, death and massive destruction reigned *right outside the walls* of the ashram. Inside the ashram, the water was chest height, rushing to the backwaters on the other side of the island. All the ashram works on the ground level—tailoring, the press, soap manufacture, incense, books, the *kalari*, the residents’ shop, the kitchens and the charitable hospital, computer room, etc., were flooded with filthy water which carried a smelly oily slime with it. But, the twenty thousand people inside the ashram were physically unscathed. There was not even a single serious injury. Amma herself then proceeded to oversee the evacuation of thousands people from the island, turning the ashram’s unfinished university buildings on the mainland into emergency shelters. Even the way in which she had the evacuation done, having everyone hold onto a long rope line to get through the waist deep waters, making those who had missing relatives wait near her until the family member appeared and all went together...in every small detail, Amma displayed a Great Mind, Heart and Observant Intelligence at work. She was not at all panicked.

The follow up that Holy Mother Amma created for the burials, adoptions, cremations, rehabilitation, housing, education, including new job skills training and then jobs for people who had lost their livelihoods and breadwinners, for those who had become orphans, is truly astounding. For the first few months, Amma, through the ashram inmates and scores of devotee volunteers provided everything: food, clothes, shelter and psychological support for the Tsunami victims.

The first emergency shelter was a very large hall, with cloth dividers. Soon, in the ashram *satsangs*, Amma’s voice was heard, expressing the worried prayers of the suffering tsunami survivors in the shelter. She said the mothers couldn’t

sleep at night; the daughters have no place to change. There are boys of their own age in the same room. Some women were pregnant, others had just given birth...in a thousand, thousand, *thousand* ways, her complete identification with the consciousness of the deeply traumatised and grieving villagers was manifested.

Once the shelter dividers were constructed, each family had a room with a place for a kitchen fire on the verandah area. This was a unique touch among the relief efforts of numerous organisations. By restoring the ‘kitchen fire’, Amma made each room an independent nest, for each family, a place of familiarity and natural, mutual activity. The ‘hearth’ is essential to the ‘home’. At the outset, Amma gave 1000 rupees to each household to buy necessary utensils. This was the beginning of a long term financial commitment and projects to enable the people to establish independence again. Free medical care and three wholesome and savoury meals a day (along with tea) were provided at numerous specific sites throughout the island for over a year.

Getting the minds and hearts to move from their frozen places of fear and intense grief into the world of opportunity that Amma was trying to provide the poor villagers with was challenging. The children were brought to the ashram for several day’s ‘camp time’ during which they learned songs, dances, (aspects of their rich cultural heritage which poverty had almost closed off from them) and the all-important swimming skills. Each camp ended in a gala public performance of music and dance. Numerous classes and meetings were held in the ashram, whose doors for help and assistance were opened 24x7. In all these ways, the people, shocked and grieving to the core, were lovingly assisted to pull themselves and their lives back together again.

Without assistance and outside agency or even initial government support, Amma’s efforts were often faced with ridiculous obstructions and delays from government agencies that were supposed to serve the public. In addition, disaster victims carrying chips on their shoulders, used the occasion to create havoc. Many people were plainly deranged from shock and grief. Others tried to exploit the situation of the devastated—looting, stealing, and trying to convert the poor to another religion.

Even as the ashram inmates began construction for the free and beautiful homes for the homeless, they sometimes faced ridicule and non-cooperation from the recipients themselves. Supplies the monastics painstakingly hauled would often be stolen. Counselling her *brahmacharinis* and *brahmacharis* not to expect or seek gratitude, under Amma’s guidance, the ashram persisted in walking an ethical path for the rehabilitation of the people.

In the neighbouring state, Tamil Nadu, also badly afflicted by the tsunami, Amma went directly to the terror-filled poor again. The confidence that the

people had in Amma, that she would do what no other agency or government official would do for them, was moving to behold. It was very apparent that they wanted only Amma's assistance. They had faith that Amma would come through for them because they felt her Love.

Now, new homes, fishing boats, education, skills and other ways of generating income have been provided to all tsunami victims that Amma pledged to support, in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Sri Lanka. Throughout what was a very difficult first 18 months, Amma gave a tremendous example to the world of selflessness, intelligent and meaningful service, and compassion in action. From Amma's comprehensive effort to restore, resettle and rehabilitate, international governments, relief agencies and other non-governmental organisations can learn much about meaningful follow-through in relief efforts.

Amma's response to the tsunami of Dec. 26, 2004 was and continues to be the response of pure compassion. It has entailed Love in every action. To this day the successful and comprehensive rehabilitation continues through higher educational opportunities, job-training, micro-loans establishing independent home industry and employment opportunities in the ashram's huge umbrella of institutions.

The state, national as well as international governments took notice of the comprehensive recovery and rehabilitation work being done by the ashram and in 2005 the United Nations gave Mata Amritanandamayi Math* (the name of the Amma's ashram) consultative status to the UN Economic and Social Affairs Commission.

Wherever we are, no matter what our limitations may seem to be, we can change our attitudes. In a voice that echos like that of an earlier King, Amma tells us:

✿ Children, we should make sure that each of our actions is of help to others and will enhance their happiness. If that isn't possible, we should at least make sure that our actions never cause others any grief or inconvenience. Praying to God that none of our thoughts, words, or deeds will ever harm anyone, but that they will always benefit others—that is real prayer. We should be willing to pray for the upliftment of others, rather than for our own progress. My children, to develop such selfless Love is the greatest progress we can make. True worship is seeing the suffering of others as our own sufferings and their happiness as our own happiness. True devotees see themselves in others. Theirs is a world of peace and contentment.⁵³

*Math—pronounced 'mutth', meaning monastery, now used to denote 'ashram' as well.

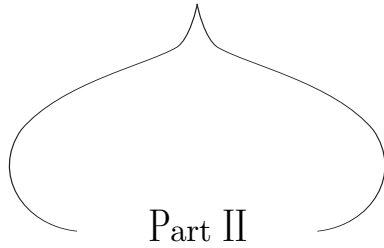
Amma wants us to conduct our lives to please Truth, found through our conscience:

✿ We should serve others without any expectations whatsoever. When others throw thorns at us, we should be able to throw flowers back at them. When they give us poison, we should give them *payasam* [sweet pudding]. This is the kind of mind we should have. The purpose of serving the world is to develop that sort of mind. When we serve others we should look upon them as God. Every one of our actions should be a way of worshipping God. Each action will then turn into a divine *mantra* [name of God].⁵⁴

What will we be like if we can carry out these teachings? Amma draws us this picture:

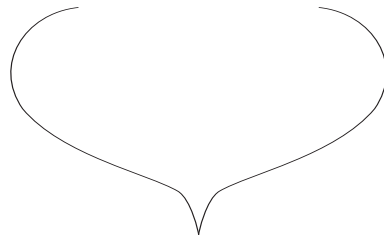
✿ Think of how much you care about yourself. You want to eat good food, live in a wonderful home, sleep in a comfortable bed, travel in a beautiful car, and you don't want anyone to hurt or insult you in any way. You always want to be happy. This is because you Love and care about yourself more than anything. Now imagine what will happen when you become one with everything and everyone. You will Love, honour and care about everyone and everything equally, but with infinitely greater depth and power than you have ever loved yourself.⁵⁵

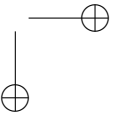
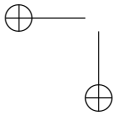
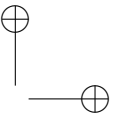
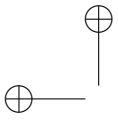
When we achieve the oneness found in the ideals of *Ahimsa* and *Truth*, Amma tells us that all of our actions will be carried out from the point of our highest ideal: “This is the highest state one can attain. There is no point beyond that. This state is the ‘pointless point.’ To attain this state, one must do intense spiritual practices.”⁵⁶ Having not had the experience yet, we can at least still illumine our own paths by the light of the ideal.



Part II

Awareness, Practices, and Observances in Earth Ethics







Chapter 27

THE VOWS OF TRUSTEESHIP AND BREAD LABOUR

Today the enemies that are attacking us from both within and without cannot be dealt with just by increasing the power of our weapons. We can no longer afford to delay the rediscovery and strengthening of our most powerful weapon, spirituality, which is inherent in us all. There are over a billion people in this world suffering from poverty and starvation. Poverty, in Truth, is our greatest enemy. It is one of the basic reasons why people commit theft and murder, and why people become terrorists. It is also the reason why people turn to prostitution. Poverty not only affects the body, but also weakens the mind...Amma feels that 80% of the problems in society would be resolved if we were to eradicate poverty...

Holy Mother Amma¹

I am sure our minds would be better if we laboured with our hands for eight hours. We would not have a single idle thought, and I may tell you that my mind is not entirely free from idle thoughts. Even now I am what I am because I realized the value of physical labour at a very early stage of my life.

Gandhi²



Trusteeship, Bread labour and *Swadeshi* are three observances that Gandhi held which effectively and practically manifested his views on politics, economics and community into everyday life. In these observances, we find both the means and the ends to create a new human society, based upon *Ahimsa* through Universal Motherhood, and upon *Swaraj* through moral economics.

27.1 TRUSTEESHIP

Trusteeship is a crown jewel in Earth ethical observances. It is inherent in the *maha-vratas* of *Asteya* and *Apariagraha* (non-stealing and non-possession). Gandhi saw it as a fundamental law of Nature and ardently hoped it would receive wide acceptance in India. He wanted Trusteeship to become a gift from

India to the world. He said, “My theory of Trusteeship is no make-shift, certainly no camouflage. I am confident that it will survive all other theories. It has the sanction of philosophy and religion behind it.”³

The basis of the practice of Trusteeship came about through Gandhi’s own blossoming of *Ahimsa*. Gandhi’s perception of Truth within himself gave rise to perceiving the same Truth within everything and everyone around him. He was arriving at the state of equal vision, *samabhava*, extolled in Hindu metaphysics which one sees so beautifully demonstrated by Amma during her gracious *darshans*. Equal vision is the hallmark of one gazing steadfastly at Truth. Gandhi was moved with compassion for the intense physical suffering and desperate need he saw around him, which today has only increased in ten-fold miseries. “I am witness, eye-witness, of millions of human beings who have not even so much as a piece of cloth.”⁴ As such, he saw that to have excess private possessions when others were in such dire need of them was a denial of the basic unity that we all share.

The doctrine of Trusteeship is part of non-violence, and part of the sacrifice that *Ahimsa* ultimately demands of the individual. Gandhi found that by consciously embracing the ideal of *Apariagraha*—non possession, Trusteeship was its outer result. He saw that through its observance a transformative energy would be unleashed in the human psyche that would have a tremendously positive effect upon nature and human life. This power comes from the touch of *Apariagraha* upon the human heart and its subsequent spontaneous swell into Trusteeship. Gandhi noted that: “Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha, Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya, Shankara, Dayananda, Ramakrishna were men who exercised an immense influence over, and moulded the character of, thousands of men. The world is richer for their having lived in it. And they were all men who deliberately embraced poverty as their lot.”⁵ Gandhi saw the evolution of his thinking on Trusteeship through the influence of democracy, along with the philosophical works of Mill, Marx, Ruskin and Jesus Christ.* From India’s philosophical riches, Gandhi found actual corroboration for Trusteeship in the *Bhagavad Gita*:

☉ The Trusteeship theory is not unilateral, and does not in the least imply superiority of the trustee. It is, as I have shown, a perfectly mutual affair, and each believes that his own interest is best safeguarded by safeguarding the interest of the other. ‘May you propitiate the gods and may the gods propitiate you, and may you reach the highest good by this mutual

*Gandhi was so impressed with Ruskin’s ideas in *Unto this Last* that he published his own Gujarati translation called *Sarvodaya* (For the Welfare of All) to bring these ideas into Indian awareness.



propitiation,’ says the *Bhagavad Gita*. There is no separate species called gods in the universe, but all, who have the power of production and will work for the community using that power, are gods—labourers no less than the capitalists.⁶

The basic problems that human beings face on the planet: food, clothing, shelter; arise out of the glaring inequity between the rich and the poor. ‘Economic progress’ as it is being held out to humanity actively undermines practical human progress through Earth ethics. Gandhi saw that economic progress needed careful social regulation if all people were to be included:

☉ Hence the ancient ideal has been the limitation of activities promoting wealth. This does not put an end to all material ambition. We should still have, as we have always had, in our midst people who make the pursuit of wealth their aim in life. But we have always recognised that it is a fall from the ideal...That you cannot serve God and Mammon is an economic truth of the highest value. We have to make our choice.⁷

Western nations are to-day groaning under the heel of the Monster God of Materialism. Their moral growth has become stunted. They measure their progress in £, sh., \$. American wealth has become the standard. She is the envy of the other nations. I have heard many of our countrymen say that we shall gain American wealth but avoid its methods. I venture to suggest that such an attempt, if it were made, is fore-doomed to failure. We cannot be ‘wise, temperate and furious’ in a moment. I would have our leaders teach us to be morally supreme in the world.⁸

In India today, the rising capitalist middle class has become another formidable force that preys upon over 70% of Indians kept in virtual economic slavery. Gandhi saw that government would not and could not claim to represent nor serve the needs of citizens unless these basic issues were overcome:

☉ The poor villagers are exploited by the foreign government and also by their own countrymen—the city dwellers. They produce the food and go hungry. They produce milk and their children have to go without it. It is disgraceful. Everyone must have a balanced diet, a decent house to live in, facilities for the education of one’s children and adequate medical relief.⁹

Gandhi saw in the practice of Trusteeship a means to conform in harmony to the ideal and perfectly economical laws of nature. Gandhi gave this discussion of the intrinsic law of Nature in regard to Trusteeship:

☉ 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.¹⁰

We may utilise the gifts of nature just as we choose, but in her books the debits are always equal to the credits. There is no balance in either column. This law is not invalidated by the fact that men raise bigger crops by mechanising agriculture and using artificial fertilisers, and similarly increase the industrial output. This only means a transformation of natural energy. Try as we might, the balance is always nil.¹¹

Increasingly, those that *have* and can feel their shared humanity with others, are recognising their embarrassing and actually outrageous position in the face of grave human inequity and suffering on a global level. Many are seeking to put their wealth into service for the poor and suffering. For Gandhi, to do so was only common sense, he saw but one human family:

☉ As soon as a man looks upon himself as a servant of society, earns for its sake, spends for its benefit, then purity enters into his earnings and there is *Ahimsa* in his venture. Moreover, if men’s minds turn towards this way of life, there will come about a peaceful revolution in society, and that without any bitterness.¹²

Trusteeship is not philanthropy. A philanthropist gives, as he wishes, to the causes he deems most needful, out of his excesses. Trusteeship entails a different understanding. As wealth is created and gained by the cooperation of other members of society, Trusteeship takes into account every hand that has gone into the production of that wealth, including that of the ‘dumb’ creation and then sees that no one has a moral right to use the wealth generated for their own personal advantage. His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama gave this recollection showing the vast interdependence that naturally demands an attitude of Trusteeship, to which we can also add the contributions of soil, water, sun, air, etc:



I began to think about how many people were involved in the making of my shirt. I started by imagining the farmer who grew the cotton. Next, the hundreds or even thousands of people involved in the manufacturing of the tractor. And all the designers of the tractor. Then of course the people who processed the cotton, the people who wove the cloth, and the people who cut, dyed and sewed that cloth. The cargo workers, and the truck drivers who delivered the shirt to the store and the sales person who sold the shirt to me. It occurred to me that virtually every aspect of my life came about as the result of other’s efforts.¹³

Gandhi’s ultimate goal was the creation of a nation state built upon the edifice of Trusteeship, from the village level on up. It would be a new pattern of *Swaraj* or democracy that the whole world could then fearlessly emulate. Gandhi saw in Trusteeship the capacity to create a new social order based upon our mutual service to one another, as well as to the whole of the ‘mute’ creation. Through Trusteeship is a way to assist in the reformation of the ideal of *varna ashrama* and village and community life. With Trusteeship, he saw a way to open the door to harmony within the individual; he saw a way for those who, consciously and unconsciously, had a hand in the creation of great poverty and human suffering through exploitation to reform themselves. He noted the plain facts: “The well-to-do live on the poor. There is no other way. What is then their duty?”¹⁴ “Immediately we realize that we have nothing of our own, that all we have is held in trust for those in greater need, we have to spend it like misers.”¹⁵

Gandhi often publicly praised individual efforts to develop an attitude of Trusteeship, and lauded them as social models. Gandhi wanted this sense of Trusteeship to awaken in the rich and those who have, not by force, but by dawning Love and caring. Many wealthy people of his time were thus inspired to seek to follow this ideal and became trustees of their own properties, recognising that the origin of their riches lay in the generational and cumulative injustice to the poor, whose labours had, in fact, made the riches.

It is the orgy of amassing that has fashioned our economic systems on the law of the jungle, on primitive instincts, rather than a purposeful and deliberate order arising from intelligent, thinking human minds cultivating ethical instincts. Gandhi saw that: “The art of amassing riches becomes a degrading and despicable art, if it is not accompanied by the nobler art of how to spend wealth usefully...Let not possession of wealth be synonymous with degradation, vice and profligacy.”¹⁶ Without education on the ethical use of wealth, the rich live lives of selfishness, not culture. At present, the result of the incorrect use of wealth is the cause of massive and growing discontent among both the rich and the poor. Neither know

what contentment is. Gandhi saw the duty for rectification of this situation as belonging to the wealthy:

☉ As it is, the rich are discontented no less than the poor. The poor man would fain become a millionaire, and the millionaire a multi-millionaire. The poor are often not satisfied when they get just enough to fill their stomach; but they are clearly entitled to it, and society should make it a point to see that they get it. The rich should take the initiative in dispossessing with a view to universal diffusion of the spirit of contentment. If only they keep their own property within moderate limits, the poor will be easily fed, and will learn the lesson of contentment along with the rich.¹⁷

Gandhi saw that the increasing disparity between the rich and the poor could end in social conflict. Trusteeship and its twin counterpart, equal distribution, afford a solution:

☉ As for the present owners of wealth, they would have to make their choice between class war and voluntarily converting themselves into trustees of their wealth. They would be allowed to retain the stewardship of their possessions and to use their talent to increase the wealth, not for their own sakes, but for the sake of the nation, and, therefore, without exploitation. The State would regulate the rate of commission which they would get commensurate with the service rendered and its value to society. Their children would inherit the stewardship only if they proved their fitness for it.¹⁸

Amma has worked arduously in her own life to inculcate this sense of responsibility in those that have to those who have not, saying that it is the duty of the rich to provide for the poor. Amma tells us: “In fact, God created the rich to help the poor, the healthy to assist the unhealthy, and normal human beings to help and serve the mentally retarded and physically deformed.”¹⁹ Amma stresses the development of compassion for others: feeling others as part of ourselves, we may begin to behave like the brothers and sisters that we actually are.

☉ Even if we cannot render help to others, we should at least not cause them any harm. That in itself is a great service. However, it is not enough. Try to engage in work that will benefit others. Limit everything to what is really needed, and do not undertake anything that is inessential. Food, thoughts, sleep and talk, all should be limited to what is essential. If we live with that discipline, there will be only good thoughts in our minds. Those who live in this way do not pollute the atmosphere. They sanctify it instead. We should consider such people as our role models.²⁰



27.1.1 *The Ideal of Trusteeship*

The ideal of Trusteeship lies in the basic understanding that permeated Gandhi’s awareness and being: “Everything belongs to God and is from God. Therefore it is for his people as a whole, not for a particular individual. When an individual has more than his proportionate portion he becomes a trustee of that portion for God’s people.”* We are also Trustees for our own talents and gifts. Gandhi noted: “Talents of all kinds are a trust and must be utilised for the benefit of society. The individual has no right to live unto himself. Indeed it is impossible to live unto oneself. We fully live unto ourselves when we live unto society.”²¹

The ideal of Trusteeship therefore includes our talents, our intelligence—all our capacities for positive input to the global community. These are not ours, they belong to the betterment of the larger community, for they are a gift from the Creation, for itself. It is a humbling thought. It is *the fact* behind *varna*. Gandhi was queried with numerous hypothetical questions, coming from the fear of being without *more*:

☉ *Apariagraha* is an ideal condition. It can be said that an ideal is never realized perfectly. But we should not lower our ideal on this account...Keeping this in mind we should sincerely try to realize the ideal of *Apariagraha* as best we can. Let us now examine the instances which you have imagined. The world will lose nothing if the rich give up their wealth voluntarily; on the contrary, it will benefit by their action, because a new and powerful force is generated as a result of a sincere act of *Apariagraha*. No one can act in such matters mechanically. He alone who feels a spontaneous urge in his heart will act, and will deserve credit for his actions. There is no danger or possibility of the entire world acting upon the ideal of *Apariagraha*. But assuming that it does, I have no doubt that it will find no difficulty in maintaining itself. There are people in this world who do not stock anything to meet their needs even for one day. You need not believe that such persons would starve if there were not in the world other people who stored things.²²

Gandhi gave this understanding of the ideal of the doctrine of equal distribution:

☉ It does not mean that everyone will literally have the same amount. It simply means that everybody will have enough for his or her needs...the

*Changed to present tense by the author. From *Harijan*: February 23, 1947. Age 77.

elephant needs a thousand times more food than the ant, but that is not an indication of inequality. So the real meaning of economic equality was: ‘To each according to his need.’ That was the definition of Marx. If a single man demanded as much as a man with wife and four children that would be a violation of economic equality.²³

There are several aspects to consider in the ideal of Trusteeship. Making one’s livelihood by means which do not exploit others and ravage the creation—right livelihood—is part of it.* For the individual, the ideal is to not *desire* wealth. Gandhi had given up his own wealth for the larger community, and said to those who would follow him: “Those of us, however, who consider it a duty to adopt poverty and believe in and desire economic equality may not be jealous of the rich but should exhibit real happiness in our poverty which others may emulate. The sad fact is that those who are thus happy are few and far between.”²⁴

For those who had personal wealth, or could not get over the desire for it, Gandhi gave this ideal:

☉ It is my conviction that it is possible to acquire riches without consciously doing wrong. For example I may light on a gold mine in my one acre of land. But I accept the proposition that it is better not to desire wealth than to acquire it, and become its trustee. I gave up my own long ago, which should be proof enough of what I would like others to do. But what am I to advise those who are already wealthy or who would not shed the desire for wealth? I can only say to them that they should use their wealth for service. It is true that generally the rich spend more on themselves than they need. But this can be avoided.²⁵

Gandhi did not feel that ownership by the State was the way to arrive at Trusteeship on the societal level. He saw that violence would be the result if people were commanded to become trustees of their own wealth. Through *Ahimsa* he hoped that people would, in and of themselves, see the reality of their necessary ethical relations as trustees for one another. Recognising that some would, however, willingly and selfishly squander what is needed by others, he saw that at times, state intervention would be necessary:

☉ I would be very happy indeed if the people concerned behaved as trustees; but if they fail, I believe we shall have to deprive them of their possessions through the State with the minimum exercise of violence...every

* As was demonstrated in Vedic India through *Kautilya’s Artha Shastra*.

vested interest must be subjected to scrutiny and confiscation ordered where necessary—with or without compensation as the case demanded. What I would personally prefer would be not a centralisation of power in the hands of the State but an extension of the sense of Trusteeship, as, in my opinion, the violence of private ownership is less injurious than the violence of the state. However, if it is unavoidable, I would support a minimum of state ownership.²⁶

Gandhi had a vision of the ideal of Trusteeship in practice in human society, which he gave as this dream for society:

☉ If only the rich people, whether titled or not, will act as trustees, they should soon be perfectly happy. The dream I want to realize is not spoliation of the property of private owners, but to restrict its enjoyment so as to avoid all pauperism, consequent discontent and the hideously ugly contrast that exists to-day between the lives and surroundings of the rich and the poor.²⁷

Gandhi saw that conditioned as we are, we have difficulty even in conceiving the ideal of Trusteeship. It has not yet touched our hearts; we really don't have a clue about how to practise it. For this condition, he recommended prayer—prayer to develop mental openness to empathic feeling for the conditions of others; prayer as a way to gain a small understanding of the ideal:

☉ We should aim at getting only what the rest of the world gets. Thus, if the whole world gets milk, we may also have it. We may pray to God and say: “O God, if you wish me to have milk, give it first to the rest of the world.” But who can pray thus? Only he who has so much sympathy for others and who labours for their good. Even if we cannot practice this principle, we must at least understand and appreciate it. For the present, our only prayer to God should be that since we are fallen so low, He may accept whatever little we do, and that even if we do not progress in this direction, He should give us strength to lessen our possessions. If we repent of our sins, they will not increase further. We should not keep anything with us thinking it as our own, but should strive to give up as much of our possessions as we can.²⁸

27.1.2 *The Observance of Trusteeship*

As a *sadhak*, Gandhi sought to observe Trusteeship in every way possible throughout his life. As he gained fame, his work attracted donations. He had numerous

moneyed friends, who gave him access to their deep pockets. All this he set into public Trusts for different social uplift works that helped to spread personal reform through social reform. Having nothing himself he used the resources that came to him like a miser, saving for the national reform charities of his Constructive Programme.

Trusteeship is not only about money, personal resources and our individual talents, ideas and thoughts. The attitude of Trusteeship is seen in our ways of personal conduct towards the Earth. The following anecdote which took place during a period of his imprisonment in India shows Gandhi’s intimate understanding of his role as trustee of the gifts of nature. It is the consciousness of ‘waste not, want not’:

One day, in the Yeravda Jail, Gandhi noticed that one of his associates from the ashram, Kaka Kalekar was in the habit of breaking off whole little branches of the neem tree even if he needed only four or five leaves. Gandhi said to him: “This is *himsa* [violence]. Others might not be able to understand, but you can. Even these four leaves should be plucked by us humbly, with due apologies to the tree. You break off whole twigs or branches.”

“...And then,” recalls Kaka Kalekar, “we stopped getting *datuns* (pieces of fresh neem or babul twigs used as tooth brushes) from outside. I said, “Bapu-ji,* this place abounds in neem trees. I will make a nice fresh *datun* for you every morning.” Bapu agreed. The next day I brought a *datun*, pounded one end of it into a soft brush and gave it to Bapu. After using it, he said, “Now cut off the used bit of the *datun* and pound the end into a brush again.” I was surprised. I asked, “But why? We can get a fresh one every day.” “I know we can,” said Bapu, “But that does not mean we should. We do not have the right. We must not fling away a *datun* until it becomes too dry to be used.”²⁹

In the ways in which we treat each other, the attitude of Trusteeship will effect the choices that we make in innumerable ways. A friend, who was also a wealthy woman, had bought Gandhi several choice personal gifts. Gandhi gave a gentle rebuke which demonstrates not only the role of truthfulness in personal relations, but also the personal effort and understanding he wanted to see in those who would follow the ideal of Trusteeship:

*Bapu or ‘Father’ was a name Gandhi was called by many. ‘Ji’ is a respectful and reverential suffix.

☉ You were extravagant in buying the thermos, the magnificent apples. But you would not be a *Rajkumari** if you were not extravagant. You are none the less so because you spend on others. If you counted yourself a trustee, as you should, of all you possess including your body, you will be balanced in using them even for your trust. You may not philosophically smile this simple truth away. Remember the value of a rupee in terms of the poor. It means 64 solid meals which millions do not have. Many in Segaon live on one rupee per month, i.e., only two meals a day costing one pice each. But millions do not get this much. How can you and I knowing this as well as that I am writing this, mis-spend a pice? Will you be wise for a while? If you will become that, or a woman of my imagination, you will have to develop all your faculties not excluding accounts keeping.³⁰

Gandhi saw leadership as having a moral responsibility to demonstrate Trusteeship. In India, during Gandhi’s lifetime, the Kings, Queens and *zamindars* (the landlords) held much of the wealth, and in fact lived on the toilings of the poor. Gandhi often spoke of the duty of Trusteeship to the royal families, who were the last block to give way in the effort to unify India into a single nation. He might have been an awkward guest, when to the Maharani (Queen) of Nabha he pointed out, “The state Treasury does not belong to you. It belongs to the people. You have been appointed by them a trustee. I wish you would keep an account of every pie[†] as a trustee does of the public trust. Keep your personal needs within bounds.”³¹

This queen, by rite of her public example, was also in a sense a trustee of the ideal of a high society woman, for those who had means looked upon her as an example to follow. This touches upon another point, for we are all trustees of the model of adulthood and the ideals that we believe in, and present to others, particularly children. Seeing this, Gandhi pointed out another avenue of duty for her: “You will render a great service to middle class women and make an impression on the State if, like other women you manage your household yourself, and do all the domestic chores of the palace.”³² Gandhi noted how due to a false sense of shame about the dignity of labour, many middle class women, looking up the social scale instead of to Reality, considered domestic labour beneath them, and added to class and caste awareness, rather than decreased it. Very little has

*Her name was Rajkumari Amrit Kaur. Rajkumari means royal princess, she was in fact a princess from a small princely state in India. She became part of India’s first independent government, as Minister of Health.

[†]Singular of ‘paise’, 100 of which now make one rupee. The rupee has been devalued greatly since Gandhi’s time.

changed.*

In the development of social governance through Trusteeship, Gandhi saw that for those in communities, the attitude of Trusteeship would make a smooth transition to an equitable and sustainable human society:

☉ When the people understand the implications of Trusteeship and the atmosphere is ripe for it, the people themselves, beginning with the *Gram Panchayats*,[†] will begin to introduce such states. Such a thing coming from below is easy to swallow. Coming from above it is liable to prove a dead weight.”³³

I hold that it is better for [man] to live by the exercise of his will [rather than the imposed will of the state]. I also believe that men are capable of developing their will to an extent that will reduce exploitation to a minimum. I look upon an increase of the power of the State with the greatest fear, because although while apparently doing good by minimising exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality, which lies at the root of all progress. We know of so many cases where men have adopted Trusteeship, but none where the State has really lived for the poor.³⁴

Gandhi deeply respected each person’s individual liberty. Through Trusteeship he was striving for equitable distribution of resources through a change in the hearts and minds of people. When social change comes through the people, it works. When it is imposed upon the people, or legislated without their support and consenting awareness of a given implication, it is ineffectual.

Through equal distribution, Gandhi wanted to develop community life and social patterns that would minimise gross inequalities, and ensure that each was receiving what they needed in order to live with human dignity. Equal distribution was also a way for people to arrive back at the ideal of *varna ashrama*. In practice, Gandhi saw equal distribution as being relative to need: “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.”³⁵ In the ideal picture of the new society that Gandhi was communicating to the world, equal distribution along with all aspects of the new social and economic order, would be brought about by a new human understanding:

*In contrast, Gandhi was very impressed with the simplicity of the royal family of Travancore (now Kerala).

[†]The village level of self-government.

⊕ 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 this being to bring about the necessary changes in his personal life. He would reduce his wants to a minimum; bearing in mind the poverty...His earning 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.³⁶

Yet Gandhi knew that the rich would not willingly give up their comforts and self-indulgence and he respected that liberty. He wanted to see persuasion rather than force used to bring about societal change from justified selfishness to ethical thinking.

⊕ At the root of the doctrine of equal distribution must lie that of the Trusteeship of the wealthy for the superfluous wealth possessed by them...How is this to be brought about?...Violent action cannot benefit society. [In the society to be rebuilt through Trusteeship] 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 society. In this argument honesty on the part of the trustee is assumed.³⁷

In the ideal of trusteeship, individuals would voluntarily relinquish their excess to the common good of all. Gandhi saw that the role of the individual Trustee may need the guidance and support of the State to implement Trusteeship on a societal level. He envisioned a system of checks upon the State and the Trustee, whereby the individual Trustee in choosing his successor would have the right to make his own choice, but that the State would finalise it. He felt that State ownership of wealth over individual ownership, was better, for it would have the effect of minimising social conflict and violence. Yet, he recognised that control by the state was walking a razor's edge, unless the consciousness of the people was at par with Trusteeship. Gandhi said:

⊕ It [state ownership] is better than private ownership. But that, too, is objectionable on the ground of violence. It is my firm conviction that if the State suppressed capitalism by violence, it will be caught in the evils of violence itself and fail to develop non-violence at any time. The State represents violence in a concentrated and organised form. The individual

has a soul, but as the State is a soul-less machine, it can never be weaned from violence to which it owes its very existence. Hence I prefer the doctrine of Trusteeship.³⁸

As Gandhi presented this ideal in practice to the nation, and the world at large, he was inundated with questions. His answers showed how Trusteeship becomes a comprehensive means to help the individual, the community and the Earth as a whole. Gandhi received numerous questions on ‘how-to-do’ Trusteeship and what a society based upon Trusteeship would look like. Through interviews and questionings, Gandhi gave clear insights into understanding his definition of Trusteeship. At one time he said: “I would certainly welcome a person becoming a trustee of his own property. He then ceases to be the owner of his property. He must then live within the commission which as a trustee he gets from the property. This is the meaning of trust.”³⁹

For a wealthy person who asked how he could become a Trustee, Gandhi gave this advice:

☀ You will accept nothing for yourself personally. That is to say, you will not accept a cheque to go to Switzerland for a change but you will accept a lakh* of rupees for wells for Harijans or for schools and hospitals for them. All self has got to be eliminated and the problem is simplified.”
“...But what about my personal expenses?”

You have to act on the principle that a labourer is worthy of his hire. You must not hesitate to accept your minimum wage. Everyone of us† is doing the same thing. Bhansali’s wage is just wheat flour and neem leaves. We cannot all be Bhansalis, but we can try to approximate to that life. Thus I will be satisfied with having my livelihood, but I must not ask a rich man to accommodate my son. My only concern is to keep my body and soul together so long as I serve the community.⁴⁰

Once in an interview, Pierre Ceresole‡ asked Gandhi:

☀ “Could one lay down a rule of life for the wealthy? That is to say, could one define how much belongs to the rich and how much does not belong to them?”

*One lakh = 100,000, in India noted as 1,00,000.

†Gandhi was speaking of the people in his ashram. Bhansali was an inmate in the ashram.

‡Pierre Ceresole—founder president of the International Voluntary Service, during his visit to India in 1935, discussed capitalism and non-violence with Gandhi.



“Yes,” said Gandhiji, smiling, “Let the rich man take 5 percent or 10 percent, or 15 percent.”

“But not 85 percent?”

“Ah, I was thinking of going up to 25 percent! But not even an exploiter must think of taking 85 percent!”

“But there are wealthy and wealthy. There are some who may have made their pile from alcoholic traffic.”

“Yes, you will certainly draw a line. But whilst you will not accept money from a brewer, I do not know what will happen if you have made an appeal for funds. Will you tell the people that only those who have justly earned their money will pay? I would rather withdraw the appeal than expect any money on those terms. Who is to decide whether one is just or otherwise? And justice too is a relative term. If we will but ask ourselves, we will find that we have not been just all our lives. The Gita says in effect that every one is tarred with the same brush; so rather than judge others, live in the world untouched or unaffected by it. Elimination of self is the secret.”⁴¹

When asked how long the exploited and depressed should wait for the rich to wake up to their duty as Trustees, Gandhi replied:

☉ That is where I disagree with the Communist. With me, the ultimate test is non-violence. We have always to remember that even we were one day in the same position as the wealthy man. It has not been an easy process with us, and as we bore with ourselves, even so should we bear with others. Besides, I have no right to assume that I am right and he is wrong. I have to wait until I convert him to my point of view. In the meanwhile if he says, “I am prepared to keep for myself 25 percent and to give 75 percent to charities,” I close with the offer. For I know that 75 percent voluntarily given is better than 100 percent surrendered at the point of bayonet, and by thus being satisfied within 75 percent, I render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s. Non-violence must be the common factor between us.⁴²

Incarcerated in jail with Gandhi in Poona, 1942, Pyarelal (one of his secretaries), made use of the opportunity to question Gandhi more on Trusteeship. Asked how it could be realized in contemporary society, Gandhi said, “The only democratic way of achieving it today is by cultivating opinion in its favour.”⁴³

“Surely you do not mean that the change would depend upon the sufferance of the owning class and we shall have to wait till their conversion is complete?” [here Pyarelal gave examples of the Russian revolution and Gandhi replied]:

☉ Ours will be an even bigger revolution. We must not underrate the business talent and know-how which the owning class have acquired through generations of experience and specialisation. Free use of it would accrue to the people under my plan. So long as we have no power, conversion is our weapon by necessity, but after we get power, conversion will be our weapon of choice. Conversion must precede legislation. Legislation in the absence of conversion remains a dead letter. As an illustration, we have today the power to enforce rules of sanitation but we can do nothing with it because the public is not ready.⁴⁴

Pyarelal felt that waiting for successful conversion would take too long. Gandhi replied: “You see, if the owning class does not accept the Trusteeship basis voluntarily, its conversion must come under the pressure of public opinion. For that public opinion is not yet sufficiently organised.”⁴⁵ He saw that through voting power, the state would be forced to accede to the will of the majority. But that this power would not be parliamentary alone. “My reliance ultimately is on the power of non-violent non-co-operation.”⁴⁶

☉ [Pyarelal asked]: “Does not the very concept of the State imply the use of power?”

Gandhiji: “Yes, but the use of power need not necessarily be violent. A father wields power over his children, he may even punish but not by inflicting violence. The most effective exercise of power is that which irks least. Power rightly exercised must sit light as a flower, no one should feel the weight of it...a non-violent state was possible in theory. But it called for a terrible self-discipline, self-denial and penance.

In the eleventh chapter of the Bhagavad Gita there is the description of a non-violent law giver or head of State. He is a person who has severed all domestic ties, he is unaffected by fear or favour, anger or attachment, he is the personification of humility and self-effacement. Through constant discipline he has inured his body to all conceivable rigours of the weather, fatigue and want...if anyone is frightened by such a description let him look at the Russians fighting in temperatures below 40 degrees frost. Why should we expect a softer solution under non-violence? Rather we should be prepared for more hardships.”

[Pyarelal’s sister interjected]: “That would mean, that only a Jesus, a Mohammed or a Buddha can be the head of a non-violent state.”

Gandhiji: “That is not correct, prophets and supermen are born only one in an age, but if even a single individual realizes the ideal of *Ahimsa*

in its fullness, he covers and redeems the whole society. Once Jesus had blazed the trail, his twelve disciples could carry on his mission without his presence. It needed the perseverance and genius of so many generations of scientists to discover the laws of electricity but today everybody, even children, use electric power in their daily life. Similarly, it will not always need a perfect being to administer an ideal state once it has come into being. What is needed is a *thorough social awakening* to begin with. The rest will follow. To take an instance nearer home, I have presented to the working class the truth that true capital is not silver or gold but the labour of their hands and feet and their intelligence. Once labour develops that awareness, it would not need my presence to enable it to make use of the power that it will release...If only we could make people conscious of their power—the power of non-violent non-co-operation—the realization of the ideal of Trusteeship would follow as surely as morning follows night.”⁴⁷

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 the solution to this riddle, I have lighted on non-violent non-co-operation and civil disobedience as the right and infallible means. The rich cannot accumulate wealth without the co-operation of the poor in society.⁴⁸

By 1943, at age 73, Gandhi had faith that the newly born and independent India would choose to follow at least some of these ideals, in the light of genuine democracy. The up and coming leadership had worked and walked with him. The masses felt the new leaders shared Gandhi’s deep concern for the untold human suffering brought about by gross economic inequity. The new leaders were to be Indians for *all* Indians. He had placed all his observations and suggestions before the nation at large, had given the example of his own life for over 30 years. When asked how land would be distributed in independent India, he gave this ideal picture based on his faith in the people who were positioning themselves to be the new leaders: “The land will belong to the State. I take it for granted that the Government will be in the hands of people who believe in this idea. I believe most of the landlords will give up their rights of their own accord. Those who refuse to do so will have to give them up under the pressure of new laws.”⁴⁹ Unless the glaring disparity between those that have and those that have not is addressed, Gandhi saw that:

- ⊕ A violent and bloody revolution is a certainty one day, unless there is a voluntary abdication of riches and the power that riches give and sharing

them for the common good. I adhere to my doctrine of Trusteeship in spite of the ridicule that has been poured upon it. It is true that it is difficult to reach. So is non-violence difficult to attain. But we made up our minds in 1920 to negotiate that steep ascent. We have found it worth the effort.⁵⁰

27.1.3 *Amma and Trusteeship*

Holy Mother Amma is the Trustee of vast resources. Like Gandhi, she has come to be recognised throughout the planet as one whose loving interest to help others is wise, selfless, genuine, and prompted by her adherence to the highest ideals and purest ethics known to humankind. In Gandhi’s lifetime, husbands feared to let their wives attend his meetings lest they should give away the family jewels that they wore—which they often did when he appealed for funds to help the poor. While Amma herself never asks for money, her example has prompted thousands throughout India and abroad to seek to serve her goals for others. Many, touched by her Love have become Trustees of their own wealth, seeking to use it in her service, which is really the service of others.

To the wealthy, Amma emphasises the opportunity that Trusteeship can bring—the chance to become a great and humane human being:

✿ Do not give up your wealth. Do not give up your expectations in life. Have them, but try to be a real human being. Try to feel the sufferings of others. You are not a machine or an animal or a demon. You are a human being. You represent the human race. Therefore, try to be loving and compassionate, because those are the signs of an evolved life. Remember, only a human being can develop compassion and only a human being can empathise with others...No other species receives this precious gift from God—the ability to understand and be compassionate. Utilise it. Don’t misuse it.⁵¹

World wide, governments now recognise that money given to Amma goes to the relief of the suffering, unlike governmental institutions, which have what Amma once described as the ‘oily cup’ syndrome: a cup of oil given to most institutions for human benefit, is poured from one level to the next, trickling down until there is hardly any oil left for the intended beneficiary.

Amma is a wonderful example of the ideal of Trusteeship in her personal life. Speaking of herself, Amma has said:

✿ Amma grew up knowing hardship. She knows the value of each paisa. She has had to struggle just to get enough firewood to make tea. Because

She knows the hardships of poverty, She doesn't let even a speck go to waste. When She sees a piece of wood She thinks about its value and how it can be used. But if you children saw it lying in your path, you'd just kick it away. Or if you saw it lying in the rain, you'd never think of picking it up, drying it and saving it. Children, would we throw away a five paisa coin? No, because it's five paisas. Without dry firewood, how can we cook anything? Even if we hold hundreds of rupees in our hands, we still need firewood to light a fire, don't we? We should be aware of the value and possible use of everything. Then we won't allow ourselves to waste anything.⁵²

Like Gandhi, she is very particular that we do not waste the resources Nature has given. She has often emphasised not wasting water. Once, someone observed: “Even when a water tap was available, Mother washed Her hands and face with water from a container. She said that when we open a faucet, we tend to use more water than we need.”⁵³

Amma's teachings show how, if we have the attitude of Trusteeship, even without having physical ownership, we can overcome many of our likes and dislikes in our environment. At present we have Trusteeship over our own attitudes. Once someone said to her:

“Mother you should tell the neighbours not to soak coconut in the back water surrounding the ashram, it smells terrible.” Amma replied:

✿ Son, there is no bad smell when there is an attitude that it is ‘mine’. Nobody cares about the putrid smell of one's own wound. With how much affection do we remove the excreta of our own child. Sometimes we might even vomit on our own body. Are we not accepting all those without complaint? Once the attitude of ‘mine’ comes, then none of these are a problem at all. Think of the coconut family as ‘ours’ (Mother laughs) then there will not be any smell.

When we are working in someone's factory, we will always try to skip work. We will have little enthusiasm and feel tired quickly. But if it is our own factory, the attitude changes. Then even if we can't eat or sleep, we will be enthusiastic. There will be no fatigue because it is our own. If you develop that attitude of ‘mine’ towards everything, then all problems will disappear.⁵⁴

Amma teaches that the relationship between man and nature is one of Trusteeship. In another incident while reprimanding a *brahmacharini*, Amma gave these

teachings which demonstrate the close links between the awarenesses, the *maha vratas*, and Trusteeship:

☸ Whatever is wasted due to our lack of care and attention is a sin. Everything has been created for a purpose. Everything has a use. Without inter-dependence of things, the world couldn't exist. Plants and trees cannot exist without this Earth. Animals depend on plants and other animals for food. Human beings depend on animals and plants. Thus the existence of the entire world is nothing but a story of inter-dependence.

...suppose two potatoes are sufficient to cook a dish. If you then take three instead of two, you are acting indiscriminately. You are committing an *adharmic* act.

Wastefulness is a form of stealing. Since you are not really using the third potato, you are carelessly wasting it. You could give it to someone else, perhaps to a neighbour who does not have enough to eat. Thus by taking that extra potato, you are denying him food. You are stealing his food and are committing an unrighteous act.⁵⁵

Amma speaks to our present time and the aching needs of our ignored environment. The responsibility of capital management is not only for labour but the Earth as well. This is especially critical, as industry and factories move out of countries where increasingly environmentally concerned citizenry oppose the ecological destruction they cause. Many transnational companies now seek to plunk their 'dirty business' in nations whose governments are less concerned with the state of the Earth, toxic pollution and the conditions of life for their poor. Many towns and areas in India are cesspools of chemical poisoning, from the underground water tables, up to the skies; where factories are causing massive ecological destruction and sickening the entire environment as well as the hapless workers in them.* Amma asks:

☸ How much pollution has been caused by the smoke from factories? Mother is not suggesting that we close the factories; She is only saying that part of the profits should be used for devising methods to reduce pollution and to revive and protect the environment.

In olden days, rain and sunshine came at the right time and supported the cycle of growth and harvest. There was no need for irrigation because

*The 2003 documentary movie *Poison for Cotton* by Altemeir and Hornung Filmproduktion, details from start to finish issues in clothing production from cotton in India today, exemplifying this point.



everything was taken care of by Nature. Nowadays, we have strayed from the path of *dharma*. We are not at all concerned about Nature, and therefore, Nature is reacting. The same cool breeze which once caressed mankind has now turned into a tornado.⁵⁶

Amma stresses the necessity of our growth in understanding our total reliance and dependence upon Nature, the natural systems of the Earth and Nature’s need for our intelligent and caring Love to protect these systems in the maintenance of the creation:

✿ The Earth, trees, plants and animals are all manifestations of God. We should love them as we love our own Self. Actually, we should love them even more than ourselves, because only with Nature’s support can human beings exist. It is said that we should plant two trees for every one we cut down. However, when a large tree is replaced by two small seedlings, the balance of Nature is not maintained...Animals, plants, and trees all contribute to the harmony of Nature. It is man’s duty to protect and preserve them, for they are helpless to defend themselves. If we continue to destroy them, it will do the world great harm.⁵⁷

Rural society in India, has total reliance and dependence upon the breast of Mother Nature. Cow dung has long been used in innumerable ways: to make dry chips with which to cook food, to provide a sealant for mud floors and walls, to offer in rituals, and also as a plaster on wounds. Now the efficacy of cow dung has disappeared. Amma discusses this:

✿ Mother remembers that in her childhood cow dung would be placed directly upon the site of a vaccination in order to prevent infection. But today, cow dung will make a wound septic. Due to the toxins with which man has polluted the environment, our immune systems have become weakened, and the cow dung has also become harmful...Untreatable diseases have become prevalent due to man’s transgression of the laws of Nature.⁵⁸

Living in Amma’s ashram community, one daily confronts the awareness of Trusteeship and its wide parameters in our lives. We are the trustees of our thoughts, actions, attitudes and choices. How much food we take, how much we waste, our use of lights, water, fans. These are part of many Earth ethical decisions—what soap, what kind of food, how much and what kind of clothing, transportation choices and greater and greater measures in recycling are all part

of the Trusteeship picture. Increasingly, residents are composting, making mats, handbags, and other useful items out of plastic waste and seeking to sell more and more of the ‘garbage’ to recycling centres. Amma’s example shows the necessity for all of us to assert our sense of Trusteeship, now.

In a voice that sounds very much like Amma’s today, Gandhi demonstrated to the inmates in his ashram the relationship between ashram life and perfecting one’s understanding of the doctrine of Trusteeship, when he said:

☉ We shall not often get opportunities like the unique one we have got just now for self-examination and study. All of us, therefore, should realize that we should so act and spend our time that we would be able to give a good account of every moment. Even a drop of water should not be wasted. We should regard everything in the country, no matter in whose possession it is, as belonging to us and take care of it and use it accordingly.⁵⁹

Amma gives constant support and encouragement for internal effort and change. We need to convince ourselves that we can change, that we have the power and capacity to do so:

☉ We may doubt whether we have the power to restore the lost balance in nature. We may ask, “Are we human beings not too limited?” No, we are not! We have infinite power within us, but we are fast asleep and unaware of our strength. This power rises up when we awaken within. Religion is life’s greatest secret which enables us to awaken this unlimited, but dormant inner power.⁶⁰

It is possible; we can do it, if we try. We can make the changes needed to give everyone a life free from hand-to-mouth existence. We can change the perceptions we have of the goals for human society and social behaviour. We can create a new ideal picture for ourselves as a human race, and begin to follow its light in our lives. Gandhi gives this encouragement for the exercise of Trusteeship in the face of seeming indifference from those who mistakenly feel they actually profit from the present form of immoral economics:

☉ That possessors of wealth have not acted up to the theory does not prove its falsity; it proves the weakness of the wealthy. No other theory is compatible with non-violence. In the non-violent method the wrong-doer compasses his own end, if he does not undo the wrong. For, either through non-violent non-co-operation he is made to see the error, or he finds himself completely isolated.⁶¹

27.2 BREAD LABOUR

Gandhi saw Bread labour as *Yajna* (sacrifice) necessary for ethical development. He attributed his arriving at Bread labour as a vow through the influence of Count Tolstoy, Bonderef,* and to Ruskin. “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.”⁶² The teachings that Gandhi understood from Ruskin, the equality of all labour, he summarised as follows:

- ☉ That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all.
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.
That a life of labour, i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the craftsman is the life worth living.
- ☉ The first of these I know. 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.⁶³

Gandhi also found corroboration for Bread labour in the *Bhagavad Gita*, the giver of deep archetypes in the Indian psyche:

- ☉ When the Gita says that ‘rain comes from sacrifice’⁶⁴ I think it indicated the necessity of bodily labour. The ‘residue of sacrifice’⁶⁵ is the Bread that we have won in the sweat of our brow. Labouring enough for one’s food has been classed in the Gita as a *Yajna*.⁶⁶
In my view, the same principle has been set forth in Chapter III of the Gita where we are told that he who eats without offering sacrifice eats stolen food. Sacrifice here can only mean Bread labour. Be that as it may, that verse is the origin of our observance.⁶⁷

Through Bread labour, Gandhi saw that a new society could arise: “Obedience to the law of Bread labour will bring about a silent revolution in the structure of society. Man’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.”⁶⁸

*Bonderef was a Russian writer whose works on human development of mind, body and spirit through meaningful physical labour also influenced Gandhi.

Gandhi found in the ideal of Bread-labour a pure practice of *varna ashrama*. Gandhi saw that the *varna* system had two basic principles supportive of Bread-labour: “[There are] two fundamental principles, namely that there are no high and low and every one is entitled to a living wage, the living wage being the same for all. In so far as these principles win acceptance they will render a positive service to society.”⁶⁹

Taking cash and status value out of education would certainly produce more people pursuing their chosen occupations in the interest of rendering meaningful service to humanity. At present, this Earth is waiting for the human intelligence that She has so carefully nurtured and created throughout the eons to fall back upon Her, like a cooling and refreshing monsoon rain.* A corrected, reformed and updated understanding of the *varna* and *ashrama* systems applied on a world wide level would certainly give Her that.

Additionally, the relationship between mental health and physical labour is one that ‘modern’ mental health care systems are increasingly ignoring. Yet, anyone who has spent the day wrapped up in classrooms with dry books, then goes home and gardens, even if only for 30 minutes, his head beneath the altar of the sky or clouds, his hands and feet engaged with the Earth, can attest to the effect of strengthening integration that such activity produces upon one. The necessity of our interaction with the five elements that make up the Earth and our bodies does not end with childhood, although the method of interaction, from play to gardening, can and does. There is something stultifying and death-dealing with our present day global modern education patterns, that teach a divorce from, instead of a marriage to—the Earth.

Gandhi saw that intellectual talent and contribution has its place in social development, but that it is not an end unto itself, as is presently accepted: “Intellectual work is important and has an undoubted place in the scheme of life. But what I insist on is the necessity of physical labour. No man, I claim, ought to be free from that obligation. It will serve to improve even the quality of his intellectual output.”⁷⁰ True use of intelligence then, would seek to serve humanity and to take responsibility for the physical maintenance of the environment around us. Gandhi saw that:

☉ The idea is that every healthy individual must labour enough for his food, and his intellectual faculties must be exercised not in order to obtain a living or amass a fortune but only in the service of mankind. If this principle is observed everywhere, all men would be equal, none would starve and the world would be saved from many a sin.⁷¹

*This metaphor is from Rabindranath Tagore’s poetry.

Looking at the educated elite in India then, he commented: “How useful it would be if the engineers in India were to apply their ability to the perfecting of village tools and machines. This must not be beneath their dignity.”⁷²

Gandhi found that the unnatural separation between the educated and the manually labouring, had come to mean that those who laboured lived with poverty and its crushing suffering, a life which the intellectual had no feeling for. He saw that Creation itself had its own needs and uses for our intellects, that we should seek to find them out accordingly:

☉ Nature has intended man to earn his Bread by manual labour...and intended him to dedicate his intellect not towards multiplying his material wants and surrounding himself with enervating and soul destroying luxuries, but towards uplifting his moral being—towards knowing the will of the creator—towards serving humanity and thus truly serving himself.⁷³

Amma also speaks about the necessity of physical labour for mental health. Once, to inspire an ashram resident, she spoke thus:

☉ Son, do not sit idle like this, God will get angry and bad thoughts will arise in you. It is much better if you dig ditches and fill them again rather than sit idle. How much work is there to do if you really look. You should spend your time doing some physical work if you do not have the mind to do meditation and *japa*. Sitting idle means letting the mind brood on unwanted things.⁷⁴

27.2.1 *The Ideal of Bread labour*

The ideal observance of Bread-labour speaks to the awareness of *Yajna*, or sacrifice. As *Yajna* must be an action done for the benefit or welfare of others, Bread labour or bodily labour done in the act of service to any aspect of the manifested world the Creation—becomes *Yajna*. Gandhi saw it this way: “This body, therefore has been given to us, only in order that we may serve all Creation with it. And therefore...he who eats without offering *Yajna* eats stolen food. Every single act of one who would lead a life of purity should be in the nature of *Yajna*.”⁷⁵ In Bread-labour Gandhi found Trusteeship, touchability or equality, and *dharma*, duty.

☉ Reason too, leads us to an identical conclusion. How can a man who does not do body labour have the right to eat? “In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy Bread.” says the Bible...There is a world-wide conflict

between capital and labour, and the poor envy the rich. If all worked for their Bread, distinctions of rank would be obliterated; the rich would still be there, but they would deem themselves only trustees of their property and would use it mainly in the public interest. Bread-labour is a veritable blessing to one who would observe non-violence, worship Truth and make the observance of *brahmacharya* a natural act. This labour can truly be related to agriculture alone. But at present at any rate everybody is not in a position to take to it. A person can, therefore, spin or weave, or take up carpentry or smithery, instead of tilling the soil, always regarding agriculture, however, to be the ideal. Everyone must be his own scavenger. Evacuation is as necessary as eating, and the best thing would be for everyone to dispose of his own waste.⁷⁶

In the ideal of a Bread labourer, Gandhi saw:

☉ 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.⁷⁷

Bread-labour is an ideal in ashram life. To inmates, Gandhi said: “Everything including sanitary service must be done intelligently, enthusiastically and for the Love of God. Everyone in the ashram is a labourer; none is a wage-slave.”⁷⁸

27.2.2 *The Observance of Bread labour*

Bread labour became a means whereby Gandhi could further spread his umbrella of empathic identification with the masses on the Earth who, without labouring with their bodies, are not able to eat. He said, “Tolstoy made a deep impression on my mind, and even in South Africa I began to observe the rule to the best of my ability. And ever since the ashram was founded, Bread labour has been perhaps its most characteristic feature.”⁷⁹

As with Trusteeship, Gandhi saw that the observance of Bread labour could not be enforced through the State or by statutes. The liberty of the individual is of paramount importance for the observance of Bread labour. Gandhi hoped that through reasoning with the power of *Ahimsa* people would willingly recognise the necessity for participation in Bread labour: “Compulsory obedience to the law

of Bread labour breeds poverty, disease, and discontent. It is a state of slavery. Willing obedience to it must bring contentment and health. And it is health which is real wealth, not pieces of silver and gold.”⁸⁰

Furthermore, he saw that the right attitude with which to conduct Bread labour is one of gratitude and joy. “All labour when done intelligently and to some high purpose becomes at once re-creation and recreation.”⁸¹

Gandhi saw that the awareness of the necessity of Bread labour had to be inculcated. He was adamantly against the free giving of food to those who could work for it. “My *Ahimsa* would not tolerate the idea of giving a free meal to a healthy person who has not worked for it in some honest way.”⁸²

When beggars came to his door; “I will not send away a beggar without offering him work and food. If he will not work, I should let him go without food. Those who are physically disabled like the halt and the maimed have got to be supported by the state.”⁸³

Through Bread labour Gandhi found a way to open the minds and hearts of the educated into compassion for those who did not have the benefits of an education. “The idea is that every healthy individual must labour enough for his food and his intellectual faculties must be exercised not in order to obtain a living or amass a fortune but only in the service of mankind.”⁸⁴

Gandhi found that Bread labour was a way to arrive at the awareness of selfless service: “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.”⁸⁵ He saw that its observance brought the meaningful and essential into life: “A life of sacrifice is the pinnacle of art, and it is full of true joy. *Yajna* is not *Yajna*, if one feels it to be burdensome or annoying...Joy has no independent existence. Joy, therefore, is a matter of individual and national education.”⁸⁶

27.2.3 *Bread labour and Earth Ethical Economics*

Gandhi saw that Bread labour can be conducted in several forms. He sought to find a means and method to labour that would economically reform and uplift the life of the very poor. India was not producing enough to feed, clothe and house her people and Gandhi took up spinning and making cotton cloth (*khadi*) with a life-long zeal, as his form of daily Bread labour.

- ☉ For me at the present moment spinning is the only body labour I give. It is a mere symbol. I do not give enough body labour. That is also one of the reasons why I consider myself as living upon charity. But I

also believe that such men will have to be found in every nation who will give themselves body, soul and mind to it and for their sustenance throw themselves on the mercy of their fellow-man, that is, on God.⁸⁷

Gandhi saw that in the production of hand-spun cloth lay India's political emancipation and economic uplift, as well as personal reform. Spinning was to him the key to *Swaraj*. As Bread labour, *khadi* spinning was to become part of Gandhi's national Basic Education system. The emphasis that Gandhi placed on the *charkha* made it a symbol of the Indian National Congress, which adopted Gandhi's Programme as its own political platform. The first Indian Flag raised by the INC had a *charkha* against the colours of white, saffron and green.

Through spinning as Bread labour Gandhi demonstrated a practical means of being able to occupy and employ many millions of hands, in an intelligent operation which would also put a few more pennies into their pockets and mouths. Words can only attest to the agony he must have felt seeing the plight of the poor in India, denuded of dignity and means of livelihood by blind 'development' and industrialisation:

☉ The more I penetrate the villages, the greater is the shock delivered as I perceive the blank stare in the eyes of the villagers I meet. Having nothing else to do but to work as labourers side by side with their bullocks, they have become almost like them. It is a tragedy of the first magnitude that millions have ceased to use their hands and feet. Nature is revenging herself upon us with terrible effect for this criminal waste of the gift she has bestowed upon us human beings. We refuse to make full use of the gift. And it is the exquisite mechanism of the hands that among a few other things separates us from the beast. Millions of us use them merely as feet. The result is that she starves both the body and the mind...The spinning wheel alone can stop this reckless waste. A semi-starved nation can have neither religion, nor art, nor organisation.⁸⁸

Bread labour naturally entails the means by which articles and results were produced or performed. Being vegetarian, Gandhi had, early on, become aware of the relationship between the means of producing food and its consumption. Later this expanded into awareness that the methods by which a product was produced are part of the intrinsic value of the end result. By campaigning for the development of a national market for *Khadi* for example, he was able to bring to the public mind the ecological education of means and ends—British mill cloth or money for the Indian farmers, unemployed carders, spinners, and weavers. Owing

to his initial efforts, there is now an internationally growing market for *Khadi*, although farmers in India are still exploited all the way from sod and seed to sale.

Gandhi was a ruralist, and believed in the rejuvenation and regeneration of India’s rural economy and villages, based upon individual participation through Bread labour. Amma likewise, seeks to nourish village development, encouraging the use and expansion of useful, practical modern amenities while keeping the skills and indigenous genius of India’s culture and civilisation alive.

27.2.4 *Machinery and Bread labour*

Many people, unfamiliar with Gandhi’s views have portrayed him as being anti-machinery and anti-industrialisation. The machines in England had left the masses of India unemployed, and the resources of the country stripped. It was against this state of things that he protested. In the early stages of the initial nation-wide *satyagraha* campaign, which boycotted goods produced by England, Gandhi was popularly billed as being anti-modern in outlook. Yet, Gandhi did not see the industrial age as wholly unnatural. “Industrialisation is like a force of Nature, but it is given to man to control Nature and to conquer her forces...What is industrialism but a control of the majority by a small minority?”⁸⁹ In an interview with Charlie Chaplin, the famous English actor of the silent films, Gandhi clarified his position for the public understanding:

☉ Charlie Chaplin: I am somewhat confused by your abhorrence of machinery.

Gandhi: I understand. But before India can achieve those aims, she must first rid herself of English rule. Machinery in the past has made us dependent on England and the only way we can rid ourselves of the dependence is to boycott all goods made by machinery. That is why we have made it the patriotic duty of every Indian to spin his own cotton and weave his own cloth. This is our form of attacking a very powerful nation like England—and, of course, there are other reasons. India has a different climate from England; and her habits and wants are different. In England the cold weather necessitates arduous industry and an involved economy. You need the industry of eating utensils; we use our fingers. And so it translates into manifold differences.⁹⁰

Many have misunderstood Gandhi’s reasons for the insistence on Bread labour, seeing instead a warped view that he wanted to end all use of machinery. He was to attempt to clarify this mis-perception again and again. “I am against machines because big industries like steel and coal dehumanise men. Rather than

destroy big and small industries we must establish a balance between them and give first place to village industries.”⁹¹ By encouraging Bread labour, particularly through hand industries, many felt he wanted India to go back to the dark ages. He said:

☉ I have no partiality for return to the primitive method of grinding and husking for the sake of them. I suggest the return, because there is no other way of giving employment to the millions of villagers who are living in idleness...A starving man or woman, who has time on his or her hand, will surely be glad to earn an honest anna* during that time, he or she will resent being advised to save his or her labour, when either can turn it into a few pice to alleviate starvation.⁹²

The role of labour to Earth ethics in society he explained thus:

☉ Labour in the real sense of the term is that which produces useful articles. Useful articles are those which support human life. Supporting human life means provision of food, clothing, etc. so as to enable men to live a moral life and to do good while they live. For this purpose, large-scale industrial undertakings would appear to be useless.⁹³

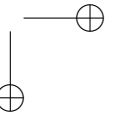
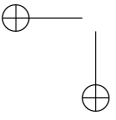
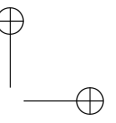
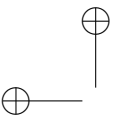
Holy Mother Amma does not speak of ‘Bread labour’ per se, although it is a natural part of ashram life that everyone gives some effort for the good of the whole community each day. She uses the world seva—selfless service. Her community has its own industries and productions, as well as a physical environment that needs care and maintenance. She stresses the inclusion of an attitude of Love in all that we do as being the singular quality that culminates in the meaning and beauty of any given action. Her outreach programmes seek to develop handcraft skills in rural villages that will enable people to gain economically. She has encouraged women to develop their own local industries through micro-loans from the bank with ashram support. These industries include small business or trade, manufacturing and small scale food production. She greatly appreciates and values all hand-made articles, frequently holding them up in ashram satsangs or community gatherings for all to see and admire. In all ways, Amma is carrying on the spirit and principles that Gandhi saw as existent in the moral fibre of the universe, deepening its understanding with the conscious exercise of Love:

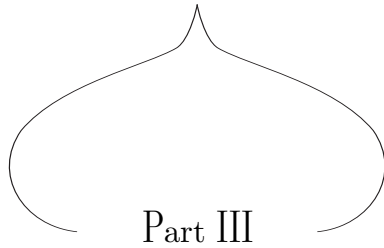
☉ Children, it is necessary to work as we live. Life is precious, therefore, do not waste it by doing things mechanically without Love. We should try

*In the old rupee system, one rupee contained 8 annas.

to put Love into everything we do. Machines can do many of the things we do, sometimes even better and more efficiently, but nobody is inspired by a machine. Even though machines produce greater quantities of work than humans, the quality of Love is absent in machine made products. When Love is absent in any action, the action becomes mechanical. People who work mechanically without love become machines within; they become less human. Humans can love; they can express love and they can live in love—they can even become Love.⁹⁴

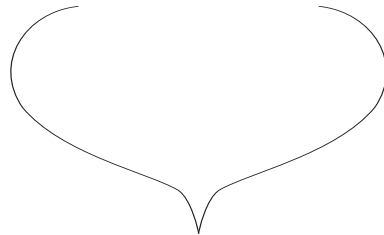
The observance of Bread labour with the fragrance of Love becomes both *Yajna* and selfless service. Gandhi saw it as our human duty, not only to our bodies, but to the whole creation. It sharpens our intellects. Enacted through our hands and feet it enables us to open our hearts and minds in sympathy and self-identification with the billions of people upon the Earth who are at present bound by immoral economics to a life of drudging toil. We thereby become more humble and expansive in our awareness. Through the physical act of conscious Bread labour, the ideal receives a ‘rounding out’ in our hearts, the atmosphere of our environment becomes imbued with our own positive intentions upon it.

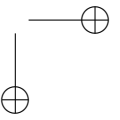
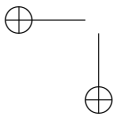
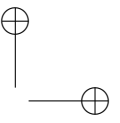
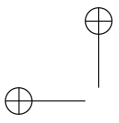


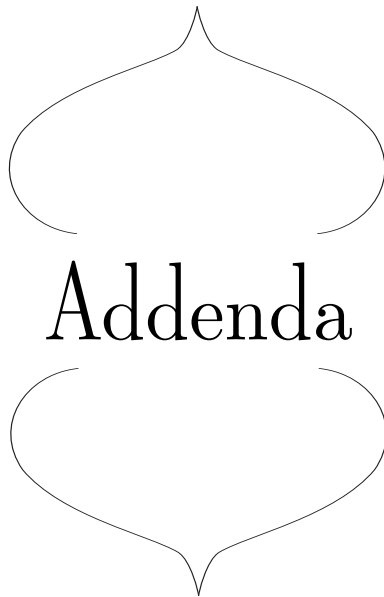


Part III

Earth Ethics in Communities and Education

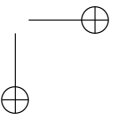
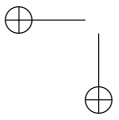
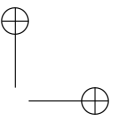
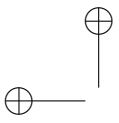




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Addenda







Appendix A

GANDHI'S CHRONOLOGY

In this Chronology, some of the dates of events before and in Gandhi's life, throughout history, which are connected with this discussion on Earth Ethics are given.

BACKGROUND

- 700 BC circa** Appearance of the work of Panini, the great Sanskrit Grammarian.
- 620 to 540 BC circa** The lifetime of social and religious reformer Gautama Buddha. Based on his teachings, followers formed the Buddhist faith. Many sacred Buddhist texts are translations of ancient Hindu texts.
- 510 to 467 BC circa** The life of Mahavira, the 24th spiritual guide and social reformer of what became known as the Jain faith. Jainism brought the jewels of Ahimsa, vegetarianism, cow protection, and environmental trusteeship to predominant positions in the philosophical thought of Sanathana Dharma.
- 500 BC circa** Rise of the great teacher, Maharishi Patanjali, author of the Shad Darshana Yoga school of thought in Indian scriptures. This science of Yoga offers a profound psychological understanding and guidelines for the development of ethical life. It includes yogic discipline for a healthy heart, mind, and physical body.
- 350 BC** The life of Chanakya, friend and advisor to King Chandragupta Maurya, and the author of the Artha Shastra.
- 300 BC** Emperor Ashok reigns in India, proponent of Buddhism and animal rights, care and protection. Parts of Kerala and Tamil Nadu are outside of his Kingdom.
- 200 BC** Roman records of government proceedings attest to India's economic hold on international markets.
- 130 BC** The life of Thiruvalluvar, author of the Kural—a collection of aphorisms for living life ethically.
- 500 AD** Adi Shankaracharya, the philosophical teacher of Absolute Monism, and widely regarded as a Hindu Reformer.
- 650 to 710** Arab conquest spreads from Baluchistan, reaching Sindh in 710 AD.
- 713** Rabi'a, a female Sufi saint, is born in Basra, Iraq.
- 1000's** Arab raids in North India. Chola empire grows in South India, expanding across Sri Lanka, Bengal, Burma.
- 1016** Advent of Ramanuja, and his philosophy of Qualified Monism.
- 1192** Muslim rule begins in India.
- 1199** Advent of Madhava, and his philosophy of Dualism.
- 1400's** British enter India as merchants. Set up trade and local offices.
- 1497** Vasco de Gama sails around South Africa, and lands in Kozhikode, Kerala, India.
- 1556** Mogul King Akbar's reign begins.



Appendix B

HOLY MOTHER AMMA’S CHRONOLOGY

Holy Mother Amma is still with us today. Her works continue to grow. This chronology includes events which are relevant to the discussion in this book. It should be born in mind that these activities have taken place amidst a weekly schedule of four public all-day and often late-night to early morning programs, satsangs, interviews, etc. Not to mention a touring schedule that includes every continent and keeps Amma going around the Earth to attend to her innumerable children throughout the year. Presently, Holy Mother Amma gets very little sleep, if at all.

HOLY MOTHER AMMA’S FAMILY

- 1924** Amma’s father, Sugunanandan is born.
- 1930 January 26** Indians nationwide take a pledge of independence.
- 1931 or 1932** Sugunanandan (age 7 or 8) first learns about Gandhi.
- 1932 May** Individual civil disobedience starts.
- 1936 November 12** In Travancore (now southern part of Kerala state) the Maharaja (King) declares all Hindu temples open to all Hindus, regardless of caste.
- 1938** Sugunanandan starts learning Kathakali, a traditional art form of telling stories through intricate acting, music, and dance.
- 1939 September 1** The official start of World War II.
- 1939 or 1940** Sugunanandan remembers Indian National Congress slogans from this time.
- 1942 August 8** The “Quit India” movement is passed by the INC.
- 1944 circa** Sugunanandan marries Amma’s mother, Damayanti.
- 1945 August 10** The end of World War Two.
- 1947 August 15** India gains Independence.
- 1948 January 30** Gandhi is assassinated.

HOLY MOTHER AMMA’S LIFETIME

- 1953 September 27** Holy Mother Amma’s officially celebrated birthday.
- 1961** Amma (age 9) counsels various people on their problems.
- 1968** Amma begins expressing divine attitudes in “*Bhavas*” (age 16 or 17).
- 1969** Word of Amma spreads; her public work begins.
- 1970** By this time, hundreds of people are coming to see Amma.
Kerala experiences an economic boom, as daily wage labourers shift to oil-rich countries and send money back home.
- 1975** The crowds around Amma swell to thousands.

GLOSSARY

- Agraha** ‘Holding force’ or ‘Persistence for’.
- Alvar** (Tamil) ‘The one who controls God through his love.’ The Alvar saints became predominant in south Indian history during the 7th–9th centuries. Through transparent and overwhelming Love of the ideal, the Alvars helped to inspire and transform the lives of millions of people.
- Abala** Without strength, weak, weakness.
- Abha** Name of Gandhi’s female relative in close attendance the day he was killed.
- Abhyasa** 1. Steady and constant effort. 2. Practical practice, practising, as music abhyasa, sadhana abhyasa, etc.
- Achara(s) or Acharam** Protocols and practices worthy of emulation. Self-disciplines for gaining mindfulness of Truth.
- Acharya** 1. Teacher or Master of a given subject. 2. One who has studied and practices the precepts contained in the scriptures.
- Aden** A city in Yemen, where many Indians were going to seek their material fortunes in Gandhi’s time.
- Adharma, Adharmic** 1. That which is against, negates, or is not Dharma; unrighteousness. 2. Sin. 3. Crime, an adharmic act.
- Adi Lakshmi** Seen as the primordial aspect of the feminine principle inherent in all life and manifested in the home through the wife. The ideal of Adi Lakshmi has eight attributes: prosperity, agricultural yield, wealth or influence, progeny, moral courage, victory or success, knowledge of arts and sciences, and food to eat.
- Adi Shakti** The Primal or Primordial Energy, inherent in all life, present in human beings also as the sexual force.
- Adivasi** Aboriginal inhabitants of India, also known as Tribals in the Indian government’s classification system.
- Adrishta** The unseen principle, beyond our intuition, mind, intellect. (Adrishta-phala) the karmic fruit experienced from unseen influences of our past actions.
- Advaita** Non-Duality; One-ness; Monism, Vedanta. This school of thought was promoted by Adi Shankaracharya.
- Aham-Brahm-Asmi** A maha vakya, meaning “I am Brahman.” (The implication being that Truth is in Me, or My true nature is Truth).
- Ahimsa** Unconditional and eternal love and supreme compassion, shown by Gandhi through Nonviolence, and by Holy Mother Amma through Universal Motherhood.
- Ahmedabad** A city in Gujarat, where Gandhi had his first Indian ashram.
- Akash** 1. Sky. 2. Vast open space. 3. Vast, like the sky.
- Akhanda Brahmacharya** A state of unbroken brahmacharya, wherein, for males,



BIOGRAPHICAL GLOSSARY

Adi Shankaracharya (*circa* 500 AD) Lit. “The First Shankaracharya.” Adi Shankaracharya was a sage, originating from Kerala who travelled all over India advocating Advaita or monist philosophy. He ‘organised’ the existent practice of Sanathana Dharma into monastic traditions. His institutions are found in the four corners of India. His intellectual reasoning capacities revived the indigenous intellectual fervour in Hindu culture which was under the sway of the school of Buddhism at the time. Shankaracharya is credited with re-organising the Hindu faith.

Andrews, Charles Freer (1871–1940) Andrews was a priest in the Church of England, advocating radical discipleship among followers of Jesus Christ. A strong voice for the downtrodden and for human justice, Andrews met Gandhi in South Africa and assisted him in setting up Phoenix and Indian Opinion. Gandhi was to call him “Christ’s Faithful Apostle” He later returned with Gandhi to India and was active in issues of indentured labour and untouchability. Later, he accompanied Gandhi in the first Round Table talks, and returned to England, on Gandhi’s advice, withdrawing from the Indian movement. A good friend of Tagore as well, Andrews was dearly loved by Indians at large. He died in Kolkata.

Arnold, Edwin (1832–1904) Arnold worked for the British Government in India for 7 years as Principal of the Sanskrit College in Poona. During this time, he gathered materials for his notable works, the *Light of Asia* a poetic rendition of the life of the Buddha as well as *The Song Celestial* his poetic rendition of the *Bhagavad Gita*. In his later life he co-founded the Mahabodhi Society of India.

Baba Amte (1914–2008). Lawyer, doctor, social reformer and dedicated follower of Gandhi’s ideals, Baba Amte worked with marginalized sections of society, founding an extensive community called Anandwan for leprosy patients, using Gandhi’s self-help ideals. He was also active in eco-justice movement and received the Right Livelihood Award with Medha Patkar of the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

Badarayana Credited with authorship of the *Brahma Sutra*, scholars are unsure of his life time, suggesting dates anywhere between 200 BC and 200 AD, and his person-hood, suggesting that he could have been a compiler (a Vyasa) from an area called Badara. Adi Shankaracharya called him Bhagavan, meaning God, an epithet also used for the Sat Guru.

Bahuguna, Sunderlal (1927–) a follower of Gandhi’s principles, Bahuguna worked in Tehri district the 1960’s against untouchability, for women’s uplift and educating people for prohibition of alcohol. He became an early environmentalist in India, Bahuguna was one of the leaders in the CHIPKO movement in India’s Himalayas from 1970. In 1980–2004 he began the Anti-Tehri Dam movement. Using Satyagraha as an educational tool, he has employed the weapon of the Fast

ENDNOTES

ENDNOTES

Introduction

- ¹ *Awakening to Universal Motherhood*: 29–31
- ² Matruvani. July, 2005. Vol. 16:11. pg 3–4. *Amma’s Message*.
- ³ *Harijan*: January 28, 1939. Age 69.
- ⁴ *I have a dream*: 48
- ⁵ *I have a Dream*: 135
- ⁶ *I have a Dream*: 19
- ⁷ *I have a Dream*: 138–139
- ⁸ *I have a Dream*: 148
- ⁹ *I have a Dream*: 139
- ¹⁰ *I have a Dream*: 150
- ¹¹ From Dr. King: “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” April 16, 1963.
- ¹² From Dr. King: Speech given to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Aug. 16, 1967.
- ¹³ From Dr. King: “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” April 16, 1963.
- ¹⁴ *Press Report*. September 18, 1945. Age 75.
- ¹⁵ *Harijan*: April 29, 1933. Age 63.
- ¹⁶ *Harijan*: October 14, 1939. Age 70.
- ¹⁷ *Mahatma Gandhi, Essays and Reflections*: 257

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- ¹ Matruvani. July, 2006. Vol. 17:11. pg 2. *Amma’s Message*
- ² CWMG 28: 142.
- ³ Ahimsa: Nonviolence, Vol. III No. 6. Nov–Dec, 2007:484 *Gandhi’s Hind Swaraj: Its relevance for Today* By G. Prasad.
- ⁴ CWMG 17: viii.
- ⁵ CWMG 22: 500.
- ⁶ CWMG 22: 104.
- ⁷ *Journey to Self-Realization*: 250
- ⁸ *Gandhi and his Ashrams*: 112
- ⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi’s last Imprisonment: The Inside Story*: 31 November 24, 1942. Age 73.
- ¹⁰ *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections*: 255
- ¹¹ *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections*: 256–257
- ¹² CWMG 59: 75. September 24, 1934. Age 64. To Govindbhai Patel.
- ¹³ CWMG 90: 34. November 15, 1947. Age 78.
- ¹⁴ CWMG
- ¹⁵ CWMG 93: 119. December 2, 1929. Age 59. To Prabhudas Gandhi.
- ¹⁶ CWMG 10. 1907. Age 38.
- ¹⁷ *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections*: 279, 284
- ¹⁸ *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections*: 53
- ¹⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections*: 466 Sybil Thorndike
- ²⁰ *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections*: 254–255
- ²¹ *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections*: 239
- ²² *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections*: 46–47

- ²³ As suggested by: *Gandhi in Anecdotes*: 67–68
- ²⁴ *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections*: 45
- ²⁵ *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections*: 455
- ²⁶ *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections*: NA
- ²⁷ *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections*: 265
- ²⁸ *A World of Ideas: Public opinions from private citizens*: 253
- ²⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections*: 58
- ³⁰ *Written by Herself: Women’s Memoirs from Britain, Africa, Asian and the United States*: 2:445–446 Vijaya Lakshmi.
- ³¹ *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*: 366–368

Chapter 2

- ¹ Vice-Chancellor, Bangalore University (2005).
- ² *Ode to a Grecian Urn*, 1819.
- ³ Interview, July 28, 2008.
- ⁴ Interview, Celine Teacher, July 28, 2008.
- ⁵ *Amma: Healing the Heart of the World*: 41
- ⁶ Matruvani. June 2005. Vol. 16:10. pg 4. *Amma’s Message*.
- ⁷ *Amma: Healing the Heart of the World*: 67
- ⁸ Matruvani. April, 2004. Vol. 15:8. pg 15.
- ⁹ AC 3:272.
- ¹⁰ Interview. September 21, 2003. *The Week*.
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- ¹² Matruvani. July 2004. Vol. 15:11. pg 8.
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- ¹⁶ *Amma: Healing the Heart of the World*: 103
- ¹⁷ Matruvani. January 2004. Vol. 15:5. pg 3.
- ¹⁸ *Amma: Healing the Heart of the World*: 95

Chapter 3

- ¹ *Small is Beautiful*
- ² *Harijan*: July 25, 1946. Age 76.
- ³ *Unity is Peace*
- ⁴ *The Principle Upanishads*: 53
- ⁵ Matruvani. November 2006. Vol. 18:3. pg 23. *In Her Arms*
- ⁶ Matruvani. July 2007. Vol. 18:11. pg 2. *Amma’s Message*
- ⁷ AC 2:316–317.
- ⁸ *Mahatma Gandhi’s Last Imprisonment: the Inside Story*: 262
- ⁹ AC 3:270.
- ¹⁰ *Young India*, January 14, 1920. Age 50
- ¹¹ Matruvani. March 2006. Vol. 16:7. pg 2–3. *Amma’s Message*.
- ¹² *Harijan*: August 25, 1940. Age 70
- ¹³ Matruvani. November, 2006. Vol. 18:3. pg 3. *Amma’s Message*.
- ¹⁴ Matruvani. November, 2006. Vol. 18:3. pg 4. *Amma’s Message*.
- ¹⁵ AC 7:87.

CWMG = Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi. SWMG = Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi. AC = Awaken Children. EW = Eternal Wisdom.



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INDEX

Angola, 749

Abdulla, Dada, 755

action

- Amma’s Teachings
- as purifiers, 395
- identification with, 317
- Love, 395
- mind and goals, 398
- necessity of Love, 401
- selfless, 396
- turns into meditation, 399
- Gandhi’s Teachings
- criterion for selfless, 397
- to make other’s happy, 307

activism

- Captain Paul Watson, 933
- Cesar Chavez, 647
- Chico Mendez, 654
- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., xxxv
- Dr. Vandana Shiva, 928
- Gandhi’s Teachings
- moral duty, 224
- John S. Mill, 529
- Medha Patkar, 936
- necessity of dissent, 529
- Ralph Nader, 559

Adi Shakti, *see* women

Adi Shankaracharya, 19

- Absolute Monism: Advaita, 118
- Brahma Sutra Bhashya, 118
- mayavadi, 118

Advaita, 104, 118

- Amma, 120
- Amma’s Teachings, 107, 168
- Gandhi’s Teachings, 168

affirmation

- Gandhi’s Teachings
- for ethical life, 851

Africa

- African spirituality, 749
- Amatonga in South Africa, 751
- Xhosa spiritual leader Nxele, 749

African ‘Gold Coast’, 749

African Americans

- and Gandhi, 11, 659
- Booker T. Washington, 764
- Child’s response to Gandhi, 13
- Gandhi’s Teachings
- Satyagraha use, 636

African National Congress (A.N.C.), 773

- Gandhi
- in ashram in India, 826
- Nelson Mandela, 775

Unkhonto we Sizwe, 775

Ahimsa, *see* himsa, *see* Satyagraha

Amma

- as living principle, 290
- monkey picnic, 296
- rabid dog situation, 296
- the rat, 300
- Universal Motherhood, 922

Amma’s Teachings

- as consciousness, 290
- as oneness, 291
- defining, 287
- feels like, 291
- how to experience, 294
- life is Love, 201
- like being in Love, 291
- limited and unlimited, 292
- responding, 293
- to change environment, 294
- as innocence in humans, 438

Gandhi

- dawning in, 273
- experiment with, 295
- monkey situation, 296
- on himself and Jainism, 288
- pain and logic, 276
- through Truth, 438
- twelve vows, 437

Gandhi’s Teachings

- and compassion, 288
- and himsa, 294
- and Nature, 290
- and non-violence, 299
- and political trust, 295
- Apariagraha and Asteya, 438
- as environmentally transformative, 301
- attribute of society, 942
- by nations, 534
- class conflicts, 562
- cleanliness, 886
- commands reciprocity, 302
- defining, 289
- degrees of himsa, 298
- diagram, 438
- effort, 287
- ethical progress, 495
- gift to the world, 287
- guides Trusteeship, 593
- highest ideal, 288
- ideal as societal guide, 532
- in economics, 558
- in hands of women, 923
- judging actions, 292