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Mahatma Gandhi: A Hold Upon Others

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ABSTRACT: *Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) is the exemplar par excellence in our time of creativity in the moral domain. Through the invention and application of the subtle principles of satyagraha (nonviolent resistance to injustice) Gandhi led the Indian people to liberation from the British empire. Gandhi had learned much from the American, Henry David Thoreau; in his turn, he became a model for the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. For this special issue of the Creativity Research Journal we include excerpts from Howard E. Gardner's chapter on Gandhi, part of his next book, Creating Minds (Gardner, 1993). For our present excerpts we have chosen to emphasize three facets: Gandhi's early life, the principles of Satyagraha, and some of Gardner's thought on the relation between creativity and morality. —Editors*

“Action is my domain”—M. Gandhi

The tension between the ruling Britons (the *raj*) and the Indian populations came to a head in 1857. Indian soldiers in the Bengal army of the British East India Company led a bloody revolt, which eventually involved a large section of India and resulted in the takeover of Delhi and the temporary installation of a native emperor. At great financial and human costs, the British eventually put down the “Sepoy Revolt.” Thereafter, the British East India Company was replaced by

the Queen of England—now the Empress of India—and by a succession of administering Viceroy. Following these wrenching hostilities, stirrings of Indian nationalism emerged, talk of a democratic India increased, and some efforts were undertaken to encourage Home Rule. Still, throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century, it was assumed that Britain would continue to rule India indefinitely; that a single determined Indian could lead his fellow citizens to independence was unthinkable.

Mohandas K. Gandhi—The Moralistic Child

Two hundred and fifty years after the British began to control India, and a mere decade after the Sepoy Rebellion, Mohandas K. Gandhi was born in 1869 at Porbandar on the Arabian Sea. His family came into the Visya caste, a middling stratum of Indian society engaged in trade and agriculture. Gandhi's family had been prominent at the provincial level: Six generations had been

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The complete text, from which this extract was taken, appears in Gardner (1993). That text includes a list of all sources drawn on in this treatment of Gandhi. Of special importance for the passages cited here are the standard biographical works by Brown (1989), Erikson (1969), Fischer (1950), and Payne (1990).

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home ministers or prime ministers on the Kathiawar peninsula. The society within which Gandhi grew up was quite conservative in religious and political matters; Gandhi himself felt it most improbable that he would ever assume a national leadership position, insofar as his family came from a small town and had available limited material and social resources. (Most of our other creators would have described their backgrounds in similar terms). However, Gandhi's parents appear to have been unusual Hindus, open to a range of religious behaviors and beliefs.

The Senior Gandhis set a high moral tone. Mohandas' mother was dutiful and saintly. She fasted regularly and selflessly and displayed much courage. "To keep two or three consecutive fasts was nothing to her" (Fischer, 1983, p. 61). Mohandas' father was stern and sometimes ill-tempered but admirable in his ability to adjudicate legal matters and to help out with domestic responsibilities. Once when young Mohandas confessed that he had stolen a golden chip from his brother's amulet, Gandhi's father took the guilt upon himself: Rather than punishing his wayward child, the father cried. This example of an injured individual who refrained from lashing out at others made a deep impression on the younger Gandhi.

As a child, Gandhi was puny, inclined to solitude, and reluctant to engage in sports. Not a particularly good student, he found school unappealing. He once described himself as follows: "I am an average man with less than average ability. I admit that I am not sharp intellectually. But I don't mind. There is a limit to the development of the intellect but none to that of the heart" (Nanda, 1985, p. 133). From an early age Mohandas displayed a notable interest in issues related to right and wrong. When playing games, he naturally gravitated to the

role of the peacemaker. At school, when asked to fake an answer in order to help protect his teacher from a public embarrassment, the young boy refused to participate in this scheme. Instead, he sought a position of moral authority vis-à-vis his parents and other elders. Perhaps impressed by his evident talents in this area, his parents allowed him to serve as a moral arbiter even in realms where they might have been expected to assert their authority.

There are certain domains of experience in which precocity or prodigiousness can be readily recognized. Provided that the society provides opportunities for the advancement of young children, one is not surprised to learn of a child of 5 or 10 who is notably outstanding in numerical or mathematical power, in musical performance, in playing chess, or in displaying mechanical or spatial prowess. When it comes to an understanding of other persons, and an ability to deal effectively with them, however, the markers are elusive. Limitations in size, power, emotional breadth and subtlety, worldly experience, and knowledge of motivation all serve to limit the capacity of the young child to appear precocious in the social, political, religious, or ethical realms.

That said, it is not unlikely that certain children are particularly attracted to issues which involve relations among other individuals; and that certain children may emerge early as preoccupied with issues of morality. Still, there is something a bit ludicrous (from a Western perspective) in the prospect of an 8- or 12-year-old positioning himself so as to be able to handle squabbles or to give advice to elders. For whatever reasons Gandhi seemed to have been such a child; fortunately for him, his family gave him a lot of latitude in probing parental reactions and in developing his own responses to the social and ethical problems which arose each day.

Thus Gandhi had repeated opportunities to “test himself” as a moral agent.

Individuals who eventually become religious, social, or political leaders often seem to be highly censorious of themselves. In Freudian terms they have powerful super-egos. Experiences which might have been forgotten or considered trivial by others take on a weighty significance. Such disparate figures as Augustine, Luther, Rousseau, and Lincoln have perseverated on their youthful foibles and have sought to atone for them even decades later. In Gandhi’s case, he was strongly affected by a youthful friendship with a Hindu youth named Sheikh Mehtab, who convinced him to violate Hindu principles and eat meat. The two boys also stole money to buy cigarettes and felt such guilt over this act that they contemplated suicide. Gandhi was also mortified that he had gone to a brothel, even though he had been rendered speechless and immobile and had made no advances to the woman who had been provided for him. From his more worldly stance, the British essayist George Orwell attempted to put these youthful peccadillos in perspective—“a few cigarettes, a few mouthfuls of meat, a few annas pilfered in childhood from the maid-servant, two visits to a brothel (on each case, he got away “without doing anything” [Nanda, 1985, p. 9]), one narrowly escaped lapse with his landlady in Plymouth, one outburst of temper—that is about the whole collection.”

Growing up in a society in which marriages were arranged during childhood, Gandhi wed Kasturbhai at the age of 13. The marriage was in some ways an appropriate one—Gandhi’s wife proved to be almost as tough and stubborn as her husband—and it lasted for over half a century. But Gandhi, still quite immature, resented many aspects of this forced alliance in what he later called “the cruel custom of child mar-

riage” (Nanda, 1985, p. 9). Apparently in possession of a strong sexual urge, Gandhi desired his young wife and yet felt guilty about his lustful thoughts and deeds. These feelings were fanned enormously when Gandhi, who had been at the bedside of his dying father, retired to have sexual relations with his pregnant bride, only to learn shortly thereafter that his father had died. Gandhi never forgave himself for this act of filial disloyalty and considered the subsequent abortion of his first child as a suitable punishment for his misdeed.

An indifferent and mostly unenthusiastic student, already married and with increasing family responsibilities, Gandhi might well have sunk into oblivion. Barely successful in passing an entrance examination, Gandhi was admitted to a small inexpensive college in Bhavnagar in 1888. A family friend Mavji Dave convinced Gandhi that it made much more sense for him to travel to England to become a barrister-at-law. Accepting this advice and leaving behind his wife and first surviving son Harilal, Gandhi embarked on a journey which was to alter his life.

A Cascade of Life Options

By electing to study in England, Gandhi immediately cut himself off from certain life options. As far as many members of his caste were concerned, Gandhi had chosen to follow a forbidden course. He was admonished by the headman of his community: “In the opinion of the caste, your proposal to go to England is not proper. Our religion forbids voyages abroad. We have also heard that it is not possible to live there without compromising our religion. One is obliged to eat and drink with Europeans” (Fischer, 1983, pp. 20-21). When Gandhi sought to defend his decision, the headman responded decisively: “This boy shall be treated as an outcaste from today. Whoever helps him or

goes to see him off at the dock shall be punishable with a fine of one rupee four annas" (Fischer, 1983, pp. 20-21).

Whatever the psychic costs of travelling to England, of deliberately choosing a marginal path, the experience opened Gandhi up to a far greater set of options than would have been conceivable in provincial India. Like T. S. Eliot visiting Europe, or Picasso travelling to Paris, the young traveller soon attained a more distanced view of his home base. Initially he was attracted to some of the surface features of the new world. He bought expensive clothing, dressed like a dandy, complete with a chimney pot hat and an evening suit, and installed a large mirror in front of which he spent minutes each day arranging his tie and parting his hair in the approved fashion of the day. In an effort to gain entry to desirable social circles, Gandhi also studied several languages, including French, and took dancing, locution and violin lessons.

The attraction to a life as a dandy proved relatively shortlived: Fascination with a whole gaggle of new ideas was more enduring. Gandhi read widely in Christianity, as well as in Hinduism. He learned about emerging ideological movements, such as theosophy and pacifism. He joined organizations like the Vegetarian Society; indeed, as Mehta (1976) noted Gandhi seemed to have developed an early taste for eccentricities of all kinds. He carried out all manner of experiments in eating, dieting, exercising, and otherwise maintaining his health. He kept careful records of everything that he did and all the money he spent, in the process becoming a well-organized young man. Though he was already quite abstemious (partly out of financial necessity), he permitted himself a trip to Paris to see the Great Exposition of 1889.

The three years that Gandhi spent abroad in Europe had the paradoxical effect of

underscoring the parochialness of his background, on the one hand, while confirming his Indian identity on the other. He was learning about European practices, behaviors, and legal systems, not so that he could "pass for" an Englishman, as he might initially have wished, but rather so that he could one day stand on equal terms with individuals from all over the world. In this respect he was like Martha Graham, who also defined much of her subsequent creative activity in opposition to the formidable but foreign models she had encountered as a youth travelling in Europe.

Biographer Louis Fischer offered his opinion that there is little resemblance between the "mediocre, unimpressive, handicapped, floundering M. K. Gandhi, attorney at law, who left England in 1891 and the Mahatma leader of millions" (1950, p. 28). And indeed, except for an incident in which Gandhi defended Dr. Allinson of the Vegetarian Society against attempts to expel him, there are few overt signs of political courage and leadership.

However, this characterization misses an important dimension of Gandhi's British experience. In his sojourn abroad, Gandhi took advantage of the situation to absorb enormous amounts of written materials as well as generous dollops of "lived" experience. Familiar with only a small part of one country, and a tiny sample of the world's religious ideas upon his arrival in England, he departed as someone relatively at home in a Center of European civilization, who had read widely, been exposed to a wide if motley array of current views, and had managed to break bread and hold his own in conversation with individuals drawn from all over the world. Such experiences made it possible for him to deal with the spectrum of individuals whom he would subsequently encounter, and to understand in an intuitive way the English leaders with whom he

eventually had to negotiate. In this relative cosmopolitanism, he resembled Chinese leaders like Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping, and a Soviet leader like V. I. Lenin who had spent time in Western Europe; and he differed instructively from Mao Zedong and Josef Stalin, who had never ventured beyond their homelands.

In 1891 Gandhi returned home to India, only to be informed upon his arrival that his mother had died almost immediately after learning that her son had passed the bar. Shortly thereafter, he met a young Indian named Raychandbai (later called Rajchandra by Gandhi) whose worldly success, spotless character, religious knowledge, philosophical thirsting, and capacity for self-reflection impressed Gandhi greatly—"No one else has ever made on me the impression that Raychandbai did" (Fischer, 1950, p. 39) Gandhi was later to comment. The time spent with the mentoring figure Rajchandra convinced Gandhi to remain a Hindu and to pursue a life of good works in his profession.

Nonetheless, unsuccessful efforts at litigation, an unfortunate effort at influence-peddling on behalf of a family member, and some advice from a British official convinced Mohandas that he had no future in India and that he ought to seek his fortunes elsewhere in the British Empire—specifically in South Africa. When an opportunity arose to travel to Durban to provide advice about a law suit, Gandhi hesitated little before accepting it and once again abandoning his growing family. One can see at work here an important facet of Gandhi's personality—when opportunity knocked, no matter at what distance and cost to self and family, he seized it.

Maturing in South Africa

Gandhi arrived in South Africa as a young, inexperienced lawyer, hoping to establish his

competence and some measure of worldly achievement before returning to his native land. He was in fact successful in his first legal encounter, thereby reconfirming an earlier impression that compromise and reconciliation could be more effective than an exploitation of the weakness of one's adversary. A series of unexpected events soon intervened, and Gandhi was to spend most of the next two decades engaged in political struggles in this distant land.

A defining event occurred when, after a week in Durban, Natal, Gandhi decided to take a train to Pretoria in the Transvaal. In Maritzburg, Natal, a white man entered the compartment in which he was seated and refused to spend the night in the same space as dark-skinned Gandhi. The conductor ordered Gandhi to a third class compartment, but Gandhi refused to submit to this directive. Gandhi was removed from the train and forced to spend the night freezing in a railway station. During the remainder of the trip to the Transvaal, Gandhi continued to insist that he be allowed to travel first-class on a train and a stagecoach and to stay in a first-class hotel. Unsuccessful in his protestations, he became increasingly angered by this mistreatment. Gandhi decided then and there that the position of Indians within South Africa was unacceptable; and within a short interval he had organized a meeting of all the Indians in Pretoria to discuss their untenable position.

In later years Gandhi traced the origins of his political mission in life to the night that he spent shivering in the railway station at Maritzburg. As he recalled,

I thus made an intimate study of the hard conditions of the Indian settlers, not only by reading and hearing about it, but by personal experience. I saw that South Africa was no country for a self-respecting Indian and my mind became more and more occupied with the question as to how this state of

thing(s) might be improved. (Brown, 1989, p. 57, (parentheses in original))

The position of Indians in South Africa was nebulous at this time. Once slavery had been abolished in the Empire in 1833, there was no longer a supply of cheap labor available in South Africa. Indians had been recruited to fill this void and had proved successful. The Indians often outperformed European businessmen, a fact that alienated the British and Dutch powerholders who worried about becoming a minority in "their" own country. Chiefly intent on making money, so that they could support their families and ultimately return home, the Indian population did not concentrate much of their energies on achieving political rights or recognition. Though technically considered citizens equal in status to those of European descent, in effect they came to be treated as "coolies," a form of labor to be exploited and disdained. They were described in statute books as "semi-barbarous Asiatics," not allowed to walk on footpaths or to remain out at night without a permit.

The Indians residing in South Africa represented a microcosm of the range of political, religious, and social groups that inhabited the Indian subcontinent. Most of them would have been inclined to ignore or forget mistreatment of the sort encountered by Gandhi on his trip from Natal to the Transvaal. Gandhi could not. He felt personally humiliated; the moralistically-inclined young child, now abetted by firsthand knowledge of the "civilities" of English life and by newly acquired skills of the courtroom, sprung into action. At the initial meeting, he impressed upon Pretoria's Indians that they were a mistreated minority; their only hope for improving their political lot would be to band together and thereafter to set and follow the highest possible standards of conduct. The first meeting with

Pretorian Indians was followed by a swarm of organizing activities as a result of which certain modest victories were gained. For example, the Indians were granted the right to travel first or second class, if they were "properly dressed."

Though Gandhi had thought that he would be returning home to India within the year, he was soon convinced that he must remain in his new residence. This change of plans was occasioned by his discovery that the South African government planned in effect to disenfranchise all Indian citizens. For the next 20 years Gandhi engaged in an almost ceaseless round of activities, all designed to improve the condition of Indians in South Africa. The issues on which he struggled included the government's efforts to deprive Indians of the right to vote, to restrict immigration from the subcontinent, to make Indians register, be finger printed, and pay taxes on indentured labor. The lines of authority were widely dispersed in South Africa. This state-of-affairs meant that Gandhi had many options on how to proceed, but it also implied that a victory at one level might soon be undercut by a contrary decision at another level or in another arena. For instance, Gandhi attained some concessions from the British Viceroy Lord Elgin, only to have them abrogated in the wake of a governmental reorganization that permitted the state of Transvaal to enact whichever procedures it liked.

As much as possible Gandhi proceeded through peaceful and legal means—writing petitions, holding meetings, launching organizations, arguing cases with exemplary care, looking for legal loopholes and means. He travelled back-and-forth to England and to India to secure support for what he was doing. He was initially a novice in each of these activities; where he could not find a master on whom to model himself, he sought to improve his performance through self-

study and self-observation. In this process Gandhi learned about diverse political realms and discovered a remarkable capacity to rely on himself when necessary. While he was not always loved, he was widely respected for the dogged yet calm way in which he pursued his ends.

Not infrequently, Gandhi placed himself at risk. In 1897 he was beaten almost into unconsciousness and virtually lynched by a white mob on the streets of Durban. Characteristically, he felt sorry for the ignorant individuals who had attacked him and did not press charges. In 1908 he was sent to jail for the first time. The conditions there were quite primitive, and Gandhi felt desolate because all familiar supports had been removed; for the first time since he had become politically active, he was not able to attend meetings, negotiate with supporters, or plan future confrontations. Yet he refused to sacrifice his principles.

Indeed, far from intimidating Gandhi, these encounters with harsh and sometimes unyielding reality strengthened the resolve of the maturing barrister. Once extraordinarily shy, he became an increasingly accomplished public speaker. He formed a number organizations which allowed him to practice his emerging leadership skills. He became a persuasive writer and contributed to many periodicals both in South Africa and abroad, most notably *Indian Opinion*, which was published in English and in Gujarati. He learned how to raise funds for his political efforts. In ever widening circles he was respected as a man of honor and as a person who could get things done, in a way that minimized ill-will.

According to Hindu teaching, the period of early adulthood is a time when a man is very much in the center of activity. Gandhi was certainly a prototypical Indian householder in this sense. He was sufficiently successful as a lawyer in that he could live

well, raise his children comfortably, and assemble a large and skilled staff. (Significantly, he did not take fees for his public interest work). He lived a highly organized life, timed almost to the minute, and kept scrupulous track of all the activities which took place under his aegis. He belonged to many organizations, ranging from the Natal Indian Congress and the Indian Educational Association to the Esoteric Christian Union and the London Vegetarian Society.

By the middle of the first decade of the century, it might have seemed as if everything had come together for Gandhi, the once lackluster young attorney with few prospects. And indeed, one might easily envisage a scenario whereby the now successful but still young Indian would either have rested on his laurels in South Africa or returned home triumphantly to India, to build up his law practice further or to assume a supporting role in politics as had his forefathers.

Gandhi did not feel a sense of accomplishment, however. If anything, he felt frustrated and in the deepest sense unfulfilled. He lamented the fact that others did not follow his personal example and blamed this state-of-affairs on the fact that he did not sufficiently exemplify his own life's principles. Hindu practice features a role contrasted to the engaged householder—that of the withdrawn religious ascetic or Vanaprastha. Gandhi seemed to have felt that this portion of his persona was underdeveloped. Around 1905 he began to read a different vein of literature, especially the more spiritually-oriented writings of the English social theorist John Ruskin and the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy. And soon enough, this activist was seeking opportunities to translate his evolving philosophical and religious views into daily practice.

Abandoning a busy home and professional life in Johannesburg, Gandhi first moved

with his family to Phoenix House in Durban. Gandhi sought consciously to simplify his life. He performed daily exercises and began to prepare his own food. He immersed himself in issues of health and medical care, even delivering his last children. Then in 1910 he founded Tolstoy Farm, an 1,100 acre development 20 miles from Johannesburg.

At Tolstoy Farm all 70 or so inhabitants, representing different religions and drawn from many regions of India, were expected to live as members of a joint family, in an ascetic, cooperative, and morally exemplary fashion. Placing himself in charge of spiritual and intellectual education of the youngsters, Gandhi promoted a Gujarati rather than a European model of education. When two boys engaged in sodomy, Gandhi hit upon a solution which felt right to him—he himself undertook a fast. When a young boy and girl slept together, he cut off the girl's hair and again fasted. He formed alliances with Sonya Schleslin and Henry L. S. Polak, two gifted idealistic individuals who would sacrifice an independent existence in order to help Gandhi realize his ideals in living. And he took vows of self-control or *brahmacharya*, according to which he must relieve himself of all possessions, remain poor, and refrain from sexual involvement. "It became my conviction," he later recalled "that procreation and the consequent care of children were inconsistent with public service" (Fischer, 1983, p. 69).

This shift to the life of a spiritual leader is perhaps less strange for an Indian than for a Western man of affairs, since innumerable models of such a retreat from the external world can be found within Hindu culture. Nonetheless, it calls for some kind of explanation. My own view is that Gandhi did not feel that he could proceed as a moral agent, attempting to achieve a better position for his people, unless he himself had attained

and come to embody some kind of moral authority. We have seen this desire to assume the role of adjudicator or moral leader, proceeding from a position of strength and moral purity, dating back to the years of his early childhood. Only by leading an exemplary life, and by attempting to influence those around him to do the same, did Gandhi feel like he had attained the necessary degree of spiritual purity; and only when such purity had been achieved did he believe that he had the moral authority to make demands on others within the public arena.

As he made these crucial decisions about how to lead his life, Gandhi was forging a number of bargains—with his people, his God, himself. In effect, he was publicly renouncing many of the pleasures of life, and assuming the existence of an ascetic, in order to model for others the highest standards of conduct. We have seen that, in their own ways, each of our creators has entered into some sort of a covenant in order to be in a position to pursue the work that is central. While a creator engaged in isolated work can make such a covenant in a private fashion, an individual whose work inheres in affecting the behavior of others may have to realize his Faustian bargain in a distinctly public manner.

Part of Gandhi's personality pulled him to an ascetic life, removed from the centers of power, but he also experienced extremely potent attractions toward political involvement and protest. In 1909 he wrote "Indian Home Rule" (*Hind Swaraj*) a political tract in which he provided a vigorous (virtually violent) defense of nonviolent protest; protested against a machine-centered civilization; criticized the advent of a European secular society whether in Britain or India; and called for a life of simplicity, traditional values, and abstinence that was to be carried on in small villages. As he put it, "The true remedy lies, in my humble opinion, in

England's discarding modern civilization which is ensouled by this spirit of selfishness and materialism which is purposeless, vain, and...a negation of the spirit of Christianity" (Fischer, 1983, p. 118).

During the final years of his South African stint, Gandhi became more confrontational. In the first of a series of potent symbolic actions, he publicly burned his registration certificate, and he led a series of protest marches in which 5,000 individuals functioned as an army of peace. Gandhi sought to fill the jails with his countrymen in order to expose the anti-Indian nature of the laws, including one especially nefarious statute according to which Indian marriages were considered to be illegitimate. For the first time a protest came to include women. Gandhi was arrested several times and sent to jail. When Indians heard about these indignities towards the leading figure of their community, many of them went on strike. The methods on which Gandhi was working at this time ultimately came together in his practices of satyagraha, a genuinely new form of protest which he was to perfect during his first years back in India.

Gandhi's activities in South Africa made headlines in England and in India. Through regular statements to the press and through the judicious timing of cables, Gandhi insured that all of those who should know were kept cognizant of the mistreatment of Indians in South Africa. Pressures mounted for some solution to a situation which was seen by many as unfair and by nearly all as acutely embarrassing for the government.

Though holding no official portfolio, Gandhi was able to work toward a settlement with General Jan Christian Smuts, head of South African government. All Indian marriages were recognized as legitimate, and various taxes and indignities were canceled. On the surface the relations between Smuts and Gandhi were cordial and on more than

one occasion Smuts indicated his respect for the Indian political leader. But when Gandhi left to return home to India for the last time in 1914, Smuts declared, "The saint has left our shores, I hope forever" (Fischer, 1950, p. 117).

Gandhi had achieved some success aiding his countrymen in South Africa but probably his greatest accomplishments were personal. During his two decades away from home, he had evolved from a shy and ineffectual barrister to a political force to be reckoned with. Alternating his focus between actions in the public arena and private spiritual growth, he was always fully engaged. He developed philosophical positions and then proceeded to live them. His experiments were carried out partly inside his own head but partly in consort with other individuals, whom he attempted to engage in his several missions. Gandhi studied and learned from each of these organizing activities, be they successes or failures, and made use of lessons during the succeeding encounters. Scientific creators like Einstein worked primarily with the organization of concepts; artists like Stravinsky or Picasso were engaged with conception, execution, and revision of works. For a man like Gandhi, a political creator, the core of his creative work inhered in his capacity to mobilize other human beings in the service of a wider goal. His personal actions—often undertaken at great personal risk—were his medium of expression, as well as his strongest ally in his endeavors.

India—Learning the Lay of the Land

Although he had spent his childhood in India and had returned home regularly, Gandhi was a virtual stranger to the land that he reached in 1914, on the eve of the first world war. By the age of 45, he had spent most of his last 28 years away. He himself

was known in political circles because of his well-publicized protests in South Africa, and the dominant Congress Party had actually offered him a leadership position. Wherever he went, people flocked to see him and to receive his *darshan* or blessing. His closest friend and political ally was a leading Congress Party official named Gopal Krishna Gokhale who, in a gesture touched with ambivalence, had extracted from the recently returned Gandhi a promise that he would not speak publicly for a year. This political respite gave Gandhi an opportunity to travel widely throughout India (third class railway coach, by choice, of course), to familiarize himself with the conditions in the country, and to evaluate the courses of action he might follow in what years remained and in the light of whatever opportunities were to present themselves.

A peculiar coincidence complicated Gandhi's first years back in India. On the one hand he knew in the back of his mind that he wanted to use some of the methods of protest developed in South Africa in order to better the conditions in India. As Gandhi put it, "I wanted to acquaint India with the method I had tried in South Africa and I desired to test in India the extent to which its application might be possible. So my companions and I selected the name "Satyagraha Ashram" as conveying both our goal and our method of service" (Fischer, 1983, p. 125). At the same time, however, Britain was at war against the Axis Powers, and Gandhi felt as a matter of principle that Indians should be loyal to their government of record. Thus Gandhi desisted from engaging in any kind of civil disobedience against Britain during the period of the war. For some, this decision to suspend a struggle was taken as a sign of weakness. Still, the war forced Britain to give India some political concessions and to delegate some powers, steps both necessary and appropriate at

a time when over one million Indians were fighting under the Union Jack and over 100,000 were to lose their lives.

In the case of political and ideological innovators like Gandhi, it is possible to point to dozens, if not hundreds of moments, when their creed has been articulated and their principal practices have solidified. We have already encountered a number of such defining moments, beginning with Gandhi's moralistic encounters during childhood, his defense of the hapless Dr. Allinson at the Vegetarian Society, and extending to the night at the train station in Maritzburg, the first protest meetings in Durban, the kernels of the idea of *satyagraha*, the first fasts at Tolstoy Farm, and the jailings and public marches during the last years in South Africa.

We can also point to early events upon Gandhi's return to India, such as civil disobedience conducted with peasants in Champaran, nestled at the foot of the Himalayas. In this particular instance Gandhi called attention to an unfair practice whereby peasants had been legally compelled to dedicate 15% of their land to producing indigo for their landlord. In the course of this proceeding Gandhi came to realize, "I had to disobey the British law because I was acting in obedience with a higher law, with the voice of my conscience. This was my first act of civil disobedience against the British" (Fischer, 1983, p. 140).

Gandhi himself contributed to this impression of a long series of "experiments with truth," each of which might be deemed an additional stone placed upon the emerging edifice of *satyagraha*. And indeed, in the case of individuals who are conducting their experiments in the public arena, where events necessarily consume much time and have an uncertain course, it is to be expected that the ultimate shape of practices will emerge only from many tentative and partial

attempts undertaken over the years. In this sense, their creative growth appears more gradual, less epochal, than that of creative individuals who traffic exclusively in the world of concepts, or in the production of discrete artistic works.

All this said, I agree with the psychoanalyst Erik Erikson that events which occurred in Ahmedabad in West Central India in 1918 occupied a special centrality in the formation of the Mahatma. It is worth taking a close look at the particulars of what Erikson dubbed "The Event"; we can then step back in the following section to consider more broadly the nature of Gandhi's achievement and understanding.

On the surface The Event was a labor dispute in an area often dubbed "The Manchester of India." During a time of inflation, high profits, and high taxes, textile workers at the mills of the Sarabhai family and of other nearby millowners felt that they were not receiving adequate compensation for their work. There was anger, unrest, and an ardent desire to correct this sensed inequity. At the urging of local authorities (but probably as well with a strongly held intuitive sense that he could make a difference here), Gandhi intervened and helped to forge an agreement that was considered satisfactory both to the laborers and to the management.

The Event was notable in a number of respects. The first unusual feature was the identity of the millowners. The Sarabhais were a distinguished Indian family who had carried out many good works and were in fact serving as hosts to Gandhi during his residence at an ahsram—a kind of reborn Phoenix farm—in this locale. The mill owner, Ambalal Sarabhai, led the millowners, while his sister Anasuya was sympathetic to the strikers and a strong supporter of Gandhi and his methods. As biographer Robert Payne described the confrontation, "For Anasuyabehn Sarabhai it was a question of

profits; for Gandhi it was a question of testing the resources of Satyagraha" (Payne, 1990, p. 324).

A second distinguishing feature was the nature of a strike that was ultimately undertaken when early attempts at arbitration failed and when the millowners began to employ strike breakers. Gandhi asked the workers to take a pledge to undertake no violence, no molesting of nonstrikers, and no begging; they consented to remain firm and to earn bread by other means during the course of the strike. For two weeks the strikers showed exemplary courage and self-restraint: They attended daily meetings where Gandhi, seated under a spreading banyan tree, exhorted them to remain faithful to their pledge. But then they showed signs of weakening, and Gandhi began to fear that the laborer's resolve and restraint would not hold.

The third unexpected feature was the turn taken by the protest. Instead of continuing the strike, with its risks of escalating demands or of unacceptable violence, Gandhi decided to fast. Having analyzed the situation carefully, Gandhi thought that he had arrived at a solution that was truly fair to both sides, as well as patterns of behavior which each antagonist should follow. To underscore the strength of his conviction, he elected to put his own being, his own life on the line: "In my opinion I would have been untrue to my maker and the cause I was espousing if I had acted otherwise...I felt that it was a sacred moment for me, my faith was on the anvil, and I had no hesitation to rising and declaring to the men that a breach of their vow so solemnly taken was unendurable by me and that I would not take any food until they had the 35 per cent increase given or until they had fallen. A meeting that was up to now unlike the former meetings totally unresponsive, woke up as if by magic" (Erikson, 1969, p. 51). The actual

decision to fast had come unannounced: "The words came to my lips," (Mehta, 1976, p. 137) Gandhi reported. Gandhi rejected the strikers' interests in fasting alongside him, preferring to have them adhere to the pledge that they had already taken. It was his first fast for a public, as opposed to a private cause. And it revealed to Gandhi the simplicity, drama, and potency of a new weapon.

The final remarkable feature was the outcome of the dispute. At first the millowners were infuriated by the strike: In Gandhi's version they "received my words coldly and even flung keen, delicate bits of sarcasm at me, as indeed they had a perfect right to do" (Bondurant, 1958, p. 71). After three days of the fast, the millowners set about to discover some means of settlement. The millowners had insisted that they would give no more than a 20% increase in pay while the millhands were holding out for a 35% increase. Gandhi craved a solution in which each party would feel that it had achieved moral legitimacy. And so he hammered out an agreement in which the millhands received 35% increase one day (thus satisfying their own analysis of the situation), an increase of 20% the next day (thus satisfying the analysis of the millowners), and then a perpetual increase of 27 1/2% (the arithmetical compromise). With the settlement reached, the millhands returned to work. And more satisfyingly, a method of arbitration which lasted for decades was put into place shortly thereafter.

From this seemingly accidental concatenation of events, both Gandhi and India achieved much. As biographer Judith Brown put it,

[Gandhi's] Ahmedabad campaign demonstrated not only the viability of satyagraha in a further type of conflict but also many of the characteristics of his campaigns which were to recur wherever he had some real control—the search for a peaceful solution at the outset, the sacred pledge as the heart of

the struggle, strict discipline and self improvement among the participants, effective publicity, generation of an ambience of moral authority and pressure, and finally a compromise solution to save the face of all concerned. (Brown, 1989, p. 121)

If we identify the Ahmedabad event as a pivotal one in the development of the Mahatma, the question arises about the kind of support that Gandhi needed to carry it out successfully. From our earlier examinations of creative breakthroughs, we should be on the lookout for a single individual (like Georges Braque) or a small group (like Einstein's Olympiad), to provide the affective support as well as a cognitive sensitivity to what is being undertaken. To the extent that the creator is working out a new language, it is important that these sustainers share in the decoding process and help the creator to see that what he is attempting to express can make sense to others, as well as to himself.

From one perspective, Gandhi's experiences at Ahmedabad may appear remote from those of Eliot in writing *The Waste Land*, or of Freud as he worked out the details of *The Project* or interpreted his own dreams. I do not wish to diminish the differences. What, for Freud or Eliot, was a largely private activity, one occurring over a relatively constrained period of time, was a distinctly public activity for Gandhi, one which had much stronger links to earlier (and to later) protests.

Yet at a deeper level, there may well be strong affinities between the two kinds of experiences. By his own testimony, Gandhi felt that he was working out the principles of a new language, or even a new axiomatic system, during the period when satyagraha coalesced. It may well have been necessary for him to have a supportive family-like environment in which to accomplish this feat. Here is where the Sarabhai family becomes crucial. Gandhi was not dealing

with a remote or impersonal combatant; rather he was dealing with members of a family, with one of whose members he was closely allied, while he found himself temporarily at loggerheads with another member of that same family. As virtual family members, these individuals could “read one another” in the same way that a mother and child can readily interpret one another’s sounds and gestures; and Gandhi had assurances that his “language” was understood by friend and by adversary. From one perspective, Gandhi may look like the creator who invented himself; but from another perspective, he benefitted from the most family-like support system during the moments of his most daring and decisive breakthrough.

Satyagraha

An individual of Gandhi’s complexity and subtlety cannot be reduced to a unique philosophical message or a single political or religious practice. Even his own attempt falls short—“What I want to achieve—what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years—is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain Moksha (roughly oneness with God)...All I do by way of speaking and writing and all my ventures in the political field, are directed to this same end” (Fischer, 1983, p. 24). (This expression resonated astonishingly with Einstein’s desire to know God’s thoughts). Yet situated at the center of Gandhi’s being was the practice of satyagraha, which he developed and refined over a period of several decades. As much as Einstein is forever yoked with relativity, Freud with the unconscious, or Picasso with Cubism, to that same extent is Gandhi the master of satyagraha.

Gandhi first spoke explicitly of satyagraha in South Africa. He employed the phrase to express the force, the power, which

Indians had mobilized over the years in order to call attention to the injustices inflicted upon them and to bring about a more humane and equitable set of relations among the “players” in the region. According to Gandhi the term *sadagraha* (firmness in a good cause) became converted into satyagraha as follows:

I liked the word (*sadagraha*) but it did not fully represent the whole idea I wished to connote. I therefore corrected it to “*Satyagraha*.” Truth (*Satya*) implies love and firmness (*Agraha*) engenders and therefore serves as a synonym for force. I thus began to call the Indian movement “*satyagraha*,” that is to say, the Force which is born of Truth and Love or nonviolence and gave up the use of the phrase “passive resistance”. (Bondurant, 1958, p. 8)

Satyagraha assumed the existence of a community in which two or more parties found themselves in disagreement or opposition. Instead of confronting another through violence, pain, or the threat of such harmful encounters, a proponent of satyagraha mobilized the reasons and conscience of one’s opponent by inviting suffering on oneself. The satyagraha hoped thereby to convert the opponent and make him a willing ally.

As Gandhi saw it, satyagraha was a form of purification. The claims of the body were considered less important than the assertions of the spirit. The satyagrahi demonstrated his sincerity and thereby undercut the rationalized defenses of the opponent. Self-inflicted suffering dramatized the plight of the satyagrahi and sought to convince the opponent of the legitimacy of the satyagrahi’s case. “No matter how badly they suffered, the Satyagrahis never used physical force” (Fischer, 1983, p. 90). Gandhi succinctly expressed the difference between traditional confrontations and those governed by satyagraha: “If by using violence I force the government to repeal the law, I am employing what may be termed body-force. If I do

not obey the law and accept the penalty for its breach, I use soul force. It involves sacrifice of self" (Fischer, 1983, p. 17). Ideally, the satyagrahi displayed a belief in himself rather than a coercion of the opponent, but Gandhi acknowledged the coercive element latent in a nonviolent protest. If there was only one satyagrahi with absolute faith, Gandhi believed that person could change the course of history.

A satyagrahi generally had a particular goal; he may have compromised in the achievement of that goal so long as fundamental principles were not undermined. But the struggle also had wider political significance: It was used to educate all members of the community and to encourage decision making and government by consensual means.

The fundamental aspects of satyagraha were not original with Gandhi; indeed they go back not only to his own mentors, Tolstoy and Thoreau, but to religious leaders like Christ, and to philosophers like Socrates. What Gandhi contributed was a detailed working out of the scenarios by which satyagraha could work, at least in the Indian-British contexts with which he was familiar.

Commencing with the core ideas of "turning the other cheek" and "loving one's opponent" Gandhi amplified the features necessary if a satyagraha were to achieve its political effects while confirming all participants in the process at the same time. He sought to encompass different kinds of satyagrahas, ranging from protests about taxes to behavior in jail. He identified the conditions under which satyagraha made sense: a situation of complexity where a return to "first principle" can be clarifying and helpful; and an issue where one's opponent is vulnerable and where there is widespread moral agreement that something is amiss. He specified the crucial ingredients of self-discipline, self-control, and self-puri-

fication—as well as loyalty and obedience to the leader. An individual must have understood his own motive for getting involved in a satyagraha and his obligations to others involved in the encounter. Gandhi explained, "A satyagrahi differs from the generality of men in...that, if he submits to a restriction, he submits voluntarily, not because he is afraid of punishment, but because he thinks such submission is essential to the common weal" (Fischer, 1983, p. 85). Gandhi underscored the need to be sensitive to one's own opponent's needs and to even come to his aid when he lost his freedom to be an autonomous counterplayer. The objective evil must never be collapsed with the persona of the individual associated with the injurious practice.

The satyagraha process began with efforts to persuade through discussion and reason. Early stages allowed accommodation and compromise. Should such efforts at conciliation break down (as they did in Ahmedabad, for example), one evolved to persuasion through suffering (e.g., through fasting); at that time one tried to dramatize the issues at stake and to gain the attention of the wider community; the hope was to be able to return once more to a process of discussion. If persuasion by reasoning or suffering remained of no avail, the satyagraha may have resorted to nonviolent coercion, characterized by techniques such as noncooperation or civil disobedience. The risk there, of course was that nonviolence may give way to violence, or that the two parties may become so estranged that any emerging agreement would be difficult to maintain in the long run. In a compelling figure of speech, Gandhi described the delicacy of this process:

The rope dancer, balancing himself upon a rope suspended at a height of 20 feet, must concentrate his attention upon the rope and the least little error...means death for him...[A] satyagrahi has to

be, if possible, even more singleminded. (Fischer, 1983, pp. 108-109)

Gandhi noted the limitations of satyagraha. It cannot be adopted in every situation. Some situations lacked the moral clarity; some lacked the disciplined actors or followers; and all too many lacked an opponent with a sense of fair-play: Satyagraha, Gandhi noted wistfully, did not work with tyrants. The coercive elements latent in satyagraha must be used sensitively, or else one risked destroying the opponent or rendering subsequent encounters dysfunctional.

Despite these limitations, Gandhi had perfected a method of enormous precision and power, one which had incalculable consequences within the Indian scene during the first half of this century and one which may yet exert even greater influence in the world community—if there be persons who can adopt it and use it with conviction. Gandhi declared,

I have the unquenchable faith that, of all the countries in the world, India is the one country which can learn the art of nonviolence...that...if the test were applied even now, there would be found, perhaps, thousands of men and women who would be willing to die without harboring malice against their persecutors. (Fischer, 1983, p. 327)

How, in a study of human creativeness, should we think of satyagraha? It is misleading to view it simply as a set of interlocking concepts, equally misleading to think of it solely as a body of established practices. What distinguishes satyagraha, and makes it an impressive human accomplishment, is precisely the fact that it represents a *philosophy-in-practice*. Through his analysis of human interests, and his experiments with forms of interaction, both conducted over a period of several decades, Gandhi arrived at a process which was as precise in its way as a ballet that has been choreo-

graphed and performed, or a mathematical expression that has been formulated and tested. Each of the features at a given historical moment, and each of the features as it evolves over the course of the interaction, must be carefully enacted and monitored; but, in contrast to a stylized ballet or a worked-out equation, there can be no algorithm for a successful outcome (and the stakes are correspondingly high). Rather, on the basis of the underlying principles *and* the spontaneous actions and reactions of the participants, the next step of the course must be planned and executed.

In some ways, including ones which I have touched above, Gandhi seemed anomalous in the company of great creators. Some students of creativity would question whether political innovation ought to be considered in the same terms as the creation of a scientific theory or a piece of music; and those who might accept Gandhi conditionally, could legitimately point out the many disparities between the manipulations of symbols involved in creating new mathematics or poems, and the relations to other human beings which lie at the heart of Gandhi's contribution. Moreover, even in the terms of my own study (Gardner, 1993), Gandhi emerges as quite different from scientists and artists: For instance, it proves more difficult to pick out a single pivotal creative moment in his career; the distinction between domain and field is not as immediately helpful; and the kinds of mentors who suggest themselves turn out to be uncharacteristically remote from the individual creator. Even the fact that Gandhi is the only creator who was not raised in the West complicates our analysis and our comparisons.

Yet, on the balance, it seems evident that my study is enriched, rather than compromised, by the inclusion of Gandhi. On so many dimensions, Gandhi was a

prototypically creative master. He was prototypical in his precocity in his chosen (moral) domain; his obsessive search for opportunities and his capacity to exploit them; his studied marginality; his oscillation between attachments to the many and the need for isolation; his essential selfishness; his Faustian ascetism; and the persistence of many childlike features in his philosophy and in his person. Perhaps most importantly, the personal experiences surrounding the strike and fast at Ahmedabad can easily be mapped onto the notions of cognitive-and-affective support, and the working out of a new language, which have emerged as the core of my analysis of a creative breakthrough.

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