



MAHATMA GANDHI

As a young attorney, Mahatma Gandhi struggled for the civil rights of Hindus and Moslems in South Africa. The last 28 years of his life were spent in another nonviolent struggle to unify the Moslems and Hindus in India and gain independence from Great Britain.

Gandhi was a devout Hindu. His belief in nonviolence was based

on a deep conviction that all human beings are bits and pieces of the Almighty. "So how can we kill or harm anyone?" he said. He felt that nonviolence meant much more than avoiding harm to fellow creatures. He saw in it a powerful and positive force for changing the world. He called it Truth-force or Love force.

He put his Love force into practice on many occasions. He undertook fasts, prison terms, and countless personal sufferings. He often forgave his enemies and renounced all wealth and status to show that all men were his brothers. To those who thought this was cowardice Gandhi said: "Suffering in one's own person, instead of rendering violence to others, is the essence of non-violence. I cannot teach it to cowards. It is the summit of bravery."

He directly applied his beliefs to overcome social injustices. He advised his followers to disobey unjust laws, but asked them not to resist arrest. On one occasion he fasted for 72 hours when his followers resorted to violence. He admitted that if there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, he would choose violence—and he stated that in most cases there are many other alternatives.

On another occasion, Gandhi led a march to the sea to protest the unjust Salt taxes which prevented anyone except the British to manufacture salt. The Salt March caught on and all of India rose up in nonviolent protest. The effect was to make the British powerless and the people of India invincible.

Gandhi went on a fast "to the death" when Hindus refused to stop harsh treatment toward the Untouchables. He ceased when the Untouchables were free.

The discipline of non-violence: three life styles

Throughout his life he preached the message of nonviolence and brotherhood, saying that this was the heart of his religion.

Gandhi saw an independent India before his death in 1948 but was saddened at the division between the Hindus and Moslems. He preached Truth-force in word and in deed until he took his last breath. He called nonviolence "freedom" and said it gave more guarantee than violence. On one occasion he was quoted as saying that millions could sacrifice themselves in warfare without the guarantee that the world would be better or that their enemy would be defeated—yet most people resent suggestions that anyone should die in deliberate nonviolent sacrifice.

An assassin's bullet killed him in January of 1948 during a prayer meeting. The centenary of his birth is now being celebrated throughout the world.



Gandhi once voiced his hope that "the unadulterated message of nonviolence might come to the world through the blacks of America."

Martin Luther King Jr. rose to leadership during the Montgomery Bus Boycott which began in 1955. His nonviolent leadership

REV. MARTIN LUTHER KING

as director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference gave direction to the Civil Rights Movement during the critical years of 1955-1965.

When his own house in Montgomery was dynamited during the boycott he told his angry followers: "...we don't advocate violence.

We want to love our white brothers no matter what they do to us."

King issued orders to his followers during the many demonstrations he led in Montgomery, Atlanta, Albany, and Birmingham: "If cursed do not curse back. If struck, do not strike back, but evidence love and good will at all times."

King had read about the fasts and imprisonments of Gandhi. He realized the need that he himself had to set an example of physical suffering for his people. He travelled to India and learned about the love-force which made Gandhi famous. He later said: "I left India more convinced than ever before that nonviolent resistance is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom. I saw in India the

results of a non-violent campaign."

The more King campaigned nonviolently for civil rights, the more violence he met with—but the more victories he won, also. There were bombings, shootings, and beatings. King once described nonviolence to a reporter: "It is a strong method. If an opponent beats you—you develop the quiet courage of accepting blows without retaliating...If he puts you in jail, you go to that jail and transform it from a dungeon of slavery to a haven of freedom and unity."

The march from Selma to Mont-



gomery was the high point of the Civil Rights Movement in the deep South. It sped up the machinery that brought about the passage of the Civil Rights Bill. Just after the march, Mrs. Viola Liuzzo, a Michigan housewife, was shot to death on her way back to Selma. King said: "If physical death is the price some must pay to save us and our white brothers from the eternal death of the Spirit, then no sacrifice could be more

redemptive."

In the last three years of his life, Martin Luther King moved from the Civil Rights Struggle of the South to the struggle for economic freedom and decent housing for black people in the North. He spoke out against the war in Vietnam, telling his listeners that brutality is wrong no matter from what side it comes.

King spent hours discussing
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Rural poverty--an insidious form of violence

"The truest act of courage... is to sacrifice ourselves for others in a totally non-violent struggle for justice." -Cesar Chavez