

SATYAGRAHA
A Service by Fritz Hudson
Presented January 18, 2004

Opening Song #172 (Zulu)

Siph' a-man-dla N'ko-si. Wo-kung-e-sa-bi.

Siph' a-man-dla N'ko-si. Si-ya-wa-ding-a.

O God give us power to rip down prisons

God give us power to lift the people

O God give us courage to withstand hatred

O God give us courage not to be bitter

O God give us power to make us fearless

O God give us power because we need it

Introduction for All Ages

In your bulletin this morning is a folded page with four groups of pictures.

On top of the first side is a picture of Martin Luther King Jr. as most of us have seen him. He is in his late 30s. As you know he was killed at the age of 39.

At the bottom of the page is Martin Luther King Jr. when he was just 21 years old. He was a student then, studying to become a minister. He was a Christian. He wanted to follow Jesus' teaching that if someone hits us we should not hit back, that we should in fact love our enemy. But he also was very angry at how white people and our government treated black people in our country and he wondered how he could change that without fighting in some way. He wondered if following Jesus teachings would mean accepting unfair treatment that would never change.

One day as a student Martin Luther King went to church and heard an older minister talk about his recent visit to the land of India - on the other side of our earth. In that sermon the minister talked about what he'd learned of the teachings of an Indian man there. On the second page of your insert you'll find his picture. His name is Mohandes Gandhi. The picture at the top of the page is Ghandi as an older man. Like Martin Luther King, Gandhi was killed, but he was much older when he was killed. He was 79.

Like most people in India, Mohandes Gandhi's religion was Hinduism. Hindus do not believe Jesus or any other person is God. In fact they believe in more than one God, but none of them are human. One of those God's name is Krishna, and one of the most famous stories about Krishna is called the

Bhagavad Gita.

The picture on the bottom is Mohandes as a young man. He was a lawyer then. His country, from the time he was born until just shortly before he died, was ruled not by Indians but rather by Englishmen. They treated Indians there no better than whites treated blacks here. Gandhi's earliest thoughts about how to respond to an enemy came from hearing about Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita. He learned there that love could be forceful, could change things, without being violent. He learned from this model to lead marches, endure beatings, to stay in jail and refuse to eat to embarrass the Englishmen into letting the Indians rule their own country. Because of Gandhi's contact with Englishmen, he eventually learned about Jesus and learned that Jesus' teachings about love were similar to what he had learned from the Bhagavad Gita. He also learned that another Indian, born many, many years ago, even before the Bhagavad Gita was written, had taught a similar lesson. His name was Siddhartha Gautama. His picture is on the third page of your insert.

Siddhartha looks a like an old man in this picture, but he was in fact fairly young, perhaps 30. He looks old because he too refused to eat, but in his case it was in the hope of making his mind clear enough to learn the deepest truths about life. In fact he didn't feel he learned those truths until he began eating again, but when he did what he learned so impressed others that he became known as The Enlightened One, or the Buddha. The religion which follows his teachings is known as Buddhism.

When Mohandes Gandhi was young, when he first learned the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, Gautama had been dead for many, many years. Because he had lived in the same part of the world though, people who lived in between had remembered those teachings and they were there for Gandhi to learn from and guide his actions by.

When Martin Luther King was young, when he first learned the teachings of Mohandes Gandhi, Gandhi had been dead for three years. But because Gandhi had written his teachings down and had traveled to share them at least as far as England, and because people from here had traveled there and heard him, those teachings were here for Martin Luther King to learn and use to guide his actions.

On the last page of your insert, you'll find a picture of Martin Luther King in his office. And on the wall, you'll see the picture he kept there to remind him of the teacher he only knew through words and pictures - the picture of Mohandes Gandhi. When they're old, even after they die, women and men who lived before us, if we study their lives closely, can teach us how to live.

Interlude #181 (India - Sutta Nipata)

No matter if you live now far or near, no matter what your weakness or your strength, there is not one alive we count outside. May deeper joy for all now come at length.

Sermon

"Siph Amandla N'Kosi" - O God give us power. I am unaware that Martin Luther King Jr. ever had any idea of, or interest in, what part of Africa, or what tribe, his direct ancestors were stolen from to be enslaved in our country. In all likelihood of course it was from some part of West Africa, from some tribe like the Mandingo, in which Alex Haley found his *Roots*. It's not at all likely that King was biologically descended from the Zulus of South Africa. And yet in an indirect, spiritual way, his power - his courage to withstand hatred, and not to be bitter - did come to him from the Zulu tribe. And the carrier of that power, the vehicle who brought it from Zululand to our land, would seem even more unlikely. That's what Mohandes Gandhi did, though, in a way. I want to remind you, if I can, how he did it, back there and then. More importantly, I want to ask you, if I can, what we might do with it, here and now.

Young Martin was stimulated to study Gandhi's life, work and writings in depth, as I've said, when he heard an older minister preach about his recent visit to India. The minister was Mordecai Johnson, President of Howard University. At twenty one, Martin was already in his last year of ministerial studies at Crozier Seminary in Philadelphia, but he was struggling with his faith in Christian love. He writes "I had about despaired in the power of love in resolving social problems. I thought the only way we could solve our problem of segregation was an armed revolt. ... Perhaps my faith in love was temporarily shaken by the philosophy of Neitzshe. I had been reading parts of *The Genealogy of Morals* and the whole of *The Will to Power*. ... (Neitzshe) attacked the whole of of the Hebraic-Christian morality -- with its virtues of piety and humility ... and its attitude toward suffering -- as a glorification of weakness." [Clayborne Carson (ed.) *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 23] In the midst of this struggle, he then says, "(Dr. Johnson's) message (on the teachings of Gandhi) was so profound and so electrifying that I left the meeting and bought a half-dozen books on (his) life and works. ... I became deeply fascinated by his campaigns of non-violent resistance ... The whole concept of *Satyagraha* was profoundly significant to me. ... My skepticism concerning the power of love gradually diminished, and I began to see for the first time its potency in the realm of social reform. (Carter. 23) (I saw that) "True pacifism is not unrealistic submission to evil power. ... It is rather a courageous confrontation of evil by the power of love, in the faith that it is better to be the recipient violence than the inflicter of it, since the latter only multiplies the existence of violence and bitterness in the universe, while the former may develop a sense of shame in the opponent, and thereby bring about a transformation and change of heart." (Carter. 26) Through Gandhi, King got the courage, not to be bitter. He got the power, when he needed it most.

How many of us, I wonder, have garnered our most profound impression of Mohandes Gandhi's life and work, not as King did, by reading, but rather by watching Richard Attenborough's movie *Gandhi*. Can you believe it debuted now 21 years ago? For those too young to have seen it, or too old to fully remember what we saw, let me risk a brief review.

Mohandes Gandhi's family and childhood home was in Gujarat state on the western coast of India. It is north of the city of Bombay and now India's westernmost border state with Pakistan. In recent years it has seen some of the most violent conflict between Muslims and Hindus. Gandhi's father was a civil administrator who successively served as prime minister in three different regional governments. Mohandes was born in 1869, just a year after W.E.B. Du Bois - the American black

called the "intellectual and spiritual father" to our country's civil rights movement. (Andrew Young)

At 19, Mohandes' family sent him to study in England to become a barrister, in hopes this would qualify him to continue his father's and grandfather's roles in government. He was admitted to the bar three years later and returned to India to begin his practice. Two years after that, in 1893, he was engaged by a local Indian company to assist with a case being tried in South Africa. Though he expected to be there for just a year, once in South Africa he found there an extensive appetite for his professional services as well as a calling to become the leader of the Indian expatriates' resistance to white oppression. When he did return to Gujarat, three years later, it was only to take time to write a pamphlet about the oppression and resistance in South Africa, and then to travel throughout India to speak and raise support for his efforts there.

When Gandhi returned to South Africa, he was seen as enough of a threat to the status quo to be surrounded and beaten by a white mob as soon as he set foot on dry land. He immediately threw himself back into the political struggle. Over time it began to work a transformation in his personal life as well. At first he was a bit of a dandy, reveling in his wealth and status. Gradually though, he turned toward a simpler and more shared lifestyle. With others he bought rural land and developed two *ashrams*. They were teaching and publishing communes that lived on their own produce. Their most daring experiment was to welcome members of the untouchable class as equal members of the ashrams and to all share in the menial and dirty work usually forced upon untouchables only. Gandhi experimented with meager diets and natural health care practices. He also became involved in providing volunteer health care. It was this work, in fact that took him to Zululand. When the South African government invaded Zululand to quell a rebellion, Gandhi organized an Indian volunteer ambulance corps to bring them aid. Shaken by the suffering he saw in Zululand, Gandhi returned resolved to adopt three practices to strengthen his service to humanity for the rest of his life. The first was *brahmacharya*, the traditional vow of celibacy, which Hindus believed was the basis for all self-control. The second was *ahimsa*, the Jain religion's commandment of non-violence to all livings. (The one we often know as prohibiting even stepping on an ant). And the third principle was *satyagraha* a word Gandhi invented himself from: *graha*, meaning "to hold onto or cling to" and *satya*, meaning Truth. Truth for Gandhi was the highest value, what he would call God. Holding on, or clinging, was what he thought was required to serve truth. It required energy, force. Later first Gandhi and then King would call satyagraha - "soul force." Now, with the actual facts of Gandhi's life to fill it out, satyagraha has become the name attached to his whole approach to personal and social purification. To me the core of satyagraha is this: the civil pursuit of the transformation of one's enemy (one's oppressor) through respectful confrontation with his or her own conscience, seeking always to convert oppression into cooperation.

In South Africa the pinnacle of Gandhi's work was reached in 1914, when years of mass petitions, marches, personal fasts, jail stays and public negotiations led to real friendship with the British Viceroy there, General Smuts, and an agreement which abolished discriminatory taxes on Indians and recognized Hindu, Muslim and Parsi marriage rites alongside the Christian, and

At the age of 45 then, Gandhi left South Africa, forever, to accept the call for satyagraha to bring independence to India itself. It took 30 years. It began with establishing an ashram in Gujarat,

following his South African models, where he developed the discipline of hand-spinning locally grown cotton into cloth for clothing called khadi, to free his countrymen from reliance on British clothing-makers. It found its highest power in his "march to the sea" to lead his people to break the British monopoly on salt-mining by taking it from the Indian Ocean. It maintained its purity in fasts which called off actions which became violent. And it found its ultimate success again in a hard won friendship with Viceroy Irwin, which eventually led to the creation of the constitution that brought self-rule.

O God give us power to lift the people.

O God give us power because we need it.

Martin Luther King's power to lift his people, power aroused through Gandhi's experience of Zulu suffering, was first given him in Montgomery in the Bus Boycott not even a decade following Gandhi's death. What kind of power could we be given, from that suffering, now approaching 50 years later? To receive that gift, I think we must ask what made Mohandes Gandhi a *Mahatma*, a "Great Soul." Bruce Bode, a colleague in our ministry, asked and answered that question for me now many years ago this way:

"What makes Gandhi the spiritual presence he is?"

"It is not, first of all, intelligence ... though intelligence adds beauty and elegance to the spiritual life. Nor is it scholarship. ... Certainly it is not being other-worldly, ascetic, or ethereal, though the life of the spirit requires that one not be cut off from the inner life of reflection, contemplation, meditation, and prayer. It is not even righteousness that is its essence, though the upright and moral life is a fruit of the spirit. Nor finally is it creativity or an open-ended searching mind ... though certainly the spirit is creative and open.

"There are two things," Bruce concludes, "... that characterize the spirit and its essence, two things ... in the life of Gandhi:

1) not to be moved by fear

and

2) not to be moved by greed." (*What Deepens Your Spirit*. 3)

Hear now that essence in Gandhi's own words:

"They may torture and kill me, then they will have my body but not my obedience. ... Rivers of blood may have to flow before we gain our freedom, but it must be our blood. ... Joy lies in the fight, in the attempt, in the suffering involved, not in the victory itself" (Richard Attenborough. *The Words of Gandhi*)

He would not be moved by fear.

Hear these words as well:

"The golden rule ... is resolutely to refuse to have what millions cannot. ... The first thing is to cultivate the mental attitude that will not have possessions or facilities denied to millions, and the next immediate thing is to arrange our lives as fast as possible in accordance with that mentality." (Attenborough. 17)

He was not moved by fear.
He was not moved by greed.

We will receive his power only if, in these same ways, "We shall not be moved."

Gandhi had his own teachers. His second ashram in South Africa was called Tolstoy Farm in homage to what he learned from the Russian novelist about simple living and pacifism. He always acknowledged Henry David Thoreau's contributions to satyagraha from the essay Civil Disobedience. But more than from them, Gandhi learned his lessons from life long study and reflection on the most ancient of all human wisdom. His core inspiration was the Bhagavad Gita. He read it and talked about it in prayer meetings every day at his ashrams. His writings also wrestle frequently with the suttas attributed to Siddhartha. Perhaps, early in his life, he referred to the Koran and to the Bible as a political strategy, to touch his desired allies and his wary opponents by speaking in the language of their own consciences. Over his years however, Gandhi's personal religion grew to embrace these scriptures as well. "The Bible is as much a religion with me as the Gita and the Koran," he said. "I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world." (Attenborough. 74,78)

Martin Luther King, at least in one way, never fully incorporated part of the power Gandhi's life offers us. King found in satyagraha a new way to affirm the teachings of Jesus, which spoke well to his people in his time and to some of us beyond. But, in a world, as he himself said, which grows ever more interrelated, more geographically together, the voice of no one tradition can speak the truth in a way we can all hold onto, can cling to. We need to hear and to know all the ancient human voices, to see and cling to the truth in all its facets, as Gandhi did, and not be imprisoned by any one view. O God give us more power to tear down these prisons, as Gandhi began to do.

As we sang in Siddhartha's voice:

"No matter if you live now far or near ... there is not one we count outside."

In the winter of 1959, when his Montgomery victory had made him known worldwide as "the American Gandhi", Martin Luther King made a pilgrimage to India to visit the Mahatma's ashram, to see his people and walk on his paths. His reaction to what he saw there faintly echoed Mohandes' reaction to what he saw in Zululand. Though he was welcomed and feted with great enthusiasm, King later said "How can one avoid being depressed when he discovers that of India's 400 million people, more than 365 million make an annual income of less than sixty dollars a year? Most of these people have never seen a doctor or dentist. ... We in America cannot stand idly by and not be concerned. ... The destiny of the United States is tied up with the destiny of India. ... Maybe we spend too much of our national budget building military bases around the world rather than bases of genuine concern and understanding."

Next winter, probably beginning this month, I expect to make my own first pilgrimage to India, to begin the sabbatical study leave provided for at that time in our agreement for ministry. I expect to walk in the paths of Siddhartha. I hope to touch the power of Mohandes as well. I'll try to see and sense what ties us to India now, whether in pleasure or in pain, as Martin was. Sharad Seth tells me that if I go in January, as I expect to, while you are celebrating Martin's birth here, I'll be experiencing India's remembrance of Mohandes' death, as it came on January 30, 1948. Perhaps I'll buy some article of kahdi, the homespun cotton clothing sold especially cheaply then in his honor.

Let us feel our ties with India now. As we celebrate the power of Martin's dream here, let us honor the power which he found in Mohandes for his work. And let us tap it to continue down his path. Song number #169 in our songbook is the song most associated with Martin Luther King, most sung on this celebration, "We Shall Overcome". Let us sing the song which precedes it, as Mohandes Ghandi preceded him, which I think reminds how we can overcome: Song #168 "One More Step"