



This is a brief outline that people can follow up on, something quite fascinating: We know that the great civil rights leader, Martin Luther King (1929-1968), got his inspiration and ideas for non-violent resistance from Gandhi. But where did Gandhi get his ideas?

Gandhi (1869-1948) got his inspiration and ideas, not so much from Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience* (1849), as some people think, but probably more from the early influence of growing up in the city of Porbandar, Gujarat where Jainism, the central tenet of which is non-violence, has a strong influence. The Jains refuse to hold occupations which would cause injury to living beings. They are the people who when outdoors cover their faces and sweep the walkways in front them to avoid harming even insects. But if we take Gandhi at his word, he got his ideas from the Russian aristocrat, Count Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) who, along with his novels *War and Peace*, *The Brothers Karamazov* and *Anna Karenina*, wrote an incredibly influential book on passive resistance titled *The Kingdom of God is Within You* (published in 1894), which Gandhi said, "overwhelmed me." "Before the independent thinking, profound morality, and the truthfulness of this book," Gandhi wrote at age 24, "all the books given me . . . paled into insignificance" "and made me a firm believer in *ahimsa*." Also in his *Autobiography* Gandhi said that Tolstoy, along with John Ruskin and Shrimad Rajchandra (Raychandbhai), was one of the three great modern influences of his life. Gandhi even kept a picture of Tolstoy in his law office.

In 1908 Tolstoy wrote *A Letter to a Hindu*, showing how the British could be overthrown through love and passive resistance. Gandhi, living in Pretoria, South Africa at the time, translated it into Gujarati, and included it in his own newspaper, *Free Hindustan*, where

it became a guide for his non-violent tactics against the British from that time until Indian independence in 1947.

In a letter written in 1909, when Gandhi was in London, Tolstoy encouraged Gandhi to help oppressed Indians in the Transvaal, and the correspondence continued, with Gandhi writing 5 times to Tolstoy and Tolstoy writing 3 times to Gandhi. Tolstoy's last letter to Gandhi said, "Your activity is the most essential work, the most important of all the work being done in the world." This was the last letter Tolstoy wrote; he died on November 7, 1910. In *Hind Swaraj* ("Indian Home Rule") Gandhi wrote:

- "My countrymen . . . believe that they should adopt modern civilization and modern methods of violence to drive out the English. *Hind Swaraj* has been written in order to show that they are following a suicidal policy, and that, if they would but revert to their own civilization, either the English would adopt the latter and become Indianised or find their occupation in India gone."

Following up on this line of thinking, where did Tolstoy get *his* ideas and inspiration? Again not so much from Thoreau, but from Schopenhauer. In 1869 Tolstoy wrote that after reading *The World as Will and Representation* (first published in 1819) by Arthur Schopenhauer's (1788-1860) his life was totally altered. Tolstoy was, in his youth, a self-indulgent aristocrat, a gambler, drunkard and libertine, but his life turned around after he read Schopenhauer, and he embraced the simple life of meditation, compassion and simplicity of Gautama Buddha and Francis of Assisi.

And from where did Schopenhauer's get his ideas and inspiration? It was from the Buddha's "The Four Noble Truths," Hinduism's Four Purposes of Life (the *Purusharthas*) and the *Upanishads*, translated into Latin in 1804 by the French scholar of Indian culture, Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron (1731-1805). Schopenhauer was introduced to this book in 1802 and studied it thoroughly in 1814, calling it "the greatest gift of our century," and the *Upanishads* "the highest human wisdom," "the solace of my life and . . . of my death." He considered himself a Buddhist at heart, and even learned meditation from his Sanskrit scholar friend, Karl Christian Friedrich Krause. Of special regard for Schopenhauer was the *Chandogya Upanishad* and the *Mahavakya, Tat Tvam Asi* ("I am That").

And from where *else* did Tolstoy receive his ideas on non-violent protest? Unquestionably, a strong influence was the American Abolitionist and Universalist minister, Adin Ballou (1803-1890) with whom he corresponded in 1889, and whose works he admired and had translated into Russian. Adin Ballou, along with the Quakers and William Lloyd Garrison (1805-1879), founder of the American Anti-Slavery Society and a leader in women's suffrage, used the principles advocated by Jesus in the New Testament to protest against slavery. In 1841, after the murder of a fellow Abolitionist,

he founded a 258 acre intentional community west of Milford, Massachusetts known as Hopedale, and in 1850 it had about 230 members.

There must have been a collective wave, comparable to the 1960s in the USA, going through America at that time, because also in the 1840s the Transcendentalists were founding their utopian communities: George and Sophia Ripley founded Brook Farm, and Amos Bronson Alcott (1799-1888), Louisa May Alcott's father, founded Fruitlands. Also, from 1845-1849, Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) was living at Walden Pond (More on intentional communities later), but Thoreau wrote:

- "In the morning I bathe my intellect in the cosmogonical philosophy of the *Bhagavad Gita* in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial."

And Thoreau's friend, Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), whose property at the north end of the lake Thoreau camped out on, wrote:

- "I owed a magnificent day to the *Bhagavad Gita*. It was the first of books; it was as if an empire spoke to us, nothing small or unworthy, but large, serene, consistent, the voice of an old intelligence which in another age and climate had pondered and thus disposed of the same questions which exercise us."
- In all nations there are minds which incline to dwell in the conception of the fundamental Unity. This tendency finds its highest expression in the religious writings of the East, and chiefly in the Indian Scriptures, in the *Vedas*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and the *Vishnu Purana*.

One of Emerson's most popular poems is Brahma:

Brahma

If the red slayer think he slays,

Or if the slain think he is slain,

They know not well the subtle ways

I keep, and pass, and turn again.

*Far or forgot to me is near;
Shadow and sunlight are the same;
The vanished gods to me appear;
And one to me are shame and fame.*

*They reckon ill who leave me out;
When me they fly, I am the wings;
I am the doubter and the doubt,
And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.*

*The strong gods pine for my abode,
And pine in vain the sacred Seven;
But thou, meek lover of the good!
Find me, and turn thy back on heaven.*

“Brahma” was written in 1856 and was published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in November of 1857. The poem was taken from Emerson's study of the *Katha Upanishad* and the *Bhagavad-gita*. Classical philosophical writings from India, as well as the works of Plato and the Neoplatonists, were read avidly by the Transcendentalists. Upon Thoreau's death in 1862, twenty volumes of Indian spiritual texts were bequeathed to Emerson.

But back to this interesting thread of influences of Tolstoy, in 1846 Adin Ballou published his most acclaimed work, *Christian Non-Resistance*, centered around certain passages from the Bible such as “Resist ye not evil” and “turn the other cheek” (Matthew 5:39) from the Sermon on the Mount and “Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore, but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid.” (Micah 4:3-4). In 1892, Tolstoy avidly read Ballou's *Christian Non-Resistance, Non-Resistance in*

Relation to Human Government and How Many Does It Take? and had them translated into Russian.

So, if we follow this thread of influences, we can see that it comes full circle: from the protests against slavery by the Abolitionists in the United States, to Tolstoy in his struggle to free the serfs of Russia, to Gandhi's *Satyagraha* movement to bring independence to India, and then back to Martin Luther King to end segregation in the United States.

Martin Luther King wrote in his Autobiography:

- . . . one Sunday afternoon [in the spring of 1950] I traveled to Philadelphia to hear a sermon by Dr. Mordecai Johnson, president of Howard University. He was there to preach for the Fellowship House of Philadelphia. Dr. Johnson had just returned from a trip to India, and, to my great interest, he spoke of the life and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. His message was so profound and electrifying that I left the meeting and bought a half-dozen books on Gandhi's life and works. Like most people, I had heard of Gandhi, but I had never studied him seriously. As I read I became deeply fascinated by his campaigns of nonviolent resistance. I was particularly moved by his Salt March to the Sea and his numerous fasts. The whole concept of *Satyagraha* (*Satya* is truth which equals love, and *agraha* is force; *Satyagraha*, therefore, means truth force or love force) was profoundly significant to me. As I delved deeper into the philosophy of Gandhi, my skepticism concerning the power of love gradually diminished, and I came to see for the first time its potency in the area of social reform. Prior to reading Gandhi, I had about concluded that the ethics of Jesus were only effective in individual relationships. The "turn the other cheek" philosophy and the "love your enemies" philosophy were only valid, I felt, when individuals were in conflict with other individuals; when racial groups and nations were in conflict a more realistic approach seemed necessary. But after reading Gandhi, I saw how utterly mistaken I was.
-
- Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale. Love for Gandhi was a potent instrument for social and collective transformation. It was in this Gandhian emphasis on love and nonviolence that I discovered the method for social reform that I had been seeking."