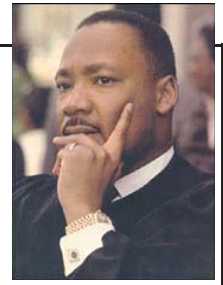


*Peace is not the absence of tension.  
It is the presence of justice. — Martin Luther King Jr*

## Satyāgraha in America



King's voice is one of the few to speak to all conditions and situations. Perhaps this arises in part from his rootedness in a *particular* American experience with a vision of *universal* order.

Who in 20th Century America exemplifies commitment to one's own faith with reverence for others better than Martin Luther King Jr?

As the photo from King's home suggests, King's ideas about non-violent civil disobedience derived in part from the Hindu Mohandas K Gandhi. King first studied Gandhi at Crozer Seminary, where he took a BD in 1951. After completing his doctorate at Boston University with a dissertation on the thought of Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman (one of my teachers and Huston Smith's father-in-law), in 1959 he went to India and talked with Gandhi's followers, including Prime Minister Nehru, "not as a tourist, but as a pilgrim."

King, whose civil rights movement leadership began in 1955 and

ended with his murder in 1968, wrote "While the Montgomery boycott was going on, India's Gandhi was the guiding light of our technique of non-violent social change."

When King was 6 years old, Gandhi said, "It may be through the Negroes that the unadulterated message of non-violence will be delivered to the world."



In tracing this history, we discover the irony that Gandhi himself claimed his *Hinduism* only after being stirred by the writings of a *Christian*, Leo Tolstoy. As Wilfred Cantwell Smith has shown, Tolstoy himself was converted to non-violence and social service by the Christian story of Barlaam and Josaphat, a retelling of an earlier

story from a *Muslim* source, which in turn received it from the *Manichees*, who had recast the story of the *Buddha*, successively called Bodisaf, Yudasaf, and Josaphat. And earlier versions suggest *Jain* or other beginnings. Thus our celebration of King's wisdom has ancient and universal origins.

Just as Gandhi matured in Hinduism by discovering Christianity, King was strengthened in Christian love by respectful study of the Hindu. King remained Christian. Gandhi remained Hindu. Conversion was unnecessary because they stretched and enlarged their own faiths. Our encounters with those of other religions may lead us to deeper powers of our own heritage, which is really an intertwined, universal story, as King's example shows us.

Here is the gist of Gandhi's *satyagraha*, "truth-force"—

- Make no distinction between process and goal. Tactics used must exhibit in the present the spiritual nature of the future goal.
- Lack of involvement betrays community.
- See the truth in one's opponent and the demonic potentials in one's own position.
- We must be as pure as we ask others to be.
- The process, the community, is not complete until wholeness is restored among all "adversaries."

For a look at a look at a more recent movement inspired in part by Dr King's efforts, we recommend the current movie *Milk*, about the San Francisco supervisor who was assassinated in 1978.

The goal is to be at peace both with others and with ourselves.



The encounters we have with those of other religions may lead us to hidden

and strong nuclear forces, so a spiritual “theory of everything” honoring the sacred in



- nature,
- selfhood, and
- society, is the search CRES hopes to provoke and excite.

Building community — with

- the environment, with
- the many “selves” in each of us, and with
- one another in community —

is a profound response to the gift of life we enjoy. The wisdom of responding to duty as an act of friendly playfulness may be a secret of unending bliss. —VB

In his famous “Letter from the Birmingham City Jail,” King outlines four steps of a non-violent campaign:

- collecting facts to determine whether injustices exist,
- negotiation,
- self-purification, and
- direct action.

The “means we use must be as pure as the ends we seek.” This is why those engaged in direct action were repeatedly asked, “Are you able to accept blows without retaliating? Are you able to endure the ordeals of jail?” and so forth.

Many injustices around us damage and degrade community — in Kansas City metro, in the nation, in the world. The “Beloved Community” King



envisioned is still to be realized. The Beloved Community is made

not by protecting ourselves at all costs from injustices around us or by blaming others for them, or by keeping silent when we are witnesses to outrage, but by helping to make them visible in such ways as to affirm our relatedness even to those who do injustice, and to pull them with ourselves into a more just world. This sometimes results in crisis, which King saw as potentially creative.

powers of our own heritage, which is really an intertwined, universal story. As King’s example shows us, an encounter with another faith can stimu-

**A SPIRITUAL PATH**

Christian M L King Jr  
 from Hindu Gandhi  
 from Christian Tolstoy  
 from Barlaam-Jesaphat  
 from Muslim source  
 from Manichees  
 from Buddhism  
 from Jain elements

late and deepen our own. If the only religion you know is your own, you really don’t know it at all. The Christian

may become a better Christian, the Jew a better Jew, the Buddhist a better Buddhist, by recognizing and embracing the differences expressed within our common humanity, sharing the planet’s fate.

King, Gandhi, and Pandurang Athavale (see *Many Paths* 2004 February) joined ●Asian and ●Monotheistic themes. *CRES works to integrate their vision with insights of ●Primal faiths.* As the physicists move toward a single comprehensive explanation that unites gravity, the electromagnetic force, and the weak



One of the most interesting applications of the Gandhi-King understanding of community is found in the work of a former writer for Jerry Falwell, Mel White, who since has acknowledged his male partner. (See <http://www.soulforce.org>.) White lists five “soul-force” vows:

- ▶ to seek the truth, to live by the truth, and to confront untruth wherever I find it,
- ▶ to reject violence,
- ▶ to take on myself without complaint any suffering that might result from my confrontation with untruth and to do all in my power to help my adversary avoid all suffering, especially that suffering that may result from our confrontation,
- ▶ to control my appetite for food, sex, intoxicants, entertainment, position, and power that my best self might be free in doing justice, and
- ▶ to limit my possessions to those things I need to survive, using them to help make things fair for all.