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978-1-107-15600-5 — The Power of Nonviolence
Richard Bartlett Gregg , Edited by James Tully
Excerpt
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*The Power of
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BY
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To
Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

Preface to the 1934 Edition

Richard Gregg

The struggle in India during 1930–33 proves that there is power in the method of non-violent resistance which Gandhi advocates and uses. If, then, this method of solving conflicts has elements of practical validity, the perils of war and class conflict make it important for us to learn whatever may help evolve peace. Is non-violence possible in the West, or not? To what extent is it practical, and why? Is it intellectually and morally respectable, or not? The subject of pacifism, in both individual and collective use, should be removed from the profitless atmosphere of emotional adjectives and vague mysticism, futile protests and sentimentalism combined with confused thinking. We need to understand non-violent resistance much more clearly and fully.

It is difficult for one trained in modern Western modes of thought and action to understand this idea or to believe that its practice can be cogent. Even Gandhi's explanations come out of a background of thought, feeling and attitude of life very different than ours. The assumptions of Indians are different, and so are their social experience, the elements of thought which are implicit but never definitely stated, their historical allusions, their analogies and figures of speech. Therefore I have felt it desirable to try to restate and explain this method in modern Western concepts and terminology. But the book is not a history of the Indian struggle for independence, or even Gandhi's part in it.

I have tried to test the idea of non-violence with the recent findings of psychology, military and political strategy, political theory, economics, physiology, biology, ethics, penology, and education. Yet I have tried to

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be simple, to avoid technical jargon, and to keep the treatment fresh. I have tried to meet all the critics of the idea fairly on their own ground. Because the subject is controversial, and in order to aid any who might doubt or disagree with my conclusions, I have cited my main sources and authorities in notes at the end of the book.

I have, however, not limited the explanation merely to Gandhi's own concepts or to India, but have tried to explain and evaluate the principle in its application in any country, at any time, under any circumstances and for any cause. I have attempted to show why persuasion of this sort is more powerful and more permanently advantageous than physical coercion. Some sensitive people will see many moral beauties involved in non-violent resistance. Although the moral beauty of the method is an important and enduring factor in its power, there is not the room to discuss it in this book, and, anyhow, I do not feel competent for that. Considerations of that element must be sought elsewhere. This book attempts only to be a rational discussion of the other and less subtle elements of the validity and power of the method.

If we want a better world, we must be prepared to do some careful thinking. It is time we stopped being sketchy on a matter which really touches us all so closely. For in reality this matter of handling conflict constructively is of immediate interest to everyone who has ever been angry or afraid; resentful, revengeful or bitter; who has ever taken part in a fight, mob-violence or war; or who has ever been the object of anger, hatred, exploitation or oppression. It touches all who are troubled lest the great economic, political and social questions which are pressing upon all nations will issue in appalling violence and increased insecurity for everyone. It is also important to those who hope that somehow the ideals and conduct of mankind can be harmonized, and the ideals made practical.

My qualifications for writing this book are experiences of conflict involved in three years of industrial relations work, — investigation, conciliation, arbitration, publicity and statistical work for trade unions, — followed by a stay in India of nearly four years beginning with 1925, another six-week's visit to India in March and April, 1930, a careful study while there of Gandhi's movement and all his writings, so far as I could find them, and a study of much of the other literature of the entire subject of conflict and peace.

To all the profound, clear and sensitive minds with which I have come in contact, in India and in other countries, in the past and the

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present, I owe a great obligation. To Gandhi especially I am grateful. For criticism and help I desire to thank especially my wife, C. F. Andrews, W. Norman Brown, Caroline F. Tupper, Blanche Watson, John Nevin Sayre, and my sister Marjorie T. Gregg. I want also to thank all the authors and publishers who have kindly permitted me to quote from their books and articles. In each such case I have mentioned the author, publisher, and book or article at the appropriate place.

Richard B. Gregg

Foreword to *A Discipline for Non-Violence* 1941

Mohandas Gandhi

A Discipline for Non-violence is a pamphlet written by Mr. Richard B. Gregg for the guidance of those Westerners who endeavour to follow the law of satyagraha. I use the word advisedly instead of “pacifism.” For what passes under the name of pacifism is not the same as satyagraha. Mr. Gregg is a most diligent and methodical worker. He [has] had first-hand knowledge of satyagraha, having lived in India and that too for nearly a year in the Sabarmati Ashram. His pamphlet is seasonable and cannot fail to help the satyagrahis of India. For though the pamphlet is written in a manner attractive for the West, the substance is the same for both the Western and the Eastern satyagrahi. A cheap edition of the pamphlet is therefore being printed locally for the benefit of Indian readers in the hope that many will make use of it and profit by it. A special responsibility rests upon the shoulders of Indian satyagrahis, for Mr. Gregg has based the pamphlet on his observation of the working of satyagraha in India. However admirable this guide of Mr. Gregg’s may appear as a well-arranged code, it must fail in its purpose if the Indian experiment fails.

M. K. Gandhi
Sevagram, India
August 24, 1941

Foreword to the 1944 Edition

Rufus Matthew Jones

Here is a new kind of book. The title might give the impression that this is another book by a dreamer of dreams, that once more the idealist has projected his iridescent rainbow, which will always be up in the sky and never touch the earth at any point.

But the reader will soon discover that this book is not just another dream, or one more rainbow vision. There is as much realism in this book as there is idealism. It is a fine blend of *what is* and *what ought to be*. In any case, for this writer, *what ought to be* springs out of, and has its ground and basis in, *what is*. We are not invited to watch mental “projections” shot up like rockets. We are rather called upon to follow a careful dialectic process which shows an effective method of life demonstrating itself, proving its genuine worth and verifying itself in practice.

Nobody can read Chapter 2 of this book – “Moral Jiu-Jitsu” – or Chapter 3 – “What Happens” – without being convinced that he is not being rushed into a vague subjective idealism. These two chapters, to single out only two, gave me a compelling sense, as I read them in manuscript, that there was a clear thinking mind behind the pen that wrote them and that the book must go forth to print to do its work of leadership in the world. I rejoice to see it on its way, and I predict for it a far-reaching appreciative welcome.

Let me give one or two “exhibits” of the practical wisdom of the book: “As a method of solving conflict, non-violent resistance is sounder than reciprocal violence because it is more efficient. The first reason for this is

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partly psychological. Anger, hatred, and fear make an enormous drain upon our energy.”

“The peaceful resister has to expend much energy, but he applies it more intelligently than does the violent man. He selects the really important forces in the environment and seeks to alter them. The angry and violent man puts too much emphasis on immediate objects and too little on the ultimate impelling forces behind them. If he considers impelling forces, he does not analyze them sufficiently or go far enough back. He has to waste much energy because, as it were, he uses too short levers in attempting to move or divert opposing objects or forces. The non-violent resister, by using longer psychological levers, may have to work more slowly sometimes, but the work is more efficiently done and tends to be more permanent.”

“Peace imposed by violence is not psychological peace but a suppressed conflict. It is unstable for it contains the seeds of its own destruction. The outer condition is not a true reflection of the inner condition. But in peace secured by true non-violent resistance there is no longer any conflict but a new channel found in which both the formerly conflicting enemies are at work in the same direction and in harmony. Here the outer condition reflects the inner conditions. This is perhaps one reason why Gandhi calls this mode of solving conflicts ‘Satyagraha’ – holding to truth. Such a peace is enduring.”

There are only a few vivid snapshots out of the compact wisdom of the book. The author has drawn upon almost every department of life to illustrate his thesis. In one chapter he is a historian, in another he is a psychologist, in another he takes us into the techniques of the law-court, in another he shows the statesman confronted with problems of international life. He is as much at home in one field as in another.

We expected him to draw upon the New Testament, especially upon the Sermon at the Mount, for texts on non-violence. And so he does. But the reader will soon discover that this is only one of the author’s many effective religious documents. He draws upon the literary sources of all the great religions of the world. This book has something to say to Hindus and Mohammedans and Buddhists and Jews as well as to Christians. He reinforces his argument from Tolstoi to St. Francis, from George Fox and Gandhi, but we are never left with sentiment and enthusiasm. The argument is buttressed with the insight and wisdom of the men of the world’s affairs and with the judgment of leading

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economists and sociologists as well as with the insights and inspiration of prophets and seers.

There is a remarkable story about Moses in ancient Hebrew legends. It tells how when Moses was going up the mountain to his death on Pisgah he asked Jehovah why it was not possible for him to be allowed to enter the Promised Land which he could see stretching out before his dying eyes. “You doubted me,” Jehovah said to him, “but I forgave you that doubt.” “You doubted your own self and failed to believe in your own powers as a leader, and I forgave you that also. But you lost faith in this people and doubted the divine possibilities of human nature. *That* I cannot forgive. That loss of faith makes it impossible for you to enter the Land of Promise.”

It is only a legend, but it suggests a profound truth. It is only those who believe in man and have faith and hope in the new and better world which man in cooperation with God can build here on earth that help to lead us towards the lands of promise. The author of this book has this deep-seated faith and he has effectively interpreted it.

Rufus M. Jones
Haverford, Penna.

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Richard Gregg

There is a political maxim, almost an axiom, that you cannot permanently govern large numbers of people merely by violence or by deceit or both. Despite the events of the last decade, this maxim stands. Part of the converse of the maxim is a proposition whose truth is much less generally recognized, namely that in non-violence and truth there is power.

The struggle in India during 1930–33 and the subsequent and continuing impasse of the British Government in India prove that the method of non-violent resistance which Gandhi advocates and uses is potent. If, then, this method of dealing with conflicts has elements of practical validity, the vastly increasing perils of war and class conflict make it important for us to learn whatever may help to evolve peace.

Is non-violent resistance intellectually and morally respectable or not? If anywhere it is at all practical, to what extent, and why? Is it applicable in the West, or not? The subject of pacifism, in both individual and collective use, should be removed from the profitless atmosphere of emotional adjectives and of vague mysticism, futile protests and sentimentalism combined with confused thinking. Both the advocates and opponents of non-violent resistance need to understand it much more clearly and fully.

It is difficult for one trained in modern Western modes of thought to understand this idea or to believe that its practice can be cogent. Even Gandhi's explanations of it fail to carry weight with most of us. His explanations come out of a background of thought, feeling, and attitude to life very different from ours. The assumptions of Indians are different,