

REMARKS

THE HONORABLE HUBERT H. HUMPHREY

GANDHI'S LIVING LEGACY

WASHINGTON, D. C.

NOVEMBER 18, 1969

I think both Mahatma Gandhi and Dag Hammarskjold would be pleased by this institution and this occasion.

They would be pleased because this conference is no empty intellectual exercise, but a tough practical examination of the Gandhian legacy and its activist application to the most difficult problems we face today -- external war and internal insurrection; personal, communal and societal violence; urban disruption and minority alienation.

It is altogether appropriate that a college based on the concept that the world is a global village should serve as sponsor for this Centennial symposium examining Gandhi's relevance in the contemporary world.

It is equally appropriate that a college seeking to perpetuate the memory of Dag Hammarskjold should begin its first century as the first century of Mahatma Gandhi draws to a close.

The associations are easy to trace. There is a clear philosophic succession from the man who brought the concept of non-violence into the political arena to the man who sought to institutionalize non-violence among nations.

Both men devoted heart and mind to goals still paramount on the human agenda.

Both men were martyred in pursuit of that goal.

Dag Hammarskjold College -- with its international flavor and direction, and its pervasive cross-cultural emphasis -- seeks to emphasize the community of man.

Gandhi, in his crusade for human brotherhood, sought always the highest common denominator among men.

There are as many interpretations of the Gandhian legacy as there are interpreters -- each of us likes to think that we know our Gandhi best.

Who after all are the true followers of Gandhi today? The small minority of youngsters who speak the language of non-violence -- and provoke violent confrontation in the name of peace? Or their peers who seek to reinforce and strengthen the United Nations?

Who reads Gandhi correctly? Those who honor him as a religious leader -- or those who choose the spinning wheel and remember him as an economic theorist and developer?

Who is correct? Those who fault your or my interpretation of Gandhi -- or those who recognize that great men, truly timeless men, offer a multiplicity of interpretation, and yours and mine -- even in conflict -- may both shed light on a life of more than ordinary richness and complexity.

Because I am a politician, I am going to concentrate for a few moments on that part of the Gandhian legacy which is political in impact.

But I want to emphasize that this approach to Gandhi -- a political approach -- is by no means intended to denigrate the importance of Gandhi as a theologian and philosopher.

Nor do I mean to isolate any part of a life remarkable for its unity. Dag Hammarskjold once said:

"We cannot mold the world as masters of a material thing, but we can influence the development of the world from within as a spiritual thing."

If he was not speaking of Gandhi, he should have been.

For no national leader in the world's long history has had so pervasive an influence result from personal conviction.

For Gandhi, conviction meant commitment and commitment led inescapably to action. There was no tear in the cohesive fabric of his life. Morality and politics were inextricably intertwined. He allowed no distinction between his internal and his external life.

Gandhi never sought power save in pursuit of purpose. Though he was the acknowledged leader of the world's most populous democracy, Gandhi never held political office. He never held party office.

As a politician, I find this a matter to remark. Lacking formal title, without official position, Gandhi wrought change unequalled by any political leader mandated by popular franchise.

Through precept and example, Gandhi -- barefoot and clad in loincloth -- led his poor people to victory in peaceful battle with a great and wealthy imperialist nation.

How?

Would non-violence have worked such a political miracle in another time -- another place?

We don't know -- and the answer is immaterial. The Gandhian lesson is not to be found in his victory against the British Empire, but rather in the victory of spirit that results from acting on principle -- and in using this spirit to develop real political leverage.

Without for a moment denigrating Gandhi's motives, I would like to emphasize his skill as a political tactician. Gandhi knew -- as did Martin Luther King after him -- that passive resistance and non-violence are powerful political weapons.

Weapons of particular potency, whether battling tyrants like Bull Connor or enlightened leaders like Clement Atlee.

Nor is non-violence a tool for the weak. It took guts, strength and enormous self-discipline not to strike back in Birmingham -- and it took intelligent leadership to see the potential political leverage in such a course.

*subject*  
 The quarter of a million citizens who marched to Washington in peaceful protest in September, 1963, knew it too -- and the power of their passive demand, in combination with non-violence under the fire hoses in Birmingham -- is written into the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Would Martin Luther King's approach have been a success without the Gandhian precedent?

Again, we don't know.

Does the appeal lie in the message, or in the man?

Again, we don't know.

But I would like to suggest that we divest ourselves for a moment of today's knowledge of Gandhi's achievements, and make the difficult attempt to recall the pull of his spirit -- before recognition and preliminary to his great victory.

What made so many of his people respond to Gandhi?

It is easy, with contemporary hindsight, to recognize his inherent greatness. It was no such recognition that drew his followers so many years ago. They responded to the magnetism of a great leader, a man who commanded the spirit.

In today's increasingly strife-ridden world, as we struggle to extricate ourselves from a particularly painful conflict, we must view his achievements with awe and wonder.

How does a single soul so impress his personality and conviction upon a nation -- and thus change the course of world events?

It remains a mystery of the human spirit comparable only -- as so many have said -- to the mystery of the man from Nazareth.

Gandhi did not start -- nor did he end -- with Indian independence as a primary goal. A man passionately involved with humanity, his basic concern was for the brotherhood of man.

Human dignity, the eradication of racial, religious and caste discrimination -- these concerns antedated and post-dated Gandhi's devotion to Indian independence.

Well over half a century ago, Gandhi was organizing religious minorities to resist -- passively -- the severe discriminatory laws being enacted against them.

When Gandhi left Africa to return to India, he became involved in all aspects of the sub-continent's affairs -- but nothing took precedence over his concern for the plight of the untouchables and the growing bitterness between the Hindus and the Muslims.

For Gandhi, the partition of India along religious lines was bleak tragedy, and independence did not diminish his concern. In free, partitioned India, he struggled to establish a conciliatory policy toward Pakistan and worked for the well-being of the Muslim minority.

Gandhi's crusade for human brotherhood is written into the Indian constitution -- but Gandhi would have preferred that it be alive in the heart of man.

There is little doubt that he was the spiritual father of the whole extraordinary group of secular leaders who gave the new Indian nation its unique humanist aspect -- a quality rarely found in an emerging young nation. We can see it in India's strivings for social justice, and in her responsible international efforts in quest of peace.

Such participation in the community of nations is crucial to the achievement of world order.

Any nation-state -- new or old -- should have as its legitimate objectives:

- .national security
- .national independence
- . national development

But all three are impossible of achievement if a nation puts individual national goals ahead of the cooperative concerns of the world community.

--Real national security comes only through international peace

--Real national independence comes only through active recognition of the inter-dependence of nations

--True national development will come only when minimal trade barriers allow a free flow of the world's resources

Many emerging nations are denied recognition because they lack awareness of the interdependence of the world community, because they persist in selfish policies -- economic and political.

These young nations may be likened to many of today's young people, those who are engaged in a desperate search for identity -- an identity they will one day realize can only be found as part of the community.

In like fashion, the young nations must join us in the world's community before finding true national identity.

This is Gandhi's lesson in international politics.

Domestically, within the United States, we are his beneficiaries not only through Dr. Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights movement, but through such domestic disciples as Roger Baldwin and the American Civil Liberties Union, through Bayard Rustin and his host of militant moderates, and through Caesar Chavez, seeking to apply the Gandhian precepts on behalf of the poorest of our people.

Indian freedom was inevitable. History might have led us to think that carnage and destruction would be the inevitable consequence of the battle for freedom.

But Gandhi wrote a new text for historians. Because he refused to hate, because he refused to kill, the British walked out of India with cheers -- instead of curses -- ringing in their ears.

A long, bitter, exploitive colonial relationship became a cordial, mutually advantageous friendship between two independent nations.

The lesson of this extraordinary turn of events was not lost on the other imperialist nations, nor on other colonial leaders struggling to rid themselves of foreign domination.

India -- through Gandhi -- made it clear that a civilized accommodation to the nationalist surge was indeed possible in our contentious, not-always-civilized world.

It was clear too that non-violence can be militant; that pacificism can be a position of strength offering impressive political leverage.

We all have a great deal to learn from Gandhi -- not only those who resort to violence and terror in their despair, but also the policy makers who ask for more and more weapons in a world that already has too many; not only those who use force in the name of peace, but also those who call for repression and ignore the sources of discontent.

All of us who believe that change can occur without violence are in a sense his disciples. In a world increasingly threatened by violence -- a world in which wars and personal confrontations tend to be increasingly explosive and contagious -- the concept of non-violence is ever more important.

Man's history is littered with the bodies of those who have gone to war. Gandhi led the first legions in the passive -- and victorious -- battle for peace.

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