

Gandhi's Lessons ...

Al-Musawwar, 6 February 1948.

1 How many lessons have been cast upon humanity! And how often the pessimists think ill of what results these lessons have had! For they see evil as immense, sin as dominant, and oppression as extending its authority over the lives of individuals and communities, and so they hasten to pessimism, and go to excess in their ill opinion, and fill the world with weeping and wailing and lamentation for this wretched, despairing humanity, which memory does not profit, which admonition does not reform, whose conscience lessons do not purify — which instead receives the prophethood of prophets, the wisdom of the wise, and the guidance of guides, and then proceeds on its way toward evil as though it had received nothing at all!

2 Read whatever you wish of the pessimists' literature and philosophy, and you will darken your own soul with what you read, and you will come to see that the world is nothing but an environment hostile to evil, sin, oppression, and aggression ... and read whatever you wish of the optimists' literature and philosophy, and you will see that nothing could be more wondrous than what already is, and that the evil which besets people in their public life, or in their private life, is nothing but a passing accident — if it weighs heavily now, it may well lighten tomorrow — and that life is bound to lead mankind, on some day near or far, to a land filled with justice after injustice had filled it, and in which good shall prevail after evil had dominated it!

3 Look around you, and you will see much evil: you see it within yourself, between yourself and your own soul, when you struggle against your instincts, and when you strive after your own interests, and when you think of pure good only rarely; and you see it between yourself and your fellows, in the competition over interests, the race after ambitions, and the committing of grave transgressions to secure trivial hopes ... and you see it between yourself and authority, in injustice, oppression, and tyranny, and in scheming to flout the laws and to outwit men of state, and in attempting to slip free of order ... and you see it between peoples and states, when one plots against another, schemes against another, and prepares for another the causes of war, exerting in it all the ingenuity it can muster!

4 You see all of this, and so you are affected by the pessimists' pessimism, and you mock the optimists' optimism, and you ask of human life: what is its worth? What is its wisdom? What is its purpose? And you stand bewildered, troubled, awaiting the answer to this question without ever attaining it or arriving at it!

5 A friend once spoke to me by telephone, and I asked him how he was, as people do when they resume a conversation, and he answered me: "My state is the state of one in despair, who sees how an idea can be killed in a brief moment! Have you learned of Gandhi's assassination?!" And I answered him that ideas cannot be killed, my good sir — say rather that Gandhi has been killed, but Gandhi's wisdom, his lesson, his philosophy, and his influence cannot be killed, and death cannot reach them.

6 Gandhi was seventy-eight years of age, and it was possible that death might have carried him off before this age, and it was possible that death might have carried him off in some sudden shock; his physicians, and he himself, had claimed that he might well have lived past a hundred, by some years short or long, but fate takes no counsel and holds no consultation — it simply descends when it wills, and when destiny wills it to descend; and so an assailant assailed Gandhi and killed him, and all his countrymen grieved for him, and many who were not his countrymen grieved for him too ... those grieved for him who know the worth of purity of soul, and beauty of spirit, and unbroken aspiration toward the loftiest ideals, and unbroken summons to pure good; for he was, of all this, the truest image known to modern history.

7 And the most eloquent grief for Gandhi, or the most eloquent tribute to him, is that humanity should profit from the valuable lesson he cast, and the far-reaching admonition he spread abroad ... and humanity does profit from this admonition and this lesson, beyond doubt, whether it wishes to or not, and whether the pessimists despair or the optimists hope; for it is the very mark of wisdom that it is immortal, never dying, that it strikes true wherever it reaches, and bears fruit wherever it settles, and it is the very mark of an idea that it conquers and is not conquered, and that its authority grows and expands without diminishment, without dwindling, without withering.

8 And the most eloquent lesson Gandhi cast upon present and future humanity is this pure, confident, deep faith in freedom, which no oppression can conquer, no tyranny can diminish, no force can reduce,

however great that oppression, tyranny, and force may be! The freedom that stood firm against the whole of the British Empire, so that the whole of the British Empire could not attain anything of it! The freedom that stood firm for hundreds of millions of the people of India, so that hundreds of millions could not attain anything of it! The freedom that stood firm for the whole of nature, so that the whole of nature, in the spiritual field, could not attain anything of it! The freedom that said to the British Empire: you shall not turn me from what I want, and the British Empire could not turn it from what it wanted ... and that said to the millions of India: you shall not turn me from the path I walk, and the millions of India could not turn it from the path it walked ... and that said to the whole of nature, with all its health and sickness, its strength and weakness, its life and death, its contentment and displeasure, its concord and discord, its enticement and intimidation, its torment and bliss: you shall not be able to divert me from the course I pursue, and the goal toward which I strive — and the whole of nature could not divert it from its course or its goal.

9 And another lesson Gandhi cast, no less eloquent nor less far-reaching than this one, is his faith in the human conscience, and in the fact that this conscience is shared among all people, and that because of this it can call out to itself and respond to itself, and one part of it can reach another, and receive from another, and be affected by another ... for he did not believe only in his own freedom, but believed in the freedom of all people, and spent his life waging his peaceful, gentle, tranquil struggle so that people might feel their own freedom, and so that trust in it, faith in it, and reliance upon it might spread among them ... for he saw all people as having been created free, just as he himself had been created free, save that he had become conscious of his own freedom, and had believed in it, and had trusted in it; so other people, too, must become conscious of it as he became conscious, and must grant it the same trust and faith he granted it.

10 And another lesson, no less eloquent nor less far-reaching than these two, is his faith that the human conscience calls out through love and not through hatred, through security and not through fear, through peace and not through war, through brotherhood and not through enmity ... for he did not make people see their own freedom through the path of harshness, or violence, or compulsion, but rather made people feel his love for them, his kindness toward them, and his hope in them, wishing that all of this might find an echo in their consciences that would return

to his own conscience, so that concord might come to be, and affection might come to be, and brotherhood might come to be, and cooperation toward the good might come to be, and victory over evil, however its forms and appearances might differ, might come to be.

11 Gandhi was, then, the truest image known to modern history of man's love for man, man's trust in man, and an optimism arising not from heedlessness, or weakness, or vanity, but arising rather from knowledge, strength, and sound judgment ... and if people take these lessons to heart — and many of them will take them to heart — then Gandhi has been granted that same immortality granted to prophets and the wise, an immortality that profits mankind and raises them toward the good.