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# Gandhi and the Virtue of Forgiveness

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## ABSTRACT

*Satyagraha and ahimsa are widely acknowledged as central to Gandhi's life-work. Our argument in this paper is that forgiveness (ksama in Sanskrit) was another of Gandhi's core values. The first section of the paper introduces ways in which forgiveness has been understood as a concept and practice within Western traditions. We demonstrate that forgiveness lies close to the heart of Christianity, and show that it is also an issue relevant to contemporary concerns: since the 1990s, forgiveness has featured in numerous secular studies, exhibitions, websites, and other media. The second section identifies how the key precepts that informed Gandhi's vision of the transformatory significance of forgiveness were derived from and grounded in the spiritual and philosophical traditions of South Asia, Hinduism and especially Jainism. Our final section more specifically explores the implications of forgiveness in Gandhi's thought and practice. Forgiveness is an important component of Gandhi's dual concerns: the 'spiritualisation of politics', and also the 'politicisation of spirituality'.*

## Introduction

SATYAGRAHA AND AHIMSA are widely acknowledged as central to Gandhi's life-work. Our argument in this paper is that forgiveness (*ksama* in Sanskrit) was also one of Gandhi's core values, and one that has been overlooked in most scholarship. In this paper we explore the significance ascribed to forgiveness in South Asian religions, and identify the manner in which South Asian perspectives on forgiveness shed light on Gandhi's conceptualization of personal and political transformation. However, although Gandhi considered himself a

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Hindu, he was certainly richly eclectic in the sources of his religious and philosophical convictions. Theosophy, Tolstoy and Ruskin, esoteric Christianity, and Indian nationalism were all important formative influences. We therefore contextualise our discussion of forgiveness within Western as well as South Asian traditions of thought and practice.

Forgiveness lies close to the heart of Christianity: the injunction to forgive others, and the promise of receiving forgiveness from God for one's own sins, are central tenets for most Christians. Indeed, prior to the late 1980s, discussion of forgiveness in the West was for the most part confined to Christian communities, seldom reaching mainstream publications in other areas. However, since the 1990s, scholars from different disciplines have written dozens of books and journal articles on forgiveness, a topic which has also featured in numerous popular essays, exhibitions, websites, and other media. The first section of our paper introduces ways in which forgiveness has been understood as a concept and practice within Western traditions. We aim to show how forgiveness has emerged from Christian traditions in the West to become an important topic in psychology, philosophy, and even politics. Despite this new interest in the West, relatively little analysis of forgiveness in other faiths has appeared. The second section of this paper identifies the manner in which the key precepts that informed Gandhi's vision of the transformatory significance of forgiveness were derived from and grounded in the spiritual and philosophical traditions of South Asia, Hinduism and especially Jainism. Our final section more specifically explores the implications of forgiveness in Gandhi's thought and practice.

To anticipate some of our later observations, we follow most scholars in agreeing that Gandhi was profoundly influenced by both Jain and Hindu doctrines. It is striking that the concept of forgiveness is an intrinsic aspect of *ahimsa* (nonviolence) and *satya* (truthfulness) in both religious traditions. In Jainism, liberation is attained through the three jewels of right faith, right knowledge, and right conduct. The latter is taught and practised through the medium of ten 'cardinal virtues', of which the most prominent is forgiveness.<sup>1</sup> We also show that the term forgiveness appears in an important position in Gandhi's beloved *Bhagavad Gita* (16.3). This is an important reference, because it is cited together with other 'divine qualities' (*daivim sampadam*) – for example charity, non-violence and compassion – to which a spiritually-minded person should aspire.

Our study of Gandhi's statements on forgiveness has not revealed any particular evolution over the period of his life, although we

recognize that in other respects he sometimes modified his views in response to changing events. Neither do we map his statements against particular incidents which he experienced; we rather produce a synthesis of his views, illuminating their philosophical and religious roots. We hope the paper proposes a new dimension in the study of Gandhi's work: namely that forgiveness is an inalienable component of his way of life that also embraced *ahimsa* and *satyagraha*, practices that cannot be understood without an appreciation of *ksama*.

The next step in an evaluation of the importance of forgiveness to Gandhi – and indeed the important contribution made by Gandhi to our understanding of forgiveness – would certainly be an analysis of incidents in his personal biography or in national events in which he participated. Unfortunately such an undertaking is beyond the scope of this paper; but interested readers may consult the standard biographical sources to investigate further.<sup>2</sup>

### **Transformative Forgiveness: The Western Tradition**

Forgiveness is a noun, which takes its meaning from the verb *to forgive*. There are a range of definitions of forgiveness, but at the core of most of them there is recognition that it involves the relinquishment by someone of feelings of hatred and the corresponding urge for revenge against those who are believed to have caused suffering of some kind. As such, forgiveness can have a transformative impact on relationships. Indeed, as Hannah Arendt argued in *The Human Condition*, without forgiveness there could be no new beginnings in human relationships - we would all remain trapped by the pains inflicted and suffered in the course of our social lives. In her words, "forgiving serves to undo the deeds of the past, whose 'sins' hang like Damocles' sword over every new generation".<sup>3</sup> As such, forgiveness can be viewed as a creative process that can leave people in a position to move forward into the future together, and consequently it is one of the most powerful sources of nonviolent change. As Beverley Flanigen has observed, "Forgiveness is the ultimate liberator."<sup>4</sup>

In the West, forgiveness is often associated with the phrase 'forgive and forget'.<sup>5</sup> However, whilst forgiveness certainly involves what we might call 'memory work', it does not necessarily entail 'forgetting', neither does it involve excusing evil. According to Desmond Tutu, "Forgiveness does not mean condoning what has been done. It means taking what has happened seriously and not minimising it; drawing the sting in the memory that threatens to poison our entire existence."<sup>6</sup> In similar vein Michael Lapsley has depicted the challenge addressed by different forms of forgiveness work: "How to take the poison out

of the past, how to detoxify the past.”<sup>7</sup> One way in which this can be achieved is through the capacity to distinguish between the evil acts and those people responsible for them. To the extent that people can make such a distinction, then the possibility of letting go of the hatred of the other and the desire for revenge that is at the heart of interpersonal forgiveness is heightened. As Govier has observed, “To forgive a person or a group means to overcome the bitterness, resentment and hatred we feel, due to wrongs committed, and to move towards a more accepting construction, distinguishing acts from agents, and leading eventually to reconciliation.”<sup>8</sup>

From this perspective forgiveness involves what we might call the reframing of the past. The ‘victim’ is liberated from the over-determining negative influences of the past by a preparedness to distinguish between the wrong committed and the person responsible for that wrong.<sup>9</sup> This process is facilitated to the extent that the perpetrator attempts to distance him- or herself from the ‘old self’ that was responsible for the pain and suffering.

There appears to be a number of ways by means of which a perpetrator can distinguish his or her current self from the act (and the actor/person) that caused the original suffering.

*1. Apology, confession and request for forgiveness.*

The request for forgiveness from a wrong-doer and an apology for the wrong committed eases the path towards forgiveness insofar as it indicates that the perpetrator is aware of the offence caused and is expressing a desire to reach towards a new relationship with the victim. To the extent that perpetrators are prepared to acknowledge their guilt, then they are clearly establishing a distance between their present ‘self’ and the historical self that committed the wrong.

*2. Expressions of repentance and the promise not to repeat the wrong.*

The acknowledgement of shame regarding the wrongs committed and the promise that they will not be repeated represent one more layer in the affirmation of the perpetrators’ commitment to ‘change their ways’, distancing themselves even further from their old selves and reassuring the victim about their future relationships.

*3. Offers to make amends - reparations*

The willingness of perpetrators to ‘pay the price’ and face the consequences of past deeds, either by preparedness to suffer and/or willingness to make reparations, can symbolise in a very clear and unambiguous fashion their distance from the old self that committed the original wrongs, and reassure the victim that they will not be

repeated. Furthermore, such offers and 'distancing activities' on the part of the perpetrator provide evidence that perpetrator and victim now share the same moral world, share the same normative standards regarding proper behaviour.

Of course some people can bring themselves to forgive those they feel have caused them unjustified harm without any act of repentance or apology from the perpetrator. Indeed forgiveness, as an 'inner act', can be directed towards those who are no longer alive - many people for various reasons come to forgive those from their past who have damaged them in some way.<sup>10</sup>

To forgive or not to forgive is a matter of choice, and our discussion so far has focused on people making such a choice on the basis of their own interests (getting 'the monkey off their backs' is one way of depicting this process) rather than for any concern for the well-being of the other. We have also concentrated on what we might call the factors that facilitate 'conditional forgiveness'. However, some people are more pre-disposed to forgive for what we might call 'other-directed' reasons and are prepared to practise what we might term 'unconditional forgiveness'. This is particularly so if they are adherents of a moral code, philosophy or faith tradition that valorises forgiveness such as Christianity. Indeed, for many people, forgiveness is associated with Christianity - Christians are the ones who *ought* to forgive. One illustration that comes to mind is that of a South African, Dawie Ackerman, whose wife had been killed in an attack on a church in a Cape Town suburb in 1993. Whilst seeking amnesty under the terms of the South African truth and reconciliation process, one of the attackers apologised for his actions. Dawie Ackerman responded, "I want you to know that I forgive you unconditionally. I do that because I am a Christian, and I can forgive you for the hurt you have caused me, but I cannot forgive you the sin that you have done. Only God can forgive you for that."<sup>11</sup>

Christians are enjoined to love their enemies and forgive those that sin against them; just as God forgives so should humans. Within Judaism, however, forgiveness in the sense of releasing someone from indebtedness (*mechila*) is conditional upon a display of repentance (*teshuva*), which must be sincere and accompanied by steps to correct the wrong done. From this perspective, to offer forgiveness without sincere repentance serves to perpetuate the evil. At the same time, there is within this tradition the belief that people have a right to forgiveness once they have repented authentically. It is as if forgiveness is offered as a sort of *quid pro quo* for the moral transformation of the perpetrator. This conditional approach to forgiveness is one not confined to Judaism - the Christian theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer

dismissed the 'cheap grace' entailed in "the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance".<sup>12</sup>

One of the most interesting discussions of the moral issues raised by forgiveness in relation to evil is contained in Simon Weisenthal's book, *The Sunflower*.<sup>13</sup> In the first section of the book Weisenthal recounts his experience when, as a young Jew in a forced labour camp during the Second World War, he was summoned to the bedside of a German SS officer dying from wounds received in battle. The young Nazi wanted a Jew to hear his confession and forgive him for the terrible crimes he had committed. He had participated in the slaughter of Jews, including the murder of women and children who were burned to death as they took shelter. His was a tortured soul. He knew he had done wrong and he regretted it bitterly. He sought forgiveness before he died, so that he could face death and God. Weisenthal tells how he walked away from the dying man's bedside without granting him the release that would have come from forgiveness. His reasons for doing so were twofold:

1. Only those who have been the victims can extend forgiveness. You cannot forgive on behalf of others.
2. As the SS officer had been responsible for murder, the victims were not alive and were therefore not in a position to extend forgiveness. There can be no forgiveness for murder.

The second half of the book consists of commentaries by moral philosophers and theologians from different faith traditions. Within the third main monotheistic tradition, Islam, God is both compassionate and merciful to those who repent. However, as in the Jewish tradition, a death-bed repentance after a life of sin is considered inauthentic and forgiveness is not offered. With reference to humans, it is considered morally acceptable to inflict appropriate punishment on those who have caused harm. But those who can exercise 'courageous will' and forgive offenders are held in special regard. Thus we can read in *The Qur'an* (42: 40):

The recompense for an injury is an injury equal thereto (in degree): but if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from Allah: for Allah loveth not those who do wrong.<sup>14</sup>

The power of forgiveness can be three-fold: it can liberate victims from their burden of 'victimhood', it can grant some relief to those perpetrators who feel guilt for their actions,<sup>15</sup> and it can thereby help to heal broken relationships.<sup>16</sup> This transformative power is manifested with most clarity at the inter-personal level. Analysts within



the Western academic tradition have been less clear about the significance of forgiveness in nurturing positive relationships at the inter-communal and inter-societal levels.

### **Group Forgiveness**

Individuals can forgive groups, corporate entities and institutions that have caused them injury. Moreover, in certain cultures the distinction between the individual and the wider collectivity of family, clan and tribe is blurred. In such societies it is the group that carries responsibility for the actions of each of its members. This form of collective responsibility (and identity) is the basis of the feud as an institution. In such situations it is easy to see how interpersonal processes of forgiveness arrived at by due process and ritual, as embodied in the Arab custom of *sulha*, can have a very direct and significant impact on inter-group relations.

In societies where there is a greater emphasis on the individual, groups can still be the subjects and objects of forgiveness, according to Govier. She claims that "Groups can act. Groups can be harmed... groups can have beliefs, attitudes and feelings".<sup>17</sup> Be that as it may, it is important to emphasise here that the phenomenon of 'inter-group forgiveness' cannot be separated from individual processes. Thus, when individual members can relinquish their own feelings of bitterness towards former enemies, when they are capable of feeling remorse for their own past actions, and especially if these are embodied in gestures and actions, then they can act as exemplars to their contemporaries, thereby contributing towards a change in inter-communal and inter-societal relations. This is particularly so when such individuals occupy public positions which enable them to claim with some legitimacy that they represent a particular community or broader entity, then they can act as significant agents in promoting reconciliation between such collectivities. As Michael Ignatieff has remarked, "Leaders give their societies permission to say the unsayable, to think the unthinkable, to rise to gestures of reconciliation that people, individually, cannot imagine."<sup>18</sup> Such 'prophetic acts of witness', which can also be represented in public memorials and other symbolic spaces, have the power to touch people in such a manner that they feel more willing to become reconciled to past loss and anticipate some form of constructive co-existence with former enemies.

Gandhi, of course, did not recognise the concept of 'enemy'. Indeed, the prime focus of his struggle against the British Raj was to liberate not only the colonised but also the colonisers from the violent and oppressive situation within which they were caught. However, before going on to examine some of Gandhi's key assumptions as



they relate to forgiveness, it is important to examine the South Asian religious traditions that formed the context for the development of some of Gandhi's core 'articles of faith'.

### **Jain and Hindu Perspectives on Forgiveness**

Specifically with regard to forgiveness, it seems to us that Gandhi's views can best be examined in the light of the two major scriptural and spiritual traditions that informed his childhood and much of his adult life, namely Hinduism and Jainism. Gandhi was indisputably eclectic in the sources of his convictions. There is however much disagreement among scholars about the extent to which Gandhi was influenced by each. A recent study by Tidrick, for example, has argued that the Theosophical Society and associated 'New Age' thinking of the 1890s played a larger role than has previously been recognised.<sup>19</sup> Hay, on the other hand, has emphasised Gandhi's adoption of Jain ideas and practices,<sup>20</sup> whilst Gier has argued that Gandhi was closer to Buddhist thought than is usually acknowledged.<sup>21</sup> The consensus though is that, while recognising the diversity of influences, Gandhi is best understood, as he understood himself, as Hindu: specifically from the Gujarati Pranami Vaishnav community which had long-standing, intimate bonds with Jain traditions. These bonds were especially close in towns like Porbandar and Rajkot where Gandhi spent much time. Gandhi's early spiritual formation was thus rooted in the Hindu family, with strong Jain influences. He grew up in a *Vaishnava* family. As he writes in his autobiography:

The Gandhis were Vaishnavas. My parents were particularly staunch Vaishnavas ... Jainism was strong in Gujarat, and its influence was felt everywhere and on all occasions... These were the traditions in which I was born and bred....In Rajkot I got a grounding in toleration for all branches of Hinduism and sister religions. Jain monks would also pay frequent visits to my father, and would even go out of their way to accept food from us – non-Jains.<sup>22</sup>

After his return to India in 1914, he lived in an almost entirely Hindu environment, notably in his ashrams in Sabarmati and Sevagram, as well as, of course, spells in British gaols with other, mostly Hindu, political prisoners. His own spiritual life was in many ways congruent with that of Hindu practitioners in other ashrams: meditation, prayer, fasting, celibacy, repetition of the *Ram* mantra, selfless work and study of Hindu scripture. By the 1920s, the mature Gandhi was fully at ease with his own identity as 'Hindu', albeit warmly acknowledging the truths of other world-views. When he did write about specifically religious themes, his words are usually consistent with the neo-

vedantic reformulation of 'Hinduism', although invariably with his own characteristic stamp. Well-known quotes from Gandhi himself express his allegiance, after years of wide reading in and around other faith traditions, to Hinduism; and in particular his firm belief in the *Bhagavad Gita* as not only a wonderful scripture, but even as Mother to himself and all devotees, "The *Gita* is the universal mother. She turns away nobody. Her door is wide open to anyone who knocks...The *Gita* is not only my Bible or my Koran; it is more than that, it is my mother."<sup>23</sup>

But Gandhi also liked to frequent Jain teachers and temples, and in the 1890s he came to know one of the greatest Jain saints of modern India, Srimad Rajchandra (1867-1901).<sup>24</sup> Rajchandra settled many of Gandhi's spiritual doubts and was a significant personal inspiration for him: local people referred to Rajchandra as 'Gandhi's Guru'.<sup>25</sup> This paper now proceeds to identify some key components in both traditions, and then identifies ways in which Gandhi interpreted, interiorized and practised them.

Of course, to speak of 'the Hindu tradition' is itself tendentious given the vast scope and variety of Hindu religious thought. This discussion is based on what is known as neo-Hinduism or neo-Vedanta, a reasonably homogeneous discourse within modern liberal, rationalist Hinduism.<sup>26</sup> Although forgiveness, (*ksama* in Sanskrit) was not a major topic in the classical texts of Hinduism, a number of related concepts are discussed in several key works and are prominent in Hindu discourse, forming a cluster of meanings which provide a substantial overall conceptualization of forgiveness in the Hindu tradition.<sup>27</sup> Two epics, the *Mahabharata*, of which the *Bhagavad Gita* is a small section, and the *Ramayana* have a quasi-scriptural status: incidents and personalities from them are widely cited as authoritative exemplars of correct behavior. In both, there are extended discussions of forgiveness and revenge, qualities which are played out in many of the sub-plots. The discussions are quite sophisticated and varied: for example, some speakers imply that forgiveness is to be adopted in all circumstances, while others argue that it also has drawbacks. *The Mahabharata* even has a famous 'hymn to forgiveness' which opens as follows:

Forgiveness is virtue; forgiveness is sacrifice, forgiveness is the Vedas, forgiveness is the *Shruti* [revealed scripture]. He that knoweth this is capable of forgiving everything.

Forgiveness is *Brahma* [God]; forgiveness is truth; forgiveness is stored ascetic merit; forgiveness protecteth the ascetic merit of the future; forgiveness is asceticism; forgiveness is holiness; and by forgiveness is it

that the universe is held together.<sup>28</sup>

We can thus see that *ksama* was valued from early times. *Titiksha* means tolerance or forbearance, and is another quality praised in the *Gita* (2.14), along with similar virtues like *akrodah* (freedom from anger, 16.2) and *ksantih* (tolerance, 13.8). The theme is that whatever occurs, one should not feel anger, resentment, or mental disturbance. Even if someone attacks or insults us without cause, there is no need to feel enmity. How do we come to this state? One approach is a deep acceptance of the 'law of returning karma': an 'enemy' is in fact only the instrument of a process which we ourselves initiated, and for which we are responsible. If I had not created a problem for myself because of some past action, I would not now be experiencing a difficulty. To a devout believer in this theory, taking revenge on an 'enemy' means to shoot the messenger and ignore the message. Moreover, those who accept the law of karma and reincarnation may be relatively willing to let go of longing for retribution: they feel that the perpetrators will inevitably receive a comeback for their deeds, so it is almost irrelevant to go out of one's way to try to inflict some kind of punishment or revenge.

More generally, tolerance of discomfort can be interpreted as an important element of spiritual discipline, not necessarily taken to the point of extreme austerity, but at least willingness to suffer hardship, as exemplified by Gandhi in British prisons. A more profound interpretation within non-dualistic schools of Hindu philosophy is the realization that the Self of all human beings – indeed all living beings – is essentially one and the same, and one with God also. So there is no 'Other' against whom one might feel anger.

South Asian historiography distinguishes two major early streams of religious thought: orthodox Vedic ritualism, and alternative, ascetic (*sramana*) traditions, Jainism being an example of the latter. Jains themselves regard Mahavir, the founder of their religion, as the most recent in a long line of enlightened sages who lived in earlier times, sages known as *tirthankaras* or *jinas*.<sup>29</sup> *Tirthankara* translates as 'ford-maker', one who helps the ordinary believer cross the torrents of life to immortality; *jina* means 'spiritual victor', and the word Jain (with the adjectival form Jaina) means one who follows a *jina*. As with Buddha and Guru Nanak after him, the teaching initiated by Mahavir became so influential that it is considered a separate religion rather than merely an offshoot of Hinduism, although, as with Buddhism and Sikhism, many fundamental ideas are similar to or compatible with Hinduism. Jains, especially in Gujarat, have by and large remained on good terms with Hindus: for example, they often inter-

marry and participate in Hindu religious festivals and other observances, without feeling that their own faith is compromised. There is considerable overlap, friendship, and communication between the faiths notwithstanding some important doctrinal differences.

Whilst the doctrine of *ahimsa*, non-violence, is an important concept to Hindus and Buddhists, to Jains it is arguably the central or core teaching.<sup>30</sup> As Zydenbos has observed, “Ahimsa is an ethical concept which determines the character of nearly all Jaina religious practice more than any other: it is considered central to the whole of Jaina ethical thought”.<sup>31</sup> In its pure Jain form, *ahimsa* means completely abstaining from causing injury to others. ‘Others’ here includes all life forms, birds, plants, and even micro-organisms. At a deeper level, even the word ‘other’ should not be used, since Mahavir preached complete identity with the beings around us: “You are that which you intend to hit, injure, insult, torment, persecute, torture, enslave or kill”. A famous Jain phrase puts it succinctly: ‘*Ahimsa paramo dharmah*’ (non-violence is the supreme religion).<sup>32</sup> Violence, disconnectedness, disrupts our spiritual as well as our physical cosmos. Modern Jain writers, incidentally, also discuss the importance of non-violent economics, developing ideas put forward by Gandhi and J. C. Kumarappa, later developed by Schumacher and others.<sup>33</sup>

If Jain teachings on non-violence are widely appreciated, it is perhaps not so well known that forgiveness is also a core component of the religion. Jainism is perhaps unique among world faiths in having a festival, the *Paryushana*, in which ‘forgiveness’ is the central component. The festival itself lasts for a week or ten days and is the most important event in the Jain calendar. Jain families visit temples to listen to discourses and readings; and they engage in fasting and penance. The evening is often devoted to meditation, specifically the practice of *pratikraman*, a reflection on their spiritual life which includes introspection, prayers, detachment from the body, and resolutions for the coming year. The specificity of *Paryushana* is the central role of forgiveness. There is a unique procedure, in which every Jain asks forgiveness from all individuals and from the community, for any offence they may have committed. All dissent and disagreement is supposed to be set aside, and individual and social relationships healed. They ask forgiveness by approaching the other person, joining hands and asking for ‘*Micchamidukadam*’ or forgiveness. Literally, *dukadam* means bad deeds; and *micchami* means fruitless. The sense is, ‘May any past problems between us cease here and now, with no repercussions’.

Apart from the forgiveness festival and other specific calendar events, Jains are likely to practise forgiveness as an integral part of

their religious life. So, just as the community has developed a unique festival, it has developed a number of mantras specifically to deepen the power of forgiveness. Two examples are given here:

Universal Forgiveness Prayer

*Khamemi Savve Jiva, Savve Jiva Khamantu Me,  
Metti Me Savve Bhuyesu, Veram Majham Na Kenai.*

I grant forgiveness to all living beings. May all living beings grant me forgiveness. My friendship is with all living beings. My enmity is totally nonexistent.

Universal Peace and Friendship Prayer

*Shivmastu Sarva Jagatah, Par hit nirata bhavantu bhutaganah,  
Doshah Prayantu Nasham, Sarvatra Sukhi bhavantu lokah.*

May the whole Cosmos be blessed. May all beings engage in each other's well being. May all weakness, sickness and faults diminish and vanish. May everyone and everywhere be healthy, prosper, blissful, and peaceful.<sup>34</sup>

How do Jain teachings compare with Western concepts of peacefulness and in particular forgiveness? Several points stand out.

First, there is far less emphasis on vicarious atonement, or the forgiving power of a deity or saviour, than in Christianity. According to Jain philosophy, there is little benefit to be had in imploring a merciful Father or some other such figure to remove our sins and help us to salvation. Rather, salvation is fairly and squarely within our own competence. If we have committed sins, we are bound to suffer the consequences. By spiritual practice, particularly austerities and a generous life-style, we can gradually overcome the effects of our previous bad karma, and also avoid generating new bad karmas for the future. We atone for our sins by our conduct.

Second, the injunction to forgive those who have committed offences against us sounds rather similar to that in Christian traditions. Jains are enjoined to forgive, deeply and unconditionally, both as an ongoing daily practice, and specifically, in a community, in the *Paryushana* festival. Compared with Christianity, however, there is little sense of the 'vertical' relationship between humans and God that exists in the monotheistic religious traditions. The comparison with psychotherapy seems more appropriate: if I forgive the others, my own mind and emotions will feel a great sense of relief, it may set a new direction in my life, helping me to move away from past grievances and resentments. The context here is possibly also closer to the 'cultivation of virtues' which, Gier shows, has been a major pre-occupation with several currents of philosophy including classical

Greek and Chinese.<sup>35</sup>

Third, and here a contrast with both Christian and 'post-Christian' Western thinking, the concept of forgiveness in Jainism is deeply rooted in a universalising philosophy of non-violence, extending to intellectual non-violence (refusal to assert superiority over other world-views) and non-violence towards everything from molecules to mountains. On one level, we should forgive anybody for anything, because we should feel universal friendship and connectedness. If I think anyone has committed an offence, or 'hurt' me in some way, I am suffering from a delusion. That person has merely been an instrument for some of my returning karma, and I should be grateful to him or her. And on the most profound level, the level of the sage Mahavir, a Jain might even discover that there is no 'other person' who he or she might forgive no matter what offences are seen by other people: the sense of oneness, extended Self, *atma* has been manifested.

Gandhi's world-view was also informed by the conviction that at some sub-stratum of existence all is one. It was part of his genius that he was able to take such traditional religious concepts and values, and give them a new social and political significance, which also imbued his struggle for liberation with a significant spiritual dimension. This is particularly so with regard to his exposition of the significance of forgiveness within his overall emancipatory project.

### **Gandhi and Forgiveness**

Gandhi, one of the most prophetic figures of the twentieth century, was assassinated because of his commitment to reconciliation between Hindus and Muslims within the sub-continent. However, his influence continues to inform and resonate through nonviolent movements for socio-economic change and political liberation, particularly through the writings of Gene Sharp.<sup>36</sup> Sharp and others have concentrated on drawing out the contemporary implications of Gandhi's recognition that any regime depends in the final analysis upon the cooperation and consent (forced or otherwise) of its subjects, and therefore any regime can be challenged and undermined through the erosion of the pillars of support upon which it depends. However, few of the contemporary generation of activist-scholars who have drawn inspiration from Gandhi's work have acknowledged the centrality of forgiveness within his world-view.

In this section of the paper we locate the concept (and practice) of forgiveness within Gandhi's world-view. Our argument is that forgiveness was central to Gandhi's vision of the Indian freedom struggle. For him true *swaraj* or self-rule could only be achieved by

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means of satyagraha; central to his vision of satyagraha was *ahimsa* (positive non-violence); and at the core of this orientation to the world was the value and the practice of forgiveness, as he wrote in 1925, "Nonviolence implies love, compassion, forgiveness."<sup>37</sup>

Gandhi concluded *Hind Swaraj* with the observation that "Real home rule is self-rule or self-control."<sup>38</sup> He was convinced that for India to be truly free (rather than "English rule without the Englishman"<sup>39</sup>) the collective project had to be based on transformation at the individual level.

If we become free, India is free. And in this thought you have a definition of Swaraj. It is Swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves. It is therefore in the palm of our hands ... but such Swaraj has to be experienced, by each one for himself.<sup>40</sup>

As he observed in 1939, "Swaraj of a people means the sum total of the Swaraj (self-rule) of individuals."<sup>41</sup> He developed this analysis a few years later, incorporating a thread that ran throughout his life and work, that any change based on compulsion, cowardice or blind obedience to power-holders was inauthentic and would prove to be without substance. He wrote:

Individual freedom alone can make a man voluntarily surrender himself completely to the service of society. If it is wrested from him, he becomes an automaton and society is ruined. No society can possibly be built on a denial of individual freedom.<sup>42</sup>

Gandhi acknowledged that self-rule, at the individual and collective level, required the basic human rights of freedom of speech and association; it also required the fulfilment of basic human needs that could only be achieved through political, social and economic independence. In a speech in 1917 he reviewed the evils that characterised so much of Indian life and demanded, "If we cannot remedy these evils, how can we attain swaraj? Swaraj means managing our own affairs."<sup>43</sup> However, such institutional changes could only be fulfilled if they were accompanied by an equally profound transformation at the level of the individual. "We cannot achieve this political and economic freedom without Truth and non-violence in concrete terms, without a living faith in God, and hence moral and social elevation."<sup>44</sup> In other words, *swaraj* as 'outer freedom' would be nothing but an empty shell without 'inner freedom'.

The outward freedom therefore that we shall attain will only be in exact proportion to the inward freedom to which we may have grown .... And



if this is the correct view of freedom, our chief energy must be concentrated upon achieving reform from within ... When this reform takes place on a national scale no outside power can stop our onward march.<sup>45</sup>

How was this inner change, this self-rule (swaraj) to be achieved? For Gandhi, of course, the prime means of change was *satyagraha*. In his speech at the Gujarati Political Conference in November 1917 he articulated the linkage. The satyagrahi is one who is unflinching in adherence to truth, whatever the hardships:

With truth for sword, he needs neither a steel sword nor gunpowder. Even an inveterate enemy he conquers by the force of the soul, which is love. ... Love can fight; often, it is obliged to. In the intoxication of power, man fails to see his error. When that happens a satyagrahi does not sit still. He suffers. He disobeys the ruler's orders and his laws in a civil manner, and willingly submits to the penalties of such disobedience, for instance, imprisonment and gallows. Thus is his soul disciplined. ... In the event, no bitterness develops between the satyagrahi and those in power, the latter, on the contrary, willingly yield to him. They discover that they cannot command the satyagrahi's obedience. They cannot make him do anything against his will. And this is the consummation of swaraj, because it means complete independence. ... This satyagraha is India's distinctive weapon.<sup>46</sup>

It was observed above that Gandhi's world-view was informed by the belief that beneath the level of appearances, all is one. This ground of all being, this ultimate reality, the essence that permeates in and throughout all, and which for many is God or the Divine, was termed Truth or *satya* by Gandhi.

One reason for the adoption of the term Truth instead of 'God', a change which took place in the early 1930s, was to avoid any division with the atheists within the freedom movement. However, Gandhi is here also simply re-stating a formulation given in the Upanishads and later Vedantic philosophy, for example that of Shankara and Vivekananda, with which Gandhi was thoroughly engaged. According to the earliest Upanishad, for example, God's 'secret name' is 'The Truth of truth' (*satyasa satyam*).<sup>47</sup> Another early celebrated aphorism using the same term is in the Taittiriya Upanishad (2.1): *satyam jnanam anantam Brahman* [God is Truth, Intelligence, Infinity].<sup>48</sup>

Firmly embedded within this tradition, Gandhi declared that "nothing exists in reality except Truth, everything else is illusion".<sup>49</sup> This is the Truth or Reality with a capital T (or R), and for Gandhi the aim should be to realise this (Absolute) Truth, to become one with it, to achieve swaraj or self-realisation. The significance of this commitment to the realisation of truth in relation to Gandhi's overall

project has been expressed very clearly by Raghavan Iyer:

To believe in Absolute Truth, which is God, implies that every man embodies a portion of that truth, i.e., is a soul possessing "soul-force". As truth is the substance of morality, man is a moral agent only to the extent that he embodies and seeks truth. ... Abstract truth has no value unless incarnated in human beings who represent it by proving their readiness to die for it.<sup>50</sup>

In the seeking of truth, however, we need to bear in mind that as mere mortals we have access only to our own 'relative truth', and our truth is likely to be different from the truth of others. Therefore we must approach Truth (with a capital T) by the testing of our relative truths, and this can only be done by strict adherence to ahimsa, as any violence of thought, word or deed, would be contrary to the oneness of all that is the bedrock of all life.

Therefore, when we come across violence and injustice, oppression and exploitation, conditions that are contrary to Truth, we must seek to convert and change those responsible, we must seek to liberate them from the evil situation and the damage they are doing to others and to themselves. We must do this not by inflicting suffering and violence on them but by being prepared to suffer ourselves, in the spirit of ahimsa.

The commitment to ahimsa, the determination to do no harm but to maintain a positive attitude of good-will, even towards the evil-doer, is incompatible with the pursuit of revenge against those responsible for evil. And for Gandhi forgiveness was the voluntary restraint of the urge for vengeance. Hence, forgiveness was at the very heart of the Gandhian 'method' and philosophy of satyagraha. Indeed, for him ahimsa was 'the extreme limit of forgiveness.'<sup>51</sup>

By their refusal to inflict violence on those whose behaviour they were seeking to change, satyagrahis were aligning themselves with that power or essence at the heart of reality. As he affirmed in November 1921, "Non-cooperation springs from love, not hatred. Soul-force is love force and the world is ruled by this force. If you want to free India through your strength, shower love on others."<sup>52</sup>

The power of this soul-force, of nonviolence, was all the greater when the 'victims' of injustice and oppression refused to resort to the coercive and violent resources available to them, but remain committed to ahimsa. This was the nonviolence of the brave, the nonviolence of those with the courage to withstand suffering without inflicting harm on others. Gandhi contrasted this with the nonviolence of the weak, the nonviolence practised by those lacking the courage or the commitment to resist by violent means. Hence, whilst he equated

ahimsa with forgiveness, he was insistent that “forgiveness is the quality of the brave. Ahimsa is impossible without fearlessness.”<sup>53</sup>

Non-violence is not a cover for cowardice, but it is the supreme virtue of the brave. Exercise of non-violence requires far greater bravery than that of swordsmanship. Cowardice is wholly inconsistent with non-violence. Translation from swordsmanship to non-violence is possible and at times even an easy stage. Non-violence, therefore, presupposes ability to strike. It is a conscious deliberate restraint put upon one’s desire for vengeance. But vengeance is any day superior to passive, effeminate and helpless submission. Forgiveness is higher still. Vengeance too is weakness. The desire for vengeance comes out of fear of harm, imaginary or real. A dog barks and bites when he fears. A man who fears no one on earth would consider it too troublesome even to summon up anger against one who is vainly trying to injure him. The sun does not wreak vengeance upon little children who throw dust at him. They only harm themselves in the act.<sup>54</sup>

By extension, therefore, true forgiveness for Gandhi was the voluntary restraint of vengeance and the offering of compassion by those in possession of the courage and the capacity to avenge the wrongs they have suffered. Just as the person with no appetite affirms nothing by fasting, the mouse - lacking the capacity to seek vengeance - is not in a position to forgive the cat. Gandhi affirmed again and again that forgiveness, an integral part of ahimsa/nonviolence, is ‘an ornament of the brave’. “Nonviolence is a weapon of the strong and is respected only when employed by them. Nonviolence means forgiveness and this is the glory of the brave”.<sup>55</sup> “Forgiveness is the virtue of the brave. He alone who is strong enough to avenge a wrong knows how to love (and forgive)”.<sup>56</sup>

Moreover, this ‘soul-force’ of which forgiveness is an integral dimension, has the capacity to redeem the wrong-doer. As Gandhi affirmed in *Young India* in 1921:

... the refusal to speak, to participate in the evil, to assist one’s own degradation, to cooperate with the wrong-doer, gives strength to oneself, and awakens and purifies the wrong-doer. ... Non-cooperation ....heals without killing.<sup>57</sup>

Forgiveness, the voluntary restraint from pursuit of vengeance, is thus integral to the whole Gandhian project of swaraj or self-rule. Indeed, satyagraha can be viewed as forgiveness in action, active forgiveness. Hence we read, “Nonviolence implies love, compassion, forgiveness”.<sup>58</sup> Writing about his experiences with satyagraha in South Africa, he observed that

No matter how often a satyagrahi is betrayed, he will continue to repose his trust in the adversary so long as there are not cogent grounds for distrust. Pain to a satyagrahi is the same as pleasure. He will not therefore be misled by the mere fear of suffering into groundless distrust. On the other hand, relying as he does upon his own strength, he will not mind being betrayed by the adversary, will continue to trust in spite of frequent betrayals, and will believe that he thereby strengthens the forces of truth and brings victory nearer. ... Distrust is a sign of weakness and satyagraha implies the banishment of all weakness and therefore of distrust, which is clearly out of place when the adversary is not to be destroyed but to be won over.<sup>59</sup>

Gandhi's project was to achieve freedom not through inflicting injury on the oppressors but by converting them through self-suffering and self-purification. Hence the dynamic in satyagraha was not the imposition of suffering on others but *tapas*, the preparedness of the satyagrahis to suffer in their commitment to their version of the truth. As preparation for such self-suffering Gandhi advocated a period of self-cleansing, of which forgiveness was a constituent element. Thus he wrote:

Firstly, we must acquire greater mastery over ourselves and secure an atmosphere of perfect calm, peace and goodwill. We must ask forgiveness for every unkind word thoughtlessly uttered or unkind word done to anyone.<sup>60</sup>

To seek forgiveness increases our humility:

'To ask for forgiveness' and 'to receive forgiveness' are beautiful ideas. I act on both the principles. But I have always believed that forgiveness in this sense does not mean what is commonly understood by it. A sincere desire to be forgiven increases our humility; we are able to see our weakness, and this knowledge gives us the strength to be good.<sup>61</sup>

With regard to the practice of nonviolence, and hence of forgiveness, Gandhi professed the belief that women were especially suited, observing to a Western visitor:

... women can play a very important role in establishing peace ... because women by nature are endowed with the quality of forgiveness. Women will never succeed in aping men in everything, nor can they develop the gift nature has bestowed on them by doing so. They should neither allow their family members to have, nor should they themselves have any connection with anything relating to war. God has endowed women with hearts overflowing with love. They should utilize this gift properly.

That power is all the more effective because it is mute. I hold that God has sent women as messengers of the gospel of non-violence.<sup>62</sup>

In expressing what to many of us would seem to be a somewhat heretical view of gender differences, Gandhi was revealing once again the manner in which so many of his beliefs were grounded in traditional India world-views and philosophies.

### **Concluding Observations**

As was argued in the second section of this paper, Gandhi's interpretation and practice of forgiveness is completely congruent with Hindu and Jain tradition. Indeed, his spiritual perspectives can be well understood through three prisms:

1. Forgiveness as a virtue, alongside others such as charity
2. Forgiveness as a component of spiritual power
3. Forgiveness as a means to regenerate society.

Gandhi's work is a primary case study of virtuous politics: "that good ends must always be matched with good means"<sup>63</sup>, a position that was challenged and sometimes mocked by many other Indian nationalists. Gandhi broke with the pre-modern Indian concept of the saint as an isolated yogi, but neither did he ever accept utilitarianism or pragmatism. The list of 'divine qualities' cited earlier from the *Bhagavad Gita* (16.3) serves as a good reminder of virtues to which a spiritual person should aspire, and several of Gandhi's statements about forgiveness quote the *Gita* and the *Mahabharata*.

In a letter written in 1935, Gandhi also discusses a spiritual dimension to forgiveness that seems very close to Jain ideas:

Basically the effect of sin must be endured. One who endures it intelligently does not sin again and becomes pure. This is the meaning of being absolved. Absolution can never mean that man may continue to sin and seek forgiveness over and over again. One who has been forgiven does not sin again.<sup>64</sup>

A more controversial claim made by some Indian mystics is that spiritual practices, for example celibacy, give rise to special powers. Such claims have been held up to criticism and occasionally ridicule.<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, they have a long, respected tradition within Indian culture. In fact it is barely possible to understand Gandhi's career, his understanding of his own role, and the admiration he attracted, without consideration of this factor. In particular, many Indian mystics believe that by the concentrated practice of *ahimsa*, celibacy, fasting

and associated virtues and practices, a spiritual figure may acquire such power that his will becomes virtually unstoppable. Gandhi himself, and many of his followers, appear to have held to the belief that one might become a living channel of cosmic power. As Iyer has observed: “The concept of *sacchakriya* – the making and ‘act of truth’ – endows the Gandhian notion of truth with a magical quality and supernatural force that seem utterly strange to the modern man”.<sup>66</sup>

Forgiveness is an integral component of such spiritual practice. A successful yogi may appear as a mild and powerless person, but in fact he is an embodiment of an extraordinary energy which will eventually overcome all obstacles. As is well known, Gandhi did not argue for passive forms of non-resistance; on the contrary he believed that *ahimsa* and *satyagraha* would be the most effective channels of power to overcome British rule, untouchability, and other obstacles to India’s true freedom. “Here, in this righteous war, truth, non-violence and forgiveness are the weapons. The consequence of using such weapons can only be beneficial” (speech at Borshad, 18 March 1930). “When you are ready to fight for the right, Gandhiji arms you with the all-conquering and never-failing weapon, namely...suffering *cum* forgiveness”.<sup>67</sup>

Gandhi was a particular admirer of Vivekananda, who made one of the earliest, and most successful, attempts to re-interpret traditional Hindu doctrines for Indian society as it emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. Vivekananda a generation earlier had made the point that there are two kinds of ‘non-resistance’ which might appear similar, but which are in reality polar opposites. There is the non-resistance of a weak person, who will not stand up to injustice because he or she is powerless, frightened or indifferent; on the other hand, there is the active resistance of the powerful, saintly person, who confronts unjust authority, but who refuses to do so with either physical or even verbal violence. In his work *Karma Yoga* Vivekananda wrote:

One man does not resist because he is weak and lazy, and he will not because he cannot. The other man knows that he can strike an irresistible blow if he likes; yet he not only does not strike, but blesses his enemies....We must first care to understand whether we have the power of resistance or not. Then having the power, if we renounce it and do not resist, we are doing a grand act of love; but if we cannot resist and yet at the same time make it appear and ourselves believe that we are actuated by motives of highest love, we shall be doing the exact opposite of what is morally good. ...Before reaching the highest ideal, man’s duty is to resist evil.<sup>68</sup>

In a similar tone, Vivekananda argued that a beggar, a person

incapable of earning a living, is not an example of detachment from wealth. "Buddha gave up his throne and renounced his position: that was true renunciation. But there cannot be any question of renunciation in the case of a beggar who has nothing to renounce" Several of Gandhi's remarks on forgiveness are fully in tune with this line of thought: "Forgiveness, we have been told, is the ornament of the brave, but what is that forgiveness? Passivity? Taking the blow lying down? Is that the meaning of not resisting evil?"<sup>69</sup> "A non-violent person is not afraid of a tyrant but is kind to him. The law of compassion tells us that we cannot be kind to those of whom we are afraid. Forgiveness is the virtue of the brave."<sup>70</sup>

Finally, Gandhi believed that prayer and spiritual practice were essential not only for the struggle against the British Empire, but also for the overall renewal of Indian society. One method which might achieve this goal was prayer: not only individual but also communal prayers which Gandhi used to lead not only in his ashrams but wherever he went about India. His prayers seem to naturally reflect his Vaishnava theistic heritage, and also reverence for a non-personal divinity – Truth, Law, or Reality- which perhaps also derive from his Jain background as well as from Vedantic philosophy.

Prayer has been the saving of my life. Without it I should have been a lunatic long ago....My religion teaches me that whenever there is distress which one cannot resolve, one must fast and pray.... Heartfelt prayer is undoubtedly the most potent instrument that man possesses for overcoming cowardice and all other old habits.<sup>71</sup>

In a long speech about prayer and its importance for the community, Gandhi stressed that "prayer is the very soul and essence of religion" and that "the petition should be for the cleansing and purification of the soul":

This God whom we seek to realize is Truth...To propitiate this Truth is *prarthana* [Gujarati term for prayer] which in effect means an earnest desire to be filled with the spirit of Truth...I hope that a time will come when all our conduct will be one continuously sustained prayer. Such is the ideal prayer for the Ashram.<sup>72</sup>

Many scholars have designated the main achievements Indian civilization as being in the realms of religious metaphysics, art and music, grammar and pure mathematics, i.e. in introspective, non-empirical disciplines.<sup>73</sup> Admittedly this view has recently been subjected to substantive criticism with respect to technological discoveries<sup>74</sup>, but not with respect to modern political theory, which



remained largely undeveloped in South Asia until the middle of the nineteenth century. Apart from the strong hold of religion and idealist philosophy, it should be remembered that Hindus were excluded from a 'normal' national political life for many centuries after the Muslim and British invasions: political debate only became tolerated, and then under severe restrictions, after the 1870s. Nonetheless, India did witness efforts to combine its heritage of spirituality with social and political concerns: most effectively perhaps in the work of the Brahmo Samaj, mainly based in Bengal, which from the mid-nineteenth century had among other objectives the abolition of the caste system, the emancipation of women, and democratization of education.

However, although Hindus were late in evolving political theory as understood in the West, they did develop a long tradition of thought about kingship and rule, topics conceptualised around the classical Sanskrit concept of *artha*. Moreover, Persian traditions of political thought were further developed under Mughal imperial rule for example by the outstanding scholar Abu'l Fazl.<sup>75</sup> Some indigenous, or at least non-European elements of 'spiritual kingship' theory thus also underlie the almost mystical approach to political power.

Gandhi's genius was to take such initiatives and aspirations beyond elite discussions, and into a national mass movement, directly touching the lives of millions of individuals in a way that earlier Indian thinkers had not achieved. As we have seen, he did not compromise the fundamentals of spirituality in doing so; on the contrary, he showed that spirituality could and should inform politics on the sub-continent. We have shown that Gandhi's spiritual eclecticism is also apparent in his approach to forgiveness, which did not stray far from his native Hinduism but was certainly enriched by his experiences of Christianity, Jainism, and other traditions. One aspect of his work was the 'spiritualisation of politics', for example the adoption of ahimsa and satyagraha as political 'tools'. Another, hugely important and innovative dimension was the 'politicisation of spirituality': removing India's traditional religious disciplines from the confines of the ashram or mountain retreat, and locating them within the turmoil of modern politics. Both these dimensions demanded a central role for forgiveness alongside virtues such as tolerance and patience in the creation of Gandhi's unique 'weapon', spiritual power for social transformation.

### Notes and References

1. forgiveness (ksama), 2. humility (mardava) , 3. straight forwardness

- (arjava), 4. contentment (sauch), 5. truthfulness (satya), 6. self-control (sayama), 7. austerity (tappa), 8. renunciation (tyaga), 9. detachment (aparigraha), 10. celibacy (brahmacharya).
2. For example, Mahadev Desai, *Day to Day with Gandhi: Secretary's Diary*, 9 vols. (Varanasi: Sarva Seva Sangh, 1968-74); Louis Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (New York: Collier, 1962).
  3. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1959), p. 213.
  4. Beverly Flanigan, *Forgiving The Unforgivable: Overcoming the Bitter Legacy of Intimate Wounds* (Newyork: MacMillan, 1992), p. 71. She continues with the caution that 'It is not, however, easily accomplished.'
  5. There is a Somali saying which advises us to forgive our enemies, but remember their names!
  6. Desmond Tutu, foreword to catalogue for photographic exhibition, *The F Word: Images of forgiveness* (London: The Forgiveness Project, nd.).
  7. Michael Lapsley, lecture at Coventry University, 20 April 2005.
  8. Trudy Govier, *Forgiveness and Revenge* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 106.
  9. In real life the binary division between victim and perpetrator, innocent and guilty, is never so straightforward.
  10. One might include 'self-forgiveness' in this category, in the sense of us coming to terms with the old self that committed shameful wrongs. Govier (and others) have distinguished processes of forgiveness on the basis of the types of relationship between victim and offender 1) Unilateral or one-sided forgiveness, where the wrong-doer expresses no acknowledgement or remorse, 2) Bilateral forgiveness where the offender provides the victim with reasons for forgiveness, and 3) Mutual forgiveness where there is acknowledgement of wrong-doing by both parties. Govier, pp. 48-9 & pp. 62-4. The authors are very aware that in some cultures it is not customary to apologise in words and appropriate symbolic and material gestures of acknowledgment, repentance and reparation can take different forms.,
  11. Quoted in Lyn S. Graybill, *Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Miracle or Model?* (Boulder, CO.: Lynne Rienner, 2002), p. 43.
  12. There is a Japanese saying which expresses this more graphically: 'Forgiving the unrepentant is like drawing pictures in water.'
  13. S. Weisenthal, *The Sunflower* (New York: Schocken Books, 1997).
  14. *The Holy Qur'an*, translation and commentary by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Brentwood, Md.: Amana, 1989, pp. 1257-58. See also M. Gopin, 'Forgiveness as an element of conflict resolution in religious cultures', in M. Abu-Nimer, ed., *Reconciliation, Justice and Coexistence* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2001), pp. 87 - 99.
  15. This includes the relief that can come through self-forgiveness, the capacity to 'forgive oneself' for past wrongs.
  16. Forgiveness does not always lead to a restoration of a relationship -

it is quite possible for someone to relinquish his/her feelings of bitterness towards another and yet have no desire to engage in any further interaction. The restoration of relationships, which is at the core of what many understand by the term reconciliation, requires at least two willing parties, and forgiveness can be a unilateral initiative - we can forgive those who have no idea that they have caused us such offence and aroused such bitterness as to need to be forgiven!

17. Govier, p. 91
18. M. Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1998), p. 188.
19. Katheryn Tidrick, *Gandhi: A Political and Spiritual Life* (New York: I B Tauris, 2007).
20. Stephen N Hay, 'Jain Influences on Gandhi's Early Thought', in *Gandhi, India and the World*, ed. S. Ray (Bombay: Nachiketa Publishers, 1970). & Stephen N Hay, 'Jain Goals and Disciplines in Gandhi's pursuit of Swaraj', in *Rule, Protest and Identity*, ed. Peter Robb and David Taylor (London: Curzon Press, 1978), pp. 12-32.
21. Nicholas F. Gier, *The Virtue of Nonviolence: From Gautama to Gandhi* (New York: SUNY, 2004).
22. *Ibid.*, p. 141-2
23. Ramesh Betai, *Gita and Gandhiji* (Ahmedabad: Gujarat Vidyapith), p. 75-6.
24. Rajchandra's teachings are contained in his poems and letters, including a number of well-known letters to Gandhi. His most celebrated work is probably the spiritual instruction known as *The Self-Realization* [Atma-siddhi], translated into English by Govardhan Dassji, (Boria, Gujarat: Srimad Rajachandra Ashram, 1985).
25. See <[www.shrimad.org](http://www.shrimad.org)> for further information. Alan Hunter is grateful to Mr Kishorbhai Shah of Rajkot for providing a personal account of Jain-Hindu interaction in Gujarat, and to Mr Vinod Kapashi now of Harrow, UK, for a lengthy interview. The topic of Jain influence on Gandhi is discussed at length in Nicholas F. Gier, *The Virtue of Nonviolence: From Gautama to Gandhi* (New York: SUNY, 2004), especially Chapter Two: 'Nonviolence in Jainism and Hinduism'. Gier summarizes some scholarly dispute about the precise influence of Jain philosophy in Gandhi's eclectic personal spirituality. U. K. Pungaliya, *Philosophy and Spirituality of Srimad Rajchandra* (Jaipur: Prakrit Bharati Academy, 1997) is a recent study of Rajchandra's life and works.
26. For oral interpretation we would particularly like to thank Swami Satyarupananda of the Vivekananda Ashram, Raipur; Sister Atmaprana of the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, New Delhi; Sister Satchitprana of Sarada Math, Kolkata. See also Alan Hunter, 'Forgiveness: Western and Hindu Perspectives', *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* Vol. 20, 2007, pp. 27-35.
27. Our discussion focuses on the term *ksama* which is used in classical

texts and commentaries and in prayers, festivals, and mantras. In everyday speech, as far as we know Gandhi used the word *maafi* to mean 'apology, forgive, excuse me, sorry'. *Maafi* is a word of Arabic origin that entered India through Urdu, and is widely used in north Indian vernaculars.

28. Mahabharata Book 3 (Vana Parva), Section 29, see <<http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/m03/m03029.htm>>.
29. Conventional scholarship suggests between 600 and 590 BCE as the birth date of Vardhaman Mahavir, the founder of the Jain religion, who was born close to the modern city of Patna, Bihar. The original scriptures of Jainism are composed in Ardhamagadhi, an ancient north Indian language related to Sanskrit.
30. Unto Tähtinen, *Ahimsa: Non-violence in Indian Tradition* (London: Rider, 1976), is perhaps the most comprehensive study in English on *ahimsa* in classical South Asian traditions.
31. Robert. J. Zydenbos, 'Jainism as the Religion of Non-Violence' in J.E.M Houben and K.R. Van Kooij (eds), *Violence Denied* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), p. 185.
32. Ibid.
33. See for example Acharya Mahaprajna, *New Man New World* (New Delhi: Adarsh Sahitya Sangh, 2001), p. 200.
34. These and other prayers can be found at <[www.jaina.org](http://www.jaina.org)>
35. Gier, especially Chapter Nine.
36. Sharp's recent work includes *Waging nonviolent struggle: 20th century practice and 21st century potential* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 2005)
37. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (CWMG), v. 32, p.273. Accessible at <http://www.gandhiserve.org/CWMG/>
38. *Hind Swaraj*, p. 104
39. *HS*, p. 30
40. *HS*, p. 65
41. *Harijan*, 25th March 1939
42. *Harijan*, 1st February 1942
43. 'Speech at Gujarati Conference', CWMG, v. 16, pp. 121.
44. *Harijan*, 2nd January 1937
45. *Young India*, 1st November 1928
46. 'Speech at Gujarati Conference', CWMG, v. 16, pp. 126-8. Emphasis added.
47. Brhadaranyaka Upanishad, 2.1.20, cited in Ranganathananda, *The Message of the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2005), p. 151.
48. See Swami Sarvananda, *Taittiriyaopanisad*, (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, n.d), pp 90-92.
49. Quoted in R. Iyer, *The moral and political thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 150.
50. Iyer, p. 157.
51. *Young India*, 4 November 1926 (CWMG, v.36, 429)
52. *Navajivan*, 27 November 1921.

53. *Young India*, 4 November 1926. Similar views expressed earlier by Vivekananda are discussed later in this paper.
54. *Young India*, 12 August 1926
55. CWMG, v. 25, p. 483
56. CWMG, v. 21, p. 159
57. *Young India*, 22 June 1921
58. CWMG, v. 32, p. 273.
59. CWMG, v. 34, p. 273.
60. *Young India*, 23 March 1921
61. CWMG, v. 36, p. 168
62. CWMG, v. 94, p. 263
63. Gier, *Virtue of Nonviolence*, p. 24.
64. Letter to Chi Brijkrishna, 18 September 1935.
65. See for example Tidrick, *Gandhi* and Karl H. Potter, *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1963).
66. Iyer, pp. 175-6.
67. *Young India*, 22 January 1925.
68. Swami Vivekananda, *Karma Yoga* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre, 1973), pp.16-17.
69. Speech at Sabarmati, 12 January 1928.
70. Letter to Prithvi Singh, 23 May 1941.
71. Cited in Ravindra Varma, *The Spiritual Perceptions of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Delhi: Rupa and Co, 2006), p. 148-9.
72. *Ibid.* 155.
73. See for example Hajime Nakamura, *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1964) especially Part One: India, Chapters 11 and 12.
74. John M. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
75. See Saiyid Athar Abbar Rivzi, *Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar's Reign: With special reference to Abu'l Fazl* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1975).

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