



Library IAS, Shimla



00016201

SELECTED LETTERS

I

M. K. GANDHI



G082

D 451.1- D451.2

N PUBLISHING HOUSE
AHMEDABAD

0.82

D 451.1

SELECTED LETTERS

I

1

SELECTED LETTERS

FIRST SERIES

M. K. GANDHI

Chosen and translated by
VALJI GOVINDJI DESAI



NAVAJIVAN PUBLISHING HOUSE
AHMEDABAD

First edition, Samvat 2005 (1949 A. C.)

5000 copies

Seven annas

G 082
D451.1



Library IAS, Shimla



00016201

Printed and Published by Jivanji Dahyabhai Desai,
Navajivan Press, Kalupur, Ahmedabad

CONTENTS

	Page
To Ashram sisters	3-16
Punctuality 4, the whole duty of man ; prayer 5, sisters of mercy 6, wearing of jewellery ; आत्मवत् सर्वभूतेषु 7, character 8, devotion 9, wanted a woman 10, neither male nor female 11, fear and faith 12, work among women 13, Sanskrit and music 14, contacts with labourers 15, the principle of action 16.	
To Ashram children	17-23
Watch your friends 17, life and death 18, परस्परं भावयन्तः ; qualifications of a student 19, organization 20, contentment 21, how to serve 22, humility 23.	
To workers	24-29
Fear of death 24, stick to one thing 25, art 26, the Ashram as an institution 28, tolerance 29.	
To Lakshmidas Gandhi	30-32

To Kallenbach	33-34
On death 34.	
Letters from Yeravda Mandir	35-56
Sparks of the divine 35, how to mark auspicious event; enjoyment of beauty 36, <i>brahmacharya</i> ; who is the enemy 37, truth is God 38, asthma; seeing God 39, why India is dear 40, school theatricals 41, vanity and self-respect 42, seeing God; God the only friend; miraculous powers 43, <i>brahmacharya</i> ; faith and understanding 44, tell the truth; Christian science; abstention from drugs 45, hypocrisy 46, purify thyself 47, age of marriage 48, how to finance service 49, <i>parayan</i> of sacred books 50, belief in God; realization 51, fasting, Jain atheism and Gita theism 52, the will and the grace of God 53, truth is God 55.	

ERRATA

Page Line

23 11 from bottom For *human* read *a human*.

48 6 For *But* read *However*

SELECTED LETTERS

FIRST SERIES

The following letters were translated from Gujarati for *Gandhiji* edited by D. G. Tendulkar, M. Chalapathi Rau, Mridula Sarabhai and Vithalbhai K. Jhaveri (Karnatak, Bombay). These translations are unique in the sense that my manuscript was revised by Gandhiji with his own hand in Samvat 2000.

V. G. D.

TO ASHRAM SISTERS

One outstanding merit of non-violent resistance to wrong as taught by Gandhiji is that in the matter of recruitment it covers a very much wider field than violence. In a violent conflict the combatants have to be able-bodied young men, but in a non-violent struggle old men have almost as good a chance as the young, and women are not at a disadvantage compared with men. On the contrary as suffering is the badge of their sex, women are at a positive advantage, if only they cast fear out of their minds. Such being the case, it was not perhaps a matter for surprise

that Indian women should have responded splendidly to Gandhiji's call and played a distinguished part in India's unique struggle for independence.

How Gandhiji prepared the women of India to pull their weight in nation-building activity would be a fine subject for study; but we catch a glimpse of his method in the letters written by him to the sisters of Satyagraha Ashram during his absence from the Ashram.

I

Wardha,

Day of silence [Monday]

Sisters,

The first thing for me to do after breakfast is to write you a letter. It is now five to seven; you are therefore all on your way to the prayer hall. You have to be punctual in reaching the hall at the fixed time. Those of you who have promised to attend the prayer daily should make it a point to be present except in circumstances beyond your control. I have suggested to Ramniklal that he should

explain one or two verses from the Gita every day. But you are of course free to read something of your own choice. Keep up the habit of writing, and always try to improve your hand. But all these things are not an end in themselves; they are only means to an end. The end is performance of one's allotted duty. The whole duty of man is to wish well and to do good to others. And as the first step towards discharging it, you should learn to love one another as your own blood sisters, and share one another's sorrows as well as joys.

Bapu's blessings

II

Wardha,

Magshar shudi 11 [1983]

Today also I remember you after breakfast. It is just 6-50, time for your prayer. We may miss many things in life but not prayer, which implies our co-operation with God and with one another. Prayer should be a bath of purification for the spirit of man. Physical health suffers if we do not wash our bodies; similarly the spirit becomes unclean if the

heart is not washed with prayer. Please therefore never be negligent in prayer.

The life of — provides an object lesson for you. . . . She fills up every second of her time with purposeful activity. All of you should try to reach the same height of devotion, renunciation, and purity. Is it too much to expect that you will spread all over India after you have finished your training for service? I realize our lack of sisters of mercy every moment. Very few women come out to serve their fellow countrymen. Women are the very incarnation of service, but at present they minister only to their own families. Why should they not extend the field of their ministry so as to embrace the whole of India? A truly religious person becomes a citizen of the world, but the service of one's own country is the stepping-stone to the service of humanity. And where service is rendered to the country consistently with the welfare of the world, it finally leads to self-realization (*moksha*).

III

[January 1927]

. . . At the women's meeting yesterday, I started a fresh piece of propaganda. Women here [in North Bihar] wear heavy ornaments of silver, do not comb their hair, and keep their children dirty. I therefore condemned the wearing of jewellery, with the result that some of the sisters gave away their anklets and necklaces on condition that on no account should the jewellery donated be replaced. While receiving these gifts, I remembered all of you down there, for you could do this kind of work very much more effectively than I. And you must equip yourselves for it by renunciation and devotion. Ba has been very helpful to me these days.

आत्मवत् सर्वभूतेषु। That is, we must entertain the same regard for others as we have for ourselves. And if we did, we would be ashamed to find other people's children dirty as we would be if they were our own. So also if we found others in distress, we would make that distress our own and try to relieve it.

Paush shudi 14

IV

[January 1927]

It is in the fitness of things that you have elected Gangabehn as your president. But may I suggest that after electing your president you have to help her to fulfil the duties of her office? Gangabehn is illiterate; still you have rightly appointed her president out of regard for her character. Rest assured that literary education is no good without character. President means chief servant. A ruler can issue orders only if he has acquired the highest qualification for service. His orders should be intended not to advance his own interests but the welfare of society. Rulers nowadays have lost sight of their duty, so that instead of setting an example of selflessness and devotion they give themselves up to pleasures and use their powers as an instrument of self-indulgence. But you have elected Gangabehn as president from a religious standpoint; you have therefore resolved that Gangabehn should be your leader in your endeavour to qualify as sisters of mercy.

V

Betia,
1983 Paush vadi 6

If at the Ashram we cannot train sisters for lifelong service to the country, where else can we hope to do so? It is true that you have not health and strength, self-confidence, or the literary education requisite for the purpose. But if you have true *bhakti* (devotion), all these things will be added unto you. *Bhakti* means faith in God and in ourselves as His instruments, and it enables us to renounce our all. It is difficult to renounce for the mere sake of renunciation. A mother would never by choice sleep in a wet bed but she will gladly do so in order to spare the dry bed for her child.

VI

Malvan,
Magh vadi 11

There is always a women's meeting during the tour. I am therefore gathering fresh experiences everyday. I feel that women hold the keys of Swaraj in their hands. But who

will bring about an awakening among them? Multitudes of women live in idleness; who will induce them to take to industry? Mothers spoil their children from their infancy, and load them with ornaments and superfluous clothes. They marry their young girls to old men. I am deeply pained when I see women heavily bedecked with ornaments. Who will explain to them that these trinkets are no aid to beauty? Real beauty is the beauty of the soul. And so on. But what is the remedy? The remedy will be readily found when some strong-willed Draupadi is thrown up by our people. You should resolve and try to acquire such capacity. Patience and perseverance overcome mountains.

VII

Chaitra vadi 9

There are men in the Ashram as well as women, but supposing that the men were out one day and thieves came to the Ashram, what would all of you do? Have you ever thought about this? If you haven't, think of it now and let me know what you would do. How I wish you would falsify epithets like

abala [the weaker sex] and *bhiru* [the timid one] which are applied to women!

VIII

[Vaishakha shudi 1?]

These epithets cannot properly be applied to all women, as for instance to women among the *Raniparaj* or to the women in the west or in Africa or in Burma. Women in the west are doing much work that was supposed to be reserved for men. I do not mean that all their activities are worthy of imitation, but they have certainly upset many calculations of mere men. In Burma women manage everything. At the Ashram we are striving for self-realization. The soul is neither male nor female, neither young nor old. These attributes belong to the body alone, as both scripture and experience testify. The soul is the same in both you and me. Therefore who am I to protect you? Only, if I have mastered the art of life, I have to teach it to you.

IX

Nandi,

Vaishakha shudi 15

I am very glad to know that you are not subject to fear. Why should one who knows that God is there to protect us all be afraid? But His protection does not mean that we may not be robbed or that we may not be bitten by a snake. Such incidents do not show that He protects us any the less but that we had not enough faith in Him. The river is always willing to give its water to all, but how is the river to be blamed if some one does not fill his bucket at it or does not go near it believing the water to be poisonous? (All fear is a sign of want of faith. But faith cannot be acquired by force of intellect. It comes but slowly after deep meditation and continuous practice.) We pray, sing hymns, read books, seek the association of men of God, and perform the spinning sacrifice in order to attain that faith.

X

Nandi,
Vaishakha vadi 13

Does Mirabehn write to you occasionally? I can see from her letters that she is doing a great deal of work among the women as well as men. I will let you know one of the points in her letters. She writes that she finds all the sisters she meets very good-hearted, but their ignorance is terrible. These sisters do not know even the simplest thing. If she talks to them about the spinning wheel, they are surprised, and they do not understand the idea of plying it for the poor. Religion for them is only worship in the temple. They hardly know what service means. This impression may be due to her not understanding them fully. But we do know how (our womenfolk are ignorant of even ordinary things. Though the responsibility for this ignorance rests with men, women must prepare themselves to cure this evil.) This is the task before you. I want all of you sisters to fit yourselves for it according to your capacity.

XI

Jyeshtha shudi 14

I hope you are pronouncing the *shlokas* correctly, though we shall not be called to account for reciting the name of God incorrectly. God is a searcher of hearts only. If our hearts are pure, we will get full marks even if we stutter in our speech. Writing about this, I may describe the pleasant experiences we are having here. Mysore is a part of Karnatak which has given us Kaka Saheb. Sisters here know Sanskrit and music very well. I heard their songs at Nandi, and the day before yesterday two sisters here sang in correct Sanskrit pronunciation a summary of the Ramayana. I think there were more than 100 *shlokas*. I could not detect a single mistake in them. One of them is still a student, and she knows the meaning of the verses also. But why am I writing to you about this? I value the work you are doing at present more than the study of Sanskrit. Become sisters of mercy, fearless and pure, and work as a team. This is a better education than any other. If a study of Sanskrit

and music could be added on to it, of course so much the better.

XII

Bhadrapada vadi

I am sure you have understood why I want you to make contacts with the labourers at the Ashram. To collect a few coppers from each of them for the relief fund is merely an occasion for making them kinsmen. You should work for mutual good understanding and share one another's joys and sorrows. You need not give much of your time for this. What is wanted is a change of heart. We should aim at feeding them with the kind of food we eat, and clothing them with the same dress as we wear. We should wish that they had a share in all the good things that we like and obtain for ourselves, and work for such a consummation.

Do not be frightened by the wide implications of these views of mine. There are always two meanings to everything, one wider and the other narrower. We shall not be put out if we understand the wider implications but start with the narrower.

XIII

Trichinapalli

I visualize from here the work you are doing. Whoever works according to her capacity has fulfilled her mission. But in your work you must cultivate that attitude of mind which is inculcated in the Gita. That is to do everything with a view to serve or as an offering to God, and if your action is an offering to God, you will never have the feeling "I am doing this." You will not then have ill-will for anybody and you will be generous to others. You should always ask yourselves whether your smallest action is guided by these principles.

TO ASHRAM CHILDREN

XIV

Hardvar,

Phalgun shudi 3, Monday

Boys and girls,

Children are innocent, loving and benevolent by nature. Evil comes in only when they become older. They are innocent even in their mischief. If this holds good in your case, each of you should serve others, helping them to rise higher and saving them from a fall. You should watch and if necessary warn one another. Your watch should not be like that of a policeman but of God. God watches us all not with a view to punish but to chasten. Such should be the nature of your watch also. You must teach others what they do not know. Whoever speaks an untruth should be lovingly turned away from it. Remember, you must keep the promise you have made.

XV

You are all students of the Gita. Everyday you recite a portion of it at the morning

prayers. If therefore you are troubled in mind upon hearing of my illness, you must have recourse to the Gita for relief. I fell ill just while I was translating the second chapter. I recall the lesson it teaches us and keep myself in good cheer. You too should cheer up in the same fashion. The body must suffer for its ill deeds. We die to live once more, even as we live only to die at last. Life therefore is not an occasion for joy nor is death an occasion for sorrow. But there is one thing needful. We must ascertain our duty in life and continue to discharge it till we die. You know what is your duty either by faith or by conviction. See that you are not remiss in your performance of it. And having done your duty you will play your usual game of tipcat and dance in *rūsa* as well even if you hear that I am no longer in the land of the living. Continue to do your duty as if nothing had happened and thus falsify the news of my passing away. I depend upon you.

XVI

Chaitra vadi 9

What fine fellows you are ! Kaka Saheb complains that he used to write to you, but you had not the leisure to reply to his letters. Are things any better now ? Must you go on expecting others to write to you, while you do nothing in return ? Remember the phrase in the Gita, परस्परं भावयन्तः । Benefits have to be mutual not only as between God and man, but also as between man and man, teacher and pupil, friend and friend. He who only receives but does not give is guilty of breaking the vow of *asteya* (non-stealing). *Yamas* like truth, non-violence and the like are obligatory on all students, for one who does not keep these observances is not entitled to prosecute any studies.

I find I have passed from gay to grave. But never mind. There is no law against combining instruction with amusement.

XVII

Nandi

Your secretary has this time honoured me by writing a letter.

What have you all understood from the book which you are now reading as a text? I would enjoy it very much if each of you would, without consulting others, write it to me in clear handwriting on a good sheet of paper. It will also be your examination.

XVIII

Vaishakha Purnima

You have flown away from the nest. So really speaking I should not write to you. But I am writing this to tell you that you may fly away wherever you like, but I still remember you and follow you with my eyes.

XIX

Nandi,

Vaishakha vadi 13

It is true that Kanti is out. But you have formed an association. So you have built up an organization. There is one advantage in an organization. It continues to exist whether the number of its members increases or decreases. *Mahajan, panch*, nation, community, an organization—all these never die. If all the members whom we know today die, even then the organization continues to

exist. There are many such organizations in the country even today. Your small organization must also become like that. A king may die but Government never dies. It lives for ever. So in France when the king died, it was said, "The king is dead, long live the king." This means that the throne of the king never remains vacant. So should it be with your association. I have continued to write to you every week as far as I could, in spite of your holidays so that you may acquire such a habit. I will ask you to account for all the letters I have written during the holidays.

XX

I remembered you all very much during my Mysore tour because there were many more things which you could have seen than I could. My time for sight-seeing is over. I can live only for the work I have in hand. It would be a sin for me to take a single breath for anything else. But the natural beauty of Mysore, her various institutions, her gardens, music and paintings are things for you to see. But we are helpless in the matter. We can hardly do all that we wish

to do. If we could do everything at will, goodness knows how many worlds would already have been created and destroyed. Contentment is therefore the best of riches.

XXI

I understand why I cannot have any letters from you regularly. You are all very busy nowadays. If your work is real service I am ready to take your letters as written. If the body serves but the mind is absent, our service can bear no fruit at all. There can be no self-indulgence in service. I hope the fragrance of your service will spread itself. A servant does not ask to become leader. He expects no service from others. He is satisfied with what he gets and has no complaints at all. He has only the right to serve. What matters if he does not get food or shelter in return? It is God's grace that there are undistressed persons even in the areas of distress. When all are in distress, who can serve the nurses? So we must fend for ourselves when we go out to serve. We must not rely on others, but should be thankful to them for such help as they can afford to give.

XXII

I would say that only now your classes are functioning in the right way. For you are having an object-lesson in service. Literary education is intended only to quicken our spirit of service. Now that you have the opportunity to render service, pour your soul into it and learn to enjoy it thoroughly. When you serve, do not give yourself up to spiritual pride and say, "I do it." The service of the proud is nothing worth. The Gita is there to teach us that we do nothing, that we can do nothing. We are only the instruments of God's will. What is the difference between a watch and ^a human being? A watch does not work by itself; it is set going by a man. In the same way, we do not move, we do not act by ourselves. The power that moves us is God. Just as a watch stops when its wound up spring has run out, so also when our spring is done, our cart comes to a dead halt. While it is still on the move, we feel that a certain freedom of action is granted to us. Let us use that freedom to learn and do the will of the great Carpenter.

TO WORKERS

XXIII

There is no remedy except patience in such an ugly situation as described by C. I have no doubt in my mind that the approach should be the same in the mother country as in the Transvaal. But C's letter shows that we can prepare ourselves for it only in a place like Phoenix. A man should be free from fear even when he has to sleep in the cemetery, but if in the process of mastering fear he sleeps in the cemetery on the very first day, it is possible that he will only lose his life. India nowadays for you and me is a cemetery. We must prepare ourselves here to make our beds there and sing Mirabai's hymn, "Take thought of nothing except the name of God."

To be afraid of death is like being afraid of discarding an old and worn out garment. I have often thought of death and have the intellectual conviction that it is sheer ignorance which makes us afraid of death. I am however not sure that this conviction has

become part and parcel of my spiritual being. I say this in view of my reactions when I see a snake for instance. And yet I feel that I will acquire the necessary strength to welcome death whenever and however it comes. I wish every one at Phoenix becomes equally fearless.

XXIV

I have been thinking about the matter ever since you talked to me about it. The more I think of it, the more I am convinced that you should not take up that new activity. I see greed in it. I wish you would not take it up even in the manner I had suggested. If you have the energy to conceive new ideas, — and you must have it, as you look upon yourself as young, — utilize that energy in opening up fresh avenues in your service of Harijans and Bhils. Even so you will not have time enough for your work. This work is more than enough not only for the life of a man like you but of many more besides. Greed for service has its limits. There is no end of misery in the world if we look for it. At every step we find there is scope for reform. Surely God does not expect us to redress all these wrongs.

But if He has any such expectations, He has also taught us the art of doing it, and it is this: we must pick up even a little bit from that mountain of misery, apply our whole mind to the task of removing it and refuse to do anything else. Having done this we have as good as lifted the whole of the mountain. This is a simple principle, and if I have succeeded in impressing it upon your mind, I would ask you to take a vow that you will undertake nothing else but this two-fold service even if the kingdom of the earth is offered to you. If ever an occasion arises that in spite of engaging yourself in this service, you have time on your hands, come to me, and I undertake to show you that you have forgotten to do many things in the field you have chosen.

XXV

I enjoyed the visit to art galleries in Rome and took great interest in the art, but what would be the value of an opinion expressed after a brief visit lasting only two hours? I am hardly qualified as an art critic. I liked immensely some of the things there. If I could live there for two or three months,

I could observe the paintings and statues every day and make a study of them. I saw the statue of Christ on the cross. It attracted me most. But I did not think that European art was superior to Indian art. Both these arts have developed on different lines. Indian art is entirely based on the imagination. European art is an imitation of nature. It is therefore easier to understand, but turns our attention to the earth; while Indian art when understood tends to direct our thoughts to Heaven. This is only for a person like you. I attach no importance to these views. It may be that my unconscious partiality for India or perhaps my ignorance makes me say so. . . . Take me for a parent who narrates stories from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, as he knows them, to his children who know much less. You will see that I do enjoy art. But I have given up or have had to give up many such pleasures. I drank deep of those pleasures which have been incidental to my quest of the Truth, and am ready to partake of new pleasures of the same type. To a devotee of Truth his activities come in the natural course of things; he is therefore a follower of the third chapter of the Gita

without an effort. I believe I was an aspirant of *karmayoga* even before I read the third chapter, but this is a digression.

I like your question about the Ashram. Labour is a prominent feature of the Ashram, because it is our duty to engage ourselves in physical work. One who avoids such work lives as a thief. Besides the work in the Ashram is not only for ourselves but for others also. The spinning wheel is the focal point of such work, because it alone can be conceived as a subsidiary occupation besides agriculture for the millions in India. Its value is economic as well as spiritual. The Ashram exists not only for service to our country but also for service to humanity, and self-realization through such service.

Every one cannot join the Ashram. The Ashram is not an infirmary or orphanage. It is for those men and women who wish to become brothers and sisters of mercy. Therefore it is not for those who are unable to do physical work. However we may take a few of those who are disabled in body but have a keen desire for service. And we must not drive away those who have joined the

Ashram and have subsequently been disabled. Many activities of the Ashram may outwardly appear contradictory, but this contradiction will disappear once you see their inner meaning.

It is not at all necessary that all those who have come in contact with me should be like me. It is even undesirable. That would be mere imitation. It would be worthwhile to adopt what is good in me only to the extent that they can assimilate it. For instance, Sardar takes tea, but no one thinks of stopping him. It may be that tea may be a necessity for him on medical grounds. Then what about some of those who stay with me and are my companions and who are meat-eaters? Only those who know that tea does not suit them or have thought about how tea is grown with sweated labour should give up tea. Ba takes tea in spite of the fact that she lives with me. She also takes coffee. I would even lovingly prepare it for her. Why is that so? I know your question was put only in fun. But we are prone to misunderstanding and intolerance in these matters and we must correct these errors.

TO LAKSHMIDAS GANDHI

XXVI

Johannesburg,
27. V. 1906

Respected brother,

I have your letter of the 17th April. I do not know what to say. You are prejudiced against me. There is no remedy against prejudice. I am helpless. I can only reply to your letter in full.

1. I have no idea of separating from you.
2. I claim nothing there.
3. I do not claim anything as mine.
4. All that I have is being utilized for public purposes.
5. It is available to relations who devote themselves to public work.
6. I could have satisfied your desire for money if I had not dedicated my all for public use.

I have never said that I have done much for brothers or other relations. I gave them all that I could save; and this I have mentioned not out of pride, and only to friends.

Rest assured that I will cheerfully assume the burden of supporting the family in case you pass on before me. You need have no fear on that score.

I am not now in a position to send you money as you desire.

It is well if Harilal is married; it is also well if he is not. For the present at any rate I have ceased to think of him as a son.

I am willing to go to India to attend Mani's wedding if at all possible. But I cannot give you any idea of my present condition. I am so hard pressed for time that I scarcely know what to do. Please cable the date of marriage, so that if possible I might hold myself in readiness to go.

I might perhaps inform you that I am in debt to Revashankarbhai.

You may repudiate me, but still I will be to you what I have always been.

I do not remember that I expressed a desire to separate from you when I was there. But even if I did, my mind is now quite clear, my aspirations are higher and I have no desire for worldly enjoyments of any type whatever.

I am engaged in my present activities as I look upon them as essential to life. If I have to face death while thus engaged, I shall face it with equanimity. I am now a stranger to fear.

I like those who are pure in heart. Young Kalyandas, Jagmohandas's son, is like Prahlad in spirit. He is therefore dearer to me than one who is a son because so born.

XXVII
TO KALLENBACH

[This letter was written in English.
V. G. D.]

7 Buitensingle, Capetown,
March 16, '14

The greatest grief imaginable has befallen me. My brother died yesterday, I suppose simply thinking up to his last breath of me. What a passionate wish it was on his part to meet me. I was hurrying everything on so that I could go to India with the quickest dispatch and fall down at his feet and nurse him. But it was not to be. Now I must go to a family of widows with my poor self as the head. You who do not know the Indian patriarchal family system do not quite realize what this may mean. Anyway my desire to get to India is keener than ever. And yet who knows? I doubt very much whether I shall ever realize that desire. However I must prepare for the pilgrimage, and then leave

it calmly in the hands of Him, who wields the almighty power.

These shocks make in me for still more intense fearlessness of death. Why should the event agitate one? The grief itself has a selfish touch about it. It is no calamity that my brother is dead if I am ready to meet death and consider it as the supreme and welcome crisis in life. It is because we fear death so much for ourselves that we shed tears over the death of others. How can I who know the body to be perishable and the soul to be imperishable mourn over the separation of body from soul? But there is a condition attached to a real belief in this beautiful and consoling doctrine. He who believes in it must not pamper the body but must be its ruler. He must regulate his wants so as to make it serve the dweller within. Not to grieve over the death of others is to accept a state almost of perpetual grief. For this connection between body and soul is itself grievous.

These are the thoughts that rule me just now. I shall not write another letter just now. This has written itself.

LETTERS FROM YERAVDA MANDIR

Gandhiji used to call his prison a *mandir* or temple, the temple for him of liberty spiritual as well as political. When he was in Yeravda mandir in 1932, Shri Mahadev Desai joined him in March, and kept a diary in which besides entering the events of the day he copied *in extenso* or in part the numerous letters Gandhiji wrote to members of the Ashram as well as outsiders. For instance he noted that on the 14th of March Gandhiji wrote as many as 42 letters to Ashramites besides the half a dozen letters written to others. In course of an English letter to an Ashramite, he wrote the following.

V. G. D.

XXVIII

In working out plans of self-restraint, attention must not for a moment be withdrawn from the fact that we are all sparks of the divine and therefore partake of its nature, and since there can be no such thing as self-indulgence with divine, it must of necessity be foreign to human nature. If we get a heart-grasp of that elementary fact, we

should have no difficulty in attaining self-control, and that is exactly what is implied in the Gita verses we sing every evening. You will recall that one of the verses says that the craving for self-indulgence abates only when one sees God face to face.

XXIX

[To a couple who sent a printed letter to him, mentioning the fact of their marriage and asking for his blessing]

We wish you would both render disinterested service. That the request for blessings should have been made on a printed card detracts from its value. If you seek blessings you should write in your own hand and state some good resolutions you have made to mark the auspicious event (*Translated from Gujarati*).

XXX

Beauty must be praised, but the praise should be mute. And you must enjoy it by giving it up (तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथाः ।). A man who is not moved by the beauty of the sky is incapable of being moved by anything at all. But one would prove himself to be a fool if

he began to build a flight of steps in a vain attempt to reach the heavens (*Translated from Gujarati*).

XXXI

[To a girl who wanted to observe *brahmacharya*]

In observing *brahmacharya* the chief thing is to realize the brotherhood of all men. We are all the children of one Father. And therefore marriage is not to be thought of. Take food as you would take medicine, and not in order to gratify the palate. Keep mind and body fully engaged in acts of service. Meditate on God as Truth (सत्यनारायण). If you clearly see that it is your duty to shave the head clean, by all means remove the hair and never care for what people would say. Your devotion to God should express itself as ministry to man.

Passions are our real enemies, with whom we must wage eternal war. This war alone is the theme of the *Mahabharata* (*Translated from Hindustani*).

[The six internal enemies of man are enumerated in the following verse :

कामः क्रोधस्तथा लोभो मदमोहौ च मत्सरः ।

'Lust, anger, greed, pride, delusion and envy.' Christianity lists these as the seven deadly sins: pride, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony, avarice and sloth. V. G. D.]

XXXII

[To the children in the Ashram. Written on March 21, 1932]

Do you remember my definition of God? Instead of saying that God is Truth, I say that Truth is God. This was not always clear to me. I realized it only 4 years ago, but my conduct has been unconsciously based on that realization. I have known God only as Truth. There was a time when I had doubts about the existence of God, but I never doubted the existence of Truth. This Truth is not something material but pure intelligence. It rules over the universe; therefore it is Ishvara (the Lord) . . . This is for me almost a matter of experience. I say almost, because I have not seen Truth face to face. I have had only glimpses of it. But my faith is indomitable (*Translated from Gujarati*).

XXXIII

[To a sufferer from asthma]

Write to Dr. . . . But I may suggest that you must fast for three days and break the fast with milk and orange juice (*Translated from Gujarati*).

[After dictating this letter Gandhiji said, ' I have made this experiment on my clients who besides legal advice received medical advice also. There was one Lutavansinh who observed a fast and lived on rice, milk and marmalade for a month. At the end of the month he was free from asthma. I also induced him to give up tobacco.' V. G. D.]

XXXIV

[To a co-worker who asked if one could see God face to face while still living.]

This question never worries a liver of the Gita life, for he is entitled only to strive and must not bother about the consequences. Still I am inclined to think that perfect realization of the Supreme is impossible so long as one is subject to the limitations of life. He might reach the door but cannot enter as he still

bears his body like chains. However he should be ever conscious of pain due to separation from God; if this pain is not felt he will be negligent in his effort and might even stop it altogether. The pain must not cause despondency but must be the spring of hope everlasting and a spur to stronger effort. Remember the Gita promise that the least little effort never goes in vain. Therefore the pain of separation too must be a source of joy for the aspirant, as he is confident that he is bound to reach his goal sooner or later (*Translated from Gujarati*).

XXXV

India is to me the dearest country in the world, not because it is my country but because I have discovered the greatest goodness in it. It has been subject to foreign rule, it is true, but its subjection too is a proof of its goodness. The status of a slave is preferable to that of a slaveholder (*Translated from Gujarati*).

XXXVI

[Shri Indu Parekh, an Ashram boy, asked, ' Shri Krishna got Bhishma killed by placing Shikhandi in front of him and prevented Jayadrath from seeing the sun by covering it up with the *sudarshan chakra*. Was his conduct on these occasions justified? And if it was not, can we enact such scenes as a part of our school theatricals?' Gandhiji replied to him on a slip of paper of the usual size for children, 4 inches long and 2 inches broad.]

It is an excellent question. The *Mahabharata* is poetry, not history. The poet tries to show that if a man resorts to violence, untruth too is sure to come in, and even people like Krishna cannot escape it. A wrong is a wrong, no matter who the wrongdoer is. Krishna was at fault in both the cases, and if my memory serves me right, Vyasa too takes an unfavourable view of these incidents. There may be no harm in enacting these scenes if such conduct is clearly shown as unworthy of imitation (*Translated from Gujarati*).

XXXVII

[To Shri Narandas Gandhi, the secretary of the Ashram]

I have my doubts about the propriety of enacting such scenes. I do not think we can derive any benefit from scenes in which big people have acted unworthily. Children are apt to draw the moral that if big people behave like that, so can we. I therefore think that our theatricals should be of a different kind altogether like say Rabindranath's *Mukta-dhara* or Maithilisharan Gupta's *Anagha*, which is very good indeed and fit to be presented to the children there. The Hindi is simple and sweet, and the subject-matter leaves nothing to be desired (*Translated from Gujarati*).

XXXVIII

Vanity is emptiness: self-respect is substance. No one's self-respect is ever hurt except by self, vanity is always hurt from outside.

In the phrase 'seeing God face to face' 'face to face' is not to be taken literally. It is a matter of decided feeling. God is formless. He can therefore only be seen by spiritual sight.

XXXIX

We may have any number of co-workers but God alone can be our friend. Friendship with men comes in the way of our friendship with God, as I have found from experience.

I do not believe that Krishna had the power of going from one place to another by supernatural means. Real *yogis* never go in for the acquisition of miraculous powers, for their *yoga* is solely an instrument of salvation, and they would never sell their birthright for a mess of pottage (*Translated from Gujarati*).

XL

Real *brahmcharya* must persist at all times and in all conditions. It is certainly difficult to reach this stage, and no wonder, for our very birth is due to an act of self-indulgence. We are deeply attached to the body which

owes its existence to that act. It must be difficult to overcome the inherited tendency to indulgence. However the body is also the temple of the Holy Spirit, and when we have seen the Supreme face to face, *brahmacharya* becomes a natural state, and remains undisturbed even if the celestial nymph Rambha comes down from the sky and tempts us. Our mother is the paragon of beauty for every one of us. Passion is stilled as we contemplate her beauty. So should it be when we think of every other woman. . . .

. . . The intelligence becomes keener as faith grows deeper. Indeed the Gita teaching seems to be this that it is for God to endow us with understanding, while it is for man to become richer and richer in faith. We have to grasp the implications of faith (*shraddha*) and understanding (*buddhi*), but this grasp too is obtained not by the study of definitions but by real humility. He who thinks that he knows knows nothing. He who thinks that he knows nothing acquires knowledge in God's good time. Even Almighty God cannot pour a single drop of water into a pitcher that is full to the brim. We have therefore

every day to stand before God as beggars with empty hands. This is covered by our observance of *aparigraha*, that is non-possession or poverty (*Translated from Gujarati*).

XLI

[To a correspondent who asked whether we should tell the truth or tell a lie, when telling the truth is likely to cost some one his life, while telling a lie might save him from death.]

The truth, where it is relevant, must be told at any cost (*Translated from Gujarati*).

XLII

I have met many Christian Science friends. Some of these have sent me Mrs. Eddy's works. I was never able to read them through. I did however glance through them. They did not produce the impression the friends who sent them to me had expected. I have learnt from childhood, and experience has confirmed the soundness of the teaching, that spiritual gifts should not be used for the purpose of healing bodily ailments. I do however believe in abstention from use of

drugs and the like. But this is purely on physical, hygienic grounds. I do also believe in utter reliance upon God, but then not in the hope that He will heal me, but in order to submit entirely to His will, and to share the fate of millions who, even though they wished to, can have no scientific medical help. I am sorry to say however that I am not always able to carry out my belief into practice. It is my constant endeavour to do so. But I find it very difficult, being in the midst of temptation, to enforce my belief in full.

XLIII

I have discovered one great defect in our women, namely that they hide their thoughts from the world. They thus become hypocritical. Hypocrisy comes easy to those alone who are wedded to untruth. I do not know of anything so injurious as hypocrisy, but the hypocrisy of our middle class women who are always subject to pressure eats into their vitals like a veritable cancer. Every now and then they do things which they do not like, and believe that they must do so. If they apply their mind to the subject a

little, they will see that there is no reason why they should yield to outside pressure, no matter from what quarter. Let them master this first lesson that they must cultivate the courage to stand before the world just as they are, and everything else will be added unto them (*Translated from Gujarati*).

XLIV

[To granddaughter Manu]

It is good that you saw Harilal's sorry plight with your own eyes. I knew everything already. However let us not give up hope. For with God all things are possible. If there is any merit still to Harilal's credit, it will make itself felt. We must not pamper him nor feel false pity for him. If only we become purer and purer ourselves, our purity is bound to exercise a beneficial influence over him. You must be tough and write to Harilal that you cannot have anything to do with him so long as he has not given up drink. He might rise from his stupor if all of us adopted such a strong attitude. A drunkard often gives up drink if he feels a severe shock.

I approve of your views on your marriage. You were dangerously ill as a little child and there was no hope that you would recover. But your life was saved thanks to Ba's devoted nursing and skilled medical treatment. But that illness was so severe that your growth was arrested for the best part of five years, and you are weak even now, so that you might fall ill but for Bali's excellent care. Therefore I always consider you to be at least 5 years younger than you actually are. For us in the Ashram the earliest age at which a girl should think of contracting marriage is twentyone. At this rate you will hardly be ready for marriage at 25. *However,* ~~But~~ I have no intention of binding you down.

For the present you must attend to your studies, build up a good constitution and understand as well as discharge your duties in terms of the Gita doctrine (*Translated from Gujarati*).

XLV

[To Shri Nanabhai Bhatt]

Why are you worrying over Dakshina-murti finance? Here you can by all means take a leaf from my book, for I am an expert in the subject. I had mastered one lesson long before the country made a *mahatma* of me. Just as one may not carry on trade with borrowed capital, one may not conduct a public institution on a credit basis. And if an institution has to send out the ablest members of its staff in order to collect the necessary funds, I would say that it operates on a credit basis. Instead of pitching upon a certain sum of money as your target, you should limit the number of admissions so as to be able to manage with the funds actually collected. It is the easiest thing in the world to carry out my suggestion. You have only to make up your mind; that is all. At the beginning of the year you should fix the amount of money you will need. If you get that amount without leaving your post of duty at the school, you carry on. If you don't, you close the school down. Your school has

an excellent record and efficient teachers. Why then don't you have faith? Dedicate the whole thing to God who will conduct it if He so wills. 'He has never been known to let down His servants', as the Gujarati poet puts it. You say you could have surmounted the difficulty if the Sardar or I had been available. But where is the difficulty? And who are we to help you forward? One blind man cannot lead another. Therefore cast your burden on Him alone (*Translated from Gujarati*).

XLVI

If learned Brahmans are also good men, it would be a desirable thing for them to spread the knowledge of the Upanishads among the people. But nowadays learning and goodness hardly ever go together. Therefore I am indifferent as regards the *parayan** of the Gita or the Ramayan in public. A *parayan* undertaken by one who does not understand the meaning, or understanding the meaning, reads scriptures aloud for show or for fame as if there were anything meritorious in merely reading them aloud, is nothing worth.

* Recitation from beginning to end.

I would go even farther and say that it does harm (*Translated from Gujarati*).

XLVII

We must believe in the existence of God, inasmuch as we believe in our own. Living beings exist and so does God Who is the sum-total of all life.

By a disbelief in God we injure ourselves in the same way as if we disbelieved in ourselves. That is to say, not to believe in God is something like suicide. But it is one thing to believe in God, and quite another thing to conduct ourselves as if we had such a living faith. As a matter of fact there is no atheist in the world; atheism is a mere pretence.

A man realizes the Supreme by becoming absolutely free from likes and dislikes and never otherwise. I hold that he who says that he has attained realization is far, far away from his destination. Realization is a matter of experience but does not lend itself to description in language.

I can live only in virtue of my faith in God. In my view there is no God different

from Truth. Truth is God (*Translated from Hindustani*).

XLVIII

It is my experience as a fasting expert that the breaking of fasts on solid food often results in great harm to the body.

XLIX

[Purushottam Gandhi writing from Rajkot asked Gandhiji three questions: (1) What is the difference between the so-called atheism of the Jains and the theism of the Gita? (2) If God is not a doer, who dispenses grace? Is prayer anything more than the expression of a person's wishes? (3) What do you mean when you say that 'Truth is God?' To him Gandhiji replied as follows:]

I do not think there is any contradiction between the Jain and the Vedic doctrine. They are only different ways of looking at the same thing. The God of Vedic Hinduism is doer as well as non-doer. God pervades the universe and is therefore a doer, but He is a non-doer inasmuch as action does not affect Him, and He has not to enjoy the fruit of action. The universe is not the result of any *karma* (action) of God in the sense

in which you use that word. Therefore there is no discrepancy in the Gita verses quoted by you. Remember that the Gita is a poem. God neither says nor does anything. He did not say anything to Arjuna. The conversation between the Lord and Arjuna is imaginary. I do not think there was any such conversation between the Krishna and the Arjuna of history. There is nothing improper or untruthful in the setting of the Gita. There was a custom of casting religious books into such a shape, and we cannot find fault with any cultured individual even today who employs such a vehicle for his ideas. The Jains put it logically, unpoetically and drily and said that there is no Creator of the universe. There is nothing wrong in saying so. However, mankind cannot live by logic alone, but needs poetry. Therefore even the Jain rationalists found it necessary to have temples, images and similar aids for the spirit of man, which are ruled out by mere logic.

In answering your first question I have in effect also answered the second. 'Grace is the diction of poetry. Devotion (*bhakti*) is itself poetry. But poetry is no improper or

inferior or unnecessary thing. On the contrary it is badly needed. Science would tell us that water is a chemical compound of hydrogen and oxygen, but in the language of poetry water is the gift of God. Understanding such poetry is an essential element of life, while ignorance of the chemical composition of water does not matter in the least. It is perfectly logical to say that whatever happens is the fruit of action. But 'impenetrable is the secret of action' (Gita IV-17). We mortals are so constituted that we cannot know all the causative factors of even a very ordinary event. We are therefore perfectly right in saying that nothing happens except by the will and the grace of God. Again the body is a prison for the soul, who is like the air enclosed by a jar. The air in the jar is ineffective so long as it thinks itself to be different from the atmosphere. In the same way the soul imprisoned in the body will be unable to draw upon the Reservoir of Power that is God so long as she imagines herself to be a doer. Therefore to say that whatever happens happens by the will of God is to state a matter of fact, and such humility

befits a seeker of truth. A lover of truth entertains only righteous wishes which are bound to be fulfilled. Our prayers bear fruit for the world to the extent that our soul is grounded in truth. The universe is not different from us, and we are not different from the universe. We are all members one of another, and influence one another by our actions. Actions here include thoughts, so that not a single thought is without its effect. Therefore we must cultivate the habit of always thinking good thoughts.

I say that truth is God not because God is without form and so is truth, but because truth is the only comprehensive attribute of God. Other attributes are only partial expressions of the reality that is God. The Gujarati word *Ishvara* (the Lord) is also a descriptive epithet of God, but as it literally means ruler, it sounds quite insipid. Thinking of God as the King of Kings does not satisfy the intellect. Such a line of thought may generate a kind of fear in our minds, so that we are afraid of committing sin and are encouraged in doing meritorious deeds. But merit acquired out of fear almost ceases to

be merit. Let us do good for its own sake, and not in order to win a reward. Pondering over the matter like this, I found that 'God is truth' is an incomplete sentence. 'Truth is God' is the fullest expression of our meaning in so far as it can be set forth in human speech. We arrive at the same conclusion if we consider the etymology of the word *satya* (truth), which is derived from *sat*. *Sat* means eternal. That which exists at all times is truth. It alone is, everything else is not. But while we learn to recognize God as truth, we must not allow our faith to weaken. On the other hand it should grow stronger. Such at any rate is my experience. By looking upon truth as God we steer clear of quite a number of dangers. We lose all interest in seeing or hearing about miracles. Seeing God is difficult to understand; but seeing truth presents no such difficulty. Seeing truth is indeed a hard task, but as we approach nearer and nearer to truth, we catch a glimpse of the God of truth, so that we hope to have a full view in His good time and our faith also burns brighter and brighter (*Translated from Gujarati*).



