

# Chapter 2: Live Together or Perish Together in an Uncertain World: How Does Dr. King, Gandhi, and Mandela's Legacy of Hope Speaks to Us Today?

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## Abstract

This analysis reflects on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1964 Nobel Peace Prize speech, emphasizing his call for global unity and addressing societal issues. Connecting King's ideals to the contemporary era, it explores persistent challenges, including racial injustice, poverty, and war. The chapter then delves into Mahatma Gandhi's 'Satyagraha and ahimsa,' emphasizing personal discipline and truth in social change. The final section highlights Nelson Mandela's anti-apartheid leadership, a timeless inspiration for freedom fighters. Urging spiritual transformation and justice pursuit, this examination underscores the enduring legacies of these figures as beacons of hope, advocating for a collective commitment to peace, justice, and unity on Earth.

**Keywords:** Nobel Peace Prize, Martin Luther King Jr., Global Unity, Social Justice, Mahatma Gandhi, *Satyagraha*, Nelson Mandela, Anti-Apartheid, Freedom Fighters, Legacy Reflection

## Introduction

At the prestigious ceremony of the Nobel Peace Prize held in Oslo, Norway, on December 11 1964, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929 - 1968) delivered a compelling speech titled 'The Quest for Peace and Justice'. His powerful words

resonated with the audience as he called upon the global community to embrace peace and fraternity. With conviction, he declared:

There is a sort of poverty of the spirit which stands in glaring contrast to our scientific and technological abundance. The richer we have become materially, the poorer we have become morally and spiritually. We have learned to fly the air like birds and swim the sea like fish, but we have not learned the simple art of living together as brothers (King 1964).

According to Dr. King, the survival of humanity depends on its ability to solve the problems of racial injustice, poverty, and war. To him, the great challenge for humanity comes from the fact that we have inherited a large common house despite our differences. It is a big house-world, in which we must live together. Blacks and Whites, Easterners and Westerners, Asians and Africans, Pagans and Jews, Catholics and Protestants, Muslims, and Hindus, despite their ideological and cultural differences, must learn to live with one another in this great world. More than ever, claimed King, 'We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools' (King 1964). Really, mutual acceptance is the foundation of human rights and shared duties on the common ship of humanity.

Regrettably, six decades since this poignant call from the African American martyr of racial justice and integration, humanity is not yet at the point of harmonious solidarity. On the contrary, divide between King's noble aspirations and reality seems to be increasing. The protests initiated by the movement *Black Lives Matter* in Minneapolis and spread throughout the world, after the murder of Georges Floyd on May 26 2020 (Hill 2020), were the expression of a general malaise around the issue of racial injustice. Moreover, many economists admit that the world has never been so rich as in our times. However, the difference between rich and poor had never been so colossal as it is in our times. And wars and conflicts, including the war in Ukraine, the terrorist attacks in both West and East Africa, are endless and seem to benefit those who initiate them through the business of sophisticated weapons, only good for terror. In addition to these dark clouds which continue to distance humanity from its true destiny, there are ecological disasters, the emergence of new diseases including Covid-19, the global prevalence of corruption and the sinister reality of migrants dying in the oceans and frontiers. For Pope Francis, 'Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last

two hundred years. (...) We need only take a frank look at the facts to see that our common home is falling into serious disrepair' (Francis 2015, N. 53, 61).

Before King's sacrifice for civil rights, Mahatma Gandhi, whose revolution commenced in South Africa, led a successful struggle for his country's liberation, India. He mentored his disciples to assimilate the mighty weapons of 'Satyagraha and ahimsa,' his philosophy of truth-force and nonviolence. Convinced that personal discipline, unwavering attachment to truth, and self-transformation were as crucial as social change, he sacrificed his life to defend the truth. Following the footsteps of his predecessors, Nelson Mandela driven by the suffering of his people, devoted his life to fighting against racial discrimination, striving to promote equality, equity, justice, and reconciliation for South Africa. Mandela's inspirational leadership as an anti-apartheid revolutionary and political figure continues to embolden freedom fighters across the globe.

This introspective examination serves as a wake-up call, urging profound spiritual transformation, a compassionate approach to globalization, and the relentless pursuit of social and ecological justice on Earth. It thoroughly examines the profound historical and enduring political legacies of the revered figures we hold as our unwavering beacons of hope, unflinching sources of light, and firm pillars of strength. Firstly, I will immerse myself in the enduring memory of Dr. King, whose heritage epitomizes the defense of a dignified life, the animating vital force within every soul. Secondly, I will illuminate Mahatma Gandhi's revolutionary quest for truth. Lastly, the third part of my reflection will encompass Madiba's intense dedication to South Africa and the world, an African sage who erected bridges to foster interconnections between people and cultures, transcending mere populism, polarizations, and artificial policies.

## **The Universal Responsibility to Uphold Human Dignity**

The legacy of Dr. King should primarily be remembered as that of a defender of life, the vital force that animates all living beings. 'Vital force is the source of all movement, growth, and power in the universe. It is the dynamic energy that animates all living beings and sustains the natural order' (Mbiti 1969: 19). In African cosmology, everyone is believed to possess a personal vital force. This vital force is associated with the breath. It is the source of life, energy, and spiritual power within a person. Maintaining a strong and balanced vital force is essential for well-being and vitality. The idea of vital force highlights the interconnectedness of all living beings. Humans are intimately connected to

nature and their actions can impact the balance and harmony of the natural world. Communal living and collective responsibility are instrumental to preserving the vital force of individuals, families, and communities. According to Mbiti (1969), individual life gets its meaning through the community and the community exists thanks to the individuals. Human dignity is understood within the sacredness of human life, which is a relational life. Living harmoniously within a community is, therefore, a moral obligation ordained by God for the promotion of life. Nobody exists by himself or herself. Each person owes his or her existence to his or her contemporaries, and to past generations. As maintained by Mbiti, 'Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: 'I am, because we are and since we are, therefore I am'' (Mbiti 1969: 108 - 109). The principle of *I am because we are*, is an expressing of the social nature of human beings and recall the necessity for mutual collaboration as a sign of brotherhood. It echoes the philosophy of Ubuntu, emphasizing the interconnectedness and interdependence of all individuals within society (Tutu 2000).

Dr. King embodied the fundamental values of human fraternity, justice, and love, all without explicitly using terms such as 'vital force'. His actions spoke louder than words, authentically demonstrating the profound meaning of life. His dedicated efforts were primarily directed towards marginalized communities and those facing adversity, illustrating solidarity with individuals standing against oppressive forces. In becoming a martyr for human rights, King left behind a legacy with a particular focus on advocating for the rights of African Americans. He significantly contributed to the ongoing struggle against discrimination and inequality through his commitment to nonviolent resistance. His life was a powerful example of the transformative impact that actions grounded in love, resilience, and the pursuit of justice can have on society.

Convinced that 'The time is always right to do what is right' (King 1964: 4), he wholeheartedly dedicated his life to defending lives imperilled by racism, discrimination, and crime. As King passionately proclaimed, 'Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere' (King 1963: 82). In fact, there has been and continues to be a significant gap between the *Declaration of Independence* in 1776 and the reality of human rights in American society. King's civil disobedience for the achievement of human rights marked a paradigm shift in a social revolution in the United States. He understood that civil disobedience becomes a duty when life is threatened by injustice.

In the historical context of revolutionary pursuits, individuals advocat-

ing for change have frequently turned to a higher moral standard to scrutinize a legal system that hesitates to address the pressing crises of the time. A notable example is found in the work of Gunnemann (1979). Examining the case of Dr. King, we observe that he drew inspiration from diverse principles such as the *Declaration of Independence*, the word of God, and natural law in his quest to uphold the human rights of African Americans. The foundations of his arguments were undeniably robust.

Dr. King's revolutionary stance was deeply rooted in the pursuit of human dignity, and this quest found sustenance in the religious underpinnings of his movement. The malevolent force of segregation emerged as the chief impediment preventing African Americans from enjoying their rights within the societal framework dominated by White Supremacy. The injustice was palpable, and for Dr. King, eradicating this systemic evil became a paramount objective in pursuing justice and equality.

He delineated distinct eras in the evolution of race relations in the United States, as documented in John Ansbro's report (Ansbro 2000). 'The first period, from 1619-1863, treated the *Negro* as a depersonalized cog in a vast plantation machine. Then, the Supreme Court gave constitutional validity to the whole system of slavery, and the Negro was declared property and subject to the dictates of his owner' (Ansbro 2000: 161). Despite their involvement in the *War of Independence* (1750-1783) and the enactment of the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution, King asserted that African Americans were persistently viewed as commodities, treated akin to pack animals, deemed subhuman, and ultimately regarded as an inferior race.

The second period, argued Dr. King, spanned from the *Emancipation Proclamation* of 1863 to the 1954 Supreme Court decision on school desegregation (Ansbro 2000). In this time frame, legal acceptance was extended to the Negro; however, full recognition as a person remained elusive. According to Frederick Douglass (1845; 1855), the *Emancipation Proclamation* granted the Negro an abstract freedom, lacking in the provision of necessities such as food, land, and shelter. In line with King, 'Emancipation granted the Negro freedom to hunger, freedom to winter amid the rains of heaven. Emancipation was freedom and famine at the same time' (King 1967: 79). Indeed, such negative freedom is inhuman, dangerous, and life-killing. Political freedom without economic freedom is a provocation of peace of mind.

Consistent with Dr. King's revolt, I question the extent to which Black people worldwide are free. The vital force of our ancestors is appealing to us to shake the coconut trees of hypocrisy, exploitation, and racism. 'Our lives begin

to end the day we become silent about things that matter' (King 1967: 23). However, our commitment is to be nonviolent.

The civil rights struggle Dr. King engaged in was aimed at emancipating the oppressors and the oppressed. Quoting Douglass, he stated: 'This is a struggle to save black men's bodies and white men's souls' (King 1966: 80). All human life is connected. The disease of discrimination corrupts both the life of the oppressor and the life of the oppressed. Because humanity comes from God, who is love, each person is to be his or her brother's and sister's keeper. As stated by Dr. King, 'He is a part of me, and I am a part of him. His agony diminishes me, and his salvation enlarges me' (King 1966: 23). Therefore, oppression or discrimination anywhere is oppression and discrimination everywhere. King was engaged in revolutionary actions to enable healing through complete freedom for both black and white men and women.

In *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (1967), he quoted Emmanuel Kant: 'All men must be treated as ends and never as mere means' (King 1967: 97). According to Kant, human beings should function morally as if they were members of a kingdom of ends or rational beings. Each person is sublime and holy, for he or she is human. Therefore, all humans are created equal. Regrettably, due to impoverishment, prejudice, and exploitation, millions worldwide are unjustly regarded merely as tools at the disposal of supremacists rather than being recognized as autonomous individuals. Their vital force is not valued for their own sake but instead utilized to serve the interests of the powerful.

King's unwavering commitment to a just revolution was profoundly entrenched in implementing nonviolent strategies. He astutely formulated principles of nonviolence in his leadership, and his steadfast followers consistently adhered to his philosophy (Sané 2014). With wisdom, he employed timely prayers, vigils, and mass civil disobedience to awaken his people's conscience, urging a return to the principle proclaimed in the *Declaration of Independence* and the establishment of universal justice for all. Nonviolent resistance confronts evil with courage and is devoid of hatred, embracing suffering while seeking reconciliation with opponents and maintaining unwavering confidence in the triumph of causes (King 1958). It is an embodiment of unconditional love. In 'Strength to Love' (1963), he wrote: 'Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that' (King 1963: 62). King's wisdom finds realization through the commitment of individuals striving for human dignity,

prioritizing the marginalized, and pursuing the common good. According to King, Mahatma Gandhi was a profound inspiration for the path of nonviolence in his revolution. He believes that Jesus Christ provided the spirit of engagement, while Gandhi supplied the motivation. How does Gandhi's enduring legacy speak to us in the present day?

## **The Pursuit of Truth: A Collective Responsibility for Humanity**

The enduring legacy of Gandhi continues to resonate, reminding us of the timeless importance of nonviolence and the transformative power of peaceful means in effecting positive change. Central to Gandhi's philosophy is the notion that the quest for God, *Satyagraha*, is intrinsically intertwined with the quest for Truth. In Gandhi's belief system, the concept of God surpasses boundaries and encompasses universality.

For Gandhi, Truth is the Soul or Spirit, and so, the *Satyagrahi* or seeker of Truth gets a soul-force in pursuing the Truth (Kumarappa 1961: 6). Gandhi claimed: 'For me the only certain means of knowing God is nonviolence-ahimsa' (Bondurant 1958: 20). In fact, *ahimsa* is one of the ten points of *Yama* and *Niyama*, the ethical code which underlies yoga, tantra, and parts of Hinduism. However, it is utilized by Jains, as well. It is the renunciation of the will to kill or to damage. In conformity with Gandhi, the principle of ahimsa is 'hurt by every evil thought, by undue haste, by lying, by hatred, by wishing ill to anybody' (Gandhi & Prabhu 1955, chap. II, para. 2). To find God, the only certain way is love, for God is love. To achieve the Truth, the *satyagrahi* has to encounter injustice, cruelty, exploitation, and oppression, but will pursue Truth by doing good even to the evildoer. Love is to be applied to wrongdoers, and to people who hate good doers. In fact, the nonviolent resistance does not consider evildoers as the end of this journey for the Truth; rather, God is his ultimate goal.

Additionally, Gandhi advocated for self-governance. He believed that individuals and communities should have control over their affairs and should work toward self-sufficiency. He emphasized the importance of decentralized governance and empowering local communities. Equality and social justice were vital to him. He fought against various forms of discrimination, including those based on caste, religion, gender, and economic status, because he believed in the inherent worth and dignity of every individual and advocated for social justice, equal rights, and opportunities for all members of society. He

emphasized a simple and minimalistic lifestyle against the possessive prisons of materialism because, to him, a person's worth is not related to their bank accounts but their capability to prioritize spiritual and ethical values. Through advocacy for self-reliance and empowering local communities, he preached equality, social justice, and equal rights for all, including rights to relevant education. He believed that interreligious harmony was possible. Interfaith dialogue and cooperation among different worshipers can never be a threat to the stability of a nation. Against the dogma of religion, Gandhi stood firmly for spirituality. Religion and spirituality are similar because both relate to the transcendent and involve believers. However, they have significant differences.

Religion encompasses a specific set of institutionalized beliefs, practices, and dogmas observed by organized communities or groups of people. On the other hand, as Gandhi emphasized, spirituality is an individual practice fostering a connection with the divine or transcendental forces. This connection leads to a profound sense of peace and purpose. A spiritual individual may not necessarily align with any religion, as spirituality transcends institutionalized beliefs. Gandhi cautioned that, in some instances, organized religions can impede the richness of spirituality.

According to Gandhi's wisdom, inherent spirituality exists in all humans from birth. However, as individuals grow and become engrossed in social life, driven by the pursuits of survival and success, they tend to lose sight of their spiritual essence, fading into roles and identities imposed by society. Gandhi's message resounds today, asserting that true greatness is unattainable without a spiritual connection with the soul—the authentic self. Building this connection necessitates qualities such as honesty, integrity, and compassion (GandhiServe 2005).

Gandhi urges that only those who forge a genuine connection with their soul identity can uncover their vocation. Every individual, he believes, has a vocation to discover and a mission to manifest moral values, strong character, and deep spiritual roots. Gandhi advocates for the harmonious integration of spirituality into one's identity and purpose to realize genuine greatness and meaningful living.

Discovering your vocation means determining your purpose in life, which is based on a clear understanding of your unique skills, abilities, and desires. Following your vocation produces greater self-fulfillment, makes you a better steward, and equips you for more productive service to others. To hear your call, you'll need to set aside ambition,



distractions, and resistance based on fears and low self-esteem. If circumstances interfere with your ability to follow your vocation, you may need to recraft your job or role to better fit your purpose (Johnson 2018: 52).

Besides, if one succeeds in discovering one's vocation, one discovers one's uniqueness because nobody exists by accident, and every person is unique. My uniqueness cannot be interchanged with another person's uniqueness. Like a missive sent on Earth, everybody has come into the world with a mission to perform. Uncovering the essence of this mission, encompassing its symbols, significance, challenges, implications, and risks, demands both attention and boldness. As conveyed by the African proverb, 'Both lions and sharks are professional hunters. However, lions will never be able to hunt in oceans, and sharks will never be able to hunt in the jungle. However, both are excellent hunters'. This suggests that each person possesses a distinctive set of capabilities. The exemplary life of Mahatma Gandhi serves as a compelling reminder that embracing a spiritual path facilitates the discovery of one's uniqueness, liberates the mind from competition, and fosters greater acceptance and diversity in society. As Gandhi aptly expressed, 'The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others' (Gandhi, as cited in Frye 1964).

Genuine individuals acknowledge the undeniable truth that they exist within a shared world and recognize the merits of diversity. Hence, fostering dialogue becomes crucial for ethical interpersonal communication. Embracing dialogue requires a dedication to seeking the well-being of others, cherishing relationships, and, most importantly, respecting diverse opinions and individual differences. Nelson Mandela, the lawyer who staunchly opposed Apartheid from his confinement in Robben Island prison, internalized this truth and discovered a new purpose within the collective journey of South Africans against White supremacy. Post his liberation, Mandela opted for reconciliation over retaliation, dedicating the remainder of his life to bridging people and cultures. His accomplishments play a vital role in the global transformation of Earth into a unified home.

## **Guided by the Construction of Bridges: Connecting People and Cultures**

The construction of bridges to foster connections among people and cultures should serve as a guiding principle for our endeavors, recognizing Madiba

unwavering devotion to South Africa and the global community. His engagement to bridging divides and cultivate connection among individuals and diverse cultures deserve celebration worldwide. While we readily acknowledge the tangible significance of physical bridges, which span isolated lands, rivers, seas, forest, and islands, Mandela championed the inherent dignity of every individual, regardless of their race, gender, or heritage. He embraced the principles of reconciliation and forgiveness as essential for healing a divided South Africa (Boesak 2012).

It was much more the historic moment of the late 1980s and the decision of the apartheid leaders to negotiate with the leaders of the liberation movement that moved Mandela and other ANC leaders to the idea of a non-violent transition and subsequent effort to seek reconciliation with their former enemies (Prevost 2023: 287).

Enduring twenty-seven years in prison, Mandela emphasized the crucial role of dialogue, negotiation, and nonviolent methods in achieving peaceful social and political transformation in his nation. Unfortunately, his lifespan did not extend beyond fulfilling his destiny of translating political freedom into socio-economic freedom. Similar to bridges serving the purpose of facilitating movement, traffic, and encounters, Mandela himself can be viewed as a bridge – an embodiment of a vital force recognizing education's transformative power to open doors, connect people, and uplift individuals and communities, breaking the cycle of systemic poverty and inequality. In his later years, he devoted himself to bridging the gap between Black and White communities, fostering dialogue, and guiding his people to align their fundamental rights with modern capabilities for articulating their needs. Realistically, he understood the importance of reconciliation as both an open door and an enduring field for cultivation. While Mandela was not exempt from criticism, the wise leader did his best, acknowledging that his decisions were not flawless.

The servant and visionary leadership of our ancestor Madiba should inspire us to continue connecting and reconciling people of different cultures, fostering unity within South Africa, and building bridges between South Africa, Africa, and the rest of the world. By exemplifying the value of strong institutions, global solidarity, and opposition to imperialism and neocolonialism, Madiba paved the highway for democracy and transformative leadership. African leadership seeking to stay in power should follow his

example. However, how we utilize the bridges he created to foster economic justice depends on us, our institutions, and the policies governing our relationships.

Embracing a harmonious life that contributes to the greater good, akin to Mandela, involves recognizing each person as a neighbor to serve, an alter ego to promote, and a fellow human being to love within a just system. Social values such as truth, freedom, justice, and love, inherent to human dignity, form the foundation of authenticity within our shared home. Leaders who want to enact political and economic reforms, build bridges, and encourage cultural exchanges must uphold these values as unwavering reference points. All people of goodwill should cherish and uphold these principles, as they hold the key to a more equitable and interconnected world.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, our collective journey toward a flourishing existence in our common home, guided by the legacies of King, Gandhi, and Mandela, requires us to adopt responsible behaviors that embrace nuanced identities, cultural diversities, equality of rights and duties, without neglecting our commitment to Mother Earth. According to the environmental philosopher Hans Jonas, each person must make the following ethos his own: ‘Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life’ (Jonas 1984:11). For Jonas human survival depends on our individual and common efforts to care for our common home. Implementing racial justice should always follow the implementation of ecological justice for the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are intertwined (Francis 2015).

To promote human dignity and integral justice inspired by Mandela, Gandhi, and King, we must recalibrate our way of living, forge new relationships informed by integrity, and make solidarity a shared duty. The earth is to be considered as the generating source of life instead of remaining a resource to be exploited without any care. Condemned to live together or perish together, we must restore order in our common home to be capable of passing on to future generations a world in which all people live peacefully. Indeed, men and women can collaborate and reshape the world. Many are still convinced that love is better than hatred, solidarity than selfishness, active non-violence than violence, and complementarity than competition. Therefore, it is essential to sharpen our discernment and nurture universal values. In the words of King, building a peaceful world requires more than a mere rejection of war.

It necessitates a profound love for peace and a willingness to make personal and communal sacrifices for its realization.

Before concluding his Nobel Lecture, Dr. King shared the fascinating story about Ulysses and the Sirens, drawn from Greek literature.

The Sirens had the ability to sing so sweetly that sailors could not resist steering toward their island. Many ships were lured upon the rocks, and men forgot home, duty, and honor as they flung themselves into the sea to be embraced by arms that drew them down to death. Ulysses, determined not to be lured by the Sirens, first decided to tie himself tightly to the mast of his boat, and his crew stuffed their ears with wax. But finally, he and his crew learned a better way to save themselves: they took on board the beautiful singer Orpheus whose melodies were sweeter than the music of the Sirens. When Orpheus sang, who bothered to listen to the Sirens? So, we must fix our vision not merely on the negative expulsion of war, but upon the positive affirmation of peace. We must see that peace represents a sweeter music, a cosmic melody that is far superior to the discords of war (Dr King 1964).

Inspired by the tale of Ulysses and his crew, who embarked on a relentless quest and ultimately found sanctuary in a secure harbor, we are prompted to navigate the seas of existence. Much like their odyssey involved exchanging perilous melodies for life-bestowing ones, we can follow suit as a collective humanity. We can connect hearts and minds by assuming the roles of stewards of vital forces, drawing inspiration from figures like King, truth seekers reminiscent of Gandhi, and architects of bridges akin to Mandela. Rather than succumbing to illusions, deceptive distractions, populism, relativism, and emptiness, let our unity and inclusivity flourish. In doing so, we can forge a robust, harmonious, and fortified future against the tumultuous waves of uncertainty.

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