

Inspirations of the World

by Lisa Volden

You are nothing. Your beliefs mean nothing. Your life belongs to the majority and there is nothing you can do about it. This is only a fraction of what Martin Luther King and Mohandas Gandhi were forced to deal with in their lifetimes. King is widely known for his leadership in the black equality movement and Gandhi for his devotion and suffering for peace between religions and independence from the British. Two men fighting different struggles somehow touched nearly every person in the world with their stories of greatness. However, they were similar in a few ways. Both of these amazing men endured a life long struggle due to oppression and at the same time practiced nothing but non-violent forms of protest.

Martin Luther King struggled immensely due to oppression. Along with the rest of the African American race in the United States, King had to deal with discrimination throughout his entire life. African Americans in the 1960's, regardless of how educated they were, weren't allowed to serve on juries, vote, stay in motels, dine at lunch counters, or use bathrooms labeled "whites only." They were also denied the right to choose where they would rent or buy their homes (White 2). Because King was so involved in organizing protests against black oppression, he received numerous threats to his life, beginning when he took charge of the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955 extending to his murder in 1968. Once while his children and wife were inside their home, King's house was bombed. In addition to that, he had his hotel rooms and phone tapped by the FBI under J. Edgar Hoover. This opened the door for rumors to creep in while the FBI tried to make him commit suicide shortly after he won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 (White 4). However, as King stated in one of his famous speeches, "We have come to our nation's capital to cash a check" (qtd. in White 6), and neither King nor any other one of his loyal followers was going to leave until that check was cashed. No man or event could stop Martin Luther King from struggling to fight and end the oppression that was placed on his people.

Much like King, Gandhi also had to struggle with oppression throughout his entire life. Practicing only truth, love, and nonviolence to all living things, Gandhi traveled to South Africa from England, where he was studying to become a lawyer. It was here that Gandhi experienced some of the worst forms of discrimination. Gandhi once refused to relocate to the "colored" section of a train heading to Johannesburg, which led to him staying a very uncomfortable night in the freezing train station after being kicked off the train. He was then arrested by a Caucasian stagecoach driver the next morning (McGeary 6). Despite Gandhi's many protests and attempts to gain independence in India from the British, justice was never served and it seemed that the only ground he accomplished was in raising the spirits and dignity of his people (McGeary 6). However, once the British were finally out of power in India, the war suddenly changed to that between his own people, between religions. It seemed that all of his protests and efforts to gain freedom between 1946 and 1947 did nothing to end the slaughter between the Muslim and Hindu people. Because his people refused to live with each other in peace, as was his belief, Gandhi placed the blame on himself (McGeary 8). On January 30, 1948, a Hindu murdered Gandhi by shooting him three times at point-blank range. His murderer believed that it was Gandhi's fault that the Muslims had a piece of the Hindu nation, and hated him for not holding feelings of hatred towards the Muslim people (McGeary 9). This amazing man, murdered by one of his own people, has inspired millions of people in the world to re-evaluate their beliefs because of the courage and strength he held to overcome oppression along with King.

Amazingly, even through all the hate and humiliation Martin Luther King was handed, he repeatedly demonstrated nothing but nonviolent forms of protest. King was a preacher who often spoke of freedom and equality. He was driven by stories from both the New and Old Testaments of the bible, particularly the story of the Israelites from the Old Testament and the gospel of Jesus Christ from the New (White 5). King was extremely courageous and faithfully followed the path of nonviolence (White 5). He organized bus boycotts, rallies, and protests rather than participating in any form of rioting. In one instance, King

had received a threatening phone call in the middle of the night stating that if he did not stop the bus boycott, he would be shot and have his house blown up. Instead of retaliating, King began to pray. Of that event he said, "I could hear an inner voice saying to me, 'Martin Luther, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And lo I will be with you, even until the end of the world'" (qtd. in White 5). It is this inner strength that has made Martin Luther King one of the world's most righteous.

Likewise, not only did Gandhi practice nonviolence, but in essence, he is the portrait of nonviolence and human rights. Gandhi was a vegetarian who devoted every Monday to his cause and did not speak a word on that day (McGeary 2). He also came up with the idea of "passive resistance" to fight the British government's plan to fingerprint Indians (McGeary 6). In addition to this, Gandhi used bus boycotting, mass nonviolent non-cooperation, and civil disobedience to undermine the British government's attempts to oppress his people (McGeary 7). Gandhi is the culmination of peace and the idea of nonviolence. He was referred to by his people as Father of the Nation (McGeary 2). To everyone else, though, "his image offers something much simpler – a shining set of ideals to emulate. Individual freedom. Political liberty. Social justice. Nonviolent protest. Passive resistance. Religious tolerance" (McGeary 2). Gandhi held an untainted devotion for the nonviolent creed and his struggles with oppression have and should give the rest of us hope for the future of our societies.

The similarities between these two men cannot go unnoticed. They both struggled immensely for freedom and equality all the while showing nothing but love and peace for humanity. These famous words from Martin Luther King perfectly summarize the basic goal these men were trying to achieve; equality and understanding for all mankind. "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" (qtd. in White 4). For these two men to live their lives and struggle in such a peaceful and harmless way in spite of all of the ugliness that was pushed upon them is truly heroic, and their efforts should never be forgotten.

Works Cited

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