

HIND SWARAJ:
Its Appeal to Me

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Preface to the Second Edition

This booklet is a reprint, with slight modifications, of a research paper I wrote way back in 1982. It deals with the struggle that I went through in trying to understand what Gandhi stood for, culminating in a realization that his small booklet “Hind Swaraj” written in 1908 contained the essence of his approach to life.

“Hind Swaraj” is not an easy book to understand, especially for people used to logical reasoning. That is perhaps why Nehru and other followers of Gandhi were aghast at what he had written, and rejected it as a panacea for India’s problems. But serious students of Gandhi would be making a blunder if they ignored its contents and message.

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INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi had conveyed the quintessence of his ideas in a small booklet titled *Hind Swaraj*, which was first published using a question-answer format in the columns of the *Indian Opinion* of South Africa in 1908. As he came to occupy a position of pre-eminence on the political and social scene in our country, this booklet was read widely and reprinted several times. However, his ideas as conveyed in this booklet found little acceptance, even among his admirers and followers. Many thought the booklet represented a view-point that he must have discarded with the passage of time. But Gandhi corrected them, saying:

“The booklet has gone through several editions and I commend it to those who would care to read it. I withdraw nothing except one word of it, and that in deference to a lady friend.”

However, Gandhi did concede that he had been unable to win others over to his point of view. Hence he made an all-important distinction between his ‘corporate activity’ – where, in deference to the wishes of others, he was omitting a crusade against modern civilization – and his personal goal, wherein the objective remained the attainment of Swaraj as spelt out in the booklet:

“But I would warn the reader against thinking that I am today aiming at the Swaraj described therein. I know that India is not ripe for it. It may seem an impertinence to say so. But such is my conviction. I am individually

working for the self-rule pictured therein. But today my corporate activity is undoubtedly devoted to the attainment of Parliamentary Swaraj in accordance with the wishes of the people of India.”

The above passage was written in 1921. Could it be that in the year 2008, a full century after the publication of *Hind Swaraj*, India is getting ripe for its message? There are a few signs, some faint and some not so faint, that not only in India but all over the world, there is a growing disenchantment with the ‘fruits’ of modern civilization, which Gandhi had condemned in unequivocal terms. But does this mean we are getting ready to make the great transformation necessary to actually follow the lead given by Gandhi? What would such a step imply, both at the personal and societal level? It is the purpose of this booklet to address these important questions.

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The usual procedure in a seminar (wherein this document was first presented way back in 1982) is to present “papers”, generally of an academic nature, and certainly without any personal touch. On this occasion, I had deviated from this tradition, as the title of this document conveyed. I had done so deliberately, for I felt that on certain occasions a personal touch can be a valuable aid in establishing good communication, especially a personal rapport, between the reader and the writer. My own attitude towards Gandhi and all he stood for had undergone a sea change during the period 1969 to 1982, and I felt a personalized account of this change will help in conveying what I was trying to say. I apologize to those who find the introduction of a personal element jarring, but it is unavoidable in what is essentially a narrative of the journey that my mind, my thinking process, has traveled through.

During the period 1960 to 1969 I was deeply troubled by the problems of poverty and inequality and exploitation that existed in our midst, and acutely felt the need for social change. I had joined several social change groups and organizations with the hope of doing something meaningful, and initially felt drawn towards the leftist ideologies. In 1965, after getting my degree in electrical engineering, I went to the USA for further studies and then started my career there in the field of systems engineering and computer science, but during my spare time became quite active in social change groups. However, gradually I became disillusioned with their functioning, and my attraction towards leftist ideologies started waning. At that time, Jay Prakash Narayan had visited the US and addressed Indians there, and I felt moved by his sincerity and commitment. I was already feeling like returning to India, and his appeal to do so helped crystallize my decision.

So, in 1969, I returned to India and took up a job in the field of systems engineering in Delhi. It was also the year of the centenary celebrations of Gandhi’s birth, and so I had the opportunity to see several old Gandhian stalwarts. I was particularly drawn to the personality of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, who was then visiting from Pakistan. During my spare time, I continued my involvement with social change groups, and so got to know a number of people who could be broadly termed ‘Gandhians’. As I learnt more of the life and deeds of Gandhi, I began to see that here was one man who had practiced those ideals that I cherished. As my

disillusionment with the leftists centred around the wide gap between their preaching and their practice, I was happy to make this discovery.

But as I delved deeper into Gandhi's prescription for the ills of humanity – and, in particular, for the emancipation of India – I found it confusing. In fact, my mind often revolted against what he had to say. Much of it was clearly at odds with the scientific training I had been put through. In certain places, he seemed plainly irrational: as for example his 'karmic' explanation of worldly events. On many occasions, he seemed to advocate a throw-back to medieval times: as for example his unreserved praise of conditions in ancient India (see pp. 46-47 and 60-63 in *Hind Swaraj*). Worst of all, there seemed to be such obvious contradictions in his approach. A good example is his condemnation of railways (see pp. 44-48 in *Hind Swaraj*), which is based on the logic that "God set a limit to a man's locomotive ambition in the construction of his body". But if God wished to so set a limit, then why did He endow us with the intellect to discover the steam engine and the diesel locomotive? Worse still, if Gandhi had such contempt for railways, why did he travel in them – why couldn't he confine himself to the limits that God had set? Such questions bothered me. And yet, Gandhi's magnificent adherence to the ideals I cherished precluded my rejecting him totally. He had won my heart, but not my head.

Then followed a period of intense search. It was spurred by a spate of incidents in my life that involved my relationships with my co-workers, my friends, my family, the servant at home, and, most important, certain colleagues of mine with whom I had set up a professional consultancy service with the idea of putting some of the ideals that I (and they, too) cherished into practice. I won't go into details, save mention that it was a period of deep anguish and agony, and caused me to repeatedly re-examine my own role vis-à-vis the ideals that I supposedly cherished. Declaring equality as an ideal was easy, but was I really dealing with those around on equal terms? Talking of the need for sharing was alright, but was I really genuine in my desire for sharing? Admiring Gandhi for truth and honesty was fine, but was I really being fully truthful and honest? It was a very painful exercise to face up to these questions, but a stage had come when I had no choice. Consequently, I set out in search of some means by which I could be less unworthy of the ideals that I supposedly cherished.

It is this search that brought me to the concept of self-rule or self-control, and once I understood what that involves, my entire understanding of Gandhi underwent a sea change. I began to see all that he stood for in an entirely different light, a light that I had never been exposed to in my earlier years. I had gone through what would be regarded as the best of education, but throughout I had felt that something very basic was missing. Modern education had taught me how to think. But it had not taught me self-control, i.e., how to control my thoughts, my mind. I had thus become a slave, not a master, of the thinking process. The result was that I had fallen an easy prey to any temptation that crossed my path. I now realized that unless one can guard against this, one cannot practice any ideals: and the saddest part is that as long as we are slaves to the thinking process, we are oblivious to our deviations from our own ideals. Thus modern education is a great aid in making us good engineers, good doctors, good scientists, good economists, but not good human beings.

I also realized that education that teaches us self-control does not have to be invented: it merely has to be re-discovered. There have always existed, *and still exist*, many highly evolved souls who have themselves mastered the art of self-control and are ever willing to guide the *genuine seeker* along such a path. Such highly evolved souls can be found in all countries, but India in particular has an abundance of them. At first, what these great souls

taught seemed to me, like Gandhi's writings, anti-scientific and irrational. But as I went deep into their theory and their world-view, I slowly began to realize that the education they imparted was far more scientific, more objective, more logical, and of much greater practical benefit than anything I had ever imagined. Even now, I marvel at the fact that such a thing exists at all, and am dumbfounded when contemplating the opportunities it offers.

The result was a complete revolution in my way of looking at myself, at the world around me, at the universe, at the concept of God and religion, at life and its purpose. Among the many things that were transformed was my attitude towards Gandhi. Slowly but surely, my head fell in place with my heart. This transformation profoundly altered the way I looked at everything he had done, said or written. I began to see *Hind Swaraj* in a different light, and recognized that it was a truly seminal book. True, the book could have been written in a more cogent, better organized way; but such writing is the field of the academic or intellectual, not of a Gandhi.

Like all Indians, I had all along associated 'swaraj' with independence, especially the political independence we obtained in 1947. I could see someone extending the meaning to include economic independence or even social justice, but never did I imagine Gandhi had an entirely different meaning for the word. However, once I understood what self-control meant and what education it involved, it seemed obvious to me that Gandhi equated 'swaraj' with self-control (the literal meaning of the word 'swaraj' is mastery over self, or self-control), and that this was the concept that threaded through his entire book: the English sub-title 'Indian home rule' being somewhat misleading. I cite below a few references from the book in support of this view:

1. At the very end of the book, Gandhi summarizes in unambiguous terms the message of his book: "Real home-rule is self-rule or self-control", to be achieved through soul-force or love-force.
2. On page 20, Gandhi declares impatience and swaraj to be poles apart: "You are impatient...The fact that you have checked me.. shows that, for you at any rate, Home Rule is far away." Impatience is a state indicative of lack of self-control, and has nothing to do with the political or social meanings with which the word 'swaraj' is usually associated.
3. On pages 28 to 33, Gandhi makes it clear that the Reader's picture of Swaraj – political independence – amounts to "English rule without the Englishman". He then warns that the true nature of Swaraj "is as difficult for me to understand as it seems to you to be easy", implying thereby that it is an intricate concept, way beyond its usual mundane associations.
4. He then goes on to pass strictures on the civilization the English have come to represent, the rationale behind these becoming evident on page 61 where he defines true civilization in terms of control over the mind: "Civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty. Performance of duty and observance of morality are convertible terms. To observe morality is to attain mastery over our mind and our passions. So doing, we know ourselves. The Gujarati equivalent of civilization means 'good conduct'."
5. Based on the above, he explains on page 65 that for attaining Swaraj "it is not necessary for us to have as our goal the expulsion of the English", but that, "it is Swaraj when we rule ourselves...such Swaraj has to be experienced, by each one for himself": another clear indication that his definition of Swaraj was in moral and religious, not political or social, terms.

6. The above gets reinforced by the manner in which he contrasts Mazzini's ideals, which he supported, with Garibaldi's methods, which he did not: "Mazzini has shown in his writings on the duty of man that every man must learn how to rule himself...Garibaldi simply wanted Italy to be free from the Austrian yoke" (p.67).
7. His discussion of passive resistance (pp.84-85), good education (pp87-89) and the evils of machinery also center around the argument that bringing "our senses under subjection" (i.e., practice of self-control) is the road to putting "our ethics on a firm foundation", without which no Swaraj is possible.

Of course, one *could* view the contents of Hind Swaraj differently, without giving prime importance to the concept of self-control. In fact, I suspect that most present-day scholars of Gandhi would be either irritated or amused at my interpretation. I am sure they can draw on powerful arguments to show that my reading is erroneous. There is no way I can prove that they are wrong or I am right: the grand old man is no longer in our midst, and it only he who could have certified for sure what exactly he had in mind. All I can do is assert this: that before I understood what self-control stands for (and this was no small or quick exercise), Hind Swaraj seemed to me to be full of contradictions and confusion, but after that the message seems to come through crystal clear.

As I struggled to grasp the meaning of self-control and through it the message of Hind Swaraj, my mind went through a severe and stormy 'debate'. Perhaps a good way of conveying how I finally came to understand Hind Swaraj is to capture that debate (which took place in *my own mind*) in the form of a hypothetical conversation. Of course, such a "constructed dialogue", put out in a handful of pages, can never be a good representation of the complex maneuvering that the mind actually goes through. But it may of some help in communicating with others, especially those whose doubts and reservations are of a similar variety; it also has the incidental advantage of being in keeping with the 'question-answer' format that Gandhi used in Hind Swaraj. So now, here is that hypothetical conversation:

A conversation between Mind and Soul

Mind: What exactly do you mean by self-control, which you equate with Swaraj?

Soul: Swaraj or self-rule or self-control is that mental state in which, by getting rid of evil tendencies within, one becomes master of oneself in the sense in which Gandhi, Buddha etc., were. For example, when Christ was being crucified, when nails were being driven into his hands and legs, his reaction was not one of anger or fear or even pain, but of love: he implored the Lord to forgive those who were doing it, "for they know not what they are doing". That is self-control in its supreme form: complete mastery over oneself, whatever be the circumstances. How much ever we may *wish* to be in a state of love and compassion and forgiveness, how many of us would not complain to the Lord, cry out in agony, curse the tormentor, and in other ways lose our self-control when subjected to such treatment? Leave alone ordeals such as crucifixion, we break down and bow to circumstances even during the most minor trials. How many of us can refrain from opting for 'sleeper' accommodation if it necessarily entails bribing the train conductor? How many of us can master the willpower to give up smoking? How many of us can resist watching a morally corrupting movie? If we reflect deeply over our lack of self-control in our day-to-day dealings, the extent to which we are slaves rather than masters of the mind becomes self-evident.

The essence of Gandhi emanated from his capacity for self-control, as is evident from the following piece by Louis Fischer:

One evening I watched Mahadev Desai spin. I said I had been listening carefully to Gandhi and studying my notes and wondering all the time what was the source of his hold on people. I had come to the tentative conclusion that it was his passion.

“That is right,” Desai said.

“What is the root of his passion?”, I asked.

“This passion”, Desai explained, “is the sublimation of all the passions.”

“Sex?”

“Sex and anger and personal ambition... Gandhi is under his own complete control. That generates tremendous energy and passion.”

What is extremely important to bear in mind is that self-control is the means to the practice of ethics and morality, and in fact of all ideals. Generally, most of us subscribe in theory to the ethical and moral standards, as well as to ideals such as truth and ahimsa, that great men like Gandhi personify. And yet, when it comes to putting these very ideas into practice in our day-to-day lives, we fail miserably. *The development of self-control is the key to bridging this gap.*

Q.: Undoubtedly, great souls such as Christ, Buddha and Gandhi had enormous self-control. But they are the rare exceptions, and were born that way. While they are worthy of admiration and even worship, surely the common man cannot emulate their example.

A.: I do not agree that they were born that way. Gandhi was full of escapism, fear, indulgence, even jealousy, in his younger days. It was through spiritual training (and the essence of all spiritual training is self-control) that he underwent a miraculous transformation from a timid, cowardly, floundering, unimpressive person to one who radiated fearlessness, truthfulness, will-power, energy and self-confidence. Buddha and Christ too went through similar training, and, thereby, transformation.

Actually, such a transformation *seems* miraculous because we are not familiar with that process, that ‘spiritual education’, which leads to self-control. Modern man is totally in the dark about the existence of such education. But such education does exist, and is available to each one of us, especially here in India with its rich spiritual heritage. Once we understand what spiritual education involves, personality transformations of the kind displayed by Gandhi will no longer surprise us, and we will realize the truth behind the age-old saying that ‘every saint has a past, and every sinner a future’. Great souls will then no longer be seen as those who were lucky enough to be born that way, but as those who worked themselves up to that level.

Of course, this is not to say that every person who takes to training in the art and science of self-control will, in this very lifetime, reach the heights of a Gandhi or a Buddha, just as it cannot be guaranteed that a student who enrolls for a physics course will end up as a Newton or an Einstein. But what can be guaranteed is that every person who takes to the spiritual disciplines that teach self-rule will bridge at least a small portion of the enormous gap that separates us, the ordinary atmas, from the great souls, the mahatmas.

Q.: This business of spiritual disciplines is a dangerous one. As you know, Christ, Buddha and Gandhi belonged to different religions. The moment we talk of spiritual training, we get into the controversy of which religion is greater or better, and in a multi-religious country like India such controversies will only lead to riots and divisions, as happened at Partition. It is much better to understand Gandhi's message in Hind Swaraj without recourse to religion, and we can do so by understanding and taking to satyagraha, or passive resistance, and ahimsa, or non-violence.

A.: It is my firm conviction that satyagraha or passive resistance cannot be *implemented* (as different from being understood in a theoretical sense) without recourse to self-control of a very, very high order. Gandhi was emphatic on this point:

“ To become a passive resistor is easy enough but it is also equally difficult. I have known a lad of fourteen years become a passive resistor; I have known also sick people do likewise; and I have also known physically strong and otherwise happy people unable to take up passive resistance. After a great deal of experience it seems to me that those who want to become passive resistors for the service of the country have to observe perfect chastity, adopt poverty, follow truth and cultivate fearlessness. These characteristics are not to be abandoned in the belief that they are difficult. Nature has implanted in the human breast ability to cope with any difficulty or suffering that may come to man unprovoked. These qualities are worth having even for those who do not wish to serve the country. Even a man weak in body is capable of offering this (i.e., passive) resistance. One man can offer it just as well as millions. Both men and women can indulge in it. It does require the training of an army; it needs no jiu jitsu. Control over the mind is alone necessary, and when that is attained, man is free like the king of the forest and his very glance withers the enemy.”

Thus Gandhi makes it clear that anyone, even ‘millions’, can develop to a state where the ‘very glance withers the enemy’, a state we associate only with super human personalities such as Christ, Gandhi or Buddha. The secret, he says, lies in “control over the mind” that leads to chastity, poverty, truth and fearlessness, and he insists that without cultivating these a satyagrahi is no satyagrahi. How does one achieve the desired goal of “control over the mind”? We all know it, and Gandhi too makes it clear (pp.87-88) that modern education offers no means to achieve this end. Wherein, then, can we obtain the tool for obtaining control over the mind? Here is where the introduction of spiritual training becomes unavoidable. It is only through such training that one can cultivate the qualities necessary to become a true satyagrahi.

As far as ahimsa is concerned, Gandhi's requirements were even more stringent. He insisted that spiritual faculties be developed to a degree where one loses fear of death, one of the most difficult tasks even for a person who has developed a fair amount of self-control. How uncompromising and unequivocal he was on this point is evident from his statement that “I see how I can teach ahimsa to those who know how to die; to those who are afraid of death, I cannot”.

I do, however, quite agree with you that it would be dangerous to rake up controversies relating to superiority or inferiority of one religion compared to another. But I do not mean to do that at all. On the contrary, introduction of spiritual training leading to self-control would help unite all religions, for development of self-control is at the root of “that religion which underlies all religions” (p.41) and is in fact the quintessence of all religious teaching and training.

Q.: I am not convinced. In fact, if you will permit my saying so, I have a faint suspicion that you are trying to show all religions as offshoots of Hinduism: a suspicion that I sometimes

have had even about Gandhi. After all, this business of self-control is peculiar to Hinduism, with its glorification of the ascetic way of life.

A.: If by asceticism you mean giving greater importance to non-material pursuits over the material (“set a limit to our worldly ambition so that our religious ambition could be illimitable”, as Gandhi put it on p.42), then I insist that it is not peculiar to Hinduism. A religious teacher, by definition, is one who emphasizes the non-material over the material: so this is a universal, and in no way peculiarly Hindu, criterion. On the other hand, if by asceticism you mean self-mortification or forced denials, then I must hasten to point out that self-control stands for something very different. Forced abstentions of the kind associated with self-mortification actually lead to an inflammation of passions, for it is the property of the mind to react violently when denied something. The result is that the craving for that which has been denied increases, and eventually a stage comes when the cloak of self-mortification is torn away and the person loses even the small amount of self-control that ordinary humans possess. Gandhi himself never advocated self-mortification, as is evident from the following advice he gave to his American follower Richard Gregg:

“ If you were to give up [something] in a mood of self-sacrifice or out of a stern sense of duty, you would continue to want it back, and that unsatisfied want would make trouble for you. Only give up a thing when you want some other condition so much that the thing no longer has any attraction for you, or when it seems to interfere with that which is more greatly desired.”

So the whole secret of education for self-control is to reach out to something higher, sweeter and more satisfying than the material and mundane things of life: something that is more life-giving, more attractive, than life itself. Here is where the ‘religious’ element comes in, for spiritually realized souls *know*, from personal experience, that contact with God, with that Inner Voice reverberating within, is so sweet that one is ready to sacrifice anything for its sake. Once this contact is established, one can live in the midst of all worldly temptations and yet not fall a prey to them. This state, so different from that of forced self-denial, is the real test of self-control, and the true goal of all religions. The best expression to describe this state was given not by a Hindu, but by Jesus Christ: “be ye in the world, but not of it”, he exhorted his disciples. The ‘lotus’ symbol of the Buddha conveys the same ability: to be in the midst of slush and mud, and yet not be contaminated by all the dirt around. The Prophet Mohammed, too, wanted his disciples to develop this state. This is evident from the famous story where the Prophet and his disciples were in a desert, sitting in the shade of a tree. The Prophet commanded his disciples to, one by one, remove his shoes, stand in the sun and name every single thing or person he possessed. Each disciple did so when his turn came, shifting uncomfortably from one foot to another as the scorching heat from the sun was truly unbearable. The last one ordered to do so was the ‘ideal’ disciple, Mohammed’s son-in-law Ali, who jumped on to the sand, announced, “I only have you, Master”, and jumped back into the shade. What a wonderful way in which the Prophet conveyed the message of ‘being in the world but not of it’ to his disciples!

So, self-control is not peculiar to Hinduism. It represents “passivity about worldly pursuits but activity about godly pursuits” (p.42), which is the basis of *all* religions.

Q.: This business of passivity about worldly pursuits irks me. But before I come to that, let me ask you this: if all religions are really the same, as you contend, why is there so much strife between them? And why do the teachings of every religion, and even of the sects within a religion, differ so much from each other?

A.: We have to learn to distinguish between true religion or spiritual training which imparts self-control as the means to God-realization, and organized religion which is generally contaminated with some form of vested interest. I am not trying to find fault with organized religion. Development of vested interest is an inevitable outcome of any form of organization, religious or otherwise, especially those which involve money or power. It cannot be helped. Even organizations operating in the name of Gandhi have been known to become the seat of vested interests. Rather than blame anyone, it is better to recognize that this is the inevitable result of giving prime importance to money or power, and therefore that there is very little we can do to eliminate these clashes of vested interests once money and power become the prime considerations. But what we can do is bear in mind that true religion or God-realization is something sacred, to be obtained only through Swaraj or self-control, whereas strife, bitterness, rioting and religious wars represent conflicts among the vested interests of those running the organizations.

Pir Inayat Khan, the great Sufi saint who lived in Delhi in the 20th century, referred to this distinction as ‘living *the* religion’ versus ‘belonging to *a* religion’. He was emphatic that there was only *one* religion that we could *live*. If, in our day-to-day life we *live* the life of a true Muslim, Inayat Khan said, we are automatically also living the life of a true Hindu, a true Christian, a true Sikh, and a true Jew, for self-control becomes the essence of our existence. Sectarian considerations come into the picture only when we stop living *the* religion and instead see ourselves as ‘belonging’ to various religious groups: this leads to sects and divisions, and thereby to vested interests and conflicts.

So, Gandhi is not the only one who talked of self-control as representing ‘the religion that underlies all religions’ (p.41). All great souls, all truly great religious teachers, have done so. And if you would prefer to listen to personalities who command authority in scientific rather than religious circles, I could refer you to Albert Einstein (see his book *Ideas and Opinions*, especially the chapter on Religion and Science), or the other famous physicist Erwin Schroedinger (see his *My View of the World*), or the famous economist E.F. Schumacher (see his *A Guide for the Perplexed*). Far from projecting an atheistic viewpoint that we generally associate with scientists, they have taken a stand that corresponds to Gandhi’s, including the emphasis on self-control as the basis of all true religions.

Q.: This brings me to the question of worldly pursuits. All the three examples you have cited - Einstein, Schroedinger and Schumacher – were very much involved in worldly pursuits.

A.: In that sense, Gandhi was even more energetically involved in worldly pursuits.

Q.: Yes, but you just quoted him as idealizing the state of ‘passivity about worldly pursuits’.

A.: By ‘passivity’ about worldly pursuits, Gandhi had not meant inactivity. On the contrary, he meant super-activity, and demonstrated it in practice. When one looks at the 90+ volumes that comprise *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, it is difficult to believe that one single man could have written all that. But he did all that as a ‘side affair’, alongside his leadership of the country, his padayatras, his fasts, his prayers meetings, his experiments in nature cure and a host of other interests, including the role of a marriage counselor to some estranged couples! What a supremely energetic man he was.

The secret of his energy lay in his ‘passivity about worldly pursuits’. This ‘passivity’ is a state of the mind, not of the body. By the process of self-control, one throws out all ambition,

all ego, all desire for results and all self-interest. This enables one to work at a level above that of ordinary consciousness. At the ordinary levels of consciousness, our mind is 'active' in worldly affairs, weighing and calculating the situation around us in terms of self-interest. This is but natural, for except in the case of those who have developed self-control, the mind represents our ego, our 'self'. Those who have studied the science of the mind, the science behind the art of self-control or God-realization, know that this process of weighing and calculating is a tremendous drain on our nervous energy. This enormous drainage takes place during all our waking hours, for this process goes on even when we are seemingly doing nothing, e.g., just lazing around. Self-control teaches us how to preserve and utilize this vast store of nervous energy, which is usually wasted. By learning to make the mind 'passive', i.e., non-calculating as far as self-interest is concerned, Gandhi had managed to tap this vast potential of nervous energy. Thus 'passivity in worldly pursuits' does not mean inactivity but a tremendous burst of truly selfless activity. This is precisely what Christ advocated when he talked of 'being in the world but not of it'. This is what Lao Tsu, the great sage of China, had in mind when he said the 'inactivity' of the Tao represented a seemingly paradoxical combination of supreme activity *and* supreme relaxation: when our self-interest is no longer involved, we can afford to be totally relaxed, and we will then be able to tap that vast reservoir of energy hidden within us. This is what Lord Krishna had in mind when he recommended 'nishkama karma', action performed without desiring the fruits thereof. This is also what is the true meaning of 'moksha' or liberation. We normally think of 'moksha' as representing a release or escape from this world, but its deeper and truer meaning is escape from the 'enemies' inside of us (*kam, krodh, moh, lobh* and *ahankar*). Therefore, moksha and self-control are synonymous. I suspect that the greatness and energy displayed by Einstein, Schroedinger and Schumacher were a result of their success, however partial, at the attainment of self-control.

Q.: I suddenly realize you have digressed from the theme of the book. *Hind Swaraj* is all about Swaraj for India. But you have defined Swaraj in terms of self-control, which is essentially an individual affair.

A.: Swaraj at the social or national level means a societal set-up designed to encourage its citizens to practice self-control. It is not an easy thing for individuals to opt for self-control; all our 'natural instincts' tend to drive us in the opposite direction. The social set-up can either further inflame these instincts, or provide an atmosphere where they can be overcome more easily. To the extent that it goes in the latter direction, there is Swaraj at the social or national level.

This is the clue to why Gandhi termed his book 'a severe indictment of modern civilization' (p.16). In modern civilization, as Gandhi points out (see pp. 36-37), men are enslaved by temptations and luxuries and dissuaded from morality and religion. In other words, a society based on such a civilization that encourages self-indulgence, not self-control, needs to be condemned.

Incidentally, Gandhi pointed out that India had lost its Swaraj not because the British had taken over the land by force but because Indians got tempted at the sight of British goods (see p.38). And, he maintained, as long as this temptation lasts, India can never attain real Swaraj. The attainment of a *mental* state where this temptation is absent or at least low is the goal or definition of *Hind Swaraj*.

Q.: Gandhi's indictment of modern civilization is a wide-ranging one. He condemns not only British goods but the parliamentary form of democracy, railways, doctors, lawyers – just about everything we are used to. Much as I admire Gandhi, I consider it an impractical, unnecessary and even retrograde step to abandon all these. Further, what is the precise social set-up that can replace these? Marxists have a well-defined social structure in mind for implementing their goal: what is the equivalent Gandhian vision?

A.: To make a particular structure the goal is to put the cart before the horse. Even in Marxism, the ultimate goal is the creation of a New Man, not merely a social structure involving the dictatorship of the proletariat. Too much stress on social structure tends to make us forget that it is a new value framework we are after. This is particularly true when self-control is at the root of the desired value framework.

Further, specifying a social structure too much in advance unnecessarily introduces inflexibility and rigidity in our pursuits. Definitely, new types of social relationships will be required to implement the Gandhian vision at a societal or national level, but we must not forget that *decentralization* would be an essential ingredient of such a scheme, and it goes against the principle of decentralization to prescribe an organizational structure to be applied uniformly in all areas. It is best that local leaders come up with their own ideas and structures, keeping in mind local conditions and constraints and constantly learning from their own and other peoples' experiences. The important thing is to make sure that the message of self-control has seeped in: the rest will automatically follow.

This is not to say that no social-economic models for implementing Swaraj at the social level exist. A very good example of such a model is contained in the book *Forest Farming* by Sholto Douglas and Robert Hart, with an introduction by E.F. Schumacher. This book presents to us a scheme by which ecologically balanced development of a bio-region can take place by integrating forestry with farming and encouraging multi-usage of land through a balanced, rather than an exploitative, approach. The book shows how we can make use of the “incredible *potentialities* of nature”, if only we can learn to discover and utilize them by tuning in with, rather than vainly trying to lord over, nature. For example, it demonstrates how all our basic requirements such as food-stuff, fibres, building material, shade, water, energy, etc., can be obtained through trees in a way that does *not* deplete natural resources, thus providing a more or less permanent solution to the world's economic problems. (In a sense, this amounts to an amplification of the ideas of J.C.Kumarappa, the brilliant economist who became Gandhi's ardent disciple).

Such a scheme can, of course be implemented only in a decentralized set-up with “natural bio-regions” forming the basis of community living. But the important thing is the objective of the whole set-up: the objective would be to provide everyone the basic needs by making use of nature's bounties, thus giving individuals a lot of time and opportunity to go in for the higher pursuits – intellectual, cultural, and, most important, spiritual – without being unduly anxious about where the next meal will come from. Instead of the present ‘rat race’, where everyone is forced, willy-nilly, to equate living with ‘making a living’, citizens living in such a social-economic set-up can make independent choices about how to spend their lives on the basis of their personal interests rather than mere economics, with the state and society encouraging everyone to make the difficult decision of practicing self-control.

Lest such a scheme seem utopian or impractical, it is good to remind ourselves that in the last few decades or so a number of small communities have sprung up in different parts of the

world wherein the essence of these ideas are being put into practice. Auroville in India is a good example, but as Duane Elgin has documented in her book *Voluntary Simplicity*, there are many millions who have begun to live a life in which the acquisition of goods is seen as a means to satisfy basic needs, rather than an end in itself. Such a lifestyle frees one to pursue the higher goals that provide for personal development, harmonious human relationships, intellectual and creative activity, and, most important, spiritual growth.

As the book *Forest Farming* makes abundantly clear, a set-up based on voluntary simplicity would *not* be a throw-back to medieval times. In fact, science and technology will have greater scope than now, albeit with a different emphasis: the pursuit of happiness, rather than merely the accumulation of goods.

This brings us to the answer to why Gandhi opposed railways, doctors, lawyers etc. He opposed them *because of their adverse effect on self-control*. To take the example he gave about doctors (p.59), “ I overeat. I have indigestion. I go to a doctor, he gives me medicine, I am cured. I overeat again, I take his pills again. Had I not taken the pills in the first instance, I would have suffered the punishment deserved by me and I would not have overeaten again. The doctor intervened and helped me to indulge myself. My body thereby certainly felt more at ease; but my mind became weakened. A continuance of a course of medicine must, therefore, result in loss of control over the mind. I have indulged in vice, I contract a disease, a doctor cures me, the odds are that I shall repeat the vice. Had the doctor not intervened, nature would have done its work, and I would have been freed from the vice and would have become happy.”

One may be tempted to say, “Ha, the solution is not to condemn doctors, but to have a campaign against overeating and vice”. Yes, there is a force to this argument. But we must not forget that institutions such as doctors, railways, lawyers, parliamentary system, etc. are part of the culture of modern civilization in which self-control is positively discouraged. Therefore, campaigns against overeating, vice, etc. are never very effective in such a setting. Take, for example, the ill-effects of TV, which have been so well documented in studies such as “The Plug In Drug”, whose title itself conveys the result of this research effort. When TV was first introduced in India in 1965, its ill-effects were already known. To combat these, the then Minister for Information in those days, Indira Gandhi, announced a policy that confined TV sets to ‘community centres’ in the villages, with the lofty aim of making them ‘audio-visual educational tools’ to spread knowledge and eradicate illiteracy. But over the years, the same TV has become a principally urban phenomenon, a ‘status symbol’ of the worst kind, with children as well as adults falling a willing prey to the ill-effects of this plug-in drug. In a civilization where self-indulgence pervades the atmosphere, all technologies and all professions cannot help but give further impetus to self-indulgence.

If we can instead have a ‘post-modern civilization’ of the kind envisaged in *Forest Farming*, with emphasis on ecology and self-control, there would be place in it for doctors, lawyers, railways, technology, science: but all these would be of a very different kind from those present right now, and would earn praise rather than scorn from a Gandhi.

Q.: Ecology and social forestry – the main theme of the book by Douglas and Hart – are well-known concepts, and are beginning to be widely accepted. But I fail to see the connection between these and self-control.

A.: Ecology is actually the art and science of seeing things as a whole. Our body is a good example of that which we are able, at least in a limited way, to see as a whole: we know that a nail driven into a finger will cause pain and discomfort not only in the finger but in every part of the body, for all our body parts form an interconnected whole. Normally, it is not imagined that such a 'wholeness' exists outside of an individual. A man dying in Kolkata is not thought to be causing any pain to, say, a gambler in Las Vegas. But actually, even though most of us are totally unaware of it, a deep interconnectedness does exist between everything in this universe. Every man is connected to every single fellow human being, dead or alive, and this connection extends to every creature in the non-human realms too, and even to the non-living aspects of the universe. *This living interconnectedness is the basis of all true ecology.* Incidentally, it is this very invisible interconnectedness that is referred to as God by all great souls including Gandhi: their spiritual training makes them conscious and aware of this unity as something very real, very concrete. Even more interesting, Albert Einstein has invoked his Relativistic concepts of space and time to define a human being and man's hidden potentials based on this interconnectedness:

“ A human being is part of the whole, called by us ‘Universe’, a part limited in space and time. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest, **a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness.** This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is, in itself, a part of the liberation and a foundation for inner security.”

Another great scientist, James Jean, has done the same from the view point of quantum mechanics:

“ As it is with light and electricity, so it may be with life: the phenomena may be individuals carrying on separate existences in space and time, while in the deeper reality beyond space and time we may all be members of one body.”

Unfortunately, education in modern civilization is based solely on the ‘reductionist principle’ enunciated by Descartes, and totally ignores the wholistic or ecological angle that 20th century physics is pointing to. The reductionist principle teaches us how to analyze, to break down into parts, but not how to see the whole, i.e., the invisible interconnection between two seemingly disparate parts. The essence of analysis is to learn to ‘think’, which we are taught; the essence of ‘seeing as a whole’ involves control over our thinking process, which we are not taught. Here is where the connection between ecology and self-control comes in. An ecologically-oriented life would mean introduction of education by which we can learn to master the forces that regulate our mind – and this is also the road to self-control. So, the same education process that teaches us self-control also teaches us how to view the world around us in a wholistic, or ecological, framework. In fact, without such education in self-control, well-meaning concepts such as ‘social forestry’ could have disastrous results.

This, incidentally, is the clue to understanding why Gandhi condemned railways and yet traveled in trains. Gandhi's condemnation of railways is based on the argument that ‘God set a limit to man's locomotive ambition in the construction of his body. Man immediately proceeded to discover means of over-riding this limit’ (p.48). But what is ‘God’? It is very, very necessary to understand and constantly bear in mind that great souls such as Gandhi do not look upon God as a ‘person’ who lives somewhere ‘high above’. To Gandhi, God represents that invisible force which unites each one of us with every other aspect of the

universe. In other words, the ultimate basis of ecology is nothing but God; or, conversely, God is nothing but that force, that love, which binds one and all. So, what Gandhi is saying is that previous to the introduction of railways, a certain ecological balance was maintained that was conducive to self-control. But in discovering the steam engine, the diesel locomotive and electric train, man allowed his intellect, his 'reductionist tendencies', to develop without a compensating development in the wholistic or spiritual faculties. Hence the railways contributed to an atmosphere of a 'rat race' where self-control was lost sight of. If only we could develop sufficient self-control so as not to be a slave of a technological innovation, if only one could ensure that intellectual development needed for the invention and use of a gadget is matched by a corresponding spiritual development so as to lead to an ecological balance, then no harm can come from that gadget. It is for this reason that Gandhi, having developed the required self-control, did use the railways. The important thing is to refrain from being a slave to the innovation or gadget (a *mental* condition) rather than use or refuse an innovation or gadget (a *physical* condition). When the car in which Gandhi was once traveling from Sevagram to Wardha developed trouble, he quietly and happily walked all the way – and, amazingly, reached Wardha in time for the meeting for which he was proceeding!

Q.: You have brought in so many different aspects and subjects into the discussion. Is it not possible to understand *Hind Swaraj* without understanding such difficult concepts as ecology and God?

A.: Once self-control is understood, an understanding of all these other things automatically follows. Gandhi's vision was an all-encompassing one, and any attempt to look at it in fractional or reductionist terms is tantamount to killing it. We are used to looking at different subjects and aspects in a compartmentalized manner because of the reductionist education we have been brought up on, but one who has developed a 'wholistic' vision can easily and immediately see the inter-connections.

In this context, it is interesting to note that recent research on the brain and in psychology (see *The Psychology of Consciousness* by Robert Ornstein) has revealed that intellectual training of the kind we receive in modern education confines itself to development of only a very small part of the brain's total capacity. The 'right hemisphere', which represents intuition, wisdom, love and other characteristics relating to 'wholistic' vision, remains completely undeveloped. Education in self-control will help us to rectify this imbalance and enable us to see reality in a non-compartmentalized way.

Support for the Gandhian vision is also coming from many scientists who are delving deep into the implications of Relativity Theory and Quantum mechanics. David Bohm, a favourite student of Einstein, was the first to venture into this field. Fritjof Capra's *Tao of Physics* was the leader in bringing this connection to the common man's notice. His later book "The Turning Point", in which he examines the socio-political implications of the new world view emerging in science, clearly demonstrates the connection between the work of these scientists and what Gandhi stood for. For example, the 'turn' in human history (from which he derives the title of his book) that he predicts is so much in line with Gandhian thinking:

From competition to cooperation
From unlimited expansion to optimal size
From material growth to inner growth
From central power to decentralization
From hard technology to soft technology

From specialization to synthesis and multi-disciplinary approaches.

Q.: Ah, this appeals to me. I hope the world is really moving towards what Capra foresees, though I don't quite see the link between all that you have talked about and the 'turn' envisaged by Capra. But tell me: what can I, as an individual, do to help create this new world, this Gandhian 'turn', as predicted by Capra?

A.: Put your heart and soul into self-control, into God-realization.

Q.: What?

A.: Yes, put your heart and soul into self-control, into God-realization.

Q.: This is really ridiculous. I want to do something for the world, and you ask me to shut my eyes from all that is going on in the world and instead become a recluse.

A.: I never asked you to become a recluse, or even to shut yourself off to what is going in the world. I only asked that you should, we all should, *strive* in the direction that Jesus Christ indicated when he exhorted, "Be in the world, but not of it". Unless we constantly bear in mind this maxim in mind, we will end up serving not the world but our own egos. This is the central cause behind the failure of so many well-intentioned revolutions. Its leaders, not having mastered the art of self-control (especially with reference to what Mahadev Desai had termed 'personal ambition' in his conversation with Louis Fisher), fell an easy prey to the delusion that they were serving their country when actually they were serving their own egos.

By contrast, practice of self-control releases tremendous energy which can be utilized to serve the country and the world without interference from the ego. Gandhi had demonstrated this so well.

Q.: So what you are saying is one should be involved in the kind of action Gandhi was and at the same time develop self-control. Is it possible to do both simultaneously?

A.: Yes, it is. In fact, self-control can never be implemented in isolation. It has to be tested and improved during our day-to-day interactions with fellow human beings. Spiritual teachers who guide us in this development do suggest certain periods – maybe a couple of hours a day – of 'meditation' that involves being alone and quiet, both physically and mentally, but the idea is to develop the required level of mental tranquility to face up to the problems and trials of this world without losing our self-control, our balance and equanimity. So we have to be very much in the world – have a vocation just like anyone else – and yet strive not to be of it. Being involved in public work of the kind Gandhi was is one possible vocation, and an attractive one for someone who wishes to serve humanity.

Q.: Are you implying that there are other vocations by which one could serve humanity?

A.: Yes.

Q.: Like what?

A.: Just about anything.

Q.: What do you mean?

A.: It is a little difficult to explain what I mean, for it involves an understanding of that seemingly absurd statement of the spiritually realized souls that ‘every microcosm contains the entire macrocosm’. But let me try, anyhow. As I told you, in the wholistic or ecological view of the universe, there is an invisible inter-connection between everybody and everything. Spiritual education, or self-control, puts us in touch with this interconnection, this unity, this source from which the entire creation has emanated. Hence it gives an unbelievably powerful tool by which to understand and, if deemed fit, to influence the universe.

In the materialistic, atomized way of looking at the world and its inhabitants, there is only one way that anything can get done in this world: the ‘external’ or visible way that we are all familiar with. But in the non-materialistic, ecological, wholistic world-view, we have a much better and more effective way open to us: the ‘inner’ or ‘invisible’ way of self-control.

Let me illustrate by means of a somewhat crude analogy. Supposing that I was asked to ensure that no electrical appliance was functioning within a particular city. One way I could go about my task would be to comb through every locality, go through every street, search every house, locate every appliance of every kind, and put off every switch connected to each appliance. This would not only be tedious and time-consuming, but would also be inefficient, ineffective and incomplete: I may miss so many switches, and in any case cannot ensure that someone else may not switch on what I have switched off. But if I could somehow locate the source of electrical supply to the city, I would have hit upon an efficient as well as foolproof way of accomplishing my goal. A similar comparison exists between the ‘external’ and ‘internal’ ways of performing action: the first one involves an inefficient and mostly ineffective interaction with each individual part whereas the second deals directly with the source, the Tao, that governs our universe.

Once I saw a cartoon showing a man and his wife stranded on the road with a car whose engine had developed problems. The hood was open, and the husband was staring blankly at the engine parts, while his wife was looking angrily at him, and saying, “Don’t just stand there, hit something.” In a sense, that is what we are made to do when our social conscience cannot stand all the ills of society and we try to change everything through our social revolutions – we hit out at what has gone wrong, without understanding the laws behind the working of the universe.

The well-known story of how Ganesha won the race for ‘going round the world’ by just going around his parents (i.e., God or the source of everything) on his rat while his poor brother Subramanyam struggled to traverse the entire universe externally on his peacock is, in my opinion, our ancients’ way of conveying the efficacy of the internal modes of action over the external.

Q.: Did not Gandhi choose the external forms of action?

A.: His external actions, being of the visible variety, were obvious and hence are well-known. His internal actions, being invisible, are not. But I have come to believe firmly that it was his internal actions – the constant radiation of love and compassion from his highly powerful ‘inner self’ – that was responsible for his real influence. Take, for example, what happened at Kolkata in 1947. Mountbatten had pleaded with Gandhi to become his “One Man Boundary

Force” to preserve peace in Bengal, as against the 55,000 armed soldiers assigned to Punjab. We know the unbelievably terrible things that took place in Punjab; by contrast, Gandhi single-handedly enacted ‘the miracle of Kolkata’. What is interesting and important is the manner in which this miracle was performed. He did not go around the streets of Kolkata, he hardly met anyone or made speeches. He accomplished what he wanted by his mere presence and his prayer meetings. And what accomplishments these were! When he arrived in Kolkata, he was greeted by a howling, jeering, cursing mob. In 24 hours’ time, the ‘goondas’ had sheathed their daggers and both communities joined together for the flag-hoisting ceremonies. In a week’s time, attendance at the prayer meetings had jumped to 100,000 people: “lining roof tops, hanging from windows, clustered on balconies”. Within two weeks, there were almost a million. When, on August 31, the peace was broken by the action of some goondas, he did not tour Kolkata trying to implore people not to join in the bloodbath. Instead, he went on a fast, saying, “I am searching deep *within myself*. In that, silence helps.” Within three days, several gangs of goondas came to Gandhi’s Beliaghata residence and voluntarily surrendered what amounted to a huge pile of grenades, automatic rifles, pistols, knives and other deadly weaponry. It seems obvious to me that the contact he had established with the people of Kolkata, in particular the goondas, was of an intimate and internal, not of a superficial and external, kind.

Q.: This is all a very different way of looking at Gandhi and at social change, and I am not sure I like it. You are, in effect, saying that those who are involved in external action are not really helping humanity. By saying so, you are discouraging those who would like to go into public work and social service. In fact, you are casting aspersions on your fellow Gandhian workers who are involved in constructive work programmes, in prohibition campaigns, in promoting khadi etc.

A.: No, no, no. That is not what I meant to do at all. I must apologize profusely if that is the impression I have conveyed. I have the greatest respect for workers in the Gandhian movement, especially those who have dedicated themselves to field work. The ‘external’ action that they have put in is indeed laudable, and certainly gives them a much higher rating than those who have put in no action at all. All I am saying is that internal action can be much more effective, and that those who are involved in activities such as prohibition, khadi etc. (activities that derive their rationale from the concept of self-control) can enhance their contribution considerably if they also, simultaneously, took to education that teaches self-control in our day-to-day dealings.

Q.: Similarly, would you advocate that those who are involved in internal action take to external forms of universal service and become leaders in social change movements?

A.: No. For two reasons. Firstly, once one is in contact with that Unity, that true Inner Voice within, one is infinitely wiser as well as more loving than any of us, and hence needs no prodding to be told how to serve humanity. Secondly, involvement in external action, especially at the leadership level, requires certain qualities of intellect which may not be available to all those involved in internal action.

Q.: Isn’t there a contradiction in what you are saying here? You say a person who takes to self-control becomes extraordinarily wise and then in the next breath you say he or she may not have the required intellect.

A.: Modern education equates intellect with wisdom, which is a grave error. One may have very limited intellect – not even enough to pass primary school –and yet may be extremely wise. If you like to think in terms of Robert Ornstein’s neurophysiology, intellect involves development of the left hemisphere, whereas wisdom involves development of the right hemisphere. I am not saying both cannot be developed by the same person. Einstein, Schumacher and Schroedinger showed that this was certainly possible. But modern education ignores and even suppresses the development of wisdom, with the result that these days intellectuals generally have very little of it (Einstein, Schumacher and Schroedinger developed theirs *in spite of* and not because of modern education – Einstein was dubbed a ‘lazy dog’ by his professor but got his inspiration for the Theory of Relativity from a ‘cosmic religious experience’, Schumacher got his training from a Burmese Buddhist, and Schroedinger from his exposure to Vedanta). One the other hand, those who are uneducated could nevertheless be well-endowed with wisdom.

Q.: So you say an illiterate villager, a washerman in the ghat, or a housewife confined to the kitchen may be far wiser than you or me?

A.: Indeed. Self-control comes naturally to such people, and self-control is one of the best indicators of wisdom.

Q.: Are such people capable of rendering universal service, of being helpful to humanity?

A.: Very much so. Real and truly effective service is of the internal, not external, kind. Externally, it may seem the Presidents and Prime Ministers are guiding our destiny, that the Lenins, Maos and Gandhis give shape to history. But that is only an illusion. Those who have pierced the veil of this illusion testify that real action takes place in the invisible realms of our ‘inner’ selves. History seldom records the names and deeds of the real architects of the human drama. Gandhi referred to this through one of his most profound analogies: “ The seed is never seen. It works underneath the ground, is itself destroyed and the tree which rises above the ground is alone seen.” (p.24)

The great revolutionaries who are bringing about the revolution documented by Capra, Duane Elgin etc., may be found in obscure, unlikely places, like Auroville or Timbaktu. Their external activities may be far removed from anything to do with social change. They may not be leading marches, drafting petitions, or shouting slogans; they may not even be capable of these. There may be millions of them, scattered all over the world, and most unlikely to draw our external attention. The greatest beauty of a true Gandhian revolution is that the real masses can take an active part in it by merely practicing self-control, and each person can make an extremely valuable contribution without even being consciously aware of it. By the very nature of this revolution, it just cannot be suppressed. No other revolution can involve so many people and be so totally immune to suppression.

Q.: Hmmm! This is interesting. How many do you think are taking part in such a revolution these days? If it is a good enough number, if there any hope of its success, maybe I will join them too.

A.: This is a very wrong way of looking at our task. As Gandhi warned, “You and I have nothing to do with the others. Let each do his duty. If I do my duty, that is, serve myself, I shall be able to serve others”. (p.104) Self-control has to be practiced for *its own sake*, irrespective of results or what others are doing. Let us not forget that the goal is *nishkama*

karma, and if we start looking for the fruits of action right in the beginning itself, how can we hope to achieve that lofty goal? So, the decision to practice self-control has to be unconditional.

Q.: Okay, supposing I decide to practice self-control. What is the first step I have to take to implement this decision?

A.: My personal advice would be to do it under the guidance of a good teacher, a person who has himself (or herself) achieved a great measure of self-control.

Q.: I have heard of certain yogis who are able to spend days buried in the ground, or change their body temperature at will, or bring their heartbeat to a halt. Are these indications that they have achieved the required measure of self-control?

A.: We must never forget that any *display* of self-control is a sure indication of a very serious lack of it. Self-control and exhibitionism never go together, just as one who is truly humble will never claim to be so. One who has real mastery over the self can do all that these feats that so-called yogis perform, but never do so in public. Egolessness is the root of such a one's existence, and is evident in the quality of humility, love, compassion and selfless service that radiates from him or her.

Q.: Humility, love, compassion, selfless service. These are qualities that I like, and wish for. As I progress on the path of self-control, will I develop them?

A.: Undoubtedly. That is the whole idea. But humility being one of these qualities, one would attribute one's accomplishments and progress not to the 'I' but to God. When everyone from Rajaji to Mountbatten to the *New York Times* congratulated Gandhi on the 'miracle of Kolkata', his reaction was: "we are toys in the hands of God. He makes us dance to his tune". The hallmark of a true saint is that he never regards himself as anything but a sinner.

Q.: At the moment, I am involved in certain ways in 'serving humanity', though whatever you have said has made me wonder whether I am really doing so. But even though my actions may be external and therefore limited, this is all that I am capable of right now. Will I have to give up or curtail what I am doing while I master the art and science of self-control?

A.: Not at all. On the contrary, after a period of time, the ability to carry out these functions more efficiently will automatically develop. And, most important, everything will then be done in God's name, without the ego coming in the way.

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About the author

T.S.Ananthu obtained his B.Tech. in Electrical Engineering from IIT, Madras, in 1965, followed by a Master's degree in Industrial Engineering (Engineering Economic Systems) in 1966 from Stanford University. He worked in the corporate world for 11 years – first in USA with Xerox Corp. in Rochester, NY, and Esso Mathematics and Systems in Florham Park, N.J., then with IBM World Trade Corp., in New Delhi and then for a software company that he had set up with friends in Delhi. He left the corporate world in 1977 to join the Gandhi Peace Foundation in Delhi, where he was involved in researching the science-spirituality and

technology-ecology connections. Since 1991, he has been with the Navadarshanam Trust, which is devoted to the exploration of alternatives to the modern way of living and thinking.

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The booklet 'Hind Swaraj' is a severe condemnation of 'modern civilization'. It was written in 1908. My conviction is deeper today than ever before. I feel that if India will discard 'modern civilization', she can only gain by doing so.

- M.K.Gandhi
January 1921

The liberation of India was to Gandhi a *religious* duty because for him the liberation of India was only a step to the liberation of all mankind from the tyranny of violence to others, but chiefly in themselves. So, Gandhi could say, "When the practice of *ahimsa* becomes universal, God will reign on earth as He does in heaven".

- Thomas Merton
Well-known Catholic Priest