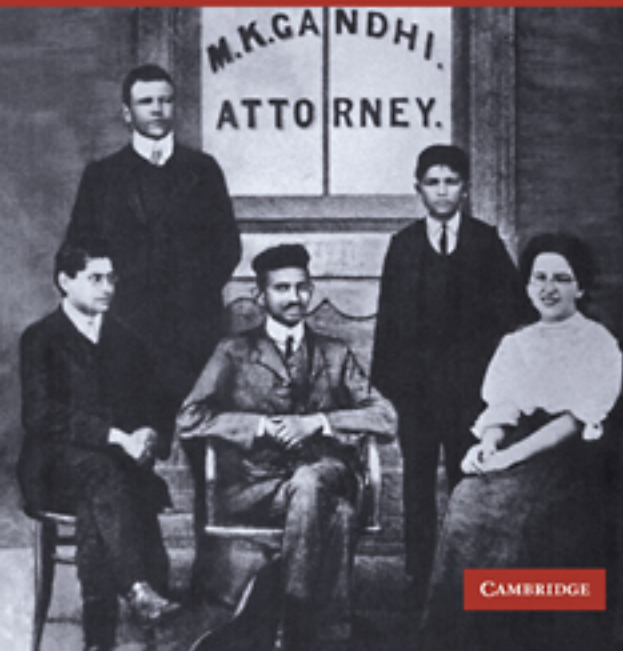


THOMAS WEBER

# Gandhi

as Disciple and Mentor



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## GANDHI AS DISCIPLE AND MENTOR

Thomas Weber's book comprises a series of biographical reflections about people who influenced Gandhi, and those who were, in turn, influenced by him. Whilst the previous literature has tended to focus on Gandhi's political legacy, Weber's book explores the spiritual, social and philosophical resonances of these relationships, and it is with these aspects of the Mahatma's life in mind, that the author has selected his central protagonists. These include friends such as Henry Polak, Hermann Kallenbach, Maganlal Gandhi and Jamnalal Bajaj, who are not as well known as those who are usually cited, such as Ruskin and Tolstoy, but who left a deep impression nevertheless, and motivated some of Gandhi's major life changes, such as his move to Tolstoy Farm. Conversely, the work of luminaries, such as Arne Næss, Johan Galtung, E. F. Schumacher and Gene Sharp, reveal the Mahatma's influence in arenas which are not traditionally associated with his thinking. Weber's book offers new and intriguing insights into the life and thought of one of the best known and most significant figures of the twentieth century.

THOMAS WEBER teaches politics and peace studies at La Trobe University. He has been researching and writing on Gandhi's life, thought and legacy for over twenty years. His publications include *Nonviolent Intervention Across Borders: A Recurrent Vision* (with Yeshua Moser-Puangsuwan 2000) *On the Salt March: The Historiography of Gandhi's March to Dandi* (1997), *Gandhi's Peace Army: The Shanti Sena and Unarmed Peacekeeping* (1996), *Conflict, Resolution and Gandhian Ethics* (1991) and *Hugging the Trees: The Story of the Chipko Movement* (1989).



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THOMAS WEBER

*La Trobe University*



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## *Preface*

In a sense this whole project started when I was researching Gandhi's Salt March to Dandi in the early 1980s. I worked in the library of the Sabarmati Ashram for many weeks and walked the ashram grounds daily. While there, a significant question arose for me: how could Gandhi have left this utopia – or at least a place that must have been a rural utopia in 1930 rather than the small oasis surrounded by a very noisy and dirty urban sprawl it is now – vowing (in effect) never to return? Simplistic explanations of sacrificing his home on the altar of the national cause were not totally satisfying. I completed my Salt March work and went on to look at other aspects of Gandhi's nonviolence, but the question never really went away.

In 1996, when, for a short time, I was at the Peace Research Institute in Oslo (PRIO), I had the good fortune of getting to know Arne Næss. I had long admired his Gandhi-related writings and we had lengthy talks on matters Gandhi. When he stayed with us in Australia the following year, I realised how deeply he was influenced by Gandhi. After reading some of his writings on deep ecology, although the issue was not often commented on, and certainly not in any detail, it became obvious to me how much that work also owed to the Mahatma. As a teacher of peace studies, I was aware of the Gandhian philosophical feel of Johan Galtung's brand of peace research, especially his views on the definitions of violence. The expanded definition that comes through his writings as structural and cultural violence clearly seemed to me to owe much to Gandhi. And I had the same feeling years before when I read E. F. Schumacher's classic book *Small is Beautiful*. In 1999, I spelled out these connections in an article on the Gandhian underpinnings of deep ecology, peace research and Buddhist economics by looking at Gandhi's influence on the three leading figures in the respective fields: Næss, Galtung and Schumacher.

Following discussions on the different approaches to nonviolence in my honours class on nonviolent activism over the years, I decided to spell out the similarities and differences between the approaches of the 'idealists',

represented by Gandhi, and the ‘pragmatists’, represented by Gene Sharp, the main contemporary nonviolence theoretician. Following the acceptance for publication of that article, I decided that my next task should be going back and finally looking seriously at Gandhi’s abandonment of the Sabarmati Ashram in 1930 and seeing if it might have had anything to do with his ‘nephew’ Maganlal Gandhi. As I started this work, it dawned on me that this was not another article but a chapter of a book on the influences on Gandhi, and about Gandhi’s influence on others. The paper on Næss, Galtung and Schumacher formed the core for three much lengthier sections looking at each in turn to add to the work on Sharp. This would make up the bulk of the Gandhi’s influence side of the ledger. The Maganlal Gandhi work was really just one of the studies that would make up the other, the influenced, side.

The influenced and influential Gandhi give us another valuable insight into the Mahatma and his philosophy. The most well-known recent biographies of Gandhi tend to be political biographies. He is the main player in India’s freedom struggle, the eventual ‘father of the nation’. His fight for the rights of Indians in South Africa and his three major political movements in India are generally the centre pieces of his story. The years between political campaigns – and the ones in India came at roughly ten-yearly intervals – spent on self-discovery or anti-untouchability and other social work, are often glossed over. But different biographies of Gandhi could be written. How about a spiritual or constructive work biography with the political campaigns being mere extensions to these more fundamental projects which are far more than periods of marking time? A different picture of Gandhi would emerge, and certainly not a less accurate picture. By examining the influences that went into making the Mahatma, we see Gandhi the spiritual seeker, the Gandhi who wanted to find the meaning of life through various ‘New Age’ experiments and philosophies and through service to others without which he could not find his true Self. If we examine Gandhi this way, his most important relationships are not necessarily the ones he has with the usually recorded political co-workers (such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel) but those with social work colleagues and fellow seekers and soulmates who tend to disappear from the record, especially the English-language record. In short, if we look at a different Gandhi to the one who is usually portrayed, different influences can be found and different relationships come to the fore.

The influential Gandhi shows us the parts of his quest and discovery that have been found useful by others, and thus gives us a picture of his legacy – and, as seen here, again it is not necessarily a political activist legacy. This

exploration of Gandhi is not presented in a strictly chronological way (although the order of the influences on him are given more or less in the sequence in which they occurred), rather it is presented through his relationships and through those who had relationships with him or his thought.

The first section sets the scene by looking at the phenomenon we call influence. I examine what is meant by it and how it differs from determinism, conversion and chance. This is followed by a discussion of whether the moments at which life-changing influences take hold can be pinpointed or whether influence tends to move more in an incremental fashion. Why was Gandhi so influential? He is examined in light of the literature on power and authority. Influence is inextricably tied in with relationships and of course it does not only flow in one direction – Gandhi was also influenced by his close friends, some of whom can best be described as soulmates, and even by those who owed their allegiance to him as disciples.

The next section of the book, about influences on Gandhi, contains six chapters. The first details the usually discussed examples of influences on the making of the Mahatma. Short case studies look at his relationships with a childhood friend, religious and New Age fellow travellers, the key books that Gandhi himself discusses as having a great impact on him, and his political guru. This is followed by four chapters that look at Gandhi's relationship with Henry Polak, Hermann Kallenbach, Maganlal Gandhi and Jamnalal Bajaj. All of these four relationships, even though Gandhi may have been the senior partner in them and at times the completely dominant one, had a great influence on Gandhi himself. I argue that it is not possible to understand why Gandhi set up Phoenix Settlement, why he moved to Tolstoy Farm, why he left Sabarmati Ashram, and why he ended up at Sevagram without understanding these relationships. Interestingly, in the English-language (mainly political) Gandhi biographies, these relationships, especially the ones concerning Maganlal and Bajaj, barely rate a mention even though I argue that they were crucial in Gandhi's life. The sixth chapter looks at Gandhi himself. Who was the person that grew out of these influences? What do his influencers tell us about him?

The final section, on Gandhi's influence, mirrors the previous section and it also consists of six chapters. It again details the people whose names generally come up in discussions of Gandhi's (again, generally political) influence. The case studies look at his relationships with his co-workers in India's freedom struggle and international figures from three continents who are famously known, and self-described, as Gandhians. The four following chapters look at Gandhi's influence on the philosophies of

the intellectuals and social activists Arne Næss, Johan Galtung, E. F. Schumacher and Gene Sharp. The final chapter examines the question of why he had the power to influence so many others. What do those he influenced tell us about the legacy of his philosophy?

For the chapters that conclude each of the two substantive sections of what follows, I have used the analogy of an hourglass. By way of personal history, most of us can be represented by a funnel – a utensil for concentrating liquids so that they can be fed into a small opening. In the analogy, a great many influences are captured by the cone of a funnel. They are combined as they flow through the narrowing outlet to give a blended output – the personality and behaviour traits of the individual who is the end product. This seems to be a fair representation of how most of us get to be who we are – and probably for many of us the funnel analogy is sufficient. However, some individuals also have more than a passing influence on others (beyond their children).

For those who strongly influence many others or whose influence is significant in shaping the world in an objectively discernible way, the analogy does not go far enough – the appropriate analogy may be the hourglass rather than the funnel. An hourglass is like a funnel standing on its apex on a mirror. Sand from the top compartment flows through a narrow opening to the bottom compartment. The influence that is concentrated at the narrows, the ‘waist’ between the two glass compartments representing the individual, spreads again to influence many others. Gandhi is such an individual. Countless influences, like sands in an hourglass, flowed into the making of the Mahatma. Some of them are identifiable as those of friends and notable thinkers who went before him. But influences also flowed from him (and many through him) to the bottom chamber, the broad spectrum of others who, either personally or by way of a system of thought or style of activism, in a recognisable way became who they did become at least partly as a result of his influence. The concluding chapter of the influenced section examines the ‘top of the hourglass’ while the concluding chapter of the influential section examines the ‘bottom of the hourglass’.

In this work, I have been helped by many. They include Robin Jeffrey, who (as often seems to be the case) was part of the process of formulating the idea for this book; James D. Hunt and Surendra Bhana, who assisted me with my investigations into Gandhi’s days in South Africa and helped me track down important sources; Shahed Power, who shared his manuscript about Gandhi’s influence on Arne Næss with me; Peter Lawler who kindly gave me copies of Galtung’s unpublished papers on Gandhi; Johan Galtung, Ralph Summy, Brian Martin, Graham Dunkley and Arne Næss who read

sections of the manuscript and gave me valuable advice; Delene Hutchins who read the entire manuscript, too often pointing out poor punctuation or grammatical indelicacies; and the librarians at La Trobe University's Borchart Library, who so efficiently managed to procure obscure documents for me. In India, I would like to thank Amrutbhai Modi of the Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad for guiding me in my search for Maganlal Gandhi and for making my stay at the ashram as pleasant as it was, Rambhauji Mhaskar, Kanakmal Gandhi and Hirabhai at Sevagram for organising my programme there, and Tulsidas Somaiya for bookending my 2003 India visit at the Bombay Sarvodaya Mandal. Jyotibhai Desai, Michael and Anand Mazgaonkar assisted me with translations of Gujarati material concerning Maganlal Gandhi. I would also like to thank Narayan Desai, who helped me clarify my thinking about seeing Gandhi in a more holistic way than he so often comes across in English-language biographies. And, of course, thanks to Marja and Hanna for being there.

## *Glossary*

<i>Ahimsa</i>	Nonviolence
<i>Ashram</i>	Religious community; hermitage; centre for social service
<i>Beti</i>	Daughter
<i>Bhai</i>	Brother; as a suffix to a proper name it connotes respect
<i>Bhagavad Gita</i>	Sacred Hindu book containing Krishna's dialogues before battle
<i>Bhoodan</i>	Land gift. Vinoba Bhave's movement aimed at securing land for the landless by asking the wealthy to donate it voluntarily
<i>Brahmacharya</i>	Celibacy; control of the senses as a spiritual discipline
<i>Charkha</i>	Spinning wheel
<i>Charotar</i>	A fertile, dark soiled area of the Kaira District of Gujarat, which is the stronghold of the Patidar (Patel) caste
<i>Chhotabhai</i>	Younger brother
<i>Chipko</i>	To hug. The name of the world-renowned Himalayan conservation movement
<i>Dacoits</i>	Bandits
<i>Darshan</i>	View of auspicious object or person from which the viewer gains merit
<i>Dhoti</i>	Long cloth, tied at the waist and wrapped around the legs. A common north Indian male garment
<i>Gramdan</i>	Village gift. Vinoba Bhave's plan for villagers to pledge to run their village on a cooperative and communal basis
<i>Gram Swaraj</i>	Village self-government

<i>Harijans</i>	Literally 'Children of God'. Gandhi's term for dalits, known in his time as 'untouchables'
<i>Hanuman</i>	The monkey god. A popular Hindu deity and a hero of the epic tale, the <i>Ramayana</i>
<i>Karmayogi</i>	One practising the yoga of selfless action as a path to union with God
<i>Khilafat</i>	Hindu-supported Muslim movement in 1919–20 against the harsh terms imposed on Turkey by Britain following the Great War in which the Turkish Sultan, who was also the Caliph of Islam, was to be deposed
<i>Khadi</i>	Hand-spun, hand-woven cloth
<i>Krishna</i>	Most popular incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu
<i>Kurta</i>	Long, long-sleeved collarless Indian shirt
<i>Lok Sabha</i>	The Lower House in the Indian parliament
<i>Mahatma</i>	Literally 'great soul'. A title of great respect
<i>Mahila</i>	Women
<i>Malguzar</i>	Important landowner
<i>Mandal</i>	Association or conference
<i>Moksha</i>	Liberation from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Unity with the Supreme
<i>Purdah</i>	The custom of keeping women in seclusion or under the veil
<i>Sangh</i>	Association or congregation
<i>Sangha</i>	The Buddhist monastic order
<i>Sannyasa</i>	Renunciation of normal life in a religious quest
<i>Sannyasi</i>	One who has taken <i>sannyasa</i>
<i>Sardar</i>	Chief. An honorific title
<i>Sarva Seva Sangh</i>	Association for the service of all. An umbrella grouping of most of the major Gandhian organisations
<i>Sarvodaya</i>	Literally the 'welfare of all'. Gandhi's social philosophy
<i>Sati</i>	The ritual self-immolation of a widow on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband
<i>Satyagraha</i>	'Truth Force' or 'Soul Force'. Gandhi's term for nonviolent resistance
<i>Saurashtra</i>	Literally land of a hundred states. Peninsular Gujarat.

<i>Seth</i>	Merchant; wealthy man
<i>Seva</i>	Service
<i>Sastra</i>	An authoritative text, usually religious
<i>Shanti Sena</i>	Peace brigade
<i>Swadeshi</i>	Made in one's own country, local production.
	Self-sufficiency
<i>Swaraj</i>	Self-rule; independence
<i>Upanishads</i>	A collection of holy Hindu treatises
<i>Yajna</i>	Religious sacrifice
<i>Yatra</i>	Journey, pilgrimage
<i>Zamindar</i>	Important landowner



PART I

*Influence*



## CHAPTER I

# *The nature of influence*

## INTRODUCTION

We all come to times in our lives when we change our beliefs or ways of living. How do these changes come about? Why at one particular time rather than at another? To what degree do such changes come about because of contact with persons and ideas that have the power, at that particular point in time, to alter our destiny? William James noted that ‘Our ordinary alterations of character, as we pass from one of our aims to another, are not commonly called transformations, because each of them is so rapidly succeeded by another in the reverse direction; but whenever one aim grows so stable as to expel definitely its previous rivals from the individual’s life, we tend to speak of the phenomenon, and perhaps to wonder at it, as a “transformation”.’<sup>1</sup> Where this transformation is a religious one, especially if it is preceded by crisis or is sudden, James calls it ‘conversion’. This means that ‘religious ideas, previously peripheral in [the] consciousness, now take a central place, and that religious aims form the habitual centre of [the person’s] energy’. This self-surrender, while to James more interesting and with more abundant and startling subconscious effects, is not the only form of conversion. And, by and large, it is the other form that is of more concern to us here. In the ‘volitional’ type of conversion ‘the regenerative change is usually gradual, and consists in the building up, piece by piece, of a new set of moral and spiritual habits’.<sup>2</sup> Gandhi, and those who were his followers in various senses, did change deeply as a result of their interactions, sometimes suddenly but more often as a ‘final straw’ in an evolutionary process. In exploring causal antecedents of the changes that grew out of these relationships, possibly the word that best sums up what I am trying to convey is ‘influence’.

<sup>1</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (Glasgow: Collins, 1960), p. 199.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 201, 209.

The first definition of influence in the Oxford dictionary is an astrological one. It informs us that influence is an ethereal fluid that flows from the stars in a way as to affect a person's character, personality and destiny. Of course the Oxford dictionary does not leave it there. Further definitions, perhaps more immediately relevant for my task, include the flowing into a person of 'any kind of divine, spiritual, moral, immaterial, or secret power or principle'; and the 'exertion of action of which the operation is unseen . . . by one person or thing upon another'; and most pertinently, 'the capacity or faculty of producing effects by insensible or invisible means without the employment of material force, or the exercise of formal authority; ascendancy of a person or social group; moral power *over* or *with* a person; ascendancy, sway, control, or authority, not formally or overtly expressed.' In short, influence is also an agency of power, without the overt exercise of power in any political sense, that can affect and modify something or someone else.

When someone changes their attitudes or behaviour as a result of some sort of physical sanction, we call the process the exercise of power. Although psychologists may also use the term 'influence' as synonymous with more surreptitious techniques of persuasion, for the purposes of this study I am not interested in mass communication and in influence as the formation of public opinion or manipulation (where someone, for example a clever salesperson, pressures another to do something they would not otherwise do, such as purchasing a product they may not really want; or pressures someone to do something that builds up a debt relationship that may later compel an act of reciprocity). Nor am I using it in the way it is employed in the social psychology literature where the influence is often a synonym for the word 'power' and generally concerns the questions about how agreement is actively elicited from others (through rewards or punishments) and about the dynamics of social groups where members tend to hold similar views. I am using the term in the sense that it is used in sociological parlance, where the process occurs voluntarily or unconsciously without the necessary presence of an active influencer. The issue for me is best encapsulated by the sorts of answers that can be expected to be given when someone is asked: 'who have been the main influences in your life?' In short, for my purposes the astrological metaphors are more apt than the psychological explanations concerning the use of overt power in relationships.

Influence can come from formal institutions such as schools and the mass media (where often it does amount to manipulation), from other individuals or informal groups. Although he lived at a time before the advent of mass media as we know it, Gandhi of course must have been

greatly influenced by family members and school. The influence of family and school are more or less given to all of us, but there are other influences that strike cords with some of us and not with others, some that affect us at some times in our lives where they would not at other times. What really concerns me here is the seemingly selective influence of individuals, personally or through notable books, or by way of informal groups, on the making of the Mahatma. This includes the relationships that prompted or legitimated changes he made or gave him the social support necessary for taking innovative risks – the top of the hourglass. Equally, I am also interested in the bottom of the hourglass, the influence of Gandhi in shaping the lives of others who went on to make substantial contributions in their chosen fields in ways that can, at least to a discernable degree, be said to have come about because of this influence.

#### CHANCE, CHOICE AND DETERMINISM

Of course we should not totally overlook chance as a determinant of history, especially personal history. There has been a tendency to see the march of history as somehow inevitable, however, in the words of Merriman, chance, and equally we could add ‘coincidence’ here, ‘has not always received its due from historians seeking to explain world events’.<sup>3</sup> At the individual level most of us accept the role played by chance in our personal lives, why, then, not in the life of Gandhi? Perhaps it was pure chance that he went to England to study law, that he stumbled upon a certain vegetarian restaurant, that he ended up in South Africa to practise his new profession, having failed at it at home, or that Henry Polak and Hermann Kallenbach were introduced to him. Of course chance played a role in the life of the Mahatma, and of course so did many other factors – and far too many for them all to be put down to mere chance. Gandhi chose to do things that most of those around him simply did not choose to do.

The determinists tell us that every event has a cause or a series of determining causes and that we are victims of a past which has conditioned us to choose in a certain way. At times we may not be able to trace the sequence of cause and effect, and at times there may be many contributory causes to an effect. If an event happens where we cannot pinpoint any cause, we may call it a chance happening and if the happening seems to have been caused by ourselves, we say that we chose it by our own free will. Whatever

<sup>3</sup> See John M. Merriman’s introduction to his edited book, *For Want of a Horse: Choice and Chance in History* (Lexington: The Stephen Green Press, 1985), p. ix.

the driving determinants of our choices are, differing possibilities present themselves to us and we continually have to make choices regarding them. The degree to which our choices are free is still debated by philosophers and psychologists. In any case, the choices we make can have profound consequences for our lives. Whether the choices made by Gandhi were 'hard determined' by his previous history, including his interactions with the others described in this book, cannot be settled here. However, there is ample evidence that the relationships discussed had a profound influence on him, encouraging his evolution in certain directions, perhaps being 'soft determinants' in his development. While it is undoubtedly true that small causes can have large effects and that no one can tease out all the possible determining variables in any given life, I am trying to understand Gandhi's own life journey by attempting to piece together what probably were determining conditions, by attempting to distinguish significant connections between events and less significant ones.

What I have attempted here is not to write counterfactual history of Gandhi's life: if this did not happen, or if this person had not met Gandhi, or if Gandhi had not read this particular tract, what shape would his future have taken? Possibly, perhaps even probably, Gandhi would not have become the Mahatma if he had not gone to England to study, or, even more importantly, to South Africa as a failed Indian lawyer. But could he have become the Mahatma without the circumstances that led him to write articles on Indian recipes for London vegetarian journals? Other counterfactual questions could include: If Gandhi had not met Raychand would he have become a Christian? And then what? If he had not met Polak would he not have founded an intentional rural community based on simplicity and spirituality? Would he have remained an urban lawyer or would his ashram days merely have come a little later – or perhaps even earlier? If Maganlal Gandhi had not died when he did, would Gandhi have returned to Sabarmati after the Salt March and continued with its unruly (or in that case perhaps less unruly) inhabitants? Without meeting Gandhi could Rajendra Prasad have become President of India and Vallabhbhai Patel Deputy Prime Minister? Would Kenneth Kaunda have been a believer in nonviolence for as long as he was without his reading of Gandhi? And without such a reading, what different path would the American Civil Rights Movement have taken with a non-Gandhi-influenced Martin Luther King Jr.? Without meeting Gandhi, would Shantidas have set up Gandhian ashrams in the south of France? Would there be no philosophy of deep ecology, or concepts of structural violence and Buddhist economics if their founders had not undertaken a careful reading of Gandhi? While these questions

may be interesting to speculate upon, no definitive answers are possible. Nevertheless, as Ferguson suggests, such counterfactual scenarios need not be mere fantasy, they can be 'simulations based on calculations about the relative probability of plausible outcomes in a chaotic world'.<sup>4</sup> I will leave these speculations to others who may wish to engage in them. Although the plausibly causal, or at least influencing, connections in the four substantive chapters in each half of what follows have not previously been commented on at any length, the connections and their consequences explored here *were* made and *did* happen and although chance and coincidence may have played their parts, the people and philosophies Gandhi came into contact with at more than a superficial level, generally through seemingly conscious decisions on his part, also had a very strong influence on his personal future development. And it is argued that he also had similar strong influences on the personal history and intellectual development of those portrayed here who came into contact with him or his ideas.

#### EVOLUTION, TIPPING POINTS AND TRIGGER EVENTS

Life is a progression of one thing after another. We learn from our mistakes, we are inspired by people and events, we change our world views as we mature. Short of accidents, major illnesses, wars or other significant catastrophes, only rarely does something momentous happen that alters our lives in an instant. Most changes are gradual, or volitional conversion in James' terminology. They tend not to occur on the road to Damascus. Sometimes, however, although probably coming out of a later realised nurturing groundwork, change seems sudden. How often does it happen that we may be interested in something or want to go somewhere but do very little about it until, suddenly (and possibly very suddenly to the outside observer), one day a decision to follow through on the interest is taken and we change our lives? Why did it happen then, not before or later? Out of what dynamics do seemingly rapid changes emerge?

Although the word 'conversion' usually refers to religious change, it also has a wider meaning and can, at the less dramatic end of the scale, grow out of the phenomenon that I have been calling influence. There is a dearth of empirical studies on the unconscious and psychic mechanisms involved in conversion, and the literature that does exist is very general. However, from it can be concluded that conversion manifests itself as a change in

<sup>4</sup> Niall Ferguson, 'Introduction' to Naill Ferguson (ed.), *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals* (London: Paperback, 1988), p. 85.

personal thoughts, feelings and actions, often preceded by 'anguish, turmoil, despair, conflict, guilt, and other such difficulties'.<sup>5</sup> It is generally agreed that almost all conversion follows upon some kind of crisis where previous standards, goals and beliefs cease to function well and the conversion can be described as a coping mechanism. The crisis need not be spiritual, but may be political, psychological or cultural. Gandhi certainly had times of deep spiritual crisis in his life, and at these times his way forward tended to come out of the interaction with someone close to him. For example, the counsel of Raychand when Gandhi was questioning his own faith at a time when his Christian friends believed that his conversion, in the traditional religious sense of the word, was imminent. But there does not always seem to be a crisis before a rapid change, and this can make abrupt changes seem inexplicable.

Recently there has been much written about 'tipping points' where suddenly an idea, trend or behaviour pattern reaches a 'take-off' point the way that a present but managed disease suddenly and inexplicably becomes a full-scale epidemic or the way a subculture's emblematic clothing becomes the height of popular fashion almost overnight.<sup>6</sup>

Decades ago, the dispute formation and conflict resolution theorists were talking about 'trigger events' where an incident (or one too many) or perhaps some annoying or irritating behaviour suddenly brings on a new realisation that pushes the person acted against into the arena of overt and public dispute. The trigger event forces a person to consciously analyse his or her experience of an action, or may cause them to reinterpret previously seemingly insignificant actions in a way that imbues them with added meaning, causing them to see the world differently. In the area of disputes this may mean that they realise that they have been wronged and that this requires some reaction.<sup>7</sup>

Analogous situations occur in the lives of individuals outside the context of disputes or trend changes. At times it may be hard to define the tipping points and trigger events that make sudden changes possible, but they are there. Gandhi, for example, was experimenting with different 'New Age' philosophies and practices and working at simplifying his life, then, literally overnight, after having read John Ruskin's book *Unto this Last*, he

<sup>5</sup> Lewis R. Rambo, 'Conversion', in Mircea Eliade (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), vol. iv, p. 74.

<sup>6</sup> On this see Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (London: Abacus, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> On this see Jeffrey M. Fitzgerald, David C. Hickman and Richard L. Dickins, 'A Preliminary Discussion of the Definitional Phase of the Dispute Process', unpublished paper presented at the 1980 Conference of the 'Law and Society' Association in Madison, Wisconsin, pp. 4-5.



purchased a property and set up a communal farm run along the lines of the dictates of his till then more or less armchair philosophy. The tipping point may have been the reading of the book, or the final straw in a lengthy evolutionary process may have started with the forming of a relationship with Polak who was to give him the book, or even with the chain of events that led him to claim Polak as a friend. In the other geographical and lifestyle shifts that Gandhi undertook, the trigger events may have grown out of special relationships or may have been provided by the sudden ending of such a relationship through death, or even by the lengthy pleading of a soulmate/disciple in search of a surrogate father that could no longer be ignored.

#### MENTORS, FELLOW TRAVELLERS, SOULMATES AND DISCIPLES

No inventor, including the inventor of the self, works alone. We all make ourselves in interaction with others. How do our relationships influence our future directions and even future selves? In relationships sometimes it is difficult to determine who influences whom – even if one partner is clearly the senior one. Relationships, if they are not totally one-sided (and possibly even then), are dialectical. The more influenced party, if in a direct relationship with the object of influence, can still affect the more influencing one – and, even if the dominant party is or becomes a world figure, the flowing back of influence can have profound significance.

Four terms spring to mind in this connection: mentor, fellow traveller, soulmate and disciple. Mentors are experienced and trusted advisers who are also friends. Although the term ‘fellow traveller’ is often used to describe communist sympathisers, more generally it refers to those responsive to a certain point of view without being fully paid-up members of the organisation propagating that view. The term ‘soulmate’ is predominantly used to describe the relationship between two people, usually of the opposite sex, who are temperamentally well suited to each other or have a strong affinity with each other, often at a deep spiritual and intellectual level. Disciples are the dedicated followers of a leader.

While Gandhi may have seen himself as a disciple of Raychand, Ruskin and Leo Tolstoy and considered Gopal Krishna Gokhale as his mentor, he was also a mentor to many others and an undisputed leader to still others who can be classed as his disciples. In Hindu tradition, the guru is a religious teacher who undertakes to give personal instruction to a disciple, the chela. The relationship between master and pupil is a close one with utmost reverence and obedience required of the chela. An ashram is a community

where a holy man and his disciples live. And it is the presence of the guru that gives the ashram its importance. Four of the major influential relationships discussed here are inextricably tied up with Gandhi's four ashrams.

Gandhi was a guru for many, but regardless of Ved Mehta's characterisation of some of those that worked with him as apostles<sup>8</sup> most of the best-known political ones such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Rajendra Prasad and Vallabhbhai Patel were clearly more than that, being co-workers in India's freedom struggle. Of course, although Gandhi's philosophy in action actively rejected the hierarchical dependence and 'inequality of the master-disciple relationship in favour of a dialectic between equals',<sup>9</sup> this did not necessarily mean that all could step out of Gandhi's shadow and operate as fully independent and creative, albeit influenced, individuals (as Shantidas could, but Mirabehn and Hermann Kallenbach could not). Disciples generally try to carry on the work of the master, often following the holy writ without the ability to marshal the creativity necessary to meet new situations. These disciples do not interest me in this particular study.

Gandhi was a fellow traveller with the South African Christian missionaries who became his close friends and in his school years, although early on the junior partner, with his childhood friend Sheikh Mehtab. Henry Polak and Kallenbach, and especially Saraladevi Chaudhurani, whom in 1920 Gandhi called his 'spiritual wife', were clearly for a time his soulmates<sup>10</sup> rather than mere political co-workers. Maganlal Gandhi and Jamnalal Bajaj, who I have included in the list of those who influenced him, were clearly disciples – but on the death of what sort of disciple does the master claim that he has been widowed? What sort of disciple is adopted as a son whose death leaves the leader in a state of utter desolation? Maganlal Gandhi and Bajaj were not the equals of Gandhi on a common quest as friends earlier in the Mahatma's life may have been, but nevertheless their discipleship was tinged with something of the soulmate relationship. Perhaps Moore's definition of the soulmate as someone 'to whom we feel profoundly connected, as though the communication and communing that takes place between us were not the product of intentional efforts, but rather a divine grace'<sup>11</sup> is nearer the mark than the more bland definition given above. Several of Gandhi's relationships I examine here seem to be of this order. Moore

<sup>8</sup> See Ved Mehta, *Mahatma Gandhi and his Apostles* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1977).

<sup>9</sup> Richard Lannoy, *The Speaking Tree: A Study of Indian Culture and Society* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 381.

<sup>10</sup> Gandhi seems to have had a platonic but sexually charged love affair with Saraladevi, see Martin Green, *Gandhi: Voice of a New Age Revolution* (New York: Continuum, 1993), especially pp. 273–85.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Moore, *Soul Mates: Honoring the Mysteries of Love and Relationship* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994), p. xvii.

speaks of these relationships when he notes, that 'The point in a relationship is not to make us feel good, but to lead us into a profound alchemy of soul that reveals to us many of the pathways and openings that are the geography of our own destiny and potentiality.'<sup>12</sup> This is the very point of some of the explorations of relationship I attempt here. Further, Moore believes that 'slight shifts of imagination have more impact on living than major efforts at change', and that 'deep changes in life follow movements in imagination'.<sup>13</sup> Several slight shifts of imagination that led to deep changes in Gandhi's life came out of the dialectical processes of interactions within his close relationships. The influence of those, often shared, slight shifts frequently proved profound.

Of those who Gandhi influenced by his personal presence most were disciples. Prasad, Patel and Vinoba Bhave clearly were disciples, but more than mere disciples and less than soulmates. Because of the mentoring of Gandhi their political guru, and because they retained the ability to act independently of their master, they achieved the highest positions in newly independent India. Shantidas, for whom Gandhi was a guru/mentor, went on to become more of a fellow traveller than obedient disciple, and the others, who did not know Gandhi personally (for example Kaunda and King) were fellow philosophical travellers who learned important political lessons from their illustrious predecessor. Perhaps Sunderlal Bahuguna is somewhere in between. Of the four major figures discussed in the section exploring Gandhi's influence on others, Arne Næss, Johan Galtung and E. F. Schumacher are fellow travellers with Gandhi, not political disciples. Gene Sharp became one after starting off as a disciple. The web of influences is a complicated one.

#### CHARISMA AND AUTHORITY

As noted above, Gandhi, like the rest of us, was heavily influenced by various elements of his childhood situation and the people and philosophies he came into contact with. However, unlike most of the rest of us, he was also extremely influential. A glance at a Gandhi bibliography will readily turn up books with titles that attest to this: *Under the Shelter of Bapu, In the Shadow of the Mahatma, At the Feet of Bapu, At the Feet of Mahatma Gandhi, Homage to Gandhi, The Saint of Human Rights: Gandhi, A Saint at Work, Mahatma Gandhi: The Man Who Became One with the Universal Being, World's Homage to Mahatma, Gandhi-Mahatma: An Anthology of*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. viii.

*Appreciations from all Quarters of the Globe, Mahatma Gandhi: The World Significance, Humanity's Homage to Gandhiji, Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections on His Life and Work, Gandhi as Others See Him, Mahatma Gandhi and the U. S. A., Gandhi and the American Scene, Mahatma Gandhi as Viewed by Foreigners, Gandhi Through Western Eyes, Mahatma Gandhi (The World's Greatest Man), Gandhi on World Affairs, Gandhi and the Nuclear Age, Gandhi Today, Gandhi: His Relevance for Our Times, Gandhi and Stalin, Gandhi and Marx,* and countless thousands of others, including many hundreds of biographies. Anthologies of his works or articles about him promote his relevance, explain why he should be an influence for the rest of us (and even claim that we ignore him not just to our individual peril, but at the risk of the annihilation of the planet).

For Gandhi's seventieth birthday, India's leading philosopher (and later President of the Republic) Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan edited a volume of essays of reflections on Gandhi's life and work by extremely eminent persons. A second edition, that was to be presented to Gandhi on his eightieth birthday appeared after the Mahatma's assassination as a memorial volume with a section containing essays of appreciation and shorter homages from world statesmen and moral leaders.<sup>14</sup> In short, it is hard to think of too many people who were more influential than the Mahatma.

Why *was* Gandhi so influential? It has often been remarked that Gandhi provided a signpost for moral living, leaving us with some valuable insights about the way life should be oriented so as not to become dysfunctional to the self, society or planet. For many of those who knew him he was influential as a father figure or charismatic leader, and for those who did not come under his personal sway there was the great world-renowned moral authority he wielded and example and teachings he left behind. In short, Gandhi had power.

Power comes in many forms. It can be coercive or manipulative or stem from legitimate authority – where obedience is voluntary rather than forced or wielded in a way not visible to the obedient. For the great sociologist Max Weber, legitimate authority is of three types: the traditional (where obedience stems from tradition), legal-rational (where obedience stems from the legal legitimation of the ruler), and charismatic (where obedience is exchanged for the possibility of the leader transforming the life of the follower). Charismatic leaders are the most legitimate of rulers for they have no hold over their followers other than the faith the followers voluntarily

<sup>14</sup> S. Radhakrishnan (ed.), *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections on his Life and Work* (Bombay: Jaico, 1956).

invest the leader with. The religious prophet who defies tradition in the name of divine command, such as Christ or Mohammad, is the archetypical charismatic leader. It is not overly presumptuous to include Gandhi in this list of charismatic leaders.

In Weber's scheme, the charismatic leadership style is characterised by a guru-disciple relationship in which the leader creates his or her own structures in keeping with the religious nature of their 'calling', rather than relying on more traditional ones.<sup>15</sup> Willner notes that followers effectively relinquish their autonomy to the will of the charismatic leader.<sup>16</sup> In a similar vein, Kohut describes the messianic leader with whom followers identify because 'his self has largely merged with the idealized superego'.<sup>17</sup> The values and 'meaningful, high ideals' of the leader provide a potential for psychological growth in the followers.<sup>18</sup>

Other theorists of leadership have produced different typologies. In his examination of political groupings, Graham Little analyses the ways individual selves come into relationship with other selves in his classification of leadership types. His 'strong leader' is engaged in a project of competition (the self *vs* other), his 'group leader' is concerned with group solidarity (self in other), while the project of his 'inspiring leader' is one of mutuality or communion (self and other).<sup>19</sup> In the latter group, the leader and followers interrelate through communication, and the relationship is one of shared visions and ideas where, even if the leader is the first to see the vision, the response of the followers is also an internal one.

While Little's inspiring leader and followers 'are distinguished by their equality under the authority of an idea',<sup>20</sup> rather than the authority of the leader under Weber's charismatic leadership or Kohut's messianic leadership, they share similarities. For Gandhi's Indian co-workers, whom I examine in the introductory chapter to the Gandhi's influence section of what follows, and also in the case of the two Indians in the major case studies in the Gandhi influenced section the relationship was one of charismatic leader and followers. However, in the case of the two Jewish fellow seekers of

<sup>15</sup> Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organisations* (New York: The Free Press, 1964), pp. 360–1.

<sup>16</sup> Ann R. Willner, *The Spellbinders: Charismatic Political Leadership* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 243–9.

<sup>17</sup> Heinz Kohut, 'Creativeness, Charisma, Group Psychology: Reflections on the Self-Analysis of Freud', in Paul H. Ornstein (ed.), *The Search for Self: Selected Writings of Heinz Kohut, 1950–1978* (New York: International Universities Press, 1990), vol. II, p. 828.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 801.

<sup>19</sup> Graham Little, *Political Ensembles: A Psychosocial Approach to Politics and Leadership* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 6–8.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

Gandhi's South Africa days and the activists who saw Gandhi as a spiritual and social reformist guru, the relationship is best seen as one of inspirational leader and followers. For the four people detailed in the major case studies in the Gandhi's influence section there is strong intellectual influence rather than leadership.

#### CONCLUSION

What I am attempting here is not a chronological biography of Gandhi – there have been enough of those already. Yet, in order to undertake a thorough examination of the major turning points in anyone's life and the interior processes that went into bringing them about, as I attempt to do here with Gandhi's, what may be required are the tools of psychoanalysis. Even then, when the Freudian process is applied to long dead individuals through their writings or recollections of those who knew them, the enterprise is one that many view with more than a little scepticism: the arenas of psycho-history and psycho-biography remain controversial.<sup>21</sup> In looking for clues in Gandhi's private life that throw light onto his public one,<sup>22</sup> I am not in any way attempting to belittle the admirable public political Gandhi. Having said this, there is the possibility, especially given that I am not a psychoanalyst, that I am merely selecting small instances from a very full life, snippets of conversation that may have been inadequately remembered years later, or lines of correspondence that may not have had the deep meanings I invest them with, and stretching them to provide a very subjective interpretation of Gandhi's movements, both intellectual/emotional and geographical. I may be guilty of elevating chance encounters or small influences to the status of the major influence on a life, or in Gay's words of explaining 'too much by too little'.

And I may even be doing the same with those I claim were influenced by Gandhi. Of course everyone's life is composed of many influences – but was Gandhi an influence among many equally minor influences or a great one, and even perhaps the greatest one? It is not always possible to tell, and in what I am doing here there is danger of peddling a conspiracy theory of sorts, one that sees the Mahatma lurking under every bed, as the inspiration behind almost every social movement with a peace/justice/ecological bent.

<sup>21</sup> See Peter Gay, *Freud for Historians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>22</sup> For the best example of such a study of Gandhi, see Erik H. Erikson's chapter 'On the Nature of "Psycho-Historical" Evidence' in his book *Life History and the Historical Moment* (New York: Norton, 1975), pp. 113–68.