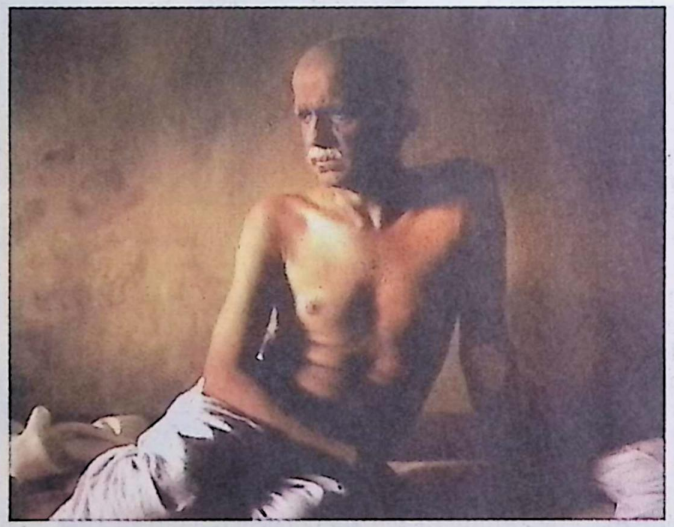
Magic Touch

TOHON

Life is guided by one's deep-seated instincts. The most important one is self-preservation: one wants to live, and live happily. The other instincts include emotion and passion, fear and courage, hate and love, brutality and compassion, ego and humility. In some sense human lives, like those of the rest of the living world, are chained by these inherent instincts. On the one hand, a man struggles to satisfy his instincts and, on the other, he wants to set himself free free of suffering, in particular. So life is nothing but a battleground where war is being continually waged in different shapes and forms.



First, there is a war against oneself call it inner drive or journey hidden in the depths of one's own heart. And then there is an outer one. One wants to change his surroundings (including people) or do things to suit himself, his knowledge, faith, conviction, ego and, above all, want and need or simply to improve his own lot. The nature and strength of these inherent drives primarily dictate the course a life runs.

Inner drive may have profound influence on some, while outward struggles dominate most. Yet there are some whose lives are guided by two equally strong but diametrically opposed drives. And then there are a few who possess two equally powerful but complementary forces that sustain each other; shape each other. As a result, the inner and outer lives of such men are entwined as one seamless, coherent piece.

There are at least two such men in contemporary times Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela. These two men have a number of things in common. The most profound one is their ability to see men (including their worst adversaries) as equals regardless of their colour, race and religion. They both freed themselves from chains (both inner and outer) and helped others (including their captors) to be free. They both stand as symbols of justice, freedom and friendship. They put forward their lives as messages to humanity.

In his book *Gandhi Portrayal of a Friend* (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1948) Stanley Jones, the legendary missionary/evangelist who made India his home, writes that once he approached Gandhi before his travel to the West asking him if he has a message for him to carry. Gandhi thought for a moment and said, "Such a message cannot be given by word of mouth; it can only be lived. All I can do is to live it that will be my message." The words moved Jones profoundly and on Gandhi's death, he described him as the 'most Christ-like man' who 'is stronger in death then he was in life'.

Gandhi told the story of his life in *My Experiments with Truth* (Penguin Books, England, 1982). As the story tells, this thin, little man did not treat faith as a doctrine, he 'left it a deed'. He did not expound truth; he 'experimented with it'. His life was nothing but experiments with his faith and, at times, he took his experiments to the extreme.

Time and again during his (and his wife, Kasturbai's) life threatening sicknesses, he took risks against doctor's advice to take non-vegetarian diet. Gandhi was not prepared to resort to violence. His worst trial of faith came when his 10-year-old second son (Manilal), who had already been through an acute attack of smallpox some years back, had a severe attack of typhoid, combined with pneumonia and high fever with delirium. The boy was too weak for medicine to have any effect. The doctor recommended eggs and chicken broth instead. Since Manilal was a minor, consultation with him was out of question for Gandhi. He had to decide for him. The life of a chicken (or that of an unborn chick) was equally sacred to him. He was not prepared to trade it for his son's life.