He plunged himself into soul-searching in the midst of one of his worst crises in life. "My honour is in Thy keeping, oh Lord, in this hour of trial", he kept repeating. Manilal's frail body managed to escape from the jaws of death. 'To see the universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth face-to-face, one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself' was Gandhi's unwavering faith in words and in deeds.

If Gandhi was a 'mahatma' (a Hindi word, meaning 'great soul'), Mandela is an 'umkhululi' (a Xhosa word, meaning 'liberator'), who in the process of freeing himself, liberated his country and people. In his autobiography (*Long Walk to Freedom*, Little, Brown & Co., London, 1994) Mandela writes:

"It was during those long and lonely years [in prison] that my hunger for the freedom of my own people became a hunger for the freedom of all people, white and black. I knew as well as I knew anything that the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed. A man who takes away another man's freedom is a prisoner of hatred; he is locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow mindedness. I am not truly free if I am taking away someone else's freedom, just as surely as I am not free when my freedom is taken from me. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity."

The profundity of Mandela's words and deeds was revealed during Bill Clinton's meeting with him in South Africa. In his autobiography (*My Life*, Alfred A Knopf, New York, 2004) Clinton first talks about his own circumstances:

"When 1998 began, I had no idea it would be the strangest year of my presidency, full of personal humiliation and disgrace, policy struggles at home and triumphs abroad, and, against all odds, a stunning demonstration of the common sense and fundamental decency of the American people. Because everything happened at once, I was compelled as never before to live parallel lives, except that this time the darkest part of my inner life was in full view."



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.

Clinton then narrates his meeting with Mandela.

Madiba (Mandela's colloquial tribal name, which he asked me to use), I know you did a great thing in inviting your jailers to your inauguration, but didn't you really hate those who imprisoned you?" He replied, 'Of course I did, for many years. They took the best years of my life. They abused me physically and mentally. I didn't get to see my children grow up. I hated them. Then one day when I was working in the quarry, hammering the rocks, I realized that they had taken every thing from me except my mind and heart. Those they could not take without my permission. I decided not to give them away." Then he looked at me, smiled, and said, "And neither should you'.

After I caught my breath, I asked him another question. 'When you were walking out of prison for the last time, didn't you feel the hatred rise up in you again?' 'Yes,' he said, 'for a moment I did. Then I thought to myself, They have had me for twenty-seven years. If I keep hating them, they will still have me. I wanted to be free, and so I let it go.' He smiled again. This time he didn't have to say, 'And so should you'.

At this point of reading My Life, I too had to catch my breath. I felt that in one touch Mandela freed two more men: Clinton of his hate towards his adversaries and me of my negative perception of Clinton.

The lives and times of the Mahatma and Umkhululi shine even brighter as the world passes through one of its darkest hours. Wouldn't it be nice if the magic touch of their lives could free us from some of our deep-seated, dark instincts?

Tohon is the author of The Landscape of a Mind, Athena Press, London, 2005

Acknowledgement: The help of Professor S. J. Neethling (Xhosa Department, University of the Western Cape, South Africa) providing the Xhosa word for 'liberator' is gratefully acknowledged.