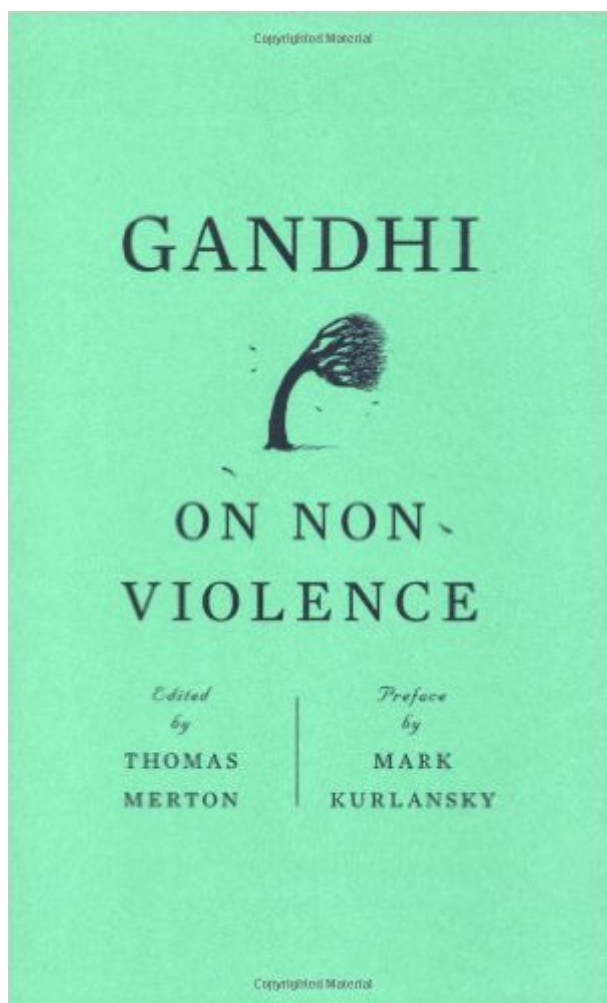


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Gandhi On Non-Violence (New Directions Paperbook)



Synopsis

An essential compendium for understanding Gandhi's profound legacy. "One has to speak out and stand up for one's convictions. Inaction at a time of conflagration is inexcusable." —Mahatma Gandhi The basic principles of Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence (Ahimsa) and non-violent action (Satyagraha) were chosen by Thomas Merton for this volume in 1965. In his challenging Introduction, "Gandhi and the One-Eyed Giant," Merton emphasizes the importance of action rather than mere pacifism as a central component of non-violence, and illustrates how the foundations of Gandhi's universal truths are linked to traditional Hindu Dharma, the Greek philosophers, and the teachings of Christ and Thomas Aquinas. Educated as a Westerner in South Africa, it was Gandhi's desire to set aside the caste system as well as his political struggles in India which led him to discover the dynamic power of non-cooperation. But, non-violence for Gandhi "was not simply a political tactic," as Merton observes: "the spirit of non-violence sprang from an inner realization of spiritual unity in himself." Gandhi's politics of spiritual integrity have influenced generations of people around the world, as well as civil rights leaders from Martin Luther King, Jr. and Steve Biko to Václav Havel and Aung San Suu Kyi. Mark Kurlansky has written an insightful preface for this edition that touches upon the history of non-violence and reflects the core of Gandhi's spiritual and ethical doctrine in the context of current global conflicts.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book was disappointing. Although the quotations are excellent, by themselves they are little

more than random sentences. Without the context of Gandhi's story, without knowing what his life and actions were all about, having a book with some words he said is practically meaningless. As I read the quotations, I found myself referring to Louis Fischer's biography of Gandhi, and Gandhi's own autobiography to find out what the quotes meant when Gandhi actually said or wrote them. When I got too lazy to look up the quote somewhere else, the words merely passed before my eyes in a way that could not be described as reading. The entire volume has an engineered, overprocessed quality because of the topical, rather than chronological or situational, arrangement of entries. The introductory essay seemed to run on forever, but it is an interesting insight into Gandhi's motives and choices. Generally, though, it is verbose and tedious, not at all the engaging and lively reading I would hope would be associated with such a charismatic subject. I can see this volume being useful for gathering direct quotes for a paper or speech about Gandhi, but without background information found in other materials, the meaning behind the quotes in this book will be next to impossible to understand. In short, for general reading on Gandhi's life, find another volume. Get this only if you're looking for sound bytes arranged by topic for use as one liners.

I deeply regret other reviewers cannot appreciate the historic context of this book">[Read more](#)

If you want to start with Gandhi's experience on non-violence, this is a good book to begin with. Although brief, the thoughts and feelings of Gandhi are clearly shown.

Trappist monk Thomas Merton (1915-1968) wrote in the Introduction to his 1964 collection of Gandhi's writings, "Gandhi's principles are, then, extremely pertinent today, more pertinent even than when they were conceived and worked out in practice in the ashrams, villages, and highways of India. They are pertinent for everybody, but especially for those interested in implementing the principles expressed by ... Pope John XXIII in 'Pacem in Terris.'" (Pg. 20) Gandhi said, "Given the proper training and proper generalship, non-violence can be practiced by the masses of mankind." (Pg. 25) He argues, "In non-violence the masses have a weapon which enables a child, a woman, or even a decrepit old man to resist the mightiest government successfully. If your spirit is strong, mere lack of physical strength ceases to be a handicap." (Pg. 29) He suggests, "Non-violence cannot be preached. It has to be practiced." (Pg. 44) He cautions, "the duty of a man of God is to act as he is directed by his inner voice. I claim that I act accordingly... I ask nobody to follow me. Everyone should follow his own inner voice." (Pg. 34) Perhaps surprisingly, he states, "The ideally non-violent state will be an ordered anarchy." (Pg. 55) He asserts, "Truth and 'ahimsa' must

incarnate in socialism... He who denies the existence of that great Force [God] denies to himself the use of that inexhaustible Power and thus remains impotent... The socialism of such takes them nowhere." (Pg. 62)He explains, "My own fasts have always been strictly according to the laws of satyagraha... I have been driven to the conclusion that fasting unto death is an integral part of the satyagraha program, and it is the greatest and most effective weapon in its armory under given circumstances. Not everyone is qualified for undertaking it without a proper course of training." (Pg. 69)He admits, "In the secret of my heart I am in perpetual quarrel with God that He should allow such things [as the war] to go on. My non-violence seems almost impotent. But the answer comes at the end of the daily quarrel that neither God nor non-violence is impotent. Impotence is in men. I must try on without losing faith even though I may break in the attempt." (Pg. 72)There are other, much more extensive collections of Gandhi's writings and words, but Merton's selection (made in the context of the American civil rights movement) is an illuminating one.

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