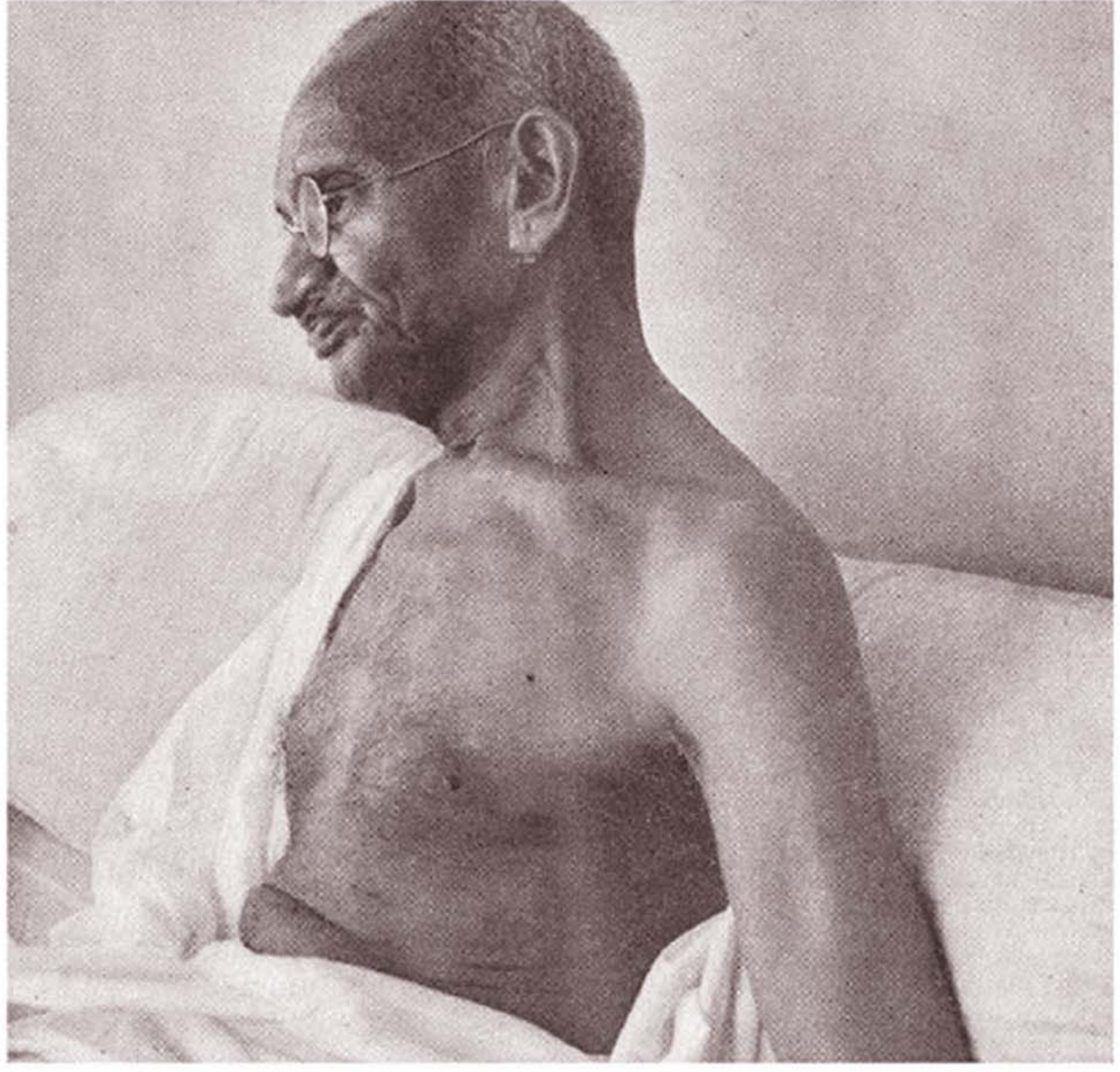


I STILL BELIEVE IN NON-VIOLENCE

By Mahatma Gandhi



THE principle of non-violence means, in general terms, that men will deliberately shun all weapons of slaughter and the use of force of any kind whatsoever against their fellow men.

The most familiar comment on this principle is that we who believe in it are naïve fools without realistic knowledge of the world. The criticism is leveled particularly against me, since it is my name that is most commonly associated with non-violence.

It is said that if I were not such a simpleton, deliberately closing my eyes to conditions as they really are, I would know that non-violence can never hope to prevail over such powerful and brutal forces as those represented by Nazi Germany and Japan, which are the essence of unscrupulous armed might. Non-violence, it is said, may be all very well in theory, but in practice, it is too hopelessly idealistic to have any chance of success in this modern world of armored divisions, parachute troops, dive bombers.

Are we naïve fools? Is non-violence a sort of dreamy wishful thinking that has never had and can never have any real success against the heavy odds of modern armies and the unlimited application of force and frightfulness?

India's recent history gives the answer to this. We have won considerable victories. We have faced powerful armed forces and we have not been swept out of the way. We still exist; belief in non-violence still exists. Does not the fact that only a single victory has been won prove that non-violence, developed to greater perfection, could win greater victories against greater armed forces?

But let me describe the true follower of non-violence—the true non-violent soldier as I see him.

The chief requisite for a soldier in a violent army is physical fitness. He must have this in order to develop the ability to kill. Old people, raw youths and those suffering from disease are thus excluded.

Mahatma Gandhi

But in the non-violent army, the chief requisite is the ability to die for your belief. This depends not on physical but on mental fitness. Therefore, this army can welcome to its ranks old men, women, youths, the blind, the sick and the lame. Thus it follows that the non-violent army has a much greater mass base; it consists not merely of a certain section of the population but of all sections.

The non-violent army has no use for weapons. It beats its swords into plowshares and its spears into pruning hooks. Whereas, the soldier of the violent army is trained in the use of violence by being taught how to shoot, the non-violent soldier has no time or need for this. All his training comes through nursing the sick, saving those in danger at risk of his own life, and cultivating the capacity for sacrifice of the highest type.

The non-violent soldier recognizes no such thing as an external enemy. He has nothing but compassion for those who consider themselves to be his enemies. He believes that no man is intentionally wicked, that there is no man who does not have the faculty to discriminate between right and wrong, and that if that faculty were to be fully developed, it would mature into non-violence. No men can remain enemies in the face of such a treatment and such a spirit. They must ultimately be absorbed by it and become part of it.

The non-violent soldier prays to God, therefore, to help the so-called enemy develop this sense of right and wrong, and to bless him. His prayer for himself is that he may ever grow in moral strength so that he may face death fearlessly.

Body and Mind Fitness

I said that the lame, the old, the very young, the sick and the blind are welcomed by the non-violent army. That is true. But if possible, the non-violent soldier must develop physical as well as mental health, for there are certain duties that can be performed only by those with a trained physique.

For the non-violent soldier must have the capacity to bear severe beatings, torture, mutilations, starvation and worse, and accept these without fear and *without anger* against those who oppress him. He must have the ability to stand guard at a single spot night after, night, day after day; he must not fall ill even if he has to undergo cold and heat and rain. He must have the strength to go to places of peril, to rush to scenes of fire, and the courage to pass through the very haunts of death. He must have the resourcefulness and capacity to plunge into seemingly impenetrable scenes of rioting, the will and the desire to go to the rescue of men trapped in burning houses, and the fearlessness to plunge into a flood to save people drowning there.

Mahatma Gandhi

There have been those in India who had weapons but who threw them away after embracing non-violence and offered themselves freely and unafraid to bullets and raw steel.

This is the true non-violent soldier.

I have heard it said that the non-violent movement has had some acceptance in India only because the Indian people are cowards who have no weapons and therefore are incapable of defending themselves; that non-violence, therefore, suits them very well indeed.

On the evidence I have given, are the Indian people cowards? Would a coward have the courage to bare his breast to a rifle? Is there any army in the world that could prevail over such soldiers? Having no fear themselves, could Hitler, could Japan conquer them?

Judge if we are naïve fools; if there is no courage in our hearts! Judge if we who believe in non-violence have no practical conception of how to overcome the evils that exist in today's world! ★★★

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