

## 5. On Truth

[\[Audio Link\]](#)

**Stephanie:** What does Gandhi mean by truth?

**Michael:** This is an important question, since his whole autobiography was called, “My Experiments with Truth.” And since he ultimately – right about 1928, I think, identified truth as God. So, many people think that truth means saying something that’s factual as opposed to something that isn’t factual. But for Gandhi, it was so much deeper than that.

And let me start off by reading you a statement of his. Here’s what he said, “To see the universal and all-pervading spirit of truth, face-to-face, one must be able to love the meanest of creation as one’s self. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to truth has drawn me into the field of politics. And I can say without the slightest hesitation, and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics, do not know what religion means.

I think Gandhi had deeply embedded in his consciousness, the ancient Sanskrit concept of “sat” or satya or reality which has three meanings simultaneously. It’s good for us to be aware of. One, of course, is the truth versus untruth part. Wherever it was practical for him to do so, he always tried to tell the truth, particularly about his own faults and his own intentions.

But much deeper than that, it means that which is real as opposed to that which is unreal. And it’s on that that he bases his satyagraha or clinging to truth. And that enables him to make the astounding statement, which I think we will only believe if we can test it out in practice, that ultimately evil has no existence. It isn’t real. It only hangs around insofar as we support it.

If we believe in it, if someone threatens me, and I respond with fear I am in a sense corroborating that evil. I’m corroborating his evil. So, that the second meaning of truth is that which really is. And that which really is, is eternal. And it is also the sum total of all existence. So, that’s why he can go so easily from saying if you want to know truth, you have to love the meanest of creation as yourself.

Of course, all the mystics have said that. St. Augustine said, “If you dislike anybody, you are denying God. So, you must be able to love everyone. It doesn’t mean accepting what they do or what they believe in, but it does mean wanting their underlying welfare. So, now the third meaning of satya or the root, “Sat” is good. So, again, you have this fundamental commitment to the underlying good positive nature of reality.

And all of that is summed up in his concept of truth and he feels that he can exemplify it. He can get at it. He can manifest it by clinging to the truth as opposed to telling false statements by always acting in such a way that would bring about the greatest good for the greatest number of people. And by always being able to see through the unreality and the alienation and separateness of the world and cling to that underlying reality or truth. And on one of occasion, in

his book, "Satyagraha in South Africa," he actually said, "This is the doctrine of satyagraha in a nutshell." That truth being that which is cannot possibly be defeated. And untruth being that which is not cannot possibly be – cannot possibly prevail.

So, if we can only orient ourselves to truth and cling to it, despite all the emotional and ideological temptations that may hit us, assail us from other directions, that truth will turn into a living power that will manifest goodness in our world.

[\[Gandhi for Beginners\]](#)