

## Article

# Gandhi's View on Judaism and Zionism in Light of an Interreligious Theology

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**Abstract:** This article describes Gandhi's view on Judaism and Zionism and places it in the framework of an interreligious theology. In such a theology, the notion of "trans-difference" appreciates the differences between cultures and religions with the aim of building bridges between them. It is argued that Gandhi's understanding of Judaism was limited, mainly because he looked at Judaism through Christian lenses. He reduced Judaism to a religion without considering its peoplehood dimension. This reduction, together with his political endeavors in favor of the Hindu–Muslim unity and with his advice of *satyagraha* to the Jews in the 1930s determined his view on Zionism. Notwithstanding Gandhi's problematic views on Judaism and Zionism, his *satyagraha* opens a wide-open window to possibilities and challenges in the Near East. In the spirit of an interreligious theology, bridges are built between Gandhi's *satyagraha* and Jewish transformational dialogical thinking.

**Keywords:** Gandhi; interreligious theology; Judaism; Zionism; *satyagraha*



**Citation:** Meir, Ephraim. 2021. Gandhi's View on Judaism and Zionism in Light of an Interreligious Theology. *Religions* 12: 489. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12070489>

Academic Editor: Edward Foley

Received: 19 May 2021  
Accepted: 26 June 2021  
Published: 30 June 2021

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This article situates Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's *satyagraha* in the perspective of a Jewish dialogical philosophy and theology. I focus upon the question to what extent Gandhi's religious outlook and *satyagraha*, initiated during his period in South Africa, contribute to intercultural and interreligious understanding and communication. I investigate his view on Judaism and Zionism, with the aim of creating an interface between his thought and Jewish transformational dialogical thinking. To the best of my knowledge, a rereading of Gandhi through the lenses of an interreligious philosophy and theology from a Jewish point of view showing the possibilities and limits of Gandhi's non-violent heritage has not been undertaken until today.<sup>1</sup>

In what I call "trans-difference", one recognizes the differences between cultures and religions and builds bridges between them. Trans-difference brings diversity and unity together. It implies respect for particularity as well as readiness to communicate and change. It strives for unity without uniformity. In interreligious theology, religious "trans-difference" is not a mere possibility, it is rather a must in the construction of a relational identity that is intrinsically linked to others. As such, it is a civilizing force that promotes interaction between different individuals and groups and counters existing intercultural violence. (Meir 2013a, 2015, 2017, 2019)

One preliminary remark has to be made. Gandhi gave priority to works and deeds. He was not interested in a theoretical, pluralist theology of religions or in the exchange of religious opinions. Speculative theology was for him even a source of untruth. (*Harijan*, 23 March 1940) Yet, without an interreligious praxis as that of Gandhi, the attempt to construct an interreligious theology is doomed to fail. The study of Gandhi's praxis appears to be highly relevant for a dialogical theology, in which the question of unity and diversity is central. His use of the term *dharma*, which involves duties such as non-violence and service to others and which is as much religion as ethics, fits an interreligious theology that has peace as its method and aim.

The first part of this article discusses Gandhi's religiosity and his extraordinary attitude towards other religions. Part 2 deals with his view on Judaism and Zionism and shows

the limits of his ideology.<sup>2</sup> In the third part, I evaluate the humanizing power in Gandhi's active non-violence and turn to the situation in the Near East and to the question whether his position has relevance in Israel and Palestine.

### 1. Gandhi's Religiosity and His View on Other Religions

Gandhi was born as a Vaishnava. Vaishnavism venerates Vishnu as the supreme God. Rama and Krishna are amongst his incarnations. Vaishnavas are vegetarians and fast during festivals. They focus on personal devotion and non-harming. Gujarat, where Gandhi was born, was a place with many religions. Putali Bai, his mother, belonged to *Pranami*, the sect that combines Hindu and Muslim religions. Young Gandhi visited the Vaishnava temple, but also the temples of the Pranamis. Jains and Muslims frequently visited his parental home. Gandhi also followed the devotional, emotional religion of the *bhakti*, in which *ahimsa* (non-violence or non-killing) is central. Deeply influenced by Jainism, he practiced the doctrine of *ahimsa* (although less extreme and more positive; Chatterjee 1983, p. 58) and searched in selfless service for *satya*, the ultimate Truth. He accepted their theory of the "many-sidedness of reality" (*anekantavada*) and of the fragmentary character of Truth perceptions. Gandhi called himself a *sanatanist*, a traditionalist Hindu, although he was a reformist.

Gandhi scholars have noted that there is a gradual evolution in Gandhi's life, where he remade himself at several stages, also and foremost on the spiritual level (Markovits 2000, pp. 253–54). In his student years in London, the study of holy texts and vegetarianism that relates food to spiritual life brought him closer to God. In South Africa, where he arrived in 1893, he connected to his Indian identity, praised celibacy and became a *satyagrahi*. In contact with Christians and theosophists in London and in South Africa, Gandhi rediscovered his Hindu roots and started reading the Bhagavad Gita. With time, he focused upon the Bhagavad Gita and Tulsidas' Ramayana. He developed a keen interest in Christianity. Tolstoy's ethical interpretation of Christianity and his non-violence were close to his heart. The motto of the theosophist movement "There is no religion higher than Truth" as well as the attention of this movement to Hinduism and Buddhism appealed to Gandhi. He did not act primarily in conformity to religious norms, but rather according to morality and truth. In his non-dual religiosity (*advaita*), Truth is God, and a matter of experience.<sup>3</sup> As the British historian Judith Brown has remarked, *satyagraha* was a "science" of ethics; Gandhi "was an experimental scientist, trying out different strategies of resisting and using particular symbolic issues in different contexts". (Brown 2009, p. 53) In accordance with *ahimsa*, the battle of Lord Krishna and Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita received an allegorical interpretation: it was not about a just war, but about one's inner struggles.

With his highly personal religiosity, Gandhi's non-violent attitude was independent of the sanctions of scriptures, although his main principles were grounded in the *yama-niyama* of the yoga tradition. He supported hereditary occupations in the caste system, but rejected untouchability. In that sense, he was—like Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786)—conservative, but at the same time renovating.<sup>4</sup> His religiosity was ethical, universal and focused upon spiritual development, of which *ahimsa*, *brahmacharya* (celibacy), *satya* (Truth), *asteya* (non-stealing) and *aparigraha* (non-attachment) were essential ingredients.<sup>5</sup>

Gandhi's view on religions is fascinating in that it embraces other religions.<sup>6</sup> However, as mentioned, one has to recognize an evolution in his thought. During his time in London, from 1888 until 1891, he became a member of the Esoteric Christian Union, which reduced Christianity to a minimum and combined it with elements of other religions. Later, he thought that Hinduism was higher than other religions: Hinduism was superior to Christianity, it was more inclusive and believed that all have souls, not only human beings. From 1930 on, he developed a concept of religious equality, without superiority of Hinduism.<sup>7</sup> He came to such a conclusion because, first, "Truth" (*satya*)—as the consciousness that the Divine is in all—was above imperfect words. Second, because true religion was only realizable by means of a praxis, available to all. (Schmidt-Leukel 2019, pp. 113–14) Gandhi himself testifies to the fact that he moved from tolerance to equal respect for all religions.

He first regarded Hinduism as the most tolerant and inclusive of all religions. Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism were even part of Hinduism. Later, he spoke of the equality of all religions (Sugirtharajah 2012, p. 126).

Religion in Gandhi's sense transcended all religions, it did not supersede all religions, but harmonized them. (*Harijan*, 10 February 1940) Religion with a capital letter was present in all religions, it pervaded the entire existence and was relevant also and foremost for politics. It expressed itself in non-attachment and permitted to see the equality of all. Education was first of all religious, i.e., ethical. (*Hind Swaraj*, p. 103) Truth was not a dogmatic possession—it was never to be reached completely. It was a non-violent praxis, universal love: truth-force or love-force that brings about social changes. Already in his South-African period, from 1893 to 1914, Gandhi used different prayers in order to celebrate religious unity. Krishna, the Buddha and Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount belonged together. For Gandhi, pluralism was natural and this came into expression in his interfaith mass gatherings. After a fast in 1924, for instance, he wanted a ceremony expressing religious unity. Imam Sahib had to sing the opening verses of the Qur'an. Andrews had to sing a Christian hymn. Vinoba Bahve had to recite from the Upanishads and Balkrishna had to sing the Vaishnava hymn. (Fischer 1984, p. 284) In the prayers in his ashram, verses from different religious books were recited. The prayers from different traditions were a celebration of the unity, to which Gandhi strove. Gandhi was a critical participant in his religion. He held, for instance, a large intercommunity dinner with Hindus, Muslims and untouchables sitting shoulder to shoulder. Such interdining was far from self-evident, given for example the Hindu custom of purification by fire of the cutlery used by Muslims. The Sanskrit sentence *tat tvam asi* ("you are that") from the Chandogya Upanishad, in which the Self is identical with the ultimate reality, allowed Gandhi to see in every other human being a friend. As written in the Bhagavad Gita (18:61), God abided in the heart of all beings. Gandhi did not detach himself from others, even from the most wicked ones, since there was only one soul. Service to others was serving God.

Gandhi believed in the coexistence of different religions in the Indian nation (*praja*). He opposed divisions on the basis of religion. In the Indian cultural tapestry, a multitude of religions was lived as a blessing. Gandhi found the core of non-violence in different religious source: in the Gita, in the Qur'an and the New Testament.

Gandhi precedes what is today called interreligious theology, in which all religions are leading to spiritual perfection. To his mind, religions were aspects of the Divine, fragmentary visions of the Higher Reality. He was open to Christianity, Islam, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism. Asked if one God did not require one religion, he said: "a tree has a million leaves" and all are rooted in God. A particular religion was only "one mode of presentation of the same eternal truth". (CWMG (*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* 1999) 1, p. 139; *Natal Mercury*, 2 December 1894)<sup>8</sup> This pluralist standpoint anticipates the position of John Hick, the great pioneer of interreligious theology, who distinguished between the *noumenon* of God and the phenomenal perceptions of Him/Her/They/It.<sup>9</sup> Truth was more than the notions of it. But Gandhi went further in understanding the religious other, reaching out to her, learning from her and striving for mutual enrichment. Gandhi lived religion interreligiously and looked for the ethical quality in religious others. To the journalist and biographer Louis Fischer (1896–1970), he said: "I am a Moslem, a Hindu, a Buddhist, a Christian, a Jew, a Parsi". (Fischer 1984, p. 544) His religiosity is marvelously described in Yann Martel's novel *Life of Pi*, where the main character Piscine stays before a pundit, an imam and a priest. Asked to make a choice and decide for one religion, he declares: "Bapu Gandhi said, 'All religions are true.' I just want to love God". (Martel 2001, p. 69) Gandhi's religious thinking was not only personal, it was amazingly inclusive. Frictions between religions were not allowed: "In Hinduism, in Islam, in any religion for that matter, a quarrel with another religion is *haram*". (Chatterjee 1983, p. 128) Different religions were complementary to each other, they inspired each other.

Gandhi also knew about the necessity of "translating" in interreligious contexts. In intercultural situations, one may transmit one's own message by entering into the

world of the dialogue partner and using his words. Gandhi passed to the language of a religious other in order to reach his heart. This happened in the case of Hermann Kallenbach (1871–1945), Gandhi’s closest Jewish friend, who was hurt and angry because his plans for a new synagogue were copied by a concurrent, who received the commission. (Sarid and Bartolf 1997; Lev 2012) In October 1913, Gandhi wrote to his Jewish friend a letter, reminding him of the duty before Yom Kippur to reconcile oneself with one’s fellow as precondition for reconciliation with God. In order to plant his own peaceful thoughts into Kallenbach’s mind, Gandhi entered into the world of his friend, reminding him of Yom Kippur. (Chatterjee 1992, p. 55)<sup>10</sup>.

Gandhi was not interested in the conversion of his disciples, probably also because of his bad experiences with Christian missionaries. At their first meeting, he declared that Madeleine Slade (1892–1982) would be his “daughter”. (Mirabein 1960, p. 66) He gave her an Indian, not a Hindu name: Mirabein. She had to remain a good Christian. Gandhi wanted people from different religions to convert only to non-violence. He disbelieved in the religious conversion of one person by another. He wanted people to be better followers of their own faith. He urged the English rulers in India to become better Christians. (*Hind Swaraj*, p. 113) The German Jewess Dr. Margaret Spiegel (1897–1967) fled Berlin in 1932 and joined Gandhi’s ashram a year later. When she wanted to become a Hindu, Gandhi discouraged her to do so, since another faith would not satisfy her and she had nothing to fear in India.

Further in tune with interreligious theology, Gandhi was conscious that no religion was absolutely perfect: all had flaws. Selfish religious teachers made it worse. (*Hind Swaraj*, p. 104) Critical of religions, he knew about problematic readings of religious sources. He was aware that one may become violent by referring to sacred texts.<sup>11</sup> In this sense, he recognized what José Casanova calls the Janus face of the religions. In his view, divisiveness was not compatible with religion, which was understood as “that which acts as a link between religions and realizes their essential unity” (Gandhi 1955, p. 4).

Gandhi characterized certain customs as *adharna*, “irreligion” or “false religion”—for instance, in his condemnation of the slaughtering of goats in the Kali temple in Calcutta in 1901. (Chatterjee 1983, p. 28) Irreligion was also present when a Muslim refuses to sit with a Hindu on the same carpet and does not share his meal. (Fischer 1984, p. 540) Gandhi opposed the Muslim segregation of women (*purda*). When a woman came to him with her face hidden, he said: “No *purdah* before your brother”. (Id., p. 289) He maintained the caste system, but without hierarchy between the four caste groups. He adopted the classical division in *varnas*: *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Shudra* and the hereditary principle. However, untouchables should be absorbed in the *shudra varna*. In the caste-ridden Indian society, he declared: “If it were proved to me that this [untouchability] is an essential part of Hinduism, I, for one, would declare myself an open rebel against Hinduism itself”. (Gandhi 2011, pp. 231–32) Claude Markovits rightly remarks that Gandhi was a social and religious reformer, as were Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda. (Markovits 2000, pp. 55–56)

According to Mahadev Desai (1892–1942), Gandhi’s secretary, Gandhi was “toning down differences by creating a climate of understanding between men of varying views and thus increasing amity all around. “(Desai’s *Diary*, vol. vi, pp. 235–36) Gandhi claimed that the religions were “rivers that meet in the same ocean” and that “if we look to the aim, there is no difference among religions”. (CWMG 7, p. 338; Jordens 1987, pp. 7–8) Later, he used the metaphor of the tree, which even more emphasized the essential unity of all religions: the religions were one, and equal because of their common root. (CWMG 57, p. 17; Jordens 1987, pp. 11–12) Mingling traditions, Gandhi had the tendency to play down differences in view of bringing people together with a common task. Chatterjee writes: “[...] Gandhi seems to me to go beyond both encounter and dialogue, envisaging and showing which is but natural, since God dwells in every man” (Chatterjee 1983, p. 134).

Gandhi’s Jewish friends Herman Kallenbach, Sonya Schlesin (1888–1956), Henry Salomon Leon Polak (1882–1959), Lewis Walter Ritch (1868–1952) and Gabriel Isaac (1874–1914)

were all universalists and theosophists. They were unfamiliar with the post-Biblical tradition, expressed in multiple ways, including philosophy, mysticism, rituals, laws and customs. Yet, since they had their own remembrance of oppression, persecution and racism, they could easily identify with Gandhi and the Indians in racist South Africa. Not as the wider Jewish community, these individuals courageously decided that they could not longer be onlookers. They became engaged and stood up for the rights of the Indian minority, in the name of universal, ethical brotherhood. Although they lacked a Jewish education, they expressed their Judaism by engaging themselves in the struggle of Indians against discrimination.

Gandhi, from his side, distinguished between “organized” religion and religion of the heart or spiritual self-development. In *Hind Swaraj* he wrote: “I am not thinking of the Hindu, the Mahomedan, or Zoroastrian religion, but of religion which underlies all religions”.<sup>12</sup> This comes close to Abraham Joshua Heschel’s distinction between depth-theology, which unites all, and theology *tout court*, which separates. (Heschel 1967) For Gandhi, all seek the Truth. Peace is indeed the result of the humility of people, who recognize that their own truth is relative and that it grows “between” them in interconnectedness. Cognitive humility and recognition of the other are pillars of present-day interreligious theology.

## 2. Satyagraha and Its Limits

Gandhi’s thoughts exhibit many affinities with Jewish dialogical thinkers as Buber (1886–1965), Heschel (1907–1972) and Levinas (1906–1995). Relatedness is focal in Jewish dialogical philosophy as well as in Gandhi’s worldview. In the following, I explore Gandhi’s view on Judaism and Zionism as a test-case of his attitude towards a specific religious tradition. I put his religious views in the framework of an interreligious theology in order to shed new and refreshing light on his thoughts. I situate Gandhi’s ideas on Judaism and Zionism in his time, but go beyond that in valuing “trans-difference”, which promotes communication and unity without uniformity.

### 2.1. Gandhi and Judaism

Against his own conviction that one has to judge a religious other from his or her own standpoint (Chatterjee 1983, p. 34), Gandhi looked at Judaism through Christian eyes and did not understand it on its own terms. His understanding of Judaism was informed by Christian supersessionist thoughts. The Old Testament put him to sleep, the New Testament, especially the Sermon on the Mount, was different. (Gandhi 2011, p. 52; Palaver 2020a) He started reading the Old Testament, and got as far as the book of Exodus. (Chatterjee 1983, p. 53) The ancient Jews saw themselves as exclusively elected, which was parallel with Hindus, who saw themselves as Aryas against Anaryas or untouchables. Gandhi invoked the “stigma” against the Jews that their ancestors were responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus. (*Harijan*, 17 December 1938) Adopting a traditional Christian anti-Jewish bias, he once wrote that the Jews believed in an eye for an eye<sup>13</sup> and did not have an idea of loving the enemy. (*Harijan*, 18 February 1939) He added that the Boers read the Old Testament, accepted the eye for the eye and acted accordingly. (Gandhi 1968, p. 16) With the principle of an eye for an eye, one would end up with the whole world becoming blind. Gandhi maintained that many Jews do not know about forgiveness. (*Harijan*, 18 February 1939)<sup>14</sup>.

Gandhi further reduced Judaism to religion, without paying attention to its peoplehood dimension. In a much discussed article on the Jews, published in the newspaper *Harijan* on 26 November 1938 (CWMG 68, pp. 137–41)<sup>15</sup>, Gandhi argues against Jewish presence in Palestine and considers Judaism to be a mere religion. However, Jews did and do not view themselves as a mere religion, but as a people. As I will explain more broadly, Gandhi was not supportive of Zionism and underestimated the spiritual power in it. He rightly states that “[t]he Jews born in France are French in precisely the same sense that Christians born in France are French”. Yet, he excludes Zionism from the Jewish identity.

Gandhi knew that Jews were a religious community as well as a people and that they based their request for the land upon the Bible. Practically, he rejected the Jewish claim upon the land and did not regard it as constitutive for Judaism.

## 2.2. Gandhi and Zionism

Maurice Shertok (later Moshe Sharett; 1894–1965) of the Jewish Agency took the initiative to ask Gandhi to raise his authoritative voice in favor of the Jews in the Middle East. Gandhi took upon him the task of a counsellor and mediator, with the help of Hermann Kallenbach and the Anglican priest Charles (Charlie) Freer Andrews (1871–1940). His recommendations were not followed, not by Jews in Germany nor by Jews in Palestine. The diatribe in the late 1930s between Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Buber brings to light their differences. Both linked politics and ethics, but whereas the former did not support Zionism, the latter embraced it. Both deemed that the challenge of a sincere moral life had to be brought to the public square. Gandhi could not separate active non-violence from social justice; unjust laws had to be disobeyed. Peace was impossible without justice. Through self-suffering and self-purification, one had to melt or transform the heart of the oppressor. Avoiding passive submission as well as violent retaliation, Gandhi pleaded for the third way of active non-violent resistance. Both Buber and Gandhi dreamed about awakening. (Gandhi 2009, pp. 9, 23; Buber 1901) But when Gandhi published his aforementioned long article on the Jews, Buber, a lover of peace and great admirer of Gandhi, rebuked the article and wrote a letter to Gandhi, that was never answered.<sup>16</sup>

Gandhi had written in his statement that Palestine belonged to the Arabs “in the same way that England belongs to the English or France to the French”. It would be “wrong and inhuman to impose the Jews on the Arabs”. He rejected political Zionism. Jews were a religious community, “the untouchables of Christianity”, who could reside in Palestine “only by the goodwill of Arabs”.<sup>17</sup> Their home was rather in the country of their birth or residence. In Germany, they had to see themselves as full citizens. If he were a German Jew, Gandhi would claim Germany as his home and challenge the Germans to shoot him. A “double home” for Jews would provide a justification for the Nazis to expel them. It would be “a crime against humanity to reduce the proud Arabs so that Palestine can be restored to the Jews partly or wholly as their national home”. Before the Arabs—he further stated in his *Harijan* article—Jews had to offer themselves to be shot or to be thrown in the Dead Sea. Gandhi wanted the Jews to love the enemy and, by doing so, save their “self respect” by avoiding helplessness and forlornness. They could rely on God, to whom they attribute personality and who—according to their belief—rules every action. To the Arabs, he did not propose *ahimsa*, clearly for his own political reasons favoring the Hindu–Muslim unity. Gandhi did everything in order to preserve the Hindu–Muslim unity in India. His pro-Arab position in the Palestine question was helpful in maintaining this unity.<sup>18</sup> Gandhi himself was not entirely satisfied with what he had written. To his close friend Hermann Kallenbach, a universalist and a Zionist, he wrote that he had “made a plunge into unknown waters”.<sup>19</sup> Already in 1913, Kallenbach was a Zionist and part of the administration of the South African Zionist Federation. In the 1930s of the preceding century, he became an active Zionist. Gandhi had written the article in absence of his Zionist friend.

In his reaction to Gandhi’s statement, Buber pointed to the ineffectiveness of *satyagraha* for German Jews in that time. He wrote that Jews did not proclaim the teaching of non-violence, as did Jesus and Gandhi: sometimes one had to use force to save oneself and one’s family. (Buber and Magnes 1939, p. 19) He further pointed to the quite different situation of Indians in South Africa and of Jews in Nazi Germany. Gandhi had overlooked the differences, by demanding *ahimsa* from Jews in Germany. One could not compare between the Jews and the untouchables, whom Gandhi called *Harijans*, “sons of God”. The Jewish situation in the 1930s was radically different from that of the *dalit*.

From Gandhi’s article and Buber’s reaction, it follows that, in the perspective of a dialogical philosophy, Gandhi failed to adopt a “trans-different” perspective, in which

respect for the situatedness and historical circumstances of others is focal. Could he demand from other people in completely different circumstances what he demanded from his own people? Was he right in recommending to and even demanding from cultural others in very different circumstances what he demanded from the people belonging to his own Indian culture?

Gandhi was well informed about the special Jewish relation to the land of Israel, he read inter alia informational brochures brought to him by Kallenbach, but in his pro-Arab bias and fight against British colonialism and imperialism, he chose to disregard this Jewish particularity. Because of his political interests in India, he had adopted an Arab perspective on Zionism. Buber rhetorically asked if India is also only in the hearts of the Indians. Gandhi's position on Palestine as belonging to the Arabs was one-sided and understandable within his political stance that favored a Hindu–Muslim unity in India. His political interests with the Indian Muslims influenced his Near East policy. On a more fundamental level, his opposition to a Zionism that used violence was the result of his *satyagraha*.

In a dialogical perspective, the question arises whether lofty ideas of one culture can be easily pasted into another political, social and cultural situation and whether one's own view is not necessarily relativized by another one. To my mind, intercultural dialogue is successful to the degree that differences are taken into account, which is the precondition for "trans-different" communication, bridging and mediation.

Gandhi's desire to keep Hindus and (70 million) Muslims united in India colored his attitude towards Zionism. He opposed partition in India as well as in Palestine. He was careful in avoiding discomfort to Muslims.<sup>20</sup> Noteworthy is that, in the period between 1919 and 1922, he had supported the Khilafat (Pan-Islamist) movement against English imperialism, and in the 1930s, he opposed the so-called dispossession of Palestine. His was a double standard: one for the Jews, who were judged by the highest spiritual standards and one for the "proud Arabs", who were judged by the "accepted canons of right and wrong".<sup>21</sup> Again, this stance is understandable in the framework of Gandhi's political struggle for a unified India, but it was unfavorable to the Jews in Palestine.

The Jews had no right in a place "which has been held for centuries by Muslim powers by right of religious conquest". (*Young India*, 6 April 1921) In the late 1930s, Gandhi's opinion was challenged: the cruel Turkish regime killed one million Armenians. But he suspected that these reports were much exaggerated. He did not criticize the Ottomans for the treatment of the Armenians, blaming instead the victims. (Kumaraswamy 2018, p. 150) He insisted on Muslim religious sentiment and the Khilafat "ideal", the Muslims had "the right of religious conquest", but Jews had "to revise their ideal about Palestine".

Gandhi expected from German Jews to proudly present themselves as Germans, whatever the outcome would be. He advised the Jews to adopt *satyagraha*. For Jews in Germany and in Palestine, however, *satyagraha* was utopic and, in fact, dangerous, since it did not consider the real Nazi threat. Gandhi knew the art of the possible; he often made compromises with his opponents. He would agree with Vittorio Hösle's theory on the importance of the institutional, strategic rationality. Hösle remarked that this rationality is frequently seen as the evil in the world, but it is needed in order to minimize humanity's problematic natural state. (Hösle 1992, pp. 59–86)<sup>22</sup> Yet, dissimilar to Hösle, Gandhi trusted that man's nature was good in the end and he expected that friendly communication was the remedy *par excellence* for political and social problems. The means determined the end; means and end were one.<sup>23</sup> Gandhi lacked political realism in his judgement of the Jewish situation in the 1930s and his advice to the Jews was the result of his profound belief in universal friendliness. He distanced himself from the evil acts of a person, but befriended everyone. He had no foes. He declared that he had no hatred, even for Adolf Hitler. (CWMG 75, p. 272) On 24 December 1938, he wrote in *Harijan* that "human nature in its essence is one and therefore unfailingly responds to the advances of love".

Gandhi was a staunch believer in the changeability of the human being. In his campaigns, he had the common good of oppressors and oppressed in mind. He wanted

to change the minds of people with unethical behavior and to influence the opponent. Was it realistic by any means to try to melt Hitler's heart? From a Gandhian perspective, however, "realism" was rather the product of a non-violent attitude. Gandhi failed to understand the depth of Nazi evil, when he compared Nazism with the British evil. He did not assess rightly the situation. On 23 July 1939 and 24 December 1940, he even wrote letters to Hitler.<sup>24</sup> He reminded him of Poland, Denmark, the Czechs; no word on the Jews. He wanted to melt the stony hearts of people and turned to them, including to Hitler, as "friends". He hated the sin and loved the sinner.<sup>25</sup> Hitlerism could not be defeated by anti-Hitlerism. *Ahimsa* was the answer to *himsa*. (*Harijan*, 22 May 1939) Gandhi proposed his life-long friend Kallenbach to pray for Hitler, and he understood that the latter could not. He wrote that Kallenbach and thousands of Jews "have no thought even of 'loving the enemy'", for them "revenge is sweet, to forgive is divine". (*Harijan*, 18 February 1939) But he admitted that a Jewish Gandhi in Germany would be killed within five minutes. (*Harijan*, 22 May 1939)

Gandhi wrote about a possible "justifiable war" of the Jews against Hitler, but he did not believe in war.<sup>26</sup> Palestine did not belong to the Jews. Regrettably, he wrote, Zionists made their national home "under the shadow of the British gun".<sup>27</sup> His vantage point greatly differed from that of Buber, who wanted to reconcile the Arab and the Jewish claim: the Jewish-Arab coexistence was at the heart of his dialogical Zionism. Buber belonged to the peace movement *Brit Shalom*, which aimed to create cooperation between Jews and Arabs. (Ratsabi 2002) The land was large enough for both peoples.

After the war, Gandhi remained to a great extent silent on the Shoa.<sup>28</sup> In a conversation with the journalist Louis Fischer, he repeated his position: the Jews should have offered themselves to the butcher's knife. (Fischer 1984, p. 435) This would have been heroic, it would have aroused the world and the people of Germany. They died anyway in their millions. It would have been a victory of non-violence to perish unarmed.

It is well known that Gandhi himself was not a radical pacifist. As a member of the Indian Ambulance Corps, he participated in the Boer war (1899–1902) and the Zulu war (1906). He supported Indian recruitment for the British army in WWI and counted upon the British protection in case of a Japanese attack. He did not oppose the military defense of Kashmir in 1947. Military actions were sometimes required in certain cases. In extreme conditions, violent resistance was better than cowardly inaction. (Brown 2009, p. 49) But he noted that the Jews wanted to punish Germany and to bring England and America to fight Germany. (*Harijan*, 17 December 1938; 24 December 1938) For Jewish ears, this was outrageous language. Henry Polak asked Gandhi to retract his words, which he did. He emphasized that his opinion was "based purely on ethical considerations, and is independent of results".<sup>29</sup> One did not have to expect immediate effects of *satyagraha*; in the end—he trusted—there would be results.

As mentioned, Gandhi's approach to Zionism was biased because of his political support for the Hindu-Muslim amity. Publicly, he rejected the Jewish claim of a homeland in Palestine, privately he was prone to recognize its validity. (Shimoni 1977, p. 60) For Gandhi, the Jews had a vision, but do not realize it. Zionism as reoccupation of Palestine had no attraction for him. The real Jerusalem was the spiritual one. Consequently, Jews could realize Zionism everywhere in the world. Gandhi's words on praying for Hitler, on "saving self-respect" and setting "an example, which would save the whole of Jewry", left the Jews baffled.

With his non-violent approach that did not completely exclude proportionate use of force, Gandhi avoided the extremes of military power-balance as well as radical pacifism. *Satyagraha* was universal love. Peace was the result of a change of hearts. In his negotiation with the powerful, Gandhi considered the non-violent struggle as an alternative for violence. In the extreme case of a lunatic murderer, the killing of such an individual was justifiable. (*Young India*, 4 November 1926) In the case of Hitler, however, Gandhi still believed in his transformability. He did not stop trying to believe in the possible return of an evildoer. Yet, was Hitler not so entangled with evil that melting his heart was impossible? Is non-



violence “an over-riding obligation”?<sup>30</sup> Buber, a champion of dialogue, admitted in 1953 that Hitler was so intensively immersed in the sphere of monstrous inhumanity that an unbridgeable rift separated this man from others: no dialogue was possible (Buber 1957, p. 232; Meir 2013b, p. xxix). Gandhi persisted in trying to disarm the enemy by arousing in him humanity. He did not believe in a violent intervention in order to end a tragedy. He insisted that violence was not a way to fight violence. When it came to the Jews in Nazi Germany or to the war of the British and the Americans against Germany, the use of violence was not his option. He remained inflexible in his position, which worked well in South Africa, where he opposed British colonialism, but which was a failure in his understanding of the Jewish situation in Germany and Europe in the 1930s of the preceding century and during the Holocaust.

Martin Arnold argues that Buber misunderstood Gandhi’s article on the Jews, since Gandhi did not propose a concrete strategy. (Arnold 2011, pp. 323–42) In a letter to Hayim Greenberg (1889–1953) of the American Zionist journal *Jewish Frontier*, Gandhi writes indeed that he was not disillusioned that his article did not “convert” one Jew to *satyagraha*. (*Harijan*, 22 May 1939) The example of one single Jew in *satyagraha* could have influenced others. Gandhi trusted that God is potentially present in all human beings, including the perpetrators. *Satyagraha* aimed at redeeming the enemy from his animosity and appealed to the opponent’s deeper self. The Jews too—he claimed—believed in the presence of God in all they do. He did not believe that physical survival was the most important thing. The hardest metal would melt under sufficient heat of non-violence. (*Harijan*, 7 January 1939) Through non-violence, one would save one’s dignity. Gandhi was convinced that, in the end, *satyagraha* would be efficient. In Jewish eyes, however, the first task for Jews in Germany of the 1930s and the forties was: to save lives as much as possible. Was it Buber who misunderstood Gandhi—as Arnold argues—or was it Gandhi, who did not grasp that Jews act differently than Hindus?

On the basis of the above, I conclude that there are limits to Gandhi’s *satyagraha*. Zionism was born as a solution for a people that was persecuted and humiliated during ages. For Gandhi, Zionism was essentially a violent, intruding, colonial movement. He did not see all sides involved in the conflict. He abhorred violence and, during the Shoa, did not imagine enough the necessity of the limitation of the infinite demand of love. Moreover, he believed that the Jews wanted to punish the Germans, whereas he himself was against punishment. He opposed sending Englishmen to jail and wrote about the wickedness of the trial of the Nazi war criminals. Here is the moment where Jewish realistic thoughts on saving lives, justice and the right of necessary self-defense inevitably clash with Gandhi’s *ahimsa*. From a Jewish vantage point, the Nazi rage asked for “realism” and “self-defense”, which is not to be relativized by pointing to the relatedness of all by all and by a radical deconstruction of the words “self” and “defense”. I agree with Judith Butler that aggression frequently hides beyond self-defense. (Butler 2020) Gandhi himself deemed that legitimate self-defense was consistent with non-violence. (Gandhi 2009, p. lxxvii) Recognizing that non-violence was not possible for the Polish people in 1939, he praised their violent resistance to Hitler. Yet, he did not think, in the case of Nazi Germany, that Jewish self-defense against the state terror was a necessity. He did not think sufficiently of Jews in terms of a peoplehood, in dare need for help.

Gandhi’s active, non-violent method allowed for exceptions and always went step by step. Gandhi himself hesitated whether he could bring his *ahimsa* to others. Nevertheless, he believed others could perform that task. He persisted in his way and demanded from others to follow him.<sup>31</sup> As Adam Roberts, an expert on international relations, writes: “Any approach that sees one form of action, or one political destination, as universally applicable risks suffering from what might be termed the ‘Comintern fallacy’—the mistake of appearing to know best what is good for all other societies”. (Roberts 2009, p. 21) Also Claude Markovits deems that Gandhi’s actions were so firmly embedded in the cultural Indian and even the Hindu context, that one cannot directly transpose it into different cultural contexts. In the same vein, Margaret Chatterjee wrote: “Gandhi was never able to

see that *satyagraha* was non-universalizable". (Chatterjee 1992, p. 165) Consequently, one should refrain from prescribing to other societies in different contexts and times what is practiced at one time in one society. Local conditions and circumstances have always to be taken into account (Roberts 2009, pp. 20, 23). In Gandhi's unique blending of religion, ethics and politics, he sincerely thought that *satyagraha* was a panacea, the path by excellence, to be followed by all. *Satyagraha* was for him a universal way, which grew out of his interpretation of the particular, Hindu situation.

### 3. The Challenge of Gandhi's Satyagraha

#### 3.1. Inspiration

Notwithstanding the clear limitations of Gandhi's *satyagraha*, described above, an empathic study of Gandhi's worldview opens a wide-open window to much needed and unforeseen possibilities and challenges. Gandhi's transformative activities, his talents as negotiator and organizer of mass demonstrations contain a huge potential for peace activists across the globe. Although his *satyagraha* had its limits, also in India (Brown 2009, p. 56), his creative opposition to any form of violence and his attempt to influence the oppressor and transform him, remain highly inspirational.

In the postscript of her book *The Force of Nonviolence*, Butler greatly values Gandhi's soul-force against state violence. Gandhi's power of non-violence as expressed in fasts, civil disobedience and boycotts is a protest against unjust legal systems. In her analysis of violence and non-violence, Butler escapes a war logic that distinguishes between grievable and un-grievable lives. She remarks that the egalitarian struggle is often characterized as "unrealistic", but that, in fact, this is its strength. All human beings are in unequal embodied social relations. The relevance of Butler's argument lies in the insight that only a supported life can persist as a life. Self-preservation depends on others, on social relations that contribute to flourishing or not. These relations can express detrimental warmongering, or transformational alliances. Gandhi's *satyagraha* contributes to a more equal relationship between people, in which all lives are grievable.

Of special importance for a more equal society is Gandhi's ethical and deed-centered approach to religions. His religious practices keep at bay a dogmatic fanaticism and lead to a dialogical reality. As such, it has huge dialogical potential. Gandhi contributed to the positive use of religions in conflict management.

A dialogical theology, as I perceive it, follows a dialogical praxis.<sup>32</sup> It involves deep listening and perfecting society by getting involved with religious others. Recognizing the religious other in her uniqueness, being present to her, and listening to her without hidden agenda is a "testimony" to the Ineffable, which the Vedas describe as "*neti, neti*" (not this, not that). Gandhi did not always see the religious other in her uniqueness, but he felt the Divine present in everybody and everything. In the binomial unity-diversity, his emphasis was on unity rather than on diversity.

Moreover, Gandhi's concept of truth as practical and relational is a remedy to religious absolute truth claims. The idea of a relational truth as service to others was even more fundamental than the concept of God. (Chatterjee 1983, p. 13) The great temptation of religions lies in their absolute truth claims. Countering this negative inclination, Gandhi contributed to an interreligious theology that has interconnectedness as its method and aim. The truth of religions was not absolute; Truth with a capital letter was above religions. Here, the influence of Jainism upon Gandhi is manifest. In Jain doctrine, it follows from the doctrine of "many sidedness" or "non-absolutism" that truth is necessarily complex. (Howard 2018, p. 82)

The science of *satyagraha*, discovered by Gandhi in 1906, was experimental. His community was a laboratory, where he experimented with social relations. The way to the Divine was through deeds and self-discipline, through purification and control of the passions. Gandhi championed *satyagraha*, in which Truth implied love and firmness; it was "the Force which is born of Truth and Love or non-violence". (Gandhi 1968, pp. 106–7) *Satyagraha* was firmness (*agraha*) in truth and love (*satya*): truth-force or love-force. (Fischer 1984, p. 102)

*Satya*, truth, derives from *sat*, which denotes “to be” but also “God”.<sup>33</sup> Truth is God.<sup>34</sup> Everything is illusion, only God is. (Fischer 1984, pp. 377–78)<sup>35</sup> Gandhi’s detection of this ultimate reality became possible in relationship with others. His *satyagraha*, based upon truth (*satya*) and non-violence (*ahimsa*), was profoundly relational.

Gandhi sought the Truth in ortho-praxis, more especially in the renouncement of ego-attachment. In a practical, experimental way, one discovered the *Atman*, the non-egotistic, deeper Self. The Gandhian notion of Truth as approachable in proximity to others contains, therefore, a formidable potential for peace activists. When religious truths are all perspectives on the Infinite, which escapes the grasp, interreligious peace with its characteristics of humble openness, learning from and extending hospitality to religious others, shines at the horizon. In liberation theology as in Gandhi’s religious thoughts, Truth and peace belong together. What counts is the daily work for peace, not abstract, sophisticated thought. Truth or love had to be realized in view of the liberation of all.

From Gandhi, one may learn that truth sprouts from the earth (Ps. 85:12a): it is born in communication and grows between people in peaceful interconnection. The aim of truth is to bring peace, which is established as the result of the humility of people who recognize that their own truth is relative. In a dialogical theology, which has interlocution as its aim and method, cross-bordering values unite people who belong to diverse religions.

Along this article, I insisted upon what Jonathan Sacks called “the dignity of difference”. For Gandhi, truth appeared differently to different persons: “There is nothing wrong in every man following Truth according to his lights”. (Fischer 1984, p. 381)<sup>36</sup> This Gandhian saying on Truth from a wide range of perspectives makes religions somewhat relative and prepares the way for a more reflective openness to other religious narratives in an interreligious or dialogical theology. Such a theology does respect singularity, without forgetting communication and complementarity.

I have shown how Gandhi’s way and the Buberian way differed. Different cultures and religions develop in certain circumstances different ways of decreasing suffering. Yet, in a dialogical theology, complementarity, interaction and mutual influence of different lifestyles are basic. Hence, being a prophetic “sign” is not necessarily incompatible with putting limits to evil by using proportionate and reasonable violence. In this manner, a virtual meeting between the Jewish Moses and the Indian Moses may open new and unexpected horizons.

Communication between Gandhi’s *satyagraha* and Jewish thought remains a fascinating possibility. Similar to Gandhi, the prophets did not trust in physical force, but in moral strength. Gandhi’s universalist Jews developed prophetic solidarity with Indian immigrants in South Africa. Gideon Shimoni calls them, in reference to Deutscher, “non-Jewish Jews”. (Shimoni 1977, p. 12) Objecting this view, Shimon Lev suggests that they supported Gandhi because they considered that the battle for social justice was a Jewish value. They reminded their own history of humiliation and discrimination.<sup>37</sup> In Egypt, the midwives Shifra and Pua offered civil obedience when Pharaoh instructed to kill Jewish boys (Ex. 1: 15–21). They preceded Gandhi and his Jewish followers.

In an interreligious perspective, one may learn from Gandhi’s amazing attitude towards opponents. He opposed Mohammed Ali Jinnah (1876–1948), the future founder of Pakistan, who accused him of wanting an all Hindu rule. But Gandhi wanted diversity in India and called Jinnah “brother Jinnah”. He disliked the idea of Islamic brotherhood, widening it in a theosophist way to the “brotherhood of man”. All were brothers and sisters. Love as the law of life and the aim of humankind would lead to all-encompassing sister—and brotherhood. In Gandhi’s sublime worldview as in a Jewish dialogical philosophy, belonging is belonging to all. (Meir 2018, pp. 17–33) The word “belonging” relates to two realms: it indicates pertaining to a particular group, and also designates relatedness to universal humankind. In a Gandhian perspective, the copula “and” is reevaluated. As against religious fanaticism that mushrooms today, Gandhi lived with religious others and worked with them. He valued the humanizing force in different religious sources, but did not accept them when they conflicted with non-violence. Gandhi belonged to the

Hindu tradition as well as to the world. He searched the Truth in a multiplicity of religions. As in today's interreligious theology, he knew that belonging to a specific group is not contradictory to belonging to the world as such.

Religious peace activists are inspired by Gandhi, who interpreted religion as a non-dividing, uniting force. Sacred books received a multiplicity of interpretations, but in a Gandhian viewpoint, those interpretations that led to violence could never be legitimate. He said: "Error, no matter however immemorial it may be, cannot derive sanctity, and even a Vedic text if it is inconsistent with morality, with injustice, will have to go by the board". (Chatterjee 1983, p. 29) Like Buber (Buber 1962), he did not accept scriptural passages when they conflicted with his moral conviction. Morality was above scriptural authority, as deeds were above doctrines. Moral deeds made up a religious person: one recognized the tree at its fruits. The action of non-violence was the criterion of the religious person.

### 3.2. Gandhi, Israel and Palestine

I showed the limits to Gandhi's *satyagraha* when it comes to the situation of Jews in Palestine and in Germany in the 1930s, but *satyagraha* contains positive challenges for the present. What would Gandhi say today in the situation of Israel and Palestine, in a time of new anti-Semitism? Anti-Semitism reappears today in the form of radical anti-Zionism that makes an equation between Israeli Jews and Nazis and inverts the Holocaust. Gandhi would not have supported the idea of the creation of a Jewish State, but it is questionable whether, in his pragmatic approach, he would agree with the dismantling of such a state, once established. He would perhaps have pled for the coexistence of a Palestinian state alongside the Israeli one, or for a binational state that cares for the welfare of all. In India, he opposed partition and pleaded for unity, regardless race or creed. Would he think today, like Buber, that the land was large enough for Jews and Arabs?

Sure, we live in quite different times than Gandhi. Gandhi's view on Zionism in 1938 was much influenced by the situation in India, a situation that changed with the establishment of Pakistan. Moreover, Israel is not Great Britain and the Palestinians are not Indians. However, the answer to the question on the relevance of Gandhi's thought in Israel/Palestine is not without importance. As Margaret Chatterjee writes, Gandhi believed "that the most urgent struggles against injustice can be humanized, so to say, by the persuasive and creative power which is released when men of goodwill band together, with enmity to none, in order to better their lives and those of their neighbours". (Chatterjee 1983, p. 6).

Jews are back in Israel and the Jewish state is a fact. At the same time, demonization, delegitimization, double standard thinking and black-white morality concerning the state of Israel are very much present, also and foremost in the BDS movement. The Star of David is compared with the swastika and Israel is compared with Nazism and South African apartheid. I think that it is questionable whether Gandhi would continue to say that Palestine belongs to the Arabs. I guess he would rather adopt a pragmatic standpoint and suggest what he calls "the beauty of compromise" in order to advance the peace process and to create a more peaceful situation. (Gandhi 2011, p. 178) He would oppose the Israeli occupation of the West Bank as well as the Palestinian armed resistance and the recourse to terrorism. In line with his peaceful thinking, he would disapprove of any form of fanatic nationalism, hatred and demonization, in an attempt to create a more peaceful society by melting the hearts of people from both sides.

Gandhi's voice continues to be heard and interpreted in different ways. Revisiting Gandhi, the Australian scholar John Docker, for instance, presents the historian Flavius Josephus as a Jew, who resisted armed rebellion of Jewish nationalists and became a prolific diasporic writer and author of the historical tract *The Jewish War (75–79)*. Docker links Josephus's position to that of Daniel Boyarin, who contrasts the "masculine" Zionism with the "feminized" (sic) Talmudic narrative about Johanan ben Zakkai, a Tanna of the first century CE, who escaped besieged Jerusalem in a coffin, pretending to be dead. Johanan ben Zakkai negotiated with Vespasianus, saving Yavne and its sages. (Talmud Bavli Gittin

56a–b) Boyarin opposes the non-violent diasporic Jewish culture to a patriarchal Zionism. Docker concludes that Boyarin comes close to Josephus' vision of the importance of non-violence in the Jewish tradition: "In a world still marked by national and religious violence, nonviolence as argued for by Josephus in antiquity and Gandhi in the first part of the twentieth century—and by Daniel Boyarin in his musings on rabbinic Judaism, Josephus, and the Zionist myth of Masada—remains the only hope for humanity in a disastrous world". (Docker 2007, p. 217) Following Daniel Boyarin and identifying Zionism with mere violence, Docker himself became an anti-Zionist Gandhi *redivivus*, who was unable to see Zionism as a legitimate expression of Judaism.

For Shamir Hassan of the Aligarh Muslim University, Gandhi's disapproval of Zionism was the result of some basic attitudes. First of all, Gandhi could not conceive a state of European migrants in Asia. Second, he disagreed with "the Zionists' demand that the whole world must share in, and pay for, the guilt of Nazi Germany's persecution of the Jews". Finally, he rejected the almost total dependence of the Zionists on political and financial aid from Europe and America. Hassan concludes: "To these attitudes the Zionists did not, and still do not have an answer". (Hassan 1993, p. 751) In Hassan's rereading of Gandhi, there is no place for Zionism; it is fundamentally rebuffed.

In contrast, P.R. Kumaraswamy of Nehru University, author of a book on Gandhi and Israel (Kumaraswamy 2017), contests the assumption that the lack of normalization of relations between Israel and India was Gandhian, whereas normalization in 1992 was un-Gandhian. (Kumaraswamy 2018, p. 147) He writes that those who venerate Gandhi's "consistent" opposition to Zionism "carefully avoid not only Gandhi's duality over Arab violence but also do not contextualize Bose's Nazi-imperial linkages". (Id., p. 162)<sup>38</sup>.

Apparently, other re-readings of Gandhi than that of Docker and Hassan belong to the possibilities. Gandhi is more than the traffic circle in Kiryat Gat that bears his name. His counsel to the Jews in Palestine to contribute to the creation of a peaceful society is congruent with the profoundly Jewish idea that the land of Israel remains always "promised" in a Holy History. In the Hebrew Bible it is written that the land belongs to God (Lev. 24:23).<sup>39</sup> Several Gandhian steps in Israel/Palestine are imaginable. Jews and Arabs could say, as Gandhi said against the landowners in India that "the land belongs to the Lord of us all". (Fischer 1984, p. 563) Jews and Arabs could take care of securing buildings, just as Gandhi who decided in 1946,—when violence between Hindus and Muslims erupted,—that one had to choose one Moslem and one Hindu in each village in order to guarantee the safety of all. (Id., p. 559) Like Gandhi we could fast when iniquities are committed or as a means for social action. We could step in Gandhi's path, who desired not only to liberate his own people, but others as well. Israelis and Palestinians could march together in peaceful marches. One of Gandhi's profound insights was that *moksha* was not purely individual, it had to be interpreted in a collective way: liberation was liberation of all. (Chatterjee 1983, pp. 155–73) One does not have to wait for leaders to act; one may start from the bottom, even with very few lovers of peace. Gandhi himself started the famous Salt-March in 1930 against the British Empire's salt monopoly with less than one hundred people.

The Mahatma influenced peace activists globally, among the most famous Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, Albert Luthuli, Vaclav Havel and Martin Luther King Jr. In Israel and Palestine, we should not stop to envision a better future, given the present situation in which violence frequently turns lethal. One does not have to necessarily suspect all peace initiatives as unacceptable foreign influence and undermining the existing social fabric. Dissidents, who protest against an unjust regime are the ones who most care for social cohesion. The parties involved could stop seeing themselves as victims and blaming the other and, instead, approach the other as a real partner, with whom coexistence is possible and necessary. Self-interest may be transcended in view of the liberation of all. Douglas Allen of Maine University writes that we can learn from the action-oriented *karma yoga* of Gandhi. (Allen 1997, p. 10) In his interpretation of the Gita, Gandhi sees a way of overcoming attachment, ego-desires and cravings. The selfless action, which treat friend

and foe alike, was a path to become one with the Divine. Following Gandhi's will to communicate, notwithstanding everything, could be dangerous. Gandhi himself paid with his life, as did Martin Luther King and Yitschaq Rabin, another "soldier of peace". But it is a courageous alternative to the existing violence.

Gandhi's lofty position implies that violence and injustice have to be actively resisted. Conscious of modern man's and modern states' temptation of violence, he proposed a way that one can still adopt progressively, if the situation allows. Violence as relational reality could be diminished in a positive, non-violent way. Justice always has to be pursued by just means. The biblical command: "Justice, justice shall you pursue" (Deut. 16:20) implies that justice has to be realized justly. In Gandhi's parlance: the relation between means and end is like the seed and the tree. However, religions have been hospitable as well as hostile. In the name of religions, unholy wars have been waged. (Sacks 2005) We could become neighbor religions, in positive interaction with others. Religious reconciliation could bring about a hoped for more peaceful coexistence. Hans Küng has said that there will be no world peace without the peace between religions. (Küng 2005, p. 890) If religions start relating to each other, violence can be reduced.

The Norwegian founder of peace studies Johan Galtung wrote about different forms of violence: direct violence, but also structural and cultural violence. (Palaver 2020b, pp. 3–4) The newest form of violence is frequently cultural. (Strømmen and Schmiedel 2020). "Trans-difference" in which distinctiveness, mutual influence and communication go together, could avoid cultural isolation and cultural relativism and promote interculturality. It could bridge between religions and at the same time emphasize the specificity and embeddedness of the religious other.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Margaret Chatterjee did basic work on Gandhi and religion (Chatterjee 1983, 2005). For an older short study on Gandhi and religious pluralism: (Jordens 1987). On Gandhi's religious quest: (Nanda 2002); on Gandhi and Hick: (Sugirtharajah 2012). For a study of Gandhi's religious pluralism: (Jolly 2012).
- <sup>2</sup> For Gandhi's relationship to Jewry and Zionism: (Shimoni 1977; Chatterjee 1992; Lev 2016; Kumaraswamy 2017). See also (Hunt 1983).
- <sup>3</sup> This insight comes close to the saying "If you are my witness, I am God" in the Midrash Psiqta de-rav Kahana (Mandelbaum 1962, p. 208).
- <sup>4</sup> In *Hind Swaraj*, he defends the idea of *varna* and writes that "[e]ach followed his own occupation or trade, and charged a regulation wage" (Gandhi 2009, p. 66). Like Gandhi, who combined a conservative and a novel attitude, Mendelssohn was a traditional Jew as well as an enlightened man, who rejected dogmatic thinking (Meir 1997, pp. 148–49).
- <sup>5</sup> Gandhi took his celibacy vow in 1906, in the same year of the establishment of his *satyagraha* movement.
- <sup>6</sup> In his introduction to *Hind Swaraj*, Parel notes the great influence of Rajchandra Ravjibhai Mehta (1868–1901), a Gujarati Jain and diamond merchant, who helped Gandhi to overcome an intellectual crisis in 1894. (Gandhi 2009, p. lx)
- <sup>7</sup> On 23 September 1930 he wrote to Narandas Gandhi that there is an equality of the religions. (CWMG 44, p. 166; Jordens 1987, pp. 10–11).
- <sup>8</sup> Elsewhere, he compares the different religions to beautiful flowers from the same garden or to branches of the same majestic tree; *Harijan*, 30 January 1937.
- <sup>9</sup> Hick once said: "Had I been born in India, I would have been a follower of Gandhi". (Sugirtharajah 2012, p. 131, n. 5).
- <sup>10</sup> For the importance of translation as an act of peace, in which the target language is changed, transformed and renewed because the source language is conveyed in the target language, see (Rosenzweig n.d., pp. 154–55). Rosenzweig believed that there was only one language behind and in all the languages, there was only one world with many differences, which made communication possible.
- <sup>11</sup> Nathuram Godse, Gandhi's murderer, who came from the group Mahasabha that favored Hindu nationalism, referred to the Gita.
- <sup>12</sup> *Hind Swaraj*, p. 41.
- <sup>13</sup> Ed Noort draws my attention Gandhi's saying: "[ . . . ] I do think that in an age when people were unrestrained in their appetite for the enemy's blood, Moses restricted retaliation to equal measure and no more". M. K. Gandhi, "Notes," *Young India*, 9 February 1922.
- <sup>14</sup> In *Harijan* on 17 December 1938, he wrote that Jews sought revenge against the Nazis by appealing for a war against Germany.

- 15 The article was written on the 11th, after the *Reichskristallnacht* in the night of 9–10 November (Panter-Brick 2008, p. 110).
- 16 Gideon Shimoni assumes that Gandhi did not read the letter at all. In a conversation with Louis Fischer, who reminded him of the letter, Gandhi did not remember it. (Shimoni 1977, p. 47; Fischer 1984, pp. 431–36; Buber and Magnes 1939).
- 17 In a letter d.d. 1 July 1937 to Chaim Weizmann, Kallenbach doubted the wisdom of leaving the Jews “at the mercy of the goodwill of the Arabs”. (Panter-Brick 2008, p. 96).
- 18 The Indian Nation as Gandhi understood it as driven by morality of the ancient Indian civilization was above religions. Muslims and Hindus had the “same ancestors”. (Gandhi 2009, pp. 48, 50–51) In his Quit India speech on 8 August 1942, he repeated that to be Indian is above all religious differences.
- 19 Sic in a letter sent to Kallenbach from Segaoon (Wardha), Sevagram Ashram, on 26 November 1938.
- 20 Parel notes that, compared with the original Gujarati text of *Hind Swaraj*, the English translation is careful not to hurt Muslim sensibilities. Sentences were omitted in order not to cause discomfort to Muslims. (Gandhi 2009, p. 48, note 81)
- 21 Following Shimoni, Chatterjee writes on “double standards” (Chatterjee 1992, p. 157). This view is contested by Nanda (Nanda 2002, p. 221), who writes that Gandhi had more hopes for *satyagraha* of Jews than of Arabs: his dilemma was that of a prophet, who is also a political leader: “he knew his idealism was the realism of tomorrow”. (ibid.) For Nanda (2002, p. 220) Gandhi was neither pro-Arab or pro-Jew: he saw the problem from a moral viewpoint. See also Shohet’s reaction in his newspaper *Jewish Advocate*, 2 December 1938. Avraham E. Shohet was an Indian Jew from the Baghdadi community in Bombay and the head of the Bombay Zionist Association. In a letter d.d. 7 March 1939 he wrote that Gandhi viewed the Palestine question as a purely Muslim question. (Shimoni 1977, p. 49)
- 22 (Hösle 1992) Answering a letter of Hayim Greenberg, Gandhi deemed that it is true that a Jewish Gandhi would be taken promptly to the guillotine, but that *ahimsa* remained efficacious in the long run. *Harijan*, 22 May 1939.
- 23 See (Gandhi 2009, p. 79): “The means may be likened to a seed, the end to a tree; and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree”.
- 24 In the letter of 1940, Gandhi did not directly address the situation of the Jews.
- 25 In a parallel way, he hated the “Western civilization” of the British, which was based upon power and lust, but he did not hate the British. To the “reader” in *Hind Swaraj* (Gandhi 2009, p. 72), the “editor” says: “Your hatred against them [the British] ought to be transferred to their civilization”. On the last page he writes: “I bear no enmity towards the English, but I do towards their civilization”. (Id., p. 117).
- 26 In his letter to Gandhi, Judah L. Magnes retorted that a war against something evil would not become a righteous war,—in Gandhi’s wording, a justifiable war—, but a necessary one. (Buber and Magnes 1939, pp. 30–33).
- 27 True, Gandhi proposed *satyagraha* also to the Czechs, the Abyssinians, the British and the Indians, but in the case of the Jews, the result was particularly catastrophic.
- 28 Gandhi said to Fischer: “I told Silverman [Sidney Silverman, a British member of Parliament, visited Gandhi 8 March 1946] that the Jews have a good case in Palestine. If the Arabs have claim in Palestine, the Jews have prior claim”. Fischer added in a later version “a prior claim, because they were the first”. Simone Panter-Brick, however, deems that Gandhi,—as lawyer,—meant: “a claim which is self-evident in the absence of evidence to the contrary”. That the Jews had “a good case” meant that there was sufficient evidence to support a legal position (Panter-Brick 2008, p. 147). However, against this interpretation *ad meliorem partem* pleads Gandhi’s article entitled “Jews and Palestine”, published in *Harijan* 21 July 1946, in which he complains that the Jews depended upon American money and upon the British arms “for forcing themselves on an unwelcome land”.
- 29 In a statement given to Kallenbach in July 1937, Central Zionist Archives, S. 25.3587.
- 30 This is a question of M. Chatterjee, who further asks if the duty to save life was not a compelling duty for somebody as influenced by Jainism as Gandhi. (Chatterjee 1992, p. 116)
- 31 Hardiman (2003, p. 59) notes that, for Gandhi, no human being was without some form of human conscience. He copes with the objection that in a cruel regime as Nazi Germany there was no chance for civil resistance (he coins the felicitous term “dialogical resistance”) to succeed. He counters the argument by describing what happened in February 1943 in Berlin when non-Jewish spouses protested against the arrest of their Jewish husbands. In the end, the Nazis released their Jewish husbands. (id, pp. 60–61) But these Jewish men were detained for registration, not for deportation; for the Nazis, their status was different from that of other Jews. See (Meyer n.d., pp. 63–64).
- 32 For Alan Race (Race 2001), theology and dialogue are twin tracks.
- 33 Rabindranath Tagore translates *sat* as “Reality” (Tagore 1931, p. 85).
- 34 In 1931, he reversed the formulation “God is Truth” to “Truth is God”. In *Harijan*, 16 February 1934, pp. 4–5, he wrote: “He [God] and His Law are one. The Law is God. [ . . . ] He is Truth, Love, Law and a million things that human ingenuity can name”. (Chatterjee 1983, p. 103).
- 35 This line of thinking is almost like that in the pious Jewish movement of Hasidism, which proclaims that only God really exists. The mystical idea that all is God is already present in the medieval *Tikkunei Zohar* 81b: “no place is empty of Him” (*lét ‘atar panuy miné*). The discussion of the different Hasidic explanations of this utterance would exceed the scope of this footnote.

- 36 See also the saying of Gandhi in January 1928: “Our prayer for others ought never to be: ‘God give them the light Thou hast given to me.’ But ‘give them all the light and truth they need for their higher development.’” (Chatterjee 1983, p. 129).
- 37 S. Lev, “Gabriel Isaac, Gandhi’s Forgotten Lieutenant”, p. 34 quotes Isaac who, “[I]ike Ritch, Polak and Kallenbach, [ . . . ] also emphasized that ‘as a Jew, he could not rest while another people was being subjected to persecution of a type with which he was familiar’”.
- 38 The Indian nationalist Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose sided with Japanese imperialism and Nazis, in order to overthrow the British in India. When he was elected President of the Indian National Congress, Gandhi intervened and prompted his demission. Kumaraswamy (2018, p. 160) notes that those, who quote Gandhi’s disapproval of Jewish collaboration with imperialism, rarely comment on Bose’s track record. Chatterjee (1992, p. 123) notes that in today’s India, Bose is still seen by some people as a hero.
- 39 Buber referred to this biblical verse in his reaction to Gandhi’s article on the Jews.

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