

Gandhi's Seven Blunders

by Donella H. Meadows

A few weeks before he was assassinated, Gandhi the Mahatma had a conversation with his grandson Arun. He handed Arun a talisman upon which were engraved "Seven Blunders," out of which, said Gandhi, grows the violence that plagues the world. The blunders were:

**Wealth without work.
Pleasure without conscience.
Knowledge without character.
Commerce without morality.
Science without humanity.
Worship without sacrifice.
Politics without principles.**

Gandhi called these disbalances "passive violence," which fuels the active violence of crime, rebellion, and war. He said, "We could work 'til doomsday to achieve peace and would get nowhere as long as we ignore passive violence in our world."

To his grandfather's list of seven blunders Arun later added an eighth:

Rights without responsibilities.

Gandhi gave the list to Arun in 1947. Almost 50 years later the blunders have been institutionalized, built into our corporations, our governments, our very culture. Not only are we no longer embarrassed by them; we actively practice them. In some of them we even take pride.

From Wall Street to state lotteries, we entice ourselves with the promise of wealth without work. Whole sectors of the economy offer pleasure without conscience. Many scientists believe their greatest strength is their ability to separate their knowledge from their character and their science from their souls. Advocate serious morality in a commercial context (away from the PR department) and you will be laughed out of a job. Morality? It might be nice to take the high road, but our competitors won't. So forget it!

Insiders in Washington and other capitals speak openly of their ability to cut political deals in a world totally without principle. That's how it works in this town, they say, and they're not apologizing or regretting; they're boasting.

Religious movements calling themselves Christian have somehow been derailed into picking and choosing among the gospels, grasping at Biblical snippets that seem to support possessiveness and self-righteousness, never noticing the passages that urge sacrifice, sharing, compassion, humility, forgiveness.

Conservatives raise high some of Gandhi's blunders (pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character) to bash over the heads of liberals. Liberals hit back with their own select list (wealth without work, commerce without morality). Everyone scrambles for rights without responsibility.

Somehow our public discussion has become dominated by either-or simplicities. If you complain about commerce without morality, you are accused of being against commerce. Suggest bringing humanity back into science, and you're anti-scientific. Say there's something wrong with wealth without work, and you're class-jealous, a hater of rich people, an underminer of capitalism. Murrur

that worship might require sacrifice, that faith might entail service to the unfortunate, and you are suddenly an enemy of religion.

This simplistic thinking seems incapable of embracing the idea of BALANCE, which was Gandhi's central point. He wasn't calling for work without wealth or humanity without science; he was calling for work AND wealth. Science AND humanity. Commerce AND morality. Pleasure AND conscience.

A latter-day Gandhian, E.F. Schumacher, made a careful distinction between two kinds of problems, solvable and unsolvable. Solvable problems—like measuring the distance from the earth to the moon, or figuring out how to make a two-wheeled, human-powered means of transportation—depend on understanding the physical laws of the universe. Those laws are stable. Solutions to that kind of problem endure. Once you have an answer,

it will remain valid. You can give it to others and it will work for them too.

Unsolvable problems occur in the realm not of physics but of morality. They often take the form of reconciling opposites, each of which is profound and necessary: "How shall we raise our children, with freedom or with discipline?" is an example Schumacher gives. The answer has got to be not freedom without discipline, not discipline without freedom, but both, in a shifting balance, dynamic, not engraveable in stone, not the same for every parent, every child, or even the same child over time.

Life is bigger than logic, says Schumacher. There is no Final Solution to child-raising, except that "You must LOVE the little horrors... Love, empathy, understanding, compassion—these are faculties of a higher order than those required for the implementation of any policy of discipline or of freedom."

Life is full of unsolvable problems. Pretending to have solved them by choosing just one or another of profound opposites can generate even more blunders than the ones Gandhi listed. Justice without mercy. Order without freedom. Talking without listening. Individuality without community. Stability without change. Private interest without public interest. Liberty without equality. Or, in every case, vice versa.

Listen to our public debates about health care, crime, taxation, regulation. You will hear the Gandhian blunders, the frantic search for a permanent simplicity, the passive violence that leads to active violence. There's no point in taking sides in these debates. There's only an opportunity to point out that balance, discovered through love, is what we should be seeking—and what we will always have to be seeking. ◊

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