

Melting Hitler's "Heart of Stone": Gandhi's Attitude to the Holocaust

By Shimon Lev

On November 1938 Gandhi published an article which dealt with the two questions that most preoccupied the Jewish world: Nazi Germany and the conflict between the Arabs and Jews in Palestine.¹ Gandhi used the *Harijan* newspaper as a stage for presenting his rather demanding suggestion to the European Jews to adopt his *satyagraha* (non-violence) strategy in order to resist the Nazi type of racist violence. This harsh demand raised variety of responses among the Jewish political and intellectual community and among Gandhi's Jewish friends and admirers who were disappointed by the article. The most known critics of the article were the famous Philosopher Martin Buber and the American Jewish thinker and leader Judah L. Magnes. Both argued that the conditions and circumstances in Nazi's Germany are so extreme; therefore there was no possibility of implementing *satyagraha* against Hitler's regime. Magnes also argued in his response that the Jewish concept of "kiddush Hashem" (martyrdom, literally, to sanctify the name of God)—which is a central concept in Judaism since the destruction of the first and second temples—is itself a kind of a non-violence doctrine. Magnes and Buber claimed that although the Jews have a vast unfortunate experience of martyrdom, there will be no public effect to such martyrdom in Nazi Germany, and it would not be effective.²

The Holocaust raises the question of whether non-violence strategy demonstrated in Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy has any meaning in the confrontation with extremely cruel and merciless doctrines. In this article, I examine Gandhi's attitude to Nazi Germany and Hitler, in respect to historical events, and especially the advice he gave European Jewry at that time and the responses of Jewish intellectuals. I will focus on Gandhi's attitude toward Nazism as a doctrine and present Gandhi's morals, which are the basis of his reflection on the kind of action Jews of Europe should have taken in an extremely vulnerable situation. In light of the responses from Buber and Magnes, I will also focus on the similarities and the differences between "kiddush Hashem" (martyrdom) and *satyagraha*. Finally, I will refer to what Gandhi had to say on that subject after the Holocaust, when the extent of it was revealed.

Introduction

Mohandas Karmchand Gandhi was a prominent figure in the history of modern India and of the whole world. He was a lawyer who transformed to an extreme ascetic, a social reformer, a mass leader and a unique politician, who integrated politics and high personal morality. He was a proclaimed pacifist, although sometimes a "conditional pacifist" as in the South African Boer War and World War I, who began his public activities in South Africa at the end of the 19th century. There he initiated a non-violent struggle for Indian rights according to the principles of *satyagraha*, the term he coined for the doctrine of civil disobedience, advocating adherence to the truth and conducting civil rebellion and protest via non-violent resistance while preserving the victim's human dignity and self-respect.

According to Gandhi, *satyagraha* differs from the non-violence of the weak and the meek, whom accept their fate and find themselves helpless and therefore, lack the ability to resist. Instead, *satyagraha* offers a model of active powerful non-violent resistance, which requires personal and mental strength and cleaving to the truth of true and just principles. The *satyagraha* struggle Gandhi led in South Africa during the years 1904-1914 was eventually partially successful: In 1914, the government was compelled to change some of the discriminating laws against the Indian population that lived in South Africa. Gandhi describes the historical events and the eight years of struggle in his lesser known autobiography *Satyagraha in South Africa*, which was published in 1925 in Gujarati and translated to English in 1928.³ One can look at this book as an autobiography, but another possibility is to read it as a manual for a passive resistance movement.

In 1915, Gandhi returned to India as a well-known Indian leader in order to act there, and within a few years he became the leader of an Indian mass movement in the struggle to obtain independence from the British government. One of the apexes of the struggle was the constitutive Salt March, which took place in 1930, in which Gandhi initiated a campaign against the government control and taxation of the salt production, an event that sparked civil rebellion throughout the country. This event was a crucial turning point in the Indian struggle for independence, which was obtained after World War II, in 1947. Gandhi was assassinated on January 30, 1948 by Nathuram Godse, a Hindu nationalist. Gandhi's personality is a fascinating riddle, which preoccupies numerous researchers throughout the world to this very day. The question of the efficacy of a non-violent struggle is still relevant to the questions that have been preoccupying the Jewish world following the Holocaust and the ongoing violent struggle in the Middle East.

Gandhi advised the Jews, as he advised other subjugated people, to employ his method of satyagraha, believing that their doing so would eventually soften even Hitler's "heart of stone."⁴ Gandhi's proclamations on the eve of World War II seemed to reveal his lack of understanding of the Nazi evil, as well as his lack of political realism, both of which were revealed during the war and in light of the huge scope of the Holocaust. Gandhi's words generated great resentment in the Jewish world: Responses to his proclamation appeared, among other places, in Judah L. Magnes's and Martin Buber's famous letters to Gandhi and also in letters written by Hayim Greenberg, the editor of the American Zionist Socialist newspaper *The Jewish Frontier* and by Avraham Sohet, the editor of the Indian Jewish newspaper from Bombay *The Jewish Advocate*.

In future years, and even after the war, when the dimensions of the Holocaust became known, Gandhi abstained almost completely from dealing with the Holocaust, and he never renounced his position, as we will see. In his few statements on the issue pertaining to the Jews, he related mainly to the conflict in Palestine and expressed his opposition mainly to the "Jewish terrorism" in the struggle in Palestine.

Satyagraha and Kiddush Hashem (Martyrdom): Similarities and Differences

One of the prominent attributes to Gandhi's evolvement was the discovery of the "East through the West." During his many years in England and South Africa, Gandhi encountered non-conformist alternative religious and ethical doctrines (e.g., The Theosophical Society, The Esoteric Christian Union, Tolstoy). It is well known that as part of these encounters he was influenced by Leo Tolstoy, Henry David Thoreau, and John Ruskin. Gandhi adapted and developed these principles into a unique doctrine, which he incorporated in the principle of *ahimsa*, that is, voluntary abstention from hurting any living creature. This principle is extant in the Hindu concept of *ahimsa* and is even more strictly emphasized in the Jain religion. It is true that Gandhi incorporated a number of central Western terms relevant to the issue into his doctrine (such as civil disobedience, civil rebellion, pacifism, and non-violent resistance), but these were inadequate for him, so he coined the term "satyagraha."⁵

Judaism has a rich experience of martyrdom (*kiddush Hashem*), containing a wide variety of manifestations with attributes that are shared with satyagraha. Throughout the many centuries of Jewish persecution, there were many events in which Jews decided to die rather than to submit themselves for slavery or idol worship. The ability and willingness to stand for one's own truth and belief is a basic shared feature between the two concepts.

The source in Judaism for this absolute commitment to one's faith is based on the principle of "be killed but do not trespass," which appears in *Sanhedrin* in the Babylonian Talmud.⁶

In its origin, this demand relates only to three commandments: Incest, idolatry, and bloodshed. In regard to the remaining the rules, one may disobey them in order to not be killed. The basis for that is comes from a phrase from Leviticus: "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man does, he shall live in them." That quote was interpreted in the Talmud—the central text of rabbinic Judaism, considered second to the

Torah—as "not die in them."⁷ Yet, in times of annihilation, and when disobeying a commandment has a meaningful public and educational effect, the obligation of martyrdom is expended to all religious rules and commandments.⁸

As mentioned above, Gandhi distinguished between the passive resistance of the weak on the one hand, and the active, but non-violent, resistance of the strong on the other. In order to demonstrate this difference, he described a mouse's attitude to a cat. The mouse does not resist the cat non-violently: It surrenders to it because it is helpless. In its profound sense, satyagraha has deeper and wider meanings concerning the victim's personal transformation, which also involves attempting to cause a spiritual reconciliation in the rival. In contrast, the Jewish tradition of martyrdom takes place only after every possible physical and violent resistance or when attempt to escape has failed and the situation is absolutely hopeless. It does not relate to the possibility of influencing the rival's moral positions.

Another difference between kiddush Hashem and satyagraha is that passive resistance or ordinary civil rebellion such as martyrdom enables the victim to utilize negative emotions such as anger and violence, whereas satyagraha should be gentle: It should not hurt others and it is not supposed to operate on the power of anger and desire for revenge. Satyagraha's strength and success depends on motivation and true intention. Non-violent struggle and non-violent resistance can also take place as a strategic step on the basis of an unjust principle, but then their moral value is annulled.⁹ Moreover, even a non-violent struggle taking place on the basis of a just and moral principle can contain external motives such as a desire for results deriving from personal egoism or a desire to win. The purpose of a satyagraha struggle is not to defeat the rival, but to bring about his transformation.

Elazar ben Yair and His Second Speech in Masada

In order to comprehend the approach toward satyagraha, it is worthwhile making a detour to ancient times. There were times when people in the Roman Empire apparently looked in astonishment and appreciation on what they viewed as the willingness of some Indian sages to commit suicide by burning themselves alive with joy in order to free themselves from this worldly life.

Strange as it might appear, the famous Jewish ex-rebel commander Josephus Flavius, who wrote the book *War of the Jews* between AD 76-79 in Rome, used the Indian attitude to life and death as an example to be followed. Flavius used the archetype of the well known story of Calanus, the Indian sage who followed Alexander the Great from North India.¹⁰ According to the Greek myth, Calanus burnt himself alive on the pyre before the king's eyes. Flavius takes the Indian's model of Calanus by putting in his mouth words that describe an example of self-immolation like the Indian sage.

Elazar ben Yair was the commander of the Jewish insurgents who took refuge in the desert fortress of Masada while fighting the Romans in the summer of AD 73. He was trying to convince his companions to commit a collective suicide in order not to fall in the hands of the Roman soldiers. For that purpose, according to Flavius, he addressed his friends with two speeches. In his first speech he emphasized the idea that was common by Jewish extremists who were fighting the Romans. The concept was that it was better to die with honor as a free man than to live a life of slavery. It is better to submit to the Divine punishment and to commit suicide than to fall into the hands of the Romans.

But he failed to convince his listeners in this speech.

In his second speech, Ben Yair tried again, but this time he brought the idea of the immortality of the soul and emphasized that during life the soul is imprisoned in the body. The soul is liberated when one dies. As an example he turned his view to India:¹¹

It might be expected that we, so carefully taught at home, would be an example to others of readiness to die. But if we do need the testimony of foreigners, let us look at those Indians who profess the practise of philosophy. They are men of true courage who, regarding this life as a kind of service we must render to nature, undergo it with reluctance and hasten to release their souls from their bodies; and though no misfortune presses or drives them away, desire for immortal life impels them to inform their friends that they are going to depart. No one tries to stop them, but everyone congratulates them and gives them messages for his dear ones: so confidently and so truly do they believe that the souls share a common life. Then after receiving these commissions they consign their bodies to the flames, that the soul may be as pure as possible when it is separated from the body, and hymns are sung to them as they die in fact they are sent off more happily by their dearest ones to death than other men are sent by their fellow-citizens on a long journey: the bereaved may weep for themselves, but the departed they deem happy, ranked now among the immortals. Well then! Are we not ashamed to show a proper spirit than Indians and by our want of courage to bring the Law of our fathers, the envy of all the world, into utter contempt.¹²

The end of the story is well known. The rebels slaughtered the women and children and then each other. In modern time, the image of India unknowingly served as a helpful tool in building a new Masada myth for the Zionist movement, symbolizing bravery and a firm standing for one's freedom. This concept, which was fundamental for the creation of the state of Israel, was emphasized strongly after the Holocaust. It was the basis of the famous slogan: "Masada shall not fall again," used to declare that the Jewish citizens of Israel shall stand solid and fight until their final breath against future disaster in contrast to what happened in Europe. That story, its narratives, and the different approaches shown by it regarding life and death, is reflected in the matters dealt with in this article.

The Zionist Effort in India before World War II

Only after the 1929 Palestine riots did the Jewish Agency in Palestine begin to pay attention to the political events in India and not only to propagating Zionism among the Jews of India. After visiting Bombay in 1930, the Jewish Agency's emissary Gershon Agronowski (Agron), the first important emissary who began to deal with the political aspect of events in India, demanded that "Zionism direct its face Eastward."¹³ This call was after many years of neglecting and ignoring India by the Zionist movement. But the reactions in the Indian press to the 1936-1939 Arab revolt in Palestine, as well as the growing distress of European Jewry after Hitler's ascent to power, were major factors in the intensification of Zionist political efforts in India. These efforts were directed toward the leaders of the Hindu Congress Party, led by Gandhi and Nehru, who regarded the Zionist movement as a colonial extension of British imperialism. With a long-term view, it was understood by the Zionist movement that the problem no longer was with the Muslim leaders and masses who supported the Khaalifat movement, but, rather with India's future role in Asia. The matter was analyzed in a confidential report by the Arab Bureau of the Zionist Movement, concluding that "the great political future awaiting India, requires our comprehensive action."¹⁴

For this purpose, the leadership of the Jewish Agency decided in 1936 to send to India Dr. Emanuel Olsvanger (1888-1961), an intellectual Zionist activist with wide horizons and a scholar of Sanskrit. Alongside him was the Jewish architect Hermann Kallenbach (1871-1945) who was Gandhi's close friend from the time they were in South Africa together between the years 1903-1914; Kallenbach was supposed to join the mission.¹⁵ Moshe Sharett, who was the head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency, sent Kallenbach an urgent letter in July 1936, in which he asked him to assist in this Zionist

mission hoping to establish useful contacts with the most important Indian leaders: Gandhi and Nehru. Sharett wrote:

It is clear that our political future as a nation returning to its home in Asia must ultimately depend in a large measure on the amount of good-will and solidarity which we will succeed in evoking on the part of the great Asiatic civilizations... It is that you yourself should go to India to take part in or rather to lead, this mission... But our movement is passing through dangerous times—its whole future is now at stake... There are but few people whom circumstances have placed in a position enabling them to render service of an extraordinary character. I am advised and believe that you are at the present moment such a person... you are in a unique position to help Zionism in a field where the resources of the Jewish people are so meager as to be practically non-existent.¹⁶

Sharett understood that Kallenbach's relationship with Gandhi was highly personal, of a spiritual nature, and did not function on the plane of the Jewish people's nationalist aspirations. He wrote carefully and sensitively

What you have no doubt regarded as a part of your purely private past which has nothing to do with Zionist or Jewish affairs can now be of invaluable service to our national movement—it can, so to speak, be "nationalized", and with eminently useful effect.¹⁷

Kallenbach was not surprised by Sharett's appeal; a similar suggestion was made by Charim Weizmann, President of the World Zionist Organization, a few years earlier, in England. Kallenbach responded to Sharett quickly in the affirmative, but asked that he shall keep his expectations minimal: "Our people are going through most anxious times and none of us should refuse the call for service, when it arrives."¹⁸

Kallenbach was supposed to join Olsvanger and assist him in his meeting with Gandhi.¹⁹ However, he was delayed in England for business reasons, and on August 12, 1936, Olsvanger went to India alone. Olsvanger arrived in Bombay on and met Nehru twice, but these meetings did not go well. In his opinion Nehru was misinformed, ignorant, and strongly prejudiced against Zionism. Nehru said that he objected to all types of imperialism, be it British or German, and claimed that Zionism was part of British imperialism.²⁰ Nehru would be a key objector to formal relations with Israel in future years. One could argue that Gandhi provided the ideological basis for the negative attitude toward the Zionist movement and Israel; Nehru, the political one.²¹

Olsvanger's meeting with Gandhi went even more poorly than did his meeting with Nehru. Gandhi was lying in bed, sick and weak, and received Olsvanger for only twenty minutes, with about fifteen of his disciples standing around him. Gandhi said he was very happy to hear about Kallenbach's pending visit, and Olsvanger, who was searching for a way to Gandhi's heart, noted that Kallenbach was a Zionist, to which Gandhi replied, "I know, but, you see, he has so many poor relatives."²² Gandhi must have meant that the ascent of the Nazis and the subsequent severe financial blow to Kallenbach's family were among the causes of Kallenbach's identification with Zionism. Olsvanger bitterly noted in his diary: "This is how he understands Zionism." He decided to wait for Kallenbach's arrival before making any further attempts.

Olsvanger was strongly biased against Gandhi, and in his diary and reports, referred to him as "lemmel" ("sheep" in Yiddish, with a strong negative connotation). Despite the original plan, Olsvanger was forced to leave India before Kallenbach's arrival. In light of Olsvanger's deprecatory attitude toward Gandhi, it is hard to imagine Kallenbach and Olsvanger getting along in a shared mission; Kallenbach's admiration and deep friendship with Gandhi would have prevented an easy partnership with Olsvanger.

Kallenbach arrived to India after Olsvanger had already left. Kallenbach's renewed meeting with Gandhi, after twenty-three years of severance was, for him, a fulfillment of a life-long wish, and he ascribed personal spiritual significance to it. He spent about six weeks in the ashram, and the two held many profound and spiritual conversations, as they used to do in the past, especially in Tolstoy farm's days in South Africa.²³

When Kallenbach was at the ashram, Captain Strunk, an official Nazi journalist and a member of Hitler's staff, visited the ashram to assess the energy behind the Indian people's struggle for independence. Gandhi introduced Strunk to Kallenbach, who was sitting on the floor wearing only a khadi dhoti, as a German Jew, saying, "If you please. He was a hot pro-German during the War." Gandhi then added, unflinchingly: "I should like to understand from you why the Jews are being persecuted in Germany?"²⁴

Over the course of their long conversations, Kallenbach tried to explain to Gandhi the essence and the importance of the Zionist cause. Using informational brochures provided by Sharett and his personal experiences in his recent visit to Palestine, Kallenbach hoped to change Gandhi's anti-Zionist views as expressed during the Khaalifat movement in India.

It appears from Gandhi's letters to Kallenbach that, as a result of Kallenbach's visit, he supported Kallenbach's personal desire to live in Palestine as a pioneer and did not reject the Zionist ideal outright. Gandhi later became more involved in the Zionist issue, formulated a statement about the Arab-Jewish conflict, and even offered himself as a mediator between the two sides.²⁵

Gandhi invested thought and effort on the Zionist issue, but the convergence of several factors led him to abandon his mediation attempt. The fact that Kallenbach could not—or did not want to—leave his business in South Africa, as well as the lack of response from the Jewish camp, were disheartening. After the Zionist leadership in Palestine received the Peel Committee's report on the one hand, and the Arabs objected to its conclusions on the other hand, the political-military situation in Palestine was fundamentally transformed. The Peel Commission (1936-1937) was a Commission of Inquiry that set out to propose changes to the British mandate in Palestine. Gandhi's ideas became impracticable in the smoldering Middle East. Furthermore, the drama between the Congress party and the Muslim League generated a political constellation in which Gandhi could no longer represent the Indian Muslims. As a result of various factors—such as the rapid changes in India, the rising power of the Muslim League under Mohammad Ali Jinnah's (1876-1948) dominant leadership, the danger of a partition of the country, Kallenbach's absence, the Zionist lack of response to his proposal, and the escalating violence in Palestine de facto—Gandhi's attempts at mediation were halted, and the result was the cessation of his involvement with the matter. This led the way for Gandhi's controversial proclamation.

Gandhi's Proclamation about "The Jews" and the Reactions to It

Gandhi formulated his proclamation regarding the question of Palestine and the attitude to Hitler on November 11, 1938 unintentionally the day after Krystalnacht. It is not clear why Gandhi hurried to publish it without waiting for the return of his Jewish friend Hermann Kallenbach, whom he was expecting.²⁶ According to Gandhi himself, he did so because he had received letters, probably from his Jewish friends, demanding his reference to the issue, but it might have been that in light of the Ivan Conference (July 1938), those Jews who tried to escape from Europe had one possible welcoming destination, namely by the *Yishuv*,²⁷ the Jews who lived in Palestine, which complicated the conflict even further. Gandhi understood the critical connection between the two issues and decided to publish his opinion on them.

Gandhi opened his article with a mention of his special ties with his Jewish friends from his days in South Africa, and compared the world's attitude toward the Jews with the Indians' attitude toward the Pariah castes. Gandhi reiterated his traditional position on the political use of non-violence. While recognizing the presence of Arab violence, he advised Jews in Palestine to use methods of satyagraha. It is worth quoting at length.

Several letters have been received by me asking me to declare my views about the Arab-Jews question in Palestine and the persecution of the Jews in Germany. It is not without hesitation that I venture to offer my views on this very difficult question. My sympathies are all with the Jews. I have known them intimately in South Africa. Some of them became life-long companions. Through these friends I came to learn much of their age-long persecution. They have been the untouchables of Christianity. The parallel between their treatment by Christians and the treatment of the untouchable by Hindus is very close. Religion sanction has been invoked in both cases for justification of the inhuman treatment meted out to them...But my sympathy does not blind me to the requirements of justice. The cry for national home for the Jews does not make much appeal to me... Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same way that England belongs to the English or France to the French. It is wrong and in-human to impose the Jews on the Arabs. What is going on in Palestine today cannot be justified by any moral code of conduct ²⁸

The comparison of Jews to "untouchable castes," the Pariah or *Harijans*—"sons of God," a name Gandhi gave to the untouchable castes in India, is interesting. Gandhi may have wanted also to clarify his position to his readers in *Harijan*. Hayim Greenberg, the editor of the American *Jewish Frontier*, also wrote to Gandhi, making the comparison between different groups of "millions of untouchables" such as the blacks and, of course, the Jews. ²⁹

Relating to the situation in Germany, Gandhi advises the Jews to employ satyagraha as a way of coping with Hitler and his deeds, which he calls "the actions of a crazy but brave young man":

But the German persecution of the Jews seems to have no parallel in history. The tyrants of old never went so mad as Hitler seems to have gone. And he is doing it with religious zeal... If there ever could be justifiable war in the name of and for humanity, a war against Germany to prevent the wanton persecution of a whole race, would be completely justified. But I do not believe in any war. A discussion of the pros and cons of such war is therefore outside my horizon or province... ³⁰

It is important to mention that after arriving from South Africa to England during World War I, Gandhi made an effort to join the empire's war effort according to the model of the Indian Ambulance Corps, which he first established during the Boer War in South Africa and again later during the "Zulu Rebellion" in 1906. In contrast to these previous wars, in which Gandhi played an active role, against Hitler, of all people, he advises absolute, that is, absolute pacifism. Surprisingly, he foresees the concrete possibility of the massacre of European Jews, but emphasizes the internal value of his principle for the victims themselves:

Can the Jews resist this organized and shameless persecution? Is there a way to preserve their self-respect, and not to feel helpless, neglected and forlorn? I submit there is... I would refuse to be expelled or to submit to discriminating treatment. And for doing this, I should not wait for the fellow Jews to join me in civil resistance but would have confidence that in the end the rest are bound to follow my example. If one Jew or all the Jews were to accept the prescription here offered he or they cannot be worse off than now... The calculated violence of Hitler may even result in a general massacre of the Jews by way of his first answer to the declaration of such hostilities. But if the Jewish mind could be prepared for voluntary suffering, even the massacre I have imagined could be turned into a day of thanksgiving and joy that Jehovah had wrought deliverance of the race even at the hands of the tyrant. ³¹

Gandhi uses his experiences during the satyagraha struggle in South Africa and claims that the Jews in Germany are placed in a better position to use satyagraha. He ignores the fundamental differences between the Jews' situation in Germany and that of the Indians in South Africa, and writes:

And they have in the Indian satyagraha campaign in South Africa an exact parallel. There the Indians occupied precisely the same place that the Jews occupy in Germany. The persecution had also a religious tinge... But the Jews of Germany can offer satyagraha under definitely better auspices than the Indians of South Africa. The Jews are a compact, homogeneous community in Germany. They are far more gifted than the Indians of South Africa. And they have organized world opinion behind them. I am convinced that if someone with courage and vision can arise among them to lead them in non-violent action, the winter of their despair can in the twinkling of an eye be turned into the summer of hope. And what has today become a degrading man-hunt can be turned into a calm and determined stand offered by unarmed men and women possessing the strength of suffering given to them by Jehovah. It will be then a truly religious resistance offered against the godless fury of dehumanized man.³²

I believe that the roots of this absurd and unfortunate comparison lies in Gandhi's experience in South Africa, where Jews succeeded in changing discriminatory laws by utilizing political tools.

But it seems that Gandhi also felt uncomfortable with his proclamation, and, as early as the following day, he quickly wrote his friend Kallenbach:

You will have seen my article on the Jews. I have made a plunge into unknown waters. How I wish you were here at this time wholly free from the cares of the South Africa obligations. But that was not to be.³³

After the publication of this letter, Kallenbach decided to go to India immediately. Before he set forth, he sent Nehru a letter asking him to act in order to prevent the propagation of Nazi propaganda in India and to promote obtaining entrance visas to India for German Jews. At the end of the letter, he turns to Nehru and writes in bold letters "Please help us."³⁴

Did Gandhi Know about the Occurrences in Europe before the Holocaust?

One of the questions arising from this context is whether Gandhi could have understood what was happening in Europe and which sources he had for fully understanding the situation.

Margaret Chatterjee claims that there is no doubt that Gandhi was aware of the situation of European Jews since he had much information, which he got from a variety of sources.³⁵ First, Hermann Kallenbach visited Gandhi's ashram few months earlier, and he had a personal connection to the issue. Kallenbach had relatives in Europe, he was anxious about their fate, and based on his personal knowledge, he must have understood the gravity of the situation. Second, there were others: the pacifist and Nobel Prize winner and writer Romain Rolland; Henry Polak, another Jewish friend and important supporter of Gandhi's from his South African period; and Margaret Spiegel, also a Jew, who visited India in 1932 and joined Gandhi's ashram escaping Berlin. There were many other guests, people of great influence, politicians, religious figures, and journalists from all over the world who thronged

to Gandhi's ashram in order to meet him and, among others things, discuss current affairs with him.

In addition, it is clear that the connection between the question of the Jewish-Arab ongoing conflict in Palestine and the situation of European Jewry caused the attitude toward Hitler and Nazism to become a central topic in Gandhi's conversations with Kallenbach. The threat of a war in Europe was the most urgent political issue at hand. On the other hand, Gandhi's inopportune comparison between the circumstances of the Indians in South Africa to that of the Jews under Hitler attests to the fact that Gandhi could not have understood the scope of the Nazi evil. It should be noted that, in contrast to many leaders in the world, Gandhi and Nehru wholeheartedly supported giving Jewish experts of German origin entrance visas to India, provided they had professions that were in demand there. Nehru wrote to the Indian nationalist and Gandhi's rival, Subash Chandra Bose (1897-1945) who objected to such an idea:

The Committee sees no objection to the employment in India of such Jewish refugees as are experts and specialists and who can fit in the new order in India and accept Indian standards.³⁶

Eventually this suggestion failed because of British policy, and only about 2,000 Germans and Austrian Jews found refuge in India.

Bose was at the other end of the political spectrum. He escaped from India under mysterious circumstances, arrived in Berlin under Hitler's patronage, and called for an Indian struggle against the British with German-Japanese aid. In 1943 he arrived in Singapore, which had surrendered to Japan, in a German submarine and there he took command of the "India National Army." Despite the fact that his attempt to free India ended in a catastrophic bloodbath in 1944 and 1945, many Indians identify with him and believe him to be a national hero.

Jewish Intellectuals' Responses to Gandhi's Article

Gandhi's article generated responses in the Jewish world, especially from those who were his admirers. The first to respond was Avraham Sohet, a Zionist activist, Bombay resident, and the editor of the *Jewish Advocate* newspaper. He mentioned poignantly that Gandhi finally "broke his strange silence" about the events in Europe. According to Sohet, Gandhi either received false information or was ignorant of what has transpired in Europe and in Palestine and, hence, his view is at best naïve and, at worst, "tragically inconsistent."³⁷ Gandhi's comparison between the Jews and the Indian untouchables ignores the fundamental point, which is that unlike the Indians, the Jews do not have a homeland. The same was true regarding the recommendation to learn from the Indian struggle in South Africa, since the discriminatory laws in South Africa could not be compared to the Nazi government's terror. There was almost no physical terror in South Africa, and cases of violence were extremely rare without any possibility of comparison between them. Sohet also accused Gandhi of judging the Jews according to the highest spiritual criteria while judging the "proud Arabs" by "accepted norms."

Two admirers of Gandhi were Judah L. Magnes, a prominent Jewish Reform leader and the rector of Hebrew University and Martin Buber, the famous Jewish philosopher. No one could have been more disappointed than they were since Gandhi's doctrine was very compatible with their adherence to the ways of peaceful coexistence as well as with their attempts to reach a political compromise with the Arabs in Palestine. Moreover, Magnes and Buber supported a binational state, just as Gandhi wanted a multinational India. They believed that Gandhi's opposition to Zionism was one-sided and pointed to his lack of understanding of the events in Nazi Germany, and, therefore, felt compelled to respond. They translated Gandhi's article into Hebrew and wrote their response—very carefully: