



Bill Gates vs. Mother Teresa by Nipun Mehta

Two days ago, I was in China, speaking to a bunch of influential business leaders. One of them posed a challenge: "You speak about Vinoba Bhave, the spiritual heir of Gandhi, and how he walked 80K kilometers across India and inspired people to donate 5 million acres to their neighbors. Yes, it might've been an unprecedented feat in the history of mankind, but really, how many people remember Vinoba today? Instead, think of how many people remember Steve Jobs and the legacy he left behind." From a short-term impact point of view, it's a thoughtful dilemma.

In fact, Forbes magazine did a piece which reflected similarly, asking the question: "Who has changed the world more: Bill Gates or Mother Teresa?" And they concluded Bill Gates. My response to this industrialist, though, was a true story that happened a few weeks ago at a school near Pune. I asked the same question to them: who do you want to be when you grow up -- Bill Gates or Mother Teresa? Usually about 60-80% of them will vote for Bill Gates, but here, a majority of them said Mother Teresa. So I probed further. Why? As people started raising their hands, a shy young girl -- maybe 11 years old -- raised her hand, hesitated, and then put it down. Seeing that, I encouraged her to speak, and her response completely floored me.

"Sir, Bill Gates used the power of money to change the world, and Mother Teresa used the power of love to change the world. And I think love is more powerful than money."

End of story. It was simple, clear, elegant and spot-on that it required no further responses from the class.**

The end of that story is the beginning of an audacious possibility. In keeping with the theme of our gathering, my Impossible Dream, and one that I'm sure we all share, is a world where we elevate this spirit of love from the mere emotional ranks of Bollywood to the infinitely stronger spiritual ranks of our hearts. As humanity, we have understood intellectual quotient (IQ), and even emotional quotient (EQ) but what the world needs now is CQ - Compassion Quotient. It is an intelligence of the heart. More than a decade ago, neuroscientists discovered that, physically speaking, there are actually neurons not just in our brain but also in our heart. As Kabir and many sages tell us so clearly: Open your heart and it can contain the whole universe!

Our greatest hope for awakening our collective compassion quotient comes from - children! Children like that 11 year old who just intuitively knew that if you are moved by love, you can move mountains. In conversations with Dr. Maria Montessori, Gandhi said it very clearly, "In the early part of my life, I discovered that if I was to realize Truth, I must obey, even at the cost of my life, the law of love. And having been blessed with children, I discovered that the law of love could be best learned through little children."

The thing about this law of love is that it has a half-life that is far, far greater than the law of stuff. Its impact lasts for many generations. Inspiration from our gadgets devolves into mere information, sometimes within a matter of minutes. But when that same inspiration is delivered to us through someone who walks that talk, it activates the information in a context of vibrational aliveness. It resonates deep within our consciousness. And this is why, in the long term, the law of stuff stands no chance against the law of love. Work that is moved by love, no matter how small and humble, has an unending after-life.

A few years ago, my wife and I went on a walking pilgrimage. We started at the Gandhi Ashram in Gujarat and walked south; we ate whatever food was offered and slept wherever place was offered. It was an experiment that radically changed our lives. Along the way one thing we repeatedly encountered were the ripples of the law of love, particularly from Gandhi and Vinoba who had often walked those same paths. During a visit to a small village in the area, Gandhi realized it was 6PM - which was his prayer time. He was taking a walk on the farm, with some elders, but he immediately sat down right there for prayer. A bit thrown off, the elders gathered a couple folks who happened to be nearby.

Govardhan Patel was one of them. He was in fifth grade at the time, his mom had passed away when he was 2, and his father had polio; he wasn't all that interested in Gandhi. As serendipity would have it, though, he sat there in silence during Gandhi's prayer. And something shifted. He sat in on Gandhi's evening talk, and that very same day he decided to dedicate his whole life to service. When we met him he was a ripe 82-years-young and was still going strong, having transformed not only his village but dozens of others.

There are many stories like his, for instance that of Nagardas Shrimali. At a train station, while Gandhi is just passing by, amidst the throngs of people, he yells out: "Bapu, what should I do with my life?" Bapu says, "You go and teach your values to other children like you." Shrimali was 16 at the time, from that day forth to his last breath, Nagardas - who was "untouchable" -- dedicated his life to educating children.

Authentic inspiration has a long after-life, indeed. And my friends, we need to rekindle this law of love within us, and within our greatest hope -- our children, the next generation.

I want to end with a true story.

Many years ago, my dear friend Jacob Needleman was teaching a class at San Francisco State University, and he asked a question to his class of thirty students. "How can we be good?" One student raised his hand and said, "I learned goodness from my 5-year-old son." He goes on to explain: "My son and I were enjoying Christmas in Mexico, as he was excitedly playing with the toys he had received just the night before. A kid from the neighboring slum comes by, and I told my son to give him one of his toys. After some pleas and tears, he finally agrees and picks up a toy. His least favorite toy!" In a vintage Mufasa-Simba moment from Lion King, the father looks his 5-year-old in the eyes and says, "No, son, not that toy. Give him your favorite toy."

At this point, the son instinctively protests, but then looking at his father's stern-yet-compassionate look, he begrudgingly goes to the door to give away his favorite toy. Naturally, the father figured he will have to console his son when he returns; lo and behold, much to his surprise, the son returns back with a hop in his step. With an innocence befitting to a 5-year-old, he looks his Father in the eyes and says, "Dad, that was amazing. Can I do it again?"

This is the law of love, and may we all keep doing it again and again and again.

** Since the writing of that article, Bill Gates has thrown his energies into exploring other dimensions of impact as well.

This article is based on a talk by Nipun Mehta at InspirEd in Mumbai, Dec 2012. Nipun is the founder of ServiceSpace.org, a nonprofit that works at the intersection of gift-economy, technology and volunteerism. His popular TED talk *Designing for Generosity* provides an overview of their work and guiding principles.