

Title: "Power Comes From the Barrel of a Gun" - took the opposing view

"Would you respect me, If I didn't have this gun?  
'Cause without it, I don't get it,  
And that's why I carry one."  
-Phil Collins

Power. A word from which many meanings derive. To each individual, it means something distinct and it is how one uses their power that makes up who they are. Power does not come from the barrel of a gun. A gun can do nothing without someone there to pull the trigger. The power to take a life rests within the person, the gun simply serving as their tool. When groups protesting for a cause they believe in use violent tactics, do they ever accomplish anything? When we kill , what do we achieve? To say that power lies in the barrel of a gun is to say that the most effective way to get what we want, or what we feel we deserve is to murder. It is only those with no faith in their dreams, or belief in themselves who could make such a statement.

Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "If a man hasn't found something he will die for, he isn't fit to live." A leader in the Black community and the recipient of the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize, King's accomplishment of attaining civil rights for Blacks was a great one, but the road to achievement was long and full of sacrifices. It was a time when Blacks had no rights and most of them accepted this as the way it was and no one could do anything about it. Most of them, but not King. When the police arrested a black woman for sitting in the front of the bus and refusing to give up her seat to a white woman, King led a committee that organized a boycott of buses. The results were that on April 23, 1956, the Supreme Court ruled that "segregation in public transportation is unconstitutional" and that South Carolina as well as 12 other states must remove the "whites only" signs that hung in the front of the buses. This was just the beginning, he vowed to continue his fight using "passive resistance and the weapon of love". He helped establish the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and became its first president. Then in 1957, King met with Vice-president Nixon in Washington to "discuss racial problems .

He went on to lead protests, demonstrations and marches, making the non-violent resistance stronger than it had ever been before. He succeeded in making people aware that every human being is born equal and that no one should be denied his civil rights. Martin Luther King had a dream and he knew that there was only one way to make it come true, to wake up and to take action. He was a true example of someone putting their power to good use. He started his life with a disadvantage, he was hated because of the color of his skin, but he did not let that stop him. He was arrested, thrown in jail, stabbed, stoned, he even had his home bombed. Through it all, he refused to give up, he had found a cause worth dying for and he did. He was murdered on the night of April 4, 1968. People tried to use their power to stop him and his fight. In the end, they may have succeeded in killing its leader, but the battle against racism lived on. Looking back,

people say that Martin Luther King Jr. was a very powerful man. I have never heard anyone say his attackers or his murderers had.

"I am indeed, a practical dreamer. My dreams are not airy nothings. I want to convert my dreams into realities, as far as possible." -Mohandas K. Gandhi

Mahatma is the name the people of India gave to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. The meaning is Great Soul, and they considered him as the father of their nation. He named his autobiography, "The story of My Experiments With Truth." That was, after all, what his life was about: the truth and his search to find it. He was against violence in any form, he felt there existed better methods of accomplishing things, and he proved to be successful. he made up his won technique for social action that he called satyagraha, "non-violent resistance to injustice and wrong." Gandhi's actions were guided by his philosophy that the way a person behaves is more important than what he achieves. It was these tactics that he used in his fight for India's independence.

Gandhi was a lawyer, on a business trip to South Africa and he was greeted with prejudice and discrimination against the fellow Indians living there. What was supposed to be a trip, ended up being a 21 year stay as he began to work towards a cause he believed in, Indian rights. He launched a newspaper entitles, "Indian Opinion" that was published weekly. He returned to India and soon after became the leader of the Indian Nationalistic Movement. He led a satyagraha campaign, but the moment riots broke out, he canceled it. It was defeating its own purpose if violence was involved. Gandhi brought about many economic and social reforms; he led campaigns, strikes, demonstrations, and achieved many great things. The people of India will always be grateful to him, for he played the major role in acquiring freedom for their country, which Great Britain finally granted in the year 1947. Although he may not have been large in build, his strengths when it came to the issue he believed in as well as his moral values, were immeasurable. He found something to fight for and he did, never suing violence, even if it could have worked to his advantage. He was a man much like Martin Luther King Jr., both achieving civil rights for their people and attempting to abolish discrimination. Unfortunately, Gandhi too, suffered from his opposition. he too was arrested on several occasion and was the victim of murder. The day he dies was one marked with grief, but not a weakness on his part. No one thought on that day, Gandhi lost his power and his murderers achieved it. Reflecting on his life, one could describe it as a series of historical events

Gandhi defined a satyagraha as one with the persistent hope, "who followed a vision of truth and tried to deploy the strength of truth and love in daily life. I believe that that is an accurate description of is own character. "In the name of our party's movement, The Syrian Muslim Party of Justice, we declare that the blood of all Jews living in Syria will be spilled

starting on Saturday the 13 of March 1994, according to Muslim month (1/Shawal 1414). May the almighty witness our deed."

A special branch of the secret police in Syria --the Makhabrat-- was assigned to keep the Jewish community's activities under constant surveillance. Emigration of the Jews was forbidden. When Jews who still tried to escape illegally were caught, they were thrown in jail without a trial or charge. Jews were not permitted to be a candidate in an election nor were they granted voting rights. Travel was allowed only for medical treatment or to visit relatives. In order to assure their return, they were required to leave as family members behind as well as large sums of money. There were restrictions on the numbers of Jews allowed to attend University, and the only Jewish schools in Damascus were ordered to accept a vast number of Palestinian students. The Jews were forced to wear identity cards, marking their religion on it. All mail from outside Syria was censored and telephone calls were monitored.

The Jews outside Syria found out what was going on and decided to take the matter into their own hands. Everyone went about it in their own individual way. Michael Schelew, national chairman of the Syrian Jewry Committee of B'nai Brith Canada's Institute for International Affairs and Paul Marcus, National Director of B'nai Brith Canada's Institute for International Affairs, wrote an article for the Leader-Post, a newspaper printed in Regina. The article was entitled, "The abuse of Jews a fact of life in Syria" and it exposed the truth about what was really going on there. NAHON, an organization that focuses mainly on social action and is made up exclusively of students, distributed this article as well as many others at one of their conventions, to promote awareness among students in Montreal. When Syrian President Hafez Assad made a commitment to allow the Jews to leave freely in 1992, he did not honor his promise. 73 senators wrote a letter expressing their concern over this issue to President Clinton, urging him to "press Syria to honor its commitment to allow the Jews the right to travel freely." B'nai Brith Youth Organization began an international petition, requesting that "the Syrian government fulfill its promise and allow free emigration of Jews from the country" immediately. Everyone had their own way of helping, each individual and group used their power in their way, and together, we succeeded. The Jews in Syria are now free to leave the country as they wish.

Regardless of whether or not an individual is the president of the United States or simply a student, they have the power. It is up to us to make the difference because the power remains with the people, not the gun. It is easy to walk blindly past the truth, to close our eyes and deny what is going on. It is easy to blame others and to say that unless we kill, there is nothing we can do. The ones who make use of their power are the heroes, the ones who are remembered. Do not follow the path set out for you, do as the people mentioned in this paper have. Pave your own, and leave a trail. Power does not lie within the barrel of a gun, it lies within you.