

The path we choose to take in life...

Extended Essay

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Abstract:

The following Essay attempts to review, analyse and compare specific texts of three world leaders during the last century: Shoghi Effendi, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela. The objective of the essay is to examine the following question: “To what extent have these three diverse leaders used the metaphors of light and darkness to portray the battle between the forces of good and evil?”

The research included study of the life and writings of these three leaders and selecting those writings and speeches that were directly relevant to the research question. Furthermore, after having analysed the various concerns and issues addressed by these leaders in their time relating to the opposing forces of good and evil, the essay compares their approaches to both identifying the main problems facing their own and the upcoming generation as well their passionate claims to solutions to these problems.

The finding of this study clearly demonstrates that all three diverse leaders confronted similar causes of conflict and did indeed utilise to a significant extent the metaphors of light and darkness to illustrate the problems they confronted in battling the opposing forces of good and evil.

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Introduction:

Choose anything in life, and the chances of one being able to find a metaphor for it is very high. Metaphors are about taking an object's function or appearance and relating it to something else. Metaphors can be used for various reasons and are often used in poetry to appeal to another person or to express something which cannot easily be described. They can also be used to give the audience or the reader a better understanding of a topic. If the focus of a text is abstract or complicated it easier to relate it to something more familiar, concrete and tangible – involving something one has experienced with ones senses.

Shoghi Effendi, a Persian man who became the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Martin Luther King, an African American leader in the American civil rights movement and Nelson Mandela, the first black president of South Africa, all used metaphors to describe the forces of good and evil in the world during their time. They spent their life working for the betterment of the world, stood up for what they believed in, and didn't give up nor showed any fear in expressing their views in words or in actions. All three leaders had one common purpose, to make the world a better place. This is obviously no simple task, but in the process, all of them attempted to describe two main opposite forces in the world as the underlying problem confronting humanity.

Humanity have known and referred to these forces as 'good' and 'evil'. These forces have always existed as concepts and expression of actions for humanity, and

are exemplified in all religious texts and historical accounts throughout times. Still in our times the issue of right and wrong, good and evil are relevant. It is the balance between these forces the three diverse leaders, brought up in different parts of the world with different value systems, have tried to address, and the consequences that occur when there is imbalance between them. In order to explain to the world the effects of good and evil they used to a large extent metaphors as a tool; especially employing the metaphors of light and darkness.

The research question for this essay is to what extent have three diverse leaders during the last century used the metaphors of light and darkness to portray the battle between the forces of good and evil? The essay will attempt to review, analyse, and compare texts from Shoghi Effendi, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela, revealing their similarity and viewpoints – even if they had very different backgrounds and life stories.

Background information of Shoghi Effendi:

Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, was born 1897 in Persia and died in 1957 in London, England. He lived most of his life in Palestine, and spent his time serving the Bahá'í Faith, a world religion whose purpose is to unite humankind under one universal Cause and one common Faith. Shoghi Effendi's generation grew up during "World War I" and "World War II" and most of his writings were written during the Second World War which was a time of great strife and depression. He grew up in Palestine, a country that was in addition greatly affected by the war. Hence it would make sense for him to talk about the state of the world and about the good and evil within the people who saw so much "menace of social chaos, class hatreds,

and worldwide ruin” (1) and were losing hope. He was well respected by many people and numerous books have been written by and about him. In a biography entitled *Shoghi Effendi* the author describes his relationship to Shoghi Effendi in this way; “No words will ever be able to describe the depth of my devotion and of my abiding love for him, nor the transformation I underwent under the influence of his warm and tender affection; an influence that changed my character, my outlook on life, my habits, and opened my eyes to the unending vista of new aspirations and horizons.” (2) This quote indicates the type of person Shoghi Effendi was and how he inspired people who knew him and heard him speak.

Analysis of Shoghi Effendi’s Writings:

Throughout his life, Shoghi Effendi wrote numerous books and letters, and translated several difficult and complex writings into English from Persian. In his writings, he dealt with the state of society at present as well as its future and described the dynamics between opposing forces in society and in man, such as those of “good and evil”. To give us a better understanding of his ideas, principles and writings, he used numerous metaphors, especially those of light and darkness. He wrote; “There is a tremendous darkness in the world today, the darkness caused by mankind’s going against the Laws of God and giving way to the animal side of human nature. People must recognize this fact, and consciously struggle against pessimism and depression.” (3) But how does one effectively “consciously struggle against pessimism and depression”? Shoghi Effendi had interesting explanations of these opposing forces and the use of metaphors illustrates his ideas perfectly. In his view, evil is in a sense non-existent in the same way as darkness is non-existent. That is, darkness is only the absence of light. Light is an active force, a force and power that can eradicate

darkness. For example, a candle or a light bulb can generate light, but there does not exist a candle or light bulb or a switch that can generate darkness. In this way of looking at it, light can extinguish darkness but darkness cannot extinguish light. These are interesting ideas – but if darkness is indeed non-existent – how come we still know it and experience it? Shoghi Effendi explains: "We know absence of light is darkness, but no one would assert darkness was not a fact. It exists even though it is only the absence of something else. So evil exists too, and we cannot close our eyes to it, even though it is a negative existence. We must seek to supplant it by good." (4) Here Shoghi Effendi states that we can overcome darkness by "supplanting" it with light. In the world today, some people have evil intentions and some have good intentions, but Shoghi Effendi's assertion is that in order to overcome evil we cannot simply eradicate it by trying to remove it, focus on it or put it in prison - but rather defeat it with goodly deeds. If we are in darkness and we do not generate light, in different directions or different colours, then we cannot control or influence the darkness. We need concrete actions of good that will counterbalance the evil. Moreover, Shoghi Effendi's implies that there is no such person in the world as purely evil; they are just evil through their dark actions. By the same token, everyone, if he or she desires, has the capacity to choose to turn on the light (goodly deeds), and once the light is turned on, darkness, or evil, vanishes. One could also imagine that if a person is filled with darkness, people around him need to shine their light unto him so that his darkness disappears.

Finally, Shoghi Effendi warns us about the consequences of not opposing the forces of evil;

We have but to turn our eyes to the world without to realize the fierceness and the magnitude of the forces of darkness that are struggling with the dawning light of the ¹Abha Revelation. Nations, though exhausted and disillusioned, have seemingly begun to cherish anew the spirit of revenge, of domination, and strife. (1)

Here Shoghi Effendi advises the peoples to become part of the ‘army of light’ or forces of good, encouraging those people that are armed with virtues such as kindness, justice, equality, love and compassion to use their moral compass in conquering the opposing forces darkness, such as racial hatred and injustice.

Background information of Martin Luther King:

As Shoghi Effendi, Martin Luther King also used light and darkness as metaphors for good and evil. Martin Luther King is today known all around the world for his steadfastness against racial discrimination and promoting black peoples civil rights. His work even earned him a Nobel’s Peace Prize in 1964. Mr Luther King was born in the southern states in the USA in 1929 and died in 1968 when he was assassinated, having only reached the age of 39. As a black leader who brought hope and encouragement to the black people in United States, he is also remembered for having brought something new to the whole world. His campaign for the rights for the black people started around 1955 and he became especially famous after his well known speech “I have a dream” which was delivered in 1963.

¹ The “Abha Revelation” is the revelation of the Bahá’í faith which is considered as the army of light.

Analyses Martin Luther King's Speeches:

As mentioned, Martin Luther King was a gifted speaker and very inspiring. He used many metaphors in his talks, which always had inspirational effect on his listeners and contributed to great change within individuals and in society at large. In one of Martin Luther King's speeches he uses, among others, the metaphor of light and darkness to illustrate the opposing forces;

The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth. Through violence you murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate. So it goes. Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. (5)

Essentially, Martin Luther King also asserts that darkness and evil can only be overthrown by goodness and love. One cannot "kill" evil, because it will never cease to exist he but, as he claims, merely increase the evil. Martin Luther King used the example "Returning violence for violence multiplies violence" implying that if one war starts, it will only create more wars and one cannot create peace from it. Feelings of revenge cannot create peace. For that reason Martin Luther King explains to us that "The chain reaction of evil - hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars - must be broken, or we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation." (6) An "abyss" is an infinite space, like the universe, and "annihilation" is when there is absolutely nothing - everything has been wiped out and all that is left is darkness. There is clear implications to darkness and evil and it makes the sentence strong and vivid that the

reader is instantly enraptured with dread. Martin Luther King very bluntly informs us that unless we change, our life will be ruined and darkness will prevail over the light until it is extinguished. At this point one can observe some similarities between what Shoghi Effendi's and Martin Luther King's writings express when they use very similar metaphors to illustrate their points of view. Their thoughts are concurrent in how they imagine the state of the world will become if we continue with what we are doing – and not exchanging more beauty and good for our evil and avenging ways.

Background information of Nelson Mandela:

Nelson Mandela became the first black president of South Africa in 1994 and is famous for being one of the greatest leaders of the 20th century. He was born in South Africa in 1918 and as of the summer of 2008, he celebrated his 90th birthday. He joined the African National Congress at a young age in 1942, and in the late 1950s, after having worked his way up to a higher rank, he became increasingly concerned with the issues of apartheid (separation between the races). However, in 1961 he was arrested for his political activities, and he expected penalty by death – but his beliefs in democracy were so strong that he was willing to die for them. However, he did not receive the penalty of death, but was convicted for life imprisonment. After 27 years in 1990, he was set free and the moment he was released he set out to do what he had planned a long time ago. In 1993 he received the Nobel Peace Prize shortly followed by being elected the first black president of South Africa in a free election in 1994. Even if Nelson Mandela spent about a quarter of his life in prison, he never became imprisoned within himself but his belief for righteousness and equality only grew stronger. Nelson Mandela is a great, living example of the forces of light conquering darkness in the world.

Analyses Nelson Mandela's Speeches:

Considering Mandela's background, it is not unexpected that he refers to light as freedom and that freedom is essential in order to triumph over darkness – in his case; apartheid. As a president, Mandela spoke to the people of South Africa about democracy in this way: "Democracy is still in its infancy, while we are still crawling from the darkness of apartheid into the sunshine of freedom". (7) Mandela uses the metaphor "crawling from the darkness" symbolising that independence is being gained, slowly and painfully, but surely. The quote can even be referring back to Plato and how he describes man crawling out from the cave into reality. It is a mission where the opposing forces of light and darkness take on particular significance in that it demands so much unrest and sacrifice. Mandela uses the metaphor 'darkness' in his speeches to emphasize the evil in apartheid. However, as the other leaders referred to, he also looks towards the bright side of life and uses the metaphor of light and sunshine to expound freedom. In one of his speeches he enlightens the people of South Africa and India saying; "Now as we emerge from the darkness of apartheid into the sunshine of freedom, we are at last able to express fully the warm feelings between our two nations." (8). At this point Mandela is no longer referring to South Africa as "crawling" towards the light, but rather "emerging" from it. There has been progress in his work. And he is furthermore trying to create friendship between two nations, South Africa and India, referring to the delights of such friendship as warmth in the sunshine of freedom. In a later passage he address the younger generation thus: "To the young people of our country, many of whom have not yet registered, I make a special appeal. Freedom can never be taken for granted. Each generation must safeguard it and extend it. Your parents and elders

sacrificed much so that you should have freedom without suffering what they did. Use this precious right to ensure that the darkness of the past never returns. Register now so that you can help build the future and keep the light of freedom burning.” (9) At this point we understand that South Africa is overcoming the darkness of apartheid at a steady pace and Mandela is now focusing on how to maintain the light of democracy burning by educating the younger generation, ensuring that they understand its significance by employing the metaphors of darkness and light.

Comparing and analysing the three world leaders:

Shoghi Effendi, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela are three amazing leaders with different backgrounds and upbringing who confront the problems of the world during the 20th century and try to address them. They share many similarities; they try to do something with the opposing forces in the world they live in. And even though they confront different parts of ‘evil’ - they are passionate about the same solution. Shoghi Effendi is concerned about good versus evil in society and employs the metaphors of light versus darkness and successfully explains how one can only overcome darkness with more light. Martin Luther King accentuates more on the emotions of love and hate, but also employs the metaphors of light and darkness and that the solution can only be achieved by love eradicating hate. Lastly, Nelson Mandela stresses the opposing forces of freedom versus apartheid and like the two previous leaders, uses light and darkness as metaphors, pointing out that one can only overcome apartheid with freedom.

All three leaders are referring to the opposing forces of good and evil and what humanity must do to exchange evil for good. It seems that part of their mission

is to establish the reality of 'evil' in order to be able to create a change. And in their speeches and their writings they are able to inspire people to believe in warmth and light and goodness and freedom. They convince one that light too exists, and then follow and explore its beauty. This is what good leaders do. Or is it? What exactly is a good leader? Plato, the Greek philosopher, in *Allegory of the Cave*, contemplates upon life and what we perceive to be true light and darkness. One of his main interpretations is that we cannot understand the reality or the truth until we have experienced it and put it through practice. In *Allegory of the Cave* Plato describes what it is like for man being inside a cave filled with darkness and only exposed to light from the fire. All his reality is inside that cave, and he cannot understand anything beyond it. Plato goes on to describe that if man is exposed to the world with "true" light from the sun, some people will be frightened and run back into their fantasy, however others will want to explore further. Those who show interest and are willing to accept the new reality are the ones who are leaders. Shoghi Effendi, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela can all be said to have not only accepted this reality – but truly understood it and been able to convince others of its existence. In a sense, one can imagine that "the sun of truth" has shone its light upon them, and they have reflected this light upon the people of the earth as pure, polished mirrors – displaying the sun's beauty, warmth and rays of light.

Conclusion:

I have undertaken the task of looking at three diverse leaders in the 20th century who had never met each other and whom have very different backgrounds. During my research I have come to discover that they are closely related through their speeches and writings. They have addressed many of the same issues, had the same

good intentions, and used several of the same metaphors to describe the problems and their solutions. Their purpose has been the betterment of the world - to create unity in diversity - and their appeals as to how this must be accomplished also correlates. They have enlightened the world in emphasising that although goodness cannot exist without evil, nor can love or freedom exist without hate and apartheid – it is the balance between them that matters.

Today, even though technology has developed exceedingly well, and communication has evolved beyond the borders of countries, mankind's knowledge and understanding of how to implement the good force in our aspects of life is limited and on a global scale the expressions of hate and ignorance still flourish. The balance has still not been achieved on a global level, and these negative forces still live on. However, we have learned from these three great men that we can only heal something with its opposite. For example, if a feeling of hate should enter the heart, we can only surmount it with a stronger feeling of love. Should a thought of war come to mind, we must conquer it with a stronger thought of peace. These opposing forces are part of our lives, and one cannot live without the other. Like the stars – they constantly shine, but are only visible to us when they are surrounded by darkness. Humanity's job is to strengthen the light and become like a brilliant star that undermines the darkness in the universe. Today it is our job as individuals to shine the light of freedom, love and unity to each other – and to follow the example and advice of these leaders that all lived what they preached. We must try to live and emulate the light of truth that Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King and Shoghi effendi reflected to us and try to act upon it.

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