Discussion Questions for Gandhi

Some of the major characters to watch for: Mohandas Gandhi (aka “Mahatma” or “Bapu”), Kasturba Gandhi (his wife), Charlie Andrews (clergyman), Mohammed Jinnah (leader of the Muslim faction), Pandit Nehru (leader of the Hindu faction—also called “Pandi-gi”), Sardar Patel (another Hindu leader), General Jan Smuts, General Reginald Dyer (the British commander who led the Massacre at Amritzar), Mirabehn (Miss Slade), Vince Walker (New York Times reporter)

1. Gandhi was a truly remarkable man and one of the most influential leaders of the 20th century. In fact, no less an intellect than Albert Einstein said about him: “Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.” Why him, this small, unassuming man? What qualities caused tens of millions to follow him in his mission to liberate India from the British?

2. Consider Gandhi’s speech (about 30 minutes into the film) to the crowd regarding General Smuts’s new law (fingerprinting Indians, only Christian marriage will be considered valid, police can enter any home without warrant, etc.). The crowd is outraged and cries out for revenge and violence as a response to the British. This is a pivotal moment in Gandhi’s leadership. What does he do to get them to agree to a non-violent response? Why do they follow him?

3. Consider Gandhi’s response to the other injustices depicted in the film (e.g., his burning of the passes in South Africa that symbolize second-class citizenship, his request that the British leave the country after the Massacre at Amritzar, his call for a general strike—a “day of prayer and fasting”—in response to an unjust law, his refusal to pay bail after an unjust arrest, his fasts to compel the Indian people to change, his call to burn and boycott British-made clothing, his decision to produce salt in defiance of the British monopoly on salt manufacturing). What common thread, if any, do we see in these responses that might be instructive for us as leaders?
4. Consider the enigmatic, two-sentence speech that Gandhi made when he arrived to a hero’s welcome in India in 1915 (about 40 minutes into the film). The speech seemed anything but impressive. What would such a moment look like today if it were a political or spiritual leader giving that speech? Why might there be a difference?

5. Comment on the methods Gandhi used to effect change, in particular his disposition to be patient and non-retaliatory in the face of injustice. How, if at all, does that inform your thinking about leading well?