Mahatma Gandhi’s letter to my father

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Ishani deems it a privilege to publish in this issue a short but highly enlightening write-up. It has been kindly sent to us by a esteemed reader of Ishani Shri Omar Luther King.

As readers will observe, the write-up mainly consists of a letter from the father of Sri Omar Luther King addressed to Mahatma Gandhi and Mahatmaji’s response to his letter. Mahatmaji’s letter has been reproduced in his own handwriting. That itself is a very important feature. But the thought expressed by him in a short letter in typical bravity of expression is highly enlightening.

We express our sincere thanks to Sri Omar Luther King for favouring Ishani with this precious treasure.

— Editor

It would be interesting to note what Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, had to say about death. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi who was popularly and affectionately called Bapu (meaning Daddy), on hearing about my mother’s death, wrote to my father thus:

Sarania Ashram
10-1-46

Dear Tayyebulla,

Some mutual friend had told me of your loss before your letter was given to me on my arrival here that night at about 10 p.m. Why grieve over the inevitable? And death is the common measure of all that lives. Imagine the torture that birth would be if there was no death! Loss therefore is a conventional word. Then true friendship is tested finally by the death of the loved one. And the verse you quoted from the eternal Quran puts the finishing touch on all I say. Let him take what He has given. Let us then praise His great name. My prayer is with you.

You have done well in not coming to me.

Sincerely,

Bapu

Mahatma Gandhi’s Handwritten Letter

Mahatma Gandhi wrote the letter from an Ashram in Gauhati where he was staying on his Assam tour in January 1946. My father, then the President of Assam Congress (1940-48) was a Security Prisoner from the 9th August 1942 to March 1945, and since his release from prison he was living in a sort of exile, lone and far, in Nowgong town in Assam, as our own Gauhati house was still under forced Military occupation on account of the War.

The letter that Gandhi wrote was in response to this letter.

M. Tayyebulla
Nowgong
8 January 1946
Dear Mohandas,

Some mention of you and the matter of your loss happened in my mind last night. At what a time, however, many are the inevitable and eternal is the common theme. If all that has happened in the past were to be if there was no death! True, it is true in a certain sense, but is it not also true that it is better?
My dear Bapuji,

Having lost my wife on 26 December 1945... and having none at all to look after the little children... I could not - my wish notwithstanding - manage to leave for even one single day to go down to Gauhati to meet my Bapuji... "Inna lillahi wa inna illaihi rajün: Verily we come from Allah and to Him we all return" (Al-Koran). Oh, what a difference to me, Bapuji! I pray to Allah for peace, and I hope Bapuji will pray too.

With taslim and love,

Yours affectionately,

Tayyebulla