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Unperfekthaus, Essen

Gun or Gandhi ?

I was born shortly after the Second World War. I am German, I am European. Like a great many people in Europe, my family and I didn't have much to eat. As children, we played on bomb sites. Over the course of time "Why war?", "Why violence?" became very important questions in my life.

That is why I began taking an active interest in Gandhi. How was it possible for him to be successful? Martin Luther King Jr. too fascinated me for the same reason. Both initiated wonderful things – and both were murdered!

Mao Zedong, China's revolutionary leader, said, "All power comes from the barrel of a gun."

In contrast, Gandhi, India's "Father of the nation", said: "The force of love and pity is infinitely greater than the force of arms."

In the spring of 2011, the whole world looked to Egypt. For decades a dictator had ruled the country in a grip of iron. After 18 days of non-violent action prepared a long time in advance, he was toppled.

Shortly before, the same thing had happened in Tunisia, and some 20 years ago, East Germany's dictatorship collapsed within a few weeks. Other such events also call Mao's statement into question. What is stronger, the power of the gun-barrel or Mahatma's concept, "gun" or "Gandhi"?

Which idea is the most powerful?



The picture on the right shows Arnold Schwarzenegger in the role of Terminator, representing faith in violence or „the barrel of a gun”. The picture on the left, with Mahatma Gandhi, represents the assumption that non-violence is more powerful.

A research study revealed: Of 323 rebellions in favour of more democracy from 1900 to 2006, a minority were fought without weapons, or with little violence. **52 per cent** of these were successful. In contrast, of the majority using violence, only **25 per cent** were successful.



2 : 1 for Gandhi's concept



My own research showed the reason for that. There is a powerful human potential in everyone, which in certain circumstances is infectious. Gandhi described it with the new word satyagraha, in Western terms it would be the power-of-goodness.



Power-of-goodness

This potential is not only present in political situations, but also in everyday relationships. Sometimes we are made aware of the power-of-goodness when something unexpected happens.

I live in the city of Essen. The following happened in the Underground some years ago in August in the rush hour. In the first carriage two young men were just about to beat up an African. The other passengers were frightened but nobody moved – except a little girl who stepped between the men and the African. She didn't say a word. The men looked stupefied, and made as if to push her to one side, but they didn't touch her. Other people, adults, now moved to intervene. Nobody was hurt. The youths got out at the next station, and everybody was relieved. The African thanked the little girl and the others who had shown their solidarity.

Power-of-goodness is an innate potential of all human beings. We tend to go to meet other people in a spirit of goodwill and fairness. We want to be treated in the same way ourselves. The predisposition to goodwill and fairness does not always get the upper hand. It can however be stimulated, even in people who don't believe they have a conscience.

The Philippine expression for the way of acting inspired by the power-of-goodness is “offering dignity”.

The racist attitude of the men on the Underground was lacking in dignity and at the same time an attack on human dignity. The behaviour of the child was full of dignity. She showed the men up, but at the same time showed them how to behave in a way more worthy of human beings. One might say that the little girl “offered them dignity”. Equally, the adults saw there was an acceptable way, one which preserved the dignity of all involved, to remove the threat to the African. The child's behaviour, originating in the power-of-goodness, was infectious.

Why is “offering dignity” a powerful option for overcoming violence? Because power-of-goodness lies dormant in every one of us. **This energy begins to awake, namely to resonate in us, when we become aware of people who act out of this energy.**

Our own innate predisposition to the power-of-goodness makes us want to do the same, and to become active for more goodwill or more fairness, for more sustainability or more freedom. It depends on other factors whether we let ourselves be influenced to act in the particular situation.

This sort of resonance happened 6 weeks ago, on the 20th of August 2013, when Antoinette Tuff,



a bookkeeper at the McNair Elementary School in Decatur, Georgia, USA, was able to avert the attack of a berserk gunman.

A young man armed with an assault rifle forced his way into the office of the school where Antoinette Tuff was working. He fired some shots into the floor, went outside and shot at the police. He came inside again and ordered her to ring the police and tell them that they must either leave or he would shoot at them again. He said he was ready to die. Antoinette Tuff did not react to his threat. When she realized that he was desperate, she bared her heart to him. She told him how a year before she herself had almost committed suicide, but had overcome the crisis. She was able to calm him down. She told him that she loved him, and offered to go with him to protect him when the police came. After they had been talking for half an hour, he put his gun and 500 shots of ammunition aside, lay on the floor with his hands held behind him and waited for the police. Nobody came to harm. Two days later the “Washington Post” and several radio stations reported this miraculous event.

The power-of-goodness occurrence in the Underground in Essen was not reported in the press or in any mass medium. If there had been bloodshed, it would probably have been publicised. Events where the power-of-goodness is involved are less newsworthy than violence. They are however at least as important, if not more important. This is something we aren't sufficiently aware of and forget all too easily. We should take such events seriously, wherever they occur or however we hear about them. The power-of-goodness is of paramount importance!

**"It is essential
that we give space
to the love
in ourselves
and
that we allow it to grow."**

Hildegard Goss-Mayr



"It is essential that we give space to the love in ourselves and that we allow it to grow", says Hildegard Goss-Mayr, the honorary president of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation.

We can develop our potential for the power-of-goodness. It depends on the image we have of ourselves. We behave towards other people in the same way as we see ourselves. The development which is meant here is a reorientation from an egocentric self-image to one centred on relationships.

What do we understand by an *egocentric* self-image? We believe that everything is centred on ourselves, on me, on my own group, on "our country", our way of life, our football club or whatever social unit we think of as our own.

Relationship-centred self-image :

- 1 being increasingly aware of our relationships with the world around us, and realizing that people and the whole environment, including all those outside our own group, are essential for us and our self-image;**
- 2 being strengthened in our own identity;**
- 3 not believing that my own point of view is the only true and absolute one, but is relative; somebody who contradicts me might be right.**

A reorientation to a relationship-centred self-image involves:

- being increasingly aware of our relationships with the world around us, and realizing that people and the whole environment, including all those outside our own group, are essential for us and our self-image;
- being strengthened in our own identity;
- not believing that my own point of view is the only true and absolute one, but is relative; somebody who contradicts me might be right.

With this relationship-centred self-image, we can find our place in society more easily, and deal with our own personalities and with other people more satisfactorily.

This reorientation according to the power-of-goodness can be compared to Copernicus's Revolution of the Celestial Spheres. 500 years ago it was believed that the earth was the centre of the universe, and all the educated world was shocked at Copernicus's findings. The principle that everything revolved around the earth was no longer valid. Instead,

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In this way Copernicus painted a much more appropriate picture of us and our relationship to the universe in which we live.

Copernicus's findings also apply to human relationships in the social context. New ways and possibilities open up. Just as the planets influence each other

through gravitational force, we can influence one another as we travel along similar lines and in ever-changing relationships.

Antoinette Tuff was herself in danger, but she saw that the young man confronting her was also desperately at risk. She joined their two paths, so that he could pick up her magnetism and learn to trust her. She was able to pave the way for him out of the degrading and desperate impasse he was in.

If dignity, respect, goodwill, and fairness determine our actions, this attitude can be transmitted to others, it can be infectious.

This is crucial especially in cases of massive injustice. Social abuses can be remedied, even when powerful key personalities are not prepared to be swayed. It is possible, because those in power are only powerful as long as others obey their orders, or cooperate with them. If their subjects refuse to cooperate, their power crumbles to dust. This is what happened in the “Rosary Revolution” by “people power” in the Philippines in 1986, which had been well-prepared beforehand.

Men versus tanks

At the beginning of the 1980s, the oppression by the regime of the dictator Marcos was growing at a frightening rate. In 1984, Hildegard Goss-Mayr and her husband Jean Goss, who had worked for reconciliation and non-violent conflict management in a number of political situations, answered a cry for help from members of religious orders in Manila. They explained the power-of-goodness, stressing that commitment to this non-violent path was just as demanding as a commitment to violence. They held seminars for activists who were to disseminate these ideas and the appropriate techniques more widely. A newspaper was founded called “Offering Dignity”. Thousands of people were instructed in the techniques of the power-of-goodness. In February 1986, when Marcos announced a false election result, the opposition initiated a boycott of banks supporting Marcos. Parts of Marcos’s army disassociated themselves from him and barricaded themselves in a camp. Marcos ordered tank units to recapture the camp, but the civilian population



crowded onto the streets and stood, offering bread and flowers, singing and praying, in front of the tanks. The tanks halted. Hours later the tanks left. The dictator's reign was over. After rebel soldiers had promised that Marcos and his family could leave unmolested, he fled the country.

What is stronger: Gun or Gandhi?

Martin Luther King Jr. said: "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 murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate... Returning violence to 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."

The power-of-goodness



works essentially in three ways, in one's own action, in infectiousness, and in non-cooperation.

Courageous action engenders respect. If some people find it daunting, others are attracted by it. In the case of Marcos, non-cooperation spread more and more until his power finally disintegrated.

Because, in contrast to destructive action, the power-of-goodness does not endanger, injure, or kill other people involved, but wins them over to be fellow-campaigners, more and more people contribute to its strength. That is why the power-of-goodness can become a source of great strength.

Applying the power of goodness is the appropriate method, not only in resolving conflicts but also in general in remedying abuses of all kinds.

“The most convincing way of saying NO to what is unacceptable (e.g. injustice, social abuses) is to say YES to more mature ways of contributing to more fullness of life for everyone.”

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