



Effective through the Power of Goodness

Martin Arnold
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The power of goodness is a newer, more exact term for the method of dealing with conflict successfully used by Gandhi and others to promote justice and peace. In describing the effectiveness of his concept, Gandhi used the term “satyagraha”, “*the power born of truth and love*”. It became clear that “ahimsa”, nonviolence, is not in any way to be associated with weakness. Gandhi’s concept and similar ones have acquired new significance in the western world in the term “*power of goodness*”.

In numerous personal, social and political conflicts, employing this method has been shown to be extremely effective. The power of goodness was an essential factor in the success of the Peaceful Revolution in Germany in 1989, in the Philippines in 1986, and in Tunisia in 2011, as well as in liberating India and Ghana from colonialism. Upheavals on a world scale, as well as on a personal level, show that using this power for more justice, peace and humanity, does not harm the opponent. It is not confrontation on the level of “Who can inflict the most damage on the other?” The application of the power of goodness is targeted at the intention of the opposite party, aiming to influence his decision to act in either a destructive or in a cooperative way.

Elements of the power of goodness

Basic assumptions: People who have been successful in applying the power of goodness to serious social abuses show that they have basic assumptions which are common to different cultures, one of them being that everyone has a predisposition to goodness, to truth, justice and humanity. As a result, people who threaten or oppress others can be addressed with respect and goodwill. Adversaries are neither harmed nor belittled (nonviolence).

This firm attitude of goodness is associated with the wish to advocate the common good and to committing oneself to removing injustice and championing the cause of *a life in fullness for all*.

Dialogue: Goodwill and respect in communication strengthen the solidarity of committed groups, and are also a distinctive feature of dialogue with those people who support a particular wrong. They are contacted as early as possible, and dialogue is sustained even under extremely difficult conditions. Public actions can encourage the readiness for dialogue.

Creativity: Action undertaken in the power of goodness cannot remain entrenched in opposition. Together with the persons concerned, improvements and lasting solutions are initiated and developed actively and creatively.

Showing courage: The power of goodness has nothing to do with being “nice” in the sense of passive compliance. On the contrary, active, courageous action is carefully prepared, including being ready to accept injury or blows without taking revenge. Even if you are afraid, courageous action is possible. It commands the respect of adversaries and observers alike.

One’s own action: People acting in the power of goodness first examine their own share in responsibility. Social injustice can only exist if there are people who support it. Sometimes it is difficult to ascertain in which way we are responsible in situations of injustice, for example, when we buy clothes produced in unjust conditions. However, when we realize this, it opens the way to the possibility of not contributing to the situation. Constructive action often leads to an injustice being rectified. Saying “no” to what is unacceptable is most convincing when we are saying “yes” to more mature alternatives. Resolute action can shift even very heavy stones.

Resonance: If one person takes the initiative, other people are often encouraged to join in even if few or no words are spoken. The friendly attitude and the example of activists have a contagious effect, because the predisposition to truth, justice and humanity common to all mankind finds its

resonance in others. A positive dynamic force comes into being and solidarity and support grow. Political scientists and peace researchers speak of a “virtuous circle” as against “the vicious circle of violence”. The spiral of the power of goodness shows the way out of the spiral of violence.

Persistence: In order to rectify severe injustice, you need staying power to remain resolute in the cause of justice. Each new step has to be considered bearing in mind both the past and the future. According to the circumstances, your action is intensified or varied. Since Gandhi, there has been a great deal of experience with nonviolent action exercised in the power of goodness, but there are no methods which are generally applicable. Every action is developed and realized according to the particular situation.

Mass non-cooperation: Often one’s own intensive commitment and public pressure seem to remain unfruitful for a long time. Important key personalities persist in refusing to cooperate in remedying injustice. Their authority can then be undermined by organized mass non-cooperation with the injustice. People are only as powerful as other people make them by means of their support. For instance, a boycott against a powerful system of authority can be successful if enough people participate in it.

Nonviolence: Not using violence and not wanting to harm anyone make sense for three reasons:

1. human suffering is not increased,
2. the adversary is urged to escape from the spiral of violence,
3. there is more chance for justice and freedom to succeed.

Prospects of success: Rebellions and campaigns carried out with little or no use of weapons have been proved to be more effective in strengthening democracy than armed conflicts.

Empowerment: Learning how to conduct conflict fairly, wishing the opposite party well.

Acting in the power of goodness implies being ready oneself to learn, to develop the basic attitude described above and to acquire competence in the methods of conflict resolution. There can be no guarantee of success. Careful planning does however make powerful joint action possible, and can in the end produce a good result for all concerned.

Read more

- Martin Arnold (2014): Accepting the power of goodness – the power with the seal of quality. <http://t1p.de/pxs3>
- Burkhard Bläsi (2001): Konflikttransformation durch Gütekraft. Interpersonale Veränderungsprozesse. Münster..: Lit-Verlag
- Hildegard Goss-Mayr (2008): *Wie Feinde Freunde werden. Mein Leben mit Jean Goss für Gewaltlosigkeit, Gerechtigkeit und Versöhnung. Mit einem Geleitwort von Franz Kardinal König.* Münster..: Lit-Verlag
- Martin Arnold (2011): *Gütekraft – Hildegard Goss-Mayrs christliche Gewaltfreiheit.* Overath: Bücken & Sulzer
- Martin Arnold (2011): *Gütekraft – Gandhis Satyagraha.* Overath: Bücken & Sulzer
- Martin Arnold (2011): *Gütekraft – Bart de Ligts humanistische Geestelijke Weerbaarheid.* Overath: Bücken & Sulzer
- Martin Arnold (2011): *Gütekraft. Ein Wirkungsmodell aktiver Gewaltfreiheit nach Hildegard Goss-Mayr, Mohandas K. Gandhi und Bart de Ligt. Mit einem Geleitwort von Johan Galtung.* Baden-Baden: Nomos
- Martin Arnold und Mirjam Mahler (2013): „Gewaltfreiheit“ → „Gütekraft“! BSV, Informationsblätter. http://www.soziale-verteidigung.de/uploads/tx_ttproducts/datasheet/Guetekraft_mit_Kopf.pdf



<http://www.power-of-goodness.net>

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