

FROM OPPOSITION TO NON-VIOLENCE

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Introduction and definition

Non-opposition and non-violence are fundamentally linked. Opposition is never far from violence, as, for example, the drug is never far from addiction. And opposition, such as violence, implies that we consider the other person in terms of balance of power. It is likely that one chooses non-violence before choosing non-opposition. But I think the two go hand in hand. And therefore, I don't think we can ask questions about the limits of the opposition, if we don't initially take a stand for non-violence.

On the other hand, having interest in it doesn't imply to practice it. The interest precedes practice, but it doesn't necessarily lead to it.

Although the two concepts are quite different, they have much in common and in what follows, it occurs that some paragraphs combine the two concepts through examples.

Before going developing further, and although it is a term that everyone knows and uses, it is useful to give again the definition of opposition.

This is one found on the net at : <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/opposition>

1. the action of opposing, resisting, or combating.
2. antagonism or hostility.
3. a person or group of people opposing, criticizing, or protesting something, someone, or another group.

There are two more parts on this definition, but not appropriate for the present subject. What interests us here is the opposition that leads people to confront each other.

We won't refer to the action of opposition. For, the actions of refusal, non-cooperation, resistance, do not necessarily mean, as we will see, to oppose people.

What we will consider is mostly the mental attitude of opposing people.

Opposition and disagreement

There is a fundamental distinction between disagreement and opposition. In disagreement, there is the observation of a difference. In opposition, there is the unacceptability of this difference. And the solution to the problems we face, is easier to obtain or discover when we're in a mood of acceptance. In other words, the oppositional behavior does not help solving problems. We will see that in most cases it is even an obstacle or a hindrance.

Non-acceptance leads to the balance of power, and therefore it leads to:

- escalation,
- behaviors of authority and submission,
- injustice,
- violence,
- intolerance, disrespect, intransigence,
- misunderstanding.

However, refusing to be opposed to something does not mean that we deny our opinions, or are hypocritical or silent and adopt inertia.

Disagreeing, while not taking an opposing attitude, does not mean the absence of anger, indignation and fear, while facing certain situations or behaviors. The difference is mainly in the way we consider our interlocutors, not as adversaries but as partners or potential partners. It also means binding our emotions to ourselves and not to others, and to link the onset of these emotions to facts or behavior and not to individuals.

For example, being indignant when my boss overwhelms me with work implies that the decision to increase the amount of my work activates my anger but I am still responsible for that emotion. Looking that way, I am able to view my boss as a potential partner, not as an enemy. It will also enable me, if I do not give in to emotions, to be

able to try to understand him, especially to understand the reasons for his decision, not based on what I can interpret, but depending on what I'll do to know for real, by asking. This will also leave me the opportunity to expand my choices facing his decision or even to negotiate without turning against him with refusal or blackmail. Disagreements are part of our daily lives, but we are not obliged to opt daily for the opposition.

What are the situations that arouse our desires to oppose

The opposition can appear in all areas of life, being expressed or unspoken, collectively or individually. It's the opposition of a community in front of an institutional power, of an employee in front of his employer, of a child's facing his teacher or parent, of a spouse in the couple, of a neighbor. It can also be the opposition in front of a stranger who steals our priority at the wheel, a colleague or friend with whom we disagree. These are all situations that can lead to conflict: when one disagrees; when we can not accept a situation: neither let it be; when we want to be tenable when we consider to be right; and we want to impose our views on our opponents.

We are therefore in a balance of power. It's us or them. And if it's not us who have the most strength, or the more power we will have to find another way to oppose and try to succeed.

The choice to get out of trouble abound: aggression, physical violence, manipulation in the form of guilt, pressure, lies, blackmail or otherwise. Whatever can the reaction be, frank or dishonest, it may bring success, but not with the real consent of all the people involved, nor on a stable or durable way.

But there are other choices, which, if they are not necessarily successful in the short term, are more likely in the long term to convince our opponents / partners and this on a lasting and or final way.

What are the apparent or admitted (declared) reasons why we are getting opposed to?

a) "To avoid"

Apparently, there are many possible reasons why we are getting opposed to something. But if we look closely, they are generally quite rare, because when we answer the question, the answer that usually arises, begins with "to avoid". To avoid something to happen, or to make something no longer existing. And this is a poor goal to propose the adverse party. Besides, if we had an alternative objective in mind, we wouldn't think probably to get opposed but we would implement this goal.

Sometimes it happens that two goals are in opposition, and that it's necessary to counter one of them to succeed in implementing the other. But often the goal of one implies the absence of what the other tries to establish or maintain, and this without any alternative proposal. And that doesn't mean that the objectives of removing an obstacle, are negative in their essence, far from it. Who could deny the benefits of the abolition of slavery or of the death penalty, for example? However, failures are brought by the means chosen to reach those goals, and this is what leads to conflict.

b) The spirit of revenge

When we don't agree and don't understand the motives of the opponent, it is easier to judge him, a priori, as incompetent or malicious, than trying to understand the reasons that brought him to act against our interests.

Did it never occur to you to choose a behavior of revenge towards someone saying, "so he/she will understand it"? This means that you choose to make him/her the harm that you feel you have undergone from him or her, in order that he/she understands what it means to undergo this.

Or when someone takes revenge for a wrong he claims to have suffered from you, what would you understand, other that: "He/she is an asshole", "he/she has nothing understood," he/she is in bad faith", "Has he/she lost his/her mind?", etc. ... sometimes with envy, once again, to take revenge.

I think this kind of attitude is really related to the type of education one received, which is explained later in the text.

In the same context and in relation to violence, Jean-Marie Müller states:

"It's always the other who started. Violence is always a response to the violence of the "other-who-has-started." Therefore, "He got what he deserves"; "He had not to start." "well done for him." Well! No, precisely, this is not well done: to do violence, it's never doing well, it's never doing good. If the other began, it is not a reason to continue. For, if the other was wrong to begin, I certainly have no reason to continue. "

"C'est toujours l'autre qui a commencé. La violence est toujours une réponse à la violence de "l'autre-qui-a-commencé". Dès lors : "Il n'a que ce qu'il mérite"; "Il n'avait qu'à pas commencer." "C'est bien fait pour lui." Et bien! Non, précisément, ce n'est pas bien fait : faire violence, ce n'est jamais bien faire, ce n'est jamais faire le bien. Que l'autre ait commencé, ce n'est pas une raison pour continuer. Car si l'autre a eu tort de commencer, je n'ai certainement pas raison de continuer."

excerpt and translated from the book (in French) : "Le principe de non-violence"

The attitude of revenge is often blind, it leads to a spiral from which it is increasingly difficult to escape. For, more acts of revenge are increasing from both sides, more it's difficult to stop the process. It is before entering the process that it's necessary to stop, and to refuse to listen to our impulses, or at least, to refuse to turn them into actions or words, to stay more clear-sighted regarding what we're looking for. For, is this "being right", "having the last word" or "being able to take the right of going further when the other is the one who began" the most important thing? Are we really obliged to accompany anger brought by a situation, with the hatred for those who created it? For, if we want to improve this situation, it is not in despising those who are at its source, that we will obtain their favors. We can change our mindset. For, without ignoring the anger that may be present, only our respect and empathy may bring lasting results, even if it is not guaranteed.

Denouncing to get others to rally to the opposition: the example of activists groups

Often, in the confrontation, we will attempt to accumulate the forces of our side; either the force of number, or that of authority, or even that of the threat, of blackmail.

A way to create the force of number consist in informing by denouncing. That's what a lot of associations are trying to do, using the means of opposition in order to dominate their interlocutors. Often their actions are limited to the attempt to spread information denouncing a problem, through the launch of petitions, through conferences, debates, the publication of texts, articles, books, and sometimes through actions shows, in order to be publicized and reach the public as widely as possible.

All associations are not in this register of course. Some act "for" something, some act "against" something, some simply inform, others inform to act "against". There are from all kinds, and it mainly depends on the mentality of their members.

I think of the environmental groups for example. One group will inform the citizen to stimulate to calculate his ecological footprint, the other will inform the same citizen denouncing the number of tons of CO2 rejected each year by country, and they condemn these facts. Both may, for example, explain the result of CO2 emissions on global warming, but one will try to enable the reader/listener to realize the issues, which can lead to behavior changes, bringing a reduction of CO2 emissions. The other will do the same having as target to lead the reader / listener to oppose himself, and join the ranks of the opponents in order to bring a government to legislate a reduction in pollution. And this second attitude occurs then in a balance of power (the power of the masses), rather than in order to provide the government with non-polluting alternatives. The two approaches are completely different. The first associations are usually in the solidarity action, the other are rather in activism. And many organizations are working in both registers.

I also think that, in this context, the publicity made by the opposition groups through the mass media, represents only the tip of the iceberg. For, elsewhere, other people are doing a painstaking job much less spectacular, but far more constructive. Gandhi expressed this as follows:

"A falling tree makes more noise than a growing forest."

Many alter-globalists have understood this, and that's why they preferred the term "alter" to the "anti"-globalization.

For, their goal is not orientated to "counter" the globalization, but rather to offer an alternative globalization. But not everyone is clear about these concepts. For, if one says that "another World is possible", and keep going into actions of denunciation, not only they do not change their attitude, ie they remain in the same register of attitudes than those who were denounced, but in this way, they do not offer anything new either.

For, even in informing, in most cases, only those who seek this information are concerned about it, and listen to the message, whether it is denunciatory or constructive. In addition we all have beliefs of all kinds. And when we seek to be informed, we won't necessarily seek the most objective information, but mostly the one that will confirm our beliefs. Besides it is difficult to persuade on the basis of information only. The testimonials and pictures can help influence, sometimes the example too. But more often, we are affected only when we are experiencing ourselves, when we live things, when we feel them deeply, when they concern us closely, when they immerse us. The speech alone rarely convince. So, informing has its limits.

What I question is the effectiveness of the approach limited to the spread of information and denunciation in order to make things change. However, the information is not harmful in itself. Indeed, a discourse that is not convincing, is not in vain, however. If it does not convince those to whom it is addressed, it can question others who have been in touch with that same information, but also, it may occur that it echoes later, when experience will join the information content because the impact did not take place immediately. It is therefore never in vain to speak now, but it's preferable doing it without direct expectations.

But beyond, a constructive message will be better perceived and better understood than a message of opposition. Simply because it makes you want to go towards something and already shows the means to act effectively; while the message of opposition, between the lines, reveals a kind of cry for help against the inability to be heard, and this is generally not very motivating.

The effects of the opposition

Opposition generates: opposition, or submission temporarily.

It's in fact already at the level of our way of thinking, behind the attitude of opposition, that we miss our goals. For, by opposing, we impede, and sometimes, we even prevent us reaching our goals. Our attitude is leading to behaviors that often can not be accepted by the interlocutor. For, the opposition is a serious obstacle to dialogue and negotiation. In the worst cases it can stop the communication, and give way to strategies of violence, whether between nations, between peoples, in education, at work, in friendship or inside the couple. The opposition occurs in the register of the balance of power. When we don't want the other to act in one direction and we can not help him or get him to do otherwise, we can only try to force him, impose, prevent him to do what he wants. And that can only be considered unacceptable by the interlocutor whoever he is, unless he is able to work on the register of submission. That's what the children do with their educators, employees with a boss, or a country defeated by the war. And any person or group of persons who submit, does in general not really understand the point of view of the one who has the power. And nothing will lead him/them to understand. And this implies that the balance of power must be maintained to keep the submission, and that the person in power, if he does not maintain its strength, will be at risk of losing it. In fact, in many cases, we chose opposition when we do not have clearly defined our goals, consciously and positively, and when we put full responsibility for the situation on the shoulders of our adversaries, without being aware of our own responsibility in this situation.

The opposition attitude can be successful, sometimes. But this is not always durably, and rarely in favor of improving relations between people involved; which does not predict easy resolution for future problems between them.

A negative, violent, insulting attitude, in front of those we're opposed (whatever the nature of the issue), will never lead to the direction of mutual understanding.

When we react in opposition to others, we generally assume that the other is: either bad faith, or is not able to understand. But other people are not more in bad faith than we can claim to be ourselves. Are you aware on a regular basis to act in bad faith? I don't think there are many people who can answer yes. Our subjective inner coherence prevents us from that.

Being in opposition with someone while suspecting his bad faith will be seen as unjust by the person, and can only stimulate him to maintain its own position, to feel misunderstood or unfairly attacked or blamed, and so on. And it will not only stimulate the person to maintain his position, but it will strengthen his defense and, therefore, stimulate him in return to oppose ourselves. And once this situation is installed, it is indeed difficult to understand each other, to negotiate, and to change views. On the other hand, this will help first not to give up or to adopt an attitude even more rigid, and lead to escalation, aggressiveness.

Because when you "defend" a cause, you remain on the defensive. Someone who explains something when being on the defensive is much less convincing. Also, if you defend your cause in front of people who defend the opposite, you are almost certain not to convince, because everyone is on the defensive, nobody is listening to the other. And in this case, opinions, not only can not get closer, but they are moreover likely to freeze, and cause blockage in the evolution of discussions, negotiations and so on.

In parallel to the fact that the opposition rather stimulates mutual incomprehension and favors stagnant positions; it tends to eliminate sense of responsibility. We think that the other is responsible or guilty. We think being ourselves okay, being in our right, on the side of justice, and we are just victims. We believe we understand the perspective of the other (from ours), simply thinking that if he is not in bad faith, it's because he did not understand, and even, that he is not able to understand. And we prove it, by not explaining him what really matters to us in the situation. But in fact, we are not more able to understand him, for, if we had understood him, we would have changed our attitude and we wouldn't have chosen to oppose.

In this context, often, the opposition leads to the inverse of what we want. For, when we oppose someone or a group, it works like a house of cards. Cards placed in opposition remain upright. In opposing, we maintain upright what's opposing. In opposing someone, something, we maintain the problem, we help our opponents to maintain their positions, making them more rigid, we stimulate the mutual misunderstanding, and we help ourselves to stay within the opposition and not to advance, or so few.

Being opposed to something or someone leads often to a lot of difficulties to maintain this attitude and to denounce the problems around us, without finally getting anything. It means often that we act (and lose a lot of time and energy) to just make some wind. But often we are not ourselves conscious of that. And so, it prevents us from acting effectively where something is possible.

When the attitude of opposition remains, it leads inevitably to a deterioration of the situation, whatever the scale of the problem, and it can sometimes block the situation for years, decades.

The fact that the opposition keeps us in the problem, can cause a lot of suffering. In being opposed, we feed negative emotions, feelings and thoughts, associated with anger, indignation, sometimes in defiance or guilt. It is not easy to accept what is, when it does not make sense to us, when it does not meet our need for consistency, integrity and justice.

However, if such acceptance is possible, it will help to evolve inside the situation and often to come out of it without being wounded or weakened. Just going with the flow - even if it does not seem favorable – makes possible to reduce suffering and to mobilize the energy elsewhere. It doesn't mean to get overwhelmed by problems without lifting a finger, but rather to stop kicking over the traces, to be able to see the emergence of solutions.

Going simply with the flow when confronted to a problem, does not mean to abdicate in front of our objectives, or not being true to our opinions. On the other hand, this allows to reduce the suffering and to distance oneself at the situation, and this distance will change the perspective and solve things through a different way. In other words, by letting go the first coming idea of solution when confronted to a problem, we give ourselves a better chance of finding a truly satisfactory solution.

Conversely, resisting the flow can be exhausting. For, being opposed will amplify the suffering caused by the problem and it will blind us to find ways to escape.

It is likely that suffering, when being inside the flow and in a state of mind of acceptance, does not preclude to be happy, while when we are suffering and not in a state of mind of acceptance, it becomes unbearable and makes our misfortune.

We can imagine the situation as an energy balance. When a problem exists somewhere, it can be represented as an amount of energy at one side of the balance: the problematic side. The more we invest our energy in the problem, the more the problematic side is gaining weight, even if energy is oriented to combat the problem. And if the solution is elsewhere than in the problem, it is at the other side of the balance. And so, once we invest our energy in the solution side of the balance, it means that this energy gives weight at the solution side and as it is not invested into the problem, it's taken away from the problematic side. It's then a double gain for the solution. The more we invest in solutions, the less we give weight to the problem, and so we end up reversing the ratio of weight, and at one point, the problem eventually disappears by itself, emptied of all its energy, emptied of all its weight, to let the solution emerge.

And it looks like the image of the half-filled glass that fills up when you look at the filled part (see the article in French "The boomerang of thoughts" : <http://sechangersoi.be/4Articles/boomerang01.htm>). It is important not to try to stop opposing 100% of the time or to be non-violent 100% of the time, but to make the choice in this direction, and make steps as we get the opportunity.

What is the origin of the attitude of opposition

Fear is the first of the reasons that lead us into the behavior of opposition, and sometimes it is quite legitimate. But not always.

Our ignorance can lead us to avoid the communication and the negotiation by fearing to fail, and sometimes also by our inability to be turned down when we make a request. Ignorance will lead us to fear and to the choice of the opposition.

Another driving force of the opposition may be anger. Rather than managing our impulses or waiting to regain our calm, we are opposed on an abrupt way, more led by the urgency of our emotions than by the situation itself.

Whether it's fear, anger, or ignorance, our actions are often not as oriented "for a way to carry out something than "against" what the other wants to achieve. And as long as we stay in these attitudes, we will be unable to change the process. It is necessary to first become conscious of what leads us to be in opposition. For, it's the fear, the anger and, to a lesser extent the ignorance, that is paralyzing: our creativity (to find alternative solutions), our kindness, our generosity, our flexibility, our empathy. And so we freeze in the attitude of opposition "against" anything that does not suits us.

Another driving force of the opposition is victimization. If we consider ourselves a victim of injustice, without any opportunity to take another look at the situation, the attitude consists in looking for a culprit, and it is against him that we will oppose because it is on him that we put all the responsibility of the situation, of the problem we are experiencing. But by removing all our responsibility from the situation, we evacuate at the same time the possibility to initiate ourselves a solution. This lack of sense of responsibility makes us subject to the situation, puts us in the situation of the child who obeys, or rebel, without choosing the way of communication, creativity, alternative. This freezes the roles and prevents to find a solution satisfactory to all.

Considering ourselves as a victim means taking the role that justifies the one of the tormenter; it means to enter or remain in the scenario from where we would like to get out at all costs. For, taking a victim role means to participate in a game. To stop this participation, it is better to accept taking our responsibilities, rather than putting them all on the back of the tormenter, which means, in most of the cases : getting out of the game, or refusing to accept its rules and create our own rules.

"To perpetuate a problem, there is nothing better than the reproach. Blaming others implies that we deny our own power, while consciousness entitles to overcome the problem and to control the future." Louise L. Hay "Transformez votre vie" (french version) Ed Marabout p. 54

Changing framework

I think that before changing our patterns of behavior it is important to be able to recognize patterns in which we are so far, and I think that's the rub in general.

For, who is able to confess bluntly (without having made a work on oneself before) that his tendency, in front of an injustice, for example, is: violence, manipulation, groan?

However, apart from rare exceptions, we all are (sometimes, often or always) in this register. And those who refute it the most are probably those who have the most work to do.

Unless they are those for whom behaviors of violence, manipulation or groaning, are considered as quite correct, absolutely not to be questioned.

As long as we don't understand in which framework we are used to be, we cannot see that there are other frames of thought. It's a bit like, when you learn to lie, you become truly able to consciously choose not to lie, and to understand the moral utility of not doing it.

And it is not easy to understand the framework in which we are, or to know that there are other possible frameworks. We can represent it through the example of the fish that does not know what the water is until it experiences what air is. Just as we do not know a priori the presence of air if we do not know the wind, water or suffocation.

And as long as we are not conscious of what is really the opposition, because we are immersed in it, we do not consider it a problem, and we wonder why dwelling on it, often accepting the consequences, as inevitable, and often unable to see its ineffectiveness.

a) Education

To really be conscious of what is the opposition, what it evokes in us, what is its origin and how to recognize it, it's worth it to go look at what's making our environment (air or water), and first, to look at the frame in which we were immersed in our childhood, namely the methods of education, that yet are still used.

Punishments as rewards, mark these methods of education, still now. And yet these are means for conditioning, but they prevent real learning, they prevent the emergence of consciousness. And we are mostly the fruits of this kind of education.

This means that everything, in our way of learning, was based on authority, so on the balance of power, and consequently on the competitive part.

All this leads to a lot of drifts:

- Lack of confidence: we only can act with confidence when our peers agree with us, we are unable to view ourselves as our own reference;
- We judge, and let ourselves be judged;
- We accept the authority of experts - when they tell us they are experts - even being manipulated, without relying anymore on our own common sense, on our intuition, on our own knowledge, on our experiences, on our feelings ;
- We compare, and continue comparing: we must be as well or better than others. And when we can not do as well, we are in constant frustration or shame;
- And of course, when we do not agree: we are opposing, believing that this is how we will get the change we desire: without being conscious that:

on one hand, in a lot of circumstances, we might accept the frustration of getting nothing; and secondly that there

are still different situations, or intermediate, that are not frustrating for anyone. But this is not part of our frames of thought.

We can take the example of students who are gathering to heckle the professor in class. Rather than taking their responsibilities, and proposing, intervening, speaking, creating (because it is not possible or because they do not realize this possible), they rebel, and they act behind his back, they even laugh at him, they despise him, they mess around with him.

And later as an adult, why shouldn't they continue?

It is as if the human being was unable to get out of childhood. It is true that there are situations, rather numerous, where there are no other solutions in front of a child than exercising authority. But in adulthood, the responsible human, in most situations, should be mature enough to get out of those kinds of relations. But we still are all, or almost all, functioning in that register.

b) The language

Another approach to the framework is language. Indeed, our language is often very poor to help us change. French is not the worst in this area, although it is not the best either (original text has been written in French). Already in French, how can we call a person with whom we are disagreeing, but not in opposition. The language does not offer it. Either it speaks of an interlocutor, which ignores the concept of disagreement, or it will regard the interlocutor in a competitive situation by talking about opponent or enemy. I had no other choice in this text than using the word opponent to designate the person, group or entity with whom we disagree.

Another example, in French, and in many other languages as well, for the notion of "non-violence," we have to take a term that denies the violence, while the concept refers to many other notions. It is as if the inverse concept of violence was not accessible to us in thought, since it has no representation in the language.

In a feminist glance, it is as if we had named "man" the person of the male gender, and that we gave the name "non-man" to the person of feminine gender.

When we speak of "the fight for non-violence", we use two concepts that contain the notion of violence, while our aim is completely away from these notions.

There are, to me, something dramatic at this level. For, how to think properly, if the words we use lead us to think violent.

So far our best tool to translate our thought is language. But language is culture too, and, in return it immerses our thinking. With so much violence in the language, we are almost forced to think violent.

I'm not sure that we should necessarily change the language. But learning to be fully conscious of what we say (conscious when using a word that refers to violence to talk about things that refer to benevolence) seems to me to be a good learning to do.

And to get back to the concept of opposition. When we act in the direction of: "not to" (do or get something) this is still an attenuated form of opposition. And the language here is really a reflection of our way of thinking. This is the difference as between "going towards" and "escaping from." Our actions are totally different when we have an objective like "going towards" than when we have no objective and are trying to escape something. And "no objective" is used on purpose, for, when we're acting in the negative: we can not achieve anything.

Everything that consists in leaving a situation without knowing in which direction we should orient our action, compared to the attitude of going towards a specific, selected situation: is resulting in a random choice of the destination. If you do not want rain anymore, you'll try to avoid the places where it rains, with no guarantee that it will not rain somewhere else. If you choose to go into a sunny area, you will define a precise destination, where the probability of the sun is maximum.

Most of us are unable to express our desires, our projects and our objectives with affirmations. Often we know very

precisely what we do not want, and we have totally no idea of what we want. It is a bit as if we were walking backwards, unable to look in the direction in which our steps lead us, and ultimately, groping our way along, looking towards the problems that we want to leave, being the back on our objectives. Admit that it's enough to walk through and take the wrong way! And therein lies the error, because as we have not realized what we really want, we will have more difficulty in finding the best solutions to our problems.

The non-violent communication (among others) helps to be clear about this: it offers us, in front of the problem, to define the need that is not filled, in order to find what will fill that need; rather than to escape what is not able to fill it.

The French language (and most Western languages – the text has been written originally in French) do not even have words to express the solidarity and constructive action. When we have a constructive purpose, (which is not in opposition), we still use the words "fight for" (lutter pour, combattre pour), because there are no others. The language forces us to stay in our ways of thinking (warriors (guerrier), violent, in opposition), prevents us from moving on to the next level.

c) Television

Another important element of our environment, in which from 98 to 99% of people are immersed several hours a day, is television. By absorbing models, advices and televisual information, we become identified to the world that TV offers us. And this television offers us a lot of violence, much opposition, a lot of manipulation.

It is almost vain to attempt to break away from this influence, as long as we stay customer of TV. And nothing stimulates us to that in view of the fact that, without exception, all around us is influenced by the same modes of thought. The predominant model conveyed by television is the balance of power, either through fictions with violence, authority, power at every levels, either via transmission of information or knowledge through experts, specialists, placing us in a passive, submissive, non-thinking role: they think for us.

Compassion, solidarity, tolerance, generosity, cooperation, collaboration, creativity, negotiation: are nearly insignificant in the televisual context, and are rarely stimulated in the viewer, except to get money from him for humanitarian purposes, which don't concern him, in general, not directly.

Crimes, revenges, violence, manipulations, lies, power games, competitive situations, authoritarian and paternalistic behaviors or submissive behaviors, or aggressiveness: are, in conversely, ubiquitous in most of the broadcasts, regardless of their orientation.

How can we then consider not to repeat all this in our own lives, if we do not really have access to alternatives. These ways of thinking are disclosed to us on a daily basis, insidiously, very slowly. And very few viewers are questioning what they see. And often, those who do, feel sufficiently critical to avoid being trapped. But can we be critical of what we are not able to perceive?

If these people were really critical, they could not accept anymore the current televisual content. And as, from 98 to 99% of the population has television for reference, there is no room for a different speech. Nothing or very little, can question the hegemony of its conditioning.

d) The pursuit of profit and power

Two other aspects of our society that lead to the behavior of opposition, are the values that define the structure of the consumer society, namely: profit and power. These two trends lead inherently to individualism and competitiveness. And in this context, how can we protect ourselves and be a winner without opposing to everything that impede to get there?

The opposition is really part of our culture, but it is not inevitable. Nothing prevents us to evolve into something else. Only some exceptional figures such as Gandhi and a few others, have chosen another path. For the rest we are all still in the bath of the opposition.

Change

A / Observing - integrating

Once we understand what is really the opposition and its consequences, which is only the beginning of consciousness, it becomes possible to observe it everywhere.

It is then far more convincing than any explanation. What we understood intellectually takes depth when it's observed in reality. This is where real change in the framework (of thought) takes place. Give a try is easy, even without believing in it, for details as for the important things: try to observe it: and it becomes almost obvious fairly quickly. And once we have access to the new framework, we are still able to reason in the former one, we still understand it, but it is no longer satisfying, because it no longer makes as much sense as the new. This is called a paradigm shift. And learning to operate in this new framework, will be the result of a long road to further learning.

Our consciousness forces our evolution with time. For, once we're informed, we're on the way to become conscious (which are two different stages): we begin to measure the problem, to know its consequences, we begin to be able to observe more clearly around us first, on ourselves after. For, it is much easier to observe the mistakes of others than to admit our own. Yet this is part of learning, because without this clear look at ourselves, we can only continue the quest for change on the outside, while it is on ourselves that the work can be done primarily.

Yet it is worth to analyze what, in us, causes us to be in opposition. Often this are our fears that guide our thoughts and actions. For, the idea is not so much to point the blame elsewhere, than to see that we are ourselves in something that ultimately we don't desire anymore. And before stopping to desire it, we must first see it. And because it's mostly something between ourselves and ourselves, there is no question of fault, or of guilt, but it's a question of possible choices to make.

Another trend that can evolve, is the flexibility in change itself. Many people are reluctant to leave the oppositional, aggressiveness behaviors and even, violent ones, because they want to reach the goal in the short term. And in the absence of achieving this, they then consider that it is simply inaccessible. Somehow, they think that if we are unable not to oppose in all circumstances, it's because the opposition remains the best solution. Of course, when we begin to change, we rarely find the adequate attitude, alternative to the opposition, at the first time. By thinking at the objective, and finding progressively the means, we can see how far we can go. There is no point of saying in advance that we never will go far enough. We are just not able to see far enough to know how far we can go. The fact is that change is a work that we do on ourselves, and it has nothing to do with techniques to be applied.

B / Before acting

1) Lay the problem correctly

A very common mistake, in a situation that does not satisfy us, consists in seeking solutions before having laid correctly the problem. And we are very often in this mode. This is one in which we keep talking about the problem, believing, among other things, that denouncing is a way to solve it.

And yet we can not get out of a problem if we do not know that it exists, or if this problem is not properly defined. Therefore we have first to know it and lay it correctly. We need to learn to stop looking at ourselves as a victim, or to observe others as victims or perpetrators, and to be able to see our own responsibility in the issue (responsibility not involving the notion of guilt).

And in the same way, focusing on the problem without arriving to solutions, is intrinsic to the fact that we have not yet fully assimilated what the problem is, because when this happens, resolving it is quite natural then. It remains then to choose the real solutions.

2) Solve a problem, doesn't mean to make it nonexistent

A significant change also lie in no longer considering that we should 'get rid of' what we do not want with the purpose to get what we want.

It is not always necessary to destroy a house to build another, renovation sometimes responds better to the needs. There is no need to ban non-organic agriculture in order to be able to invest in organic agriculture. There is no need to ban the car to make possible to walk, to cycle, or to take public transportation.

Of course, destroying or prohibiting, may be possibilities to consider, but it is rarely easily accepted by those who want to maintain what already is. And it applies even more in the areas of relationships, not based on material and concrete facts. Indeed there is no need to evict someone or to silence him, to force or to persuade; when we want to satisfy our own desires or needs. There are often other ways that meet the needs of everyone. If we fix clearly the needs, the objectives to reach, we will have greater access to innovative and satisfactory ideas for everyone.

3) Find the solution somewhere else than in the problem

If being opposed is actually part of the problematic way of reasoning, then it would be elsewhere that we should try to find the answer. Personally, there are also a lot of situations where I do not see how to do otherwise than getting opposed, and yet, I think this is our handicap: as we are not able to see a way to do otherwise, we remain in our problems. We perpetuate them, we reproduce them, we multiply them.

4) The urgency : when there is no alternative to the opposition

However, there are situations where non-violence, negotiation, mediation, patience, acceptance, compromise, compassion, understanding, selflessness, etc., have no place because there is urgency. There is no room then for the debate on the opposition. In particular, in a violent situation needing action, either by force (physical force or psychological edge) or to divert attention or the perpetrators of such violence. This is the case when we are a spectator of a scene of violence between two persons, and particularly perpetrated on children, and that we consider that we can have influence over the perpetrator. And it is certainly not easy to act with conscience (and not under the influence of an impulse), because it is almost obvious that the violence will return against us.

In this respect Gandhi's quote below, is very explicit:

"I do believe that, where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence. But I believe that non-violence is infinitely superior to violence."

It's a whole way of learning to get there. For, in the emergency, it is not always easy to make sense of things. A whole inner debate starts, and we are never sure to make the right choice. When reacting and being in opposition turns out to be the wrong choice, it can have worse consequences than to let go. For, the question that often arises is: "Who am I to intervene with people I do not know, or not enough? ". It's a bit the same debate as in the violence between two countries or inter-ethnic, inter-religious, when it comes to the right of intervention. Individually, I think the main thing is to act in good conscience, and being connected to our benevolence rather than our impulses, our anger or our indignation.

5) Refusing the apparent urgency

A common pitfall consists in not seeing the difference between the actual emergency of the situation, as described above, and the impression of urgency created by our impulses through the emotions of fear, anger or whatever. If there is no danger of death, destruction, or impending shock, if there is not an extremely short deadline to meet (for a decision or action), nothing prevents us from taking the time, and seek calm.

6) from 90 to 99% of the situations would not require the opposition

In front of any problematic situation, the question of opposition always arises. More we learn and more the proportion of resolution without opposition may increase. And I think from 90 to 99% of the situations we face, can be resolved without an attitude of opposition. I do not exclude that 100% are concerned.

C/ Acting

1) Not seeking to have the last word

One of the first lessons consists in never seeking to have the last word in a discussion, abandoning the attitude of wanting to be right. And this doesn't mean to let say, than to let go in front of our own impulses to argue. A good school in this game consists to learn to stay silent in front of provocation. This is the clearest example showing how far opposition may be harmful. If someone is provoking, it's better to ignore it, let go and leave. For, responding we stimulate at 500% and we get back 5 times more provocation.

2) Acting when we're in the right frame of mind

When we feel threatened, or when we are seething with anger at a situation deemed unfair, and where the first reaction is to react violently expressing anger; if there is no emergency, it is possible to withdraw and look for other solutions, to calm our anger (sometimes it takes quite some time, especially at the beginning of learning). This allows to interpret the attitude of the opponent in other ways (different than what first comes to mind, which is obvious if we are not careful), trying to understand his own possible reasons to do so. It is so possible to take the time not to react immediately and see if we can respond as best, in order to calm the tension, trying to talk, if we can express our mutual positions, to try to understand, to reassure the person who is aggressive with us, if necessary (as we become ourselves aggressive when we feel threatened), to make understand the reasons for our anger, expressing at the same time that the anger is not oriented on their person but on the situation. And this requires to be sincere. This often requires time to get there.

It can be useful as well to know that if we wait to no longer be under the influence of emotion, our response will be different. Our state of mind, our mood can change by focusing on other concerns, leaving time go, and even more importantly, after a night's sleep. If we're in the mood to moan, to complain, whine, oppose, criticize, be outraged, despise, and so on; we won't be good for anything. The difficulty, in general, on the one hand, is to realize that this is our state of mind. For, in general, we are better able to see when we are calm and in good mood than the reverse, and most importantly, we will be more inclined to recognize it, which is much more difficult in the case of a bad mood. And yet when we are in the negative side of mood, not only we are unable to see creative solutions to our concerns, but we are especially inclined to oppose, to be aggressive and kick over the traces. And sometimes just a few hours sleep are needed to make arise a clear solution in the morning, appearing then as obvious. It has nothing to do with the opposition, it has more to do with creativity, alternative, the unexpected, stuff that we would not have thought as long as we were in the previous state of mind. Sometimes even, the problem doesn't seem no more to be a problem and the solution consists in abandoning the subject.

When we want to impose our solution to another, as we think his solution totally unacceptable, if not urgent, we can refrain from responding at first, to see how to we can react later differently. And if we trap ourselves to respond aggressively in the immediate impulse, we will be in state to see the damages made, either on the person or on ourselves (the boomerang effect that never fails to happen).

3) Relativisation

Another possible change in attitude consists in reducing our position, to nuance, to put things in perspective, being able to look at what confronts us with other glasses, as if we were someone else. This allows us to be less intangible, less intransigent. That the needs, which are responsible for our position, are intangible, doesn't mean necessarily that our position has to be intangible, because there are thousands of ways to meet our needs.

4) Inquire on the position of the opponent

Then, what, in the attitude of the other, does seem so unfair or so threatening? And what could we do to stop looking at him like threatening?

This requires to understand his point of view, either by guessing, or by searching, or by asking him. But it also need to be able to reach the point of view lying behind what is expressed. For, what is expressed in the discussion, in the negotiation, is often colored by the defensive attitude (authoritarian, aggressive, subject, ...), not to mention the unconscious aspects of it. It's a learning that takes a long long time. It demands first to be clear with ourselves, with

our own feelings, emotions, thoughts, needs, so to really be able to distance ourselves from that, and to be able to distance ourselves from the emotions triggered in the confrontation with the other, as to really be able to listen to him. Again, the Non-Violent Communication, and other learning methods of relational communication, can help us to get there.

5) Change the way how we express ourselves (less threatening)

There are ways to express opinions without being perceived as threatening to the person who thinks differently. Being on the defensive in front of someone who is afraid, magnify the problem. Kindness can do it decrease. But it is an art that has to be learned to be mastered. Admitting the validity of the views of the other, expressing sometimes our own doubts, our fears, can finally put us less in danger than declaring our truths so unquestionably. And that happens as well when we speak in first person, without expressing our arguments as "the truth", but as our conviction. Thereby showing the acceptance of our diverging opinions on the other. The ideal is to give more energy to listening to and understanding than expressing ourselves, without being subject or polite either. Doing it on a genuine and caring way. Very few people are able to do so.

6) Difference between being in opposition and refusing to cooperate

Often the confusion persists between being in opposition and refusing to cooperate. I will refer to an example well known in France. In 2004, a comment rather awkward from Patrick Le Lay, CEO of TF1, was published in a book: "Les dirigeants face au changement, Baromètre 2004" (Editions du Huitième jour). Here is the most famous phrase:

"... To make an advertisement visible, it is necessary that the brain of the viewer would be available. Our broadcasts are designed to make it available: it is to say, to entertain, to relax to prepare it between two messages. What we sell to Coca-Cola is available human brain time (...). "

More information on these sites (in french):

<http://www.acrimed.org/article1688.html>

<http://www.republique-des-lettres.fr/427-patrick-le-lay.php>

In response to this unfortunate phrase that shocked many viewers, an opposition action has been carried out. A word is passed between viewers via the Internet (forums, sites, chain emails) to boycott the channel on September 22 of that year.

I don't know the number of people who followed this movement. But the message was clear: "we do not accept to be treated this way". That was the message consciously expressed; but in reality, the action itself, meant something quite different for the addressees. It meant that even when viewers know they are regarded in this way, and manipulated by TF1, somehow, they adapt well to it, as they agree to submit to this treatment 364 days of 365 . What a great encouragement to continue this so decadent policy.

Other viewers, probably fewer, had a different reaction. They did not agree and have not even found it useful to let it know. They decided not to look anymore at TF1. And since they are not fools, and know that the other channels, as long as they operate at the audience ratings and advertising, following the same line of reasoning as that of TF1; they simply turned off the TV set. They stopped cooperating with this farce, without opposition. If the firsts seem still being interested to be manipulated, the seconds are conscious they don't have the power to convince them, but they take their responsibility as individuals.

The real opposition in this case consists more in demonstrating in front of the windows of TF1, in writing petitions, in writing articles that denigrate them, in boycotting their emissions, in creating or participating in associations who try to put a spoke in the wheels of TF1, etc.

On the other hand, turning off the television, consists in turning our back to something that does not suit us, it consists in putting our limits, but it has nothing to do with attempting to eliminate the channel or to stop their action.

In many cases, when we have neither the power nor the ambition to negotiate with those with whom we disagree, it is possible simply not to cooperate with them, without trying to oppose. Just, simply turn our eyes towards something else. And sometimes it may seem cowardly, but it is only an appearance.

For, when we have no power to change things in one area, we have the power to weaken the impact of this area in our lives, and perhaps in the lives of others, putting all the weight of our energy, our work on the side of the alternative.

The attitudes of opposition and alternative attitudes sometimes lead sometimes to very similar behaviors, perhaps even identical. For, if I boycott all multinationals for example, with the aim of refusing to help their existence, I am in opposition. And if I buy local, handmade, ethical, organic or natural, I am not in opposition, but in the alternative. Yet in both cases, the result will be that I will not buy from multinationals.

However in the second approach, the objective is to support local workers and artisans, not to get rid of the multinationals. The energy, thoughts are focused entirely differently.

7) The concession or the alternative

Too often we see our problems and potential solutions in a Manichean way. The solution will be black or white; problematic, or satisfactory. It's either me who wins; or it's me who loses when the other wins. At most, we can imagine a middle ground where everyone make concessions, and where resentment persists, for, it's either the other who prevents me from having a solution as I dreamed, or I feel guilty because I prevent the other to obtain its fully satisfactory solution, or even both at once. If I fight with my neighbor about the size of the hedge, he wants it to 2 meters high, I want it one meter high. Either I win or he wins, or maybe we choose to have a hedge of a height of 1.50 meter. No one will win, no one will lose, but no one won't be totally satisfied. And yet, if he wants a 2 meters high hedge it is to prevent any possibility of prying eyes to his garden, and if I want a 1 meter high hedge, it is in the order to have more light and more sun to my kitchen garden. But if we redevelop the two sites, the place of my kitchen garden, the place of the hedge, the private space of each, we could find a solution that satisfies everyone, without having to discuss the height of the hedge, and being twice satisfied, first with the chosen solution, and secondly with the good neighborly relations that we would win.

8) The value of the escape, the avoidance, the silence, without being coward

There are sometimes opportunities where staying silent is better than answering. And it is not always easy to know what is most appropriate. For, staying silent can also mean: letting do or cowardice. The avoidance or escape are not better than the opposition, but can sometimes be temporarily useful. The whole thing is getting to know the consequences of our actions. If choosing to ignore can have worse consequences than being in opposition, it is better to oppose, but there may also be better ways than opposition. If on the contrary, letting do has no bad consequences, and being in opposition stimulates what we're opposing to, it is better to let do. I think it's all very subtle for the application. And we don't always know what's the right choice. A tip though: when letting do is a difficult thing to do, it's in general the best thing to do: it's then useful to listen to our impulses, and temporarily to suppress or to control them. On the other hand, when letting is the easiest solution, it's because it's usually because of our indifference, of our convenience, of our cowardice, and either we are not fully aware, and no question will arise, or this apparent convenience can lead us to question if there might be something better to do. And "better" is not necessarily opposition, there is sometimes better to do than being in opposition.

In many conversations, discussions or negotiations, even without provocation, it's sometimes better to be silent than to answer.

When someone has immutable certainties that are totally contrary to our own, talking to him about those certainties and expressing our own opinions, will in most cases consolidate its own certainties, and there will be no real exchange, just a dialogue of the deaf with a risk that this could escalate.

Even in politics it's working that way. The more we oppose a policy, the more this gives strength to it. Only the balance of power may make it fall, but then it should be maintained over time, for, as soon as the balance of power is reversed, the policy comes back in force.

9) Changing individually, before investing in some collective action

An often criticized attitude, is the choice of the priority of individual action over collective action. But again, this

consists in a change of frame of reference. Collective actions, solidarity actions, activists actions, have little weight as long as they are carried by people using the mode of the opposition. Yet it is the general trend for those who wake up as citizen (when the civic consciousness awakens for a person), to act primarily at a social or political level, before acting on an individual level, it is observable everywhere. And yet, reversing this priority is often considered as individualism, selfishness. But the intention is far more to avoid to get involved in harmful actions as far as we are not able to act constructively. The real individualism is among the overconsumers (anesthetized by advertisement and mass media), not among those who are socially involved. And doing our part when refusing certain collective activities of opposition, has nothing to do with laziness or cowardice, but well with a certain determination, and courage in not following the masses, often by moving our attitude from the one used by our contemporaries.

In fact, new possible attitudes are multiple and unlimited in diversity. There are never or rarely easy answers: for such a situation, such an attitude. Depending on each particular situation, on our experience and on our internal reactions, the most appropriate attitude to adopt may appear to us or not. And there is quite a way to go before getting the answers.

Non-violence as alternative: to opposition, to violence, and to manipulation.

A / Non-violence

1) Non-violence doesn't lead to be in opposition to individuals

Once the frame of reference has been changed regarding the opposition, there is not much more to be added to lead to non-violence. Non-violence is characterized above all by the unfailing benevolence of those who use it.

Non-violence in its essence, doesn't lead to be in opposition to persons. It leads just not to cooperate with what is the problem. The opposition is somehow at the source of violence. Therefore it seems important to approach first of abandoning the attitude of opposition before talking about the concept of non-violence.

Non-violence is from the same nature as disagreement. It can be expressed in a variety of ways: refusal, non-cooperation, pursuit of communication / négociation, silence, absence; but it doesn't use the destruction, pain, aggression, blackmail, sabotage, contempt. It is characterized by the respect of others and above all, as already said, by the benevolence towards them.

2) Non-violence and pacifism

Getting to non-violence occurs rarely through non-opposition. It usually arises first in a position of "opposition to violence." And it starts most often by the condemnation of institutionalized violence (war), that is to say : pacifism.

Pacifism is the first door to cross to access the non-violence. It's a desire for peace, a struggle for peace, but it does not define the nature of the means to get there. Pacifism does not exclude the balance of power (some practices of non-violence neither for that matter, since some activists are claiming to be practicing non-violent sabotage, for example.) However, judging negatively a problem, does not mean: seeing the solution. For indeed, some pacifists are willing to make war in order to make peace. They are those who arm themselves to prevent war. In this registry, some are condemning some types of violence, for example, the one who is killing, the one that tortures. But also they continue to agree with violence elsewhere, for example by accepting aggression or manipulation. Still others will condemn physical violence but not verbal and psychological violence. Still others will condemn violence on humans or on animals, but not the physical destruction.

It is quite easy to judge and condemn the violence outside of ourselves, while maintaining and ignoring that which we carry within us (in French, see the article about it on our own violence : <http://sechangersoni.be/4Articles/notrepropreviolence01.htm>). And condemnation of violence is still quite far from the choice of non-violence. It's a little like the difference for a junkie between recognizing his addiction, and making the choice not to touch drugs anymore, and put it into practice. Condemning violence is an intellectual judgment, it does not imply the ability to manage emotions, nor the one of speaking and acting always in complete benevolence. The purpose of pacifism is the same as that of non-violence. The means may differ. Non-violence seeks coherence in the aim as much as in the means, for, as Gandhi said, "For, the end is in the means, as the tree is in the seed, and

as surely as the wheel of the cart follows the step of the steer."

The second stage is then to become conscious of what we carry within us, the same violence as the one we condemn, for, we all have within us the ability to be violent. Then comes the choice to learn to recognize it, to know it, and then to manage it until we become able not to use it. It is more a psychological and spiritual path of evolution than an intellectual understanding or an ideological choice.

Non-violence is not pacifism. This is a way, and it begins with a struggle for peace, but the more we go this way, the more we understand that it's an attitude of heart more than a goal to pursue.

The desire to become non-violent is not a final choice, nor even a clear choice to define. It is built and defined little by little and has to be redone for each new situation. And the more we understand the values underlying the non-violence, the more we want to apply it as widely as possible.

For my part, I include in the concept of violence every aggression, that is to say, also verbal violence and insidious violence as manipulation etc. And also all that is about the balance of power, when we try to impose on the other without giving him any choice. So all forms of violence: as much physical as psychological.

Similarly, I believe that it is better not to ban our own violence as long as we are not able to choose other means than violence or cowardice. However, it is our responsibility to try to avoid being in situations that lead to violence, or to create them ourselves.

Nobody can really claim to be totally non-violent. Generally we choose non-violence as things come, missing sometimes (often) the boat.

As already explained above by the image of the scale, engaging in non-violence means putting the weight of our energy, our intentions, our evolution toward benevolence, tolerance, respect, generosity. And the more we weigh in that direction, the more lighter becomes the side of violence, of opposition, and of any negative feelings and attitudes in general.

And as for the opposition, violence is deeply implanted in our culture, through language as already described above, and through our education. Having been educated in violence, both physical and psychological, will make violence always justifiable to our eyes.

I truly believe that our difficulty in approaching the concept of non-violence, and further, the one of non-opposition, is not at all intellectual, but due to the fact that it has been integrated inside ourselves from our early age.

In this respect the two following extracts, respectively from the (in French) « Manifeste contre la violence "éducative" » (Manifesto against educational violence)' http://parents.autrement.free.fr/article.php3?id_article=13 and from an article on educational violence, written (in French) by Olivier Maurel (the article was published on the page : <http://www.harmattan.fr/index.asp?navig=catalogue&obj=article&no=2644> , but is no more available on internet), reveal on an evocative way the inconsistency of our way of doing, even if they are commonly accepted by everybody.

"Why is it permissible to hit children when it is illegal to hit an adult male, female, elderly, and, in prison, the worst criminals? Would our laws allow to attack only the weakest? Our children have the right to be raised without violence, which doesn't mean without firmness."

"..... a slap or a spanking teaches in one action and in one shot (as in to say!) a great lesson of immorality and of anti-democracy. It teaches them in fact that :

- When you disagree with someone, you have the right to hit, even though you love him.
- When you're big and strong, you have the right to hit the small and weak persons.
- When someone hits you or threatens you, you must submit to him.
- Violence is bad but it is also good, since, it's "for his own good" that we hit the child. "

B / Process of non-violence

The process of non-violence consists in saying, *"I do not agree with you, I can therefore not cooperate with your actions, and I will do everything to get what I want, but I never will make you any harm to get it: I will do nothing in the kind of contempt, destruction, slander, etc. and I accept all the consequences that you decide to inflict me, including that of not getting anything, losing freedom, or even losing life. I will just maintain my position until we can talk and find a solution that suits both of us. "*

And this implies to think: *"I want all the good of the World for you, but I respect the limits of my cause, and its importance is such that, in all conscience, I can not submit myself to your request / requirement, and I accept to suffer the consequences that you decide to inflict me if you don't understand the value of the change that I'm asking."*

"I am acting for my cause but it is not against you."

To choose non-violence, we must know our own violence, having accepted it and being able to manage it as to be able to choose not to use it. A person acting according to non-violence knows that having a certain position, not opposing, and not cooperating, he/she will be perceived as an aggressor. And the art of non-violence is precisely never to oppose, but to maintain a strong position, whatever the consequences, sometimes up to death in the most extreme situations.

It is possible, even probable, in the most sensitive cases, that the other person doesn't really understand the meaning of what is proposed to him/her, and understands it as opposition, and aggression, and respond to that with aggression. But if we remain non-violent to the end, regardless of aggression addressed to us, we will never respond to that. And this literally disarms the interlocutor. He may even increase his aggressions to push us to attack back. But as long as we experience his aggression by maintaining our position, he can not do anything. And that's where all the magic of non-violence takes place. There is a moment where someone in the group of the interlocutor will finally, him too, no longer wish to cooperate with his peers because he sees the injustices, and the nonsense of it all. And this is the beginning of a change to the negotiation and the search for new solutions that have never been tried before. And it may take a long time, years, but also generations, even millennia.

What essentially characterizes non-violence is the look that we wear on the person in front of us : it is always kind, regardless of the odious or unfair acts that he may commit or have committed. Being non-violent involves intrinsically having consideration in absolute for the person with whom one is facing. It involves trying to understand him - which in any case, can justify or excuse any unfair acts - and it involves trying to get from him a change towards more justice, towards respect for our person. This being also valid for groups of persons.

The following quote from Martin Luther King, is a perfect example of this attitude:

"We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We shall meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will, and we shall continue to love you. We cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws because noncooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. Throw us in jail and we shall still love you. Bomb our homes and threaten our children, and we shall still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our community at the midnight hour and beat us and leave us half dead, and we shall still love you. But be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we shall win freedom but not only for ourselves. We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process and our victory will be a double victory."

Gandhi, meanwhile, illustrates the attitude of those to whom the non-violent actions are directed, through the following quote:

"First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win. "

This can be explained as follows.

The ideas and opinions that destabilize us, that frighten us, we can generally not accept them immediately. We will

first ignore them: we do not even understand what we are talking about, or we prefer to pretend that they don't exist. Then we despise them, we laugh at them : it seems so twisted to us that it's not worth the trouble to give interest to it, it's better to laugh at it. Or we laugh at it : hoping that mockery helps evacuate the subject without having to go through confrontation. Once the idea is gaining ground and becoming more important, it seems to bear a kind of strength: we feel threatened concerning our usual values: it is then necessary to combat it, to prevent it from passing. And at some point, the understanding arrives, the threat disappears, and the idea is adopted.

Non-violence is really aimed to people who have not yet understood or recognized the existence of an injustice, and therefore it generally implies the idea of possible abuse, suffering, even dying.

In the case of Gandhi or Martin Luther King for example, it was addressed towards the English settlers who had not yet understood that colonialism is unfair, or towards whites who had not yet realized that black people are human beings like any other. And dealing with people who are in such a misunderstanding, we must expect extremely violent attitudes in return, up to crime (Gandhi and Martin Luther King have both been murdered for their ideas, and by the fact that 'they acted non-violently).

Yet when people who acted in non-violence, are killed, the general condemnation is such that those responsible for these crimes are losing much more credit that they did win.

Some consider non-violent attitude as a weakness, an inability to respond with aggression. Yet it's just the opposite, by choosing it we can offer ourselves as a scapegoat, it is intrinsic to the approach. This requires a lot of courage to intentionally propose ourselves as a target to someone who wants to attack.

Claire De Brabander - Brussels 2008

Translation December 2011

site : <http://sechangersoi.be/EN/EN-home.htm>

page : <http://sechangersoi.be/EN/4EN-Articles/Opposition%20EN.htm>

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