

Text Series: Introduction to the Spiritual View of the World and of Man

Text No. 5: The current world situation from a spiritual point of view

5.1 On the current situation

In the eyes of many people today, there is an all-encompassing worldwide conflict in the dual reality between the good, the positive on the one hand, and the evil, the negative on the other. This conflict between the good and the evil is an expression of the current development phase of mankind: On the one hand, the negative has reached the peak of its power in the current time period - the Kali Yuga - on the other hand, more and more positive energy is flowing onto the earth.

Exercise

Consider where and in what form in the current world political situation you perceive positive, uplifting efforts, and where and in what form negative, destructive tendencies.

Now someone may object that in the world of duality there is always a confrontation between opposing forces, i.e. also between the positive and the negative. That is undoubtedly correct. Only today we actually seem to be in a period of intensified confrontation between good and evil, and this because we are in the midst of a transformation step of human beings and the Earth. As human history has shown in almost all revolutionary upheavals, in times of transition or transformation the retarding, backward-looking forces insist even more strongly on their positions and privileges, while the forward-looking, change-oriented currents push ever harder toward their goal. This results in an ever-increasing tension that will eventually tip the balance and allow the new to finally break through.

According to the opinion of many spiritual currents, the strategic-political situation on earth today is as follows:

The negative forces are absolutely dominant at the moment, they control everything, even our thinking, our feelings and our actions. The expressions of this dominance of the negative are materialism, violence, egoism and the striving for power. Idealistic and spiritual goals are systematically denigrated, made out to be naive, ridiculous or utopian, or tabooed and put into the sectarian corner. At the same time, total control over the individual human being is being expanded more and more, e.g. through ever more comprehensive databases and their networking, through marketing and advertising, through data mining, area-wide low-frequency electromagnetic radiation, for example through mobile telephony, WLAN networks of computers, multifunctionality of electronic media, systematic restriction of individual freedom, macro-climatic measures, increasing financial pressure on the individual, escalating work stress or growing social control and financial pressure over or against all those who are not in the work process. Young people are no longer offered identificatory world views, ideals or personalities, instead they are offered electronic games glorifying violence, a rampant cult of stardom that arbitrarily inflates almost everyone to the status of a star for a few weeks and then drops them, and makes millions of young people want to

become stars themselves. Old people and society as a whole are increasingly driven into a youth mania that undermines the natural generational order and the solidarity of the various age groups. An attitude of "I want everything" and material egoism is increasingly destroying social solidarity and the functioning of society. Poverty is seen as self-inflicted, and the rich are encouraged financially, fiscally and sociopolitically to accumulate even more wealth.

Politicians increasingly pursue their own special interests, and the common good is increasingly lost sight of. A special method of the negative forces is nationalism: In warlike conflicts people from different nations and religions are led against each other by making them believe that they fought for the good and their opponents for the evil. One's own side serves as a figure of identification, the opponents as projection surfaces for aggression, hatred and violence. The fact is, however, that both sides are similar in their behavior (violence, brutality, torture and murder). From a superordinate point of view, warlike conflicts serve to divide people, to discredit the positive forces of love, peace and harmony and to keep people permanently under the spell of evil.

Exercise

What criteria do you see for distinguishing particularistic actions in politics that are one-sidedly oriented toward the self-interest of politicians or groups from political actions that serve the common good?

On the other hand, more and more people are becoming interested in spiritual questions without finding sustainable answers in the churches or existing religious communities. More and more individual people are committed to idealistic or spiritual goals and are engaged in a spiritual development process, but often feel left alone and relatively powerless. At the same time, ever stronger positive spiritual forces are seeking access to our planet and to people.

Therefore, it is a matter of giving the positive spiritual forces access to people and to our planet without directly attacking the negative forces - and thus getting into a direct confrontation with them. Strategically, it is about the establishment of a strong, worldwide network of people and institutions who place themselves without reservation on the side of spirituality and the divine impulse and work to open access to the positive, spiritual energies and to connect with them permanently. At the same time, it is a matter of raising one's own spiritual vibration in order to increasingly become a resonance vessel for the positive mental-spiritual energies. Thereby the balance of power between the negative and the positive shifts successively and incessantly in favor of the positive. Parallel to this, the effectiveness of the inflowing positive mental-spiritual energies also increases.

Exercise

What criteria would a policy have to fulfill, which is made out of a spiritual basic attitude?

5.2 Different forms of politics

Traditionally, one can encounter two fundamentally different approaches to politics:

- the **Machiavellian** - in the sense of the Italian power politician Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), who described the methods of such politics in detail in his famous work "Il Principe" (The Prince) - **understanding of politics**, which is oriented toward power and the preservation of power, and
- the **rebellious**, change-oriented **understanding of politics**.

Literature reference

Niccolò Machiavelli: Il Principe. Milano: Classici Signorelli 1973.

Exercise

Choose a political issue that has been on your mind recently. Which position on this issue would correspond more to a Machiavellian, which to a rebellious politics?

The first form of political understanding - Machiavellian politics - defines itself as exclusively solution-oriented, efficient and cost-conscious - but often forgets the elementary concerns and imperatives of humanity. Often violence is used as the last and logical consequence of such politics, if it serves to achieve the political goal.

The second form of political understanding - rebellious politics - feels and acts out of a sense of solidarity with the disadvantaged - and does not exclude violent change. For example, the Catholic bishop Dom Helder Câmara declared over 50 years ago that violence in the sense of self-defense of the poor could be legitimate under certain conditions (cf. Hélder Câmara 1969:36).

Literature reference

Hélder Câmara: Revolution für den Frieden. Freiburg: Herder 1969.

You can immediately see where the problem lies:

Both types of politics overlook two central aspects:

- Their actions are primarily oriented to the external, material structures, the physical-material world is to be changed with material methods.
- In their actions, the love of the divine is at least not in the center, indeed - from the dynamics of action, love and the commandment of love are increasingly marginalized and seen as "naive rapture". The strategy pursued is usually conflictual, i.e., does not correspond to a spiritual attitude of love and empathy toward the opponent.

Exercise

Take again the political question chosen in the previous exercise. Consider what a spiritual position on it might look like.

Surprisingly, many political movements that clearly practiced a rebellious understanding of politics in their younger years - such as liberalism, socialism and Marxism - slipped into a Machiavellian understanding of politics in later years: liberalism as ordo- and economic liberalism, to which today's neo-liberalism also belongs, socialism in social democracy and Marxism in later communism or Stalinism.

This seems to indicate that the two types of politics are not too far from each other, namely insofar as they have placed at the center of their understanding not the love of the divine but their material strategies of seizing and maintaining power.

One might object that liberation theology, although it has a rebellious understanding of politics, clearly places love of the divine at the center.

Thus Leonardo Boff writes: "Spiritual experience always means an encounter with a new and challenging face of God, which shows itself in the challenges of concrete history. Historically important processes of change contain an ultimate meaning, a radical demand, which is perceived by religious people as the arrival of the mystery of God. God has meaning only when he appears as the radically important thing of a given reality with all its shadow and light sides. God, then, does not simply appear as a particular category in the religious realm, but in the context of an event as meaning, as hope, as an absolute future for man and his history" (Leonardo Boff 1984:59).

Literature reference

Leonardo Boff: Von der Spiritualität der Befreiung zur Praxis der Befreiung. In: Eduardo Bonnín (Hrsg.): Spiritualität und Befreiung in Lateinamerika. Würzburg: Echter 1984.

Liberation theology is an extraordinarily interesting attempt to center spirituality in the horizontal sense, that is, in the form of interpersonal solidarity.

Thereby the presence of the divine is, as it were, thought and felt into human interaction and work: "The presence of God takes place neither automatically nor exclusively where God is spoken about and his name is sanctified, but always and everywhere where truth and justice are brought about through right action, even if an explicit awareness of God is no longer given". This is about "praying in the process of liberation, about experiencing an encounter with God in the encounter with fellow human beings" (Leonardo Boff 1984:62/63).

But where is the border to a Marxist who does not believe in God, who is also convinced that the higher meaning of being human takes place in human work and in an ongoing process of liberation of (working) people? Doesn't the dimension of the divine fall out of this, as it were - or isn't it simply reduced to a myth of interacting and liberating people?

In liberation theology, prayer is understood as collective communication and as an expression of the "conflictual nature of the liberation process" (Boff 1984:68), and as an expression of the liberating community. How close such a liberation-theological understanding of prayer is to the idea of Marxist self-criticism is shown by the following quotation: "Liberation prayer is often the occasion for a critical evaluation of the actions and behavior of the participants in the prayer community. They manage to criticize each other without being squeamish or sensitive. Objective criteria count: the kingdom, liberation, consideration for the steps of the people" (Boff 1984:69).

A basic spiritual attitude, as I understand it, instead of mutual criticism, would try to align oneself collectively with the love of the Divine and to open oneself collectively or

individually to the action of the Divine - in order to then implement it in everyday life. This can very well happen collectively, i.e. in the group.

The above passage makes something else clear: Once apart from the fact that here the Kingdom of God idea is understood not eschatologically, but purely on this side in the sense of an "ideal social community", the divine meta-reality - that is, what we have paraphrased as the zero-point field - seems to no longer exist or at best to express itself indirectly.

Ultimately, this means that liberation theology - should it become a political factor with access to political power - is also likely to ultimately slide into Machiavellian politics. Or else - liberation theology will strengthen its vertical spirituality in addition to its horizontal one, but then it will most likely go a similar way as many religious or spiritual currents before it.

Nevertheless: Liberation theology is extremely interesting because it moves very consciously exactly on the interface between social liberation in the group and spiritual orientation.

5.3 Criteria for a Spiritual Politics: Love, Truth, Nonviolent Action

Interestingly, liberation theology in Asia has always emphasized both aspects much more strongly: the experienced, direct (vertical) spirituality and the social liberation in the sense of a horizontal spirituality. Both approaches are strongly anchored in the great Asian religions, Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism (cf. Aloysius Pieris 1986:125ff).

Literature reference

Aloysius Pieris: *Theologie der Befreiung in Asien. Christentum im Kontext der Armut und der Religionen.* Freiburg: Herder 1986.

Crucial for a truly spiritual politics is that it starts from the concern of the heart. An environmental disaster, the suffering and death of people in war, social injustice, political oppression, hunger and misery affect us.

Affectedness means that we sympathize from our innermost being with the affected people or living beings - we go, so to speak, into resonance with their experience of suffering. However, this is not about pity in the sense of "oh, the poor thing!" - with the furtive ulterior motive: "fortunately I am not affected myself" - but compassion: deep understanding and connectedness with the experience of those affected in the feeling that we are not separate from these injured or suffering people, but that their suffering is also my suffering. This then gives rise to the deep impulse to act, to change the situation, and to help those affected.

We can, of course, feel other feelings: for example, anger, rage, and hatred toward governments, soldiers, or politicians who make unjust policies, or grief.

However, these feelings do not come from the spiritual core, from the God spark of the human being, but are peripheral in nature - they usually come from the emotional body. This does not mean that we should reject or even suppress such feelings: Like all negative feelings, we should try to enclose these feelings in love, to accept them as part of us and let them stand. If we are then able to send unrestricted love to the actors of this unjust policy,

we have also forgiven them - of course without accepting their behavior. Rather, through this forgiveness we create for ourselves the decisive basis to act: For example, by achieving more justice, by helping out of a heartfelt concern, by recognizing the truth and letting it become visible.

Exercise

What could a basic spiritual attitude to the following political topics look like - choose an example:

Asylum policy, armament program for the army, old-age provision, inclusion of the disabled, highway construction, deployment of army personnel abroad, fight against terrorism, integration policy, privatization of the electricity market.

Try not to slip into either a Macchiavellian or a rebellious position.

Gandhi ingeniously combined vertical spirituality (e.g. meditation, prayer) with social action, i.e. horizontal spirituality. The result is Satyagraha, the politics of non-violent action in truth.

References

The following paragraphs are taken - partly edited - from a text by David J. Krieger.

For details on Gandhi's politics of satyagraha, cf: David J. Krieger in C. Jäggi/D. Krieger: Fundamentalismus. Ein Phänomen der Gegenwart. Zürich: Orell Füssli 1991. Seiten 225ff.

Satya means truth. In Sanskrit, sat also means being and God; from this, Gandhi concludes that truth is God. From this religious concept of truth, in which, according to Gandhi, atheists and skeptics can also participate because they must both affirm some truth, he derived the following principles of his politics:

- First, truth is imperishable and indestructible. Whatever happens, truth will prevail, and falsehood will always be temporary.
- Second, those who act according to truth will prevail, even if their efforts seem unsuccessful at first. Even if only one person follows the truth and acts in the truth, he will be able to disempower an entire government, because it is God who acts through him.
- Third, from the truth come only deeds that are politically effective, that is, capable of establishing human community. Gandhi says, "Truth unites man with man into community. Without truth there can be no social order" (quoted from Iyer 1973: 168, translation by David Krieger).

Literature reference:

Raghavan Iyer: The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi. New York: Oxford University Press 1973.

Ever since Machiavelli, we have heard from the proponents of the Machiavellian understanding of politics that it is just the other way around: The *raison d'état* - that is, the interest of the state - often forbids truthfulness in politics. Gandhi vehemently rejected this idea, not as a moralist, but as a politician.

In response to the objection that his politics were "idealistic" and thus unrealistic, Gandhi referred to another central concept: **ahimsa**, or nonviolence.

For Gandhi, the voice of conscience is not a mere opinion, but it speaks an unconditional commitment with absolute authority. Therefore, non-violence is the possibility, on the one hand, to uncompromisingly follow the fundamental truth of our conscience, but on the other hand, not to fall into an individualistic and inconsequential pietism - as rightly criticized by liberation theologians. At the same time, we are also open to the deepening of truth, since we, as limited beings, can never grasp the whole truth. Gandhi illustrates this in the following statement:

"It seems that the impossibility of grasping the full truth in this mortal body led an ancient sage to the realization of ahimsa (non-violence). The question that came to him was, 'Should I tolerate those who cause me difficulty, or should I destroy them?' The sage saw that the one who destroyed others never progressed, but always stopped where he was, while the one who was lenient with his opponents went forward and first dragged the others along with him" (quoted from Iyer 1973:231, translation by David Krieger).

One could go further: Only when I succeed in loving the other person who is causing me suffering do I truly act from my spiritual core.

While fundamentalist attitudes use violence in various forms to achieve religious and political goals, this is by definition unthinkable for a spiritual person: Love never hurts - it heals. In contrast, violence specifically uses the injury of people or living beings to achieve goals.

Gandhi in 1935 published in the "Harijan" the following principles of non-violence:

- (a) Nonviolence involves as complete a self-purification as is humanly possible.
- b) The power of non-violence grows in proportion to the ability to use violence.
- c) Non-violence is superior to violence without exception, i.e. the power that a non-violent person has is always greater than when he uses violence.
- d) Non-violence knows no defeat. Violence, however, always ends in defeat (after Iyer 1973:193/194, translation by David Krieger).

Much of this confession will be incomprehensible until a third concept, *tapas* or self-suffering, is explained. Before doing so, however, it is important to see why Gandhi wanted something like a confession of nonviolence in the first place. Gandhi was aware that most people-even many of his closest associates in the Congress Party, who were committed to India's independence-could not subscribe to this confession. Congress politicians also initially pursued a rebellious policy in India that would later become a Machiavellian policy. Gandhi felt compelled to distance himself from the Congress Party on several occasions because of this. For Congress politicians, the use of force was merely a tactical issue. For Gandhi, however, nonviolence was a matter of principle and stood far above any tactical considerations.

The commitment to nonviolence was so important to Gandhi because he could not accept the common notion that the end justifies the means. First, Gandhi said, people in everyday life are not always able to distinguish clearly between ends and means. Second, we have

only the means in our control, not the end. And third, it is simply not the case that the end justifies the means, but rather it is the means that determine the value of the end. And most importantly, since we as human beings are obligated to do what is good, our means would also have to be intrinsically good. It is impossible to love someone and hurt them at the same time.

Therefore, for Gandhi, non-violence was a means as well as an end: "Without ahimsa, it is not possible to seek and find truth. Ahimsa and truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to keep them apart and separate them. Ahimsa is the means, truth the end. The means must always be within our reach, so ahimsa is our highest duty. If we strive for the means, we will certainly reach the end sooner or later. Once we have understood this, we can be sure of victory" (quoted from Bondurant 1967:24, translation by David Krieger).

Literature reference:

Joan V. Bondurant: Conquest of Violence. The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict. Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press 1967.

But this does not solve the problem. For how can we become aware that our conception of truth is not perfect? After all, all the different ideologies and religions claim exactly this. But if one is convinced that one's own truth is absolutely correct, then the use of all possible means to enforce it can be legitimized. To avoid this very danger, the Enlightenment sought to banish all religious claims to truth from the public sphere. But we have seen that the problem cannot be solved in this way in our postmodern global situation. **The religious renewal, which is criticized everywhere under the fighting word "fundamentalism," points precisely to the fact that the suppression of religion from public life has failed.** In order to understand how the militancy of fundamentalist thought, which is also manifest among the Enlightenment thinkers, can be defused and absorbed into a communicative practice at a higher level, we need to explain Gandhi's third term tapas (self-suffering).

At the end of 50 years of experience, Gandhi was convinced that the only thing that can explode an **ideological absolutization** of the conception of truth is voluntary self-suffering and the love of one's enemies that goes with it. For in every conflict the expected resistance of the opponent becomes, first, a confirmation of the already made condemnation of his position and, second, a legitimization of his own use of force. But if the opponent does not respond with violence and hatred and nevertheless resists, then - according to Gandhi - no human being can remain unaffected. The one who needs violence will have to ask himself in time where his non-violent "opponent" gets the moral strength to behave in such a way. Obviously, he also has a share in the truth. Thus, the one who uses violence must question his ideology, which justifies that violence.

Thus, non-violence becomes a **critique of ideology**. For the aggressor sees that we take the suffering upon ourselves and that no suffering is inflicted upon himself. In this process, fear and mistrust dissolve in a genuine dialogue. In a non-violent confrontation, therefore, the others do not have to suffer for our mistakes, and these mistakes do not escalate into new points of contention. One can stay with the matter at hand - and act from the heart, from the divine core. A constructive solution thus becomes possible. This is also why Gandhi rejected violent revolutions.

Gandhi formulated the following basic rules for satyagraha:

- 1) Reduce one's own demands to the minimum and review this self-critically.
- 2) Continuous search for a solution to the conflict, which the opponent can also accept.
- 3) Such a solution must also fully satisfy the opponent. In addition there is the strict discipline..., which makes the adherence to such rules possible (after Bondurant 1967:38ff).

Non-violence becomes a tool of community building when people replace the power of weapons with the power of the mind or spirituality. This spiritual power, or "soul power" as Gandhi called it, is attained only through tapas. Gandhi saw conflict among people and between states as inevitable. Accordingly, history is also inevitably connected with suffering. **This is because suffering is created by every conflict. The task of human beings is to take on this suffering voluntarily so that the process of community building becomes creative and free.**

But most people react with fear in a conflict situation out of ignorance of this their true task and ability. They try to shift the suffering onto the other person. This "natural" reaction is, according to Gandhi, the origin and essence of violence. For violence is nothing other than the attempt to escape suffering in a conflict by shifting it onto the other. Non-violence, on the other hand, consists in voluntarily taking this suffering upon oneself. And this suffering voluntarily taken upon oneself is what Gandhi understands by the term tapas.

Satya - truth, **ahimsa** - non-violence and **tapas** - self-suffering are, according to Gandhi's conviction, the three pillars of a spiritual politics.

Exercise

Choose again the same political topic as in the last exercise.

Try to formulate a spiritually oriented position on it in terms of the three principles satya - truth, ahimsa - non-violence and tapas - self-suffering.