

Inner Strength : a Fundamental Weapon against Violence

by Pat Patfoort

1. The relationship between Inner Strength and Nonviolence (cf. fig.1 & 2)

We distinguish two systems, each based respectively on two models : *the Major-minor model* is at the basis of the system of violence, and *the Equivalency-model* is at the basis of the system of nonviolence. In the Major-minor system the tools are *arguments* : to convince, dominate, overpower others, to shout people down. In the Equivalency system the tools are *foundations* : they are the answers to the question “Why?” one has a certain point of view. They are the needs, feelings, values, habits, objectives, interests of this person or group.¹

Inner strength is a very important element for thinking, behaving, and reacting in an Equivalent way, which is at the base of nonviolence. Inner strength enables us to avoid being put in a minor position either by ourselves or by others. It also enables us to avoid the temptation of elevating ourselves to a Major position.

1.1. Not letting ourselves end up in a minor-position :

The more Inner Strength we have:

- 1) the more we can learn to know and accept ourselves as we are;
- 2) the more self-consciousness we develop;
- 3) the better we are able to know and accept our needs, emotions, values, habits, objectives and interests (our “foundations”);
- 4) the more self-confidence we have;
- 5) the less we depend on what others think about us;
- 6) the less we feel judged or criticised negatively by others;
- 7) the less we feel blamed, insulted, threatened, attacked;
- 8) the less we feel bad, wrong or guilty;
- 9) the less we judge ourselves;
- 10) the less we think our needs and feelings are wrong;
- 11) the more we believe in ourselves, in our abilities and means of power;
- 12) the more we develop our means of power;
- 13) the more we use our means of power, and they don't go out of use.

1.2. Not letting ourselves assume the Major-position :

The more Inner Strength we have:

- 1) the less we abuse our means of power by exercising power over others;
- 2) the better we are able to listen to others and to develop empathy;

¹ To read more about these systems, models and tools : see Patfoort, Pat. *Uprooting Violence, Building Nonviolence*. Freeport, ME, USA : Cobblesmith, 1995; and, Patfoort, Pat. *I want, you don't want. Nonviolence Education*. Freeport, ME, USA : Cobblesmith, 2001.

- 3) the more we are able to accept others as they are, with their needs, emotions, values, habits, objectives and interests (their “foundations”);
- 4) the more we are able to regard the foundations of others as legitimate rather than as wrong, stupid, ridiculous, abnormal, sickly, insane; that means : the more we are able not to transform the “foundations” of others into *negative arguments*;
- 5) the more inclined we are not to use our foundations to persuade, dominate, overpower others so as to be the one who is right or normal while the other is wrong or abnormal; that means : the more we are able not to transform our “foundations” into *positive arguments*;
- 6) the less likely we are to use the destructive approach of calling our opposite ugly, stupid, dirty, lazy, impolite, uncivilized, and the like; that means : the less we use *destructive arguments*;
- 7) the less we need to threaten or to punish.

2. How do we build Inner Strength ?

1. Thinking and talking less negatively about others and ourselves.
2. Becoming conscious of times when we consider others as inferior to ourselves, and striving not to do it anymore.
3. Not passing judgment about people we find difficult.
4. Expressing difficulties we have with others in a constructive or encouraging way rather than in a destructive or discouraging way.
5. Discovering our own abilities and talents, not only the ones that are traditionally regarded favourably, but also others that are not so well-known.
6. Convincing ourselves we have those abilities and talents, if necessary constantly reminding it to ourselves, using multiple creative ways.
7. Giving as much positive affirmation as we can, to ourselves and to others, so we help others build their self-confidence and positive self-images as we build our own.
8. Admitting when we don't know something or that we made a mistake.
9. Becoming conscious of and accepting our own needs and feelings, and not judging them or being ashamed of them.
10. Admitting when we feel put in a minor-position.
11. Expressing our “foundations” (needs, feelings, values) in a solid and self-confident way, but without trying to get the other party to agree with us.
12. Working consciously on standing up for ourselves without harming others.
13. Discovering our means of power.
14. With the support of our conscience, transforming our ways to deal with our power, so we use it but don't misuse it.
15. Actively observing when others feel abused or attacked, then offering help in the form of creative solutions that harm no one.
16. Listening to others instead of talking and trying to convince them.
17. Listening to others when they feel hurt by us, and disconnecting this from any negative criticism or judgment about ourselves
18. Developing creativity in communication, positive affirmation and solutions.
19. Opening ourselves in and experiencing consciously situations in which our “truth” coexists with the “truth” of others.
20. Being open to the thoughts and “truths” of others.

21. Asking others how they feel in our company and listening to their answers, so that afterwards if need be we can change our behaviour to show more respect for others.
22. Evaluating our past actions and reactions, so as to make any needed concrete changes in our attitudes.
23. Working consciously on following our conscience even in situations where we may be criticised, laughed at, or even excluded.
24. Acknowledging and apologizing for situations where we modified our behavior towards others because of the presence of some other party.
25. Taking breaks instead of keeping on rushing and trying to finish everything as quickly as possible.
26. Taking time to discuss our path towards Inner Strength with like-minded people or groups.
27. Practicing conscious and quiet breathing.
28. Practicing periods of silence.
29. Practicing physical exercises of balance.
30. Regularly taking times out for meditation/prayer to digest difficult items and to think of how to change things very concretely.
31. Planning steps to build our evolution in the future.
32. Giving ourselves the necessary time to evolve and not feel guilty for making mistakes and not being perfectly strong yet.

3. How do we stimulate Inner Strength in raising children ?

The easiest and most solid way to build Inner Strength is by starting it as early as possible, that is, during childhood. That means that adults surrounding children –parents, grandparents, family-members, friends, teachers- can have a very important role in how much Inner Strength these children will be building, thus how strong they will be in the future as adults, and how much they will be able to build nonviolence and peace in the world.

Adults can help Inner Strength develop and grow in children, by acting in the following ways:

1. Giving space to children to express their needs and emotions, and to act following those.
2. Listening to children, to their thoughts and feelings, to their remarks, to their wisdom and advice; taking account with them and learning from them.
3. Asking questions to children –real questions, not reproaching ones, cf. the intonation-, and listening and being open to their answers.
4. Showing interest in what they do and who they are, and taking time for it.
5. Giving positive affirmation, not only for qualities and talents which are traditionally regarded favourably, and not only for qualities and talents we have a weakness for, but also others.
6. Being open and discovering creatively all possible qualities and talents of children, and expressing openly, honestly and clearly our appreciation for them.
7. Taking time to give positive affirmation to children in a creative way, and enjoying doing it.
8. Not comparing one child with other children or with other people, saying that these others are “better.”
9. Not judging or labelling children as “wrong”, “bad”, “ugly”, “stupid”.
10. When needing to express a difficult feeling we have towards a child, using “I”-messages instead of “you”-messages.

11. When we want to change some of their behaviours, emphasizing situations when they act as we would like it (encouragement) instead of situations when they don't act as we would like it (discouragement).
12. Not telling children what will happen to them but what could happen to them.
13. Letting children take risks, even with some pain or sorrow for themselves as a consequence; and showing empathy and care for their pain or sorrow.
14. Showing appreciation when children defend themselves.
15. When they defend themselves in an aggressive way, appreciating the fact they defend themselves before discussing the way they did it; accepting their anger.
16. When they defend themselves in an aggressive way, making them think about it, not by being angry at them or by punishing them, but by helping them understand and accept how their aggressive behaviour caused pain and suffering for others.
17. Together with them looking for and trying out creative ways of defending oneself without harming others; discussing this freely without telling them how they should act or what would be the best way to act.
18. Together with children looking for models of defending oneself without harming others and for nonviolent heroes in literature, videos, video-games.
19. Modelling attitudes and reactions of standing up for oneself and for others without harming anyone.
20. Not appropriating attitudes and behaviours of children who are following our examples, and not expressing such thoughts of appropriation.
21. Admitting when we don't know something, when we made a mistake, when we think a child was right and we were wrong.
22. Supporting children in discovering who they are and in finding their own capacities and means of power.

4. What does Inner Strength produce ?

It will empower us, so we can

1. show humility;
2. accept and admit we don't know some answers, some solutions, even if people expect them from us;
3. not appropriate ideas or behaviours of others which we think have been influenced by our own ideas and behaviours; not express such appropriations;
4. admit someone felt hurt by us –that means : felt put in a minor-position by us- without feeling accused or guilty; listen to the other one expressing his or her pain;
5. apologize when we unconsciously put ourselves in a Major-position, or when we did it because we lost our temper ²;
6. respect and appreciate self-defence when used toward us, even by children;
7. be conscious of and accept our emotions, even worries and fears;
8. express our emotions rather than suppress them;
9. express our needs and feelings without being afraid to be criticised or judged;
10. control our emotions, like anger and rage, so we express them in a way that does not hurt others;
11. not act in a different way because of the presence of certain people;
12. be honest and consistent;

² So : apologize is not a weakness, but a strength.

13. take care of how we communicate with words, intonation, gestures, facial expression, and how we respond to the context (the setting, the presence of a third person);
14. wait for the right time and place to communicate;
15. open ourselves to the thoughts, needs, emotions, values, habits, objectives and interests of others –their “foundations”-; listen, accept and not judge others; tune in to all the ways others are communicating;
16. give space to others, accept them as they are, to avoid putting and pushing them down in our thoughts as well as in our behaviour;
17. ask questions instead of telling people what to do and how to do it;
18. listen to explanations or foundations of others without having the feeling they gloze over or prevaricate;
19. be able to be “multi-partial” as a third party in mediation;
20. accept that even when we are convinced of our rightness, someone else can just be as certain of his; that we can have our truth while someone else has an equally valid one; regard our own “truth” as one among many;
21. reconsider our strongly held views;
22. accept that when people don’t do what we expect from them, they have foundations for what they do;
23. act according to our conscience rather than following what others expect from us, not being afraid of being criticized or punished;
24. take risks when we consciously choose them;
25. follow instructions and obey when our conscience agrees about who and what to obey;
26. not do just the contrary of what is expected from us, because it has been asked in a Major-way;
27. not feel personally abused or attacked when someone puts him- or herself in a Major-position in front of us –so not feel put in a minor-position-, but instead situate the other person in his or her context of having been put down by us or by ;
28. not feel criticized or destroyed when others express their feelings and emotions in an aggressive or abusive way; be able to listen to these emotions;
29. not automatically feel the looser –in a minor-position- when we are not the winner –in a Major-position;
30. when we feel abused or attacked, not allow ourselves to be led astray in the escalation and not reproduce the aggressive behaviour towards someone else, but instead object and defend ourselves in a nonviolent way;
31. discover and develop our means of power;
32. use our power, not misuse or abuse it;
33. develop more creativity;
34. take the necessary time for the process of Equivalent or nonviolent conflict management, for breaks, for reflection, for absorption of the foundations of others, for meditation about those foundations, for “sleeping” on them, for developing creativity, for getting to a real solution (one which satisfies all needs of all parties);
35. behave in an nonviolent Equivalent way –and maintain this behaviour- from one’s own side even when the other party doesn’t;
36. not hate anymore;
37. forgive;
38. act more in solidarity;

39. not consider facts and problems in a narrow, self-centred way, but with a wider perspective as part of a relationship, a social group, a society;
 40. develop trust in others;
 41. feel self-confident;
 42. develop peace of mind;
 43. really and deeply influence others;
 44. have real and deep authority;
 45. smile and laugh more from deep inside of us, enjoy life more, be more content;
 46. radiate Equivalency to others : the natural reciprocity of social relations is brought into play.
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[Paper presented at the 19th General Conference of the International Peace Research Association (in the Nonviolence Commission), on the theme of “Globalisation, Governance & Social Justice” at the Kyung Hee University, Suwon, Korea, 1-5 July, 2002]