

Positive Thinking

(Assembly Sharing on 8th January, 2014)

Today I would like to share a true story. It is related to one of our major concerns but again I would reveal which major concern I'd like to illustrate after I've completed the story.

Many years ago, Northern Ireland was still plagued by serious violence by two opposing camps: the Unionists who wanted it to remain part of Britain and the Nationalists who wanted it to be separated from Britain and join Ireland to become a united Ireland. Terrorist methods were often employed by both sides. One day, a father brought along his daughter to purchase some daily necessities. While the father was buying the required stuff in a shop, the girl went outside to play. When the father realized this and was about to chase after the girl, he heard a big explosion. His beautiful daughter was killed by a bomb planted by one of the camps.

Now let us pause for a while and think about the following:

If you were the father of this girl:

- a) How would you feel?
- b) What would you be thinking?
- c) What would you do after your daughter is buried?
- c) What would become of you as a result?

I think you will certainly feel great pain for the loss of the girl. But what do you think about the incident? Based on what you think, would you take up arms and revenge for your loss? Would the rest of your life become meaningless, empty because the sun has disappeared from your life? Or would you do something different?

Let me tell you how this father reacted to the incident:

Understandably, he was heartbroken. It was like the end of the world. And every time he walked pass his daughter's room; he was reminded of the pain. This was how he felt. But what did he do?

After some thought, he decided to turn his daughter's room into a memorial for the many innocent people who had been killed by either side in the conflict. He held exhibitions in his daughter's room to show visitors facts figures, photos, artifacts related to the terrible loss to human life.

He would not be able to bring his daughter back, but his life (and his daughter's death) took on a new meaning, that of promoting reconciliation and peace in Northern Ireland.

Through this story, I would like to explore the major concern of "positive thinking".

Let me share three of my reflections of this story in relation to positive thinking.

Firstly, there are always two elements to the meaning of any incident: the first element is the objective fact – here, it is the killing of the daughter. But the second element is the subjective response in terms of how we feel and what we think about the incident. The meaning of any incident is the combination of the objective fact (which is same for everybody and is undeniable) AND our subjective response (which can differ from one person to another). A girl is killed and this is an immutable fact. However, the father has some choice on how he responds to it. I think he won't have a choice NOT to feel deep sorrow. However, the father could choose to carry out revenge and perpetuate the violence - this is negative thinking. Alternatively, he could choose to make the best use of the tragedy to end violence and bring peace - this is positive thinking.

Secondly, positive thinking is not the same as simply denying one's true feelings. The father did not tell himself that he can still be happy even though his daughter is dead. This is self-delusion - cheating oneself. Quite the opposite, he acknowledged and accepted the pain brought on by the tragedy, AND BECAUSE it is so painful, there is an urgent need to end violence. In a way, he transcended (rose above) the pain.

Thirdly, positive thinking is forward looking and constructive. What has happened cannot be changed so there is no use to be fixated on the past. However, the future is not yet determined. It is moldable. If we choose to be positive and constructive, we can help shape the future and contribute to a better tomorrow. That is the power of positive thinking.

To conclude my sharing on “positive thinking”, remember that whenever you are faced with a certain situation, ask yourself the following four questions:

- (a) How do you feel?**
- (b) What do you think?**
- (c) What would you do?**
- (d) And what would this incident mean to you, based on your feeling, your thinking and your action?**