

The Principle of Action and Reaction

“When you force something toward an end, you produce the contrary”



This **Principle** explains that all things and people have their own characteristic behavior, and that they will resist or facilitate our projects, depending on how we act. When we are moved by irrational impulses and pressure something against its own behavior, we will find that although initially it may yield to our demands, sooner or later consequences will return that are different from those we wanted to achieve.

Human beings are forgers of events, they define directions for things, they plan and carry out projects. That is, they aim toward goals. But the important question is: How should we move toward these goals? Suppose a problem comes

up; how can we make the other person understand the way to solve it? Do we use violence or do we use persuasion? If we use violence, sooner or later there will be a reaction. If we use persuasion, sooner or later our strengths will add together.

Many people think “the ends justify the means,” and they tend to force everything around them. And they may often achieve successful results. But if they do this, difficulties will surely follow. They achieve their goal, but they will not be able to maintain it for long.

The Principle refers to two different situations. In one situation, the goal is reached but the consequences are opposite to what was hoped for. In the other case, because of forcing the situation, a negative “rebound” is produced. We will illustrate one of these cases with a legend and the other with a teaching.

Let us first see the legend:

Old Silenus was a satyr, half goat and half man, who wisely counseled Dionysius, the god of wine. His spirit was profound and wise, but was hidden beneath a grotesque appearance.

Because of his looks, one day some peasants captured him while he was sleeping. Proud of their catch, they brought Silenus bound in chains before the king whose name was Midas.

Midas recognized the nature of the satyr. After freeing him, he held great feasts in his honor and paid great homage, begging him to forgive the peasants for the confusion they had produced. The wise Silenus did this and furthermore wanted to reward the pious spirit of the king.

“Ask what you want, and I will grant it to you,” said Silenus. “But be reasonable since what I give cannot be taken back later.”

So, Midas asked the satyr for what he had wanted all of his life. He asked that all he touches be converted into gold, explaining himself in this way: “My kingdom is poor but its people are good and united. If I were rich, the happiness would end all effort and all privation. The whole kingdom would be benefited by the gift of its beloved king.”

Silenus granted Midas’ wish and disappeared.

Immediately, the robes which were in contact with the body of the king were converted into gold. So Midas began to run through his domains and to convert into gold the houses of the peasants, its reservoirs, its crops and its animals, to the astonishment and gratitude of everyone.

But returning to the palace that night, a pitiful clamor rose towards him. The subjects arrived with growing complaints.

“I cannot milk my goats of gold!” said one, “and my family will be left without milk and without meat”

“The crops will not yield fruit!” cried others.

Thus, all types of lamentations were presented to the king. Midas, meditating on the solutions to the problems, poured wine and brought fruits and food to his mouth. All were then turned into gold and there wasn’t any liquid or food he could swallow.

In this situation, his wife went to comfort him, fondling him, but immediately she was converted into the most beautiful golden statue.

Midas became penitent invoking Dionysius to break the sorcery of Silenus. The kind god returned everything to its original state.

The gold faded the goats returned to being goats, and the reservoirs held their water; the crops moved to the wind and the wife of the king emerged from her golden sleep. Then, Midas could eat and drink, so he gave thanks to the god with his people for having granted them poverty.

Let us see how the teaching relates to the “rebound of the action.”

Buddha said, “If a man wrongs me I shall repay him with my affection; the more wrong he does to me, the more goodness will come out of me; the perfume of goodness always reaches me and the sad air of evil goes towards him.”

An insensitive man insulted Buddha who then asked him: “If a man re-jects a gift given to him, to whom it shall belong?” And the other replied: “In this case, it will belong to him who offered it.”

“Good,” replied Buddha, “You have mocked me, but I refuse the gift and I pray you to keep it for yourself. Will this not be a source of misery for you?” The imposter did not answer and Buddha continued, “A perverse man who offends a virtuous one is like one who looks at the sky and spits at it; the saliva does not dirty the sky but rather returns and stains this person.”

“The slanderer is like one who hurls earth at another, when the wind is against him; the earth only goes back to him who hurls it, and he wished to achieve something which is not for him obtains that which is for him.”