

SEVEN STEPS TO OVERCOME OPPOSITIONS

Fr. Varghese Paul, SJ

From Gandhiji and Jesus to the last man on street, that is to say, everyone faces opposition in his/her life. Opposition is part and parcel of our human lives. The opposition can be personal, emotional, intellectual, economical or spiritual. The opposition can also be against authority and power, against position and religion or against personally held opinions and beliefs. Whatever be the nature of opposition, every one experiences it.

But the method of facing and solving the opposition may be different from person to person. Everyone handles opposition in his/her own way. Some persons are so much defeated by opposition that they submit to their opponents without any resistance like a lamb led to slaughter. Some people resist opposition blindly. Still some others in the face of opposition just ignore it like the ostrich which buries its head in the sand. Still some others believe that they are the victims of persecution and live with it.

As we see, all people face opposition in one way or other. We can recognize people from the way they handle opposition. We can recognize the personality, the character and the culture of a person from the way he/she handles opposition. When we analyze the way a person handles opposition we can know his/her difficulties, problems and ignorance. Many people do not know how to handle opposition properly and consequently experience needless problems, pain and difficulties.

I have learnt a number of lessons from oppositions and the consequent problems and difficulties caused by them. From my personal experiences and from the lessons which I have learnt, I have reached a number of conclusions. On the basis of those conclusions I elaborate here seven steps to handle opposition properly and adequately.

First, accept the reality of opposition. Opposition cannot be wished away just by neglecting or ignoring it. The first step to handle opposition is to acknowledge that there is opposition. Even if you do not like the opposition, you can solve it by facing it squarely and accepting the reality of the opposition.

Some people feel small in accepting the fact that there is opposition. But the responsibility for the fact of opposition does not belong solely to one party facing the opposition but both the concerned parties. Some people know it and so those, who oppose, often want their self identity hidden and secret. Jesus never ran away from opposition but Jesus was firm in facing up to his opponents and detractors as we will see later.

Two, understanding the core of opposition. If we want to face an opposition, we need to know well the source and everything related to the opposition. If we understand well everything about the opposition, then we can take appropriate steps to overcome them. Often the people who oppose speak all sorts of things but do not reveal the real reason for their opposition.

Recently two writers opposed an editor. They spoke against the editorial policy of the editor.

They spoke about the caste of the editor. They spoke against the attitude and behaviour of the editor. All those matters were clarified and cleared and still the opposition continued. Why? The real cause of their opposition was that the editor did not publish their articles because he did not find their articles up to the mark. If this core fact was revealed, then steps could have been taken to rewrite and improve the articles; and the unpleasant and needless opposition could have been avoided. Hence, it is important we examine all aspects of opposition and discover the core issue.

Third, recognize your opponent. People oppose you for a variety of reasons. But it is very important to know who is opposing you and the basic cause for the opposition. If the circumstances permit you, it is good to meet personally the opponent and dialogue with the person to know him/her deeply and delve into the basic cause of the opposition.

But the circumstances do not often favour such meeting and dialogue. In such situation you can try to meet the persons who are in close contact with the opponent and find about the opponent and his/her reasons for the opposition. When you know the opponent well from one way or other you will be in a situation to handle the opposition and you can decide what steps to take to solve the problem of opposition.

All the people who oppose you are not your enemies. We are also formed in the way we handle opponents. Facing opposition can make us strong and alert and if needed, correct our ways.

Fourth, do not take opposition personally. Some people become upset because there are oppositions to them out there. So even if there is no substance in the opposition, they lose their sleep; they worry a lot even to the point of spoiling their health and inner peace. Often the opponents want only to harass you and make you worry.

There is absolutely no need to take opposition personally. For instance, a mother-in-law due to force of habit, keep complaining even in small matters against the daughter-in-law. But without ignoring the mother-in-law, if the daughter-in-law takes the complaining as part of life without tit for tat, the mother-in-law in the long run will appreciate the understanding daughter-in-law and will begin to appreciate her.

Five, evaluating the opposition. It is necessary to evaluate opposition before taking any concrete step. We should not be blind to opposition of the opponent. There may be both good and bad aspects to opposition. So after examining and evaluating every aspect we discard the bad aspects and accept the good aspects. Many times a person opposes you to call attention to himself/herself or to make a point like that he/she is not getting the respect or appreciation, which according to him is his due. Sometimes, the opposition may be due to ignorance and prejudice. Take such opposition as a challenge to tell the truth and remove the ignorance and prejudice.

In evaluating the opposition those who know well the opponents, and your friends who sincerely wish your good, can be helpful. Discussing and exchanging views of those people can help you to discover the truth behind the opposition and also the good and the bad aspects of the opposition.

Sixth, decide on concrete steps to respond adequately to the opposition. After recognizing the

identify and the purpose of the opponent as well as the various aspects of the opposition, it is easy to decide on concrete steps against the opposition. The first step is to recognize the opponent and his/her opposition. The opponent may even withdraw the opposition when he/she sees that due attention is paid to him/her. Ignoring or neglecting the opponent and the opposition he/she may be irritated and the situation may lead bad to worse.

Before deciding to take appropriate steps to handle the opposition we need to take two things into account. First, we should not make any decision with a sense of revenge and anger. Revenge and anger make a person blind to realities which may lead you to a worse situation than opposition! A Chinese proverb says that a person going to take revenge in anger should dig two graves: One for the enemy and the other for himself/herself. Second, one should not get agitated on the face of opposition. Often the opponent wants you to get agitated and loose your temper. In loosing temper a person loses his/her balance of mind and the thinking power and may make irrational decisions.

On deciding on appropriate steps to handle the opponent you need to make sure that the steps are very effective and appropriate. If you threaten the opponent with some concrete steps, then, you should make sure that you are able to carry out the thread effectively. Empty threads have no meaning. Empty threats expose your weaknesses and make you a laughing stock!

Seventh, carrying out the decision to take concrete steps. In taking specific steps to handle the opposition we need to be aware of a few things. First, our steps should promote values like love, forgiveness, peace and compassion. Second, the steps should be based on Justice and morality. Unjust steps can create problems than solving the opposition. Pope John Paul II went to prison and forgave the terrorist Mohamed Ali Agakhan who fired at and wounded him grievously. He forgave him with love and compassion, but the Pope did not interfere with the justice system.

A third thing to make sure is that the opposition should not deviate us from our chosen path. In spite of opposition we should stay and progress on our path. In 1878 the British parliament made fun of Thomas Edison's invention of electricity and renounced it as unscientific. But Edison did not allow such ridiculing to affect him and he continued steadfastly on the path of his choice. His determined efforts led him to great success.

There may be something good in every opposition. So discover that something and do appreciate it. Opposition need to lead us to self examination. It is also an opportunity to see oneself through the eyes of others. Often the opposition may be due to different points of view. A well known writer in English, Oscar Wilde has a much quoted observation: "Two prisoners looked out through their prison windows. One saw mud outside and the other stars."

We should not withdraw into ourselves or run away from opposition. We do not turn back because there is stiff climp or other obstacles on our path. We go ahead because we know that on our chosen path lie success and victory and the self satisfaction of achieving our goals.

During the American independence battle at Gettysburg about 50,000 soldiers either died or were wounded. Afterwards in the dedication ceremony of Gettysburg cemetery on November 19, 1863 President Abraham Lincoln gave a speech which was described by the media like "Chicago

Times” as a useless and meaningless talk. But today the world claims it as one of the immortal speeches of the world literature!

Faced with contempt, disapproval, neglect, disrespect and accusation if Lincoln had withdrawn from public life and opposition, he would not have become the President of USA. He achieved freedom for slaves and prohibited slavery in USA. Today Lincoln is considered a great statesman of the world. The attitude of Jesus Christ in facing opposition and opponent is ideal for us. Once Jesus said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea”. But the disciples objected. “Teacher, just a short time ago the people there wanted to stone you; and are you planning to go back?” (John 11, 7-8). Jesus unflinchingly went on his path in spite of threat to his life!

Once some Pharisees said to Jesus, “You must get out of here and go some where else, because Herod wants to kill you” (Luke 13, 31). Jesus did not ran away from there but he said fearlessly, “Go and tell that fox: “I am driving out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I shall finish my work” (Luke 13, 32). Jesus was fearless as ever.

Towards the end of his public ministry Jesus entered Temple at Jerusalem in a victorious procession. Then, “The chief priests, the teachers of the Law, and the leaders of the people wanted to kill him.” But Jesus in spite of opposition of most powerful people of his time continued his mission. Luke has noted, “Every day Jesus taught in the Temple” (Lk 19, 47).

Evangelist John has a remarkable saying about Jesus, “He came to his own country, but his own people did not receive him” (Jn 1, 11). Jesus squarely faced opposition during his whole public life. In the end his enemies hanged him on a Cross. What was his response? Hanging on the Cross Jesus said, “Forgive them Father! They don’t know what they are doing” (Lk 23, 34).

Last Change : 16-05-2016
Next Change : 01-06-2016
Copyright Fr. Varghese Paul, SJ 2016