

[Note: This write-up is almost identical to the supergoodness material in the World-Changing section of GroupGenie.Org.]

Supergoodness and the Surgeon's Attitude

Summary: Most people seem to have a static definition of what it means to be a good person. A higher, more dynamic standard might produce more engagement and zeal, saving more lives and alleviating much more suffering. "Supergoodness" is an improved definition of what it means to be a good person. It means to want to learn how to do *more* good, and to regularly apply the learning to your life. In other words, people wouldn't just do the kinds of actions their parents and religious teachers taught them when they were growing up. Instead the quality and impact of the actions they did would regularly increase, because they would be learning and applying better methods.

Supergoodness

Imagine that a surgeon is taught some improved medical procedure that will save many more lives. Now suppose that at the end of the training the surgeon says: "Even though I understand why these new procedures are more effective, I'm more comfortable with the old way of operating. Besides, I enjoy doing things the old way—it's become my *style!*" Obviously, this would be an unprofessional attitude for the surgeon to take. In fact, it might even cause him to lose his license if a patient died. But while such an attitude is unthinkable in a surgeon, it is quite common in people who decide to do good. Most people prefer to do a good deed that they are comfortable with, rather than learn to do an unfamiliar yet strategic action that can produce more good.

Now imagine that some people take the attitude of surgeons. They would then ask themselves and each other, what the best, most loving actions would be. With mutual support, reflection, study and practice, they would choose actions that alleviate great suffering and save lives rather than other good actions. While medical surgeons take about eight years to learn to save lives, people who adopt a surgeon's attitude can begin to save lives and reduce suffering in a matter of months, not years.

"Supergoodness" means taking on something like a surgeon's attitude. It means thinking strategically. It also means regular action and regular study—ongoing learning to do *more* good. Most people who do good do the traditional kinds of good actions they are taught when they are young, or they do the good actions that are popularized through the media. Most people don't ask themselves the question, "What is the best, most loving action I could do?" Thinking about that question and answering it with action would be what we are calling 'supergoodness. If you want to practice and maintain this attitude you should probably join a group of others who wished to practice this attitude. Regular

ongoing support, even if it with one other person by phone, is probably essential to optimum action.

Supergoodness is to have the seriousness and focus of surgeons who know that lives depend on the quality of their work. Perhaps there are five parts of the attitude:

a. Commitment to the best methods. A surgeon would never be considered competent if he or she used less than the best methods.

b. Passion. Good surgeons are not totally detached and cold. The spirit of supergoodness is to “Act as if your child’s life was on the line, and not someone else’s.—*your* Molly, *your* Jason, *your* Kizito, *your* Prajhi, *your* Ling. Act as if you can see their faces.”

c. Reasonable stretches. We make reasonable stretches, not “kamikaze” stretches. “Make reasonable stretches” is a useful slogan to bear in mind. Do your level best.

d. Conscious effort. In some of our superprograms we ask for conscious effort for five hours per week, but we expect that the spirit of doing the best, most loving things will pervade the rest of your life.

e. Commitment to ongoing learning. Just as a medical surgeon must keep learning, we need to keep learning because our global and personal situations keep changing.

Are You a Good Person?

I think that if most people were asked for an informal definition of what a good person was, they'd probably say that a good person is someone who regularly does good deeds – actions to help others – and/or is kind and considerate. But I think that many people who do good were brought up that way by their parents, with some help from their ministers and teachers. I also think that many kind people were just born with a gentler disposition.

My definition of a really good person is someone who is willing to learn how to do *more* good. According to this definition, people who are not interested in learning how to do more good would *not* be considered really good people, no matter how much good they currently do.

I defend my definition by saying that people who are too proud of their efforts or methods, or too caught up in their projects, are like surgeons who are not interested in the best, most up-to-date techniques. My way of looking at things is my opinion. I know it may anger people who want to be thought of as good, since it might threaten their self-esteem. I prefer not to use the word good at all since it has religious and philosophical connotations, I like the concept of supergoodness as being a higher goodness, not in the religious or philosophical sense, but in terms of likely results. If I were one of the many people facing hardship in this world, I would prefer that people be supergood because it

would be more likely that I or my children would experience a release from suffering, oppression or the threat of death.

Two Criticisms of these Ideas

(1) Someone may want to dismiss supergoodness as an idea that's already more or less contained in the phrase "best practices." Someone who is asking or seeking the current best practices probably is at the moment being supergood, but supergoodness seems to be much more than best practices. — Perhaps it's an ethos, an attitude toward life and toward others.

(2) Someone might want to dismiss supergoodness, saying that the Christian language of "loving with all your heart, mind and strength" is stronger, better and more forceful. That may be true, and therefore that Christian appeal might produce something equivalent to supergoodness. Over time, however, any formulation of words gradually loses its power through repetition. So Christians and others might see supergoodness as a fresh formulation, one that might produce renewed zeal in some people. It's also a nonreligious formula, and so it may inspire many people who would reject religious language.

Status: Supergoodness and related teaching stories are being added to this website in the Goodness section.

Plans and Needs: The supergoodness attitude can be promoted through well-produced videos.

Potential Impact: More good would be done. Much more suffering would be alleviated.

"Past a certain point, loving is a learning experience, and learning is a loving experience." — Tim Cimino