

Rising violence, falling compassion

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Increasing harshness and negativity in our behaviour is cause for concern.

In today's liberal world we regard ourselves as autonomous individuals. It is hard to envisage a time when so many people enjoyed comparable freedom. Yet the very exercise of freedom in the service of greed, aggression and fear has led to the breakdown of community, perpetuation of tyranny, injustice and inequalities, and of course, sexual misconduct.



What is the origin of such contemptible behaviour? Without doubt it is the escalation of violence in the way we live our life, complete absence of compassion and the harsh use of language when we speak to each other.

Typically, when we see a friend or an acquaintance after a gap of time and we notice that he/she has lost weight, we tell the individual "You are probably not eating well?" instead of saying "You have lost weight and are looking well!" Thus the very manner in which we address the individual embodies harshness and discount.

Marshall Rosenberg, an exponent of 'Non-Violent Communication', says that much of our life is circumscribed by employing judging language and tone, operating as we do from assumptions, thus seeking to manipulate one another, and finally demanding expected behaviour. What we do not do is state concern or intent, reflect the value we feel for the other and thus communicate our compassion.

When we operate from judgment we become reactive and life-reducing. But when we operate from positive intent, we demonstrate responsiveness and enrich life.

We resort to life-reducing, harsh and reactive ways for some of the following reasons:

Lack of appreciation of self: Much of our growing years are consumed by comparisons, hurt that we absorb through relating and anguish that we experience through rejection. Thus we slowly but surely begin to lose an appreciation of

ourselves. Ironically, as children we were imbued with positivity and a 'can do' attitude. Take the example of a child of three or four who attempts to learn to ride a bicycle, falls off now and again, but doesn't give up, because the child thinks 'I can'. This is lost in youth as one trudges through life painfully, marginalised and discounted. We then spend large sums of money going to seminars that infuse our 'lost' positivism. The absence of appreciation of self results in lack of respect for self, which is played out in the way we relate to others.

Lack of unconditional acceptance of self: When an infant, either your own or a relative's, seeks to hug you with joy, you respond instinctively to the affection, even if the child is unclean. Yet when this infant, now grown, approaches to hug you, even though with affection but with unclean clothes, you're likely to chastise him. The difference between hugging the infant and not the adult comes from our conditional acceptance of the latter. In effect, since we do not accept ourselves unconditionally, we do not accept the other and thus pass judgement easily.

Celebration of poverty: Much of our life is lived in denial and through repression. We are told to learn to live with little and thus rejoice in spite of lack. We therefore do not cherish our abundance and thus expect others to also live in poverty. Children are often told by their parents who have been brought up in limited wealth that they must be judicious and 'careful.' What they are saying is actually, "I have suffered, so should you."

Lack of feeling secure in self: Many of us tend to second guess ourselves, doubt our competence and thus undermine who we are. Possessing such attitude, we invariably project it on others, maintaining contact through demand and coercion.

Lack of tolerance to ambiguity: The tendency to focus on 'what may go wrong' and not on 'what may go right' results in our transferring this anxiety onto people we deal with and, therefore, we demand predictable behaviour. As we cannot cope with uncertainty we subjugate others to our intolerance and restlessness.

The resultant behaviour, owing to some or all of the above inadequacies in us, forces us to engage with harshness, violence and victimisation.

Finally, understanding that our reactive, violent and non-compassionate ways of relating come from lack of self-acceptance, perpetuation of self-hatred and denial of our abundance will help us transcend our self-imposed limitations.

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