

Module 5

Practicing Nonviolent Communication in our Daily Lives

Friends,

So far in the previous modules, we discussed on what is nonviolent communication and its elements. We are sure by now you have been able to grasp on what exactly is nonviolent communication.

Here in this module we will discuss on how you can become a NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATOR. Here we discuss the different ways we can use nonviolent communication in our daily lives and the difference it would make. In fact, it is not enough to understand what nonviolent communication is and why it is needed to be practiced. The key challenge for all of us, to ensure a harmonious co-existence, is on how to practically use the strategies of nonviolent communication in different situations. It also entails how we will use it in our relationships, whether in our families, amongst friends, in our institutions or in the society at large. The challenge is also on how deftly we will use the strategies of nonviolence communication even in trying situations or in disputes. It is also important to reflect on how we as individuals or groups contribute towards a nonviolent communication ecosystem in families, institutions and societies. Let's try to discuss all these ideas in this module so that we can use all that we have grasped in actual practical situations.

While we are going through this module, we would suggest that you constantly reflect on different situations that you might have been and the difference it would have made if you had used the strategies of nonviolent communication.

A) Adhering to Five Pillars of Gandhian Nonviolence:

As mentioned in Module 2, if you adhere to the five pillars of Gandhian nonviolence – respect for all including nature and all other living beings, understanding, acceptance, positive appreciation and compassion, you are likely to avoid many disputes that comes in your way and promote positivity in your lives. Even if there are differences, you are likely to handle these constructively.

Several times during workshops, students question that it is difficult to adhere to Gandhian principles. When these five pillars of nonviolence are explained, then there is realization that it is not very complicated to follow the Gandhian principles.

If the five pillars are introduced to students' right from a young age, they would evolve as more positive human beings.

B) Managing our negative communication

Negative thoughts prevent us from being focussed. It is unhealthy communication. It is disruptive and drains our energy. We have seen in Module 3 on the effects of destructive self-talk and inner dialogue. Also what happens that when we get entrapped in negative thoughts is we start becoming judgemental. We start making comparisons of ourselves with others. So what we do when we are engulfed in such negative inner communication?

Let's recollect the elements of nonviolent communication. One of them was avoidance of moralistic judgements. This applies to us too. We should stop the practice of unnecessary comparisons of our lives with others'. It breeds dissatisfaction. Instead of looking at negatives in a person, ourselves or even in a situation, we should practice to see the positive.

Also we get over with the habit of frequent negative evaluation. If we are having negative thoughts, we should try and evaluate it. We should of a situation if our friend would have come up with similar negative thoughts and how we had reacted and motivated him/her. In a similar way, try to bring positivity in your self-talk.

An important element of nonviolent communication that helps us counter negative thoughts is the practice of expressing gratitude. The more we practice gratitude, the more positive energy we would generate.

C) Managing your negative and disruptive emotions:

As a nonviolent communicator, you would be able to handle and manage your negative and disruptive emotions constructively which will help you to harness positive energy. As we practice nonviolent communication, we will get attuned understand the situations and conditions which were the cause of our negative emotions.

Swami Vivekananda had rightly said: *Each time we control hatred or feeling of anger, it is so much good energy stored up in our favour; that piece of energy will be converted into the higher powers.*

D) Anger Management:

Anger is a negative emotion which affects all of us. The challenge before all of us is how to handle anger effectively. Each one of us is likely to get angry at different points of our lives. For reasons or no reasons, we might end up being angry.

On the issue of controlling one's anger, in 'Young India' (October 1, 1931), Gandhi wrote, "It is not that I am incapable of anger, for instance; but I succeed almost on all occasions to keep my feelings under control."

While as Gandhi says channelizing our anger wisely could be used for the good of the humanity, more than often we tend to harm ourselves or others by getting angry. It could be both physically or emotional. When we are angry, we might become aggressive and rigid. We also may lose our sense of judgment and ability to solve problems.

Practicing nonviolent communication will help us being patient and handle our anger constructively. Also, when we are able to channelize our anger constructively, we will be avoiding stressful situations. In situations when we are angry, one of the best ways to deal with it would be to try and understand on what is that particular need of ours that is not met and was the trigger for our anger. Avoiding moralistic judgements in every sphere of our lives will help us control our anger.

Also most importantly when we are practice traits like empathy, compassion, kindness and gratitude, we are able to manage our anger constructively. Here it needs to be noted that apart from being compassionate and empathetic for others, it is important that we practice self-empathy and self-compassion.

Gandhi gave an innovative lesson in nonviolent communication to control our anger – daily writing an ANGER JOURNAL. An ‘anger journal’ will help us write the reasons on why we got angry on a particular occasion. In the anger journal we can write on who made us angry, what were the main reasons for us to get angry, when we were angry, where we were angry and why we were angry? This will help us locate the reasons and the possible solutions to get over with our anger.

E) Conflict Resolution:

The way we communicate is crucial to how we resolve conflicts, it is central to both preventions of conflicts and resolution of conflicts. If we look at conflicts, we will realize that the reason of most conflicts is the result of perceptions, stereotypes, moralistic judgements, attitudes and assumptions.

Now if we look at different nonviolent conflict resolution methods like collaboration, negotiation, mediation, promotion of dialogues and conciliation- all depend on effective communication strategies to succeed.

Also critical in conflict resolution is the ability to reframe from a negative perception to a positive perception. This will help to defuse negative and unhealthy communication behaviours.

It is here that the role of nonviolent communication as a powerful tool for resolution of conflicts comes into play. In different parts of our lives we may get into disputes with different people including our family members, friends, colleagues and others. When we make nonviolent communication part of our daily practice, it gives important tool to handle these disputes without getting aggressive. It will help us to reframe the negative perception of the dispute to a more positive perception.

Think of the different elements of nonviolent communication – use of appropriate and positive language, compassion, empathy, understanding other person’s issues at the needs level, flexibility, openness, and practicing active listening- all aid to resolution of conflicts.

Further if we look at the other elements of nonviolent communication such as avoidance of stereotypes, moralistic judgements, avoidance of evaluative language – all these are also important approaches to resolution of conflicts.

In fact, several studies point out on how becoming a nonviolent communication practitioner, you can expand your levels of empathy and efficiency in resolving conflicts.

As use of nonviolent communication not only enables us to deeply understand issues from other person's point of view, it also ingrain within us that the ultimate goal of any dispute should be to promote emotional bridge-building and strengthen relationships, we are likely to handle emotionally charged situation with greater maturity and dexterity.

F) Promoting Pro Social Behaviour

An important outcome of practicing nonviolent communication is the promotion of pro social behaviour. As nonviolent communication essentially helps in developing connections and emotional bridge building, using it as part of our daily habits will enable us to reach out to communities.

In fact, as promotion of volunteerism and service to others has always been a desired goal of our society, a nonviolent communicator will be better equipped to do volunteering. Not only s/he will be able to reach out to others, but also when we are empathetic and compassionate we are able to understand the concerns and sufferings of others. Several studies point out on the link between compassion and evolution of pro-social behaviour.

G) Overcoming Stress:

Just as healthy food and fresh air are important stress busters, healthy communication too is equally important stress buster. Nonviolent communication is nourishing.

Just reflect on what nonviolent communication is and its elements. You will realize that when we get attuned to make these parts of our habit, we will surely be able to minimize our stress. When you try to acquire positive energy by thinking and acting positively, you are likely to be happier and it will aid to your well-being.

Connecting with people and taking part in pro-social activities are important stress busters. As use of nonviolent communication, promotes our pro-social behaviour, it could also contribute to reducing our stress. Similarly, encouraging the habit of positive appreciation will help us generate positive energy.

H) Importance of engaging in dialogues and the significance of Nonviolent Communication

Senior Gandhian, Prof. N. Radhakrishnan in his dialogue with peace scholar, Daisaku Ikeda, argues, "Insufficient communication, trust and dialogue are major causes of the tremendous violence, crime, hatred and exploitation rife in modern society." This is definitely true, as we find the level of tolerance in

our society declining. We are getting less interested to engage in dialogues especially with those who may have differing views. For peaceful coexistence, dialogue is critical.

Captured in their book, “Walking with the Mahatma: Gandhi for Modern Times”, Radhakrishnan points out, “Dialogue is wanting today at all levels: among nations, groups and ethnic groups; among proponents of different religions groups; within families; between parents and children; and among friends. Lack of dialogue breeds a corresponding lack of mutual understanding at all levels. Gandhi believed there is no suffering that cannot be solved if people come together in one place for candid discussions.”

Responding to Radhakrishnan, Ikeda argues that ‘in order to change, we have to change people’s hearts and minds.’ “The only way to advance the movement for human revolution is sincere dialogue. The power of dialogue is the power of the spirit and the intellect,” he says.

Ikeda further notes, “Impartial dialogue is possible only when one is willing to look at things from the other person’s perspective. Dialogue is not possible if one disdains or discriminates against the other person. It is naturally engendered when one believes in, respects and reveres the worth inherent in the other person.”

Hence promoting meaningful dialogues is not only critically important, but also the need of the hour for social harmony and cohesion. Having elaborated the key elements of nonviolent communication, it can be stressed that it is central to the success of dialogues.

I) How nonviolent communication brings greater efficiency in teams

Differences and conflicts are bound to emerge in all institutions. The challenge is how we deal with such differences or conflicts – constructively or destructively. In many instances, we aren’t able to handle such differences properly then the spirit of solidarity in the team reduces. Whether in schools, colleges or any other institution, our challenge is to make our team cohesive.

To encourage team-building and facilitate a cohesive unit working together, using strategies of nonviolent communication can be very useful. There is likelihood of greater trust amongst team members, spirit of solidarity and evolution of empathetic relationships. All these are likely to contribute to greater efficiency amongst the team members and overall in the entire team. Thus nonviolent communication can be a powerful tool to encourage efficiency.
