

Module 1

The Way to healthy communication

Why we need nonviolent communication

Introduction

Dear friends,

Welcome abroad this exciting orientation course on Nonviolent Communication. Here in this course you will not be required to appear any exams or you have to compete for grades. It is a course through which you can hone your skills in nonviolent communication at leisure. Friends, our central aim is to ensure that our communication ecosystem enables us to make meaningful connections not only with ourselves but also with all others. It should also be able to provide a healing touch to relationships and nurture them further. Nonviolent communication is precisely a tool that ensures that our communication ecosystem remains positive and healthy even in the most trying situations.

There are some self-reflection exercises at the end of each unit. These are meant to widen your understanding.

Also you will be required to complete the multiple choice questions. These are required to enable you to qualify to get certificates.

Well friends, have you ever thought of life without being able to communicate? Unthinkable isn't it!

For all of us communication is an essential part of our lives. We cannot, not communicate. It is difficult to survive without being able to communicate.

It is as important as the food we eat and oxygen we breathe. In fact, we are communicating at almost every moment of our lives - whether with ourselves, our kith and kin, our friends, strangers and others. It can be both verbal and nonverbal communication. Also our thoughts and ideas constitute communication.

Whether we are involved in any activity or are inactive, whether we are silent or speaking – everything has a message and these can influence not only us but others. In most cases, when we are communication with the outside world, others

are expected to respond to our messages and hence they too are communicating. Our communication process is continuous, always changing, interactive and irreversible.

Now let us think of a situation when you end up eating rotten food. You are most likely to get sick and suffer from food poisoning.

Similarly, think of a situation when you are staying in a polluted environment. You will be complaining about it. If the air that we breathe is polluted, it will lead us to variety of ailments. So both unhealthy food and unhealthy air that we are breathing in will lead to our getting sick; we are always striving to avoid these.

In a similar way, getting into unhealthy communication will make us unhappy. If we get into the habit of communicating using foul and negative language, we are likely to suffer from stress and depression. If our communication, both verbal and nonverbal is unhealthy we will be unhappy. Think of an incident when you got into a verbal fight with your friend and you end up using foul words. In all probability, while you are retiring to bed in the night and you reflect back, you will feel bad. Similarly, if our thoughts and ideas are engulfed in negativity, we will not be able to see the positives in the world and suffer from negative emotions.

The Vietnamese Zen Master, Thich Nhat Hanh explains this beautifully, “We tend to think of nourishment only as what we take in through our mouths, but what we consume with our eyes, our ears, our noses, our tongues, and our bodies is also food. The conversations going on around us, and those we participate in, are also food. Are we consuming and creating the kind of food that is healthy for us and helps us grow? When we say something that nourishes us and uplifts the people around us, we are feeding love and compassion. When we speak and act in a way that causes tension and anger, we are nourishing violence and suffering.”

He further notes, “Never in the history of humankind have we had so many means of communication -- television, telecommunications, telephones, fax machines, wireless radios, hot lines, and red lines -- but we still remain islands. There is so little communication between the members of one family, between the individuals in society, and between nations. We suffer from so many wars and conflicts. We surely have not cultivated the arts of listening and speaking. We do not know how to listen to each other. We have little ability to hold an intelligent or meaningful conversation. The universal door of communication has to be opened again. When we cannot communicate, we get sick, and as our sickness increases, we suffer and spill our suffering on other people.”

So, friends, we have realized the importance of healthy communication which do not hurt others and also do not make us unhealthy. Healthy communication is extremely crucial for strengthening of all our relationships. Let's remind ourselves of this important direction of the Buddha on the power of the words that we use:

“Words have both the power to destroy and heal. When words are both true and kind, they can change our world.”

This course will precisely help you:

- a) Grasp the importance of a nonviolent communication ecosystem;
- b) The words and language that we should use in our communication process;
- c) Understand various elements of nonviolent communication; and
- d) How you can make it a habit to inculcate nonviolent communication in your daily acts of communication.

Here we are not just limiting the use of nonviolent communication to human-to-human interaction but human-nature interaction and human-and all other living beings. As the world faces crisis of environmental degradation, it is imperative that our interaction with both nature and all other living beings are nonviolent in nature.

In this module, we will look at on why we need NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION.

So, friends let us start this unique journey....

Why NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION?

“The golden rule of conduct...is mutual toleration, seeing that we will never all think alike and we shall always see truth in fragment and from different angles of vision....Even amongst the most conscientious persons, there will be room enough for honest differences of opinion. The only possible rule of conduct in any civilized society is therefore, mutual toleration.” -- Mahatma Gandhi

Here the apostle of peace, Mahatma Gandhi underlines the importance of mutual toleration. No two persons are expected to see things in the same way or think in the same way. Similarly, in a dialogue or discussion, there will always be differences of opinion. It does not mean we end up using unhealthy communication to resolve our differences. Hence, he underlined the importance of mutual toleration in our communication efforts.

Also in many situations when we have differences of opinion with others, we end up becoming aggressive to defend our position. We may even be using unhealthy communication, using words which may further aggravate the situation or make us tensed. Here again we have to learn on how to maintain self-restrain and handle the situation constructively. Here again we have this guiding post from Mahatma Gandhi:

“To be true to my faith, therefore, I may not write in anger or malice. I may not write idly. I may not write merely to excite passion. The reader can have no idea of the restraint I have to exercise from week to week in the choice of topics and my vocabulary. It is training for me. It enables me to peep into myself and make discoveries of my weaknesses. Often my vanity dictates a smart expression or my anger a harsh adjective. It is a terrible ordeal but a fine exercise to remove these weeds.” (Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol 27, 322).

As we all get entangled in daily routines in this fast paced world, there are great likelihood of us losing our temper, spoiling our relationships or get stressed due the unhealthy communication that we may be using. So what is the way in which we can get out of such an unhealthy communication ecosystem? It is when we start practicing nonviolent communication in our daily lives.

The words of Thich Nhat Hanh encapsulates on why nonviolent communication is important: “Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I vow to cultivate loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and relieve others of their suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I vow to learn to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy, and hope. I am determined not to spread news that I do not know to be certain and not to criticize or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will refrain from uttering words that can cause division or discord, or that can cause the family or the community to break. I will make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.”

Myra Walden (https://www.sgi.org/content/files/resources/sgi-quarterly-magazine/1104_64.pdf; Soka Gakai International), talks about the importance of nonviolent communication:

“Many of us have been brought up in environments where competition, judgement, demands and criticism are the communicative norm; at best these habitual ways of thinking and speaking hinder communication and create misunderstanding and frustration in others and ourselves. Still worse, they cause anger and pain and may even lead to violence. Even with the best intentions, we can generate needless conflict. The system of nonviolent communication... begins by assuming we are all compassionate by nature and those violent strategies, whether verbal or physical, are learned behaviours, supported by the prevailing culture. Nonviolent communication helps people learn how to communicate effectively with each other so that their lives and relationships are transformed.”

Marshall Rosenberg in his book, “Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life” talks of the benefits of using it in all aspects of our lives:

Nonviolent Communication helps us connect with each other and ourselves in a way that allows our natural compassion to flourish. It guides us to reframe the way we express ourselves and listen to others by focusing our consciousness on four areas: what we are observing, feeling, and needing, and what we are requesting to enrich our lives. Nonviolent communication fosters deep listening, respect, and empathy and engenders a mutual desire to give from the heart. Some people use nonviolent communication to respond compassionately to themselves, some to create greater depth in their personal relationships, and still others to build effective relationships at work or in the political arena.

Finally, to conclude this module here is an apt quote of Emerson:

“Who you are is speaking so loudly that I can’t hear what you’re saying.”
