

Lesson 1 - “Why does no one get me?”

The Perils of Right/Wrong Thinking

In my 15 years of working with Nonviolent Communication (NVC), a decade of working with collaborative practices like Sociocracy and Holacracy, and being part of social change movements and organizations, I have realized that the idea of right-thinking and a punishment/reward mindset is the biggest challenge in building connection.

This right/wrong and punish/reward morality and consciousness alienate and disconnect us from ourselves and each other. We get into stories and labels about people and ourselves. These stories can often be full of interpretations and away from ‘what is’ or the observations, or disconnected from our needs, and end up making demands and threats on people.

When I see a team or a family wanting to work with collaboration but getting into right/wrong thinking, they often get distant and disconnected from each other.

The moment we have some dissatisfaction, instead of beginning to see what happened or why someone did something, we think of finding who is wrong and who is right and then begin to integrate that in our communication.

Domination Systems and Retributive Consciousness

Our society historically had rulers and subjects who were ruled by the former, and the rules were made largely to serve the rulers. The systems could be slavery, feudalism, patriarchy, exploitative colonialism, and aggressive capitalism.

When rulers wanted to rule, they made rules, and they created punishment and reward systems. So when we tell someone about their ‘wrongness,’ it is very triggering for them to hear, as in some way it creates a fear of punishment. The punishments could be physical harm, abandonment or isolation, or even throwing people out of the ‘tribe.’

As a result, our language has embedded the right/wrong and punishment/reward thinking in it. So when we use it unconsciously, we can imply wrongness, and also the language can imply punishment and reward. The idea of wrongness is translated into how we judge and evaluate people, and then the punishment comes when we use words that imply threat and demand.

Embedding of Right/Wrong in Our Language

According to Karl Marx every society has a certain set of relationships between people and to support those relationships it creates a certain belief system and cultural practices which he calls the superstructure.

Like slavery created fear and justified itself by calling some people inferior or less than human, and thus justifying the control and domination. Or the kings and feudal structures created a story that kings have the sanction to rule, from the ‘god’ or through the religious heads. These stories often talked of a certain morality.

Now, since the language we have inherited is meant to create judgments and control, it also creates disconnection. But the challenge is that even when I want to connect with my dear ones, my way of thinking has been shaped by right/wrong and punishment/reward, so I create stories accordingly, and even if I am able to catch myself making stories, the language I use implies right and wrong.

Understanding Fight, Flight and Freeze

So when my words are perceived as implying wrongness, threat, or demand for no choice, then the other person sees it as danger, and our body is also tuned in to fight or flight, and our reptilian brain, which is there to protect us, takes over. So the other person reacts or runs away, and both create distance. In some instances they will freeze and shut down. So these three reactions translate into defence, attack or disconnection and we are not aware, and the other person has moved away from us.

Besides, if the other person reacts to us then they also use the same language which creates more reaction in us and in most cases things escalate.

This is my understanding that despite our best intentions “people don’t get me”.

Language as the Container

We need to first realise that language is the container which is carrying our thoughts, but even more deeper work is needed to understand the language we use when we think about things, and even more dangerous is the filters we put when we hear someone. It is not just about speaking the language of right and wrong or blame and attack but also hearing that in the most innocuous statements that we make, someone can hear blame and then react.

Let us look at the cost we pay for using life alienating thinking and language. Once we understand the damage, we can begin looking for alternative ways of perceiving, hearing, thinking and expressing. We can work at various levels in NVC, and in some ways, my learnings from Sociocracy, Holacracy and many other modalities will come in this program.

Freeing Ourselves from Retributive Consciousness

In the next lesson we will explore finding ways that help us move out of the right/wrong punishment/reward thinking. We will dive into the four core elements of NVC and see how they help us connect in more enriching ways and that there are concrete and doable steps to do that.

Thanks

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