

HEEDING ANGER (iii) Using the Language of life, freedom & connection

It is said that life and death are in the power of the tongue. More powerful than words said is what is unsaid expressed through body language, in uncontrolled anger. Hidden in these said and unsaid words is emotional violence that kills the listener's spirit and destroys relationships.

Remember Mrs Tan from our last article? When she saw the TV left on with no one watching, she got triggered. It escalated till she blew up and marched up to her son's room, demanding that he switched off the TV immediately.

What triggered Mrs Tan's outburst were her unmet needs. Her unmet contextual need is to know that her family shares the burden of reducing wastage with her. Her unmet core-needs are affirmation and validation. That explained why Mrs Tan's emotions escalated when her husband uttered 'It's a small



thing.' It triggered the thought that 'what she says does not matter'.

Even though Mrs Tan has no clue about her unmet needs, they still drive her reactions. Like her, we will make unspoken expectations for our needs to be met, usually in *making demands*, (when Mrs Tan insisted that her son switched off the TV immediately), or blaming and judging. In this emotional muddle, we accuse, (*You are always spoiling him*), exclude, (*Don't interfere..*), condemn, (*You are just as bad*) etc. The other party may blow up or simply close

up. A gulf is created. A wall is erected. We expect others to take care of our needs when we ourselves are not clear what they are. Hence the way we express our anger is muddled up and unconstructive.

This scenario is played out everywhere. What ensues is predictable. Relationships die. Can we get out of this pattern? Only if we intentionally create a space to discover, to consciously connect with ourselves to see what feelings are triggered, what thoughts activate these feelings, and what unmet needs are behind these thoughts. After doing such due diligence do we then begin to have greater self-awareness. This awareness empowers us to choose a different way of expressing our anger. We can choose to express our anger using more constructive language that promotes connection.

Connect-Point

When we are in touch with what our unmet needs are, the chance of reprogramming the way we express our anger improves. There are many small steps towards this though. To clear up the muddle, many of our unhelpful *beliefs* surrounding *needs* and *relationships* need to be first straightened out.

Our beliefs about needs

This whole issue about *needs* is tricky. We either believe that taking care of one's needs is selfishness or we are so obsessed with our needs that we expect them to be met relentlessly.

The helpful belief is; *connecting healthily and fully*

with others begins with us connecting, honestly and courageously, with ourselves. We do need to be aware of our needs. However expressing a need does not mean the other must assume the responsibility of meeting it. We are not the only one with needs in a relationship. Moreover, some of our unmet core needs, such as Mrs Tan's (validation and affirmation) are simply too huge for anyone to undertake. In this case, Mrs Tan has to learn to manage her needs and nurture herself. Ideally, the other should freely give what they can offer, out of the desire to contribute to the well-being of the person, not as a result of the other's demand or coercion. Such freedom will foster connection.

Our beliefs about relationships

When it comes to *relationships*, we can become fixated on the idea of 'who is right', 'who will win'. This restricts us from generating possibilities, from considering 'win-win' as a solution. We should believe in enjoying greater quality of connection made possible by seeking a solution together. Where it is not possible, we can agree to disagree. Rather than lament in frustration over our *irreconcilable* differences, we learn to cultivate a sense of curiosity about what makes us see things differently. We respect our individuality. We attempt making things work with the *reconcilable* differences.

Only when we operate within the parameters of such clarity about needs and relationships, are we ready to reprogram the way we express ourselves. The stage is then set for us to learn to use a different language of relating.

The Language of Life, Freedom and Connection involves using the 'language of verification'. Instead of jumping to conclusions based on how we feel and interpret, we note objectively without making assumptions. Instead of blurting out "Why is the TV not switched off when no one is watching? You all don't care about reducing wastage," we catch the thoughts and withhold judgement (cultivated from creating space to keep in touch with oneself -previous article) and bring up the situation for verification. "What is happening here?"

Making subjective judgements without verifications puts the other person in a box. The other party feels, 'That's it! You have already decided.' They may battle out in self-defence, counter-attack or resort to grudging submission. But they have stopped listening. They disconnect emotionally from us.

Using the language of objective observation opens up connection. "I see that the TV is on and no one is watching it. I am feeling disappointed and frustrated. It makes me feel unsupported and alone."

When there is no 'making conclusions', there is no blame, no accusation, no criticism. This 'state of being' is not natural. We need to train ourselves to be self-restraint and not presume that what we perceive is as we think and interpret. There may be another picture within the picture.

Another aspect of the language of life, freedom and connection is the language of making concrete requests.



With space to observe our reaction to a stimulus, to label the feelings that are generated, we become more aware of our unmet needs. Managing this awareness is crucial. When we demand unrelentingly for our needs to be met, we deprive others of their right to choose and negotiate. If we do not grant ourselves the chance to express our requests, we rob ourselves of our right of expression.

Hence making requests has to be done using a language of respect. It should encourage openness, "I am open to hear ...". It invites, "Share with me what you think...", or proposes, "Will you consider...?" It is helpful when the request made of the other person ends with something concrete, realistic and negotiable.

Mrs Tan can make a request of her husband, "I need you to show me support so that I know I am not the only one here ..". That would be too abstract. If Mrs Tan also makes her request concrete, realistic and negotiable, "Will you help me to remind and teach him, in my absence, to reduce wastage each time you see that he does not...", she stands a better chance of opening up the conversation for more discussion, and hence promote greater mutual understanding.

It is impossible to avoid getting angry. It is not a bad thing too, when we are angry. Our anger tells us that we have unmet needs. If we are unaware of what these unmet needs are, we often resort unknowingly to our usual pattern of emotional violence. There is a more constructive way to express our anger. It requires a shift in beliefs and a desire to get out of our old patterns. It involves using the Language of life, freedom and connection.

When we adopt this new way of relating, we allow more space of expression and freedom in our connections. We encourage safety in communication. We will enjoy more satisfying relationships.

Contact Us

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