The Key to Harmony – will criticism help?

Liz Kingsnorth: Article for CR, May 2020

"Put harmony before being right". Daaji *

Think back to arguments or conflicts you have had... situations where harmony has evaporated, whether with an individual or a group. Now ask yourself this: Deep down, was I wanting to be right? Was I diagnosing what was 'wrong with them'? Or what was wrong with their belief, their position, or their interpretation of events? If I criticized them, was I trying to correct or change them? Did a trivial argument blow out of proportion, through my attachment to wanting to be right, resulting in self-righteous anger and a field-day for my ego? I can remember plenty of such times in my life. I also remember the horrible feelings inside, the spoiled, heavy condition of my heart.

Dr Wayne Dyer said: "When given the choice of being right or being kind, choose kind". Sometimes, 'choosing kind', leads us simply to let go of a grievance. Or we may find ourselves willing to 'be wrong'. I remember Chariji saying that, spiritually, it benefits us more to be wrong than to be right. Now, with the small crumbs of wisdom that accompany later life, I can notice a sweetness in 'being wrong'. There is a softening in my heart, a calmness - that cannot exist when I am busy scoring points.
So 'choosing kind' benefits me too.

Once I remember a student asking me: "I want to be kind but I also want to be truthful. How can I tell my boyfriend the truth when I know it will hurt him?" I asked what she wanted to tell. She replied: "I need to tell him that he's selfish, that he only thinks about himself". I said: "Is that really the TRUTH about him? Or is that just what YOU are thinking about him?" She looked taken aback and was quiet for a minute, reflecting. Then she said: "My friend thinks he's great, because he's so free and independent. So, I guess it's just my opinion of him."

She became curious how to express her experience to him, in a way that would not be hurtful, that would be honest and also caring. Such a way is offered through the approach Daaji has named 'Heartful Communication', which draws on teachings from our Masters and from Dr Marshall Rosenberg, the originator of 'Nonviolent Communication'™. We can transform our criticisms by paying careful attention to our feelings, and to the unfulfilled needs or values in our heart, that are giving rise to these feelings. We take responsibility for our own feelings and needs rather than making a judgment of the other person.

In the student's case, she became aware of feelings of sadness and aloneness, and that she longed for more consideration and companionship with this guy. The behavior that upset her was his choice to spend evenings in the gym rather than being with her, and in her mind, she judged him as selfish for this. Instead of voicing this as criticism – which would have been hurtful to him and also to her own heart – she was able to say: "When you go to the gym each evening and don't spend that time with me, I feel sad and a bit lonely, because I enjoy being with you. How about if we spend a couple of evenings a week together?" No judgements, no criticism, no demands. She gave a neutral description of what was triggering her, expressed her feelings and needs, and made a simple request. She was being authentic and truthful, with care.

If we set a clear Intention to follow Lalaji's principle: *"to have no inclination to cause any hurt to anybody's heart",* we may either express ourselves in this way or, alternatively, realise that gently letting the issue go and staying quiet, is our best option.

The way we give feedback or the way we receive criticism, greatly depends on our inner state. In 'Designing Destiny', Daaji says: *"the benefits of criticism far outweigh the disadvantages. It is a mature and wise person who graciously accepts criticism".*

If someone tells me I am arrogant or rude, I have lots of choices for responding! Defend myself, dismiss the criticism, get angry, accuse, become depressed, think what a bad person I am, make a joke of it... and so on. If I am in my heart, in a meditative state, I can do something else: try to sense what longing is there in the heart of my critic. When I listen deeply with empathy and loving intention to really understand the person, I receive their upset feelings and I hear their needs. They may need respect, consideration, to be valued. I can reflect back this understanding, thus demonstrating that I take them and their criticism seriously: "Are you feeling angry because you would like to be treated with more respect?"

It's not always easy to do this under pressure, but I've found that having a sincere wish to nourish connection and harmony with my critics, works wonders. Then can I grasp the opportunity for evolving that being criticized offers me, by pausing and reflecting on what I can change in myself and how?
Daaji says in his April 30th message: "*The Heartfulness approach is one of self-analysis for continuous improvement and refinement, with self-acceptance and self-compassion".*

Keeping the Goal as my compass, everything becomes welcome fuel for the journey towards refinement!

* Daaji: Article in Deccan Herald March 26, 2019.