**Passive-Aggressive Behaviour**

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“Every social situation is fraught with ambiguity, knee-deep in complication, hidden meanings, veiled power-struggles, passive aggression and paranoid confusion.”-Kate Fox (Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour)

Among the living species, human beings are most unique in multiple senses of the word. No one can tell with certainty whatever is going on in the mind of the other unless, of course, the other is willing to open up. Then too, chances are that the truth may not come out explicitly but in a way that leaves one absolutely dumbfounded. Those who claim to be “open books” can sometimes be hiding many untold secrets behind that façade but ones who are actually secretive can be even eerier. From the household fronts to social interactions, from national politics to international engagements, there appears to be a perplexing web of suspicions and intrigues that is beyond the perception of a clear-headed person. No matter from whichever angle certain behaviours, situations or developments are viewed, there remains much to be understood and explained.

In the animal kingdom, instincts are usually followed without a second thought. When hunger strikes, prey is hunted; when an adversary enters a restricted jurisdiction it is ferociously eliminated without giving it an opportunity to explain; when the defence is intended camouflage is resorted to; when procreation is desired no formalities are observed; in other words, everything is based on a set pattern that is meticulously pursued by different species on land, in the ground, in water or air. Prudence and sensibility have hardly any role to play. Not that animals are totally without feelings as can be seen in the case of some, especially the domesticated ones, but in the wild, things are quite unusual compared to the world of human beings.

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The very fact that humans have the capability to think and rationalize, sets them apart from all living beings. The power of language is one huge tool, which allows them to communicate with each other, which, by itself, can accomplish the impossible, something that animals are not capable of. Speech can have both advantages and disadvantages because while communication through words is the most convenient, misunderstandings can also develop as a consequence. Saying something at certain times or not saying anything on some occasions, also has its pros and cons. All these can lead to bitterness in relationships and result in irreparable damage to families and even friendships.

The question is, why do things happen in a way that causes people to drift away from one another? One thing is absolutely true, humans cannot live without humans-whether these are family and/or friends, people want comfort in their company. Depending upon the peculiarity of circumstances, some look towards immediate relatives to confide in their darkest secrets, some choose friends and some are more relaxed with strangers in disclosing their inner feelings. These varying choices spring from the degree of communication between persons. How easily they can express their likes, dislikes, their wishes, their aspirations, their resentments, their disgust or whatever else comes to their mind without being judged or misunderstood and without these outbursts being made public.

A fleeting observation would reveal that this kind of confidence is not necessarily between a specific type of relations but its absence can be highly detrimental, especially where blood or matrimonial relations are concerned. Making a family is no big deal but keeping it integrated is not everyone’s forte. It takes more than just finances and bonds-it requires verbal communication and trust.

In human society, especially among family members, there is a growing tendency to abstain from talking to each other. This disrupts the flow of dialogue particularly when there is a likelihood of discord. Rather than coming out directly with one’s reservations or anger, one falls victim to passive-aggressive (PA) behaviour that can be highly disturbing for others. Dealing with PA partners or friends can be quite challenging because of the blurry lines of communication. PA persons are prone to concealing their emotions by passing sarcastic remarks, shunning responsibilities, avoiding eye contact, or just opting to remain silent, which can put their victims in a most uncomfortable and frustrating situation, sometimes driving them out of their minds. The irony is that when confronted, PA persons vociferously deny harbouring any ill feelings leading to more complications. In fact, their attitude can arouse the anger of their victims, which could culminate in verbal or physical altercations.

PA persons are actually casualties of their own sadness and unhappiness that lies deep within their hearts, which prevents them from enjoying their lives to the fullest. Since they are unable to communicate their feelings of hurt, anxiety or anger, perhaps because of difficulty in finding the right words, PA persons are mostly fearful that being honest could alienate them from their partners. Instead of taking responsibility for a failed relationship, PA persons try to transfer it to their partners, appearing innocent to others. Somehow, they are blind to the reality that their own deceptive outlook can provoke a non-issue into a mammoth and unmanageable problem. Unfortunately, it leaves in its wake acutely traumatized and confused victims who are distraught by their low self-esteem.

Interestingly, if the affected people are able to identify that their partners are showing signs of passive-aggressiveness, they can not only protect themselves from harm but can also help them in changing their attitude. For starters, the least they can do is avoid a volatile situation by delaying an immediate conflict. Once the intensity cools off then instead of talking about one’s own hurt or anger, addressing the feelings of the PA persons could be useful in encouraging them to express their emotions openly. Once this is managed then it would become easier for PA persons to check the hurt they have inflicted, allowing them an opportunity to perhaps apologize for their insensitivity.

It may be remembered that compassion is the key to many difficulties. PA persons require the support of their family members and friends provided they can understand their dilemma and are willing to rid them of their difficulties. In the words of Simone de Beauvoir: “One’s life has value so long as one attributes value to the life of others, by means of love, friendship, indignation and compassion.”

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