

Judgment and Discernment

by Marina Michaels

It is my belief that each of us has our lessons to learn in life, and in learning those lessons, we have a wide latitude of behavior and approaches. However, that doesn't excuse us from behaving ethically according to our own standard, nor does it mean that we can get away with violating another person's space or overriding their will. Telling where one thing ends and the other begins is a matter of discernment, though sometimes people get confused and label "discernment" as being "judgmental."

It is also my belief that it is okay to draw lines, make boundaries, declare that some things and types of behaviors are not okay around oneself. When I have done so, I have sometimes been accused of being judgmental where, in my mind, I am instead being discerning.

The basic rule of thumb that I use in telling the difference between the two in myself (that is, how I tell whether I am being judgmental or discerning), is how it feels. If I am essentially okay with allowing someone to be or do whatever it is they are doing, but I don't want it to happen around me, that's discernment. If I have some strong feelings about what they are doing, feelings that are associated with thoughts that label the other person as "wrong," that's making judgments about the other person.

Even then, sometimes I have strong feelings (such as anger) that are nonetheless "clean" and healthy, and that can motivate me toward seeing that I have been allowing boundaries to be overstepped. Again, the feeling is key here: If the anger feels blaming or uncomfortable, there is almost certainly judgment bound up in it, or else I am running someone else's anger through my own energy (that's another topic entirely, though). Otherwise, if the anger feels okay, it is most likely the method my Will is using to alert me to a situation I might have been ignoring.

Although some would say (and have) that even drawing the lines of discernment are unloving, I consider that it is far more loving to discern among different behaviors and choose the ones I want to be around than it is to accept any kind of behavior around and toward me. At the very least, it is far more loving to myself, even if the people I choose not to have around me might not think so.

But I would argue that they too are being treated far more lovingly by my refusing to allow them to be around me, behaving as they do, than by people who make excuses for them and say that any kind of behavior is okay, regardless of its effects. Therein lie the roots of denial, a weed that could stand to be greatly reduced in this world.

Ironically, those who say that my approach is judgmental or unloving are the ones who are being judgmental. The compassionate approach here is to look at judging judgment itself, which we generally take to be "bad" (that is, we call being judgmental "bad"), and to say that if someone wants to be judgmental, let them. And if you don't mind being around judgmentalness, that's fine, but if you do, you can go elsewhere, or deal with it as you feel fit. Again, that is exercising your discernment.

Copyright © 1995, 1996 by Marina Michaels.
All rights reserved. For reprint rights, please see
http://www.thelighthouseonline.com/contact_information.html