Heartful Communication

LIZ KINGSNORTH introduces Marshall Rosenberg's practical approach of Nonviolent Communication, and how it is integrating with Heartfulness into Heartful Communication.

"Make sure that your acts and your words reflect the work being done in your heart". *Babuji*

Tensions were high during a 3-day peace-building dialogue between community leaders from Palestine and Israel. My co-facilitator and I were worried. The hope and determination that people had arrived with was under threat from divisions, frustrated efforts, and pain. The breakthrough came when we asked participants to simply walk along the beach with someone from the other community. As the pairs set off, they walked with distance between them. An hour and a half later they returned. Many were visibly different, a kind of serenity and fragility in their open faces. There was an air of gentle connection, a sense that people had truly met each other. Many described the powerful impact of their walks together. "I will see things differently now," said one. *They had uncovered their common humanity, shared that they had the same needs* – to give their children a good education, to celebrate their culture, to live in safety, and so on. From that moment, I was able to do what I was there to do: offer the perspective and skills of Nonviolent Communication to support their ongoing dialogue and projects.

When I first came across the approach called Nonviolent Communication, which is the basis of Heartful Communication, I realized it was transformative. Only with time and experience, I began to understand how profound it is as a way of *being*, a way to understand human behavior. It helps us experience the one-ness of humanity in a tangible way ... in each moment, every day.

NVC originated through Dr. Marshall Rosenberg, who passed away in 2015. He said, "The purpose of Nonviolent Communication is to help you to do what you already know how to do ... *to connect in a way that makes natural giving possible*. To stay with that quality of giving, moment by moment, in every contact we have. But it's easy to lose that connection. In spite of how precious it is, we forget. And instead, we play the game of 'Who's right!' It's a game where everybody loses."

We want to be in tune with our true, giving nature, but we have forgotten how. We've lost our way. Deep down we long to find a way to align our thoughts, words and actions with the loving, spiritual beings we are at our core. When we experience this alignment, we breathe freely. We remember. We feel a sense of Home.

NVC makes the alignment of our inner and outer beings possible by focusing on what is alive in the heart. Instead of habitual judging and blaming, learned from the prevailing culture, we look for the fundamental human motivators that manifest in the heart. They can be called longings, yearnings, aspirations, values or *universal human needs* – things like respect, acceptance, security, contributing to others.

[Add the list as a side bar]

NVC suggests that everything anyone says or does is an attempt to fulfill one or another of these life-affirming human needs. When we learn to focus on and validate the needs that underlie behavior, we find a way to connect with a person, even when they are saying or doing things we don't like. For example, instead of judging a child as 'bad' for not telling the truth, we see they may need to protect themselves. Perhaps in the past they experienced punishment for being honest and owning up to taking or breaking something. We can understand the child's need for self-protection, because we too experience that need, in situations we feel to be physically or emotionally threatening.

Or, as we sense what needs may be unconsciously being met in someone we call a "bully," we may discover new compassion growing within us. They may have experienced fear, disapproval and powerlessness in early life, been humiliated or isolated. Longings for recognition, esteem and being powerful, are manifesting in ways that violate the safety and well-being of others. Recognizing their unfulfilled needs can lead us to look for more fitting, healing ways to help restore the bully to their true nature. We come to realize that anger and violence – whether physical, psychological or emotional, spoken or unspoken – are the tragic expressions of unfulfilled needs.

NVC offers a radical listening and empathic responding process that can melt conflict in a surprisingly short time. I remember a neighbor who was furious with me because my workmen were trampling through his garden. He blocked the gate and refused to let them through. When he yelled, "Your guys are wrecking my garden! How long am I supposed to put up with these idiots?" I responded, "I can see you've put a lot of effort into your garden. Are you furious because you want it respected? And you'd like a timeframe for when this will be over?" He continued with his angry accusations but it took only 5 minutes of me listening to him without defending, each time empathizing with his needs in the same manner, before he softened and opened the gate. Our relationship was preserved.

NVC is a universal process that can be learned by all kinds of people, of all ages and in all kinds of cultures. I recall a team project with prison guards in Scotland that I found particularly moving. These were tough guys, mostly ex-military, allergic to feelings, keeping themselves safe through physical strength and hard-hitting humor. Our job was to teach them deep listening, conflict management, facilitation and counseling skills! At first it was difficult. Their armor seemed impenetrable and we were perceived as coming from another planet. Listening to their stories, having sincere respect and willingness to try to understand their dangerous world, finally turned the key. I will always remember sitting in a circle with them one year on. One man had tears in his eyes as he expressed his sadness and despair: "There is no room for compassion in this work." No one joked, all were quiet, nodding their agreement. In awe I reflected on how far these men had come. Now they valued self-awareness, feelings, trust, openness. They knew how to listen. They could connect to the needs of the prisoners and each other. They had self-respect. They had come home to their hearts. One said, "I am a much better man now, I feel like myself." Subsequently they won an award for teaching this to others, and guards who refused to take part were called "dinosaurs"!

Rosenberg saw the crucial role that language plays in contributing to either harmony or conflict. We think in language. Language shapes our perception, creates our "reality." Hafiz, the 14th Century Persian mystic said, " *What we speak becomes the house we live in.*" Judgments, threats, demands, interpretations, separate us from our hearts and from each other. NVC offers us a clear structure and tools for expressing ourselves without these habitual, alienating forms of language. (See https://baynvc.org/basics-of-nonviolent-communication/).
It can readily be taught to children as well as adults - children are naturals!

Daaji has said, "NVC goes 'hand-in-glove' with Heartfulness." Both are heart-centered approaches enabling us to become more loving, purer human beings. As we integrate NVC into Heartfulness, a process is emerging called Heartful Communication. Eventually, with a spiritual practice and perspective, we may hope to free ourselves of having needs. But at the moment we are imperfect human beings. Needs are there, at our core, with differing intensities for each of us. As we evolve spiritually, our needs also evolve. A wish for recognition may change to a longing for humility to be an anonymous server. A need for social belonging may transmute to a yearning for merging with the divine.

The 13th century Sufi mystic, Rumi, expresses the condition that can blossom when we move out of fear-based blame and judgment, threat, demand, winning and losing, reward and punishment; when we transform our 'diagnoses', i.e. thinking and communicating in terms of what is "right" and "wrong" with us.

> "Out beyond ideas of wrong-doing and right-doing,
> there is a field. I'll meet you there.
> When the soul lies down in that grass,
> the world is too full to talk about.
> Ideas, language, even the phrase 'each other'
> doesn't make any sense".

Let us meet in Rumi's field. It will enrich and unite us all.

Visit hc@heartfulness.org

Learning NVC

- Find a training: www.cnvc.org
- Miki Kashtan's online course: https://thefearlessheart.org/making-life-work/

- 30-day free online course and NVC resources library: www.nvctraining.com
- Facebook pages list events, e.g., NVC India; Bay Area Nonviolent Communication
- NVC with children: Google search

Books:

- *Nonviolent Communication – A Language of Life* - Marshall B Rosenberg
- *Why weren't we taught this at school?* - Alice Sheldon
- *Respectful Parents Respectful Kids* - Hart and Hodson
- *Being Genuine* - Thomas D'Ansembourg
- *Words that Work in Business* - Ike Lasater
- *Reweaving our Human Fabric* - Miki Kashtan

- YouTube videos: Marshall Rosenberg teaching NVC

For Side-Bar

Some Shared Human Needs and Values

Acceptance
Achievement
Appreciation
Awareness
Beauty
Belonging
Care
Celebration
Choice
Clarity
Companionship
Compassion
Cooperation
Creativity
Dignity
Empathy
Equality
Fun
Harmony
Health
Integrity
Justice
Learning
Love

Meaning
Mourning
Movement
Nourishment
Order
Peace
Relaxation
Respect
Rest
Security
Self-expression
Some Human Needs and Values
Space
Spiritual growth
Support
To contribute to others
To matter
Trust
Understanding