



Compassionate Communication

Why all the wars? Why all the violence? Psychologist Marshal Rosenberg has devoted his life to understanding the roots of aggression, and has found that it originates in our very language. We literally talk ourselves into it! Our language fosters the creation of enemy images. When someone cuts you off on the road, they do so because they are an inconsiderate IDIOT. We are so quick to jump to that conclusion, yet it's clearly false. That "inconsiderate idiot" may in fact be quite bright, and may be a loving father, etc., who may be considerate in many ways. When you react towards this person in an unkind manner, he will no doubt think you're the one who's the jerk. It's easy to see how such a dynamic can quickly escalate out of hand. But if we can talk ourselves into aggression, perhaps we can talk ourselves out of it.

Dr. Rosenberg applied his discoveries to mediating disputes, developing techniques he calls Non-Violent Communication (NVC). Everyday thousands of mediators around the world use these techniques to resolve disputes. The first step is to help the aggrieved parties go beyond the enemy images they hold of each other. This is accomplished by helping each party to see the basic human needs underlying the actions of the other. For we all share the same basic human needs. We may disagree as to the strategy someone uses in an attempt to meet their needs, but we can't disagree on the level of needs. According to NVC, all human actions arise in an attempt to meet needs. No matter how apparently evil someone's actions, one can't fault the underlying need. Perhaps they can be helped to adopt more satisfying strategies to meet their needs.

Instead of thinking "What an a-hole!" in reaction to someone's actions, we can learn to regard the offending action as but an unfortunate strategy for meeting that person's needs. It's not that the person is bad and should be punished, but that they are using a tragically self-defeating strategy. Perhaps they can be helped to devise a more optimal and effective strategy, which also meets the needs of others. Compassion rather than anger is a more appropriate reaction to someone's less than optimal behavior. And

clearly a reaction motivated by compassion and empathy is more likely to help the situation than a reaction motivated by anger.

Our natural response when learning of someone's need is to help them to get their need met, for that helps fulfill *our* need for authentic and meaningful connection with another being. If someone is hungry, it's natural to want to help them obtain food. If someone is cold, it's natural to want to help them get warm. When we feed someone who is hungry, or give a blanket to someone who is cold, it warms *us* up inside. It feels good. One's own needs can be gifts to those who help us fill our needs, as others' needs can be gifts to us. For anyone's most pressing need at any given time reflects what's most alive in them at that moment. Connecting with what's alive in ourselves and others makes for a rich, full, and meaningful life.

Language has a profound effect on how we perceive the world. Marshal Rosenberg has shown that our modern languages are replete with words and grammatical constructs that facilitate the perception of enemies, people who should be punished for their supposedly evil intent. Our modern languages are rife with words that judgmentally infer others' motives to be bad or evil. We are all so very quick to point a finger (the middle finger!). This applies not only to others, but to oneself. Perhaps you yourself have internalized a critical parent, who provides a running commentary concerning your copious faults. Not uncommon!

NVC is based on the premise that every human need is a wonderful and precious gift. A strategy for meeting a need may on the other hand be tragically self-defeating in terms of its likelihood for success in getting the underlying need met. NVC would have us not judge, but connect with what's alive in us, and what's alive in others, right here, and right now. NVC would have us fundamentally abandon the notion of "enemy". As the Dalai Lama says, basically "all beings just want to be happy". And as Jesus once said, "Love thy enemy as oneself".

Rationalize aggression, or realize that your essential nature *is* compassion. Now is the time!

For more information on NVC, listen to Marshall Rosenberg on [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com):

NVC (part 1) :

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dpk5Z7GIFs>

NVC (part 2) :

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XbgxFgAN7_w

NVC (part 3) :

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L8fbxPAXBPE>



