

NVC in Action

Interspersed throughout the book are dialogues entitled NVC in Action. These dialogues intend to impart the flavor of an actual exchange in which a speaker is applying the principles of Nonviolent Communication. However, NVC is not simply a language or a set of techniques for using words; the consciousness and intent that it embraces may be expressed through silence, a quality of presence, as well as through facial expressions and body language. The NVC in Action dialogues you will be reading are necessarily distilled and abridged versions of real-life exchanges, where moments of silent empathy, stories, humor, gestures, and more would all contribute to a more natural flow of connection between the two parties than might be apparent when dialogues are condensed in print.

"Murderer, Assassin, Child-Killer!"

I was presenting Nonviolent Communication to about 170 Palestinian Muslim men in a mosque at Dheisheh Refugee Camp in Bethlehem. Attitudes toward Americans at that time were not favorable. As I was speaking, I suddenly noticed a wave of muffled commotion fluttering through the audience. "They're whispering that you are American!" my translator alerted me, just as a gentleman in the audience leapt to his feet. Facing me squarely, he hollered at the top of his lungs, "Murderer!" Immediately a dozen other voices joined him in chorus: "Assassin!" "Child-killer!" "Murderer!"

Fortunately, I was able to focus my attention on what the man was feeling and needing. In this case, I had some cues. On the way into the refugee camp, I had seen several empty tear gas canisters that had been shot into the camp the night before. Clearly marked on each canister were the words *Made in U.S.A.* I knew that the refugees harbored a lot of anger toward the United States for supplying tear gas and other weapons to Israel.

I addressed the man who had called me a murderer:

MBR: Are you angry because you would like my government to use its resources differently? *(I didn't know whether my guess was correct—what was critical was my sincere effort to connect with his feeling and need.)*

Man: Damn right I'm angry! You think we need tear gas? We need sewers, not your tear gas! We need housing! We need to have our own country!

MBR: So you're furious and would appreciate some support in improving your living conditions and gaining political independence?

Man: Do you know what it's like to live here for twenty-seven years the way I have with my family—children and all? Have you got the faintest idea what that's been like for us?

MBR: Sounds like you're feeling very desperate and you're wondering whether I or anybody else can really understand what it's like to be living under these conditions. Am I hearing you right?

Man: You want to understand? Tell me, do you have children? Do they go to school? Do they have playgrounds? My son is sick! He plays in open sewage! His classroom has no books! Have you seen a school that has no books?

MBR: I hear how painful it is for you to raise your children here; you'd like me to know that what you want is what all parents want for their children—a good education, opportunity to play and grow in a healthy environment . . .

Man: That's right, the basics! Human rights—isn't that what you Americans call it? Why don't more of you come here and see what kind of human rights you're bringing here!

MBR: You'd like more Americans to be aware of the enormity of the suffering here and to look more deeply at the consequences of our political actions?

Our dialogue continued, with him expressing his pain for nearly twenty more minutes, and me listening for the feeling and need behind each statement. I didn't agree or disagree. I received his words, not as attacks, but as gifts from a fellow human willing to share his soul and deep vulnerabilities with me.

Once the gentleman felt understood, he was able to hear me explain my purpose for being at the camp. An hour later, the same man who had called me a murderer was inviting me to his home for a Ramadan dinner.