

I believe that we'll see that punishment never can really get our needs met in a constructive way if we can ask ourselves two questions. The first question is: *What do we want the other person to do differently than what they are now doing?* If we ask only this question, at times punishment seems to work, because we may be able to get a child to stop hitting his sister if we punish him for doing it. I say it *seems to work*, because often the very act of punishing people for what they do in fact stimulates such antagonism that they continue to do it out of resentment or anger. They continue to do it longer than they would have done had there not been punishment.

But if we add a second question, I'm confident that we will then see that punishment never works in the sense of getting our needs met, for reasons that we won't be sorry for later. The second question is: *What do we want the other person's reasons to be for doing what we want them to do?*

When we ask that question, I think we will see that we never want other people to do things because they are afraid of punishment. We don't want people to do things out of obligation or duty, or out of guilt or shame, or to buy love. With some consciousness, I'm confident we would each see that we only want people to do things if they can do it willingly, because they clearly see how it's going to enrich life if they do. Any other reason for doing things is likely to create conditions that make it harder for people in the future to behave in a compassionate way toward one another.

Killing People Is Too Superficial

Part of my objective is to show how the process of Nonviolent Communication will help us to fully express our anger. This is very important to make clear with many of the groups that I work with, because most of the time I'm invited into different countries, it's to work with groups that feel that they have been very oppressed, discriminated against, and they want to increase the power that they have to change the situation. Very often such groups are a bit worried when they hear the term *Nonviolent Communication*, because very often in their history they have been exposed to

various religions and other trainings that have taught them to stifle their anger, to calm down and accept whatever is happening. As a consequence, they are rather worried about anything that tells them that their anger is bad, or is something to be gotten rid of. It's a great relief for them when they come to see this and really trust that the process I'm talking about in no way wants us to stifle our anger, to repress it, to force it down. Instead, NVC is really a way of fully expressing the anger.

Now, I've said this before: To me, killing people is too superficial.

To me, any kind of killing, blaming of other people, punishing, or hurting other people is a very superficial expression of our anger. We want something much more powerful than killing or hurting people physically or mentally. That's too weak. We want something much more powerful than that to fully express ourselves. The first step that I will suggest in expressing our anger fully using Nonviolent Communication is to totally divorce the other person from any responsibility for our anger. As I've covered, this means getting out of our consciousness any kind thinking that he, she, they made me angry when they did that. When we think that way, I believe we're very dangerous. And we're not likely to fully express our anger. Instead, we're likely to superficially express anger by blaming or punishing the other person.

I show prisoners who want to punish others for what they do that vengeance is a distorted cry for empathy. That when we think we need to hurt others, what we really need is for these other people to see how we have been hurt and to see how their behavior has contributed to our pain. But most of the prisoners I have worked with have never gotten that kind of empathy from someone who has wronged them. Making the other people suffer is the best they can think of to do to find relief from their own pain.

I was demonstrating this once to a prisoner who told me he wanted to kill this man. I said, "I'll bet you I could show you something that would be sweeter than vengeance."

And the prisoner said: "No way man, I'll tell you the only thing that's kept me alive in this last two years in prison is thinking of getting out and getting this guy for what he did to me. That's the only thing in the world I want. They're gonna put

me back in here and that's OK. All I want to do is get out and really hurt this guy."

I said, "I'll bet you I can show you something more delicious than that."

"No way man."

"Would you give me some time?" (I liked this guy's sense of humor. He said, "I got plenty of time, man," and he was going to be there for a while. That's why I like working with prisoners: They're not running off to appointments.) Anyway, I said, "Now what I'd like to show you is another option to hurting people. I'd like you to play the role of the other person."

Prisoner: OK.

MBR [in prisoner's role]: It's the first day I'm out of prison. I find you. The first thing I do is I grab you.

Prisoner: That's a good start

MBR: I put you in a chair and now I say, I'm gonna tell you some things and I want you to tell me back what you heard me say. You got that?

Prisoner [in other person's role]: But I can explain it!

MBR: Shut up. Did you hear what I said? I want you to tell me back what you hear me say.

Prisoner: OK.

MBR: I took you into my house and treated you as a brother, and gave you everything for eight months, and then you did what you did to me. I was so hurt I could hardly stand it. [I had heard the prisoner talk about this several times so it is not hard for me to play his role.]

Prisoner: But I can explain it!

MBR: Shut up. Tell me what you heard.

Prisoner: After all you had done for me, you felt really hurt. You would have liked something else besides what happened.

MBR: And then, do you know what it's like for the next two years

to be angry day and night so that nothing would satisfy me, except thoughts of hurting you?

Prisoner: So it really got your whole life screwed up so that all you could do was be consumed with anger for two years.

So we kept this going for about another few minutes, and then this man was very emotionally moved and he said, "Stop, stop, you're right. That's what I need."

The next time I went to that prison about a month later, another guy was waiting for me as I came through the gate. He was pacing back and forth and he said, "Hey Marshall, remember the last time you said that when we really think that we enjoy hurting people or we want to hurt somebody, the real need is for understanding for how we've suffered?"

I said, "Yeah, I remember that."

"Would you go over that again today real slow? I'm getting out of here in three days, and if I don't get this clear, somebody's gonna get hurt."

So my prediction is anybody that enjoys hurting others is being exposed to a lot of violence themselves, psychological or otherwise. And they need empathy for the enormous pain that they're feeling.

Workshop Interactions

Again, the first step we need to get into our consciousness is that *what other people do is never the cause of how we feel*. What is the cause of how we feel? It's my belief that how we feel is a result of how we interpret the behavior of others at any given moment. If I ask you to pick me up at six o'clock and you pick me up at six thirty, how do I feel? Depends on how I look at it. That you were thirty minutes later than you said you would be doesn't make me feel whatever I feel, it's how I choose to interpret it. Now, if I choose to put on what I call judging ears, they're perfect for playing the game of who's right, who's wrong, who's at fault. When you put these ears on you'll find somebody at fault.

[Marshall is asked a question by an audience member.]

Man: So, you're saying it's how we interpret their behavior, what meaning we ascribe to it that causes our feelings?

MBR: Exactly. That's it: how we interpret the behavior is one part of our feelings.

There's another connection to feelings and that's this other choice. We can put on these other ears, NVC ears, but now when we put on these ears our thinking does not go to who's at fault. We do not go up to our head and make a mental analysis of the wrongness on either our part or the other person's part.

These ears help us connect to life, to the life that is going on within ourselves. And to me the life that is going on within our self can be most clearly revealed or grasped by looking at what our needs are. What are my needs in this situation? When I am connected to my needs I have strong feelings, but never anger, never anger. Anger is a result of life-alienated thinking, thinking that is disconnected from what my needs are. Anger says I have gone up to my head and have chosen to analyze the wrongness of the other person, and I'm disconnected from my needs. My needs are really the stimulus of what's going on, of my feeling of anger right now. But I am not conscious of what I need, my consciousness is on what's wrong with the other person for not meeting my needs.

Again, if I connect to the other person's needs I will never feel angry. I won't be *repressing* my anger, I simply won't feel it. I'm suggesting that how we feel is a result each moment of which of these four options we choose: Do we choose to go up to our head and judge the other person? Do we choose to go up to our head and judge our self? Do we choose to connect empathically with the other person's needs? Or do we choose to connect empathically with our needs?

It is that choice that determines our feelings. That's why Nonviolent Communication requires a very important word come after the word "because"—the word "I," not the word, "you." For instance, "I feel angry because *I* ____." This reminds us that what we feel is not because of what the other person did, but the choice I made.

Remember that I see all anger as a result of life-alienated, violence-provocative thinking. I think all anger is righteous in this sense: To fully express the anger means putting our entire consciousness on the need that isn't getting met. There is a need that isn't getting met in there. That's righteous; I mean we have a *right* to the feeling in the sense that a need is not getting met. We have to get that need met. We need the energy to motivate us get the need met. I'm suggesting that anger distorts that energy away from the direction of fulfilling the needs into punitive action, and in that sense it's a destructive energy.

From Philosophical to Tactical to Practical

Let me show you that what I'm talking about is more tactical than philosophical. To explain what I mean by tactical, let's go back to that prisoner example I gave you. I wasn't trying to sell the NVC process to him on philosophical principles, but tactical principles.

So, when he said they didn't respond to his request and I said, "OK, so what made you angry?" And he said: "I told you. They didn't respond to my request." I said: "Stop. Don't say I felt angry because *they* . . . stop and become conscious of what you're telling yourself that's making *you* so angry." But he wasn't of the philosophical or psychological background where he was used to sorting out what's going on inside.

So, I said: "Stop. Slow down. Just listen. What's going on inside?" And then it came out: "I'm telling myself that they have no respect for human beings. They're a bunch of cold, faceless bureaucrats." And he was going to go on, I said: "Stop, that's enough, that's enough. That's why you're angry." Then I said to the prisoner: "Now, it's that kind of thinking on your part making you feel very angry. Now, focus your attention on your needs. What are your needs in this situation?" He thought for a while and he said to me: "Marshall, I need the training I was requesting. If I don't get that training, as sure as I'm sitting here I'm going to end up back in this prison when I get out."

Woman: What you're saying makes sense to me but I feel like it

requires being so superhuman on my part. It seems like the anger is so instantaneous and to actually be able to think through these different steps seems to require me to be much bigger than I am.

MBR: All it requires is to shut up. See, I don't see that's so super heroic. All it requires is to shut up and neither say anything intended to blame the other person at that moment nor take any actions to punish the other person. So, stop and do nothing except breathe and take these steps. First—and it's a big step—just shut up.

Woman: But, in your example when you're waiting a half an hour for a person to get there, I mean, they don't have to be there, and I'm already stewing, thinking, you know, "I can't believe he didn't pick me up." "Doesn't he ever remember anything I ask," and on and on and on.

MBR: What I'm saying is there's something you could be doing during that time to relieve yourself that will also increase the likelihood that you'll get your needs met. If you do these steps that we're talking about, you will have something you can say when he gets there or she gets there that is more likely to get them to be on time the next time. I hope I can make it clear so it doesn't seem superhuman. Superhuman is to try to suppress the anger, to try to push it down.

What we're really aiming for here is to keep our attention connected to life moment by moment. We connect to the life that's going on in us, what our needs are at this moment, and focus our attention on the life that's going on in other people.

Example of One Woman's Anger

Woman #2: The situation I faced is one where I was in a conversation with someone and a third person joined the conversation and started addressing the other person without me. And he made a comment to the effect that they preferred people in their community to be white.

MBR: Yes.

Woman #2: So, I felt angry because I wasn't getting my need met to continue to enjoy the conversation I was having.

MBR: Now, hold on, I doubt that, I doubt that that's why you got angry. See, I don't think we get angry because our needs aren't getting met. I'll bet you got angry because you had some thoughts about that other person at that moment. So, I'd like you to be conscious right now about what were you telling yourself that made you so angry about that person. So, here's a person that says I'd rather have only white people here and they address somebody else rather than you and you felt angry because why? Because you told yourself what?

Woman #2: Well, I told myself, What's this person doing, taking over the conversation that I was already having?

MBR: Think behind the question, 'What is this person doing?' What do you think of a person for doing that?

Woman #2: What do I think of him?

MBR: Yeah.

Woman #2: Well, it's not a good thought.

MBR: But I think it's in there. I'm not trying to make you have certain thoughts. I'm just wanting to make you conscious of what I predict is in there. It's probably going on so fast.

Woman #2: No, right away I was feeling left out.

MBR: Well, that's coming closer. So, you interpreted him as leaving you out. See, notice how the image left out is not a feeling.

Woman #2: I see.

MBR: It's an interpretation. It's like abandoned, "I'm feeling abandoned." "I'm feeling unnoticed." So, it's really more an image; you have this image of being left out. And what else was going on there?

Woman #2: I think it was more than an image because they were making eye contact and talking to the other person, and in that exchange they were not talking to me.

MBR: But, I think there are twenty different ways we could look at that, of which leaving you out is only one. There are many other possible ways of interpreting that. And I'm saying each one is going to have a big impact of how you feel. So, let's slow down again. What other thoughts were going on in you that made you angry at that moment?

Woman #2: Well, I had thoughts associated with when somebody uses the word *white*.

MBR: Yeah, I think we're getting closer now. So, what is your image when somebody uses the word *white* in that way? Especially when they don't look at you and they look at the others?

Woman #2: What I told myself is when they say white they don't mean me.

MBR: So, they're kind of excluding you.

Woman #2: And, in fact, their behavior and body language and everything is also giving me that message.

MBR: So, you believe they are excluding you because of race? Do you have any thoughts about people who do that?

Woman #2: Yeah, a lot, I mean . . .

MBR: That's what I'm trying to get at, you see. I'm thinking it's those thoughts that got stimulated in that moment by that action and that's what made you angry.

Woman #2: I think so. I agree with what you're saying. I think it was both that and the actual fact that I was actually being excluded.

MBR: No, you weren't actually being excluded. That was an interpretation that you were being excluded. The fact, as I'm defining this observation as a fact, is that the person had eye contact with others, see that's the fact. Whether you interpret that as excluding you, whether you interpret that as racist, whether you interpret that as that person being frightened of you, these are all interpretations. The fact was he didn't look at you. The fact was he said something about white. Those are

the facts. But if you interpret it as excluding, already you are going to be provoking different feelings in yourself than if you look at it in other ways.

Woman #3: So, how could she have handled that? The body language is excluding her, the conversation is excluding her. I mean, how does she get to her needs?

MBR: If her objective is to fully express her anger, I would suggest that she become conscious of this thing that we're struggling with now, that she become conscious of what she's telling herself that is making her so angry. So, in this case, it sounds like it's come out to be something like: She got angry because she immediately interpreted herself being excluded on the basis of race. This raises all kinds of thoughts in her, about that isn't right, you shouldn't exclude people on the basis of race—is that kind of deeply in there?

Woman #2: I think that came a little later. Yeah, my immediate experience is that I appear invisible and bewildered and confused. I don't understand why that's happening.

MBR: Yeah, so your immediate response in this case wasn't to judge the other person. The immediate one is that she's confused, bewildered. She has a need for some understanding, why is this happening? Then the thinking starts to go.

Woman #2: That's when the anger starts.

MBR: Then the anger starts to come because she starts to have some hypothesis about why this might be going on. And now it's that part we want to express fully, this anger that comes from interpreting: "Hey, wait a minute, I think this is excluding me on the basis of race and I don't like that. I think that's racist, I don't think that's fair. I don't think a person should be excluded on that basis." Thoughts like that.

Woman #2: Yeah.

MBR: OK, now that's the second step. First step, be quiet and identify the thoughts that are making us angry. Next, get connected to the needs behind those thoughts. So, when you

say to yourself, “I don’t think a person should be excluded on a basis of race, I think that’s unfair, I think that’s racist,” I’m suggesting all judgments—and “racist” would be a good example—are tragic expressions of unmet needs. Now, what is the need behind the judgment *racist*? If I judge somebody as a racist, what is my need?

I would like to be included, I would like there to be equality. I would like to be given the same respect and consideration as anybody else. Now, to fully express my anger I open my mouth and say that, because now the anger has been transformed into my needs and need-connected feelings, but now the need-connected feelings for me are much scarier for me to express than the anger, you see.

“That was a racist thing to do.” That is not hard for me to do at all. I kind of like to do that. But, it’s really scary for me to get down to what’s behind that, because feelings for me are so deeply related to racism that it’s scary, but that’s fully expressing the anger. So, then I might open my mouth and say to the person: “When you came into the group just now and started to talk to others and not say anything to me, and then when I heard the comment about white I felt really sick to my stomach and really scared. It just triggered off all kinds of needs on my part to be treated equally, and I’d like you to tell me how you feel when I tell you this.

Woman #2: Actually, I did have something like that conversation with the person. And some of my frustration and anger that doesn’t go away is that I could get so far with that, but I get the feeling that there’s this whole range of experience I’ve had that isn’t comprehended.

MBR: So if I’m hearing you right, you’re afraid that the other person is not going to really connect and understand all that’s going on for you in that, all the experience for you in that?

Woman #2: Right. And then there’s buildup over years of, you know, what I guess I would call rage about that gap.