

## **AWAKENING COMPASSION: AN INTRODUCTION TO NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION with Gina Lawrie**

How do we respond with compassion when faced with responses from others like: "No!" or " Terrorists are just evil people"? It can be tough to see the divine energy in that person in the moment.

We can start by asking ourselves what our intention is in communicating with the other person. If our intention is to change them we are unlikely to find that place of compassion in our hearts. Instead the language of Nonviolent Communication asks us to hold the intention only to connect with the other person. My experience is that once I have connected from the heart and experienced the interconnectedness of us all, I am much more likely to establish that quality of connection through which everyone's needs can get met.

Next, NVC invites us to make a choice about where we put our attention. Much of the time our attention is in the past, remembering previous similar associations, or in the future worrying about what might happen. If we bring our attention fully into the present we have the greatest chance of really meeting the other person as a human being, rather than as a place to put our judgements, blame and demands.

To be present to another is often not possible unless we first give space to finding out what is going on inside us. How do we respond to our own inner voices with compassion when they say things like: " No one will want to come to my workshop" or "How could I do something so stupid, now look at the mess I've caused"? Nonviolent Communication provides a way to listen to ourselves with compassion, to translate the judgements and blame we direct at ourselves into feelings and needs, and then move on to be free to hear the other person.

How we hear is a question of the ears we hear with. We have 4 choices: -

1. Judging others as right, wrong, good or bad.
2. Judging ourselves as right, wrong, good or bad
3. Listening to our own feelings and needs
4. Listening to the others feelings and needs.

Wearing different giraffe and jackal furry ears to experience these choices, we practiced with examples from participants own lives.

There were some fun moments seeing each other wearing the ears and some moving moments as people worked with emotionally difficult

aspects of their relationships at home or at work. Not easy, but with practice we find we can have our own invisible sets of ears to remind us.

If you weren't there, you might like to try it now:-

- Think of a recent time when you have been angry.
- What did you tell yourself about the other person?
- What judgements did you make of them? e.g. 'He is just selfish' 'She's so righteous'. Who did you blame?' It's his fault because he never thinks of the consequences.' 'If my manager were better it would never have happened.'
- What judgements did you make of yourself? e.g. 'I'm always putting my foot in it. When will I learn? It's my fault, if only I hadn't opened my mouth.'
- Now listen to your feelings and needs, e.g.' I feel hurt because I really would like my views to be valued, I feel frustrated because I want to learn and change.'
- If you are still feeling angry, then use the NVC approach to anger and firstly identify what need of yours is not being met and when you really allow this in, you will find that the feeling of anger transforms into another feeling, perhaps sadness or hurt.
- Now, and only now, having given yourself the empathy for what was triggered in you, you can be truly present as you turn your ears toward the other person to empathise with them. Imagine guessing their feelings and needs, e.g. 'Are you feeling anxious because you'd like to make sure that you have the time you need to yourself? Do you feel upset because it's really important to you to feel close with those you love?'
- Even if you aren't able to guess what their feeling and need might be, simply focusing our attention on wondering what the other person is feeling and needing will change the atmosphere between you, defusing anger and reestablishing connection.

Nonviolent Communication is an approach that helps us to listen from our heart and bring compassion more and more into our consciousness. As I listened to other speakers and workshop leaders during the conference I was delighted with the degree of resonance I felt that affirmed my belief that NVC offers a practical way of living the essence of this conference and SEAL values.

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