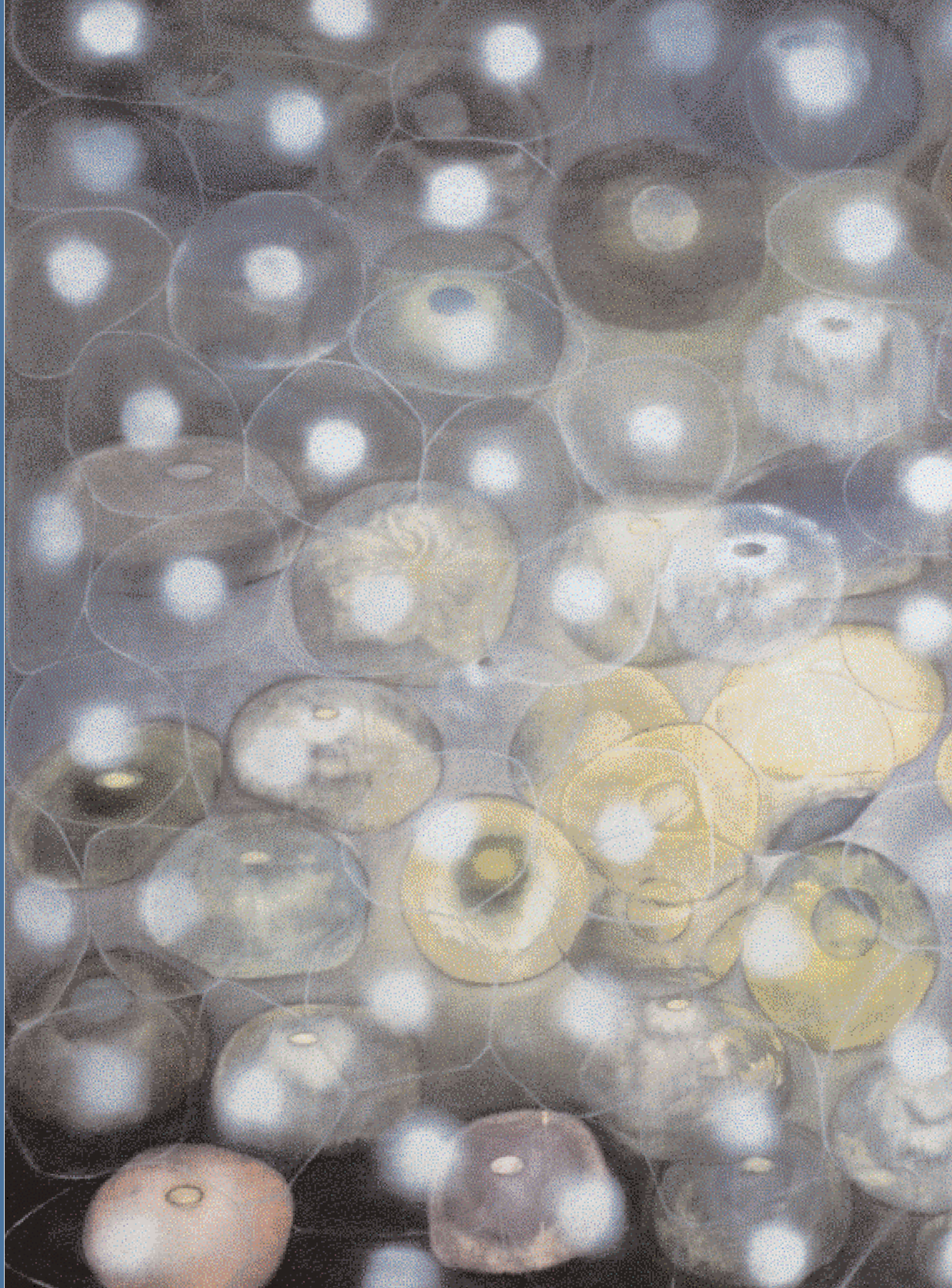


Beyond Violence?

A shift in our understanding of conflict: Perhaps the tensions of difference and diversity are evolution's engine for creative advance—not just for humans, but for the whole cosmos?

Once in a while a rare visionary comes along who pulls together so many threads of research and knowledge that the sum effect pushes the boundaries of science in ways that could change our visions of who we are as human beings—and where we might be headed. Science writer and polymath Howard Bloom is one such visionary. In his latest book, *The Global Brain: The Evolution of Mass Mind from the Big Bang to the 21st Century*, he traces the grand sweep of evolution from colliding subatomic particles through the frenzy of mutating bacteria and the survival tactics of nomadic tribes to the far horizons of space travel. The connective tissue of all this research is the cyclical dynamic of "mass mind," and how it manifests in systems as diverse as ecosystems, street gangs, and the Internet. Evolution, it seems, conducts its grand symphony via the creative interplay between the processes of cohesion and separation. Collecting together around a common event, need, or purpose, living systems are likely, eventually, to disperse and diversify according to Bloom. This move toward diversity contains the seeds of creativity and new formations. ➢

ROSS BLECKNER

His work resonates well with two themes the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS) has pursued for a number of years: collective wisdom and creativity. Bloom's analysis raises some provocative questions for us about the relationships between the collective body and the creative impulse of diversity.

Here at IONS we have launched a new initiative: "The 21st-Century Human." Those of you who have been following this magazine (formerly *IONS Review*) for a while will recognize our goal: to identify and help develop or awaken those human capacities, qualities, and skills essential for a just, compassionate, and sustainable global future. Might one "essential capacity" for the 21st-century human be the ability, collectively, to honor, embrace, and learn from the creativity of differences?

In this issue, we focus on the topic of diversity, conflict, and creativity in order to stimulate and encourage further dialogue. Bloom highlights issues that IONS will most certainly continue to explore.

For example, according to Bloom, cohesion of collectives can lead ultimately to unhealthy stagnation within a group, and at some point the impetus to separate comes into play. Separation seeds diversity and new creative evolutionary expression. Diversity is so integral to evolution that the human organism might be said to be hard-wired for diversity. Bloom identifies a "diversity generator" at work, and illustrates how it can function:

> One of the most powerful diversity generators in today's humans and animals is a force Freud called "the narcissism of minor difference." For simplicity's sake, we'll refer to it as "creative bickering." Individuals extremely similar to one another find some petty distinction, then raise unholy hell about it. To paraphrase [sociologist] Emile Durkheim, a community of saints will classify a bit of lint on the heavenly robes as intolerable, and will viciously hound those who aren't lint-free. Eventually the supposedly unkempt may seek out others with a sloppy bent, and wall themselves off as a separate sect sworn to a messy destiny. A primitive form of this impulse far precedes us hominids. The closer insects are to each other in physical form and habits, the more likely they are to be enemies (p.93).

If we are, indeed, hardwired to diversify, are we also hardwired to commit the kinds of violence that so often erupt today, when diverse opinions clash? How are we to understand and deal with the violence of our times? Is this the unredeemable legacy of the 21st century? Bloom, for one, thinks this may not be the case:

> [My] exploration of the mass mind's history . . . is intended as a small move in the progress toward [an] ancient dream . . . the dream of peace. We will always cling to common threads yet stake out grounds for squabbling. Such is the way the global brain does its thinking and creating, its testing and imagining. The more we can play out our necessary contests civilly, the closer we will come to turning spears to pruning hooks and swords to plowshares—purging the global brain at last of blood and butchery (p. 222).

Bloom's insights into the dynamics of social cohesion and diversity set the context for the following set of articles on the topic of nonviolent communication and conflict resolution:

- In an interview with journalist D. Killian, Marshall Rosenberg makes a case that compassion is a natural state of being human, and that violence is a learned habit. In working with conflicted groups, Rosenberg, often guided by his own intuition, skillfully uses his process of Nonviolent Communication to evoke what he believes is our innate capacity for compassion.
- Martial arts master Vernon Kitabu Turner applies the power of mind to ensure that his defense moves, which exhibit mastery of subtle energy, neutralize his opponents without doing them any physical harm.
- And youth activist Ocean Robbins bravely risks the transformative power of confrontation by creating safe containers for racially and ethnically diverse youth leaders to express, head-on, what are too often unspoken feelings and uncomfortable truths.

Within this section, we have included a brief web-based resource guide for further exploration into the topics of nonviolent communication and conflict resolution.

And, for further insight into the "big picture," we highly recommend Howard Bloom's *The Global Brain* (John Wiley, 2001).

—*Barbara McNeill*

Communicating from Compassion

D. KILLIAN

I first met Marshall Rosenberg when I was assigned by a local paper to cover one of his "Nonviolent Communication" training seminars. Disturbed by the inequalities in the world and impatient for change, I couldn't imagine what use a communication technique could be in solving problems such as global warming or the debt of developing nations. But I was surprised by the visible effect Rosenberg's work had on individuals and families caught in conflict.

Nonviolent Communication, or NVC, has four steps: observing what is happening in a given situation; identifying what one is feeling; identifying what one is needing; and then making a request for what one would like to see occur. It sounds simple, yet it's more than a technique for resolving conflict. It's a different way of understanding human motivation and behavior.

Rosenberg learned about violence at an early age. Growing up in Detroit in the Thirties and Forties, he was beaten up for being a Jew, and witnessed some of the city's worst race riots, which resulted in more than forty deaths in a matter of days.

These experiences drove him to study psychology in an attempt to understand, as he puts it, "what happens to disconnect us from our compassionate nature, and what allows some people to stay connected to their compassionate nature under even the most trying circumstances."

Rosenberg completed his PhD in clinical psychology at the University of Wisconsin in 1961, and afterward went to work with youths at reform schools. The experience led him to conclude that, rather than help people to be more compassionate, clinical psychology actually contributed to the conditions that cause violence because it categorized people and thus distanced them from each other; doctors were trained to see the diagnosis, not the person. He decided that violence did not arise from pathology, as he had been taught, but from the ways in which we communicate.

Humanist psychotherapist Carl Rogers, creator of "client-centered therapy," was an early influence on Rosenberg's theories, and Rosenberg worked with Rogers for several years before setting out on his own to teach others how to interact in nonaggressive ways. His method became known as Nonviolent Communication.

No longer a practicing psychologist, Rosenberg admits that he has struggled at times with his own method, resorting to familiar behavior or fearing the risks involved in a nonviolent approach. Yet each time he has followed through with Nonviolent Communication, he has been surprised by the results. At times, it has literally saved his life.

On one occasion in the late 1980s, he was asked to teach his method to Palestinian refugees in Bethlehem. He met with about 170 Muslim men at a mosque in the Deheisha Camp. On the way into the camp, he saw several empty tear-gas canisters along the road, each clearly marked "Made in USA". When the men realized their would-be instructor was from the United States, they became angry. Some jumped to their feet and began shouting, "Assassin! Murderer!" One man confronted Rosenberg, screaming in his face, "Child killer!"

Although tempted to make a quick exit, he instead focused his

RELATED WEB RESOURCES

www.cnvc.org
Marshall Rosenberg created the Center for Nonviolent Communication

www.sfcg.org
Search for Common Ground supports local and global efforts to resolve problems nonviolently

www.agnt.org/snv02.htm
Inspired by Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi, A Season for Nonviolence leads campaigns on the healing power of nonviolence

For more web resources, visit www.noetic.org/nvc

questions on what the man was feeling, and a dialogue ensued. By the end of the day, the man who had called Rosenberg a murderer had invited him home to Ramadan dinner.

Rosenberg is founder and director of the nonprofit Center for Nonviolent Communication (www.cnvc.org). *He is the author of* Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life, *(PuddleDancer Press, 2003), and has just completed a new book on the application of NVC in education:* When Students Love to Learn and Teachers Love to Teach. *He is currently working on a third book addressing the social implications of Nonviolent Communication.*

KILLIAN: *Your method aims to teach compassion, but compassion seems more a way of being than a skill or technique. Can it really be taught?*

ROSENBERG: I would say it's a natural human trait. Our survival as a species depends on our ability to recognize that our well-being and the well-being of others are, in fact, one and the same. The problem is that we are taught behaviors that disconnect us from this natural awareness. It's not that we have to learn how to be compassionate; we have to unlearn what we've been taught, and get back to compassion.

KILLIAN: *If violence is learned, when did it start? It seems to have always been a part of human existence.*

ROSENBERG: Theologian Walter Wink estimates that violence has been the social norm for about eight thousand years. That's when a myth evolved that the world was created by a heroic, virtuous male god who defeated an evil female goddess. From that point on, we've had the image of the good guys killing the bad guys. And that has evolved into "retributive justice," which says that there are those who deserve to be punished and those who deserve to be rewarded. That belief has penetrated deep into our societies. Not every culture has been exposed to it, but, unfortunately, most have.

KILLIAN: *You've said that "deserve" is the most dangerous word in the language. Why?*

ROSENBERG: It's at the basis of retributive justice. For thousands of years, we've been operating under this system that says people who do bad deeds are evil—indeed, that human beings are basically evil. According to this way of thinking, a few good people have evolved, and it's up to them to be the authorities and control the others. And the way you control people, given that our nature is evil and selfish, is through a system of justice in which people who behave in a good manner get rewarded, while those who are evil are made to suffer. In order to see such a system as fair, one has to believe that both sides deserve what they get.

KILLIAN: *But you're not opposed to judgments.*

ROSENBERG: I'm all for judgments. I don't think we could survive very long without them. We judge which foods will give us what our bodies need. We judge which actions are going to meet our needs. But I differentiate between life-serving judgments, which are about our needs, and moralistic judgments that imply rightness or wrongness.

KILLIAN: *You've called instead for "restorative justice." How is that different?*

ROSENBERG: Restorative justice is based on the question: "How do we restore peace?" In other words, how do we restore a state in which people care about one another's well-being? Research indicates that perpetrators who go through restorative justice are less likely to repeat the behaviors that led to their incarceration; and it's far more healing for the victim to have peace restored than simply to see the other person punished.

KILLIAN: *We've long believed in the West that needs must be regulated and denied, but you're suggesting the opposite: that needs must be recognized and fulfilled.*

ROSENBERG: I'd say we teach people to misrepresent their needs. Rather than educating people to be conscious of their needs, we teach them to become addicted to ineffective strategies for meeting them. Consumerism makes people think that their needs will be met by owning a certain item. We teach people that revenge is a need, when in fact it's a flawed strategy. Retributive justice itself is a poor strategy. Mixed in with all that is a belief in competition, that we can get our needs met only at other people's expense. Not only that, but that it's heroic and joyful to win, to defeat someone else.

So it's very important to differentiate needs from strategies, and to get people to see that any strategy that meets your needs at someone else's expense is not meeting all your needs, because any time you behave in a way that's harmful to others, you end up hurting yourself. As philosopher Elbert Hubbard once said, "We're not punished for our sins, but by them."

Whether I'm working with drug addicts in Bogotá,

Colombia, or with alcoholics in the United States, or with sex offenders in prisons, I always start by making it clear to them that I'm not there to make them stop what they're doing. "Others have tried," I say. "You've probably tried yourself, and it hasn't worked." I tell them I'm there to help them get clear about what needs are being met by this behavior. And once we have gotten clear on what their needs are, I teach them to find more effective and less costly ways of meeting those needs.

KILLIAN: *Nonviolent Communication seems to focus a lot on feelings. What about the logical, analytic side of things? Does it have a place here?*

ROSENBERG: Nonviolent Communication focuses on what's alive in us and what would make life more wonderful. What's alive in us are our needs, and I'm talking about the universal needs, the ones all living creatures have. Our feelings are simply a manifestation of what is happening with our needs. If our needs are being fulfilled, we feel pleasure. If our needs are not being fulfilled, we feel pain.

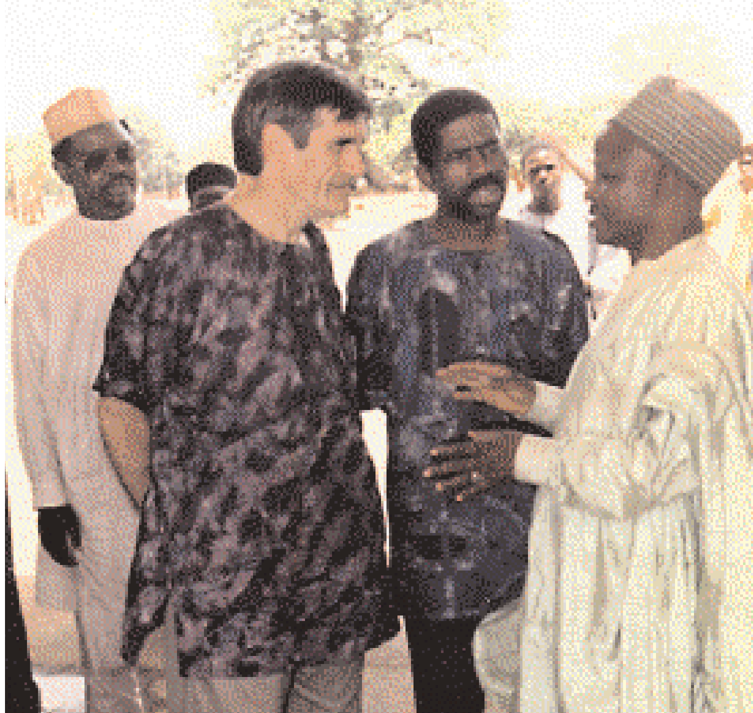
Now, this does not exclude the analytic. We simply differentiate between life-serving analysis and life-alienating analysis. If I say to you, "I'm in a lot of pain over my relationship to my child. I really want him to be healthy, and I see him not eating well and smoking," then you might ask, "Why do you think he's doing this?" You'd be encouraging me to analyze the situation and uncover his needs.

Analysis is a problem only when it gets disconnected from serving life. For example, if I said to you, "I think George Bush is a monster," we could have a long discussion, and we might think it was an interesting topic, but it wouldn't be connected to life. We wouldn't realize this, though, because maybe neither of us has ever had a conversation that was life-connecting. We get so used to speaking at the analytic level that we can go through life with our needs unmet and not even know it. And in middle-class, educated culture in the United States, I think that disconnection is a way of life. When people have needs that they don't know how to deal with directly, they approach them indirectly through intellectual discussions. As a result, the conversation is lifeless.

KILLIAN: *If we do agree that Bush is a monster, though, at least we'll connect on the level of values.*

ROSENBERG: And that's going to meet some

continued on page 14



Focusing on Needs

I was asked to mediate a conflict between two tribes in Nigeria that had been fighting violently for a year. Out of their combined populations of 400, 100 had been killed. A colleague of mine who lives there worked hard to get the chiefs on both sides to meet with me to see if we could resolve the conflict. After much effort, he finally got them to agree.

As we were walking into the session, my colleague whispered, "Be prepared for a little bit of tension, Marshall. Three of the people in the room know that the person who killed their child is in that room."

This was the first time they had really sat down together, and it was very tense at first. I started with a question to focus on people's needs. "Who would like to speak first to say what your needs are in this situation? After everyone understands the needs of everyone else, then we'll move to finding some ways of meeting the needs."

Unfortunately, they knew only how to tell me what was wrong with the other side. Instead of responding to my question, the chief from one side said, "You people are murderers." And they responded, "You've been trying to dominate us. We're not going to tolerate it any more!" The tension grew. Obviously, just getting people together to communicate doesn't help—unless they know how to communicate in a way that connects them as human beings.

I turned to the chief who had said, "You people are murderers," and guessed: "Chief, do you have a need for safety, and to be sure that whatever conflicts are going on will be resolved by some means other than violence?" He immediately said, "Of course, that's what I'm saying!" Well, of course he had not said that—he had made a judgment rather

continued on page 14

Focusing on Needs, *continued from page 13*

than express his needs. However, once we had his needs out on the table, I turned to a chief from the other side and said, "Chief, would you please reflect back what he said his needs were?"

The chief responded to this man by asking in a very hostile way, "Then why did you kill my son?"

That started an uproar. After things calmed down, I said, "Chief, we'll deal with your reaction to his needs later, but at the moment I suggest that you just hear his needs. Could you tell me back what he said his needs were?" He couldn't do it. I said, "Chief, I heard the other chief saying that he has a need for safety. He has a need to feel secure, that no matter what conflicts are present, they'll be resolved in some way other than by violence. Could you just reflect back what that need is, so that I'm sure everybody's communicating?" He couldn't do it. I had to repeat it two or three times before he could hear the other person's needs.

I reversed the process and said to the second chief, "I thank you for hearing that he has this need for security. Now I'd like to hear what your needs are in this." He said, "They have been trying to dominate us. They are a dominating group. They think they're better than everybody." Once again, this started a fight, and I had to intervene. After the group settled, I went back to trying to sense the needs behind his statement that the other side was dominating.

I asked, "Chief, behind your statement, do you have a need for equality? Do you really need to feel you're being treated equally in this community?" And he said, "Yes of course!"

Now, again, my job was to get the chief on the other side to hear, which wasn't easy. It took three or four repetitions. Finally the chief was able to hear the other chief saying he had a need for equality.

This took close to two hours. Then another chief who hadn't spoken jumped to his feet, looked at me, and said something very intensely. I was very touched when the translator said, "The chief says we cannot learn this way of communicating in one day. And he says, if we knew how to communicate this way, we wouldn't have to kill each other."

I said to the translator, "Tell the chief I am very grateful that he sees what can happen when we hear each other's needs. Tell him that today my objective was to help resolve the conflict peacefully to everybody's satisfaction, and I was hoping that people could see the value in this way of communicating. Tell him that if people on both sides would like, we will be glad to train people within each tribe to communicate this way, so that future conflicts could be resolved this way rather than through violence."

That chief wanted to be one of the members trained, and in fact before I left that day, we had members from both tribes eager to learn this process. I am happy to report that the war between the tribes ended that day. *—From* We Can Work it Out, *by Marshall Rosenberg (PuddleDancer Press, 2003)*

Beyond Violence, *continued from page 13*

needs—certainly more than if I disagree with you, or if I ignore what you're saying. But imagine what the conversation could be like if we learned to hear what's alive behind the words and ideas, and to connect at that level. Central to NVC training is that all moralistic judgments, whether positive or negative, are tragic expressions of needs. Criticism, analysis, and insults are tragic expressions of unmet needs. Compliments and praise, for their part, are tragic expressions of fulfilled needs.

So why do we get caught up in this dead, violence-provoking language? Why not learn how to live at the level where life is really going on? NVC is not looking at the world through rose-colored glasses. We come closer to the truth when we connect with what's alive in people than when we just listen to what they think.

KILLIAN: *How do you discuss world affairs in the language of feelings?*

ROSENBERG: Somebody reasonably proficient in NVC might say, "I am scared to death when I see what Bush is doing in an attempt to protect us. I don't feel any safer." And then somebody who disagrees might say, "Well, I share your desire for safety, but I'm scared of doing nothing." Already we're not just talking about George Bush, but about the feelings that are alive in both of us.

KILLIAN: *You've written about "domination culture." Is that the same as "salvationism"?*

ROSENBERG: I started using the term "domination culture" after reading Walter Wink's works, especially his book *Engaging the Powers.* His concept is that we are living under structures in which the few dominate the many. Look at how families are structured here in the United States: The parents claim always to know what's right, and set the rules for everybody else's benefit. Look at our schools. Look at our workplaces. Look at our government, our religions. At all levels, you have authorities who impose their will on other people, claiming that it's for everybody's well-being. They use punishment and reward as the basic strategy for getting what they want. That's what I mean by domination culture.

KILLIAN: *You've commented that, among the different forms of violence—physical, psychological, and institutional—physical violence is the least destructive. Why?*

continued on page 46

The Art of 'No-Mind'

What is it that makes the martial arts a path to transcendence, or the experience of "no-self," rather than simply another powerful means of developing one's strength, skill, mastery, or sense of personal accomplishment?

VERNON KITABU TURNER: It can be approached from both directions. The average person who studies martial arts today—and even those in ancient times—does so because he or she wants to have physical strength in order to be able to subdue an enemy or protect him- or herself, or to have a sense of personal power. There was also the aspect of being aggressive or warlike as a way of earning one's living, and in that case it was a career. But a person working for the good of humanity develops a peaceful center, not an aggressive nature. His or her purpose is to defend, not to attack—to defend his or her own body, to defend loved ones, to defend those who are weaker, and never to desire to do harm even to the one who is attacking, *never* to become like the evil ones who would destroy him or her. When you've developed that resolve, the spiritual path reveals itself to you and begins to lead you in the right direction. . . .

Now when you take that spiritual path, the action does not come from you. I remember the first time I became aware that my body could move but that I wasn't moving. A person threw a punch, my hand blocked it, and threw him, and I didn't even *know* that move. And then, as I began to let go more and more, I found out that the mastery was already there; I just had to get out of the way to let it emerge, to show itself. Pretty soon I was able to use this as a platform to teach others about spirituality as a practical reality. The Japanese call it *mushin*—the art of no-mind. That's when there is no conscious attempt to act, and yet you move anyway, when the action comes from such a deep place that there is no one to take credit for it. The experience of this coexistence—of this protection that is there within you—is very powerful. . . .

I've been tested by seventh-degree black belts and other top masters, and I've asked them to explain what they feel when they attack me. They say, "It's like you're not there." They say, "I thought I had you, but then you were *gone*!" This is because the movement comes from a higher place, and it *knows* what the other person is going to do. I don't know what other people are going to do—but when they try it, they discover that it's counteracted. A lot of people say, "I want to learn your technique; it's wonderful." But I say, "I don't have any techniques. Yes, you saw what appeared to be a technique, but it's not, because I did not *apply* it. What you need to learn is how to come from that place where all techniques already exist, and where the proper one will be there when you need it."

—From "A Mind Like Water" an interview with Vernon Kitabu Turner by Simeon Alev, What is Enlightenment?, *Fall/Winter 2001. Find out more about Vernon K. Turner's work at www.soulsword.com and in his book* Soul Sword: The Way and Mind of a Zen Warrior *(Hampton Roads, 2000).*

PHOTO: SIMEON ALEV

Building Bridges—The Hard Way

ocean robbins

Youth today stand at a crucial threshold, as we create patterns and ways of being that will often carry through the rest of our lives. Not necessarily clear on our values or future careers, we are open to questioning most everything.

I started YES! (acronym for Youth for Environmental Sanity) in 1990 as an idealistic sixteen-year-old. Since that time, we've reached more than 600,000 students in school assemblies, and held hundreds of camps, workshops, retreats, and trainings intended to awaken consciousness and empower young people to live from purpose and possibility. When I started YES!, I imagined, more than a bit naively, that we could transform the world within a decade by igniting a new paradigm in the consciousness of everyone we reached—a way of thinking and acting that would radiate out through their homes, schools, and communities. We wanted to transform fear into love, hatred into forgiveness, and cynicism into positive action. As much as we've taught the students we've worked with over these last thirteen years, they've taught us far more. Here's one example:

Malika, an African-American from Selma, Alabama, came to a week-long World Youth Leadership Jam that YES! organized in 1999. Hearing the depth of the struggle and despair in her community had a profound effect on me. She told us:

"I grew up in a blatant and openly polarized town in which many European-Americans held fast to the 'Old South' where slavery/segregation was merely seen as a God-ordained way of life. Actually, hate ran through the bodies of many in Selma, as smoothly as the blood that filled their veins. This hate was necessary to maintain the beliefs that undergirded the economic, political, and social power structure of the South for centuries.

"I grew up believing that any group of people who had endured the dehumanizing effects of slavery, Jim Crow, lynching, rape, and the constant evils perpetrated on us were justified in the hatred of whatever was at the root of that evil. I also saw how hatred could destroy the very body, spirit, and mind of those who held on to its powerful energy. So I realized that it was important to focus my energies on love for all communities, my own as well as those who tried to destroy me, if I was to ever give world peace and justice a chance. The YES! World Jam [one of which was held on IONS' campus] gave me the opportunity to practice what I always knew—love is the thing to do."

After meeting Malika, I worked with several other YES! staff to organize a retreat in partnership with her and her organization. We brought together fifteen white youth from the North and fifteen African-American youth from the South for a week in Selma. Our intent was to build bridges of connection and partnership across historical lines of separation, and to shine the light of consciousness and love into the painful area of racism. The challenges before us, however, were larger than I had imagined.

Shortly after the evening session closed, as the facilitators were meeting to plan the next day, a verbal fight involving a majority of the camp participants erupted in the hall, and we were called in to mediate. I arrived just as a fifteen-year-old white student was screaming at a cluster of African-American students that he was not responsible for racism, and that racism didn't even exist any more, while his counterparts shouted back that white people enjoyed the benefits of privilege earned through centuries of slavery and violence, and, "If there's justice in the afterlife, white people will burn in hell!" I said something about the need to create new patterns of partnership so that there could be healing and forgiveness, and a sixteen-year-old African-American girl shot back, "If a woman is being raped over and over, you don't tell her to forgive the rapist. You give her a gun or train her to fight back. If racism was in the past, we could talk about forgiveness. But the simple fact that you think it's over is the whole point. Your people perpetuate it, and our people are dying! You can go live a happy new paradigm in your nice safe suburbs. But me, I'm fighting for my people!"

Four hours later, some time around three in the morning, half the camp was still gathered in the hallway. Arms were still crossed, and tears were rolling down more than a few cheeks.

The conversation was intense, painful, and brutally honest. Malika and I traded a look that said, "What the heck are we going to do?"

We stumbled our way through that night, and through that week, step by step figuring out how to bring people together across what we now saw was a chasm. By the end of the week, participants were repeatedly saying that they had never felt so close to someone of a different race, and that they had learned and grown tremendously. I knew good work had been done, but I was overwhelmed by the immensity of the work that still needed to be done.

PHOTO: PALI DELEVITT

From such experiences, I saw that YES! had a lot to learn about how to bring a new level of consciousness to places of historic and present pain and conflict. And I made a deep and lasting commitment to the learning process, and to working with intentionally diverse constituencies. If differences typically divide us along lines like race, gender, and nation with a power that can destroy people and even countries, then is it possible that by bringing individuals and communities together across these barriers toward a higher common vision, and by discovering ways to embrace our differences and find love and forgiveness, some new force of tremendous transformational power might be unleashed? I believe so, and I believe we are beginning to discover at least the tip of an enormously important iceberg.

At the 2002 World Youth Leadership Jam, participants sat in a circle sharing their journeys around gender issues. The women's conversation was personal and profound. Annie (name changed for privacy), a nineteen-year-old indigenous leader from Mexico, had shared with considerable emotion that she had never been able to forgive her father for alcoholism or for beating her, and that she had twice been raped. Several other women had described similar experiences. The room was heartbreakingly raw, tender, and vulnerable. Then twenty-three-year-old Sarah from Canada (name changed), the first white woman to speak, shared that she had enjoyed a basically blessed life, and described her beloved father in some detail and with almost theatrical gusto. Annie suddenly sprang to her feet, hurt and furious that Sarah had it so much easier than she did, and because Sarah seemed oblivious to how her enthusiastic sharing might impact "some of the other women of color" who had endured abusive pasts.

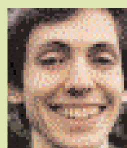
Sarah was shocked and felt hurt, as if there wasn't space for her feelings, and accused Annie of "racializing everything." All the vulnerability and tenderness in the room seemed to harden into fear, bitterness, and mistrust as Annie screamed that Sarah's sharing, and "mean-spirited comment" had "ruined every bit of love and safe space we spent this entire week creating. You just destroyed it all. Every bit of good we've done together is gone!"

That's when Malika, a facilitator at this Jam, stepped in. "And maybe," she interjected with great intensity, "maybe every bit of love and safe space we've created together this week was necessary so that we could move through this difficult impasse together. Maybe we didn't come here just to grow personally or professionally, but to do the work, together, that will help humanity move forward in some of its most intractable struggles. Maybe we, together, can do something tonight that will transform the tired old stories of privilege and oppression, and find a new path."

"But," chimed in another participant, "if we can't even deal with these issues constructively here, what hope is there for our world?"

"And if we can," replied Malika, "then what possibilities does that open up for our world?"

Excerpted from an essay entitled "Building Bridges, Creating Community: Learning How to Forge Partnership Across Differences."



OCEAN ROBBINS *is the founding president of Youth for Environmental Sanity (YES!), which since 1990 has spoken to 625,000 students and held 81 week-long camps and Youth Jams for young leaders from 55 nations. Robbins is co-author of* Choices for Our Future. *For more information on YES!, go to www.yesworld.org*

Beyond Violence, *continued from page 14*

ROSENBERG: Physical violence is always a secondary result. I've talked to people in prison who've committed violent crimes, and they say, "He deserved it. The guy was an asshole." It's their thinking that frightens me, how they dehumanize their victims, saying that they deserved to suffer. The fact that the man went out and shot another person scares me, too, but I'm more scared by the thinking that led to it, because it's so deeply ingrained in such a large portion of humanity.

KILLIAN: *In the US right now, there are some people who would have a lot of trouble hearing this. During a memorial for 9/11, I heard a policeman say all he wanted was "payback."*

ROSENBERG: One rule of our training is: empathy before education. I wouldn't expect someone who's been injured to hear what I'm saying until they felt that I had fully understood the depth of their pain. Once they felt empathy from me, then I would introduce my fear that our plan to exact retribution isn't going to make us safer.

KILLIAN: *Have you always been a nonviolent revolutionary?*

ROSENBERG: For many years I wasn't, and I was scaring more people than I was helping. When I was working against racism in the United States, I must confess, I confronted more than a few people with accusations like "That was a racist thing to say!" I said this with deep anger because I was dehumanizing the other person in my mind. And I was not seeing any of the changes I wanted.

An Iowa feminist group called HERA helped me with that. They asked, "Doesn't it bother you that your work is against violence rather than for life?" I realized that I was trying to get people to see the mess around them by telling them how they were contributing to it. In doing so, I was just creating more resistance and more hostility. HERA helped me to get past just talking about not judging others, and to move on to what can enrich life and make it more wonderful.

KILLIAN: *You have said, though, that physical force is sometimes necessary. Would you include capital punishment?*

ROSENBERG: No. When we do restorative justice, I want the perpetrators to stay in prison until we are finished. And I am for using whatever physical force is necessary to get them off the streets. But I don't see prison as a punitive place. I see it as a place to keep dangerous individuals until we can do the necessary restoration work. I've worked with some pretty scary folks, even serial killers, but when I stayed with it and forgot about the psychiatric point of view, that some people are too damaged ever to change, I saw improvement.

Once, when I was working with prisoners in Sweden, the administrator told me about a man who'd killed five people, maybe more. "You'll know him right away," he said. "He's a monster." When I walked into the room, there he was—a big man, tattoos all over his arms. The first day, he just stared at me, didn't say a word. The second day, he just stared at me. I was growing annoyed at this administrator: Why the hell did he put this psychopath in my group? Already, I'd started falling back on clinical diagnosis.

Then, on the third morning, one of my colleagues said, "Marshall, I notice you haven't talked to him." And I realized that I hadn't approached that frightening inmate because just the thought of opening up to him scared me to death. So I went in and said to the killer, "I've heard some of the things that you did to get into this prison, and when you just sit there and stare at me each day and don't say anything, I feel scared. I would like to know what's going on for you."

He said, "What do you want to hear?" And he started to talk.

If I just sit back and diagnose people, thinking that they can't be reached, I won't reach them. But when I put in the time and energy and take a risk, I always get somewhere.

Depending on the damage that's been done to somebody, it may take three, four, five years of daily investment of energy to restore peace. And most systems are not set up to do that. If we're not in a position to give somebody what he or she needs to change, then my second choice would be for that person to be in prison. But I wouldn't kill anyone.

KILLIAN: *You speak about a protective use of force. Would you consider strikes or boycotts a protective use of force?*

ROSENBERG: I was working in San Francisco with a group of minority parents who were very concerned about the principal at their children's school. They said he was destroying the students' spirit. So I trained them in how to communicate with the principal. They tried to talk to him, but he said, "Get out of here. Nobody is going to tell me how to run my school." Next I explained to them

the concept of protective use of force, and one of them came up with the idea of a strike: They would keep their kids out of school and picket with signs that let everyone know what kind of man this principal was. I told them they were getting protective use of force mixed up with punitive force. It sounded like they wanted to punish this man. The only way protective use of force could work, I said, was if they communicated clearly that their intent was to protect their children, and not to bad-mouth or dehumanize the principal.

I suggested signs that stated their needs: "We want to communicate. We want our children in school."

The strike was very successful, but not in the way we'd imagined. When the school board heard about some of the things this principal was doing, they fired him.

KILLIAN: *But demonstrations, strikes, and rallies are often presented as aggressive by the media.*

ROSENBERG: Yes, we've seen protesters cross the line in some of the anti-globalization demonstrations. Some people, while trying to show how terrible corporations are, take some pretty violent actions under the guise of protective use of force.

There are two things that distinguish truly nonviolent actions from violent actions. First, there is no enemy in the nonviolent point of view. You don't see an enemy. Your thinking is clearly focused on protecting your needs. And second, your intention is not to make the other side suffer.

KILLIAN: *It seems the US government has trouble differentiating between the two. It tries to make war sound acceptable by appealing to our need for safety, and then it acts aggressively.*

ROSENBERG: Well, we do need to protect ourselves. But you're right, there is so much else mixed up with that. When the population has been educated in retributive justice, there is nothing they want more than to see someone suffer. Most of the time, when we end up using force, it could have been prevented by using different ways of negotiating. I have no doubt this could have been the case if we'd been listening to the messages coming to us from the Arab world for so many years. This was not a new situation. This pain of theirs had been expressed over and over in many ways, and we hadn't responded with any empathy or understanding. And when we don't hear people's pain, it keeps coming out in ways that make empathy even harder.

Now when I say this, people often think I'm justifying what the terrorists did on September 11, and of course I'm not. I'm saying that the real answer is to look at how we could have prevented it to begin with.

KILLIAN: *Some in the US think that bombing Iraq is a protective use of force.*

ROSENBERG: I would ask them, "What is your objective?" Is it protection? Certain kinds of negotiations, which have never been attempted, would be more protective than any use of force. Our only option is communication of a radically different sort. We're getting to the point now where no army is able to prevent terrorists from poisoning our streams or fouling the air. We are getting to a point where our best protection is to communicate with the people we're most afraid of. Nothing else will work.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What does it take to build enough trust to help diverse groups do the healing and transformational work that needs to be done, and what are the tools we need to do that work?
- Can someone have an open heart and yet act in ways that cause violation and injustice to others?
- Is there a difference between living with an open heart, and acting in a manner that expresses the spirit of love?
- How do individuals from diverse cultures come together across lines of historic separation and build bridges of partnership?

—*Ocean Robbins*, founder of YES!

To discuss these questions with other IONS members, go to www.noetic.org and click the "Noetic Café" link.

Adapted from The Sun Magazine (*February 2003*)*, with generous assistance from PuddleDancer Press (www.puddledancer.com)*

D. KILLIAN's *work has appeared in numerous publications including* Sojourner, Curve, Diva, The Sun Magazine, Lambda Book Report, *and* Harvard Gay and Lesbian Review. *She lives in New York City and is a full-time organizer for the National Writers Union. Contact her at dianzapp@aol.com*