

## *Compassionate Touch-Compassionate Communication*

In the moments of chaos in my life, I feel both confusion and fear. I can feel my stomach, back, and jaw tighten. I notice a restriction in my chest. I feel something in my gut that is uncomfortable and difficult to describe: churning is the best word for the sensation. Intimately connecting with others lessens my sense of fear, and replaces it with trust and acceptance. In those moments, my need for connection is satisfied. My muscles relax and I breathe more fully. I feel clear and insightful. Expressing all my emotions and needs spontaneously is a difficult thing for me to do.

This dance of expression exists in all aspects of my life, and particularly within my practice. It is a dance I am enjoying within myself, as well as with others. How to continue to dance in intimate conversation is the subject of a book by Dr. Marshall Rosenberg. This book review creates connections between the book, Non-Violent Communication--A Language of Compassion, and my practice, which I feel is important to share with my clientele and my colleagues. I am a beginning student of Nonviolent Communication, and not a trainer of the method. It is from that perspective that I write.

My Feldenkrais training left me with the ability to connect with people physically and emotionally, but not a clear way to communicate verbally with my students. (That word "student" still seems inadequate to me, for they are not my students because I am not a teacher. They seem more like fellow travelers on a never-ending tour bus ride to full and healthy living. I feel more like an assistant bus driver or a navigator than anything else.) We both learn when I do not "teach".

So, fellow travelers, in dealing with my own emotions, I find it necessary to address my concerns both verbally and non-verbally. I believe the same to be true for the people I see in my practice. When to speak and when to remain silent during a lesson is difficult to determine. I rely on my intuition to inform me if I need to speak. Practice makes my intuitiveness reliable. However, what to say and what to listen for is a learned skill, and a necessary one if you are working with people as intimately as we do. How to stay fully connected with others and myself when communicating verbally is the subject matter of Non-Violent Communication--A Language of Compassion. In his book, Dr. Rosenberg clearly outlines, explains, and exemplifies the four steps of communicating compassionately.

In this model, the first step is noticing the observation of our senses (just the facts please), the second step is expressing our emotions (anger, hurt, joy, energetic, enlivened, peaceful, appreciative), the third step is verbalizing our needs (autonomy, connection, freedom, safety, comfort, encouragement,

celebration), and the fourth step is making a specific request for action to get our needs met (Would you be willing to \_\_\_\_\_?).

This process is not about solving psychological problems, as Feldenkrais work is not about removing pain. Problems are solved as a byproduct, or result from, increasing our awareness of how we communicate. The intent of Non-Violent Communication--A Language of Compassion is to connect with others by listening for and understanding their feelings and needs, and discovering what we can, and cannot do to meet those needs. At the same time, I must remain conscious of communicating my feelings and needs, and making sure I get my needs met. This is also true within the context of a Feldenkrais lesson. As a practitioner, I have feelings that must be expressed, and needs that must be met within a lesson. Page 24

Just recently, while working with a woman who has had a radical mastectomy, there was a moment of stillness in our lesson together. My hands just stopped. I waited. Her breathing was rather shallow, and something in me knew that a question was appropriate. I asked, "What are you feeling?" She was lying face down on the table, and from under the mass of hair came a few sniffles and the response, "I feel as if I have been torn apart." Indeed she had been. As part of the surgery, the surgeon had removed a large portion of the muscle from her back, and, had used it to reconstruct her breast.

My guess was that she needed a sense of herself as being integrated or complete, so I asked her if that was true. In a whisper, again from underneath the jumble of hair, and this time with a few muffled tears, came the response, "Yes, I would like that very much."

This was about the third session with this woman, so I knew many of her likes and dislikes. I knew she was a vegetarian and a wonderful cook, so I described the preparation and cooking of a beautiful meal, complete with table settings and a quiet ambiance, with her very supportive mate. The telling of that story was a wonderful moment of intimate connection. At the time I didn't know it, but the story was a dream of hers. She could now make a request to have her dream come true. This depth of emotion does not run through every lesson, but in cases where there is a great deal of fear and apprehension, it is important to spontaneously know what to listen for, and what to say.

In the following weeks and months, she filled in aspects of her life that she was afraid she would never be able to experience again. She began to make clear request to get what wanted. Her life was returning to normal, and was as rich as it ever had been.

At the beginning, or sometimes at the end of a lesson, we continue to talk about what she needs. One of her needs (or perhaps a dream or wish of hers) is to be

able to carry her own luggage while traveling on vacations. The FI reestablished the sense of herself as being integrated or complete. Our conversations about her needs were instrumental in turning the abstract idea and the felt sense of herself (being integrated) into concrete actions (going on vacations and carrying her own luggage). I consider the conversations of my clients' needs as a helpful verbal component of an FI.

One of the more day-to-day skills I found helpful from studying the process of compassionate communication is how to express appreciation and approval in a way that adds value and encourages more progress. Read Non-Violent Communication--A Language of Compassion in order to learn more about that. If you do not read the book just remember listen for “needs”, and do what you can to fulfill those needs in your lessons. I recommend reading Non-Violent Communication--A Language of Compassion. Thank you for your attention, and as Roy Rogers and Dale Evans use to sing, “Happy trails to you, until we met again.”