



Communicator Gandhi as a Non Violent Manager

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Abstract: *Nonviolent Communication (abbreviated NVC, also called Compassionate Communication or Collaborative Communication) is a communication process developed by Marshall Rosenberg beginning in the 1960s. NVC often functions as a conflict resolution process. It focuses on three aspects of communication: self-empathy (defined as a deep and compassionate awareness of one's own inner experience), empathy (defined as listening to another with deep compassion), and honest self-expression (defined as expressing oneself authentically in a way that is likely to inspire compassion in others). In this paper, an attempt is made to reveal from Gandhi's thoughts, life, and work a nonviolent communication theory. The revelation of such a theory of nonviolent communication has the potential to add substantially to the understanding of what may bring about greater communal harmony in a variety of communication contexts, and the ability to educate persons about what constitutes peaceful and nonviolent communication and relationships. While no communication theorists, ancient or contemporary, specifically state that nonviolent speech and acts are central to their theories of communication, Mahatma Gandhi's thoughts, life, work, and his views on nonviolent communication make a contribution to communication theory.*

Keywords: *Non Violence, Ahimsa, Communication theory, Mahatma Gandhi*

Introduction:

Nonviolent Communication training evolved from Rosenberg's search for a way to rapidly disseminate peacemaking skills. NVC emerged from work he was doing with civil rights activists in the early 1960s. During this period he also mediated between rioting students and college administrators and worked to peacefully desegregate public schools in long-segregated regions.

According to Marion Little (2008), the roots of the NVC model developed in the late 1960s, when Rosenberg was working

on racial integration in schools and organizations in the Southern United States. The earliest version of the model (observations, feelings, and action-oriented wants) was part of a training manual Rosenberg prepared in 1972. The model had evolved to its present form (observations, feelings, needs and requests) by 1992. The dialog between Rosenberg and NVC colleagues and trainers continues to influence the model, which by the late 2000s placed more importance on self-empathy as a key to the model's effectiveness. Another shift in



emphasis, since 2000, has been the reference to the model as a process. The focus is thus less on the "steps" themselves and more on the practitioner's intentions in speaking ("is the intent to get others to do what one wants, or to foster more meaningful relationships and mutual satisfaction?") in listening ("is the intent to prepare for what one has to say, or to extend heartfelt, respectful attentiveness to another?") and the quality of connection experienced with others.

Rosenberg's work with Carl Rogers on research to investigate the components of a helping relationship was, according to Little, central to the development of NVC. Rogers emphasized: 1) experiential learning, 2) "frankness about one's emotional state," 3) the satisfaction of hearing others "in a way that resonates for them," 4) the enriching and encouraging experience of "creative, active, sensitive, accurate, empathic listening," 5) the "deep value of congruence between one's own inner experience, one's conscious awareness, and one's communication," and, subsequently, 6) the enlivening experience of unconditionally receiving love or appreciation and extending the same.

Influenced by Erich Fromm, George Albee, and George Miller, Rosenberg adopted a community focus in his work, moving away from clinical psychological practice. The central ideas influencing this shift by Rosenberg were that: (1) individual mental health depends on the social structure of a community (Fromm),

(2) therapists alone are unable to meet the psychological needs of a community (Albee), and (3) knowledge about human behavior will increase if psychology is freely given to the community (Miller).

Rosenberg's early work with children with learning disabilities is noted as showing evidence of his interest in psycholinguistics and the power of language, as well as his emphasis on collaboration. In its initial development, the NVC model re-structured the pupil-teacher relationship to give students greater responsibility for, and decision-making related to, their own learning. The model has evolved over the years to incorporate institutional power relationships (i.e., police-citizen, boss-employee) and informal ones (i.e. man-woman, rich-poor, adult-youth, parent-child). The ultimate aim is to develop societal relationships based on a restorative, "partnership" paradigm and mutual respect, rather than a retributive, fear-based, "domination" paradigm.

Rosenberg has identified Mahatma Gandhi as an inspiration for the NVC model. Rosenberg's goal has been to develop a practical process for interaction rooted in Gandhi's philosophy of "ahimsa" which translates as "the overflowing love that arises when all ill-will, anger, and hate have subsided from the heart." (Rosenberg, 2003)

Nonviolent Communication holds that most conflicts between individuals or groups arise from miscommunication about their human needs, due to coercive or manipulative language that aims to



induce fear, guilt, shame, etc. These "violent" modes of communication, when used during a conflict, divert the attention of the participants away from clarifying their needs, their feelings, their perceptions, and their requests, thus perpetuating the conflict.

NVC trainers Inbal and Miki Kashtan characterize the assumptions underlying NVC as: Kashtan & Inbal (2004)

All human beings share the same needs

Our world offers sufficient resources for meeting everyone's basic needs

All actions are attempts to meet needs

Feelings point to needs being met or unmet

All human beings have the capacity for compassion

Human beings enjoy giving

Human beings meet needs through interdependent relationships

Human beings change

Choice is internal

The most direct path to peace is through self-connection

The Kashtan sisters further offer that practicing NVC involves holding these intentions:

Open-Hearted Living

Self-compassion

Expressing from the heart

Receiving with compassion

Prioritizing connection

Moving beyond "right" and "wrong" to using needs-based assessments

Choice, Responsibility, Peace

Taking responsibility for our feelings

Taking responsibility for our actions

Living in peace with unmet needs

Increasing capacity for meeting needs

Increasing capacity for meeting the present moment

Sharing Power (Partnership)

Caring equally for everyone's needs

Using force minimally and to protect rather than to educate, punish, or get what we want without agreement

NVC suggests that certain ways of communicating tend to alienate people from the experience of compassion: (Rosenberg, 2004)

Moralistic judgments implying wrongness or badness on the part of people who don't act in harmony with our values. Blame, insults, put-downs, labels, criticisms, comparisons, and diagnoses are all said to be forms of judgment. (Moralistic judgments are not to be confused with value judgments as to the qualities we value.) The use of moralistic judgments is characterized as an impersonal way of expressing oneself that does not require one to reveal what is going on inside of oneself. This way of speaking is said to have the result that "Our attention is focused on classifying, analyzing, and determining levels of wrongness rather than on what we and others need and are not getting."



Demands that implicitly or explicitly threaten listeners with blame or punishment if they fail to comply.

Denial of responsibility via language that obscures awareness of personal responsibility. It is said that we deny responsibility for our actions when we attribute their cause to: vague impersonal forces ("I had to"); our condition, diagnosis, personal or psychological history; the actions of others; the dictates of authority; group pressure; institutional policy, rules, and regulations; gender roles, social roles, or age roles; or uncontrollable impulses.

Making comparisons between people.

A premise of deserving, that certain actions merit reward while others merit punishment.

NVC invites practitioners to focus attention on four components: (Rosenberg, 2005)

Observation: the facts (what we are seeing, hearing, or touching) as distinct from our evaluation of meaning and significance. NVC discourages static generalizations. It is said that "When we combine observation with evaluation others are apt to hear criticism and resist what we are saying." Instead, a focus on observations specific to time and context is recommended.

Feelings: emotions or sensations, free of thought and story. These are to be distinguished from thoughts (e.g., "I feel I didn't get a fair deal") and from words colloquially used as feelings but which convey what we think we are (e.g.,

"inadequate"), how we think others are evaluating us (e.g., "unimportant"), or what we think others are doing to us (e.g., "misunderstood", "ignored"). Feelings are said to reflect whether we are experiencing our needs as met or unmet. Identifying feelings is said to allow us to more easily connect with one another, and "Allowing ourselves to be vulnerable by expressing our feelings can help resolve conflicts."

Needs: universal human needs, as distinct from particular strategies for meeting needs. It is posited that "Everything we do is in service of our needs."

Request: request for a specific action, free of demand. Requests are distinguished from demands in that one is open to hearing a response of "no" without this triggering an attempt to force the matter. If one makes a request and receives a "no" it is recommended not that one give up, but that one empathize with what is preventing the other person from saying "yes," before deciding how to continue the conversation. It is recommended that requests use clear, positive, concrete action language.

There are three primary modes of application of NVC:

Self-empathy involves compassionately connecting with what is going on inside us. This may involve, without blame, noticing the thoughts and judgments we are having, noticing our feelings, and most critically, connecting to the needs that are affecting us.



Receiving empathically, in NVC, involves "connection with what's alive in the other person and what would make life wonderful for them... It's not an understanding of the head where we just mentally understand what another person says... Empathic connection is an understanding of the heart in which we see the beauty in the other person, the divine energy in the other person, the life that's alive in them... It doesn't mean we have to feel the same feelings as the other person. That's sympathy, when we feel sad that another person is upset. It doesn't mean we have the same feelings; it means we are with the other person... If you're mentally trying to understand the other person, you're not present with them." Empathy involves "emptying the mind and listening with our whole being." NVC suggests that however the other person expresses themselves, we focus on listening for the underlying observations, feelings, needs, and requests. It is suggested that it can be useful to reflect a paraphrase of what another person has said, highlighting the NVC components implicit in their message, such as the feelings and needs you guess they may be expressing.

Expressing honestly, in NVC, is likely to involve expressing an observation, feeling, need, and request. An observation may be omitted if the context of the conversation is clear. A feeling might be omitted if there is sufficient connection already, or the context is one where naming a feeling isn't likely to contribute to connection. It is said that naming a need in addition to a feeling

makes it less likely that people will think you are making them responsible for your feeling. Similarly, it is said that making a request in addition to naming a need makes it less likely that people will infer a vague demand that they address your need. The components are thought to work together synergistically. (Nagler, 2001)

Gandhi's NVC:

The word nonviolence is the closest literal translation that Gandhi found to the Sanskrit word ahimsa. In Sanskrit, negation is sometimes used to suggest that a concept or quality is too great to be named directly. "Ahimsa is unconditional love," writes Eknath Easwaran, in his preface to *Gandhi the Man*. "The word we translate as „nonviolence“ is . . . central in Buddhism as well: Ahimsa, the complete absence of violence in word and even thought as well as action. This sounds negative, just as „nonviolence“ sounds passive. But like the English word „flawless,“ ahimsa denotes perfection." As another example, *avera*, which means "love" in Sanskrit, literally translates into "non-hatred." (Easwaran, 1978)

Hinduism is not the only tradition that honors the unnamable. Judaism has a similar practice. The name of God is unsayable in Hebrew, being letters without vowels, without instructions for how to read them. Some things are beyond words. Nonviolence is one of them. Gandhi also used other terms for his practice. One word that he commonly used is *Satyagraha*, which translates as "truth force." At times he also used the



term "soul force." Whichever term he used, Gandhi made it abundantly clear that nonviolence is a positive force, not a negation. (Radhakrishnan, 1995)

When we see others as evil, unable to care, or in some fundamental way immune to transformation, then the only available strategy is to overpower and vanquish them. Embracing the Gandhian approach and upholding the humanity of our "enemies" lead to other strategies to create change. When opponents, even oppressors, are seen as humans possessing care, dignity, and a heart that can be reached, then speaking to their humanity becomes a logical and direct approach to transforming the situation. In Gandhi's own words: "Nonviolence in us ought to soften our opponent, it ought to strike a responsive chord in his heart." Ajgaonkar & Meghshyam (n.d.)

In his trial speech made at Ahmadabad Sessions court in March 1922, Mahatma Gandhi put forward his philosophy with great eloquence, when he stated non-violence to be the 'first article of (his) faith' and the 'last article of (his) creed'. Non-violence had always been the founding principle of Gandhian spirituality, and his bedrock of his political philosophy. Gandhi's distrust of violence as a mode to assume political power and as a tool of revolution was ingrained in his world-view from the very early days of his political career. (Gandhi, 1941) (Mahendra, n.d.)

It is impossible to look at Gandhi's political activism in isolation. Springing deeply from his belief in truth, Gandhi's

political goals were ultimately specific correlatives of higher commitments to humanity and world peace. Non-violence preaches world peace and brotherhood, whereas political movements naturally revel in polemics of difference and antagonism. Gandhi's greatness lies in bringing together these two apparently combative and incongruous ideas and putting them on a common platform, where they do not subtract, but support each other. Gandhi's significance in the world political scenario is two-fold. First, he retrieved non-violence as a powerful political tool, and secondly, he was the one of the chief promulgators of the theory that political goal is ultimately a manifestation of a higher spiritual and humanitarian goal, culminating in world peace. For Gandhi, the means were as important as the end, and there could be only one means - that of non-violence. (Gandhi, 1956) (Nayar, 1991)

The Origins of Gandhi's Non-Violence Philosophy:

Gandhi's secularism and openness to all kinds of theological and philosophical schools is well-known. It was through an assimilation of various concepts and philosophical tenets that Gandhi arrived at his own understanding of non-violence. Jainism and Buddhism were the most important influences that lay behind the foundation of Gandhi's non-violence theory. Both Jainism and Buddhism preached non-violence as the basic principle of existence. All other thoughts and actions propagated by these two religious schools were based on this base of non-violence. Gandhi was deeply



influenced by his readings of these scriptures. The Acaranga Sutra of the Jains stated all life to be dear and precious, and Gandhi believed in it earnestly. The Bhagvadgita was another important influence, with its stress on non-attachment and selfless action. Christianity, along with its message of love and compassion, extended even to one's enemies, was another important influence on Gandhi's life. Bringing together all these theological schools, Gandhi was in search for a meaningful life, a life based on truth and honesty, a life that would boast of a moral courage to stand for the right and for justice, even at its own cost. It was this outlook that Gandhi employed as a tool to guide India's freedom struggle, which eventually succeeded to unite the length and breadth of the country like never before. (Gandhi, 1938)

Gandhi's Use of Non-Violence in India's Freedom Struggle:

Gandhi's championing of the cause of non-violence as the tool of India's freedom struggle was not without its share of criticism. That was, however, expected considering the fact that Gandhi entered the political scenario soon after the ascendancy of the extremists in the history of India's freedom struggle. Armed revolution was believed to be the only legitimate way to snatch political power from an oppressive regime. Gandhi's system of Satyagraha on the basis of non-violence and non-cooperation was largely unheard of, and generally distrusted. However, Gandhi's faith was strong. It was a faith based not on arms

and antagonism, but on extreme moral courage that drew its strength from innate human truth and honesty. He applied his systems with success in South Africa and was convinced of its power. However, it was an uphill task for him to convince his countrymen. Gandhi slowly started to popularise the ideas in the ranks of the Indian National Congress, under proper guidance from his political mentor Gopal Krishna Gokhale. The Congress was suffering from a lack of national leadership following the arrest and execution of the extremist leaders like Tilak and Lala Lajpat Rai, and the protest to the insulting Rowlatt Act was an immediate necessity. Gandhi soon held the mantle and introduced his non-violence modes with great success in the non-cooperation movement. It was a new era in the history of Indian Freedom struggle. Though the movement ended on an abrupt note, yet its significance was immense. (Gandhi, 1951) (Shukla, 1949)

Gandhi's Rationale for the Application of Non-Violence in Indian Freedom Struggle:

Most religions preached non-violence as a way to celebrate the miracle of life. Gandhi's concern was both based on theological as well as more pragmatic considerations. Gandhi in his trial speech accepted that Indian history is replete with tales and narratives of countless foreign invasions. However, he accused the British rule of being particularly despicable because they left the Indians more helpless and emasculated than any of its predecessors. India was in no position to get into an armed conflict



with the British, having been robbed of all economic and moral strength. So, Gandhi had the option of reinvigorating a nation that has lost all confidence in its power and inner strength. After these practical considerations, Gandhi found that the only alternative was to fall back upon what was integral to India's cultural and historical psyche, the principle of non-violence. This non-violence was used in conjunction with the philosophy of non-attachment. Gandhi declared the two goals of his life to be ensuring India's freedom and to achieve it through non-violence. One without the other would be unacceptable and weakening. Violence, Gandhi believed, bred violence, and can never be a solution to India's problem. To shame the opponent into submission was a unique feature of Gandhi's political ideology, as were discussions and amicable arrivals at convenient conclusions. No person, for him was integrally good or bad, and he was cautious never to stoop into a visceral rhetoric of hatred, except against what was unacceptable to his spiritual ideology. (Gandhi, 1932)

One of the greatest criticisms against non-violence was that it was demeaning and cowardly, forwarded particularly by freedom fighters like Savarkar. However, Gandhi believed just the opposite. He emphasized that the moral courage needed to uphold non-violence as a tool of protest was much greater than the one needed to strike back in a violent way. All through his life, he pleaded the Indians to exhibit the moral strength to refrain from resorting to violence, even at the

face of all provocation. His disillusionment that followed the Chauri Chaura incident that led to his calling off the non-cooperation movement when at its zenith was an example of his lifelong and earnest commitment to the cause of non-violence. Gandhi Smarak Nidhi (n.d.)

Conclusion:

Non-violence played a very important role in defining the course of Indian national movement, from the 1920s to the final achievement of the freedom. It formed the basis of the methods of Satyagraha that became closely associated with the Gandhian whirlwind in Indian politics. Gandhi understood economic profit to be the guiding force of the imperialist project and attacked the British government at where it hurt most, which was financial gain. Picketing, non-cooperation and organised resistance to British modes of oppression were the main modes of the non-violent political movements in India. It shaped the course of the Civil Disobedience Movement as well. Even at a later time, during the Quit India Movement, Gandhi's theory of non-violence held strong in the face of the new and radical waves in the world of Indian politics like communism and armed revolution. Even at the dawn of independence, as Nehru was getting ready to eloquently unleash his 'tryst with destiny', Gandhi was busy on the troubled roads of Bengal, preaching non-violence to mad rioters. It was probably pre-ordained that he had to lay down his life for holding on to his ideals. (Krishnan, 1960)



Gandhi was truly a martyr for the cause of non-violence, who not only preached but practiced what he preached. His life was a glorious example of his thoughts, and thousands of Indians from all walks of life, from cities and villages alike, took encouragement and force from his simple life and unshaken faith in the innate goodness of the human soul. He wielded the weapon of love and understanding, and succeeded to upturn even the strongest of the martial nations with it. Gandhi has left the world richer with a renewed faith in the dictates of non-violence. (Krishnan, 1983)

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