

**DOI: 10.7596/taksad.v7i2.1550**

**Citation:** Azgin, B. (2018). A Review on “Non-Violent Communication: A Language of Life” by Marshall B. Rosenberg. Journal of History Culture and Art Research, 7(2), 759-762. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.7596/taksad.v7i2.1550>

**A Review on “Non-Violent Communication: A Language of Life” by Marshall B. Rosenberg**

**Bilge Azgin<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract**

This article aims to celebrate the life and the work of renowned peace activist Marshall B. Rosenberg who elucidated the principles and tools of his Non-Violent Communication (abbreviated as NVC) approach in his untimely book “*Non-Violent Communication: A Language of Life.*” Indeed, “*Non-Violent Communication: A Language of Life*” is the magnum opus of Rosenberg's lifetime work and it stands out as a foundational transformative educational toolbox in developing the cognitive and emotive skills for compassion and reconciliation at both personal and societal level. Simply defined as “a way of communicating that leads us to give from the heart”, Rosenberg's “*Non-Violent Communication: A Language of Life*” provides its readers with effective and accessible tools to remove the barriers that stand in front of compassionate communication.

**Keywords:** Marshall Rosenberg, Non-Violence, Reconciliation, Compassion, Empathy, Non-Violent Communication, Restorative justice, Conflict resolution, Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Carl Rogers.

---

<sup>1</sup> Near East University, Cyprus. IBBF. E-mail: [bilge.azgin@neu.edu.tr](mailto:bilge.azgin@neu.edu.tr)

By the year 2003, psychologist and renowned peace activist Marshall B. Rosenberg had already published the second edition of his book titled *“Non-Violent Communication: A Language of Life”*. In his timely book, Rosenberg elucidated the principles and tools of his Non-Violent Communication (abbreviated as NVC) approach which he developed since the 1970’s onwards. Rosenberg received his PhD in Clinical Psychology from the University of Wisconsin where he met and collaborated with Carl Rogers. Indeed, Rosenberg’s philosophical outlook is deeply ingrained with the humanistic psychology milieu which came to prominence in the 1960’s as “the third force in psychology” (Bugental, 1964) against the established orthodoxies of Freudian psychoanalysis and Skinner’s Behaviorism. Particularly, Roger’s vigilant emphasis on empathetic listening, unconditional positive regard and authenticity in the therapeutic relationship are deeply interwoven with the foundational principles of NVC (Mayes, 2010).

Furthermore, political consciousness and activism of non-violence (Losurdo, 2015) embraced by Gandhi and Martin Luther King served as a mental framework and reference point in the life and work of Rosenberg. Accordingly, *“Non-Violent Communication: A Language of Life”* enables its readers and practitioners to actualize the famous dictum of Martin Luther King in their everyday-life who once declared: "Nonviolence means avoiding not only external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit. You not only refuse to shoot a man, but you refuse to hate him" (National Foundation for Communal Harmony, 2012). Hence, Rosenberg's work should be regarded as a transformative educational toolbox and training ground for developing the cognitive and emotive skills for peace and reconciliation at both personal and social level.

Marshall B. Rosenberg had died on 7 February 2015. Shortly afterwards, the third edition of *“Non-Violent Communication: A Language of Life”* was published in September 2015 with a forward by Deepak Chopra. Advertisement note for the third edition which declared “1 million copies sold worldwide and translated in more than 30 languages” definitely stands as a fair testimonial for the living legacy of the late Marshall B. Rosenberg. Besides the forward written by Chopra, the third edition has one more extra chapter titled “Conflict Resolution and Mediation” as Chapter Eleven. Thus, while the third edition consists of 14 chapters, the second edition is comprised of 13 chapters.

Introduction chapter of the book, titled as "Giving from the Heart", sets the tone of Rosenberg's philosophical outlook as he claims that humans by nature enjoy giving and receiving compassion. Without a doubt, Rosenberg's outlook on the compassionate aspect of human nature stands in stark contrast with Hobbesian view where human life is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" in the state of nature. The author's main concern revolves around the inquiry of how or why some people manage to keep connected with their own natural state of compassionate giving and receiving while other may get alienated by resorting to hatred, resentment, conflict and violence. Accordingly, Rosenberg (2003:3) simply defines NVC as "a way of communicating that leads us to give from the heart" and the term Nonviolent Communication is also interchangeably referred to as Compassionate Communication.

Given that, the second chapter of the book is titled "Communication that Blocks Compassion" where Rosenberg enumerates particular patterns of communication which alienate us from our own natural compassionate state. These are: 1- Moralistic Judgments, 2- Making Comparisons, 3- Denial of Responsibility, and 4- Other Forms of Life-alienating Communications such as demanding instead of requesting and justifying punishment as something to be deserved. This is the reason why Chapter Three of the book strongly emphasizes the need to distinguish observation from evaluation simply because collapsing evaluation with observation inevitably leads to life alienating forms of communication.

In the following four chapters from third to sixth, the book establishes and explores the four building blocks of the NVC process which are: 1- Observations, 2- Feelings, 3- Needs, and 4- Requests. Indeed, these four processes constitute the groundbreaking formula of Rosenberg (2003: 213) to foster peace and compassion at both personal and social level. Besides separating our own evaluation from observation is crucial for

listening and speaking through non-judgemental manner, developing the capacity to consciously identify our own feelings (bodily emotions and sensations such as being sad, angry, scared, joyful, amused etc) moment by moment enlarges our self-awareness. Then, one has to forge the critical link from feeling to need by posing this question: Which need of mine is not being met when I feel sad, or angry? One of the most critical philosophical premises of the NVC is that our feelings lay at the root cause of our own needs. According to this outlook, the feelings which we usually label “negative” such as angry, sad, or hopeless arise due to our unfilled needs.

Therefore, in the third step, it is essential to be consciously aware of our own unfulfilled needs which lay behind our own feelings. Rosenberg (2003: 214) lists “autonomy, celebration, integrity, interdependence, physical nurturance, play and spiritual communion” as the universal needs that all human beings share in common. The fourth and the last step is the articulation and verbal expression of our needs as a request. Request is different than a demand as the former is expressed through positive language and without resorting to an accusative guilt-trip or manipulative threat of punishment.

These four steps (observations, feelings, needs, and requests) constitute the core mechanisms of the NVC. One can perceive the remaining chapters in the book as illuminating the complementary principles and values which revolve around this four processes. While the Chapter Seven and Eight expands on the importance of giving and receiving empathy, Chapter Nine highlights the necessity to forge a new compassionate relationship with ourselves. Chapter Ten focuses on anger and profoundly explores how to go beyond our own anger by looking behind the feeling. Accordingly, anger is a wake up call for everyone to realize their own unmet needs. Newly added Chapter Eleven in the third edition examine the innovative contribution that the Non-Violent Communication may bring to the traditional approach of conflict resolution. The devastating cost of punishment mechanisms embedded in the social systems and the strategies to transform them are discussed in Chapter Twelve and Thirteen.

Indeed, according to Rosenberg (2003:147) “Violence comes from the belief that other people cause our pain and therefore deserve punishment.” Retributive justice model is premised on the very idea that while good and right things should be rewarded, bad and wrong things should be punished. For thousands of years, human-constructed social systems have been based on retributive justice model which sanctions and justifies violence. Hence, Non-Violent Communication highlights the necessity for a cognitive and emotive shift from Retributive to Restorative Justice which rest upon the question of "how do we restore a state in which people care about one another's well-being?" (Killian, 2003). Last chapter of the book highlights the importance of expressing appreciation in order to enrich the experience of our own lives and lives of others around us.

All of the mystical thoughts throughout the ages would agree with the wisdom embedded in these remarks: “Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it” (Foundation for Inner Peace, 2007). In a similar vein, one may unhesitatingly maintain that Rosenberg’s *“Non-Violent Communication: A Language of Life”* provides its readers with quite effective and accessible tools to remove the barriers that stand in front of receiving and giving compassion both to ourselves and to other human beings through communication.

## References

Bugental, J. F. T. (1964). The Third Force in Psychology. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 4(1), 19-26.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/002216786400400102>

Foundation for Inner Peace (2007). *A course in miracles: Combined volume*. Mill Valley, Calif: Foundation for Inner Peace.

Killian, D. (2003). Beyond Good and Evil: Marshall Rosenberg on Creating a Nonviolent World. *The Sun*.

Losurdo, D. (2015). *Non-violence: A History beyond the Myth*. Lanham: Lexington Books

Mayes, I. (2010). Nonviolent Communication: Tools and Talking-Points for Practicing the Person-Centered Approach. *The Person-Centered Journal*, 17(1-2), 90-99.

National Foundation for Communal Harmony (2012). *Promoting Principles of Non-violence for Conflict Resolution*. New Delhi.

Rosenberg, M. B. (2003). *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life* (2nd ed.). Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer.

Rosenberg, M. B. (2005). *Speak Peace in a World of Conflict: What you say next will change your world*. Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer.

Rosenberg, M. B. (2015). *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life* (3rd ed.). Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer.