

# *The Heart of Social Change*



## *Introduction*

This booklet contains excerpts from a workshop given by Marshall in San Diego in May, 2000. It is an introduction to Marshall's wisdom on effective social change. In narrative commentary and in role-play, he returns our focus to basic questions: What is the nature and energy of our spirituality? What's the good life? What do we need to change? How do we make life wonderful for everyone? Social change begins with "liberating ourselves from that which is not in harmony with creating the kind of world we desire." Marshall encourages us to use the power of Nonviolent Communication<sup>SM</sup> in the service of human social needs and the needs of our planet, and shares specific examples of how to do this. In the role plays, participants are identified as UF (unidentified female participant), UM (unidentified male participant), and MBR (Marshall B. Rosenberg). All other words are Marshall's. We pick up the conversation with a question from one of the participants of the workshop.

## **Striving for Systems Change**

UM: I'm just curious, what can we do to change the source of social problems instead of dealing with the symptoms of all the problems, to get to the root of where all this is coming from? What can we do to change what happened eight thousand years ago, or maybe duplicate it in a compassionate way so that we can change it in the next eight thousand?

MBR: First, I can tell you a strategy that I'm trying to follow myself—the best that I've found at this point. It's this: change the paradigm within myself, to liberate myself from the way I was programmed and to be in harmony with how I choose to live, with how I reflect the story that resonates the most in my heart. In other words, I strive to create that chosen world within. Peace begins with me.

Next, I really like the paradigm that I've chosen. I've found out that it's nothing new. I was just told in British Columbia by some indigenous people that I was working with up there that they liked what I presented. They said, "You know, Marshall, this is just what our elders taught us," and I've been told by Palestinians I work with that what I've come up with as a new paradigm for myself is just Islam. What I've come up with works for me and also seems to be something that other people have chosen for their own paradigm. So let's do our best to share the new paradigm with others. That's one way to create social change. Share what works for us, what makes our life richer without blasting the old paradigm, without calling them a bunch of bigots . . . tell what we like about our story, and how it's enriched our life.

Then we can get clear what social structures would look like. What would gangs (see *The Concept of Gangs and Domination Structures*, below) look like that function in harmony with the paradigm of our choosing? And how can we develop our skills to radically transform existing structures into ones that are in harmony with our paradigm?

Then I ask: What education is necessary for people to have our paradigm so that they can create other structures that resemble our paradigm? I'm trying to work in all four of these areas together.

That last one—education—is one I put a lot of energy into. I want to get the next generation of people around the world educated in a radically different paradigm, and with skills for creating structures that support the new paradigm. So, for example, we not only teach the kids in the school, we also set up Nonviolent Communication training with their parents, teachers, and administrators. And equally important is that the school is a reflection of the kind of government that we would like to see. It shows leaders as servants. Teachers are servants of the students; the administrators are servants of the teachers. Rewards and punishment are not used. The relationships among the student body are created as interdependent relationships, not as competitive ones. Tests are not given to

determine grades. Tests are given to determine whether the teacher has done his or her job. They're not tests of the students; they're tests of the learning process. This is what my book *Life-Enriching Education* is about.