

Being Me, *Loving You*



*A Q&A Session with
Marshall B. Rosenberg, Ph.D.*

The following are excerpts from workshops and media interviews given by Marshall Rosenberg on the subject of intimacy and close, personal relationships. Through role playing and discussion, Marshall touches on most of the key aspects of applying Nonviolent Communication (NVC) to create loving relationships with our partners, spouses, and family, while maintaining our personal integrity and values.

Introduction

So guess what happened today? I'm doing this relationship workshop in the evening, and I had a crisis at seven o'clock this morning. My wife called and asked me one of those questions that you just hate to have in a relationship at any time of the day, but especially at seven in the morning when you don't

have your lawyer. What did she ask at seven o'clock in the morning? "Did I wake you up?" That question wasn't the hard one. She says, "I have a very important question: Am I attractive?" [Laughter] I hate those questions. That's like the time I came home after being on the road quite awhile and she asked me, "Can you see anything different in the house?" I looked and I looked: "No." She had painted the whole house! [Laughter]

I knew that question this morning was the kind that comes up in relationships. "Am I attractive?" Of course, as an NVC-speaking person, I could get out of that by claiming that it's not an NVC question, because we know that nobody "is" anything. Nobody is right, wrong, attractive, or unattractive. But I knew she wouldn't settle for any of that stuff, so I said, "You want to know if you're attractive?" She said, "Yes." "Sometimes yes, sometimes no; can I go back to bed?" [Laughter] She liked that, thank goodness, thank goodness! In one of my favorite books, *How to Make Yourself Miserable*, by Dan Greenberg, you see this dialog:

"Do you love me? Now, this is very important to me. Think it over: Do you love me?"

"Yes."

"Please, this is very important; give it very serious consideration: Do you love me?"

(Period of silence) "Yes."

"Then why did you hesitate?" [Laughter]

People can change how they think and communicate. They can treat themselves with much more respect, and they can learn from their limitations without hating themselves. We teach people how to do this. We show people a process that can help them connect with the people they're closest to in a way that can allow them to enjoy deeper intimacy, to give to one another with more enjoyment, and to not get caught up in doing things out of duty, obligation, guilt, shame, and the other things that destroy intimate relationships. We show people how to enjoy working cooperatively in a working community. We show them how to transform domination structures, hierarchal

structures into working communities in which people share a vision of how they can contribute to life. And we're thrilled with how many people all over the world have great energy for making this happen.

A Typical Conflict

Participant: Marshall, what do you think is the major conflict, the major issue between men and women?

Marshall: Well, I hear a lot of this in my work. Women come up to me regularly and say, "Marshall, I wouldn't want you to get the wrong idea. I have a very wonderful husband." And then, of course, I know the word "but" is coming. "But I never know how he's feeling." Men throughout the planet—and there are exceptions to this—come from the John Wayne school of expressing emotions, the Clint Eastwood, the Rambo school, where you kind of grunt. And instead of saying clearly what's going on inside of you, you label people as John Wayne would when he walked into a tavern in the movies. He never, even if there were guns trained on him, said, "I'm scared." He might have been out in the desert for six months, but he never said, "I'm lonely." But how did John communicate? John communicated by labeling people. It's a simple classification system. They were either a good guy—buy them a drink—or a bad guy—kill them.

With that way of communicating, which was how I was trained to communicate basically, you don't learn how to get in touch with your own emotions. If you're being trained to be a warrior, you want to keep your feelings out of your consciousness. Well, to be married to a warrior is not a very rich experience for a woman who may have been playing dolls while the men were out playing war. She