

Dispelling the Enemy Image with Clear and Compassionate Speech

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*“The genuine warrior becomes truly gentle because there is no enemy at all.”
Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche*

Introduction

Mindful attention to speech is fundamental to human relationship, personal well-being and Buddhist practice. This paper explores how particular usage of imagery in language shapes our thinking and emotional reactivity as well as our interpersonal relationships. The subtle psychological and physiological effects of the “enemy image” created through word and phrase construction is explored in relation to the experience of fear in the body. This study investigates how many common language “pictures” create an inaccurate conceptual frame for perceived phenomena and compound difficulty in communication when states of fear underlie these distorted expressions of speech. To understand the extent to which fear both drives and is an outcome of these generalized expressions of speech, this paper investigates the role fear plays in painful emotional states. Based on the teachings of Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche this paper examines how fear is equated with suffering. Suggestions for moving towards greater clarity in language is offered from the growing field of Nonviolent Communications as it intersects Buddhist understanding of the human experience and the cessation of suffering. The examples offered include applications for increasing self-compassion and creating more clear and compassionate understanding between individuals and groups.

The Enemy Image

Nonviolent Communication defines the enemy image as words that inaccurately reflect, negatively label, and separate us from each other and ourselves (Rosenberg, 2005). It suggests that much habitual language and word usage is characterized by images of violence and victimization. I would like to suggest that states of fear are the driver of these word formations and also an outcome of their usage. It is important to recognize that these destructive language patterns are culturally embedded and cross-culturally ubiquitous. We are universally saturated with negative speech forms and objectifying labels that drive us further from present experience and recognition of our mutually beneficial interdependence. While language will never convey direct experience it can be utilized with increased intention, specificity and compassion to create positive exchange between human beings.

Let’s look at an example of a common usage of an enemy image in modern speech. A negotiation is taking place between two parties and one member, Tom, frowns visibly, quickly folds his arms across his chest, pulls his body back and emphatically states, “You have pushed

me too far!” While the other person was not directly labeled as “pushy,” the picture imagined by this statement is of a physical gesture of pushing in a way that is “too far”. The individual who has made this statement has imagined himself in a victim “picture” of receiving a push. The accompanying body gestures suggest a defensive posture of moving away, protecting the body with crossed arms and slightly raising the volume of speech. Accompanying the outer gestures would likely be signs of readying for action including a slight rise in pulse, blood pressure and muscle flexion following an increase in hormonal secretions (Ledoux, 1996).

The receiving individual, Sue, is likely to unconsciously respond to the picture image that has been projected and reciprocally respond in a defensive posture as well. The picture image of “pushing” may land as an accusation, suggesting she is aggressing against the first individual and is the “enemy”. A habitual reaction to counter the statement by the second person may include an argument and further escalation of conflict signaled by defensive postural gestures. To further dissect the above example we can observe fear at the root of the original word image in demonstrated signs in Tom of flight (moving back), freeze (crossing the arms across the chest) and fight (increased voice volume) responses.

The word image of “pushing” in this example has the effect of solidifying and sustaining fear states over time. Tom pictures himself as a victim of aggression and aggresses back through language with a projected image of Sue as an enemy. Sue may unconsciously succumb to *projective identification* and struggle internally and externally with the implication of her action as “pushing too far.” Sue has identified with the projection by joining in the experience of the word image that suggests her action is harming the other person. A two-fold fear and reactive response may ensue as she internally fights the image of herself doing “wrong” and externally resists Tom, who has now become an “enemy” as she imagines herself the victim in his word picture. Now she too experiences a heightened physiological response common to states of fear and may likely respond with a word picture such as “You are not listening to me!” suggesting she is the victim and he is in the wrong.

The first thing we notice in this exchange is how both comments are directed at summing up the actions of the other person and offer no revelation regarding the speaker’s internal awareness or positive needs in the situation. In fact, these all-too-common language exchanges reinforce a pattern of not reflecting on one’s own actions and the false imagining of the other’s action. Instead of inquiry about self or other, each makes assumptions and escalates the conflict with inaccurate and exaggerated word pictures. While tone and vocal inflection have an obvious effect on levels of physical and emotional arousal, it is also necessary to look at the pictures that are aroused in the mind’s eye. Each word picture refers to a physical action or non-action; suggestive of something each person does not want and fears. Neither statement made by Tom or Sue accurately reflects what actually did happen, or what behavior either person would have preferred from their talking partner. Neither individual paused to relax in the moment and examine his or her immediate sensations and perceptions. If both individuals were to continue verbal exchanges in the same manner, no doubt increasing levels of fear induced arousal could be physically measured (LeDoux, 1996). Their suffering would be reflected in heightened fight, freeze or flight behaviors exhibited in verbal and non-verbal gestures.

Suffering is Fear

To investigate the role of fear in human difficulties it is helpful to look at the emphasis placed by Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche on the Buddha's teaching, summing up the meaning of suffering in one word: fear (Ponlop, 2007). When we clearly understand the pervasiveness of fear in all experience, starting with ourselves, we can understand the suffering of others and are able to compassionately respond (Ponlop, 2002). Lama Tenpa further delineates three primary fears based on the three types of suffering symbolically reflected in the lower, human and god realms (Gyaltzen, 2010). These include the fear of not being physically safe (lower realm), the fear of being alone (god realm), and the fear of not having worth (human realm). Tenpa also accentuates how fear is a result of *false imagination* (Gyaltzen, 2009). From this we can deduce that it is false to imagine we are not safe, that we are alone, and that we are without worth. The first two faulty imaginings contradict the truth of emptiness, in that there is no selfhood to protect and that we are interdependent and not singular, separate or permanent. The third misperception of worthlessness contradicts the truth of our basic goodness, Buddha Nature, and our capacity to awaken in any moment. Embodiment of these truths leads to the cessation of fear and hence suffering, the third noble truth.

Fearful imagining is reflected in and can be induced by word pictures that imply danger, abandonment or worthlessness, the three types of fear to which humans are most vulnerable. These basic fears and their antidotes are reflected in three foundational rungs of Maslow's hierarchy of human needs: safety, belonging and esteem (Maslow, 1999). Looking closely at the earlier dialogue, we see how even minor statements can trigger these three fears, fear-based behaviors, and the imagined unmet needs driving fear. We can see in the first statement, "You have pushed me too far!" how Tom conjures a picture of threat to his safety. He may also imagine that he would be alone in his position and increasingly unsafe. The picture of someone pushing him may also precipitate unexamined thoughts that Sue does not respect or value him, threatening his worth as a human being. Hearing these words she may imagine Tom has accused her of ill will and fear she has lost value as a decent human being. She may also feel shame and imagine increased isolation. Her response, "You are not listening to me!" is a generalized statement that deflects a blameful image back onto him. It suggests a picture that both individuals are alone and not connected through hearing. Sue has mirrored his increased volume of speech, suggesting a returned force that would likely increase a fear-based visceral excitement in both individuals.

If we were to continue to observe escalating interactions between these two people we would note increased signs of aggression, attachment and ignorance expressed in the fear-induced reactions of fight, flight or freeze behaviors. While ignorance is at the root of each of these kleshas, fear is an outcome of ignorance and also drives the strategy of ignorance as a defense. Ignorance is obviously at work in the misperception of one another and compounded by conceptual word pictures that move each person further from direct experience. Both individuals also ignore certain phenomena that would help them see themselves, one another and the situation more fully. Ignorance can be seen in a spectrum of behaviors from lack of awareness to *dissociative* states that serve to screen against contact that is imagined to be harmful. Aggression is a forward moving posture of attack for defense or gain. Its energetic quality is to move perceived danger away or to take something that is imagined as necessary. Fight behavior is understood as a survival mechanism, and here we can see how it is a response to imagined threats to safety, connection and self-worth. The problem of attachment is intertwined in ignorance and aggression. Our grasping clouds reality and confuses strategies for getting needs

met with actual needs that are simply a reflection of our interdependence. The attachment to a particular strategy and outcome drives aggression and further mistaken thinking. Flight and freeze responses generally reflect strategies to maintain safety yet typically move us toward isolation and away from the experience of connection. Flight and freeze responses can also be utilized to avoid or hide from reality, compound ignorance and further suffering.

Fear behind Difficult Feelings

Experiences described as feelings or emotions are an amalgam of body sensations and cognitions built on past association, interpretation and future projection. It behooves us to look at how fear colors cognitive processes and is played out in difficult emotional states including anger, shame, guilt, worry, depression, confusion and desperation.

Anger is a defensive gesture in response to fears of loss of safety, connection and esteem. It is a form of aggression aimed at intimidating and creating fear in the “other”. The denial of fear underlying anger is necessary to actualize its intended effect. Individuals embodying anger will “puff up” to appear big and move quickly and forcefully like an animal that is cornered or hunting for survival. Phrases such as “I won’t let you,” or “I know better than you,” are used to inflate one’s power. To deflate the power of an imagined enemy, phrases such as “you’re disgusting,” or “you don’t know what you are talking about,” are utilized to increase the power differential by diminishing the other. The denied fear behind the display of anger is projected onto the other and this projection further solidifies an enemy image of other as weak and contemptible. Non-verbal expressions of anger increase physical excitement and may generate anxiety and fear in the person who is the target of anger. Fear and anger then become a repeating cycle of cause and effect for both participants in an escalating fight.

A phrase that captures the attitude of shame is, “I’m a bad person.” Immobilized postures of hiding, submission or withdrawal typify the social relationship of self to other in states of shame. This frozen posture is a fear response to the imagined threat of continued shaming from others. *Retroflected* anger, where we turn aggression back on the self, is a common aspect of extended states of shame. The message of shame is internalized as an enemy image and used repeatedly against the self, often in phrases that mimic “I’m bad.” The long-term effect of shame increases isolation, diminishes worth and habituates high arousal states in the body.

Guilt is a similar phenomenon to shame in that thoughts are turned against the actions of the self. Guilt may occur following the commitment of a harmful action as an expression of self-reflection and regret. Individuals may use time alone to reflect on their actions and move toward self-forgiveness, amends and positive aspirations for the future. When guilt becomes an entrenched attitude, it perpetuates harmful retroflected anger characterized by an internal dialogue of repeated recriminations. A phrase that captures this continuously looping dialogue is, “My actions are bad”. Fear of isolation increases alongside hopelessness towards change and the ability to benefit others. An extended attitude of guilt degenerates into an internalized enemy image of a shamed self in the eyes of an unrelenting world.

Undue mental rumination expressed in worry creates repeated images of suffering and anxiety based on future imagined scenarios. In worry, our thinking includes pictures of disaster exacerbated by figures of speech such as: “I’ll just die if...,” “He’ll kill me if...,” and “I’ll never

forgive myself if..." An exaggerated and distorted past is often invoked in the faulty prognostication of the future. This is inflamed by mental pictures captured in phrases such as: "I was such fool when..." and "I can never take it back." Worry freezes the capacity to respond effectively as every imagined solution is shot down by an internal voice that declares, "It's hopeless." Worry stretches across a continuum of normal concern based on projections of probable consequences to flight into obsessive, delusional and paranoid thought patterns.

Many forms of depression are exacerbated by internalized and retroflected anger. A part of the falsely constructed self *depresses*, or presses against, another imagined aspect of the self. The internal struggle is manifested in a deadlocked and nullifying expression. The internalized fight is expressed physiologically, exhausting movement and freezing the individual in fear. This frozen state reduces environmental contact and diminishes awareness and choice. The individual is stuck in a war of self-hatred, often expressed unconsciously, leading to increased hopelessness and despair. The imagined parts of the self are enemy images to one another. Aggressive and shaming phrases expressed in this deadening internal dialogue include "I hate myself", "don't even try" and "you're a loser". These invalid cognitions are the result of a spiraling pattern of negative thoughts that become increasingly exaggerated and can lead to serious depressive episodes (Begley, 2007).

Confusion is a fog we hide in to deflect fear. We may be afraid to make choices that we imagine would isolate ourselves from others or envision our safety is in jeopardy if we make the "wrong choice." We may have an imagined belief that we are not capable of making a "right decision" reflecting an attitude of low self-worth. Conflicting internal drives are at work in confusion, and uncertainty is a fog into which we unconsciously take flight. Escaping reality, we avoid identifying the source of our confusion and flee decision-making. We continue to wander in the fog of ignorance as fear of a haunting and unidentified enemy grows over time. The enemy image lurking in the fog of oblivion may be the expression of imagined helplessness or the anticipation of a dreaded result. The deadlock of helplessness and fearful expectation contribute to the holding pattern or frozen quality exhibited in confusion. *Deflection*, a pattern of turning attention away from oneself or the environment, the imagined enemy, is the flight component of confusion. Dissociation is the result of a continued and exaggerated pattern of deflection and flight from contact with what we imagine as the enemy within ourselves and the world.

An attitude of desperation leads to grasping behaviors to deflect fears associated with survival, degradation and loneliness. We take flight through deflection into driven and addictive behaviors of excessive consumption, compulsive activities, fantasy, drugs and codependency to quench pain or escape imagined self-deficit. Desperation assumes we need an external support, and we become fixated on a particular strategy to acquire it. Underlying desperation is a significant component of fearful expectation that we are not physically safe, connected to others or adequate. Instead of relaxing into the interdependent and ever changing nature of existence, we panic, and grasp onto certainty and what we imagine we can extract from the "other." In codependency we cling to others and the imagined belief that meeting their needs will make us worthy. Trusting in the ultimate nature of our interdependence, we do not target specific outcomes or particular people as necessary for the satisfaction of our needs for belonging. We know we have purpose and belong. Understanding emptiness we trust the unrestricted options available to us in each and every moment.

The Enemy Images of Self and Other

The false conceptual construction of “self” and “other” is the basis of the enemy image and the fundamental fear it provokes. The self is an enemy image because it separates us from others and we also fear its loss. The other is an enemy image because it is separate and frightening in its unpredictability. The other represents a threat in the “gain” we receive from it as well as in the “loss” we anticipate it will cause. The other is also represented in the cherished object we fear losing and the difficulty, such as an illness, we dread to gain. Even the state of happiness is immersed in fear as we suffer the anticipation of its passing. In modern terms we may understand this as existential anxiety. Ponlop describes this fear as a subliminal panic that is all-pervasive in every living heart (Ponlop, 2007).

Language is the tool that is primarily utilized to conceptually divide the world into “self” and “other”. To compound factors, thinking itself is a retroflective activity where the imagined self is divided into self and other and acted upon (Perls, 1980). In our internal dialogue we become an object to ourselves and hence, the enemy. The internalized other is patterned on an *introjected* other from the environment. Cognitive processes would not have developed if we did not have an “other” in the environment with which to speak. Thinking, and its technology speech, is built on the template of the self-other relationship in the world (Mead, 1969). Nonviolent Communication, in its thrust to move language patterns toward more accurate observations of direct perception, offers a significant upgrade. It explicates much of what is implicit in Buddhist teachings on Right Speech by offering us a systematic approach to identifying and rooting out harsh words.

Speaking with a Courageous Heart

To face fear is to have courage, honesty and heart. In the speech that binds our relationships, we must look directly at the indicators of fear arising in our words. Mindfully, we can learn to listen for the suffering beneath the enemy labels in speech. As we investigate and touch this fear in others and ourselves, our hearts naturally respond with compassion. We must be willing to acknowledge the sadness we discover below the fear of anticipated loss. It is this acknowledgement that begins to heal the division of self and other.

NVC suggests we lead with the tender heart in holding an intention to connect with others and give voice to our feelings of concern and vulnerability. We must take the courageous step of contacting and vocalizing our deeper awareness and human longing for safety, belonging and worth. With others we can compassionately listen for these needs below their painful expressions and assist them in discovering their tender heart. Our curiosity, openness and interest in contributing to the well being of self and other will eventually collapse the imagined divide. Presented here are six factors effective in addressing conflict and creating understanding between people. These interface the NVC approach with basic Buddhist principals and include:

1. Setting an intention to connect
2. Willingness to rest in unknown
3. Clear observations and reflections
4. Compassionate embrace of feelings
5. Investigation and insight into interdependent needs
6. Open, courageous and inviting requests

In our exploration we will look back at the earlier example of miscommunication and show how the application of these factors cultivates clear and compassionate speech.

Setting an Intention to Connect

In setting an intention to connect with others we prioritize clear understanding and relationship over any other imagined outcome in our dialogue (Rosenberg, 2002). An intention to connect is a commitment to deep listening and compassionate hearing as guiding principles. The intention serves as a reminder to pay close attention to internal messages as well as the information we are receiving from the “other.” We must be willing to shuttle our attention between self and other. This means at times we need to bracket our own experience to deeply listen to the other. At other times, it is a commitment to bracket external stimuli to listen deeply to our internal experience.

In the earlier example an intention to connect would have provided some breathing space in the conflict between the man and the woman. When Sue first heard Tom’s exclamation, “You are pushing me too far!” it would be helpful for her to follow an NVC approach. She could first focus on her internal experience and offer herself some empathy. It would be a good idea for her to then take a slow, intentional breath to calm some of the fear-based excitement she registered in her body. Next, shuttling her attention to him, Sue could reflect on his signs of distress and reflect on the deeper feelings and needs beneath Tom’s strong expression.

The intention to compassionately hear is a willingness to consider and appreciate the fear and suffering in the experience of both self and other. Our trust in the power of this intention is a trust in the desire for happiness that lies beneath the suffering of all people. It reflects a trust in our basic goodness and capacity for clarity and compassion in each moment. Our intention also serves to help us accept our imperfections in the dialogue process and remain focused on our priority of meaningful connection.

Resting in the Unknown

If we wish to create understanding, at any point in a difficult conversation we must be willing to generate a mindful gap and rest in the unknown. Spaciousness is created when we remember to hold still with emotions that arise and relax the tensions precipitated in the body. In the second example, when Sue took a moment to clearly see her response and calm her energy with an intentional deep breath, she was better able to let go of fear and pay attention to Tom. In the first example, unattended fears clouded her perception and she jumped to the conclusion that he was “not listening.” While her interest in being understood may not have been immediately met, relaxing into “not knowing” about the man’s aggression would provide space for compassionate investigation to arise.

In a calm state, mental activity is relaxed and space opens in the mind for reflection. We are better able to slow our speech and not respond impulsively in return. It takes courage to rest in the unknown and not be attached to a particular outcome in our interactions with others. We must be willing to let go of agendas and complicated strategies to meet our needs (Rosenberg,

2002). The simple three-step process of *mindful gap*, *seeing clearly* and *letting go* makes room for compassion to arise naturally (Ponlop, 2008). In the mindful gap we open to the unknown, the false dichotomy of self and other collapses in clearly seeing the truth of suffering, and in letting go we open to the next moment, relaxed and emptied of fearful expectations.

Clear Reflections and Observations

The mindful use of language to describe experience is a cornerstone of Nonviolent Communications. We must pay acute attention to the words we choose in resolving conflict and helping individuals make contact in meaningful ways. Commonly used metaphors in speech often derail understanding and take us further from accurately describing phenomena. Our goal in moving closer to the truth with the choice of our words moves us closer to one another. The recognition and translation of enemy images is crucial in this process. Beneath the use of an enemy image, we can always assume a sense of threat, pain or separation from others. This is obvious in our example, “You are pushing me too far!” In responding to Tom we would never correct him, rather we would first offer a clear reflection of his words and nonverbal communication that demonstrates we had heard him correctly. Something as simple as, “You stated that I was pushing you too far and your voice doubled in volume.” We would immediately follow this with a further observation, “I’m wondering if you are feeling irritated and need respect?” When we reflect our simple perceptions, we offer a more accurate mirror for our dialogue partner to consider. Our reflection of our view of the other person is less distorted and we come closer to a shared view based on valid cognition. The guess we offer, in our effort to translate his enemy image into feelings and needs, further demonstrates our interest in joining with his experience in creating a more accurate and mutual understanding.

We must be careful to note the difference between an evaluative interpretation and a clear observation. If Tom was schooled in Nonviolent Communication, he would have first noted his internal state including feelings and needs, looked for the stimulus in the environment he was responding to, and shared this information stating, “I feel upset when you suggest we delay the peace negotiations until next year. I need consideration for all the work we have done so far.” In his willingness to share the awareness of his personal experience, he is more likely to sustain Sue’s engagement in the dialogue and assist her in understanding his perspective. He stays closer to the facts when he calmly and specifically states what he was responding to. Tom would be more likely to move toward meeting his needs for consideration if he were to ask Sue to reflect his statement with the request, “Would you be willing to tell me what you heard me say?” This request would also serve to keep the dialogue focused on clear observations, instead of evaluative interpretations of each other’s behavior.

Compassionate Embrace of Feelings

In the compassionate embrace of difficult feelings we appreciate the opportunity to recognize and face suffering. Instead of judging emotion as bad we welcome the opportunity to investigate the suffering we witness in its expression (Nhat Hanh, 2001). In Nonviolent Communication we encourage the expression of difficult feelings so we may better understand the nature of pain and the causes driving its expression. When we assist others in clarifying their feelings we help them to differentiate between emotion and thought. In our example if Tom were to help clarify Sue’s feelings, he could reflect what she said and offer a guess as to her

experience based on his observations. NVC would suggest his inquiry begin with a comment such as, “When you say I am not listening to you, I imagine you might be feeling angry. Is that true?” He translates her enemy image of “not listening,” and guesses the more immediate feeling she may be experiencing. Tom’s speculation is a gesture towards understanding and serves to assist her in clarifying her internal awareness. Sue may affirm his guess or offer something closer to her experience such as, “No, I’m feeling frustrated!” It would then be helpful for him to probe more deeply in search of the fear beneath her frustration and offer a comment such as, “I’m also wondering if you are afraid that your concerns are not being addressed?” During this conversation Tom may need to shuttle his attention briefly to emotion rising in his own body and take a moment to see, compassionately embrace, and let go of his own fear. Here we see how acceptance and investigation of emotional states provides the ground for their release. Suffering is liberated on the spot and space is opened for further dialogue and understanding.

Investigation and Insight into Interdependent Needs

Needs, as defined in Nonviolent Communication, are an expression of life and universal in nature. From the Buddhist point of view we can understand this definition of needs as an expression of our interdependence. In relationships, they are not an expression of attachment, or desire for something specific from the other person. Needs represent universal human requirements for optimal health and well-being. When we reflect on each other’s needs in a specific situation, we create understanding of our mutual humanity and hence, connection. We value and affirm the needs that others strive to express and meet through their communication. We also value our own need to contribute and join with others in a way that provides mutually beneficial exchange. When we name the need that is driving a challenging feeling, we uncover the positive longing beneath a painful expression. We affirm the truth of our basic selflessness, interdependence and human value.

We can see how naming the needs for understanding, respect and consideration explored in our sample dialogue would better lead to their manifestation. If Sue had been versed in Nonviolent Communication, she could speak more straightforwardly and positively assert her need to be understood. Instead of offering an enemy image of Tom “not listening,” she could calmly state her feelings of frustration after offering a clear reflection of what she heard him say. Then it would be helpful for her to immediately add, “I would like to know that you understand my reasoning for waiting until we have a better solution. Would you be willing to hear a more detailed explanation?” This request furthers her need for understanding in a manner that is inviting and not forceful. When Sue expresses her personal feelings and needs, Tom is more likely to be drawn toward her request, than repelled by criticism and blame. If he responds positively, she might also clearly state her need to contribute to a peaceful negotiation with the statement, “I would also like you to understand my shared desire to contribute to a successful resolution. Would you be willing to reflect what you just heard me say?” Here Sue acknowledges their mutual needs to contribute, receive consideration, and respect for their diligent efforts. She also requests a reflection of her statement to ascertain that she has been heard and understood.

Open and Inviting Requests

In each of the above scenarios we heard requests that are simple, specific, doable and present-centered. Requests must be grounded in the here and now, and not vaguely refer to the universal need from which they arise. When we make a request that is doable, we offer our talking partner an opportunity to contribute positively to the ongoing dialogue and relationship. The specificity of the request adds to clarity and a measurable outcome. In our example Tom could make the request, “I am very tired and guess you are too. After we have an opportunity to rest and reconsider our options, would you be willing continue our discussion tomorrow morning for two more hours?” Sue may counter with the affirmation that she is very tired, yet unable to meet his request due to her time constraints. Tom could state that he would be willing to listen to her reasoning and suggest a time frame in the near future that could meet both their needs.

A request is different from a demand in that it neither forces nor intimidates the other person. We know our requests are actually demands by the quality of our response when they are denied. If we become angry when we hear “no,” we can assume we had a secret expectation couched in our request. When we are denied a request, it is not a sign to give up. It is an opportunity to explore what is behind our partner’s “no” (Rosenberg, 2002). This further investigation helps us better understand his or her point of view and stay connected in the process of negotiating toward a meeting point. We must learn to face our fear after clearly seeing that we have imagined our safety is threatened, imagined that we have been “pushed” into isolation or imagined we have been devalued through rejection. When we deeply investigate the “no” of the other person, we discover his or her underlying needs are valid and do not reflect negatively on our being. In making requests, we must remember that we are ultimately responsible for meeting our own needs to contribute and create understanding, respect and peace in our lives.

Conclusion

This paper provides a brief introduction to methods of Nonviolent Communication that is practical and integrates well with Buddhist principles. The approach is simple but not necessarily easy, and necessitates practice over time. We begin with looking at our internal dialogue as well as our external patterns of speech. Reflecting on the speech of our partners in dialogue, we apply the same diligent investigation and understanding we apply to ourselves. We must be as conscientious and mindful in our interpersonal practices as we are with our practice of meditation. Our willingness to experiment with these methods rests on our positive intention to connect and faith in the interdependent nature of existence. Our missteps become grist for the mill, for as Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso states, “Erring and erring, we walk the unerring path” (Ponlop, 2009).

Our openness to the outcome of any dialogue reflects our willingness to fully accept others and ourselves in the moment. The fearless pursuit of kindness, truth and human dignity is our birthright. We must not be shy in doggedly pursuing these basic human needs for others and ourselves. Learning nonviolent methods of compassionate speech is essential for this task. While holding the view of nonduality, we respect our relative experience of self and other. We accept the joy and sadness inherent in the world and in human relationship. The warriorship we practice with our words must not invoke delusion and fear. It must be clear and gentle, honest and strong.

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