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A Compassionate Journey Inward
Using Western Experiential Psychology and Eastern Nondual Wisdom

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Preface

The Inner Empathy work is derived from my own experiences of deep self-connection and of supporting hundreds of others in groups and in private sessions. I believe this Inner Empathy work is a significant contribution to the Nonviolent Communication (NVC) community. Although other psycho-spiritual models are integrated into the Inner Empathy work, the Nonviolent Communication model that was developed by Marshall Rosenberg (and from the consciousness that gives the model its life) is the overarching paradigm driving the conceptual and experiential aspects of this work. I believe I have stayed true to the spirit and intent of the NVC paradigm. I am eternally grateful to Marshall for his lifetime of innovative and powerful work.

Inner Empathy work was specifically developed for those in the NVC community worldwide who have an interest in using NVC to develop deep personal growth. The work will also support many in the NVC community who enjoy exploring a type of spirituality that supports learning to connect with and abide in the present more fully.

The Inner Empathy work is a synthesis of many types of experiential work. It is one of my passions to integrate the wisdom from different methodologies, systems, or conceptual models, into a new, effective and powerful modality. I choose to support the experiential power of the NVC model by referencing and utilizing other systems that value experiential work in the present with whatever is emerging. Another characteristic I value in these modalities is that they refrain from using pathologizing language, which is a major NVC tenet in its use of process language. Even though some of the systems/models I use come out of the psychological field, the spirit and intent of their systems is to connect to people without the psychological labels commonly used in the field. Below are brief references to the main systems and models I incorporated into the Inner Empathy work. Besides Marshall Rosenberg, these are the shoulders I stood upon to see my way in developing Inner Empathy work. I would like to be clear that what I incorporate and present of others' work is my interpretation of their work and is no way meant to be a comprehensive or complete representation of their work.

The Development of Inner Empathy Work

A huge influence on what I developed was Peter Fenner's nondual group-work called Radiant Mind. As I worked closely with Peter to develop a worldwide presence for his work, I fed my interest and passion in learning experiential nondual work. He gave me the gift of actualizing a deep recognition of emptiness in the Buddhist sense, which has informed the development of Inner Empathy work. Specifically, he taught me the value of cleaning up the reifications that occur when using conceptual tools, even when these tools are used to dereify other conceptual structures. He inspired me with an orientation of "starting from the results level" where nothing needs to be understood or accomplished, and allowing that to be the disclosive space in which learning can take place. His work was also in harmony with my desire to create something that is useful on a practical level in everyday life.

I also draw heavily from Richard Schwartz's (www.selfleadership.org) parts psychology work called Internal Family Systems (IFS). This first volume particularly relies on IFS model in laying a conceptual foundation for the other two volumes. His work validated and supported the work I was doing in mapping out how inner voices talk and respond to each other. I decided

to use his mature systems model framework to facilitate depth and bring more clarity to how we view the inner landscape. Integrating his parts work with NVC, I believe, allows greater depth than is otherwise possible. Parts systems work also allows more ease in disidentifying with aspects of ourselves, an ability which I believe also supports deeper empathetic connections. Establishing deep empathetic connections is a prime value of Inner Empathy work.

Then there is the Constructivist Psychology work of Bruce Ecker and Laurel Hulley. Their work gave me many important components to add to the Inner Empathy work. They have developed a meta psychological framework with methods of accessing unconsciously held positions that are valuable to doing deep work. Their work on coherency supports and expands the NVC notions of competing-needs scenarios. They deepened my understanding of competing needs by helping me see how one set of needs is often held unconsciously, and is yet acted upon against a consciously held set of needs. Their work also helped me develop methods of inquiry and ways of supporting others that were non-invasive in the sense that my contributions allowed space for the inquirer to create and work within their own constructions of meaning. Their work helped me see how the person in a supporting role can subtly “contaminate” a client’s meaningful self-discovery, reliance upon inner resources, and self-correction process. The supporter can consciously or unconsciously superimpose their system of meaning and operate from the position of thinking they know what is best for the client. I find that working within a client’s own ecology of meaning and basing connection processes upon that ecology of meaning is a highly accurate and effective method.

I’ve also drawn from Byron Brown’s version of A. H. Almaas’ Diamond Heart work. I reviewed Byron Brown’s work with the inner critic and how it expresses itself externally and adopted it as a template of how the critic expresses itself in our inner worlds. I’ve found that any experiential inner work has to account for and find useful ways to engage the inner critic. Otherwise the inquiry will be co-opted by the inner critic.

There are also threads of what I call Shadow Work running through the Inner Empathy work. There are too many authors supporting Shadow Work to mention here, but suffice it to say that much of the Shadow Work I incorporated comes from my own experiences of doing Shadow Work, the essence of which is to follow and be with my intense reactions to triggers. Becoming aware of how we bounce our light and dark shadows off others is a useful discipline for accessing deeply held unconscious positions and beliefs.

I would also like to acknowledge Kedar Brown, who, many years ago, inspired and renewed my interest in experiential psychology as I observed him using his Hakomi therapeutic skills in group work. I particularly resonated with the surprising way in which non-directive flow of his engagements with people supported depth.

And more recently, I’ve been introduced to and have been incorporating some of Ann Weiser Cornell’s version of Eugene Gendlin’s Focusing work. It was a delight to recently discover her work and to see how she uses language to access a person’s inner world, as I do.

I would be remiss if I didn’t thank my friends Tom Doyle and Mathew Stockstad who endure my “figuring out loud” this Inner Empathy work over lunches or during walks in the woods.

Introduction To Inner Empathy

I'm excited to write this book. In doing so, I hope to make a significant contribution to the Nonviolent Communication (NVC) community locally, as well as worldwide. In this introduction, I would like to share the reasons I chose to write this book and how it might assist you in your NVC practice. I also want to share a bit about my own challenges as I developed my work, with the hope you might be inspired to connect more deeply with yourself.

My first personal contact with the NVC model was in the mid-to late nineties in my personal life. Using the model helped me to increase my understanding of feelings and needs, which supported my ability to connect with myself and others on a deeper level. One of the innovating components of NVC is the linking of needs with feelings when we attempt to connect with what is happening internally in us and in others.

I've always had trouble with the word "need" because it contains connotative baggage of "have-to-have," and someone external is going to give it to me. It also stimulates many culturally supported negative connotation of "selfish," "needy," or "weak." In some spiritual paths, need can be equated with desire and is interpreted as something to detach from. In my personal use, I have tried to use the words "wants" or "values" as antidotal substitutes to undercut the connotative baggage. However, the NVC community and literature are entrenched in using the word "need," so I will use the word in this book as well with the caveat that I don't mean it as a "have-to-have." For me, part of efficiently using NVC internally is not only identifying needs and connecting to feelings but learning how to hold them lightly.

My current passion in life is to teach myself and others a spacious and compassionate way of being in the world. My own studies and training in non-dual wisdom traditions were the main inspiration for my interest in using NVC in my own practices. As I began teaching others in groups about non-dual wisdom, I saw the potential benefits of using the NVC model to assist them.

People who are familiar with the NVC practices and basic skills know how to empathize and can connect with present feelings/needs fairly quickly. I consider these to be valuable skills in doing experiential work in the present. I was also really excited about the prospect of working with groups of people who all had the common language of feelings and needs. I envisioned this common language as helping to create a deeper supportive environment.

The Invitation Presented In The Inner Empathy Course

This course is about working experientially with our inner terrain in two broad ways:

- 1)** by cultivating empathetic awareness, which will connect and skillfully engage our core conditioning as it emerges in the present.
- 2)** by naturally disclosing and identifying the disowned core needs that unconsciously influence our lives, using a variety of inquiry methods.

One of the presuppositions operating in this course is that cultivating Inner Empathy will naturally extend outwards, allowing us to act more empathetically and compassionately towards others. Our external actions will be informed by this inner sense of empathy and compassion. For example, when you make a mistake, if you learn to empathize with the part of you that becomes intolerant or hostile with mistakes, then this very same empathetic awareness and compassionate regard for yourself naturally and effortlessly will be extended to others who make mistakes in situations that could otherwise stimulate anger. How we treat ourselves, either consciously or unconsciously, seems to be how we treat others. I see this inside-out approach as an important practice no matter what path, religious affiliation, or secular belief system we might hold.

The deeper invitation presented in this course is for you to learn and practice tangible and systematic ways to cultivate your own self-presence. This self-presence will help you to stabilize and abide in empathetic awareness when faced with internal and external challenges.

As we learn to engage our core feelings/needs with empathy and compassion, we are naturally developing our capacity for deeper connection with ourselves and others. These deeper connections give us an opportunity to meet ourselves and hold a loving, empathetic presence for aspects of ourselves that have never received such support. Often these deeper aspects represent core needs that have been disowned and banished from conscious awareness. In my experience, experientially disclosing core needs and allowing them to be held by empathetic awareness is powerful work! I view these deeper inner connections as huge contributions to cultivating what is called “NVC consciousness” within the NVC community.

A Working Definition Of NVC Consciousness

As I understand it, holding NVC consciousness includes:

- ◆ living under the assumption that we are all one, experiencing no separation, unitive consciousness
- ◆ viewing the world through the lens of needs-based consciousness instead of right/wrong or good/bad consciousness
- ◆ fostering heart-to-heart connections
- ◆ holding needs lightly in a way where they are not “have-to-have”
- ◆ holding the intention of wanting to cultivate a quality of connection where we value everyone’s needs and trust they all can be met
- ◆ making true requests (not demands)
- ◆ deriving strategies from this space of mutual consideration of each other’s needs
- ◆ inspiring ourselves to want to contribute to others’ needs out of a sense of love and caring instead of out of a sense of guilt or shame, or being motivated by demand, duty, or obligation
- ◆ inspiring others to want to contribute to our needs out of a sense of love and caring instead of out of a sense of guilt or shame, or being motivated by demand, duty, or obligation

Marshall Rosenberg describes the NVC consciousness this way:

“The spiritual basis [of NVC] for me is that I’m trying to connect with the Divine Energy in others and connect them with the Divine in me, because I believe that when we are really connected with that Divinity within each other and ourselves, that people enjoy contributing to one another’s well-being more than anything else. So for me, if we’re connected with the Divine in others and ourselves, we are going to enjoy what happens, and that’s the spiritual basis. In this place, violence is impossible.” (www.cnvc.org)

Applying NVC Internally To Help Us Transcend Our Ego?

When Marshall Rosenberg was asked how to prevent ego from interfering with this Divine connection, he responded:

“...by seeing ego as very closely tied to the way my culture has trained me to think and trained me to communicate. And how the culture has trained me to meet my needs in certain ways, to get my needs mixed up with certain strategies I might use to meet my needs. So I try to remain conscious of these three ways that the culture has programmed me to do things that really aren’t in my best interest, to function more from Ego than from my connection with Divine Energy. I have tried to learn ways for training myself to be conscious when I’m thinking in these culturally learned ways, and I’ve incorporated these into Nonviolent Communication.” (www.cnvc.org)

One of the unique things I think this book/course offers is assisting people to experientially connect with what is commonly called their ego in ways they have never experienced before. However, I will not be using the term “ego” because I do believe that avoidance of the word supports our understanding and the quality of engagement I value as we journey inward. Let me explain further.

In many psychospiritual circles, the term ego is used and it is generally assumed that transcending the ego is a good thing or a valuable step on one’s path. Now, having been immersed in process language for many years, I often find myself scratching my head, asking, “What specifically, is the ego that people want to transcend?”

Ask ten people for a definition of ego, and I bet you’ll get ten different definitions, yet all will want to transcend it or annihilate it in some way. Besides having different definitions, I find people use the term as such a high-level abstraction (a broad label) that its usefulness has become dubious and imprecise. It is generally assumed and remains unquestioned that ego is bad and transcending ego is good and there are some spiritual goodies on the other side of ego when it is transcended. The vague term is used as a good/bad yardstick for assessing whether we are moving towards or achieving the ever-elusive goodies that transcending ego brings.

Such dichotomous thinking easily lends itself to creating conditions to suppress whatever we consider “ego” and to embrace what we consider “not ego.” Under this scheme, transcendence, or “waking up,” could be defined as becoming immersed in a positive ego state of our own making, with a cost of disowning aspects of ourselves. In my experience, creating a posi-

tive, dreamy ideal about transcending ego is a common pitfall when conducting deep inner psycho-spiritual work. The phrase “transcending the ego” often is interpreted as the means to gain whatever is idealized beyond ego (higher self, enlightenment, essence, nirvana, waking up, divine energy, source, etc.).

All these challenges with ego and we haven’t even considered the question of who or what in us is wanting to transcend the ego! A sincere intention to transcend ego could play out as a fortification of ego and become an endless tail-chasing activity.

Instead of ego, often people substitute the word “I” or “self” as the object to be transcended. Using these words brings up the same challenges as mentioned above. From what I have experienced with myself and others, we are often not even aware of the deeper sense of self (disowned core self-judgments or disowned core feelings/needs) that constitutes important aspects of what is generally referred to as ego or sense of self. If we understand that a part of the self or “I” is a coalescence of memories that rallies around an assumed identity called me and is hidden from view, how can we transcend it? How can we transcend some inner aspect of ourselves (ego, “I”, self) of which we are not aware? In other words, if there is something in us that is outside conscious awareness and that influences the quality of our life and presence, it would seem prudent and practical that learning how to become aware of this something would be the first step towards transcending it.

I find the binary system of understanding ego transcendence as good or bad to be grossly inadequate to the practical task of connecting to deeper aspects of ego, “I” or self. This static language approach, with its pathologizing and redemptive overtones, is trying to solve a problem at the same linguistic level in which it was created. I believe something different is called for.

Using the NVC model, we can use our familiarity with process language and ask, “What am I doing or saying right now that constitutes being in ego?” Such specificity gives us the precise information we need in order to connect deeply with the conditioning (egoic expression) that is emerging in the present moment. Calling it ego at that point doesn’t add anything to the understanding or connection that is occurring. In fact, because it holds such connotative baggage, I’ve opted to use other terms to do inner work. Instead of using this general term “ego,” I have attempted to explore our inner terrain using the concept of psychological parts, which are experientially defined in the first chapter.

As you will experience, the parts map will be used in a way that serves as a flexible container for the flux and flow of experience and can rise to the task of honoring the dynamism in life. The parts model also accounts for the interrelationship of different aspects of ourselves that spontaneously emerge in our experience. It will allow us to understand and tease apart our habitual internal responses.

This psychological parts approach gives us an understanding of our unique expressions of our ego states. A part can be expressed and present itself to each person differently. It could present itself as inner voices, feelings, thoughts, sensations, fantasies, metaphors, dreams, energies, aspects, or somatic/kinesthetic responses. When connecting to these parts of ourselves, we experience their expressions that represent specifically what the ego structures are saying or doing in a specific time and context. Connecting to the feelings and needs of these parts will

ground our work in concrete, real-time expressions of ego. Rather than holding the generic intention of transcending our ego states, we will deeply connect with and cultivate empathy for these parts that organically emerge. In other words, we can learn to connect, be present to, and effortlessly dis-identify with the particular ego expressions (parts of us) as they emerge in the present-time awareness. This is a different process than holding some goal of transcending ego via renunciation, disowning the ego, or being immersed in an idealistic non-egoic state. For me, becoming aware of and empathetically connecting to these parts of us that emerge in present-time experience is useful in ways that will be defined and experienced by each person.

To meet the challenge of parts residing in the unconscious, we will explore and practice ways of accessing these unconscious parts using the same process language and specificity we do with our conscious parts. I will articulate a definition of unconscious parts as parts of ourselves that hold unconscious knowings. They are something outside of our conscious awareness, yet they are something we know when brought into awareness. We will connect with the deeper unconscious knowings (core feelings and needs of disowned parts) that have so much influence in our lives.

As we shall explore and experience firsthand, these conscious and unconscious parts are often simply aspects of ourselves that are looking out for our best interest but are doing so in a way that is harsh, extreme and comes with costs. We don't need to vilify our ego expressions or parts to gain separation from them, nor do we need to remain identified with them believing that is who we are. Through empathetically connecting with them, hearing their feelings and needs, hearing their judgments and stories, we will learn a natural form of uncontrived integration that brings these unconscious knowings into conscious knowings that doesn't require us to aim at integration. It just happens, and it is very hard to say exactly what happens because connection with parts of ourselves will be different and unique for each of us.

Creating Conditions For Empathetic Awareness To Emerge

Instead of using the term "NVC consciousness," I am opting to use the term "empathetic awareness" or "compassionate awareness" throughout this work. It points more accurately to what we are doing when a quality of awareness is present in our experience that is soft and understanding of whatever is emerging in our experience. What we will be learning to do is to hold empathetic presence for whatever emerges into our awareness. The most persistent obstacle to experiencing this empathetic awareness is the strength of our identification with whatever we are experiencing.

For example, when one of our core unmet needs is stimulated, we might believe we are unlovable and feel hurt. We strongly identify with our hurt feeling and the needs that were, or are, not being met. Being "identified with" means we believe we *are* the hurt feelings, and that the judgment that we are unlovable is true. It is as though we are under a spell, yet we are not aware that we are under a spell. Our experience will be saturated with hurt feelings, and we might try to find relief. We may spend time trying to figure out why we are experiencing what we are experiencing. We may resist our experience, which can take many forms. Even worse, this all takes place unconsciously. We experience the impact of inner turmoil: we feel bad but don't have a clue that one of our unmet core needs was stimulated.

While such intensity exists, empathetic awareness is possible, but not likely, because the intensity of identification with the painful experience makes it more difficult to connect with empathetic awareness. It would be useful to have some separation from thinking “we are the hurt feelings” and that “we are unlovable” and be able to break this spell. We will learn to experientially become aware of such identification as it is happening in the moment and actively create the conditions for empathetic awareness to emerge.

The Challenge Of Cultivating Empathetic Awareness

As with any practice, there is the risk that the technique and method can be co-opted by our judgmental conditioning and used against us. Instead of simply connecting with the present-time expression of unlovableness and allowing this to be exactly as it is, we might have the urge to change it or fix it. We might feel the urge to practice positive thinking in order to counter the belief that we’re unlovable. Or we can turn this awareness on ourselves and begin to think something is wrong with us or we are bad in some way for considering ourselves as unlovable.

Out of these contexts, any action we take will further reinforce the belief of being unlovable, and thus, create a loop; our well-intentioned efforts of cultivation suddenly turn into a Chinese finger trap in which the harder we struggle to improve, the more entrenched our attachment becomes.

I see the cultivation of empathetic awareness as a potent pair of scissors cutting through the Chinese finger trap thereby releasing both fingers from the entrenched position. Empathetic awareness is one action we can take that will not contribute to the polarizing tension. Therefore cultivating empathetic awareness is one of the primary intentions of this course/book. This cultivation can be greatly enhanced by a working knowledge of and application of the NVC model.

Why NVC Is A Highly Effective Self-Referencing Tool For Inner Work

En route to learning a different way to communicate using NVC, something else happened that was very meaningful to me. I began to see how the NVC model was more than just a communication model. I saw how using the model in interpersonal contexts was also a self-referencing tool, disclosing to me the important areas where further personal growth work was needed. Participants are asked to express an observation, a feeling, a need and a request. This sounds easy enough, but, as learners of NVC all have experienced, there are struggles and challenges with applying any or all of these four components. One person might connect with how judgmental they are of others or themselves when struggling to make pure observations. Another person might realize just how disconnected from their feelings they are or how they express feelings using judgmental thought-words. Another person might see how they were not in touch with their needs or lacked a language to express their needs or wants. Yet another person might connect with the fear of rejection in making a request. Still another person may connect with the understanding that their habitual form of making requests is really a demand that may invite defensiveness or reluctance.

An important aspect of these revelations that emerge through using the model in daily life is that they are all self-generated. That is, there is no external authority telling us we are making judgments or pointing out how we are disconnecting from our feelings/needs. The information

comes from our attempts to use the model. We are forming our own conclusions and insights. I see this approach as more valuable than someone telling us we are disconnected from our feelings and needs or make demanding requests.

Arriving at our own conclusions is a powerful formula for inspiring self-motivation for learning. It eliminates the conceptual “middle man,” which can complicate, confuse and contaminate the self-motivation and self-learning process. In other words, often we want to learn or change because an external authority says that is what is best instead of coming to that conclusion on our own. The authority-inspired learning tends to subtly create dependency upon an external authority. This can cut us off from our own resources and awareness. Coming to our own conclusion is the practice of relying on our own innate wisdom.

I see and value NVC as the ultimate constructivist learning tool for assisting us in moving inward and relating to what emerges. It is more than just an interpersonal communication model; it is a powerful neutral navigation tool that can help us travel deep within ourselves without getting derailed! Let me explain further.

Getting Stuck When Using The NVC Basic Form

As I deepened my practice of NVC both personally and professionally, I began to notice a pattern that arose in myself and in my students. We would bump up against certain individuals or areas of our life where it seemed almost impossible to use the model. No matter how fluent or skilled a person was with using NVC, there seemed to be a point where core needs were intensely triggered and all the skills would be abandoned. This was especially true for self-judgments that arose out of internal pain stemming from our unmet core needs. For example, I experienced a core need to be heard. So anytime this issue came up with loved ones, I would feel very deep pain coming to the surface, which commandeered my NVC “intention of connection” and accumulated skills in supporting connection, rendering them useless. I compounded this frustration by “beating myself up” for not using NVC. Even though it was frustrating, I began to see how this inability was actually an opportunity to give me information about unconscious core needs. Not being able to use the model disclosed areas that needed empathetic connection. Berating reactions to not having the capacity to use the NVC model were also a rich source of information as to what needed empathetic presence.

For me, the core need that was disclosed was connected to not being heard. For others, different important needs might emerge that are habitual stumbling blocks with the associated feelings of deep hurt, shame, fear, loneliness, anger, hopelessness, depression, sadness and grief. I found value in such self-disclosure of areas that need attention and presence because, often, what we think we need to work on comes from idealistic notions that are different from what is actually alive in us. Our difficulty in connecting with others or ourselves tells us precisely what needs our attention.

Again, I can't underscore enough the value of these insights being intrinsically generated; they are not the product of some external authority or personal growth system telling us what we need to work on to conform to some assumed ideal of health or whatever is beyond ego transcendence. If unconscious pain is organically surfacing in difficult interactions or situations, that is something to move towards, explore, and connect with and hold in presence. Surprising-

ly, just trying to use the NVC model, and failing, can penetrate through our defensive structures to connect with unconscious material rather quickly.

Difficulties Holding NVC Consciousness Provide A Map Of Core Needs Wanting Our Attention

Our capacity to experience the qualities of the NVC consciousness is another means by which we can disclose important unconscious material. What often happens is that when some form of unconscious pain is being stimulated (unresolved hurt, shame, fear, loneliness, anger, grief, or depression), our core needs around this pain will contain “have-to-have” energy and our requests will become demands. We regress back to the right/wrong paradigm of blaming and experiencing strong urges to make the other person wrong as a means to stop our pain or feel empowered. The last thing we are ready to do when intensely feeling our pain is to connect heart-to-heart, considering the other person’s needs since our own needs are far too important at that point. Therefore, our responses are often mandated to stop the pain. Unfortunately, this might even include verbally attacking or blaming the other person. Sometimes, we can take this blaming energy and put it into NVC form, fooling ourselves into thinking we are connecting (a jackal in giraffe’s clothing or a wolf in sheep’s clothing). Have you ever used the NVC form with a blaming attitude? I have. It is quite easy.

When finding ourselves in highly triggered situations, the NVC model suggests that we preserve the connection by temporarily and gracefully disengaging from the connection. Thus, we take the time to work through our pain before attempting to re-connect with the other person. This is a fine strategy, but what about people who are triggered a lot? We could get triggered by the same core need over and over again, needing to give ourselves empathy or seeking empathy from another person in order to work through an issue. Does this mean we are sentenced to be a slave to empathy every time we are highly triggered by the same core need?

As powerful as these empathetic moments are with their sense of release and connection it is also true that, with deep triggering, these benefits are often temporary because the underlying core feelings and unmet needs remain intact. Sometimes empathy can penetrate this deeper psychological structure and sometimes not. Using my earlier example, any hurt feelings that came up in the current-time expression around not being heard could be given empathy and temporarily soothed. However, such empathy did little to heal the pain associated with not being heard as a child, and the associated belief, which I held to be true that I was never going to be heard. I noticed that even though I gave myself empathy in a current situation, my pattern of being stimulated by the pain of not being heard would continue. This informed me that deeper needs were at stake, and deeper experiential work needed to be done to directly connect with those aspects of myself (parts) that need empathetic attention.

Using NVC To Focus On External Triggers Can Be A Subtle Way Of Blaming!

Another limitation is the tendency of using NVC to exclusively focus on external triggers at the expense of connecting to our internal triggers. As my understanding and experience with NVC deepened, I began to realize how much the external triggers in my life were really about my own internal triggers being activated. For example, if a loved one called me an idiot, I could have a big reaction. I could express how I felt hurt and shame, wanting respect or a different

quality of communication. I would even make a request to the person to use different language to express his or her frustrations. This was effective in the sense that I was connecting with my feelings/needs and giving the other person an opportunity to make my life wonderful. It was ineffective on another level when I didn't connect with the part of myself that is all too willing to believe I was an idiot!

I began to realize that this critical voice, or part in me that calls me an idiot, is the part that stings me the most. If my focus is on getting needs met externally by making a request of the other person without tending to my own critical voices that are calling me an idiot, then I have only solved this problem for the short term! The part of me that holds shame and hurt and chimes in with external judgments remains intact, waiting to be stimulated either by another person or myself. By not addressing my piece in this, I fear that, I will be using NVC subtly in a way that fosters my dependence on others for my sense of well-being. I may be putting undue pressure and demands on the other person to meet a need or I could be subtly blaming the other person while using the NVC form.

Sometimes people have a difficult time with this concept, so I'd like to expound the example above: It is only because there is some part of me that believes I was an idiot that I would chime in or agree with the other person's critical comments. Otherwise, the other person's words would not have stimulated hurt and shame! There is a self-judgment inside of me to support their judgment. Without such inner "chiming in," I am less reactive and can have the inner space to hold compassion for the loved one who is expressing their needs in a tragic way. I might get mildly annoyed or sad with their name calling, but it would not be an intense trigger.

In coming to this understanding, I saw how valuable it was to work directly with my self-judgments first before asking another person to meet my needs in these high-trigger situations. That way, I would have assurance that when I did ask someone to meet my need, I would do so in a way that was more likely a true request rather than a demand. I realized that, by not doing this inner prep work, I risked covertly blaming the other person for my deep pain and unmet core needs. Another limiting possibility is that I would come to people expecting them to fulfill a need I was unwilling or unable to fulfill myself. For example, I wanted others to accept me, yet I was not really connected to all the ways I was not accepting myself.

So I began to understand how empowering it is to be able to tend to my own self-judgments as a means of holding compassion for myself. This empathetic awareness, then, naturally gets extended to others. Much of the book, and the course, is based upon empathetically and compassionately connecting with, and being present to, different aspects of ourselves that speak in harsh self-judgments (internal parts that hold feelings/needs).

Becoming Aware Of Competing Strategies Of Needs Can Unlock Unconscious Limitations

As I became more adept at using NVC internally, I also began to discover that many of my self-requests were not enacted. For example, suppose I'm upset over judging myself for having poor parenting skills. I can empathetically connect with feeling frustrated or hopeless, wanting more effectiveness in contributing to my children in a different way. I would then make requests of myself to specifically meet my need for effectiveness, only to end up sabotaging this self-request in some way (inaction, procrastination, partial follow-through, undoing what I did). I then

would begin to feel hopeless and helpless to make a change. I think we all relate to wanting to make a change, yet the change doesn't happen. There is something strong in us that pulls us back from making the change we want when making self-requests.

When I noticed this reluctance to change in myself in many areas of my life, I began to suspect that there could be deeper unconscious need strategies in play, which are in conflict with the strategies of the surface need for effectiveness. Deeper experiential inquiry work was called for to disclose these unconscious needs and their strategies. When I did access the deeper unconscious need, and brought it into my awareness, what was holding me back made perfect sense. I was simply utilizing a strategy and meeting a need that was more important than the strategies of the conscious surface need I held! I began to develop ways to access and connect with these deeper unconscious needs in order to discern the sets of need strategies that were competing with each other. I found this to be an exceedingly powerful process.

The Inherent Limitations Of Self-Empathy

Self-empathy, as emphasized in the NVC community, is a powerful way to connect with what is alive in us. I've experienced both the power of self-empathy and some of its inherent limitations when wanting to connect deeply. When highly triggered, I experience difficulty in giving myself empathy because a part of myself that is berating me is consuming my experience. My inner critic takes over, and I believe and buy into whatever it is claiming as truth. There is no compassionate voice or part of me left to enact empathy! Because of this, I began to devise practices to get some separation from these high-trigger experiences.

Another challenge I encountered is that I could have one part of me that is afraid and wanting safety and then another part of me that is berating that scared part for being afraid. This told me it was useful to consider how these voices interact with each other. It wasn't until I made a concerted effort to listen to these internal judgments that I began to hear how voices, or parts of me, were constantly interacting with each other inside me. Each of these parts had their unique set of feelings/needs. I was generally unaware they existed! That was shocking, to say the least. These inner arguments created an inner environment where endless loops were in operation, causing the polarizing rancor similar to intractable arguments between two people.

Based upon these experiences, I became very curious about how to look inside when I'm in a trigger or activated state. Here are some of the questions that arose in me that stimulated my inquiry:

◆ *How can I know when I'm connecting to myself empathetically rather than analyzing or diagnosing myself?* It is often an automatic response to begin to analyze and diagnose ourselves with personal growth labels. We will learn when, and the many ways, that happens.

◆ *What part of me holds the space or capacity to empathize with parts that are in pain or are terrified?* Does a part of you disassociate or become upset and react when intense pain is present, or is an empathetic presence active? We will learn to cultivate empathetic presence to make sure it is empathy that is engaging the pain.

◆ *How can I get the separation I need to empathize with myself when I am overwhelmed with pain/terror caused by some internal part/voice hounding me? We will explore what it means to be identified with some aspect/part of yourself, and learn how to dis-identify while maintaining connection and feeling the feelings.*

◆ *What about the parts that want to protect me from feeling the pain from the unmet core needs and try to thwart efforts to give these vulnerable parts empathy? Any inquiry process that wants to go deep inevitably will emerge against aspects of ourselves that don't want us to connect to our depths. We will learn to connect and honor the wisdom and needs of these parts, turning them into valuable allies in our intention to deeply connect.*

◆ *How can I empathize with core self-judgments representing core needs if they are unconscious or actively disowned? This has been a particularly powerful question for me. Developing skills to organically disclose and hold presence for unconscious core unfulfilled needs, the intense, survival-based feelings they hold, and their associated beliefs is one of the most powerful inner connections we can make.*

◆ *Who is the "I" that holds space for these internal critical voices/parts? Is it another critical voice/part or is it something outside the loop? How do I know? My response to this question has been to develop a methodology and set of skills to navigate the inner rapids and go inside deeply. I call it "Inner Empathy," a different skill set that is distinct from self-empathy.*

I hope you're starting to get a picture of some of the challenges we all have in giving ourselves empathy when highly triggered. This course and book will help us learn to create a quality of empathetic connection with these voices/parts of ourselves and to begin to form a relationship with them. For clarity's sake I have coined the new term "Inner Empathy" to draw important distinctions between using empathy internally and what is commonly called self-empathy in NVC circles.

The Difference Between Inner Empathy And Self-Empathy

In the basic NVC training, the emphasis is on interpersonal communication. We learned to connect deeply with others by offering empathetic questions using the basic form, "Are you feeling because you are needing?". These reflections of feelings and guessing the needs helped us know whether we were accurately hearing what the other was saying; they also let the other person know that we were hearing them. A byproduct of this kind of empathetic connection was that the speaker often would gain a deeper level of self-connecting to his feelings and needs. Also, the speaker would be supported in using "I" statements, which helps us to own and take responsibility for our experiences, making us less likely to blame others. Using "I" statements and naming needs also was a way to bring into conscious awareness feelings/needs that were in play previously unconsciously before naming them. So using "I" statements is a great advance to our own self-connection and encourages taking responsibility for our experience. When we used the empathetic guessing internally, this is called self-empathy.

As beneficial as is this use of “I” statements and owning our feelings/needs in interpersonal contexts, I’ve experienced and observed in others some drawbacks and confusion when we attempt to use the same form internally when going deep. Specifically, when we use the word “I” when connecting to deeper aspects of ourselves, such identification can constrict our inner work. I like to make the distinction between surface needs that are held lightly and deeper core needs that have lots of emotional charge. Often the same feeling and need set can represent both a surface need and a deeper core need.

For example, if I say, “When I recall how I forgot to show up for the appointment with my friend, I feel embarrassed because I want to trust I’ll follow through with my commitments.” The “I” is referring to the embarrassing feeling and the need for self-trust. In that moment of recognition and acknowledgement as I feel the feeling, I am identified with this embarrassing feeling. If this embarrassing feeling and need is a surface feeling and need, I simply will feel it and allow it to pass through my system and learn from the experience. There is no problem using “I” statements in that situation. However, if there is an intense charge or there seems to be other needs (baggage) attached to the current-time expression of this feeling/need or if it is a pattern of shame that keeps being recycled, I recognize that there is a deeper part that needs attention. The not showing up for the appointment was a stimulus for deeper shame to emerge. The charge or intensity is much bigger than the situation warrants. In this case, identification using “I” statements can work against me when doing deeper inquiry work. How?

As I begin to inquire deeper and experience the spontaneous memories of embarrassment or shame that have occurred in my life, I notice the emotional intensity is elevated. I am now beyond the surface feeling/need and I’m experiencing core feelings/needs. It is common to use I statements to describe these emotionally charged core feelings/needs. This has the effect of strengthening my identification. Strengthening my identification means I think I am the deep and intense shame or embarrassment. Rather than connecting deeper with these core feelings/needs, often a protective part comes in and shuts down the process. The shame goes back into shadow to be re-stimulated some time in the future. Why? Because using “I” statements in this inquiry process strengthens identification with the shame and unmet needs and the associated beliefs of being wrong, bad, or no good to such an extent that we experience ourselves in these ways in totality! More importantly, when we are identified with the deeper shame part, we are not linguistically acknowledging the awareness that notices this shame part. When we believe we are the shame part in that moment, we have little awareness of the fact that we’re immersed in the shame waters. There are no resources to tend to the shame! I don’t see that as a useful way to connect with these deeper aspects of ourselves. We will learn a different way to inquire that allows depth, utilizing empathetic awareness as a leading resource in the inquiry process.

For me, it is important to learn a discipline of starting with and keeping empathetic awareness in the inquiry process, maintaining a degree of separation from the feelings and needs that might be triggered. This isn’t disassociation, where we deny feelings and needs, but a form of empathetic dis-identification that facilitates a type of connection that I find exceedingly useful. A part of you can still experience its feelings/needs showing up in our bodies or present-time experience, while empathetic awareness is also there to connect with the part’s feelings/needs. However, the difference is that we are not identified and consumed with that part that is experiencing feelings/needs. Inner Empathy is empathetic awareness being present to the feelings and needs of the various parts or aspects of ourselves that emerge in our experience. Inner Empathy

is about forming relationships with our parts, hearing their concerns, being present to them, and providing the holding environment these parts never experienced. This is a powerful way to use NVC internally, doing deep inquiry work with our core feelings and needs.

A Balanced Approach To Doing Inquiry Work

Many years ago, as I began to develop this work of using NVC internally, I had a bias towards helping myself and others disclose and connect with their shadow material (unconscious painful feelings and unmet core needs). My focus was on writing about and doing exercises that created opportunities for participants to connect with this shadow material. I became adept at helping people to access the deeper feelings and needs efficiently while negotiating with the protective parts that stood guard. This emphasis of connecting to deep disowned needs was at the expense of supporting the cultivation of the person's empathetic awareness. However, I began to see that if I did not help people cultivate their inner resources to engage their shadow material, that the depth to which the inquiry work could go was limited. The same was true for my own inquiry work. So this principle emerged out of these experiences:

We can only eat as much of our shadow as we have empathetic awareness/presence to digest it.

Building up the capacity for empathetic awareness to be present to self-disclosing core feelings/needs and beliefs was a huge advance in developing my work and my own inquiries. I experienced firsthand that the more we cultivate empathetic presence with our inner world, the more we naturally dis-identify (get separation from) whatever deeper core feelings/needs emerge. So we will learn to cultivate empathetic awareness as we simultaneously learn to disclose deeper feelings/needs, exploring what I called disowned needs.

I hope you will consider these points carefully as we proceed. Above all else, I want this to be a safe experience. We have a unique opportunity to come together in a group with a common NVC language to understand and support each other by using the safe space that this language creates.

Introduction To Inner Empathy Sessions

Inner Empathy is a distinct form of inquiry relating to what emerges inside you. In this course and book you will learn how to support yourself and do Inner Empathy sessions in three ways:

- 1) You will learn to do a solo Inner Empathy session without any support.
- 2) You will learn to give unconditional, non-judgmental support to someone else, which is a rich context to learning about your inner world.
- 3) You will learn how to receive unconditional, non-judgmental support from others, which will support you in deepening your connection with your inner world.

Below is a detailed explanation of what you can expect in an Inner Empathy session.

Inner Empathy Sessions Are A Different Kind Of Contribution

An Inner Empathy session is not a therapy session. Inner Empathy is a coaching method of inquiry where you learn to hold empathetic and compassionate presence for whatever emerges in your experience. In an Inner Empathy session, there is no need to diagnose, analyze or label you according to some theoretical ideal of what is and is not psychologically healthy. You will feel a sense of comfort and ease from the facilitator's non-judgmental care and acceptance of whatever emerges.

Inner Empathy is nonpathologizing because it is not based upon the premise that something is wrong with you that needs to be fixed. Inner Empathy is based upon the premise that empathetic awareness is available to you now to hold presence and connect with all aspects of yourself on a feeling/need-based level. Holding such empathetic presence for the various conscious/unconscious aspects of your inner world can inspire natural, self-corrective shifts. Your well-being will be self-defined and based upon the choices you make based upon your unique set of needs and values.

Harmonizing Deep Conflicting Need Strategies Where One Set Of Needs Is Unconscious

Have you ever wanted to take the initiative to meet a need but something deep and strong within you held you back and you didn't know what that was? Often people are challenged with competing needs scenarios where the strategies of one set of needs is at odds with strategy of another set that is unconscious. For example, suppose you said you were experiencing conflict around wanting to follow your passion at this stage of your life. You want to live your passion, but there is something holding you back.

An Inner Empathy inquiry would help you to connect to the need that is being met by not doing your passion. Sometimes this inquiry into what is holding you back is easy and sometimes this unacknowledged need is deeply embedded beneath protective layers. Accessing it requires patience, diligence, and a skillful empathetic presence. Bringing the previously unacknowledged need that is holding you back into empathetic awareness is the first step to experiencing the possibility of moving towards doing your passion. Harmonizing deep conflicting need strategies like these in your life can make a meaningful difference in your own system of meaning.

Working In The Present With The Innate Wisdom Of Your Body/Mind System

Working in the present means we engage and empathetically hold presence for whatever is organically emerging in your experience during the session. You may have a particular issue you want to explore or may wish to engage some unsavory aspect of yourself that troubles you. You will learn to trust that the particular feelings and needs surrounding this issue that emerge in the present are what seek your empathetic awareness. You also will learn to support others and operate from the premise that the other people's body/mind system knows what is best for them and give them a type of support that honors their innate wisdom.

Working in the present also discourages you from being preoccupied and totally identified with past memories or future projections. These past/future excursions can be endless,

disconnecting, and can represent a subtle way of protecting ourselves from feeling feelings and connecting to needs/beliefs that long for empathetic presence. Present-time work will include connecting to how you believe you are, in totality, these past memories and future projections as they are happening. The Inner Empathy work will help you get separation from these memories/projections and support you in staying present to whatever is occurring in the moment. A trust in a calm centeredness emerges. This serves as a foundation upon which to do your inquiries.

Support That Cultivates Your Own Self-Presence And Guidance

When someone is supporting you while doing an Inner Empathy session, the guiding principle this person will operate under is to support you in connecting with your own empathetic awareness to hold presence for whatever challenging aspects of yourself emerge. This kind of support builds your own inner resources to continue to connect deeply with yourself. This follows the principle of teaching you to fish instead of feeding you a fish for the day. Also, cultivating your self-presence is a hedge against getting lost in your inquiry. It is very easy to become identified with your core feelings/needs and believe these feelings/needs represent your identity. Cultivating the capacity of your empathetic awareness to stay present and hold these deeper aspects of yourself becomes essential. The more capacity you develop to hold empathetic awareness, the deeper you can go into your inner world to hold presence for your core feelings/needs and associated beliefs. Learning this skill can open the way for ongoing self-support throughout your life.

Experientially Working With Deep Core Needs, Feelings, And Beliefs Allows Something Useful To Happen

Inner Empathy work was specifically designed to efficiently navigate your inner world for the purpose of connecting with core unconscious feelings/needs/beliefs that are deeply embedded in your being. The presupposition in this work is that these unconscious core feelings/needs/beliefs are largely responsible for the quality of the life we lead and express themselves in our daily life in many ways. In my experience, chronic troubles with relationships, career, parenting, etc, all find their inspiration in unconscious core feelings/needs and associated beliefs.

Inner Empathy work acknowledges that the way you access your core feelings/needs and associated beliefs is a critical factor in whether such connection is useful. Do you emotionally and experientially connect with these deeper aspects, or does your intellectual part take over the inquiry and hold these feelings/needs and beliefs in an intellectual way? A lot of personal growth falls prey to the intellectual parts of us that keeps us disconnected from deeper core needs/feelings/beliefs. This is why people who think they have connected with their core beliefs do not see any change in their lives.

The Inner Empathy work was designed to support people in directly accessing these core feelings/needs and associated beliefs experientially and emotionally. The overriding assumption and intention contained in Inner Empathy work is that such deep empathetic connections with core feelings/needs and beliefs will create a quality of connection where we can trust that something useful will occur. Useful will be self-defined as you connect with the unique expressions of your core feelings/needs.

Cultivating Reliance Upon Your Own Inner Wisdom When Being Supported and When Giving Support

I've noticed, and have a concern about, our tendency to defer to authorities when engaging in personal growth work. Such deference can be an obstacle to doing meaningful personal work. Typically, we are conditioned to look outside ourselves to authorities to tell us what to do to relieve our suffering, to fix our problems, or to improve us in some way (even authorities who talk about the dangers of looking to authorities). There is nothing wrong with looking to authorities for inspiration, learning, and self-help, if we do so in a way where our innate wisdom is invited to operate with discrimination. There is a certain quality of interdependence that emerges. When reliance on authorities is done in a way where we abnegate our responsibility for utilizing our own inner wisdom, we set up dependency, subjugation, and compliance to ideals based on others' experiences.

In my own experience, when I relied upon authorities in a manner in which I gave up my responsibility, my innate wisdom and empathetic awareness and self-leadership atrophied, becoming conspicuously quiet. A lot of personal growth work is done in this context, in which we accept whatever the authority is saying without testing it experientially or checking with our inner wisdom resources to see if it is true for us. One of the ways to provide leadership for yourself is to receive information skeptically, using your own inner resources and wisdom. This type of skepticism is different from the type that is more of a defensive posture to keep anything new from entering into your system. The skepticism of innate wisdom relies upon the part of you that looks out for your best and higher interests, and is unique to your system. Please take the time to examine any concept presented here by testing it with your own experiences on deeper levels. And remember, the conceptual models we will work with in this course are conceptual tools with the specific purpose of helping to foster a certain quality of connection with aspects of ourselves, not to entrench or bind us to be identified with the models or their components.

Another area that can be disruptive to the learning process of participants is their projection of idealistic and perfectionistic notions upon the facilitators. Often these positive projections are simply a participants' golden shadow, as Jung called it; qualities or attributes the participants have difficulty owning in themselves. Either that, or as I've experienced, deep symbolic longings for parental love or approval. It is useful to track whether this is occurring. Much insight can be gleaned by paying attention to these dynamics.

In the facilitator role, the way for facilitators to provide leadership for themselves is to remain aware of the seductive temptation held out by people who look to us for the answers, and to not accept the power offered by participants. It is easy to be lured into associating our self-worth and self-acceptance with being seen as capable of answering all questions, or giving out keen insights, or solving someone's problem. This breakdown in self-leadership often happens subtly. For example, when I feel impatient or intensely upset upon hearing a participant's pain/problem, this indicates to me that perhaps, unconsciously, I am uncomfortable with their pain and want to help them get over it so I can feel comfortable. Or perhaps I have a similar unresolved painful issue in my life that I unconsciously want to work out through the participant with less wear and tear on me.

Also, it can be very intoxicating to accept the positive perfectionist projections from par-

ticipants, which, unwittingly, can lead to our cultivating and encouraging them. Facilitators can cultivate perfectionist notions by believing they need to be perfect in their roles, to live up to the standards being projected on them. I've noticed this can be very subtle. An "I've got it together" persona can easily be formed and flaunted, which indulges these positive projections. Tracking these tendencies or possibilities helps with the overall relationship between facilitator and participant. When both participant and facilitator can provide a relatively high degree of self-leadership, a context is created for a self-correction connection, and we can trust something useful will occur.

Requirements For Doing Inner Empathy Work

What type of people flourish doing Inner Empathy work? The people who seem to thrive in doing Inner Empathy work have been on a spiritual path and/or have already done a lot of personal growth work. The book/course will help people untangle the subtle ways they confound themselves with their own brilliance, knowledge, and personal growth practices. People who are coming to the end of their search and wanting to experience the fruition of all their personal growth work will thrive in this work. People who want to abide in the present more fully, who long to experience a stabilized wholeness in their life also will benefit. Below are some qualities I believe support engaging in the Inner Empathy work that could be helpful:

- ◆ Having solid NVC empathy skills will help when we begin to empathize with certain parts of ourselves.
- ◆ The ability to sit with and be present to intense feelings will be helpful.
- ◆ Being okay with an open-ended exploration and with not having a predetermined destination to hang onto and take comfort in will help.
- ◆ Having the knowledge and experience that when you want to leave the course or otherwise check out, that this is your protection that is speaking that is shielding something deep that is stirring within you. Those who embrace these reactions as something to move towards will thrive.

Generally, my approach is secular, neither promoting any specific spiritual tradition or personal growth orientations nor denying any. Even though a larger non-dualistic context informs this work and use of NVC, the belief in or adherence to my understanding of the non-dual context or any spiritual context is not required. I would hope you would honor and bring your own spiritual beliefs and understandings into this process for yourself.

I would like to end this introduction by saying how truly touched and honored I am to have your trust and to be able to collaborate with you on your journey inside. My passion in life is to contribute to your life in ways that are deep and meaningful to you according to your wisdom, which knows what is best for you now. I thrive on creating conditions for people's innate wisdom and self-compassion and empathetic awareness to emerge, which I see as inspiring self-correction. So let us begin, shall we? What is alive in you now as you finish reading this introduction?