

# BECOMING My OWN BEST FRIEND

## *Ho'oponopono Ripples*

by Cathy Holt

At the October International Intensive Training (IIT) on NonViolent Communication held in Highlands, NC, with its originator, Marshall Rosenberg, one of his trainers, Sylvia Herskvitz, read us the article from the September *Spirit in the Smokies* about Ho'oponopono.

This Hawaiian Huna practice involves looking at any problem in another person as a part of ourselves that needs love and forgiveness, and saying "I love you" and "I'm sorry" to that part. It is a reminder that we are all joined and that whatever we see in another is really a reflection of ourselves.

The next day, we were told some shocking news: there was a man in Georgia who had dropped some hints about wanting to kill people in the NonViolent Communication community. Immediately, plans for beefing up security began being discussed, and everyone was scurrying around very worried.



Cathy Holt

Dr. Rosenberg and his wife Valentina began making phone calls and giving empathy to the man, listening while he poured out all his pain. Then it dawned on me: what an opportunity to practice Ho'oponopono! It took several requests on my part, but finally the whole group agreed to spend five minutes sending love and forgiveness to the angry, hurt and violent parts of ourselves.

Whether due to the empathy telephone calls or the loving energy we all sent, the man calmed down and no violence took place. A week after the conference, I received this email from another participant:

"My husband and I were trying to tell friends about the Ho'oponopono story that

was read at the IIT and couldn't remember much of it. Do you know where we could find it? Our friends have a son who is going through something very difficult and would like to try it."

### Compassionate Action

After I gave them the information, she wrote back: "Thanks! I sent it to some friends, and we are all using it to help a mutual friend in need who is in another state. I'm so grateful for you and the others who shared it with us. I did it last night and would like to make a regular practice of 'clearing' all the judgments and other negative stuff I have carried about people."

Her email inspired me to sit down and make a list of all the judgments I've been holding about someone. Things like, "She's so needy and greedy for recognition; she eats too much junk food; she's trying to get people to see she has something to offer; she's competitive ..."

I realized with a pang that those words describe parts of myself that I really try not to look at. The woman is in my life to remind me that I need to love, forgive and heal all those embarrassing, shadow parts of myself!

(Ho'oponopono, cont'd on next page)

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(Ho'oponopono, cont'd from previous page)

Looking deeper, I realized that the needy part of myself that was competing for attention was me as a little girl, only getting to see my father rarely after my parents' divorce and then competing with my sister for his loving attention, which we both craved. I saw how I use sweets to try to "compensate" myself for losses and disappointments.

I thought, "Maybe 'Attention Deficit Disorder' is really a deficit of adult attention that kids suffer from." They hadn't created that diagnosis yet when I was a child. I decided to spend some time comforting and paying attention to the needs of my own inner child, rather than stuffing sweets into my mouth.

### Honoring Needs behind the Emotions

This is a lot like the practice of 'self-empathy,' which I am learning from Dr. Rosenberg. When we feel upset, rather than stuff the feelings down ("If you don't face your stuff, you'll stuff your face") or act them out, we practice acknowledging our feelings and needs to ourselves.

We take a look at the judgments, which our minds are running, without acting on them and sense the unmet needs involved. Then, we can look at various ways of meeting our needs—not just the one way we were fixated on.

A major aspect of NonViolent Communication is the practice of empathy, reflecting back to others the feelings and needs we hear (or guess), no matter what their words are. I know from experience that when my own needs have not been met, I don't have very much compassion to give to anyone else.

Thus, self-empathy is important. For instance, if someone makes a critical remark to me, it's crucial for me to give myself silent recognition first: "Ouch! I feel sad, angry and scared because I need respect and appreciation."

If I don't take the time for self-empathy, the first thing out of my mouth will probably be self-defense or counter-attack! However, once I've acknowledged my own feelings and needs to myself, then I can respond to the other person with, "So, are you feeling frustrated because you would have liked ... ?"

### In Deeply Caring for Ourselves, Shift Happens

In his book simply titled *Anger*, Thich Nhat Hanh suggests that when we are angry, we treat that emotion like a crying baby—giving it our loving attention and mindfulness. He suggests we take "good care" to breathe and walk mindfully, while looking for the judgments that led to the attachment to negative beliefs. To me, this is a gentle reminder that the angry part of ourselves is the child or baby whose needs didn't get met.

When I practice really being with my feelings, a surprising thing happens. They shift! Somehow, I had absorbed the idea that if I were to be with my emotions, they would overwhelm me with their intensity. That mis-belief led to distracting and distancing myself from my feelings, pushing them down.

When I move from anger at another person into apologizing to and loving the parts of me that are like him or her, there is a profound shift in my energy. I become the nurturing parent to myself. Now, I choose to practice this more!

*Cathy Holt is the author of The Circle of Healing: Deepening Our Connections with Self, Others and Nature. She teaches "Kind Communication" classes (NonViolent Communication) and facilitates mediations. She writes for The Urban News & Observer newspaper and is also the co-author of Creating Wholeness and Make Health Happen. An environmental activist, she is part of a new co-operative called "Green Transit," which plans to provide shared biodiesel transportation for commuters and others. She can be reached via: cathyh@talkingbirdspress.com.*



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