

# The Art of Conflict: Learning to Resolve Relationship Strife



## Introduction



Conflict is never usually far away in life. Look around and no doubt daily you will see small or large tension points that you may either avoid or cannot escape from. individuals, couples, families, businesses and groups of various kinds - and of course nations - are surrounded with manifest and latent conflicts; we suffer them and usually endeavour to get through them as quickly as possible; we try to ignore them for fear of being victimised or we endlessly cycle in them, creating more and more hurt. Rarely, however, do we study conflict to find the benefit inherent in those scary situations.

Gaining skills in conflict enables one to be at ease in the most difficult situations, while at the same time cleaning up atmospheres, creating deeper relationships and, in so doing, helping to sustain healthy communities. Addressing conflict early on, and in an efficient way, prevents war. It has been said that conflict is an expression of relationship and community trying to happen, so rather than being the problem or end result of bad communication, conflict can be considered to be the beginning of the solution. It is something that is needed.

Conflict causes many to get fixed or frozen in its midst. The purpose of this course is to train ourselves in fluidity, choice, warriorship and compassion so as to be able to enjoy more the new life that conflict is trying to bring. Compassion in this context comes from a sense of valuing conflict, knowing that it is nature's way of trying to lead to contact, relationship and community. Compassion also arises from a feeling of deep security within oneself - Gandhi and Martin Luther King are good examples of this - which enables one to enter difficult situations without feeling a victim.

There are many who get addicted to the power and the adrenaline rush that comes with conflict - when winning and

dominance is their goal. However, winning is not the point of the interventions here; winning is one-sided in that it creates a loser.

The loser, to get out of feelings of being a victim, will harbour resentment, revenge and retaliation on some level, even if it is simply withdrawal from the relationship. Everyone wins when the parties involved learn to get into conflict and complete the patterns inherent within it to the point where each person involved feels relieved and friendship, intimacy, good relations or efficiency are restored.



The focus of this course is on the problems that arise in personal relationships such as those found within couples, but using this course in a business setting will also be most productive. Emotions are usually discouraged in business because business is about making profit and relationship problems are usually seen as disrupting that goal. However the atmosphere developed through unresolved and marginalized feelings and conflicts causes heaviness that, like a black cloud, makes the vision of the business obscure and the organisation itself inefficient. Unresolved conflicts at work create resentment or may cause a subtle depression; but when people are happy they are more likely to be enthusiastic and productive. Businesses too would benefit from investing in knowing more about the feeling world. In effect, that is about improving communication, which is usually on most businesses' agendas.

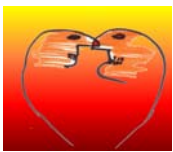
The purpose of this course is to consciously enter conflict, gaining contact and deepening relationships through disturbances that inevitably come between people. Conflict is more than just the fault of another – we usually fight about who brought, or caused the problem. Conflict in fact is the first step in resolving the breakdown in communication that happened at an earlier time; or one could say that it's an attempt at a new way of relating.

The best approach to conflict is not *“Who is at fault?”* Rather, the question might be *“What is the wisdom that is underlying the apparent cause and what is my part in it?”* An ideal approach to conflict could be: *“Hurray, we are disturbed, conflict is here, what is the new thing that it is*

*bringing to us? What is underlying the conflict that will help with our growth and happiness? Let us enter it to find the deeper reality and complete it."*

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This course contains a series of interventions designed to both escalate and de-escalate troubles and fights in order to bring resolution. You will gain the best use of these interventions if you recall several conflicts that you've had recently, or in the past, and relate them to each point. In this way you will test how the intervention would work in real life situations. It is advised to read over the fifty or so interventions and then take one and focus on that each week, applying it to the various parts of your life: your internal work, in personal relationship, with family, with work colleagues and bosses, and so on.



If you are in relationship, then you are in an ideal situation to practice both outside of conflictual moments and also when you're in the thick of it. These are powerful tools and should be tested in your everyday life to gain the full impact of their efficacy. As you progress through the course and apply them in your day to day world, you will be training yourself for entering deeper and more satisfying relationships. Focusing on one intervention per week will ensure that the most important tools will be integrated so that you will use them automatically when needed.

Many of the tools focus on personal relationships; however, the skills outlined and practised can be applied to friends, acquaintances, family, work colleagues, strangers, or groups of people – any human relationships that have a manifest or latent conflict.

In every situation of conflict it is useful to think 'intervention' rather than 'reaction'. Thinking in terms of interventions rather than finding yourself reacting has more support internally – reaction has less choice and therefore less freedom. We often get a backlash inside

after *'losing it'*. If someone irritates you, you may react; but if you perceive what it is that irritates you, then you can take steps to intervene, even in a strong or tough way. Intervention implies more awareness, while reaction often carries much diminished awareness; awareness is essentially neutral, non-partisan and available to all. Awareness could be considered the greatest tool for life's mastery. Awareness is the difference that makes the difference in conflict.

Yet while awareness may be diminished in reactions, sometimes strong reaction is unavoidable, and indeed may be needed, such as a clear 'red light' stop to certain behaviour or to create a shock by your anger in order to wake up the other person to their effect – one is using an affect to create an effect.

For example, if you feel your 'blood boil' in reaction to something that is said, then consider your reaction is needed and then let it out rather than simply losing control without such awareness. Considering your reaction is the awareness that makes the difference and helps maintain control. There are several benefits to this strategy: your reaction may change the other's behaviour; you may show the effect of their attitude by your reaction (in temper or when polarised in any way, we are usually unconscious of our affect on others, we are usually aware only of defending ourselves); in reacting you 'burn your wood' and hence can let go and move on; the roles may swap where you and your opponent switch between victim and oppressor, this natural switching in conflict will be focused on later in more detail.

If there is a threat of violence then your reaction could put you in danger because your reaction may escalate the other person. However, if you feel that you are safe then reaction may be the very thing that de-escalates the situation. What works one moment may not work the next and the right intervention for a particular situation is vital and it is hoped that this course will be a guide in that.

The skills below will train us to remain aware within such reactions, enabling one to intervene with some detachment in the

middle of the fire. Indeed the goal of integrating these skills is to maintain fluidity and awareness within conflict, not as a programme to apply from the outside, but as a momentary map that enables sure-footing in the reality of tension. The tension within many conflicts requires that we notice what is happening in the moment and support that, rather than trying to remember 'steps'. Following the tension in any moment and discovering the way through from there is the real training. The interventions below are designed as a way to play and have fun with these tense moments because they have the potential to be the path to liberation. Also, if you wish to avoid conflict because of fear then studying these tools will keep you in control – even the controlled folly of choosing to lose control.

Some people may have severe control and violence issues, and although many of the tools included here will keep one safe, nevertheless, there are real psychological problems in some people and the means of working with these special situations are dealt with specifically elsewhere on our website. If you are feeling scared, take it seriously because you may be picking up a dangerous reaction.

Fear and feelings of hurt are special interventions that bring resolution if they are not used as weapons against the other. See “Using Fear and Hurt” below.

In the examples throughout, we use invented characters that represent real life situations. The authors have used the many interventions included here and much more in their twenty-odd years of experience as therapists and group facilitators around the world. The characters mentioned are shown to be interested in awareness and learning from conflict.



They are willing to get into a fight and, at the same time, study how to resolve it; they are willing to jump into the water and find a way out from there, rather than studying it from the safety of the river bank. In normal life however, it is the fixed positions that we take up in conflict that

prevents us from bringing in the broadest awareness of the whole situation, thus blocking resolution. The characters named in the examples can be considered as either interchangeably female or male, or as of the same sex.

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## Awareness Structure

You may wish to skip this theory: to go straight to the tools section press this [link](#)

### Primary Process

Conflict, once manifest, can be seemingly chaotic and usually creates a state-like, fixed reaction that needs to control the situation; this reaction, in turn, can make conflict dangerous. Awareness, however, is fluid and requires a process attitude, or process thinking, that can intervene with the nature of the particular changing conflict. Awareness happens now - it is the *Power of Now* and even though conflict is often focused on past or future events, the conflict itself is happening now, therefore intervening in the 'now' is the most effective way of handling it - addressing the present moment with the suitable tools of awareness will resolve conflicts fast.

Using awareness to understand the structure in the middle of conflict helps to orient us when things are confusing, therefore some explanation of terms relating to the structure may be useful here. However, it is not necessary to follow this minimal structure in order to work through the interventions, so it can be skipped if you don't like theory.

The term identity, as used in the skills sections, means everything that one identifies with such as: my watch, my body, my home, my partner, my life, my history, etc. In other words, everything that has an 'I' attached to it is part of one's identity - 'I have a partner', 'I am hungry', 'I am ill'. However, this identity is simply 'a process' that changes constantly; it is not fixed although it identifies with fixed form of the outside world and therefore seems fixed to itself. We can call this identity *or you*, a 'Primary Process', (PP), because it is closest to the awareness of who we think we are.



## 'Secondary Process'

Processes, or internal and external experiences that impinge on this identity and that are often in conflict with it, can be called the 'Secondary Process', (SP). Anything that comes into contact with our Primary Process, - *'myself'* - and that causes concern, fear, threat, uncertainty, and more, can be considered as our Secondary Process; our un-integrated nature. This Secondary Process can come at us in a myriad ways: it appears in dreams, most apparently in nightmares; in inner conflict such as moods, depression, anxiety, etc; in outer problems, such as relationship conflicts, accidents, illness, good and bad fortune - Anything that we do not identify with or seems to be *'not me'*, but impinges on us is our secondary awareness process, or Secondary Process. If we identify with the *'other awareness'* - anything outside of us, for example - then we are entering the Secondary Process.

As the Secondary Process threatens, the Primary Process can become more insecure, fixed and defended. However, real security comes from integrating that secondary process; the larger part of our nature. For example, we may fear speaking in public, thinking that *'I cannot do that, it's not me'*, but when we actually do it we may feel elated, expanded and full of joy at fulfilling a challenge. In speaking on stage, we have begun to identify with, and integrate, our Secondary Process - someone who can speak in public easily. As we grow, our identity constantly expands out of this Secondary Process. On a relationship level, the information underlying a conflict that a couple is having is the Secondary Process of that couple, for example.

## Double Signals

Both of these processes produce their own body signals; there are the intended signals of the Primary Process - I smile when I meet someone, or I might use my hands to make a gesture to underline a point, and so on. This is all part of my identity - I intend it. Secondary signals, or Double Signals, are those signals that I do not intend to make but happen through my body. These signals come from a Secondary Process; that is, the action of a part of the unconscious which is often referred to as dream figures. (It has been

shown that the content of our night-time dreams stay with us and function through our bodies throughout the day.)

These dream figures signal their intentions through our bodies just as much as our conscious mind does. This process of signals coming from different sources at the same time and having different intentions causes untold problems in communication. For example, I might have coldness in my eyes while smiling; an attitude of coldness that I am completely unaware of but others may unknowingly respond to. Again, I might intend to be nice but give off a bad feeling of unrelatedness by turning my head away; I might look like a Goth or a punk rocker of old and seem ferocious in the way I dress but be very soft and gentle in my personality.



Double signals come through us but we don't intend to send them because we are unaware of them. Let us introduce Chris and Kim to help explain. Chris, for example, is saying nice things to Kim but has a grating voice. Kim gets disturbed by the grating without noticing it and reacts or goes into a mood because the signals from Chris are incongruent. One part of Chris, the conscious identity, is being nice while a secondary figure is causing trouble in the sound of the voice. (We all do this all of the time causing untold disturbances.) Some part of Chris may be rougher than he realises or would want to be and he compensated by developing niceness. This behaviour is unconscious to Chris but Kim receives the signal and thus experiences it - but also unconsciously - so the conflict will cycle because the cause - the grating dream figure - is not available to either of them. (All this signal work is routinely worked with in couple's therapy - the figures behind these signals are revealed through amplification by the Process Work Therapist.)

This mechanism is one of the main problems in conflict because of the unconsciousness involved - *'It's your fault.'* *'No, it's yours.'* *'You did it.'* *'No, you did!'* Attacking your partner, friend, or work colleague because of sending unconscious signals is unfair because they know less than you, even though the signal may come from them. All we

can say is that people exist in a sort of quantum entanglement where signals come from a different level than our conscious minds. Like the particles in subatomic physics, signals arise at the same time through different people. Being 'right' or 'winning' will not resolve problems, rather it is connecting to the underlying awareness that makes us free. We will discover more about this dynamic as we progress through the course.

## The Edge



Between these two processes of PP and SP stands the 'Edge'. This Edge is at the perimeter and defines the Primary Process - what I am and what I'm not. The Edge protects the identity from disintegrating, but can also limit it in growth. When we say in English, *'It's a bit edgy to do that'*, then you may have an idea of what the 'Edge' is - *I couldn't do that, I'm not like that, I'm not clever* and so on. When someone says, *'I'm not clever'*, for example, then you may surmise that a part of them is clever and they need to go over the Edge and connect to the SP to identify with it.

Internal dream figures stand at the Edge - Mothers, Fathers and other critical authority figures from childhood or the past - telling us that we are useless, bad, unable, etc. Or, protective internal figures saying: *'Do not do that, it's not safe; be nice because you won't be liked; be good; don't go too near this or that'*, and so on. All these spoken and unspoken attitudes create the behaviour of our identity and keep it intact. However, our awareness remains restricted and our whole self is split in two. Check this out for yourself, consider doing something that you know you shouldn't and then notice your internal reactions. These reactions are edge figures.

Finding ways to go over this edge consciously will bring growth, new life, energy, creativity and more. A person who identifies as *'nice'* may notice that a part of them is not so nice privately and so may decide to challenge that *'nice'* behaviour and become more difficult to others; conversely, an insensitive person may become sensitive and gentle - a behaviour that was split off

from a family culture, perhaps that was rough at the edges. We cannot become something *'other'* unless it is somewhere in our body signals already. Also, some behaviours of our partners represent an aspect of our own Secondary Process that we reject and will cause us to fight with them when in fact, it is part of us and we are simply projecting out unto them what we reject within.

In conflict we often hold tight to our Primary Process, or the *'me'* or *'us'*, as we feel more and more threatened. We fight doggedly to maintain our identity and its power. (When in relationship the *'we'* is also the Primary Process, or identity, of that relationship - each one identifies as part of a couple.) But real power comes from integrating our split-off nature, which appears in disturbances.

Our identity is just one role within us; in a certain way it is just another awareness dream and working with conflict is an ideal opportunity for connecting to our wholeness through the Secondary Process. The author's perspective is that the natural awareness in our bodies that we are born with has become attached to certain experiences in this life which then developed into an identity. But that pure awareness in the new born child is neutral and connected to all living things - it belongs to the creative principal of the universe and, as such, we are all a part of the whole. Therefore, the skills outlined below, which follow the inclinations of that awareness, will help us to become more our true selves.

## § Skills in Conflict

### Get into trouble

Conflict can be scary and we usually do everything we can to avoid it. We often ignore our part in creating it and then become furious at the other person for starting it. We normally hate conflict and therefore many conflicts involve conflicting about conflict – *you started it, you did so and so, it's your fault, etc.* Conflict, however, arises out of background conditions and can create new life in relationship if it is dealt with quickly and with awareness.



Conflict is easier to resolve if we step into it consciously rather than ignoring it, hiding from it, or blaming the other for starting it. Conflict rarely happens out of the blue. Our most private reactionary thoughts and moods are signalled through our bodies and our partners unconsciously pick them up. Our partner's reaction, or reactionary mood, to signals that we ourselves unconsciously send may be thought to start the conflict. However, it is usually impossible to say who really started a conflict, and rarely does anyone accept responsibility for their part.

Conflict is an answer trying to happen and avoiding it creates more and more troubled atmospheres that eventually destroy the life of a relationship. There is a place for bringing conflict out into the open, because without doing so the polarisation in the background will cycle or fill the atmosphere, but will never get resolved because it is not manifested. Marginalising conflict does not get rid of it. Choosing to get into trouble is a first step in resolving deeper issues and secret disagreements.

If you have a reaction to someone, rather than gossip about them, get into it with them because it will help our planet to process the unconscious '*information float*' that can hang like a cloud over

personal relationships, commerce, communities and countries. This unconscious float causes accidents, destroys relationships and creates havoc.

Tool: Address conflict as a first step: address that which is edgy to talk about and say the unsayable, or sense the atmosphere between you. Say to the person: *'I feel a tension between us, do you notice it? Can we talk about it?' Or, 'I don't like the way you treat me!'* In this way you are addressing what is in the background for the sake of the relationship.

## Dropping conflict

Some couples or colleagues avoid conflict while others can't stop. Conflict that continues for too long is usually only destructive. If you are always fighting then stopping the habit, if you can, is the right direction. Talk to your partner about the situation. Notice if continual conflicting is too much for you, say so without blame. Talk about what it is that both of you are really doing - do you need to win, does your partner need to win, are both of you identified with always feeling the loser? What we see in the other is usually defence and not what they really feel, similarly the same is true for our opponent. Show and talk about the background feelings. Is your relationship being trashed because of your individual positions? If you're the one who feels that you always give up first, then talk about how painful it is to always do that (but notice if you have a point to prove because that will escalate the conflict again). Finding common ground resolves conflict: feelings are often hidden in the background that both are suffering from but remain unspoken, for example. The pain of fighting itself often goes unsaid.



Tool: talk about what is unsaid. If you fight too much try both agreeing to just drop it. It just takes a little courage.

## Take your compulsion to be 'right' and use it

Many, many conflicts involve a power struggle that centres on being right - *"I'm right and you're wrong"*. We cannot admit that the other is right because we lose a sense of our own power and may feel a victim of the other's sense of righteousness. These battles are often related to childhood abuse or bullying. Rather than changing this need to be right, use it to study what is right about the interaction by reframing it. *'We met at 8', 'No we met at 7'* What might be right here is that 'meeting' with each other is important and the question is, how are we not meeting right now in the present?

Tool: Find the future and past in the moment. Reframe the argument to fit what you are both doing now in the disagreement. Use the sense of being 'right' and find the rightness of the situation in the present moment. Looking for support for your point of view in the other will not work; the only place to find it will be within yourself.

### **Note: Past and future.**

Most conflicts about events in the past or future have a power struggle behind them that is unlikely to end satisfactorily. Conflicts about what happened in the past usually cannot be resolved because they are about something out of the present moment - you can change the present but not the past. The conflict is bound to escalate and cycle because the past event is apparently not available.

On the other hand, a future event often causes conflict because of the fear of the upcoming situation and that fear may get transferred onto the other in relationship. Talk about the fear rather than attacking the other out of an emotional reaction. The future and past, however, are always happening somehow in the present moment.

Tool: Inhabit the life, the energy, in conflict rather than just stay focused on thinking and reactions. Thought alone is too limited and contains one's identity and history of being misunderstood and hurt,



we end up fighting our history. It causes conflicts to run on endlessly because concepts and memories are too abstract and therefore ungrounded and ungraspable in the moment. Follow your senses – feelings, visions, sounds, movements, unusual happenings – these provide sensory grounded information that happens in the moment and are therefore tangible – you can only drop a ball when you have a ball in your hand – what is happening is more solid than thought.

A further example: If arguing about war in some foreign country and who is at fault, then consider where war is between you now and address it.

## Three sides to any conflict

If you study any conflict that you have you will notice that your identity is always fluid even if you seem fixed – in any conflictual moment we are either on our own side, on our opponent's side, or we are neutral. Often we are secretly on the other's side more than on our own but resent it.

If you have a moment of understanding, insight or sympathy for the other's position, then you are momentarily on that side. If you notice that you understand the other position and go fully on that side then you will solve the problem quickly, because the other feels heard. You have changed internally in the moment and showed it. By picking up the initiative you are supporting both of you and therefore there is no loser. If someone really feels heard in a conflict it relieves them and frequently changes them.

You may then switch to your side and feel not understood or infuriated again, so pick that up completely (in the moment) and support your side all the way. Defend yourself once - fully - but keep fluid. Being fluid is our natural state but we get fixed on one side which makes conflict entrenched and dangerous because it escalated out of all proportion. However, stay on your side all the way and only change when the change is already in you.

At another moment you may naturally be thinking about what both of you are doing. This is the neutral position which also should be spoken about, for example: *'What are we doing, really?'*

Kim shouts to Chris, *'You're so lazy; you never try to get out and get a job.'*

Chris feebly responds with her head down, *'I'm trying every day.'*

Kim feels bad about spitting out the accusation and sees that Chris has no real defence. However, he ignores these impressions of being on Chris's side and returns to the accusation because of the fear of having no income.

Kim shouts, *'You're not trying hard enough.'*

Chris looks shameful and dejected and says nothing. Rather than becoming more determined, a process well known to her, she starts to hide from her accuser even more by looking down and slightly turning away.

Kim now remembers a time when life felt hopeless for him and automatically switches onto Chris's side again. Kim, picking up his actual feelings in the moment says:

*'It's a terrible time when one is out of work, it destroys our confidence; it did mine. I know it's hard for you and I know you'll solve it somehow. I really have faith in you.'*

And picking his side again, continues, *'I just get a bit scared.'*

Chris now changes as well because her pain is understood - both feel the same fear, they experience the common ground between them. Suddenly she finds her confidence and determination and starts talking about her concrete plans.

We can employ this method in a stand-up fight or in a conversation such as this, or any relationship polarisation. This is a martial artist's work in relationship conflict. By remaining fluid you will not get deeply polarised and entrenched. It only requires one person to be aware of this tool in conflict. Expecting the other to change or be aware does not resolve conflicts. This awareness practice will dispel fear of conflict and brings freedom and mastery. If you practice only this tool your life will change because you will fear no one.

Tool: Study, follow and reveal what is in you from moment to moment in conflict because you hold all sides and the resolution too.

## If attacked for quality X, do it more

If attacked for quality x be more of X more consciously. You are being attacked because you need awareness here and your signals are incomplete. For example, if you are attacked for thinking too much and get hurt in that attack then you can guess that you are not yet thinking clearly enough, or expressing your thinking clearly enough. If you inhabited your thinking more completely then you would not get hurt by the criticism. Maybe you are irritating because you think but allow feelings to signal through your mannerisms, thus creating confusion and reaction. Or maybe you ignore the criticism which makes the critic come after you more.

On the other hand, if you are accused of 'feeling' too much, then support your feelings more directly and consciously – stand for them. *"This is who I am; I'm a feeling person and like to cry"*. If you are against your feelings (an inner critic) then you will signal that with your body which will create the criticism in someone else towards you. (Restated: If you are doing something but are against it in yourself then there are two parts in you and others will side with either one or the other – if you are crying but don't like it, another will either feel sad for you or, most likely, feel critical of you.) The criticism, although seemingly opposed to you, is really a gift asking you to become more of who you are.

**Tool: Criticism is the beginning of awareness: do more of what you are criticised for, knowing it is a gift.**

## A grain of truth

The one who is perceived to have started a conflict will often be blamed for it. But conflict, when it erupts, is usually the tip of the iceberg. Conflict between two or more people is created by a myriad of small hurts from the past, or one strong event that was waiting to happen, or needed to happen, in the moment.



In conflict we usually block each other, don't listen and feel aggrieved that we are not heard. To resolve this problem try to find a grain of truth in the accusation and admit it fully a 100%. Taking responsibility in this way helps to complete the communication.

For example, *You're lazy! No I'm not.* Then remembering a time when you are lazy, *well sometimes I am, it's true*

In doing this it is wise not to identify as a victim, because victim identity will not resolve the problem. Only inhabited power is secure enough to admit involvement or being wrong and bring change, only inhabited power can afford to lose a little something. The next question directed towards your opponent might be, *"Now that I've admitted my part, where might you have a part in this too?"* or if they continue to criticise *"I've changed, why do you not? Or, I notice that you globalise your criticism and say "always", it's true I am sometimes lazy but I 'm not always lazy?"* - This should be done with fairness and not with revenge or backlash.

It is not reasonable to think that we should never be criticised. We are not perfect and yet we act as if we are totally faultless in the face of another's criticism. It's as if we load so much inner attack on top of us that the lightest straw of criticism coming from another is devastating. Self love is the key to this process.

**Tool: In relationship no one is completely faultless, we share the same pot. Complete the accusation by considering that you have a part in it and admit that part without a 'but'...Find the grain of truth.**

## Express your heart, tell it all

Put all your feelings, secret thoughts, hopes, fears, dreams, everything, put it all on the table. Show hurt as well as anger etc, one at a time. You may want to shout and scream at the wall just to drain the tension from the atmosphere and yourself. In this way you are expressing everything and burning up the tension.

**Burning wood:** If you are seething about a wrong or wrongs done to you, when on your own, let it all out, rant, rant and rant. Don't stop the thoughts or psychologise yourself but keep going. Allow your most extreme reactions out without suppression; keep going until you get to the message underneath it all – to when you hear something fresh and new which relieves you in some way.

**Tool:** when tension is released then the conflict quietens and the insight underneath is revealed. Try doing the work before you meet your opponent.

## Switching roles

Each of us contains multiple roles that function through us; we are different at home than at work, we are different in bed with our partner than we are at our parents' house. Our dreams at night contain a multitude of dream figures that function through our bodies in the daytime sending body signals. Awareness is fluid and not confined to physical form. If I identify as a sweet person and I dream of a nasty person then that nasty figure can signal through, let's say, my eye movements, and cause a reaction in another. I will be completely unaware of this process.



Further, we also contain the dream figure of our partner and so, in an argument, if we swap roles – you become me and I become you – then we begin to reduce the polarisation because we integrate the other side or the other's point of view into our consciousness. That point of view has been the part of us that we do not identify with but is seen only in our 'other half'. Practice this outside of a conflictual situation first, because people become serious and entrenched while in conflict and are not usually interested in awareness and mutual resolution.

**Tool:** Agree to trade places. Don't mock. Try to really get into the other's position and speak as them.



## Inner and outer opponents

Conflict is a very complicated procedure involving not only an outer opponent or opponents in the here and now, but also involved in the conflict might be each of the protagonist's painful history. There may be inner parents that each is facing in the other: authority figures from school days; events of abuse - small or large, that put one into a victim identity and which have not yet been resolved. These inner opponents can be called internal critics and they become internalised because the energy and images created in the original encounter with them remains within us. Therefore a negative Mother or Father, for instance, continues to operate within us long after she or he may have died.

(There may be other power issues in the background creating conflict. Cultural attitudes impinge on couples creating tensions and knowing the source of these tensions is important in resolving big background issues. Some pressures are class differences, male and female issues, finance, ethnicity, colour, cultural differences, sexual expression, to name but a few - see below.)

Therefore when in conflict we face two opponents, the one on the outside and the one on the inside. Our experience normally, however, is that there is just one opponent on the outside that we are dealing with because we project the inner parts outwards in the moment.



**Step one:** It is good to find out who you are arguing with internally and separate the inner and outer. Do you know this situation from the past, are you thinking of your Father or previous relationship? Perceive how the real outer person is in the 'now' and different from your history.

**Step two:** Become friends with your inner opponent because it is really your own energy turned against you that you are now making a relationship with. Do this by becoming aware of inner criticism (attitude against you) listen to it and either stand up to it by doubting

its perceptions, shouting 'Stop' to a voice that puts you down, etc. Or, agreeing that your inner critic has a point and change according to its message.

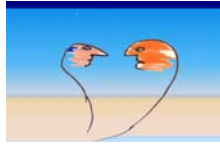
Some inner opponents need you to fight before they relax, and some need you to capitulate and become less arrogant, or some such. The point is that we reclaim their power one way or the other by interacting with them. If we are together inside then nothing can throw us.

**Step three:** When your inner opponents are on your side then you have access to your inner power and therefore, the outer situation is easier to handle because you are now dealing with one outer opponent with your own inner resources.

**Tool:** In conflict we face two opponents, the one on the outside and the one on the inside – they are often indistinguishable. When your inner opponents are on your side then you have access to your inner power.

## Becoming the 'Other'

Transforming inner opponents will work if one has a meaningful contact and experience of those figures, but sometimes we are fully focused, or magnetised, on the outer situation and totally unaware of those dynamics. If one tries to apply a method without insight then the intervention becomes a programme, and as such, will soon lose its power.



If you are obsessing and seething about another person in a way that could damage your health over time, then you may have no alternative but to do the following. This process can be applied in any situation, however we are usually reluctant to let go of our defence, thinking we will lose or become a victim. Becoming a victim of another cannot happen with this intervention.

Consider that you are not perfect and that you are capable of the same behaviour of most other people - perhaps all other people given the same upbringing and circumstances. Consider that what your opponent has done to you, you are also very capable of. It is not the other person that is you; it is the behaviour that you yourself have done too. Find an example of this in your life.

It can seem difficult to let go of your side if you feel put down in some way, but if you can see that their behaviour is You in some way, then your body will immediately relax and become less stressed. When you know that your behaviour is also the other person, then in some way you have become one with them. The other person does not have to change, but you will be out of the polarisation and 'dry'. This is the process of the elder; the one who has seen it all, done it all, been it all, and has learned not to get caught.

This is holistic work; organic work, and the environment and relations will benefit from it greatly. It is likely that our true nature lies, not in our differences, but in what we share because our very cells respond most favourably to the common ground of humanity. This process, if picked up and investigated, is one of the most powerful interventions that human beings can engage in, because it does away with all polarisation, conflict, and war.

**Tool:** Work with yourself for the insight that the behaviour that you line with???dislike in another is you at the moment, or at some other time.

**Exercise:**

- 1 Think of a person that you have a small or large conflict with at the moment.
- 2 Recall the thing that they do that hurts you. Study it and see them do it.
- 3 Now put yourself in their shoes; experience the world from their conscious perspective. This is a shamanic process of shapeshifting. A feeling change, such as a sense of relief in your body, will happen as you shift. It can be difficult to let go of our perspective but when we do we find that we are much more than our one-sidedness.
- 4 Notice that the behaviour that you now feel is you as well as the other. In a sense you are one.
- 5 At this point you are now in line with the other person as the polarisation lessens and you may find that you are freer to deal with the outer person.

## Switch gender if it's a male/female issue

Sexisms and stereotypical roles, usually in heterosexual relationships, are sometimes in the background of many conflicts - *'it's your job to do that, that's woman's work, etc'*. It is always a gender issue if one person brings it up as a problem; when an issue is mentioned it becomes part of the 'field' of communication.

People can become isolated in the gender roles and see only from that perspective, which can make them blind to the needs of the other role. In this way, the battle of the sexes rages on eternally - Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus, and there is no middle ground. But awareness is fluid and to swap roles, enabling a man to be on Venus and a woman on Mars is an act of shapeshifting that goes a long way to resolving world tensions and personal relationships.

Feeling into the opposite role and speaking from it is all that is needed. (We always ask the question, *"Why is it that men's ego is always treated as though it is delicate and too easily lost."* True power is able to take a risk to help the whole.)

Tool: A person is MORE than the role but the role is BIGGER than the person. (The person in the role of The President of America is more than that role, but the role of the president is bigger than any one person)

## Bring in split off information

Like a jigsaw, resolution can only happen totally if all the information is on the table. What is left out - not spoken about or avoided - is the very thing that is needed. Bring in what can't be said because it is already present in a feeling sense, and although it can sometimes make things worse, it is the beginning of completion. Things half said need saying fully; things alluded to need to be brought out further; fill out holes in conversation, for example:

*'I want to be on my own tonight'*

*'Can you say more about that because there is a hole in what you said and I'm left dreaming about it?'*

*'Okay, I'm upset with you because...'*

This can be the beginning of the way back to each other - speaking the unspeakable.

**Tool:** With the jigsaw complete the whole picture can be seen and addressed. Speak the unspeakable.

## The Ghost role

Almost all arguments contain a role that is spoken about but unseen – it is implicit in the conversation but not made explicit and this causes untold problems. That role is called the Ghost Role. If two parents are arguing about a child's behaviour, for instance, then it can be considered that the child's behaviour is happening between the couple in some small or large way. If this behaviour can be discovered and represented by one of the couple in the moment, then it ceases to be a ghost and the problem is more easily solved - the missing element – the ghost of being child-like is now available. Conflicts recur over and over because the missing elements that are affecting the argument are not made present. The argument may look child-like, so becoming more child-like consciously may resolve it.



Parents may realise that they may be too serious and not playful enough, for example, or too rule bound, or whatever. The conflict is bringing them to awareness. The child's 'bad' behaviour is just what they need because they have marginalised that part of their own nature. The child has to be bad because the parents need to be like that themselves. Identity splits off parts of itself that it does not like and often projects them unto others or others pick it up in the environment. Split-off awareness is always trying to become conscious and the marginalising process that we, as people do, causes this missing information to pressure us into arguments. Therefore conflict and arguments are trying to bring wholeness, completion and deeper resolution into relationship.

Similarly, an argument about in-laws or anything else that is about something 'other' outside of the moment has a ghost within it preventing resolution. Integrating this process helps both the people arguing and prepares the way for resolution with the actual outer situation being argued about.

Another Example: Chris shouts, "*You started the argument.*"

Kim responds with teeth clenched, *“No, you started it.”*

In terms of identity each of these people genuinely feels (or can't afford to feel) that they did not start the fight, and so it can't be resolved. But somehow it started and therefore, because neither of them can identify with it, we have to call it a ghost - ie the one who started the argument. Restated, anything outside of the moment - past and future events, persons or things that are referred to and not present, can have an implicit effect on what is happening in the moment.

People argue over ghosts but no one can prove the reality being referred to and so the fight never resolves itself. When the energy subsides with things unprocessed, resentment, revenge and a cold war often results. If one admits that one had a hand in starting the fight, for instance, then the pressure can be quickly taken out of the disagreement because the ghost is represented.

**Tool: welcome conflict and study it, it will deepen relationship. Discover how the ghost being referred to needs inhabiting, or identifying with in the present moment.**

**Exercise: - To be done either by yourself or with partner.**

- 1 Consider dreaming together about your relationship and ask yourself what feelings, thoughts, you have about the other. Do you gossip about the other, either within yourself or to another?
- 2 Ghosts are aspects of people that you gossip about but no one represents directly. Imagine a ghost, a figure behind your own gossip. Imagine jealousy, power, ambition. What does your ghost look like? Make your face look like its face. When are you possessed by this ghost?
- 3 What conflicts between both of you are related to this ghost that are trying to surface?
- 4 Imagine playing this ghost. What would happen? Would your partner be surprised? Happy? Angry? Now completely represent the forbidden ghost.



- 5 Now, as a creative possibility, see if you can consider that your relationship has another spirit, a mythic figure that is trying to awaken you. What might this spirit look like in your imagination?
- 6 Imagine both of you coming together. Consider what it might look like if both the gossip ghost and the ghost that wants to awaken you were present. How would they interact?
- 7 If you are doing this with a partner then both play your two figures and then you help play your partner's figures.
- 8 What similarities are there between all four figures? Talk to each other about how your life together may be structured by these figures.

## Using Fear and Hurt

Often fear is in the background when one is in conflict; fear of physical or psychological hurt and although this process has been mentioned it is worth giving it a special focus. Normally both sides wish to show defence and hide the fear; however, fear is signalled by our bodies and causes a double signal that is even more disturbing in the midst of tension. For example, looking away while being 'nasty' or stepping back while looking aggressive, or fear in the eyes while at the same time being insulting (There are countless double signals going on in conflict). Showing the fear will help resolve the conflict because it makes obvious what is unconsciously felt and helps communication to become clearer and therefore, relieves the field.

However, we often use fear and hurt as weapons - "You hurt me by saying that", said to make the other feel bad. Or, "I'm frightened of you", used to get the advantage. Fear and hurt to work well should be picked up genuinely within one and presented as a real feeling with a desire to stop it, rather than to simply switch roles and perpetuate it.

In some situations, showing fear can cause the other to become even more aggressive or hurtful because crying or cowering, for example, can make the perpetrator feel guilty. This guilt then causes the perpetrator to react even more aggressively. This situation can be complicated and may be a system where the crying may be really crying because of hurt, or may be used as a defence trying to regain some control. On the other hand the perpetrator may react to the crying through feelings of guilt about their behaviour or perhaps they have been manipulated by a parent into looking after them.

Generally however, in conflict it is best to notice signals and learn from them and leave psychological thinking and psychological insight out - using psychological thinking against your opponent does not work because insight puts the other at a disadvantage and must be rejected by them.

## Use of 3rd Parties

The use of 3<sup>rd</sup> parties in arguments can be considered dirty politics - using attitudes and examples of others to put your opponent down. It is bad practice because an outside perspective is employed to defend or support the accuser's position, while the accused is not able to defend themselves against someone who is not there. We use 3<sup>rd</sup> parties to support our position. However, in a conflict, it is important that we take responsibility for our attitude and not use others to prove our point - *'so and so agrees with me'* or *'so and so said this or that about you'*. Conflicts are usually riddled with 3<sup>rd</sup> party employment to win a point. Challenging the person to stand for themselves and for what they really think is a good intervention here.

If you find yourself using 3<sup>rd</sup> parties then using the attitude directly as your own the message will be more direct and powerful.

Chris to Kim: *I'm having a night out with the girls.*

Kim: *I want you to stay in tonight with me, you're always going out, you promised me. My Mother always said you weren't reliable.*

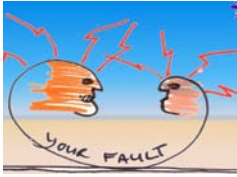
Kim in this case is using her Mother to back up her story, this will amplify a conflict because Chris can't deal with the Mother directly now and will react in defence. It is more direct, strong and clear to represent the 3<sup>rd</sup> party opinion as your own opinion - which it is. In this case Kim could say directly - *you are NOT reliable and I see it here.* This is clear and straight and Chris is able to respond directly too.

Tool: Speak as though the opinions of 3<sup>rd</sup> parties are yours alone - they are - notice why you need to use 3<sup>rd</sup> parties.

Tool: If talking about the past or future - who said what when - then how is the past or future event happening now?

## Altered states of consciousness

In conflict we tend to become more and more fixed and unbending in defence. We may think fast, but think one-sidedly, or we may freeze internally – heightened conflict tends to happen in altered states of consciousness. Rarely are we consciously fluid, able to change and be creative objectively. Fluidity means choice and



having access to other parts of our nature will give us great advantage and keep our opponent safer. Having choice means that there is a part of us that is still fully aware within the heat of the moment. Practising getting into altered states will help when conflict comes. Remembering how you are when you are a little tipsy, a little merry, is a very good way to loosen yourself up and change the dynamics of the moment. If or when you freeze act as though you are stiff in your body and thus you process the frozen identity within. Completing inner experience enables that experience to act like water – it always flows on and around obstacles.

**Tool:** What would you do if you'd had a few beers? Bring it in as a tool.

**Tool:** If you went mad or psychotic now, what kind of psychosis or madness would you have? Bring it in.

**Exercise:** (if you feel concern about your mental health at the moment ignore this exercise.)

- 1) Imagine for a moment that you have permission to go crazy. Given your personality, what type of altered state would you naturally develop if you were driven to the edge? Notice how you feel. What do you look like?
- 2) Get into it and act it out and enjoy playing.
- 3) Now imagine using this madness, this crazy wisdom, in your relationships.

4) Do something awesome, crazy, rather than just being furious with someone about their fury. Instead of waiting for life to do something to you, do it first.

## Finding the dance of relationship

Conflicts usually express themselves in a predominantly verbal way, but staying on the verbal level can restrict resolution or force violence through frustration – everything's been said a thousand times and more; the same process cycles forever. The verbal channel is an information channel that enables us to know and learn about ourselves internally, and allows us to communicate with others. However, there are other channels that are involved in the background that are also communicating through often opposing signals.

For instance: (in this example both Chris and Kim are male) Kim is shouting at Chris about not having enough space. Chris responds:

*'You seem angry but your eyes appear soft and gentle.'*

Kim, after feeling into the sense in his eyes:

*'I love you and I don't want to hurt you but I need space and...'*

This incongruent signal of soft eyes needs checking because it disturbs the relationship. Another example of mixed channel signals: Chris says, "I love you", but steps back a little at the same time (movement). Is he frightened of rebuff or does he disagree with his own statement? Stepping back further will help to bring that awareness out. The body contains all the information needed to resolve problems, but the body must lead rather than our thinking identity.

These double signals are felt by the other, and make one feel uneasy, but are normally experienced without awareness of the source. They are usually unconsciously sent and are also received unconsciously; therefore it is impossible often to say who started a fight due to these background signals. (Note: We all double signal

and you cannot 'accuse' another of double signalling because the person sending them is unaware of it. Interpreting another's signals is not a good idea, it's an invasion of their privacy and also, we can't really know the depth from which these signals come in the psyche. In any case, we normally project our own one-sided attitudes into them and create more complication.) Therefore, to bring awareness to them and let the sender unravel them, as in the example above, is the most efficient way of approaching them.

Other channels functioning in communication are feelings (Proprioception), Vision, Movement (Kinaesthesia), and of course, we learn about ourselves and the world through relationship. Relationship therefore, can also be treated as a channel that we learn to know ourselves through. Behind all signals that arise through channels stand simple patterns that resolve repeating conflicts. In other words, resolution does not come from outside, a couple in conflict contain the means to resolve it. Consider that there is a pattern to your arguments and ask yourself, *"what would that pattern look like in movement, could I draw it (vision), can it be represented in music (sound), can I do any or all of the above and bring in feeling?"* The more levels that you can add to a problem the more the underlying process becomes clear. This process can be explored alone or with a partner.

**Tool:** Suspend the rational thinking part and explore relationship in movement.

**Exercise:** If there are two willing people who want to find out more about their relationship and its problems beyond verbal content, then movement is very fast in revealing the deeper patterns that words could not get to.

- 1) Think of a problem in your relationship.
- 2) Both decide to stand and just move.
- 3) Move around the room without talking, but minimise your thinking powers. Try to be clouded mentally.

- 4) Follow and trust your bodies and notice what they do, keeping eyes closed as much as possible.
- 5) A story will emerge that will have meaning for each.
- 6) Develop the story through movement and incorporating any irrational visions, sounds, or feelings that come up.
- 7) Keep going until the process resolves some aspect of your relationship difficulties, or throws light on your path together.



## Spontaneity and Crazy Wisdom

Many of us think of ourselves in a fixed way,  
*'I'm this but not that, I'm serious and never funny, or funny and never serious, I'm hard working and not dreamy',* etc.

It appears that we spend much of our time reinforcing who we think we are in this way. We may do this because our nature is not really fixed and it is hard to get a secure persona if we are always changing. In practice, however, we seem to be closer in nature to the Taoist symbol of Yin and Yang; the dark and the light ever changing, always in flux, always developing and moving into the other.

Conflict, as has been mentioned, usually causes us to become even more fixed in identity than normal. Being something "not you" is usually considered a pretence, or not real, thus preventing experimenting with the diversity and fluidity that is the nature of awareness. If we encourage creativity to drive relationship, then stuck-ness is simply an opportunity to have fun and discover something new – if you feel stuck or blocked then experiment with becoming that blocked person. In becoming it you will soon change because we naturally change when things complete, or get fully into consciousness.

Picking something up within yourself that is not the usual you and being that in conflict will keep you free of fixity also. If you consider yourself as an intellectual rational person, try connecting to feelings and then express them; if you are an emotional and feeling person try detaching and over-viewing. You may want to use "*Crazy Wisdom*" and do something whacky but safe; just do it. (*Crazy Wisdom*, a term from Buddhism, is behaviour that is not conditioned by what is expected in any situation. It comes from a deeper detached perception that is related to the situation.)

All this is called '*Second Attention*', a term from the books of Carlos Castaneda. In conflict we often get mesmerised by the content

and that content can be called '*First Attention*', a place that we almost always inhabit throughout our waking hours and is related to our identity. Second attention is focusing our awareness at the edge of our normal rational perception and picking up the subtle feelings, impressions and inspirations, etc, that are pressing to reach , an often closed, consciousness. Picking up second attention is a little like using peripheral vision, you let go of your normal focus and awareness and just wait for impressions outside of that.



In an argument, you may notice that you want to get away: try going into the other room, saying what you want to say loudly, and then return. You may suddenly see yourself standing on your head; perhaps you need to look at the situation from that point of view; you could lie on your back, etc - if only we would!!! Experimental whackiness of this sort can awaken us out of a drama that mesmerises us. Second attention is already within us, we don't need to pretend. The trick is to have fun WITH the situation, not make fun OF the other person. It takes a certain condition of consciousness to have the fun-filled detachment to do this and if you can, then consider your partner a very lucky person.

**Tool: Follow your spontaneity and be the way you think you never are in relationship.**

Exercise:

- 1 Consider a recent relationship problem. What part of you does the other person criticise?
- 2 Imagine them criticising you again but now notice as you feel your reactions, what images, sounds such as songs, or the posture of your body, or movements that are happening outside of your normal reactions?
- 3 Try getting back into these impressions and follow this second attention.
- 4 Let go of your identity or personal history and experiment with enjoying it.

- 5 Look at your old self from this new perspective and give yourself advice about the relationship.
- 6 Now consider using this part of yourself in the relationship. Use it for yourself and others. Your partner will know this part of you that is normally far from your awareness.

## The wisdom of symptoms in resolving conflict

Within conflict, symptoms often spontaneously appear – headaches, stomach pain, back pain, heart problems such as palpitations, and so on. Long term relationship problems can cause serious illness as they become somatised – the unresolved energy flows into the body as the only outlet. From another perspective, however, the illness is the body's attempt to solve the problem. The conflict becomes somatised at the point where something cannot be expressed; we hit an 'edge' to what we can say or do, and that process manifests in the body in the short term as headaches, back pain, stomach cramps, etc. Going back to the moment just before the symptom appeared, or feeling into the symptom in the time of conflict, and then saying something that you feel is hard to say, will help towards resolution and the relationship difficulty; usually the symptom disappears at that point.

The unsaid or unrepresented is usually creating the symptom. Fear or fury are often in the background and not spoken about, but if brought in will sometimes wake an opponent up to what they are doing. If not brought in it may create symptoms. A pounding headache - you may need to be more pounding by speaking your words in a direct pounding way and thus relieve the hammer in your head by using the energy with awareness. Long-term symptoms or serious illness seem to be caused partly by ongoing processes that are not dealt with for years.

Symptoms and illness, however, are not only caused by relationship problems, they are often linked to our path in life. We need to go through experiences to gain awareness - this is a teleological perspective that says that life has meaning and purpose from the day we are born; an acorn has the pattern of the tree within it and one could predict what the tree will look like. It seems that each of us are following a sort of loose destiny.

Below is an example of how symptoms are caused by not living our fullest nature in relationship. When Kim met Chris - a heterosexual couple - she developed perennial rhinitis, caused by allergic reactions that block her nose. Every night, when she goes to bed the blocking happens immediately and lasts throughout the night. She's had it for 10 years and there is no cure. She believes from experience that symptoms carry wisdom so she has learned to enter the symptom to gain the split-off awareness.

From the allopathic paradigm, house dust, certain animals' fur and mould, etc, cause the problem and finding a way to remove these causes will bring the body back to health. Such a symptom is also related to the immune system and the allergy is on the asthmatic scale. However, from a process-oriented perspective, symptoms and illness also contain the awareness that will expand one's nature; the problem itself is the potential cure. This work is done in therapy sessions through amplification - making the symptom bigger, stronger, smaller, etc, so as to connect to the awareness behind the symptom.



Kim identifies as a very open and needing to be liked sort. She always wakes up at night with a blocked nose and then begins to feel isolated, blocked off and frustrated; no medicine will cure it. On one particular night after reacting to and fighting with the symptom, she finally begins to investigate it.

Taking the symptom at face value and ignoring her normal reasoning, she says to herself,

*'There must be a part of me that needs isolation because this symptom makes me feel isolated. Let me help the process of the symptom to unfold, I'll try to take the perspective of the symptom'*

She is now on the side of the symptom. Thinking of isolation and staying with the blocked nose, she amplifies the feeling and lets it block more. She is now trying to 'make' the symptom and so is beginning to identify with the process that is causing the problem;

she has become an identity making the symptom rather than an identity fighting against it – these two identities are very different – one is the symptom maker and the other is the victim of the symptom. Suddenly, as the symptom maker, she realises that the feelings of isolation seen from the symptom maker's point of view, is detachment. In this realisation she has connected to the part of her that, in blocking her nose, threatens her normal related identity and is indeed against that identity. She suddenly fills with joy because she has entered, with the aid of the symptom, a sort of universal independence. At that, her nose clears up immediately.

She would test the process from moment to moment: when she was contained within her own wisdom and independence, her nose opened, when she went back to her normal dependent thinking and relating to others, then her nose blocked; independence – open, dependence – blocked. Her body responded in an amazingly accurate way as she swapped from one perspective or identity to another.

Being on the side of the symptom opened a door to her deepest nature and path in life. Her nose can afford to open when she is identified with her own power and self-support. The body behaves in a simple and an exact way according to the process that we need to live. The medicine she took for ten years could not cure her, but changing identity immediately did. She could now see how this process was mirrored in her dreams (women or men standing strongly for themselves in one dream, for example), and also she could see it in her waking life. She has often been called cold and aloof, a criticism that she did not like, she identified as being too soft and adaptive.

On waking, her everyday identity is different to that within her symptoms, but the new identity, dream figure or processes contained within the symptom – the independent symptom maker – challenges her one-sided dependence so as to create wholeness. In the case of Kim, detachment needs to be lived within her relationship with Chris. If not, Chris and Kim will have constant fights about neediness and independence. According to role occupation theory, Chris will be

forced to be the independent role if Kim does not pick up that independence in herself.

Conflicts and symptoms often go together and noticing the body's troubles can bring wisdom which can help relationships greatly. In conflict, when you suddenly feel a symptom, go back and find your 'edge' just before you first felt the symptom and find out what needs to be said or done there. (The 'edge' is the moment when one confronts a difficulty however, in the tension one veers off into reaction or the rational, rather than staying with the difficulty. This is a key; when leaving the tension the process will cycle or somatise.)

**Tool: Notice a symptom and unravel it. Amplify the feeling channel so that it enters consciousness more fully.**

Exercise:

- 1) Remember a conflict that you had recently.
- 2) In that conflict, go back to the place of tension and hold the feeling without reaction.
- 3) Sit with the tension a few minutes and notice what happens if you don't react or think about the problem.
- 4) Follow the feelings in your body that may come up and make one more global or stronger.
- 5) Shapeshift into that part of your body – if heart, become it, if stomach, back, feet, whatever, become it.
- 6) As this new personality, how would you live your life and how different would this be to your normal way of being?

## Relationships are made in heaven?

Do we accidentally meet each other and then end up together, or is it that we are attracted to another because there is an organising principle bringing it all together? This is a question to be answered by the individual, but all the signs indicate that relationships are made in heaven: that is to say, a sort of relationship field exists with the right conditions that attract two (or more) people into it - that two people populate a pre-existing field. This idea is taken from the work in physics by Feynman and others. Relationship appears to be the fundamental subatomic nature of the universe; particles behave as though time and space do not exist, that the future and past are all wrapped up in one; that nothing is accidental, that particles that arise together are always connected and in relationship to each other. Many people, for example, have indications in hind sight that the person that they are with was already on their way towards them before they met. It's a though two people share a myth or field together that was unravelling before they met and continues to unravel into the future.

In that case, therefore, a relationship is a project, not only concerning the people involved, but is also a partnership with the subtle conditions that brought the relationship together in the first place. This idea is included here because if we attune with such a field, or the essence of the relationship, then we maybe able to solve all of our problems with each other more easily.

**Tool: Connect to the deepest wisdom of your relationship in inner work either together or alone.**

Exercise:

- 1) Attune with the mind of the relationship, what is the common essential feeling or atmosphere that you both exude?
- 2) Feel the essence of who both of you are, sense a sort of wisdom at your deepest level.



- 3) Rather than 'thinking' about any feelings or experiences that come up, let what stirs you develop further in its own time.
- 4) You may sense timelessness or universality. At this moment you are close to your fundamental ground, give space and time to that experience.
- 5) If an image or face arises, become that image and see your relationship from that perspective.
- 6) What do you both look like from this point of view? Is there a message about your relationship from this being?

## Doing that which you wish for yourself

If you wish to be treated in a certain way, for example, with respect, to be trusted, loved, etc, if you demand to be held, listened to, helped and so on, then consider doing to your partner what you wish for yourself. Consider that this information is needed within the relationship and that you are the one who is closest to the insight and therefore, the one who knows what to do. Consider that what you feel is what you need to give. Demands usually do not work in relationship; your partner usually does so reluctantly or not at all.

Kim to Chris:

*I need you to love me more*

Chris looking exasperated:

*I do*

Kim thinking to herself

*Am I showing enough love to Chris? In my need I don't really consider him. And also, where do I miss myself and not give myself the love I need? Rather than demanding love from him I could love myself more and maybe then I could be more receptive and related.*



**Tool:** Behave to your partner how you wish she or he would behave to you.

## Eye Movements

When people look up they are generally seeing pictures, when they look from side to side and towards the ears, they are usually listening to inner voices, and when looking down, they are often feeling. This process taken from NLP is fast and unconscious but one can ask at any time: "Are you seeing, hearing, feeling something?" We can consider that the person is dreaming at this moment and bringing awareness to it and finding out what is happening in that channel of experience, can be useful in resolving a conflict.

Chris to Kim in the middle of a fight: *'You seem to be seeing something inside?'*

Kim: *'I'm remembering how happy we were in Paris',*

Chris: *'But you never seem to listen to me!'*

Kim after a minute, *'I wish we were there, it seems so peaceful and carefree.'*

One can consider that this is the pattern that is trying to happen between them, so Chris helps her to pick up that experience and the conflict transforms as their mood changes. She says,

*'I'm tired of us fighting, I want to look after our relationship and not keep trashing it.'*

**Tool: Pick up your own eye movements and follow the impressions related to their positions.**

## Work on yourself in front of your partner

Many conflicts would be helped greatly if one partner worked on their dilemma in front of the other. Get an agreement with your partner to express yourself while the other looks on without reaction. Then your partner does the same in their turn. Express all sides in you without hiding anything. This is useful if things are stuck, cycling and feeling hopeless. Kim to herself while breaking off fighting with Chris,

*'I'm so frustrated and angry at you for being so stubborn but I also understand that because I feel that I'm too demanding. I would hate it if you let yourself be walked over. You're a silly idiot for letting me walk all over you anyway. And I can't stand the way you sit there so unrelated, it pisses me off. All you men hide behind your reasonableness for fear of losing it, you're all cowards.'*

Kim keeps talking out all her frustrations while Chris looks on. She stamps her feet, kicks the furniture, and generally blurts out of all frustrations. She then finds a resolution for herself that also relaxes Chris.

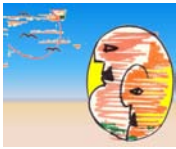
Kim, *'I've got it, I'm scared of you not standing for yourself so I am not demanding enough, I should be more straight. Get the dishes washed up now, Chris'*.

Chris smiles as he makes for the kitchen while saying: *'About time you were straight!'*

**Tool: Work on yourself in front of your partner as if the conflict was your own.**

## The high dream

When we first meet another and enter relationship, we normally fall into a high dream – typically, everything is wonderful, the future is bright and hopeful and we see nothing but excitement in our new partner. This high dream is part of the mysterious field of attraction, a dream that remains, sometimes only in the background, throughout the life of the relationship. At the beginning the dream happens without attention or work; we are simply carried along on it. Like all dreams, however, it needs to be kept alive and grounded, or it begins to feel like it was all an illusion.



This dream pattern contains the potential of the relationship but gets forgotten in the humdrum of life as we fall into our perspective roles as money earners, parents, and other demands. In the middle of a fight remember that dream, look directly at your partner, cut through the fog of defence, and see them as the person you fell in love with. Go for the high dream of the future, tell your partner how you would love the relationship to be, filter out all the negatives, shoot for the stars for both of you.

**Tool:** Express your 'high dream' consciously. Talk about what attracted you to each other, about the force that got you together in the first place.

**Exercise:**

- 1) Remember when you were first attracted to your partner, what was it about that person that caught you? Could be the hair, the figure, the smell. Could have been how bubbly they seemed, or how dependable they looked, whatever it was you will know.
- 2) Recall that quality now and get reacquainted with it in your consciousness - give that sense space to develop in awareness.
- 3) Your partner does steps 1 & 2 as well.
- 4) Now interact with each other in these high dreams.

- 5) Talk about how you lose these feelings in ordinary life and what is to be done to retain them.

## Expressing your 'low dream'

The world is in flux, nothing remains the same way forever, and high dreams always, at some point, take a turn downwards and end up in a low dream. We start arguing, we dislike some habits of the other and we suddenly see what we've been 'blind' to see before, apparently. Life bugs us so that we will grow. Going into the low dream helps to complete it quickly. Many couples avoid or marginalise the low dream but it is impossible to get rid of it. If it is not entered into however, it will operate outside of consciousness and both sides will feel attacked by the problem. In such a situation couples are unable to feel the joy of relationship because they get stuck in unprocessed dynamics. In trying avoiding the low dream all together relationship can neither reach the 'heights' nor enter the 'lows' and therefore exists in a sort of no-man's land where a kind of deadening happens.

We cannot prevent the low dream from happening because it is a natural process of change and development, therefore entering it will help to complete it. There is usually an edge to getting into the high and an edge to the low. We don't fight or disagree, nor do we love anymore, we just do our thing around each other. The low dream can bring many benefits to a relationship; not least it brings seriousness to life and confronts avoidance - one faces reality. Such a foundation is healthy for relationships and in the low dream we often really begin relating. This is the message in depression which counteracts light frivolity in a world where suffering surrounds us.

Tool:

Go into the low dream when it appears, get into trouble, don't marginalise it but complete it quickly by experiencing it fully.

Exercise:

1. Talk together about the low dream.
2. What happens to you there?

3. What kind of moods come over you when things aren't the way you wish they would be?
4. Don't try to change and be hopeful but stay with any hopelessness that comes up – let it be aware of itself. Feel it without blaming yourself or the other.
5. Notice any new and unexpected feelings in the dark place.



## Using addictions

Addictions can be helpful while in conflict. If you are addicted to running, fasting, sugar, tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, or harder substances, the states that they promise are helpful because they represent your secondary process. If a smoker, for example, you may want a relaxed, dreamy state, so she or he may grab a cigarette, if sweet things, perhaps you need to lift your energy. We get addicted because we need a certain state that is missing in our everyday identity, but rather than changing our identity to include this behaviour we use a substance instead. Because we access the state through substances and other behaviours, and not by working on ourselves and picking up the states, we never fully complete or grow into the experience. We end up repeating the addiction, doing it more and more to achieve the promised state, thus becoming addicted. However, accessing the state directly and integrating that state into the personality will help stop the addiction. The integrated state will improve relationships forever.

Exercise: Going for the state without the substance.

In all addictions there is a ritual –things we do each time we approach the substance – if drinking it could be to do with how you



open the bottle, or what you do with the glass, or something in the way you hold yourself or the substance.

Observe the ritual because that is how you will discover the spirit behind the addiction. In the case of smoking, it is the spirit that smokes the smoker rather than the smoker smoking the cigarette. In the same way the spirit alcohol controls the drinker and gets him or her drunk and usually out of control. It is the state of mind we aim for directly rather than using the damaging substance to get there. Using the substance never really enables us to take control of the state. If you have just given up an addiction in the last few weeks then you should not do this exercise.

1. Think of an addiction that you have, or an addictive tendency (we all have them).

2. Remember what it feels like when you need a cigarette, when you need a drink, eat something sweet, snort coke, take heroin, etc. Study the ritual just before taking it. Notice exactly what you do.
3. Do the ritual, enter it even more fully and follow the impressions that come up. Believe in the slight changes in mood and enter them more fully. (Example: if pretending to smoke and you see the actor Bruce Willis who looks cool then become cool – sit or walk like him, etc. If a calm sky, become that sky and so on. In this case you need more coolness or calmness; this expression is you but in some way you can't live consciously and so comes through cigarettes. If we don't live a part of our nature it comes back in any it can)
4. Learn to live and bring in this split off part of your nature into the world and in your relationships.

These will be no need for the substance if you fully live the state. On the other hand people and situations cause us to rush for our substance, tension in relating often cause us to escape and drink (as well as smoke).

Chris and Kim meet an acquaintance, Alex on the street and after they separate Chris buys an ice cream which is an unusual thing to do.

Kim to Chris: *'Why the ice cream?'*

*'Don't know.'*

Kim: *'What state does the ice cream give you then?'*

Chris imagines the taste without licking it.

*'It's sort of creamy and comforting.'*

*'Check if it's anything to do with Alex.'*

*'Alex makes me feel unnoticed, small,'* Chris answers. *'I guess I wanted to give myself a treat.'*

*'Well,'* says Kim, *'remember to get to that state before you meet Alex again, or you'll be at a disadvantage and fall into a hole.'*

Tool: Bring into relationship the part of you that lies behind your addictions, i.e. the states the substances put you in, but without the substance.

## Dream work

If you study night-time dreams you may discover that they can prefigure events of the following day in their essential pattern. Although dreams are often highly symbolic, you can find dreams standing behind body symptoms, body signals and even daily events. Dreams of the night before are often suddenly remembered when working with body symptoms, body signals and daily events through amplification methods. Dreams are teleological, that is to say, the energy and pattern of the dream have an end purpose and that purpose is to reach ordinary consciousness. As dreams are unconscious by nature, their patterns create havoc in day to day relationships. Remembering a dream in a conflict can be most helpful in understanding the underlying cause of a disagreement. Dreams both predict conflicts and cause them, and realising that a pattern in a dream can awaken us to our unconsciousness, will encourage us to look at them for inspiration in the middle of the heat.

Dreaming of a boxer in your sleep, you may notice that you are being like a boxer with your partner the next day - jabbing a little. At the same time you think that your partner is too is unrelentingly hard and driving at you. Both of you may feel like you are being punched while the boxer operates outside of consciousness - neither of you identify with punching. It is important to remember that dreams are part of the environment and do not really belong to any one person. Knowing about the "dream" boxer will give you the awareness that is missing.

**Tool:** Find out if one of you has had a dream that may help. Act like the most interesting or disturbing figure.

## Mothers and Fathers

We usually think that when we are polarised with our partner that there are just two of us in the fight. However, that is true only if that is the only level that you approach reality. A deeper awareness shows that there are at least six characters taking part on a quiet day – Mothers and Fathers and perhaps two children as well as authority figures generally and all sorts of disadvantaged experiences where one has been a victim from the past. Not only our experiences, but also all of our beliefs that we gained whilst growing up are still intact and perfectly formed in the shape of our parents. These “parents” are contained within little compartments in our heads ready to express themselves almost through our every thought –

*‘I just sounded like my Mother then.’ Or ‘That’s what your Father used to say when he was alive’.* These figures still maintain the internal structure, in the sense of their personality, and continue to function unnoticed through the grown adult, with all the belief systems of previous decades.

**Tool: Bring in your mothers and fathers and introduce them to your partner. What are their opinions?**

## Hidden dynamics

*'I'm not shouting, you're shouting,'* said with a scream. This is the process in which we do unconsciously what we are against. *'I don't like you because you're nasty'* said in a nasty way, or said in a quiet way but with a sting.

Often in conflict we do exactly the thing that we are against. We hurt while attacking others for hurting, instead of stopping the hurt, which is what we are trying to stand for. *'You don't love me'* said with disdain and in a non-loving way will not bring love because the person saying it is unloving and probably resentful in the moment. Be the change that you want creates the atmosphere for the other can respond to.



Tool: Notice how your partner is doing the very thing s/he is attacking you for and bring it to their attention in an unthreatening way.

## Fun and Humour

In the middle of conflict sometimes a chink of light gets in and suddenly laughter erupts. One or both may have an insight into the absurdity of it all. This is a fine moment because meta-awareness has come in – awareness of awareness – and playfulness often results. When we are aware of awareness then we're off the wheel of life, as it were, and insurmountable problems suddenly seem insignificant to our sense of detachment. Fun and humour picked up as a process from the background that is already trying to coming in, indicates that that fight is done, and that you're out of it. Perhaps you're finished with that one altogether?

Tool: Make cartoons/caricatures of yourselves to amplify the roles playfully.

Tool: sudden awareness of the absurd about the whole situation, including yourself within the picture, means that a part of you is off the earth so to speak, and at such a point you have the solution, at least for yourself.

## Consider it an honour to change

The one who is able to change in conflict is the one who has the most power in the moment; consider it an honour to change instead of feeling that you've lost. Power is contextual – we feel weak in one area and strong in another. A man may have more physical strength than many women, or be supported by society to be aggressive, while women less so, but a particular woman may be more intelligent or have more emotional insight. A boss may be powerful at work but powerless at home with the children; someone who may be an office cleaner could have psychological awareness, while the CEO has only the power given by the company, but with no insight into people. In any argument the power shifts from moment to moment according to these dynamics and this causes endless fighting if we do not notice where our power is.



We usually notice power in others because of its effect on us and we don't notice the power and privileges that we have. Therefore, we identify with threat rather than the power we have. If we notice the power we have, then we will feel less threatened and be more able to make choices. If you feel that you have no privileges, then consider that you may have two legs, good health, intelligence, skin colour that is safe to have in your country, education, an income, a home, free expression, and much more. Most people are unconscious of the power they have and only identify with feeling a victim. When you are aware of the power you have you will feel more secure and will be able to use your power more wisely. It is important to see your partner's powers and mention them with admiration, so that they themselves know them better and can therefore use them with more awareness. Many of us have privileges: **Social rank** – education; intelligence, class, race and ethnicity; physical and mental health and ability; language; finance; position in work; freedom of expression; gender, and more.

**Psychological rank** –self-esteem, strength to withstand physical and psychological trauma, survival of difficult childhood, a sense of one's reality and foundation, emotional intelligence, fluidity, and more.



**Spiritual rank** – belief in a greater power than oneself, a trust that death is not the end, A belief that you are not alone; that you can lean on something greater, and so on.

We can use or misuse all of the above. The rank that we are born with is most likely to be the most unconscious. Take the example of two people on a ladder - one at the top and one at the bottom. The one at the top looks around and sees far and wide and may be more interested in the view than in one below. However, the one below looks up and sees the rear end of the one above. The one below sees the result of power, but the one above doesn't have the same view. Counting your privileges means that you remain aware of your powers and can therefore use them well.

Tool: Talk to each other about your rank and privilege; what you are born with and what you have gained through life. In this way we use and enjoy our powers more without feeling guilty about them and also gain more awareness of their misuse.

## Bring sexual fantasies into relationship

Processes that we do not identify with in our day to day life and that are usually split off from our personality often appear in sexual fantasies. A couple interested in S&M, for instance, are exploring power issues and attempting to find ways to work out those dynamics within themselves and within relationship – one may want to feel the power of submission and the other the power of dominance. Trust is central in this process. Living these parts in normal life and with each other rather than just in the bedroom will enhance the relationship greatly. Another example, a man who feels like a woman and needs to dress up in women's clothes could investigate being more female in expression (whatever being woman-like means to him). Perhaps softness, sensitivity, expressive feelings are what he gains dressing up. These qualities could be brought in in everyday relating, even when his male side is functioning; similarly, in the case of a woman who dresses as a man – whatever being a man means to her, perhaps she is more aggressive in her manly nature, if that is what being male means to her.

Sexuality is a dreaming doorway into the part of us that we normally can't live in the world, and is a treasure chest pointing to wholeness. In sexual encounters in the bedroom it is often the behaviour that causes the trouble or disturbance that is the thing that will eventually deepen the sexual interaction – what puts you off is what needs focusing on. Going slow and staying with the problem as though carefully working through a maze will eventually create the circumstances for the “juices” to return. If a man has trouble getting an erection, then you might consider that he is very sensitive (like his penis). If a woman is unresponsive then creating an environment that is beautiful, with candles, music, essential oils, and so on, perhaps outside of the bedroom and maybe sometime in the middle of the day, might help. Also she may need to take control of love making at various points.

Tool: If you have sexual play in love making then bring in the essence of your part in the fantasy, into a conflict – live it more. This will have an enormous influence in resolving a fight because you will include what you split-off in yourself, thus bringing in background information.

Tool: Talk about your problems with sex when you are not engaged in it. Speak about the struggle for you without fault either towards yourself or the other. Think of the problem as necessary as a step in healing a more fundamental situation.

## **In conflict go slow - develop a metacommunicator**

Conflict races, everything grows faster while in the background parts of us freeze or are missing altogether. Slow it down, ask for space to think or feel. Move around and see from different points, take control of the tempo, don't let yourself be taken by the events. In this way you develop a metacommunicator – someone who can become aware of diminished awareness and communicate about what is happening, at least to oneself. Meta-awareness is awareness of awareness and is a further development in human perception – we don't just act, we know why we act; we see ours and other's motives. Meta-awareness is the most profound avenue out of internal and external conflict of all kinds.

**Tool: Study yourself in conflict; find the “fair mind”; the one that holds no blame and is never in conflict - the meta-communicator.**

## Work with your own double signals

Double signals, as mentioned before, are what we unwittingly send to another but do not intend, or identify with them. They are confusing to the receiver because their messages are incongruent with our intended signals.

Robyn to Lesley: *'I love you'* said with a fixed smile. The intended part is I love you; the unintended is the fixed smile. These double signals cause all sorts of confusion and recriminations when, in fact, they are flashing from a place beyond our awareness and, therefore, one cannot be blamed for having them. They are sent by dream figures while we are interacting and can easily be traced to night-time dreams.

Double signals are unconscious aspects of the sender, so noticing one's own double signals and trying to integrate them is important in relationship. If we can notice our double signals then we know more of what our opponent is reacting to. Double signals come through voice tone, facial expressions, body posture and subtle movements, also the atmosphere, and much more.

To work with the fixed smile mentioned above, Robyn would first notice it, then feel into it – let it remain without changing it, even making it more fixed – a process called *'amplification'*. This enables the message to more easily reach consciousness. Then Robyn may be able to express what is behind that smile.

Robyn takes a moment and recreates the smile and the awareness dawns of wanting some distance from relating.

Robyn to Leslie: this example is a direct repeat and I think the double signals section generally is too. Maybe state more clearly going into double signals again because...and finding a different example

*'I can't love you in the moment because I need space, (taking a step back a little) but I don't want to hurt you and that's why I'm smiling. I have an 'edge' to really supporting myself in relationship at the moment, so I usually just go along with you.'*

Robyn's identity is to love Leslie but the secondary process is double signalling the need for space or independence. The situation could get worse at this point as Leslie may feel rejected but communication is clearer, allowing the potential for resolution. People do not always need to stay together and both may be avoiding the reality which will be showing in the signals. Separation happens anyway even if people stay together while avoiding the signals. Equally, a relationship that needs space to breath will be enhanced and deepened by allowing one another the space needed.



Exercise in pairs.

1. Decide to talk to your partner for a 5 minute period about anything that is not contentious.
2. Observe your own signals, particularly at a difficult point in the conversation – a 'hop spot'. (Is your head turning away, do you look down, scratch, touch your face, smile when you don't want to? What is your posture, sitting position – do you face half away, either the top or bottom half, how close are you physically, etc. What attracts you to the other in the moment? Is it a piece of clothing, a feature of the face, etc?)
3. Inform your partner that you are going to focus on a chosen signal and then give it space.
4. Feel into it and then amplify the signal by making it bigger or more exaggerated until you get its message. Preventing the signal and then remaking it also helps in noticing the difference between when it is here and then gone – this will help in becoming aware of its meaning. Making a hand movement that represents its essence is also very helpful too.
5. When you get the message then inhabit it by speaking as it rather than communicating about it.
6. If your partner is in some way relieved then you have communicated. (And that is a joyous thing that many couples lose.)

Tool: Work with your own double signals in gestures, voice tone, movement, etc. Amplify and let the meaning present itself. Express verbally to your partner, work colleague, or acquaintance.

## Learn to ask your partner about his/her double signals

Double signals hide if they are pointed out – they act like a rabbit in the headlights. This is partly because we have marginalised their meaning because they don't fit with our identity. There is an intrinsic conflict within all of us between these two parts of our being – who wants to identify with, or support a fixed smile and what it might mean, for example – it is better to hide these things, even to ourselves. Double signals contain more or less opposite information to the impression we want to give. These signals should be warmly encouraged rather than hidden because they will come out through the body if not allowed through awareness – in a way, we cannot hide anything. Learn to ask your partner with curiosity about his/her double signals that you notice.

This work is different to the study of body language which attributes certain fixed meaning to a particular signal. In this work we are attempting to contact a piece of our split-off awareness contained within the signal; a part of our nature that has autonomy and can be described as an aspect of a dream figure; it is a living thing that needs to be respected. This is about internal communication, integration and wholeness, rather than interpretation. Dream figures are more complicated than mere interpretation, and tracking each signal subjectively; contacting the unique piece of information, together with the unconscious presence of the figure involved, contributes to deep relationship with oneself.

**Tool:** Ask about double signals without attacking or acting like a therapist or someone who has special insight. If you give out a signal of having special insight into another you will be blocked because of protection of privacy and a feeling of being disadvantaged.

**Exercise:** Another's signals.

1. Decide to talk with your partner for 5 minutes on an uncontentious subject.



2. From the 1<sup>st</sup> minute or so, notice what catches your attention and point it out with curiosity - 'I find myself being curious about the way you... or, 'I notice you doing such and such, do it more, or 'the sound of your voice has a quality like sand paper, can you make it more like that.'
3. Ask the person to notice the process themselves and to find out more about it - exaggerate it, make it bigger, louder, etc, or softer, smaller and so on - making thing less or blocking them, is also an amplification technique.
4. When they find a meaning and represent it then swap and the other partner goes through the exercise to this point.
5. When you both reach this point, speak to each other in the style of the double signal.

## Mirroring and Feedback junkies

Many of us do not complete or enter conflicts because we feel that the other will suffer if we represent what is in us. We may say a little and then watch the reaction and feel sorry or protective for the other, or even a bit scared ourselves of their feedback; we may need their love, approval, a bit of peace and quiet, etc. In this way we look



after the other and protect them against our feelings. Resentment builds as a result of not being free to speak and the other has no idea what is happening. When we look at the other we may see a victim and at that moment we mirror that within ourselves and become a victim too. In this process the other is the problem and you the supporter of the status quo.

One way out of this is to identify with the strength of the one in the mood; the one that you can't hurt, and relate directly to their power. If you are walking on egg shells around a person who seems moody, for example, then that fear in you is as a result of the power of the one in the mood. Discover that power in them and interact directly with it. In this way the person is not treated as a victim.

**Tool:** Go over your edge and say what is in you and then help the other to respond with their reaction to you. Stay in touch with your own ability to hear what may be unpleasant about you. Both of you are developing your power and the ability to represent yourselves in relationship. When we help or rescue another in relationship we also usually patronise them and infuriate their power.

## Work with the signals of distance

Noticing the natural distance between oneself and one's adversary in a conflict is a quick way of finding out what is happening behind the words being spoken or shouted. If sitting closely, what are your legs and feet doing? While the upper half may be leaning away from each other, perhaps your feet are almost



touching. Believe in this signal and investigate it – talk about it and a part of both of you that may be trying to get closer. Similarly, while close, what are both your legs doing, are they far apart? If you went into the other room and broke off completely from interaction, what does that feel like and then come back? This can be done without the other knowing, if necessary.

Relationships have a natural breathing process, a little like the tide coming into shore and then going far out – we need closeness and distance and each couple is different in these needs; if feelings of rejection or insecurity come up then talk about those feelings and where they originated. If one is too independent and the other obsessively needing closeness, then this is a system that could perhaps do with a visit to a therapist. (A trained person who is outside systems can be of great help. Each relationship is a system of some sort.)

Opposites always have an underlying wholeness; a wholeness that brings couples, colleagues and any polarisation together, without the need to compromise. In the case above, neediness and independence are roles that will be contained within each person, although each will express just one within their identity usually.

### Exercise:

1. Try going far apart and notice what the difference is from sitting close.
2. Experiment moving apart and close again

3. Then talk about it. Support what is in each of you rather than identifying with hurting the other's feelings.

In doing this exercise you will notice the distance psychologically between you - are you a hundred miles apart or close? Distance and non-communication can run on in the background if awareness is not brought to it. Going far enough away from each other consciously can be the beginning to coming together again. Trying to remain close at such a time of natural breathing out or of needing space creates stuckness - we seem close but our signals indicate otherwise.

On the other hand, do you have an 'Edge' to closeness and intimacy through lack of meeting each other in the midst of keeping life going with children, work, etc - behaving like ships passing in the night. If you are miles apart psychologically, then talk about it together, sit down opposite each other, and say,

*"what are we about these days, who are we, what is our relationship about."*

Don't let the other slip off the 'Edge'; slip off the hook, but hold the tension between you so that the process can have space to unravel. Protecting the other at this point from your reality is probably not protection but patronisation. In a broadly loving relationship, if you don't save your partner from your inner reality, then you are respecting their power to deal with life.

**Tool:** Find out what is right about distance by experiencing the spaces between you, both physically and psychologically.

## Step out physically and look at both of you

Objectivity is usually the casualty of conflict, unless one has been trained in awareness within conflict. The process, therefore, of some detachment within the fire is vital for both to come out of the other end well. Both attachment and detachment are important in their own time and we often need both at the same time for a healthy relationship. However, in the middle of a row, detachment often gets lost, as feelings, reactions, angry words or recriminations get flung everywhere. We often simply need to move and take a look at what is happening from the outside. This is using vision to get distance from it all; seeing both of you from the outside will bring in the missing awareness needed to resolve the fight. Just say to your partner, *'I need to see just what we are really doing'*. The resulting objectivity will be an enormous help to resolution. It will also enable you to become much more fluid and less fixed or stuck - the simplest things have the most power.

**Tool:** Step out of the situation and look at what you have been doing. Find out what you have been trying to express or what both of you are trying to say or do. What advice would you give to yourself from out there?

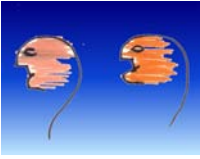
## Try just doing what you say your partner is doing

What we dislike in ourselves or what we admire in others is usually a part of us that is marginalised from our identity. All split-off material will appear, inevitably, in our partners, friends, work colleagues, or acquaintances – we often call it gossip. Split-off information cannot disappear, but becomes unconscious, and remains until it is processed and transformed by awareness. If you dislike what your partner is doing try doing it yourself. If you can support it all the way then you will experience a thrill of integrating your own missing part. Also, you will be very much less likely to criticise your partner in this regard again because it contains hidden power.

Example: A father was shocked at how angry he was with his young son for getting his ears pierced; in his youth only gipsy men did that. He was astounded at his fury so he had it done himself. He found that he was marginalising his own flamboyant and, in his case, his feminine nature too.

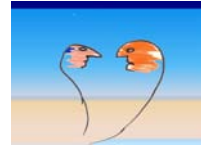
**Tool: do what you are against in your partner and discover how freeing it is.**

## Determine the 'we'



There are two primary identities in a personal or professional relationship - each of the two individuals who call themselves 'I' or 'me', and also the 'we' of the relationship. This 'we' is similar to 'I' in that it represents the identity of the relationship - we are like this and not that, we work; we're not lazy, we're religious and don't indulge in strange sexual practices, etc. If one studies the 'we' then one knows more about what is not identified with and hence where the couple can grow in relationship. What disturbs that 'we' identity will be the area for growth potential, and deeper relationship.

A couple who never argue may say, '*we never argue,*' but difficulties may be all around them - accidents, troublesome children, lifelessness, etc. Such a couple may need to contact each other through learning to fight. Likewise, for a couple who always fight each other, then peace may be in the background.



**Tool: Finding what you identify with and what disturbs you both will give a clue as to where you can grow.**

## Stop and each feel what you feel

Adding channels when in a conflict is the same as adding jigsaw pieces to gain the full picture. If you and your partner are interested in knowing more about how to complete conflict then it is most useful to agree to do the following. Stop and each feel what you feel, let the feelings come more fully to consciousness and then talk about them. Make an image of the feeling, or a fairy figure occurs to either of you, inhabit the images and interact with each other as them. You may quickly discover the background patterns that, when brought into consciousness, transforms your relationship. Tell the story of these two figures.

**Tool: building layers and perspectives resolves problems**

### Exercise

1. Stop reacting, notice your body and feel more deeply into your feelings.
2. Associate a visual quality with those body feelings – perhaps a figure from literature, art, mythology, a TV personality, a singer or song writer, a person from history or films, etc. (this figure represents a part of your personality that is you. Being it will give you access through it to your whole self and the wholeness of the relationship.)
3. Inhabit this figure – speak, move and act like it.
4. Communicate with each other through these figures. You may also want to dance these figures with each other.



## The role of dreams

Kim remembers a snippet of a dream in which he is escaping from a policeman. He can't remember what it is that he has done wrong but he knows in the dream that he will be in jail when the policeman inevitably catches him. He keeps escaping just in time but not for long. In the dream he is terrified of prison and when he wakes up he feels very distraught.

In waking life, he is staying with extended family on holiday and quickly forgets the dream at breakfast. In the dynamics around the table, with all the confusion of signals flying around, he begins to lose confidence. People are being careful with each other and the atmosphere is subtly strained but appears friendly. Kim feels more and more criticised but tries to look cool and relaxed.

At a certain point Kim took some space by himself to get away from the dynamics. Soon he remembered the dream of prison and the policeman and thought, *'Why am I being trapped like that, what am I avoiding, what is the dream pointing to?'* Then he realised something important. He realised that the dream was creating awareness of avoidance in him. It had cornered him in a scary situation and showed him avoiding a situation that eventually he could not avoid. He knew that his dream was as much a part of the environment as it was part of him; dreams are about consciousness and awareness which are opposite to the physical, solid world - individuals are not as separate from each other as their bodies appear. This was exactly what he was doing, just as the others were doing at breakfast - escaping the reality of feelings between them.

He decided to return and reveal the insecure feeling in him. In other words, he decided to trap himself by identifying with what the dream pattern was pointing out. He knew that in doing so he may be scapegoated by people who would want to continue to avoid their feelings. If he could reveal his feelings he knew he would be facing his own internal policeman and accounting for the crime of

avoidance. So he talked about his insecurity and some people were sympathetic and some patronising but he was facing his prison in that moment and began to feel free because he did not let himself be dominated by fear. Kim, in not holding his feelings in, became exhilarated with a sense of freedom and space for himself. A policeman attitude had been patrolling the family community, stopping difficult feelings from coming out – *'You must never say these things in this company'* – is the law.

The others too talked about the atmosphere and soon everyone felt freer and more at home with each other; the crime, the prison and the freedom happened in a moment of revealing, rather than continuing through hours of avoidance and tension, which is prison. Dreams can seem to be creating bad moods and conflictual situations because they contain troublesome figures that can follow us into waking life, but really they are the pattern that we need to resolve the one-sidedness of our internal and social interaction.

Kim made a pact with himself, *'I will never avoid the small feelings I have when with people, I'll be courageous and find a way to speak them out, otherwise I will imprison myself and others.'*

**Tool: check your dreams in conflict, any recent dream, and discover the pattern that could resolve your conflict.**

## Working with an opponent who is not there

What do you do if you are faced with an opponent who is either too scary to confront, or who will not take part in the conflict, or who is simply not physically present? I am going to help you to turn that person into a spirit so that you can deal with them in the present. The Irish called this spirit the Leprechaun, who would trick you and cause your downfall. The first nation peoples of North America called it the Heyoka and the peoples of Central America called it the Ally - figures that come to you again and again throughout your life and appear as your worst nightmares. We meet these figures when we realise that some problems recur over and over in different guises. Behind these experiences is your Ally who will keep beating you or even kill you until you integrate its power. The following exercise will transform any conflict internally on a most profound level if we follow it carefully.

Exercise, with a partner if possible

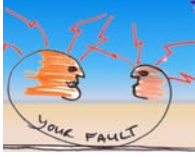
1. Think of a person who irritates you, causes a bad mood or has hurt you, someone perhaps who is competitive, etc.
2. With the help of your partner, if you have one, imagine that the person or behaviour is not real but an Ally, perfectly hidden in your opponent. Now in front of your partner make a role switch and become the Ally playing this obnoxious role. (think of it as your opponent being used by your Ally.) Take it to the extreme, far beyond the way any flesh and blood person would act. Talk, move, and speak in the way this Ally /opponent would be way beyond their worst behaviour. Keep going until you feel a mood change in you.
3. When you are ready and still playing the Ally, look back at your normal self, played by your partner and find out why this Ally has picked you to do this to. Also find out how the Ally knew that this opponent's behaviour was the very way to really get you. How does the Ally show you about an aspect of yourself that you take too seriously?
4. Now, go back to yourself. Think of a historic figure, a film character, a person you know, etc, that has integrated this Ally.

Someone who would not be affected by this Ally/opponent. A person that this Ally would not be interested in. (Trust what comes up)

5. Begin to play this person now. Act like them, be them.
6. How does this new energy and lifestyle help you to differentiate yourself from the outer opponent? What societal norms do you need to move away from? What is your new relationship style?
7. Now look at the disturbing relationship in step 1. Give yourself some advice about how to proceed with that relationship. Should you cut it off, proceed as you have before but with new awareness, change your behaviour, communicate something to the other, etc.

## Ask others to play you

Ask one or two friends to show what you are doing in the conflict.



Leave the scene so the others can take up your roles and act like both of you. It is a real surprise to see what one does and it can change years of disagreement instantly when one observes as from the outside. (Similarly, if you are depressed let someone play you as you are when in the depressed state, it may transform your depression - you may have to stand as far away as possible to dis-identify.) Look and see if you want to change anything about yourself or your partner. You may see that you are not being direct enough and that a simple direct statement will resolve years of struggle, in such a case internal support is the missing awareness. In doing this you are accessing another aspect of your personality that is not immersed in the struggle and therefore has the objectivity to help.

**Tool: stand outside and look at yourself; give yourself advice.**

## **Enact together the thing you are afraid of in conflict**

Fear and reaction causes many of our problems and often escalates the very thing we fear. If you have a sympathetic and trustworthy partner, slowly act out the most fearful outcome of an imagined conflict. Slow everything down; move and speak slowly as you do the thing that you are fearful of – do it rather than have it done to you. (If you are fearful of being stabbed or punched, for example, then, with a trustworthy partner, use an imaginary knife, never a real one, or a slow punch that passes your partner's face without touching) Notice how you feel as you act out the part that creates the fear. In doing this, one integrates one's split off power rather than becoming a monster.

**Tool: When power becomes conscious it ceases to be dangerous.**

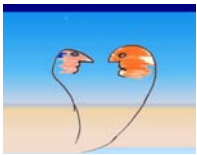
## Walk your talk and talk your walk

Truth and honesty create a strong foundation for a successful relationship and lack of trust eats at relationships from the inside. Be honest with yourself if accused of what you did or said; fully admit it if your partner blames you for something that you are guilty of - do what you say, say what you do. Walk your talk and talk your walk. This is the most honourable and blameless way to be in relationship. Admitting that you have lied is a truthful thing, if done sincerely - we all lie as human beings. On the other hand if you have done something that will hurt your relationship if shared, then consider whether or not to keep it secret: are you sure that you will never do what would cause that hurt again?

**Tool:** When accused of X reveal what is inside of you in the moment - what is really happening. That is the most trustworthy way to be.

## Let things stay stuck

We can put men and women on the moon but the smallest relationship problem can confound the best of us. Trying to get through a problem that is stuck often is the wrong approach. In any problem it is a matter of finding the appropriate intervention, approach or attitude that will allow the unravelling of the problem. Stuckness often needs respect because the very problem may be the thing that needs to happen and the resolution may be premature.



Conflicts are partly dreaming processes that have a life of their own and need respect as such. Bringing awareness to feeling stuck without trying to change anything; respecting its power and one's inadequacy, is often the very awareness and approach that is needed. Being content with the way things are - with difficulties, complexities, struggles, etc, and relating to them in a conscious way is a Taoist approach that says, *'I will sit with you in the tension until the Tao changes things and I will pick up the chance when it happens.'* In living like this one recognises that nature has wisdom and that humans are partners with life, not its creator.

**Tool:** Let things stay stuck and stay with it, then notice the changes that come up naturally and follow them. Feeling stuck often only happens when we try to push for change.



## Making trouble

Boredom between couples needs interrupting, one or the other needs to start a fight. You will know when you feel bored with the other, don't kid yourself. What stops you from confronting the other? Do you protect them from your thoughts? Well either get rid of your thoughts or bring them in, don't pussy-foot around. Does the other slump in dejection and depression at criticism? Then let them slump as you continue to confront them – don't rescue. If you rescue, then boredom will kill your relationship. If you feel sorry for them as they slump then you patronise them as powerless, and thus powerlessness will rule. In this way powerlessness is the power that takes the life out of the relationship and the fear of challenge itself rules – a powerless identity is actually powerful in this way. In this case the challenger usually feels guilt about creating the other's internal feelings of dejection and depression and therefore guilt triumphs leaving boredom and resentment to continue.

Challenge them that they are boring or whatever the situation is that bothers you; make up a problem if you need to. Challenge them about not defending themselves if they go along with what you say. Do it in a light hearted way either secretly or obviously. Any accusation is only about a part of the person; for example, telling someone that they are lazy does not mean that the whole person is lazy, but there is a lazy part that is bugging you – people are much more than any one type of behaviour. The person attacked usually feels it is all of them and identifies as a victim, which makes the attacker often back off and even feel sorry for them . That is the unconscious weapon of victim identity – creating guilt. These accusations are a process; they are not the whole reality about the person. People are not any one form, in fact at our essence, at our deepest reality, we are formless. The other half, which is found in the completion of the conflict, is either deeper, more fulfilling communication or intimacy.

Some of us ignore criticism, some of us believe it and get depressed, and some of us react strongly to the least little thing in defence and protection. If you get a big reaction then stay fluid by congratulating your opponent for defending themselves well, knowing that your overall purpose is to bring new life to the relationship. In conflict everything becomes tense, fixed, and a fight for survival. Remain unfixed and a little unrelated to your accusation while looking beyond the present moment.

Tool: With knowledge of all the interventions to this point, do not protect others from what is in you about them. Playfully confront them knowing that your criticism is not the whole of them and that what you have to say is one half that will lead to deeper communication or intimacy eventually - which is the completing half.

## Becoming Angle Poised

Some of the most successful relationships are those where one partner has a little, very friendly, banter or taunting with the other, I've seen couples in their 70s and 80s have a little humorous banter together while both smile and look totally in love after a life-time with each other. We get bored in relationship by adapting to our partner, or others in social situations or at our work.

Example:

*'I like that, don't you?'*

Said without a real question but with an unconscious demand for partner to agree.

'Yes.' comes the answer with the proviso that you must not disagree.

One can test such a statement by disagreeing. If you feel a need to change this adaptation then do the following. Become "angle poised" to your world. Disagree with a playful smile: be awkward; say no when you want to say yes; taunt your partner playfully; prod them; jump on them; wrestle; disagree for the hell of it; challenge them; ask them to follow everything you say and do it now. Keep going until they begin to take you on from their own point of view. When your partner or colleague does that then your job is done and the relationship is beginning to live again; you have used the ancient way of the trickster.

**Tool:** Bring the clown or trickster into a relationship that is dying from lack of life.



## Postscript

Each intervention considered and practiced by you will become unique and fresh through your particular style and personality, and in using them you will be developing them further; everything is evolving and these are dynamic tools that arise out of experience and are renewed through experience. If you are vaguely familiar with these interventions already, then that may be partly because they are universal patterns that are in the background of all conflict, but also you may be familiar because your own deeper nature has focused on such patterns throughout your life. In other words, your spirit is attuned to this path of flux in the background. In the end we are just practicing what we already know and need a little encouragement in difficult moments to open up to it.

There is much more that was not included here, particularly regarding interventions arising from the essence level. Producing a further course with such focus may happen in the future – see “Earth Based Psychology”, “Quantum Mind”, and “Dreaming While Awake” by Dr Arnold Mindell, for more on this subject.

If you have any questions or feedback about any of the content or you feel stuck on a particular point, then please email us with your questions. Also, if you are in a difficult situation and you feel that you need help, then again, write or phone and we may be able to offer a therapy session, given available space, or direct you to a therapist in your area if you feel face to face contact is best for you.

Good luck! The only thing you might want to remember from all of this is: **the quickest way to resolve conflict is first to value it in yourself and others.**