

Hamilton, Diane Musho

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But rather than relying on a thin, idealized hope that we will all one day just get along, we can approach conflict resolution as an art form that we are privileged to develop and hone. We can accept the challenge, becoming adept in transforming our personal struggles, and contribute to the unfolding of new ways of being for humanity.

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however difficult, conflict is intrinsic to our human experience—

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When we have a conflict with those around us, we are given an opportunity to practice transforming that conflict into patience, mutual understanding, and creativity.

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The role of Archetype
in conflict resolution

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From Crisis to Possibility To learn to transform conflict, we must let go of the notion that something or someone is wrong or bad. This belief creates fundamental resistance, and it is the first obstacle to working with conflict. We can shift our point of view to see that conflicts, like dreams, may possess an elegant intelligence that expresses truths we may not want to see clearly. For example, an old pattern needs to be abandoned or a relationship needs to grow or change. We can, with practice, learn to see this intelligence at work and respond creatively and constructively. The conflict isn't the problem; our response to it is.

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Learning how to negotiate conflict demands that we become more present, more fearless.

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"If you can't find the truth right where you are, where do you expect to find it?"

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moderating self-criticism, decreasing the intensity of our judgments, healing the regrets of the past, and over-coming our fear of the future.

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True, settled peace comes when we experience reality without division.

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Musho, which means "no conflict, no struggle."

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"The Great Way is not difficult for those who have no preferences."

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But because of my meditation practice, I saw very quickly that my uneasy thoughts were almost always about the future—whether my son would be accepted, whether he would ever live on his own, and even whether he would have a girlfriend one day. These thoughts took me immediately into a world of uncertainty, anxiety, and dread.

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we also suffer injustices. We are treated unfairly, and tragedies befall us.

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Intention can be described as an internal choice or commitment that guides our actions toward something greater than ourselves.

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we will attract what we intend. It is, therefore, essential to be fully aware of our intentions, because we will get what we wish for.

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Intention is a finite commitment, and it is also a process that requires our love and attention. In the beginning, it expresses a true possibility in our world. In the middle, we must clarify it, uproot contradictory motives, realign it with new realities, and apply energy at opportune moments. In the end, our intentions create powerful results. The old adage “Be careful what you wish for” reminds us to be sure that our intentions will bring us what we truly desire. As the Buddha says, “Have few desires, but have great ones.”

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Whenever I work with people on new communication patterns, I always ask them what their intention is before we start. Do they want to express a perspective or prove a point? Are they interested in listening, or is it more important to have their opinion heard? Are they simply interested in an exchange of views, or do they want to forge a solution? You would be surprised how often problems arise because we aren't clear or even conscious about what we really intend in our interactions with others.

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a larger intention like “I want to use effective conflict resolution skills,” or “I want to be a skilled communicator.”

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What would it be like to learn to stay present when a conflict arises instead of leaving the room?
How would it feel to be able to listen to uncomfortable feedback without withdrawing emotionally?

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if someone is criticizing us, we can intend to stay present rather than react and withdraw.

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Clarifying our intention in communication requires a willingness to be rigorously honest with ourselves, because many times our underlying motivations don’t match our conscious intent.

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Anytime we create a positive intention, we also create its opposite, or we bring the opposite into awareness. So if we want to listen and be more receptive, we are going to notice how often we jump in and interrupt. If we desire to question more, we are going to notice how often we sit back and fail to be curious. When we notice the opposite arising, whether in the form of resistance or negativity, we can learn to simply acknowledge it and return to our intention.

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Intention functions not only as a starting point but also as an anchor when we become confused or disoriented in our communications.

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each of us is embedded in a field of intentions. All those

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Our intentionality in any moment is a mix of personal, biological, evolutionary, cultural, systemic, and cosmic forces.

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Form a communication intention for the day that will contribute to the fulfillment of your lifelong intention. For example, “I will become a good listener.” Ask yourself, what are some of the attributes of a good listener? For example, “emptying myself of other ideas while someone is speaking; staying present to what someone is saying, asking clarifying questions,” and so on.

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things in the present moment—or as we like to say, “things as they are.”

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Awareness doesn’t have a dog in the fight, so to speak. It just says, “Here things are—just like this.”

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We have at least one true freedom: how we choose to focus our attention.

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Learning how to be present to conflict is similar to learning how to be present to pain.

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but presence isn’t concerned with feeling good. It is about perceiving what Master Seung Sahn called truth. By bringing our pure, open, attentive awareness to any experience, including a conflict, we learn to be present with an unbiased mind that is neither for nor against what is happening.

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it is challenging—well, almost impossible—to experience other people impartially.

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Instead of simply being mindfully aware of others, we usually react to them.

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When our ego boundaries, our preferences, or our values bump up against those of another, the first thing we do—after we feel a flush of energy—is judge the situation, usually blaming it on the other person.

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an impulse is not an imperative. We don't have to save anybody.

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The threats we face today are more often emotional, social, or political. But they are threats, nonetheless, because they challenge our deepest sense of safety—our belief systems, our self-image, and our ideas of right and wrong.

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Fear is a form of intelligence. It tells us to protect ourselves.

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Threats to Our Bodies and Physical Safety.

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Threats to Our Relationships.

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Threats to Our Sense of Belonging.

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Threats to Our Identity or Ego.

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We don't like to be blamed or proved wrong. We don't like to feel stupid or taken advantage of. We don't want to be humiliated or embarrassed. And we especially don't want to feel vulnerable or exposed.

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Threats to What We Value.

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Unknown Fear.

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We have a general sense of uneasiness, but we can't locate the cause.

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Our most common reaction to the felt experience of fear is to want to make it go away.

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When we feel threatened, the bodily sensations are certainly intense but also exciting.

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Learning to stay present with intensity, rather than shutting down or reacting defensively, is difficult

because it is like hearing the sound of a crying baby.

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I couldn't work with them if I just gave them space. It was only by respecting their intelligence that I could begin to navigate through them. The emotions were communicating truths: the environment was overwhelming; I needed more order, more routine.

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giving your attention directly to the feelings themselves.

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In meditation training, we refer to the three poisons of ignorance, passion, and aggression.

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In the first instance, we move away and disappear

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we move toward the challenge and cling;

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in the third, we move against it.

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On the menu are three drinks called I Know Nothing; Needy Clinging; and Piss Off.

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Interestingly, these same three patterns are outlined in conflict resolution literature. In the Thomas-

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Kilmann conflict inventory, 2 avoidance is another word for ignorance.

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We allow problems that could have been handled easily to grow out of proportion, until our only option is to walk away.

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habitual conflict avoidance takes a toll on our self-esteem, effectiveness, and relationships.

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In the conflict resolution world, the passionate style is translated as accommodation. Those of us with this style are prone to be cooperative and attentive, but when push comes to shove, we have a hard time valuing our own point of view and standing up for ourselves and our ideas.

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The accommodating type would rather be liked than thought of as difficult, would rather appear attractive than look disturbed, and would prefer to acquiesce rather than squabble.

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Depression and helplessness often overcome those of us who accommodate too frequently, as we relinquish our own passions in support of someone else.

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True relationship occasionally requires moments of strength, autonomy, and the courage to disagree.

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Another dilemma for the accommodator occurs when there are too many people to please;

differences between people and their agendas leave us wobbly, unsure of who to support.

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The competitive or aggressive style includes those of us whose first instinctive response to a challenge is to push back.

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There is such a thing as healthy assertiveness, aggression, and competition. Assertiveness is catalyzing, life-giving, and energizing.

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world. It is necessary for leadership and essential for drawing boundaries in relationships, for setting limits in our life, and for preserving a sense of our own integrity. We

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Highly competitive people don't seem to get depressed, but they are often disliked by others.

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Habitual aggression, however, is the most destructive strategy for protecting our ego and securing our place in the world.

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But overt aggression as a conflict style wears everyone down over time. Those of us with an aggressive style put everyone else in a state of unease. The people we interact with are on the lookout for trouble, walking on eggshells, talking in low tones behind our back. We are cut off from true communication because our colleagues and loved ones and acquaintances won't risk the arguments; we end up believing we have more support from others than we genuinely do. When we experience a loss, everyone is secretly glad.

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we suffer from our own angry outbursts and lack of kindness.

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In some contexts, we develop a passive-aggressive style for dealing with each other—a mixture of avoidance and aggression.

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a willingness to make mistakes rather than a knee-jerk reaction that protects the ego and minimizes vulnerability.

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The wisdom of aggression is penetrating clarity and power. We are self-possessed and trustworthy; we know what we think and feel, and we communicate that clearly. We are capable of asserting our preferences, but without the need to dominate or prevail. When we transform the energy of aggression, we bring integrity, rigor, and discipline to the resolution of our disputes.

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Working with Conflict Styles

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every story is inevitably embedded within a particular perspective.

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would say, “Every perspective is true and partial. Everyone has a piece of the truth.

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that a small percentage of people couldn’t take their own perspective—literally. They were incapable of expressing their preferences, their wants, and their needs.

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Some people didn't know what their wants and needs actually were.

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other people were great with facts or objective data but tended to get stuck there, ignoring the importance of feelings, intuition, cultural factors, and other subjective realities. Then there was the rare person who was so fluid in their capacity to take perspectives that they could express their point of view, genuinely listen to an opposing one, and include the implications of the law and the interests of third parties in the negotiation. They were willing to feel emotions and consider subjective interests such as pride or saving face while maintaining a vigorous view about money and value.

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in the beginning, inhabiting multiple perspectives is stressful. Each time we embody a new perspective, we add complexity, ambiguity, and room for doubt. Coming to decisions takes longer, and we become aware that even a satisfactory decision is likely to have a downside. Rather than cope with this anxiety and doubt, we are tempted to go back to collapsing reality into a single point of view.

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three different fundamental perspectives we take in our thinking, speaking, and writing.

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The first-person, or "I," perspective expresses my personal viewpoint, or subjective reality. It includes my feelings, beliefs, perceptions, emotions, value judgments, personal history, memories, and other aspects of any story that is unique to me. The second-person, or "You," perspective encompasses our shared viewpoint, or intersubjective reality. It includes our shared stories, cultural values, social agreements, common language, and the various ways we mutually resonate at a subtle or emotional level. A second-person "We" perspective might contain the shared history of a relationship between two people, or it could embody the unconscious cultural beliefs held in common by millions. The third-person, or "It," perspective points to the empirical viewpoint, or objective reality. It includes facts, evidence, proof, data, science, and legal findings, even the perspective of outside observers—that is, how "he" or "she" or "they" view the situation (or are affected by it).

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we have a tendency to conflate “the truth” with “my twuth.”

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between first-, second-, and third-person perspectives

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The first-person dimension, “I,” is personal and subjective truth; the second-person “You” becomes “We” as it illuminates the truths between us—our shared values and beliefs; and the third-person “It” conveys the tangible truths of the objective world.

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The first-person, or “I,” perspective expresses my feelings, beliefs, perceptions, and values—or for that matter, any view of things as I see or experience them.

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This privacy can be a source of great freedom, or it can turn into a prison of our own making.

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the purpose of first-person perspective is not to establish absolute Truth. Rather, it is to access an entirely unique view of the world.

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We often refuse to listen to a perspective for fear it will be interpreted as agreement.

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I can hear his concern without necessarily agreeing with him.

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I can acknowledge his perspective, or I can agree with it.

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Simply using the first-person pronoun “I” frees us from the argument and allows us to freely exchange perspectives.

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When we are in the thick of our disagreements, it can be a relief to remind ourselves that each of us relies on our first-person perspective to navigate the terrain of reality.

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The third-person truth, or “It” perspective, indicates reality as it is viewed from an objective distance.

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It includes facts, evidence, proof, data, scientific and legal findings, and instruments, such as recording devices and video cameras.

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had been making: that we consistently reach for objective reference points to verify our perceptions of the world.

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the third-person perspective is concerned with reliability and predictability.

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Rarely, in my experience, does a third-person perspective alone resolve a dispute—unless both parties allow it to happen.

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The second-person truth exists in relationship between “I” and “You” in the domain of “We.”

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shared beliefs, our cultural values, our agreements and commitments, as well as our ethics, empathy, compassion, and mutual respect.

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Conflict resolution and mediation are ultimately second-person enterprises. To bring people together “into one mind,” we must weave first-person perspectives together with helpful third-person information and data, such as business or home appraisals, neutral evaluations, profit and loss statements, or photographs of damage to a car or apartment. And then we must agree.

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you explore the three different truths of the conflict.

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Speak for Yourself: The Importance of the First-Person Perspective

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spiritual traditions remind us in their own way to seek a life beyond the self-centered perspective, to serve others, and to recognize all of reality as our True Self.

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we can’t grow beyond the limits of our small ego until it is well established. First we need to learn how to care for ourselves and be responsible for our own lives.

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“To study the self is to forget the self.”

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Indeed, as we practice meditation in a Western context, our culture's focus on healthy self-esteem seems to conflict with Zen's emphasis on forgetting the self.

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small self suffers from the problems of separation and competition, and it is subject to evolutionary imperatives such as the struggle for survival and the fear of death.

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By being kind to ourselves, we can access greater awareness and perspective.

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am sorry,"

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"I made a mistake."

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Responsibility creates freedom and freedom creates responsibility.

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Expressing a first-person perspective is a remarkable privilege of existence. Some people have never had the opportunity to speak their mind freely.

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perspectives of "I," "You," and "It" informed their decision making in their companies.

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Indeed, acknowledging the first person to the exclusion of all other perspectives is self-centered or arrogant.

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The trick is simply not to confuse a first-person perspective with a third-person truth. If you are speaking a third-person truth, you need an objective reference point. That is all. The beauty of first person is that when we consciously express it, no one can disagree with how we see things;

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Each of us is imbued with innate intelligence, wisdom, and we want to offer it.

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“Be yourself, the world will give you feedback.”

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The “I statement” is empowering because it cues your listeners that you are not talking about Truth or Them with a capital T.

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Harmonize Body, Speech, and Mind. To be effective in our communication, we need to make sure that our body, speech, and mind are all communicating the same thing.

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Include Feelings and Energy. Most of our communication is nonverbal. Our brain is organized to intuit feeling states as much as it is to listen to words.

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If There Is Something You Want, Ask for It. Identifying our desires or needs enables us to ask for

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| what we want, and our communication feels more legitimate and direct.

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| we make our needs transparent to ourselves first and then ask others for what we want.

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| When we make real requests, we can give real responses.

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| “When it comes to giving my opinion, I . . .”

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| ask someone to listen to you.

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| Listening is not passive. It requires intention, openness, and generosity.

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| simply being present to each other is our most basic moral obligation.

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| There may be instances when we are obligated to interfere, but more often than not, simple presence provides a context for others to listen to themselves, and that is the real service.

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| When we feel free of pressure, we are happy to listen, so we listen well.

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Even when someone isn't speaking to us directly, we can still listen.

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Sometimes we have a confused notion that listening means agreement. It doesn't.

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Be curious. If you like, ask a question or two to help clarify the communication. A good question might be, "What else can you tell me?"

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To be impartial is to be the ruler.

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In storytelling, third-person narrators often speak through an omniscient, observing voice that remains aloof, unnamed, and uninvolved,

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The purpose of this distance is to perceive objects and situations without the biases and distortions of our first- and second-person perspectives.

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Third person is the realm of witnesses, judges, scientists, referees, and accountants. We depend on these practiced, neutral observers to assist us in numerous ways.

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Science employs the third-person perspective to establish empirical truths.

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The ideal of an independent judiciary to settle our disputes depends to a large degree on third-person principles. Just laws, neutral judges and juries, standards for empirical evidence, and impartial witnesses are attempts to create the best conditions for delivering fair results.

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The ability to take a perspective on ourselves is the beginning of freedom.

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Meditation trains us to become neutral observers and good witnesses.

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we can be present to any situation no matter how troubling.

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A truly unbiased mind is a welcome antidote to the narrowness of our conventional points of view.

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We should learn not to cling to things too tightly (or to people) because they are always in flux, always shifting and changing.

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It is never too late to get out of a bad deal.

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creative trade-offs,

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Good negotiations depend on cultivating good relationships, so we should be rigorously ethical in our deal making and treat people well.

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The concept at the heart of Getting to Yes is learning how to shift our attention from “positions” to “interests.”

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People will often relax their positions when their deeper wants and needs are affirmed.

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Once shared interests are identified, creativity sets in.

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There are many extraordinary examples of innovation in conflict resolution—from large social movements to small, intimate gestures between friends. Every attempt to react differently establishes new pathways for others to step into when faced with conflict.

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I use the word play intentionally, because it implies an attitude of ease, curiosity, and possibility.

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The greatest discovery of my generation is that a human being can alter his life by altering his attitudes of mind.

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We never did find the source of the original rift, but it didn't seem to matter. They simply needed to clear the air and start fresh.

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Skillful reframes can help us strip the negative judgments from our conversations, drain off the threatening energy, and introduce more mercy and trust into the effort to work out our differences. For example, “You’re too intense” becomes “I’m really passionate; it’s true.” The criticism “You’re too easily swayed by others,” can be received with “I do like lots of input,” and toned down by adding, “There may be times when it is too much.” “You are so stubborn” can be acknowledged and reframed as “I admit that I take strong positions.” All of these reinterpretations create the space for a downshift in negativity and a productive conversation that results in some agreement.

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It is much more difficult to reframe experience when it is accompanied by strong feelings. If we are angry, hurt, embarrassed, or filled with anxiety, these states often govern the meaning we make of our experiences.

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I’ve told her that if she can learn to stay present to jealousy with its complex mix of passion and aggression, she can stay present to any emotion.

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To catalyze a reframe, ask what is right about the situation. What is the intelligence in the way things are now?

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What was right about her experience?

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The first time, the master gardener suggests some amendments to the soil, along with changing the watering cycle. But it doesn’t work, and the weeds come back. So the person goes back a second time for more advice. The master gardener suggests introducing a different plant into the garden, one known to ward off weeds. This strategy also fails. The frustrated gardener returns to the master a third time, and the master asks, “You changed the soil?” “Yes.” “You adjusted the water?” “Yes.” “You added the new plants?” “Yes.” “And the weeds are still there?” “Yes.” “Well, then I suggest

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that you learn to love them.” It is one thing to reframe a complaint or criticism, it is another to reframe your life.

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Be yourself; the world will give you feedback.

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Since I know my life is not literally threatened, I have learned to relax, using my breath to calm my activated, overly protective nervous system.

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“Love itself describes its own perfection. Be speechless and listen.”

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Like most of us, I have built up a lot of defenses around my self-concept, and I am quick to push away any reflection that doesn’t conform to my idea of who “I” am.

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The third approach to receiving feedback, and perhaps the most challenging, is to just take it in,

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When we’re drowning in grief, it’s hard to be present for one another, let alone acknowledge our different styles of dealing with loss.

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suffering in relationships is unavoidable.

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Calm. Some of us experience low-level anxiety when giving feedback. So we need to prepare by noticing even small levels of uneasiness.

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Clear and Simple. Once we acknowledge our appreciation, even if it's just internally, we need to express ourselves openly, simply, and clearly.

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"Let's check in about the project,"

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"Can we take some time to talk about how things are going?"

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As the Buddha said, we should tune ourselves like a guitar string: "Not too tight, not too loose."

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"What did you hear that is important to you?" or, "What do you agree with, and what do you disagree with?"

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is not what you do; it is what you do next."

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"Everyone carries a shadow," he wrote, "and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is."

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If you point out her aggression, she doesn't see it.

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From an Integral perspective, Ken Wilber would describe the shadow as any part of consciousness that we cannot acknowledge in first person as "I":

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"I'm not greedy. They are." A shadow is a perspective that we refuse to take for all kinds of reasons; it is shameful, frightening, painful, or socially offensive. Whatever the reason, it is deeply unacceptable to our sense of self, and we cannot claim it.

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But because it posed a threat to self-identity, it became unacceptable; it was pushed out of awareness and landed in second person, where it is projected onto others.

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It is imperative to own shadow, because ignoring it comes at a great cost.

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Our inability to touch the places in ourselves that we fear and judge makes us critical and fearful of the world.

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shadow of doubt,

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Face It. The first step in the practice is to notice what is disturbing to us and to describe it in detail in third person.

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1. FACE IT

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2. TALK TO IT

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3. BE IT

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Edith didn't appear to have her own viewpoint or a sense of self, apart from shuffling around trying to keep others happy.

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Worldviews comprise a whole set of perspectives that influence our interpretation of reality and filter our experience. Our worldviews make our decisions predictable and our actions consistent. They also link us with like-minded people, and these relationships and affiliations reinforce how we see things.

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"Instead of seeing the weight of certain people on society, I started to see that society itself can be a crushing weight to many, especially when it is blind to the impacts of its policies on people."

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A worldview is more than an opinion; it is an entire gestalt of opinions that frames meaning. It is impossible to persuade another person to adopt a new worldview, certainly not in the course of a single argument or negotiation. So how do we handle the conflicts that arise from fundamentally different ways of viewing reality?

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Ken Wilber and the developmental psychologists whose work he respects make the distinction between the surface features and deep structures of consciousness.

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Egocentric Consciousness. Egocentric means that our view of the world is centered on the “I.”

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When we honor our own dignity, we can recognize the same dignity in others.

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Highly egocentric types relate to others as if they are props in a play; if the people in their lives do not follow the script, they are of little use. The truth, however, is that when we can't take other people's interests into account, we end up isolated, hardened, and bereft of social support.

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Ethnocentric Consciousness.

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This stage occurs when we learn to put the group's needs ahead of our own.

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This stage of consciousness creates coherent, supportive communities that are stable and enduring.

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The limitations of ethnocentric consciousness include black-and-white thinking, blind conformity, a rigid adherence to fixed moral codes and rules, and the strong division of the world into “us” versus “them.”

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World-Centric Consciousness.

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A move to world-centric consciousness may mean that we no longer distinguish between our side and the enemy's.

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It is an expansive vision—and a good one—but very hard to realize on the ground, as anyone who has worked for a global humanitarian cause knows. Unless we continue to grow into even greater awareness as we work for the human good, the problems of the world become increasingly overwhelming to our world-centric views.

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Cosmic-Centric Consciousness.

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We will never be surrounded by people with similar worldviews. The boundaries of our egos will forever run into other egos; cultures will scrape against other cultures as they always have, and creative friction will spark as part of humanity's movement through time and evolution.

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To genuinely respect the perspectives of others, we must first come to know each level in ourselves. The nature of having views is that we conflate them with reality. But when we can stand back and look at the filter of our own worldview rather than through it, we have reached a bright line of development. Then we can begin to challenge our assumptions instead of everyone else's.

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We don't have to change anyone's worldview; we have to work with

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For anyone working with conflict, compassion is a core capacity. What is compassion? I would say that it is the expression of our empathy toward one another, our ability to feel tenderness for ourselves and a suffering world.

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What the mind can't reconcile, the heart does.

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We want to be noticed, appreciated, reimbursed, or at least be seen as a nice, caring person.

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The compassion that arises from our meditation practice is different. It stems from our willingness to see things as they are rather than as we would like them to be.

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Without suffering, there can be no compassion, and without compassion, there can be no suffering.

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view, we are impartial (not indifferent; there is a profound distinction) toward this world.

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When we are held captive by strong emotions such as rage, jealousy, or grief, we can work with them by giving in to them instead of resisting or bypassing them.

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we must drop the cherished stories running through our minds: stories about how this shouldn't be happening to us, about the wrongheadedness of the other, about how unfair life is.

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Tonglen is a heart-based practice from Tibetan Buddhism that I learned while I was at Naropa Institute. The practice shows us how to feel into our pain and transmute it into great compassion. It is a practice often taught by Pema

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Step One: Flashing on Open Space.

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Step Two: Feeling the Texture.

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Pema calls this the texture of poison, of neurosis or fixation.

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So in the second stage of tonglen, we work with textures. Breathe in black, heavy, hot light through every pore of your body, then radiate out white and cool light, also through the pores of your body, front and back, 360 degrees. Work with the two textures until they're synchronized;

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Step Three: Working with Particulars. The third stage of tonglen is working with a specific person who is suffering.

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Step Four: Contemplating the Universal. In the fourth stage of tonglen, we move from the specific to the general, from the personal to the collective, and from the particular to the universal.

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strengthen ourselves through athletics,

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healthy ego is easier to relinquish than a shaky one.

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In some of the groups I have worked with, people with world-centric points of view have rejected the traditions of their family of origin.

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I have been up against tough competition all my life. I wouldn't know how to get along without it.

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Optimally, opposition can be enlivening, contention can be sexy, and both parties can stay aware of each other by jumping into the rough patches.

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A great poet once said that our lovers should be our worthy opponents.

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Sports, games, and martial arts give us a highly ritualized way of engaging in competition and formalizing conflict.

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conflict is an expression of our profound and inextricable relatedness. We only conflict because we coexist.

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Finally, all conflicts are a manifestation of the transience of all things.

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Satori is mistake after mistake.

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we can come out of the cave, down to the ground, or out from behind the wall of our cynicism and choose to participate in the dense, bruising activity of human interaction.

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“Just lose.” The word lose had an immediate impact on me, far more than if I had heard the spiritual instruction to “surrender” or “let go.” I honestly didn’t know I was engaged in a winning and losing proposition, but I saw that, in fact, I was.

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In this context of inevitable defeat and certain loss, there is great freedom.

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engage with awareness and compassion, and we are liberated from fixed outcomes. We discover fearlessness. Other people are not so intimidating anymore; difficult conversations are less threatening. We experience real success, and yes, it feels good. Conflict confronts us with the need to change and to grow, and it provides the energetic boost to fuel that change. It catalyzes the expansion of our identity or demands that we change our life direction.

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While we can develop an array of skills, each moment presents us with a choice: Am I going to listen now? Am I interested in seeing what they see, in feeling what they feel? Am I open to another perspective? Am I willing to let go of my attachment to how I think things should be? Or am I going to sidle back down the alley of myself and my opinions, to which I have grown so accustomed, and where I rule all alone?

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It is a joy that is always there, just below the surface, arising naturally when it is not obscured by

our worries, our complaints, judgments, and struggles.

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The practice of meditation will help us experience this fundamental well-being and joy. It teaches us to relax the grasping mind, to be present to how things are, and to see how everything is workable.

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when I hear my father praising the potatoes he grew in his garden, as though the universe had given them to him personally to hand out.