

Social peace starting from an inner non-violent dialogue

Translation of

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When invited to talk about conflictual situations, participants to my sessions invariably have the same reflex no matter from which continent they come. They do not talk spontaneously about themselves; rather they talk about someone who has said something hard to swallow, or someone who gets on their nerves or prevents them from being able to fall asleep. When we become preoccupied by someone who has hurt us, the first step is to sort out what is proper to each individual involved, to let go of something belonging to the other person and to look within oneself in order to address the issue which has hurt us.

Instead of directing our attention to the other person and looking for that which is not right, we can and should look into ourselves at that part which has been affected. The psychologist Richard Schwartz, founder of the psychotherapeutic protocol IFS (Internal Family System ; cf. Richard SCHWARTZ and Michael NICHOLS, *Family Therapy: Concepts and Methods*, Allyn and Bacon, Boston, 1991) suggests an inner dialogue starting from our "Self" which he defines as that pure intact space which has not been hurt by life experiences and where calmness, confidence, compassion, curiosity, creativity, courage, clearness and connectedness reign.

From this inner source in ourselves, we can learn to cultivate a sense of welcoming and accepting that part inside us which has been injured, make a real dialogue with it, listen to it and consider what it tells us about its needs, motivations, and other aspects.

Notwithstanding how angry or depressed a part of us may be when it seems to pervade our entire being, we should understand that it is not the entirety of who we are. If, from the bottom of our heart, we consider it with respect, that injured part of ourselves can be singled out and separated from ourselves. I am who I am, and that part has its own identity; that part is a sub-part of myself, it only has a partial identity and occupies only a part of my life.

As long as it is in the bosom of my internal family, I do not recognize it. It risks acting like a child who is not given enough attention, who makes a lot of noise, becomes the centre of attention, tugs the skirt of its mother and is even capable of doing foolish things including bringing upon itself punishment in order to attract attention, even negative. By contrast, just like a child who has received the attention it needs, and who then turns to play calmly in a corner of the room, a part in myself can accept to put itself aside and then allow me to enter more deeply into myself in search of my innermost being.

On this inner path, our physical sensations and our emotions are precious gifts, trustworthy messengers whose role is that of leading us to that place where there is an impasse or something unbalanced inside us so we can deal with the problem. With compassion and gentle care of the jumbled aspects of our psychic being, we can free ourselves from our judgments, reproaches and control reflexes over others. These three poisonous tendencies emanate from the bad relations inside ourselves. We are able to let go of these tendencies much easier with curiosity, we discover (remove the cover over) our own foundations and deep-rooted motivations. In "pursuit of this inner treasure" our sentiments indicate our suffering

needs. Our visceral instincts loosen up and relax when we offer an availability and respect for each of our parts.

A turning point in making friends with the psychic aspect of our life concerns those parts of ourself which we judge to be ugly, those parts of which we are ashamed, those which we fight against at times with all of our spiritual strength. We love and accentuate our enlightened parts, those parts of our Doctor Jekyll, while we hide those parts of our Mister Hyde as far away as possible in the back of our being, in the hope of being rid of them. We judge these characteristics to be more dangerous when they seem uncontrollable when, in fact, they behave in a manner more uncontrollable when they are condemned and pushed away, just like a child who is rejected by the family.

A veritable revolution takes place when we stop fighting a part, when we learn to distinguish the part from its acts. While the acts themselves can be horrible, the part itself has a positive intention. It requires a safe haven and benevolence in order to reveal to us why it acts as it does. According to the IFS model, “managers” who control (sometimes as tyrants) or “firefighters” who seek to extinguish a fire (by resorting to oblivion in alcohol, refuge in narcotics, pornography, excessive eating, overworking, chatter, activities, or the inverse, anorexia, etc.) are like big brothers or big sisters; their role is to protect the little one inside the family, the “exiled” part which can only tell its story and explain its tormented truth to the “Self” after the big brother has accepted to stand aside. He cannot be persuaded to do this, however, until his role as protector is understood and his capabilities are recognized. It is by this benevolent process that a part can accept to reconsider its behavior. We are then able to ask it to let go of a harmful compulsive action by seeking together an alternative strategy which is less problematic and which, moreover, the part will be able to adopt because this strategy allows the part to continue to play its inner role of protection.

Whoever wants to act like an angel, acts like a beast. He who represses his Mister Hyde, condemns himself to be subjected to his Mister Hyde at the worst of times. On the other hand, he who can offer to his apparently hideous parts calmness, gentleness and curiosity, travels down a road of freedom (the reflexes activated in himself stop being in automatic mode; his parts can release their compulsive reflexes and stop interfering against his will) as well as down a road of inner unity (his Doctor Jekyll Hyde and Doctor Hyde are then able to smoke the pipe of peace.) When the “Self” is too weak, each part plays its own score. By contrast, cacophony can become a symphony in the presence of the Self when it plays its role as director of the orchestra. When the needs of our parts are understood they are able to take their rightful place in the orchestra, and the road which leads to the bottom of our heart becomes unblocked. A part which steps aside corresponds to a door hitherto closed which then opens and gives access to more intimate chambers in our inner castle or else it is like a boulder which rolls away, ceasing to block the spring, allowing it to flow forth even more. This is the virtuous circle of benevolence. At first, the parts need our benevolent consideration in order to become unblocked. In the reverse sense, the ability to be benevolent reinforces itself as the spring becomes unblocked. The first process of human genuineness which emanates from the violence which we are capable of when we are hurt, leads us from the outside to the inside. The challenge is to take seriously the signals which are present in our bodies, heart and guts, the three portals of entry to the soul. This long inner road leads us little by little to the natural place inside us where there is goodness and generosity, from where flow the sources of living water. The second process, for its part, goes from the inside to the outside: the inexhaustible superabundant source of Love which flows in us from the bottom of our heart can then really nurture each one of our parts which are suffering from a

lack of recognition. This dual process assumes two points of departure: 1) that emanating from our human nature, by taking seriously and humbly the mixture of our conflicting relationships, that which contains the most precious nuggets, 2) that of our soul which chooses, freely and responsibly, to plunge into the shadow of ourself where we can experience the most enlightening encounters.

This path by which we become friends with our deep-rooted human nature bears fruit on three levels: freedom, inner unity, and brotherhood. Let us now consider the third aspect, that of an improved dialogue with others. Whenever we are hurt, the ability to translate our own judgments and reproaches into personal treasure teaches us as well to develop an empathy capable of listening to others in the right place when they themselves are hurt; in other words not listen to judgments and reproaches which they say about others but rather listen to what they say about themselves when they talk about others. Rather than being taken in by the usual traps in communication, this involves resolutely going about seeking out their own personal treasure, coming before their actions or poisonous words.

Following is an illustration from the field of intercultural communication. One of my friends was born of Rwandan parents in Belgium the same year as I was born. Black-skinned, he has always lived in Brussels, never in Africa. He takes the subway each morning to go to work. Each time he has to put up with the look of people from Brussels who seem to be asking him: "Where do you come from?" The implication is that they are thinking "You are not from here; go back to your homeland." The reflex of my friend is to defy these looks, to tell them sometimes without words, sometimes with angry words, that he was born here, a Belgian by full right and privilege, that they are mistaken and that they would do better to consider their own racism. These experiences dishearten him. He undergoes this deep suffering with the thought that he will never be looked at as someone living here at home. I can empathize with his suffering, I who had the same experience in an opposite sense, when I found myself on African soil in my native country where I was mocked when I said that I was from there.

In reality, the integration of our multiple identities does not depend upon how others see us but rather is based on friendly encounters which we take ourself with our own internal family. We will always have from others looks of incomprehension at our multicultural identity. On the other hand, anger and hatred are the bitter wage of bad relations within ourself, relations which depend upon us. Whenever we are taken by a fit of anger (or being disturbed, sad, etc.), we can, deep down in our heart, welcome this anger, listen to it and its need for justice, show respect for its own vital space, and then little by little, recognize other more fragile parts of ourself that have been hurt, those parts hidden deeper in our being. In each instance, the right approach is to offer these parts understanding and sympathy, meeting their need to be accepted and to offer them from the bottom of our heart this acceptance until finally connecting with and fulfilling our need to accept ourselves as we are, until we are able to reconcile fully with our own complex multicultural background.

This process is not an intellectual exercise limited to words; it comes from emotional intelligence fueled by gentleness. It is an inner resource by which a part squeezed in us (often a young part) can at last live fully, in the light of love. It is thus able to better take up its proper place and nothing more than its place in the bosom of the internal family... This inner process is also able to heal the pain caused until now by how others look at us. This process leads to peace.

The peace made with ourself gives us the gentle energy to make peace with others by offering them a non-judgmental space at the heart of which can live the benevolent acceptance of their own painful experience and of their own pluralistic identity. The remedy to the violence provoked by our painful experiences is to look at them non-violently with respect and consideration. This is possible because at the bottom of the heart of all human beings exists a source place which predates our cultures and our religions. This place is conferred upon us by nature. My experience in the sessions which I hold all over the world is that, regardless of a people's religion and their culture, they are able to nurture their humanness, discover and put into practice a culture of hospitality with regard to the injured parts of their internal family and, from there, of their families outside.

This is the good news of authentic communication. Of course, this ability is not the only one which requires constructive management of conflicts. Before effective communication can take place, the strength of the framework of law is needed to create conditions making possible dialogue free from power games, manipulation and hidden agendas. After a line of authentic communication has been established, effective negotiation frees us from the reflex to hide under our blanket. In the event of divergent interests, we need to be able to produce optimal solutions satisfying all parties. However, the essence of the process is that of getting to know each person in his/her reality and in the peace which he/she carries in him-/herself. Living a life of falsehood is exhausting, living a life based on truth is inexhaustible.

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