

Aspects of Communication

*The Practical Application of Communication Skills
and Applied Problem Solving in Relationships*

by

Richard W. Clark

CAC II, EFT III Advanced, SRT®, CLCC(T)

www.GracefulTransformation.com

www.OrganicCrystalSulfur.com

www.RichardWClark.com

Tel: 604-875-9311 (Vancouver)

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“We owe a definite homage to the reality around us, and we are obliged, at certain times, to say what things are and to give them their right names and to lay open our thought about them to the men we live with.”

Father Louie (Thomas Merton)¹

“This isn’t rocket science, it’s worse.”

Unknown

A Note About Quotations and Citations

I refer to other authors and books and to prominent people who are successful or famous in various fields of endeavor. By quoting them, or referring to their ideas, I do not mean to imply that they agree with or endorse the views I offer here, and I may not necessarily agree with everything they say. Regardless of this, I wish to express my gratitude to all of them for provoking and challenging and teaching me. For whatever my own contribution to Life may be, I am aware of the wise contributions of those who have gone before me. The observations I make throughout this manual are entirely my own.

Within this brief manual there are several references to *Addictions & Spiritual Transformation*.² As much as that book is focused on addictions recovery and spirituality, throughout it there are numerous references to the dynamics of emotions and communication. Because modern culture is in the midst of an ever-increasing addictions epidemic and “we” have lost our emotional sensibilities, having that book as one you might refer to will prove worthwhile.

Respect & Dignity

Readers may encounter ideas they disagree with. The intent in writing this manual is neither to insult people nor to persuade them to reject what they believe or cherish. I simply want to put words to the reality that I see around me, and to offer alternatives to people who are foundering, confused, or dissatisfied in their pilgrimage out of illness, chaos, and general unhappiness. The world is quite large enough for different beliefs, and yet small enough that acceptance and respect are necessary for us to live in harmony.

In alternating between pronouns (you, we, they), my description of the process that relates to effective communication is for convenience and grammatical style. The pronouns aren’t intended to be accusatory, nor are they intended to include readers where they wish not to be. Any anecdotes and examples are generic and do not represent any particular person.

¹ *A Thomas Merton Reader*, Rev. Ed., edited by Thomas P. McDonnell, Image Books, 1974, p. 121.

² *Addictions & Spiritual Transformation*, by Richard W. Clark, Trafford Publishing, Third Edition, 2006.

“When there’s something you don’t understand, you have to go humbly to it. You don’t go to school and sit down and say ‘I know what you’re getting ready to teach me.’ You sit there and you learn. You open your mind. You absorb. But you have to be quiet, you have to be still.”

John Coltrane, Musician³

Introduction

This information was originally a component of a college level course that was part of a curriculum for life skills/performance coaches and for therapists and counsellors taking advanced training. I would often advise them, even though they were professional caregivers learning to communicate with others in a way to facilitate transformation; and even though these aspects of communication seemed to them almost too simple, this really was quite complex and all they needed to know about effective communication. That, in itself, is a powerful problem solving or problem-avoiding skill. And, of course, being adept at the manner of communicating that I outline here, leaves you quite skilled at problem prevention.

The detail in this manual only reflects the nature of the subject it addresses; it is complex. As you wade through the detail and nuance of applied problem solving in communication, remind yourself I present this in the context of “ordinary people” in the normal course of their life; although, from my own personal experience, these skills have been used very successfully to diffuse or transform emotionally histrionic, dangerous, and potentially violent situations. If you come to know them well and command their use, they are powerful.

At first it is certainly difficult to examine everything you say and how you say it, to be honest and direct—to be vulnerable. And of course, in very clear communication, you will be held accountable (which is always avoided by insecure people).

Any of the topics in this manual could be presented in several different places in the overall sequence of information. The “flow” of information may seem disjointed to you, but quite natural to someone else. And, while some people think I don’t spend enough time explaining one particular point, others think I’m belaboring the same point and they’re impatient that I move on. This happens because the information we each absorb is filtered through our perceptions and values (our ego⁴).

Each person who reads this will have a different perception of it than anyone else who reads it. In addition to personal filtering, the subtle disjointedness you may experience is partly due to the limitations of writing and education. These require that information be presented in some linear fashion, which isn’t how we assimilate information and certainly not how personal transformation happens. Nothing about any healing process is linear, but we can only write or talk about it that way.

The fact that you may have authority or status like being a parent or a boss over someone, or that the other person is an “ersatz-hostage” through a complex circumstance (as in some marriages or disadvantaged through economics or language) is not a reason to make the other person responsible for communication chaos. At first, communicating clearly is time consuming, hard work, and can be embarrassing, but it’s an essential component to exiting your destructive and pain-generating patterns.

I make reference to *Emotional Freedom Techniques* and body energy healing. This is a very effective self-applied technique. Once it is learned and mastered, healing from trauma and illness, resolving lingering emotional problems like anxieties, anger, fears, phobias, headaches, back pain, skin conditions, etc., can be remarkably quick. Please consider reading my manual: *Body Energy Healing – The Starter Manual*. It’s a free download at www.GracefulTransformation.com or www.richardwclark.com.

This manual on communicating is one chapter of my next book, *Facets of Personal Transformation* scheduled for publication in early 2010. As such, the information herein, although accurate, will contain minor errors in grammar and will be rewritten and probably expanded for final publication.

³ Years ago I clipped this out of a magazine, and have only a small piece of glossy paper with this quote on it. It appears to be from a mail-order club of some description, but I don’t know which one. To the editor who included it in the magazine, thank you.

⁴ Ego is discussed at [Appendix IV](#) in *Addictions & Spiritual Transformation*.

It is important that I stress this will not usually all fit together and make clear sense at your first reading. It really does all fit together smoothly, but you will have to study it and practice what I suggest. It is also important that I offer this caution: should you practice this diligently and become fluid in excellent communication, three things will become abundantly clear:

- how poorly most people communicate; how unclear or inarticulate they (we) really are;
- how quickly others become defensive (or sometimes will actually quit the relationship) when you are consistent, clear, and specific in your own communication; and,
- when you are clear and concise, you, yourself, will be more easily held accountable. As a former client once aptly remarked: “I really don’t like this—the more clear I am, the less wiggle-room I have.” She was quickly learning she had been hiding behind evasiveness and could no longer do this.

Rights and Freedoms

The following exposition is indirectly related to communication in general and underlies all discussion about communication, so it necessarily comes first. Your Rights and Freedoms are crucial and related to everything in the realm of human relations. To achieve true intimacy and fulfillment, you need, probably more than anything else, to claim and offer Rights and Freedoms. You should have been offered them when you were an infant—before you knew you had them; before you even knew you were a person. This is difficult because they threaten our notions of safety. These rights are embodied in spiritual principles.⁵

As adults, in relationships with everyone, and especially in any healing journey, too often your rights are vaguely implied out of muddy notions of dignity and self esteem. Here are your rights in intimate, personal relationships. You “should” have:

- the right to say “No” without fear of malicious or punitive consequence. If you decline or limit what you do or say, there should be no other-imposed harmful consequence.
- the right to expect confidentiality; what you say or do will be kept appropriately or respectfully private. *Gossip is always a betrayal of trust and gossip includes those private conversations you have with your best friend about your partner.* Confidentiality isn’t limited to the legislated privacy of privileged information, and it doesn’t automatically mean keeping secrets. Confidentiality cannot masquerade as a device to perpetuate abuse, or to conceal reprehensible behavior. To offer confidentiality is to offer respect.
- the right to your dignity and respect: you will not knowingly be shamed or humiliated, maligned, or misrepresented.
- the right to question or challenge anything that happens in relation to yourself or to those under your legitimate care. You have the right to ensure that you understand what’s going on in relation to you.

Children, and others who significantly depend on support workers to live, live with authority figures that wield tremendous power. Hopefully their caregivers are loving and benevolent, since personal rights are only available to some people if they are generously offered by the authority figures who control their life. In optimum circumstances, the time to learn to say “No” and to set boundaries is when you’re four, not when you’re 37 sitting in a therapist’s office, but this seriously threatens our fundamental notions of parenting.

As an adult, whether or not you have your rights and freedoms in relationships is a function of how you allow yourself to be treated (primarily by yourself).⁶ Without them you can only act at being a grown-up.⁷

What’s the connection to communication? Briefly, and this is oversimplified, it is having little or no access to your rights and freedoms, or allowing someone to have emotional privilege over yourself, or demanding emotional privilege over others, prohibits authentic communication.

⁵ “Five Spiritual Principles”, [Appendix II](#) from *Addictions & Spiritual Transformation* is a free download at www.richardwclark.com.

⁶ For another perspective if this, see [Appendix IV](#) [Ego] in *Addictions & Spiritual Transformation*.

⁷ Many adults only mimic what they’ve seen other adults do, and so they “act like grown-ups”, whatever that means. They don’t really have a clue about what “being themselves” means, and can only make it up as they go along, which most often ends up with them in awkward and unfulfilling circumstances.

Attendant to your rights, you have this primary responsibility: *You are responsible to ensure that you offer these rights to others; to offer them gracefully, as a matter of course.* The fact that someone doesn't know their rights or freedoms doesn't mean you have a license to withhold them.

Invariably, the thousands of people I've discussed "rights" with have been unclear on what these are. No one I've ever spoken to, including professionals, has appeared as if they thought about these to any length, or spoken of them in a manner that touched on all four. A surprising number of people professionally concerned with emotional health are genuinely puzzled and mumble some dismissive comment like, "Don't know, never thought of it." Usually any discussion of rights and freedoms is vague and borders on legislated culpability. Work at having these rights perceptible, defined, and visible in your life. Insist on them for yourself and offer them to others.

After a person lives with their rights for an extended period, they will naturally accrue their freedoms. This sequence is important: rights first, freedoms second. Once a person is well established in their Rights and Freedoms then effective communication seems to be a very natural component to life. So...

Out of having access to your rights, which under ideal developmental conditions would have been offered to you freely and graciously by your caretakers (before you were old enough to know you had caretakers), you would have automatically evinced your freedoms. If you are given your rights, acquiring your freedoms is automatic. The first five freedoms are from *Making Contact*, by Virginia Satir.⁸ The sixth is my addition to the list.

- (i) *The freedom to see and hear what is here instead of what should be, was, or will be.*
- (ii) *The freedom to say what one feels and thinks, instead of what one should.*
- (iii) *The freedom to feel what one feels, instead of what one ought.*
- (iv) *The freedom to ask for what one wants, instead of always waiting for permission.*
- (v) *The freedom to take risks on one's own behalf, instead of choosing to be only "secure" and not rocking the boat.*
- (vi) *The freedom to desire and create for one's own benefit, instead of catering to the wishes or demands of others.*

The only way we realize our potential in communication in intimate relationships, is by living with our rights and freedoms, regardless of the cost. You may have to forego relationships with family, friends, or spouses, but unless you are willing to insist on your rights and freedoms for yourself, you will remain unfulfilled. [From this: Authentic Values can only be realized when someone has consistent and long-term access to their Rights and Freedoms. That detailed discussion will be in *Facets of Personal Transformation*.]

We Can Not Not Communicate

We can communicate clearly or not clearly, but we can not choose to not communicate. If a person moved into the wilderness and gave no explanation to anyone, they would still communicate various things about their attitude towards their relationships, life, and society. If a person slams a door, or watches TV for several hours each day, or drives aggressively, they communicate contempt, or anger, or fear, or... whatever; but they are *not* not communicating. Ask someone how they are and they ignore you or sneer, what are they communicating? Approach all relationships, *especially the relationship with yourself*, with the belief that we can *not* not communicate.

Blaming others for misreading our own confusing and contradictory messages is, at the minimum, irresponsible. Expecting others to figure out our confusing "communication signals", without ourselves doing anything, or assuming others should be able to figure them out, sets up an array of problems. It is each person's responsibility to communicate clearly. We can *not* not communicate.

Emotions – Feelings

Emotion derives from the French word *esmovoir* (from the Latin word *exmovere*). If we broke down the Latin word it would be: *EX – MOVERE*, i.e.: *ex...* (disturb) *movere...* (move away). The sensations and emotions we experience are directly related to the energy dynamics of our body. Emotions result from chemical changes, which are dependent on body energy and, depending on what the emotions are, they motivate us to do something.

⁸ *Making Contact*, Virginia Satir, Celestial Arts (Press), Berkeley, CA, 1976.

Symbolically, or literally, “having a feeling” is to be affected or disturbed and to be moved to do something. Emotions and sensations are what prepare your body for action. They’re energy demanding you pay attention to something within yourself. We ‘move’ to our feelings.

There is much value in being able to articulate the sensations and emotions that manifest within us. This “should” be natural, but most of us have been well trained to modify, suppress, or deny them to appease the sensibilities and/or comfort of various authority figures.

Look up the following words in a dictionary; write a brief definition beside each word—learn what it means. Describe incidents from your life where you felt that way. Be thorough. We have a wide range of emotions and combinations of emotions. In order to “get in touch with them” we must know what they are. When it’s anger, or some variation of anger like frustrated, annoyed, irate, or irritated, what’s the other emotion associated with the anger? Anger never exists by itself; it is always associated with another feeling like shame, fear, or loneliness. Monitor yourself and frequently refer to this sheet.

Emotion	Definition	Incidents
Afraid		
Anxious		
Nervous		
Sad		
Lonely		
Vindictive		
Grumpy		
Ashamed		
Embarrassed		
Self-conscious		
Shy		
Worried		
Aggressive		
Angry		
Irritated		
Annoyed		
Frustrated		
Irate		

Fear is the emotion that moves you to **run away** (or otherwise escape).

Anger is the emotion that moves you to **protect and defend**.

Nervous is the emotion that moves you to **caution**.

Joy is the emotion that moves you to **celebrate**.

Happiness is the emotion that moves you to **play**.

Sadness is the emotion that moves you to **cry**.

Coldness is the sensation that moves you to **find warmth**.

Hunger is the sensation that moves you to **eat**.
Nausea / Pain / Fever are the sensations that move you to **self care/stop**.
Aroused is the sensation that moves you to **sensuous behavior**.
Shame is the feeling that moves you to **hide**.

An **emotion or a sensation** moves you to **do** something—remember this, it’s important. The next time your body experiences an emotion or a sensation, ask yourself: “*What is my body telling me to do?*”

As with communicating (we can *not* not communicate), it’s important to know and remember that *we can not not have feelings*. People can’t choose to not experience feelings—emotions, sensations, or combinations of them. Yes, we can choose to hide emotions, or translate them, or exaggerate or minimize them, or deny and repress them—but, we can’t not have them. Certainly if a person spends years and years hiding/denying their feelings it will seem like they don’t have feelings, but they do. As soon as they think they are safe enough to stop hiding them, and given time to contemplate what’s happening, they’ll begin to experience a wide range of emotions.

We exist in the dynamics of energy (explained in the *Emotional Freedom Techniques* manual) and emotion is one manifestation of energy. Responding appropriately to the sensations or emotions you experience, and not avoiding them, is what animates your body and lets you be alive. I assume in movies or in real life we have all seen dancers who are so graceful they embody the music they dance to. I recall the privilege of dancing with a woman in China a number of years ago. She was so graceful she was literally an extension of the music. It “should” be like that with our emotions: We “should” be in graceful harmony with what we feel (and honor it).

As trite and vague as it may sound, human beings are supposed to move gracefully to (with) their inner experience; human beings evade or otherwise suppress/deny their inner experience. Not responding to your inner experience or having a very limited range of responses is being emotionally shackled and, always in some manner, destructive.

Be aware of the distinction between experiencing feelings and sensations (no choice) and responding to them (choice).⁹ Your expression of feelings and sensations, depending on the social context, is to a noticeable degree what defines the adjectives and labels attached to your character, i.e. kind, mean, gentle, insensitive, rude, inconsiderate, sensitive, compassionate, harsh, friendly.

Sensations

The dynamics of biology—how our body works—provides us with information that allows us to survive and care for ourselves. This is done by providing us with sensations.

- hot, warm, cold, clammy, chilly, feverish, wet, dry, sweaty, hungry, sated, parched, horny, sore, achy, pains, nausea, headache pain, tension, dizzy, itchy, skin tingles, tired, sleepy, bloated, muscle twitches, shivers.

Categories of Information

Bits of communication information can be categorized in a multitude of ways. Here, arbitrarily divided for the purpose of education and clarity, I have assigned the information you communicate to one of three general categories. It may sound tedious, but please bear with me. These categories are:

- (1) **Ideas, Thoughts, Beliefs, Reality/Things** (everything outside of self)—science, ideas, matter, nature, animals, and your ideas and values about these; everything that isn’t in categories 2 or 3.¹⁰
- (2) **Emotions or Feelings** (inner emotional experience)—sad, happy, emotional pain, angry, afraid, shy, joyous, embarrassed.

⁹ Again, this discussion regards the ordinary course of human affairs, and potentially excludes hostages, victims of crime, and children who live with a parental terrorist (aggressive, abusive, violent, domineering).

¹⁰ This relates to those aspects of life, referred to as The Corporeal Universe (theories, ideas, matter, external reality) in the [Appendix IV](#) (Ego) in *Addictions & Spiritual Transformation*.

(3) **Physical Sensations** (inner physical experience)—hot, hungry, tired, cold, sated, physical pain, nausea, sexually aroused.

These categories are very often used in conjunction with each other *and* they are interrelated. In clear communication however, it is important to select words and construct sentences that fit with what you are talking about. As clear as you may be on your own inner experience, you must be equally clear on how you represent this externally. Here are examples that demonstrate the point at hand and can easily create confusion:

(i) “I feel like meeting my friends tonight.” — Are they saying they feel lonely; they feel happy; they feel insecure; they feel depressed? As expressed in the sentence, *feel* is unclear. In this context, what does “feel” mean?

(ii) “I feel like going to bed.” — This is also unclear. Is the person saying they feel horny and bed is a euphemism for sex; they feel ill and want to recuperate; or they feel tired and want to sleep?

As silly or tedious as it may sound, regarding “feelings”, neither sentence is clear. They sound like they are about feelings, but really they aren’t; they’re about behaviors—meeting friends and going to bed. Yes, it may appear pedantic, but it’s your job to communicate clearly, not everyone else’s job to assume, infer, or guess. Here are two other examples that are easily misleading.

(iii) “I feel like ripping your face off!”, and,
(iv) “I feel that you’re a liar.”

Aside from the aggressive or caustic nature of these last two examples, one is a threat and the other is character assassination. These will invite confusion and defensiveness from whomever they are directed at.

When people say: “I feel like...”, “I feel you...”, “I feel when...”, “I feel that...”, they won’t be talking accurately about their own emotions or sensations (which are the *feeling* categories of communication noted in #2 and #3 above). Using the word “feel” with the words “like, you, when, or that”, can be easily misleading. People who use these phrases are communicating, but there is much room for misunderstanding. The related emotions or sensations are left ambiguous and to assumption. It’s subtle and it’s important. For the examples (iii) and (iv) I’ll transpose the communications from the way they’re presented [unclear, threatening, ambiguous, labeling, non-feeling] into clear, non-controlling, feeling-specific, sentences.

Transposing Example (iii): “I feel like ripping your face off!”

Assume a person is disrespectful and embarrasses and teases you. You respond: “I feel like ripping your face off!” Here, the emotions are only vigorously implied and require guess work to identify them. There’s no stated emotional accuracy, and there’s a threatening or controlling intent. Rage is implied; so is violence. This invites defensiveness from the other person.

It could be improved to: “I feel angry and I want to slap you.” Anger is clearly identified and as such, this is an improvement; however, anger is an isolating emotion and can still be easily misunderstood (more about the components of anger later). The behavior of slapping is threatening. Depending on the extant circumstances at the time, it may represent imminent or potential danger which carries in it an implied desire to dominate and control.

This could be improved to: “I feel hurt when you tease me.” [or] “I feel angry and embarrassed when I am the brunt of your jokes.” Here, finally, there are *specific* feelings related to a *specific* behavior. It’s factual, very clear, and there’s no threat of violence.

Transposing Example (iv): “I feel that you’re a liar.”

Assume a “significant other” has missed a Friday evening date with you. They give one reason on Saturday, and a second, rather different story, several days later. You respond: “I feel that you’re a liar.”

In that short sentence, there are no identified emotions; they’re only implied and to be guessed at through assumption. And, with no modifier to the noun *liar*, there’s the implied stereotype of the other person being a complete liar. This always invites defensiveness. (There’s more about this in Stereotyping & Globalization.)

It could be improved to: “I’m really angry that you’re dishonest,” which is better, but not much. Here again, the isolating emotion of anger is identified, and the overall stereotype of “liar” is reduced to a general behavior, “dishonest”. There’s still nothing specific that’s workable to resolution.

Yet again, it could be improved to: “I feel hurt and worried (or confused) because what you told me today is different from what you told me a few days ago.” Your specific feelings are related to the other person’s specific but contradictory behaviors. This makes it factual.

By modifying examples (iii) and (iv) in these ways, they become non-threatening, non-controlling, and factual. Assumptions are not made. There’s no character assassination or intent to control. With that, it is now possible to begin to resolve the conflict.

Communicating is obviously most effective when you offer your information in such a way that it is accurate and leaves no room for misinterpretation. When the speaker is specific and clear about three things: feelings, behaviors, and events or ideas, the communication transaction is least threatening. It is also least susceptible to misinterpretation and sidetracking. In the routine areas of communicating, reframing your language in this way is the least threatening way to present information. However, in those hopefully rare situations when you may find it necessary to make threats, this will make your threats more believable. Clarity is powerful.

Remembering these three categories is one of the keys to clear communication.

(1) **Ideas, Thoughts, Beliefs, Reality/Things** (everything outside of self)—science, ideas, matter, nature, animals, and your ideas and values about these; everything that isn’t in categories 2 or 3.¹¹

(2) **Emotions or Feelings** (inner emotional experience)—sad, happy, emotional pain, angry, afraid, shy, joyous, embarrassed.

(3) **Physical Sensations** (inner physical experience)—hot, hungry, tired, cold, sated, physical pain, nausea, sexually aroused.

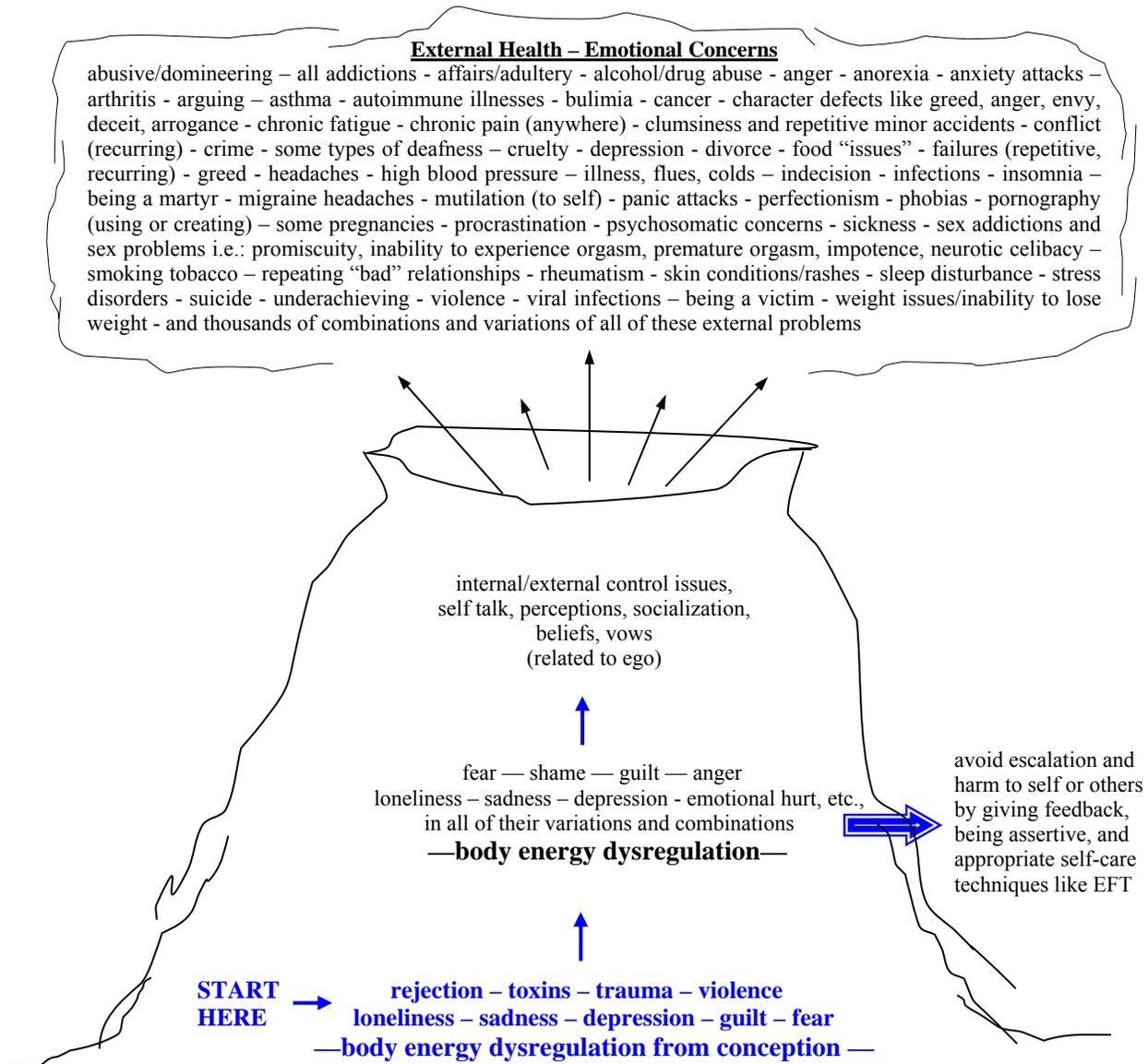
If you’re offering information that fits in the first category, you’ll be most effective when you begin your sentences with “I think...” “I want...” “I believe...”. If you are offering information that is in the last two categories, begin with “I feel...”, but then ensure the next word is an emotion or a sensation.

Yes, initially, it is tedious and may sound silly to some people, but it’s your responsibility to communicate clearly. You’ll be surprised what a difference this can make.

¹¹ This relates to those aspects of life, referred to as The Corporeal Universe (theories, ideas, matter, external reality) in the [Appendix IV](#) (Ego) in *Addictions & Spiritual Transformation*.

The Volcano

Body energy is responsible for all of our inner experience, including emotions. Dysregulated (unhealthy) body energy that is left untended causes all of the emotional, physical, and spiritual health issues we experience. Although a time-worn metaphor, there is a practical and valid symbolism in representing this dynamic as a volcano. Read carefully this (rather long) list of the consequences of body-energy dysregulation...



There are professionally efficient therapies for body energy dysregulation described in my booklet *Body Energy Healing – The Starter Manual*. These self-applied, self-help techniques often resolve or greatly reduce all manner of emotional and physical conditions, many of which are listed at the mouth of the volcano. (Yes, it sound very strange, but it’s true.)¹²

Emotional Deafness – Emotional First Aid

¹² *Emotional Freedom Techniques, Quantum Techniques, and Self Regulating Therapy®* are the body energy healing therapies I find amazingly effective and use extensively in my work. See: www.GracefulTransformation.com. Frequently and most often, when approached with skill and commitment, they produce remarkable and impressive results. Please read the disclaimers related to their use.

People suffer from emotional wounds.¹³ We've all experienced an emotional wound at some time in our lives. When people are emotionally hurt there is the immediate influence of each person's sensibilities and perspectives which cause any number of things to happen.¹⁴ How anyone responds to any specific circumstance is often quite different from what your response would be. One of the more important things that's usually overlooked is, they become "deaf"; what I refer to as "emotionally deaf". Remember a time when you tried to speak to someone who was in serious emotional pain—they didn't hear a thing you were saying. Their emotions were "too big"; there was too much pain.

Emotional Deafness happens when someone is experiencing strong pain. They can't hear things that are said to them—their emotional pain gets in the way of hearing things. In order to begin helping someone who is in a lot of emotional pain you first have to take away some of the emotional deafness. They have an "emotional" injury that must be tended to. In order to help them you have to do *Emotional First Aid*.

Emotional First Aid helps someone heal from an emotional wound. Just telling them to forget their pain or to ignore it or smarten up doesn't work; in fact giving instructions will make it worse. In a way, this is like regular first aid, except you are dealing with an emotional rather than a physical wound. Sincerely demonstrating the skill of Emotional First Aid will help the other person. It is done by:

- acknowledging or recognizing the other person's emotional pain. Regardless of any esoteric perceptions of "pain" or chosen beliefs of non-attachment, the pain is real. It doesn't matter that you can't understand it or don't agree with it. It's important that you let them have their pain—recognize and accept it as theirs. You don't have to agree with it, just acknowledge and respect it;
- making an effort to understand it from their point of view. At that moment, their perceptions of the circumstances and how hurt they are are true for them, whether or not you share their perceptions. Work at seeing it their way; and,
- communicating to them, in a supportive way, your acknowledgment (or understanding, or appreciation) of what they are experiencing. Communicate this quietly *and*, as best you can, keep your own judgments out of the transaction.

The general rule is: Everyone is entitled to all of their own feelings. Period. That may make you uncomfortable in many situations (especially if you have some vested interest in the transaction), but that's the way it is. One of the fastest ways to cause trouble in a relationship is to try and control someone's feelings. Telling a person what to feel, or what not to feel, or how much to feel; telling them to cheer up or settle down, or to get-a-grip, or to disagree with their own description of their feelings, will get you into trouble *every* time.

Here is a fundamental rule of healthy relationships: Do not control, manipulate, debate, shame, endorse, suppress, deny, minimize, or exaggerate another person's feelings. [After having said that so assertively, with some noticeable caution, I offer that there are some exceptions to that rule. However, those exceptions carry accompanying potential hazards. This is discussed in *Addictions & Spiritual Transformation*.]

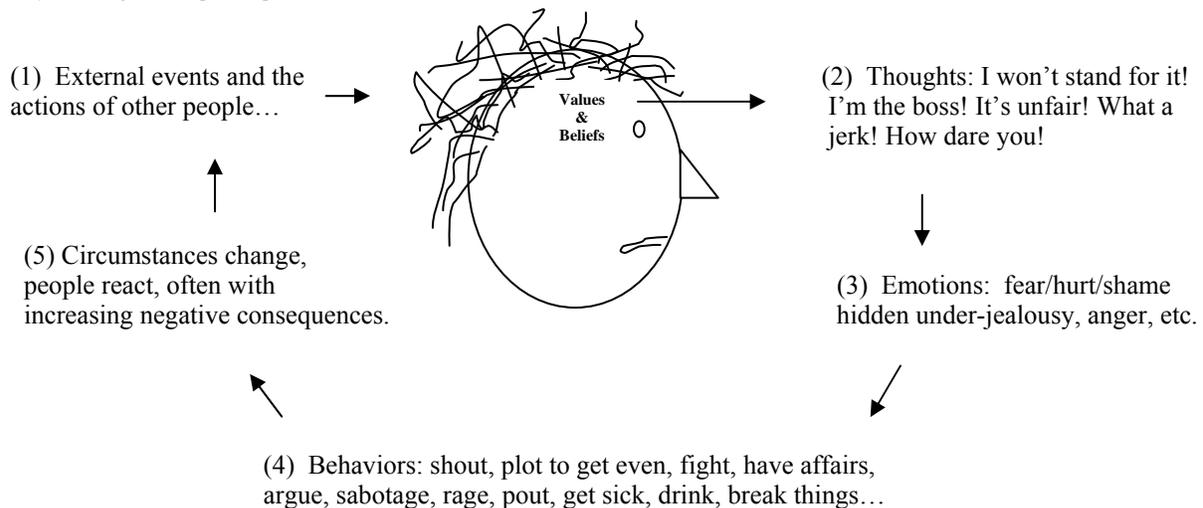
¹³ The word "pain" implies a Gordian Knot of perspectives and dynamics that is comprised of psychological, physical, and emotional pain that's influenced by drama, psychology, vows, beliefs, exaggeration, confabulation, minimization, emotional fusion, and over-coupling. "Resolving" pain is, of course, one of the motivating subtexts of all behavior. I refer to it frequently in *Addictions & Spiritual Transformation*. Some pages of note are 35, 85-88, 119, and 123, and trauma in its three main aspects is defined at p. 431. Some of the other terms are explained in the free download EFT manual.

¹⁴ In the context of the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama we are hurt because we have chosen to be hurt by maintaining a belief or adhering to a vow that promotes debt and entitlement. See the related discussion in *Addictions & Spiritual Transformation*, pp. 261-268.

Perceptions And Emotions

Negative events (whatever that means) are not what causes “bad” feelings. Incidentally, there isn’t such a thing as a bad feeling and some people believe there are no bad events, either—it’s all perception. “Bad” feelings aren’t necessarily bad. Good or bad emotions result from a person’s energy system and chemicals, and how they translate their emotions—how the body-mind links images (emotional fusion and over-coupling¹⁵); and their vows and beliefs in relation to events. Perceptions and emotions reflect the dynamics of personality and energy biology.

In the diagram below (at #1), something happens in the world. You see it, hear about it, or experience it. It’s attached to a value system (your internal beliefs and values/attitudes) and so you think something (at #2) based on a belief or a vow and influences of mylenation and body energy. Those thoughts cause an energy response—a chemical reaction (from the limbic brain), in-between steps #2 and #3—and things happen in your body. This is called “having a feeling” or a sensation (at #3). Your emotions at #3 move you to act. Your behavior (at #4) is dependent on what you feel. You do something (#4). Your behavior then influences external events and things change (at #5). The cycle begins again.



Recognize that you really are powerless over other people, their behavior, and external events (#1 and #5). In many but not all situations, you are also powerless over what you feel (emotions at #3 are generated by chemicals in your body which your brain produces). You only have control over your “beliefs and values” and your behaviors at #4. When you modify your values and challenge the way you think (at #2), and heal at a body energy level (underneath #3), and accept responsibility for your behaviors (at #4), you will be less irritable, struggle to control other people less, and (at #5) events won’t get worse.¹⁶

Self Talk – How Thinking Sets Up Conflict.

There are five ways we think that make conflict, anger, and emotional chaos difficult to eliminate from our lives. We set ourselves up in subtle ways for translating feelings (switching from one to the other like fear to anger), or for escalating feelings (going from annoyed to frustrated to angry to furious). This is one dynamic of drama. Once this is embedded in our limbic brain energy responses, then over-coupling makes these patterns a standard process.

The way we think often makes issues and emotions bigger and more complicated. This self talk originates in what we were taught, the way we perceive and think about the world, what our expectations are, our physiology,

¹⁵ These terms are defined in the Emotional Freedom Techniques free download manual at www.GracefulTransformation.com

¹⁶ This is another perspective of what is described her. See: The Two Step Dance in Chapter 8, *Addictions & Spiritual Transformation*. Perceptions in relation to authority and power are also a significant factor in this dynamic. This is sometimes referred to as Locus of Control: If you believe the governing authority in your life is outside of yourself (an external locus of control) you will be a passive agent in Life and react to what’s done to you by the outside authorities over which you have no influence. If you believe your life is governed by your own authority, this is an internal locus of control. It is this *self*-perception of inner authority that results in fulfillment and self-determination.

and what our assumptions are. Self Talk is a significant way to distort things. (Note on The Volcano p. 11 where self talk happens in the process of translating and escalating.)

Here are five ways we think (self-talk) that get us into trouble, especially anger trouble.

1) **Perfectionism**

Conflict, and the anger associated with it, is very destructive when it's associated with perfectionism. This means using a lot of "shoulds" and "shouldn'ts" in your thoughts and speech: "You shouldn't have...", "You should have...", "You ought to have...", "I should have...", "They should have...". Aside from the fact you mistakenly believe you are entitled to expect perfection from others (people do make mistakes), you criticize yourself when you are not perfect. Here are three situations where demands for perfectionism are fatal to conflict resolution.

The first is stereotyping in social roles where you expect perfection and say should or shouldn't to others, in areas where you yourself cannot do well. For example: One person (a non-cooking type) might say to a cook they should be better at cooking. Perfectionism (and stereotyping) allows that one group of people (non-cooks) can insist on improvement and perfection and justify their anger at another group of people (cooks) in an area where the first group has no expertise. So one group demands perfection from another group when they know nothing about the subject they're demanding perfection about.

The second is justifying and demanding perfection from others in those areas that we excel at (sometimes because of compulsive behavior). An example is: "You shouldn't ever be late for work! I am never, ever late!", implying "I" am a better person. They have justified their anger and abuse because another person isn't as perfectionistic or compulsive as they, themselves, are. This is frequently done so the person demanding perfection can bolster their need for righteousness because of their own insecurity.

The third is in "superior-subordinate" relationships (employer-employee; teacher-student; parent-child). A supervisor harps upon and exaggerates errors, and demands perfection (which is impossible) to maintain the illusion of superior worth/status, efficiency, or power. Errors and less-than-perfect behavior from subordinates are held up as justification for anger and punishment, sometimes to only maintain the status quo and subtle forms of righteousness (which in itself is generally abusive). Underneath this is an ego-insecurity and a need to be and been seen as "superior" and better-than.

In Perfectionism, someone else fails to be perfect and that's the excuse to justify negative criticism and anger. The perfectionist lives in a compulsive and insecure world. They get angry and damage a relationship because they or someone else they apparently care about acts just like a human being.¹⁷

2) **Stereotyping and Globalization**

When you think that someone is a jerk, a bum, or a liar, whether or not you say it out loud, you are seeing that person in a completely disrespectful way. You have ignored any part of them that is worthwhile. That is labeling, or globalizing, or stereotyping. It's an all-inclusive thought or statement, which always rests on assumptions, inference, and your own arrogance and insecurities.

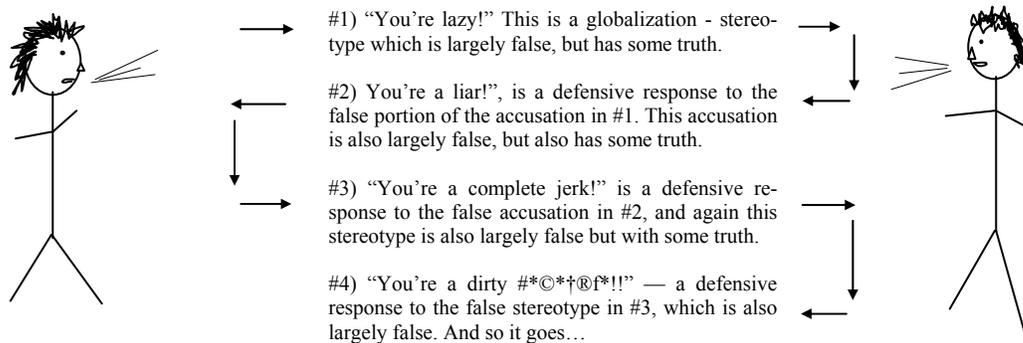
When you stereotype or label someone in this way, according to you, everything about them is unworthy or tainted. The other person has no good qualities. You have attempted to eliminate their worth which justifies them as a target for your righteous anger. This allows you to feel morally superior. You believe (self righteously) you are entitled to your opinions or feelings because they are lying, inferior, a waste of time; or too stupid, mean or cruel to bother with. Your self esteem is acquired in a destructive, empty way: seeing yourself better than them. You will have to continue to label and stereotype others in order to feel good.

Conflict is an intensely personal thing. Communication cannot be meaningful and conflict cannot be resolved if you approach it with "global" thoughts that label and stereotype. If you stereotype another person, it pushes them away from you (or you from them). The other person will sense this and will be hurt and insulted, or angry, and they'll be self righteous about it. They'll retaliate and label you as a "total jerk" for labeling them.

For the person who is stereotyped, the battle becomes a defensive action—defending yourself against false accusations. Anyone who is stereotyped is wrongly accused—they're not the complete jerk or total fool they are

¹⁷ Always bear in mind this is in the realm of "ordinary" human relationships and may not apply to judicious parenting, or in compliance with the ethical sanctions of our community or culture.

made out to be. Should someone say to you “You’re nothing but a liar!” you know that’s not completely true. You will defend against the part that’s false. Start at #1 and follow through to #4...



In order to keep your own *self*-image intact, you must defend against the part that isn’t true: #2 is a defensive-reaction to #1; #3 is a defensive reaction to #2; #4 is a defensive reaction to #3, etc. You’ll put others down because they put you down. So what can you do?

Remember that in reality, the other person isn’t a totally worthless jerk, or a complete liar, regardless of how much you insist they are. Nobody’s completely perfect or totally evil or stupid. Instead of trying to prove they’re a total anything, which can’t be done (because it’s never true), just exit the cycle. You, yourself, stop globalizing and stereotyping. This is an exceedingly difficult thing to do. However, if you stop, the other person will have to stop since there’s nothing for them to defend against. Get responsible for your attitudes and be specific and not general. In the beginning, resolving communication conflict is a matter of detail. [That’s why in giving feedback (discussed later), it’s important to be specific about behaviors.]

3) Jumping To Conclusions

This type of self-talk revolves around your proclaimed ability to predict the future, or to know the unknowable. There are three ways you Jump To Conclusions, especially when you think you are in trouble and in relation to anger and conflict:

a) Mind Reading is you believing you know exactly what another person is thinking in any given situation. Most often it really means you assume that others are thinking the same things about you that you would think if the situation were reversed. In the case of anger or disapproval: you would be angry or disapproving of that behavior should it be done to you and so if you would get angry you believe you “know” they would get angry because you would get angry. (Fun, eh?) The faulty belief is that others think and believe what you do, or that others share the same perceptions and values as you do.

b) Fortune Telling happens when you claim to know exactly what another person will do in a given situation in the future—you believe you know how someone is going to act in a specific circumstance. You’re a fortune teller and think you can predict the future. You are prescient to the degree of clairvoyance. In conflict, your faulty belief is in any given situation, other people would act the way you do. Fortune Telling generates defensiveness and anger in you before anything happens.

c) Assumptions are a self-talk problem related to stereotyping. Assumptions are based on inadequate or inaccurate information—you filling in the blanks of your own knowledge with whatever information you make up that caters to your secret prejudices and insecurities. Your assumptions provide whatever information you “need” to bolster the gaps in your own faulty reasoning. With assumptions, you will generate conflict and anger before you know what you’re talking about.

So, in the Jumping To Conclusions category you:

- get angry because you would get angry (Mind Reading);
- get angry because nothing’s happened yet (Fortune Telling); or
- get angry because you don’t know what you’re talking about (Assumptions).

The farther you jump (to conclusions) the more conflict/anger you will generate in yourself and the greater the resulting conflict will be. Coincidental to this, the more outrageous the assumptions and stereotyping, the more a person has to be belligerent to defend them; and belligerence doesn’t really defend anything, it intimidates others into submission.

4) **Exaggerating and Minimizing (Binocular Thinking)**

This is the fourth self-talk problem that I refer to as Binocular Thinking. When you look through binoculars backwards, everything becomes smaller than normal; look at something through binoculars correctly, it becomes bigger than normal. If you do either of these, the perception is misleading and problems cannot be solved without first solving the problem of magnification. This is directly related to self-perception in self-pity, for “victims” and drama junkies—minimizing or maximizing their inability or the difficulty of external circumstances. Whether you exaggerate or minimize is dependent on: (1) where you place blame, (2) where you perceive the authority sits (locus of control); and (3), how willing you are to accept your own share of the responsibility, which is usually 100%.

If you’ve made a mistake and try to avoid responsibility you might sound like this: “It’s not that bad; I mean come on now! Relax! It’s not a big deal.” You minimize your responsibility and minimize their feelings—look at the circumstances through the binoculars backwards and make the event and your culpability smaller. In other situations, to shift blame, you exaggerate the other person’s share of responsibility: “Oh ya? Look what you did!”—look at the event through the binoculars “correctly”—their share is magnified.

The other person knows immediately you’re trying to shift responsibility. They get angry and justify their anger because you’re minimizing or exaggerating. Your response is to get more angry, trying to stop them from identifying your irresponsibility, while still trying to claim they’re more responsible.¹⁸ People also frequently try to minimize anger in others, giving the other person less influence, and try and exaggerate their own anger to get more influence. This always results in more abuse.

People justify being victims, and justify their irresponsibility, depression, and self-pity, when they minimize their strengths and maximize their weaknesses. Others (rescuers) exaggerate their share of the responsibility and thereby exonerate the other person. Persecutors and religious elitists exaggerate their righteousness and exaggerate the “sins” of others. Watch for minimizing or exaggerating; it throws everything out of proportion and problem solving is impossible, at least until such time as the binoculars are set aside.

5) **Justice and Fair Play**

This type of destructive self-talk is based on a certain philosophy of life and what people believe about the universe. Angry people often justify their anger by believing life isn’t fair. Someone isn’t nice to them, someone took advantage, or some “bad” thing happened, and they were trying so hard. (Ask them how hard they are trying; they’ll tell you!) The underlying belief is the world is supposed to be just and fair. So... who said that?

One idea suggests this developed over a long period of time from religious leaders and royalty. When education and knowledge were limited and restricted to a few people, and tainted with superstition and myth, those who took power and demanded privilege insisted life was just and fair—but only the Gods could understand it. Powerful people claimed it was fate—a destiny that somehow everyone was born “in their place”—be it powerful or poor or sick or rich or closer to God—but only the Gods (or God) could understand it.

Of course being powerful or being “God’s agent on earth” carried with it certain privileges. In medieval times, it was “Fate”. Poor and sick people “had to” suffer [the abuse] because they weren’t chosen by Fate for power or glory. Those who presumed power (with power) claimed they couldn’t understand it either—but somehow it was fair and only God could understand fairness. Some people believe life is fair—usually people who haven’t been set back by fate too often. Fair is an abstract concept created by people to justify all sorts of self-serving behaviors.

¹⁸ Responsibility (and/or lack thereof) is a *significant* factor in addictions and recovery. Addressing irresponsibility is one major theme of *Addictions & Spiritual Transformation*. For additional discussion, see the index of that text and the footnote, p. 335.

Another idea about where the belief “life is supposed to be fair” comes from is with an insecurity that some people have of being afraid of the unknown. Realizing how fragile we are, and that we live by geological consent, the temporariness of Life and Good Fortune can be intimidating. Some people decide they cannot cope with a world that is random and unpredictable; in a world ruled by chance, where we really don’t know what will happen next. Physical existence appears to be reasonably logical in chemistry and science and so it must be logical in justice. “Fate” is the presumed logic of the universe for what we can never understand. Some people struggle to believe life is somehow orderly and just but they can’t understand it, and they expect (demand) that it be fair. Then they can only hope fairness happens. When it doesn’t, they get angry.

Life isn’t “fair” to a rabbit being eaten by a wolf, to animals being unnecessarily slaughtered for food, to a fish having to swim in a polluted ocean; and it isn’t fair to people. We get diseases, have accidents, get killed and hurt, without any justification or sense of fairness. That’s life in the human world, just as random as life in the animal world. “Evil people” win, “good people” die young, and other people work hard and finish last. We all know someone in each of these categories. People claim that isn’t fair, and they get angry.

Life just is. Justice and fair play are very abstract. They are human ideas and people made them up. It would appear from my reading and research, it was the religious and secular elite. And, certainly they are culturally specific. It depends on who makes the definitions of what justice is, and how many people accept that definition. The most powerful gang decides what’s fair. The definition of “war criminal” goes to the victor. That’s one of the inherent dangers in democracy—tyranny of the majority; it doesn’t mean it’s fair, it just means that the majority decides what is fair (which has everything to do with power and nothing whatever to do with fairness).

When you think something is unfair or unjust and get angry, it usually means one of two things:

- i) You don’t “understand” life because you are trying hard and lose or finish last. There’s no logic. It seems Fate is against you, which is quite frightening; or,
- ii) Your own life-rules are different and other people are not playing Life by your rules—it’s not who is more right, it’s just that your rules are different and whoever has the power decides.

The anger that results is from you believing Life (or the other person) is acting unfairly. They are, but only in relation to your value system—they’re breaking your rules. Recognize that the other person is acting fairly in their value system; they are doing what they think is right.

Watch yourself when another person acts in a way you think is unfair. Often you will try and manipulate them by logic and reasonableness, and when that doesn’t work, use anger and argument to win the day or become passive-aggressive and fight by subversive tactics like silent scorn, covert manipulation, and distance.¹⁹ You want them to change their mind. If you succeed you “win” but that’s dangerous. You tend to pat yourself on the back and become entrenched in self righteous right/wrong thinking. That’s the fallacy of strength in numbers (the tyranny of the majority). If you lose it’s also dangerous: You label them a jerk or a fool for being stubborn and not listening to reason (your reasons). This means you refuse to admit the other person’s value system is right for them. You’re angry because another person won’t agree with your definition of justice and fair play. How “just and fair” is it to insist that everyone agree with you and if they don’t you’ll pout and get mad.

* * *

These five thinking patterns: Perfectionism, Stereotyping & Globalization, Jumping To Conclusions, Exaggerating & Minimizing, and Justice & Fair Play, cause serious problems. The (ego) self-talk we speak in our minds is very subtle and causes issues and emotions to get bigger and more complicated. It originates in what we believe, and the way we perceive and think about the world.

¹⁹ See the story in *Addictions & Spiritual Transformation*, about Kim and Jan, p. 183/184.

If you have something difficult to talk about, the first thing you say is you have something difficult to talk about.

*Myths About Cultural Anger*²⁰

Anger, in relation to therapy and psychology, has generated a lot of controversy in the last 150 years. For centuries prior to about 1850, various philosophers described anger as unhealthy, unwise, socially risky (a loss of face), and dangerous to express [from Confucius and Lao Tzu c. 500 BCE, through to Galus Tacitus, (c. 56 – 117)]. Anger was a thing to complicate issues, cause trouble, and cloud the mind from reason.

Theories of Charles Darwin (1809-1882) contributed significantly to a not necessarily positive shift in perceptions of anger. Certainly, “anger” and instinct in animals were examined in detail, but the theories were presented independent of human culture. Generally, to adopt the theories proposed by many 19th century theorists leaves you in a self-perpetuating victim role—helpless to anger. As the world becomes “smaller” through technology (transportation, industrialization, sociology, psychology), cultural influences are now recognized as significant in the dynamic of anger.

For the purposes of this discussion, I have arbitrarily divided anger into two classifications. There is instinctual/survival anger and cultural anger. Instinctual anger (rage) might arise when your life or the life of your child or spouse is seriously threatened. This brief discussion is about cultural anger, which is a product of our self esteem, self-image, attitudes, values, religion, temperament, education, and how strongly we believe that life is unfair and that we’re supposed to get our own way.²¹ These are myths about cultural anger and each deserves to be examined in detail.²²

Myth #1: Anger is an essential emotion that we can’t control and/or must live with.

Early researchers compared instinctual self-defense (animal rage) to human anger. The physiology is very similar and “people-anger” was labeled as watered-down animal rage. Early theorists saw animals as helpless to their instincts so it must follow that people were helpless to their anger. Because of the general limitations of knowledge around sociology in the 19th century, cultural issues weren’t considered as a significant influence.

Anger, and its use, varies greatly from culture to culture, and some people in this culture are quite successful having very little or no anger. Cultural anger is a choice. We are taught that having power and getting our own way is good. Anger is a method to get your own way—to scare someone into giving you what you want. This is culturally learned behavior, which means it can be unlearned. Cultural anger, in any of its forms, is not an essential emotion that we must live with. Cultural anger is emotional abuse and we can learn to live without it. Anger ‘management’ is a political ego-game; anger elimination is a mandate of authentic spirituality.

Myth #2: If a little anger doesn’t work then a lot will.

Believing “more is better” is becoming, more and more, a fundamental dysfunction in modern culture. It can manifest in any number of ways from more money or shiny things, to more slimness, more authority, more sex, more muscles, more knowledge, more fame, bigger reputation. Escalating your own sense of indignation or righteousness may get you your own way, but it never resolves conflict; it pushes it underground.

When you get more angry (pushing yourself from annoyed to furious) you are intimidating the other person and trying to get your own way. This tactic is only used to manipulate and is damaging to everyone: those participating, and those on the periphery like co-workers, family members, and friends. Anger demonstrates a commitment to inequality, creates resentments, and establishes the conditions for revenge. It may be hard to believe, but in the case of anger—more is worse, less is better, none is best.

²⁰ These myths are related to information in *Anger, The Misunderstood Emotion*, by Carol Tavris, Touchstone Books, 1989.

²¹ Through over-use and therapeutic propaganda, “self esteem” has now become a trite word that has little specific meaning. As such, it’s difficult to use effectively. I use it here to draw a parallel between the vague notion of self esteem and the ambiguous (vague) notions of responsibility and anger.

²² For in-depth, valuable discussions on anger and responsibility, see (i) *Anger, The Misunderstood Emotion* (revised edition) by Carol Tavris, Touchstone Books, 1989; (ii) *Taking Responsibility*, Nathaniel Branden, Simon & Schuster, 1996; and (iii) *Anger, How To Live Without It*, Albert Ellis, Citadel Press, 1992.

Myth #3: People learn from experience.

If this were true, people wouldn't get into destructive relationships time after time. Without new problem solving skills, rooted in self-insight, individual experience in personal relationships only allows people, especially addicts, to go around in circles. Very often they (we) end up being only more effective neurotics. You can only do what you know how to do. As Buckaroo Banzi said, "*Wherever you go, there you are.*"²³

"Self-help" is a dangerous myth that perpetuates isolation and loneliness. It arose out of what I loosely describe as the modern cultural dynamics of rejection of authority, greed, and a need to impress (primarily ourselves) with a dislocated sense of independence.²⁴ *Self-help* always prohibits getting recovered from addictions; and insisting that learning from experience is the best way sets up an isolating value system. In emotional issues and conflict resolution, gathering new information about yourself (outside of your experience) is what is required to break the cycle. Experience isn't necessarily the best teacher.

Myth #4: Old habits and attitudes require a long time to change.

This myth arose in various contexts. In early psychoanalysis theories were being developed; much of it was experimental, and therapy did and sometimes does, take a long time. This, however, is about anger and the slow progress that some people make in changing their attitudes. It can be a reflection of their willingness and not on the nature of anger. Cultural anger always relates back to perceptions, some sense of entitlement, and personal responsibility.²⁵ The fact is, once you acquire new information about anger, you will change as fast as you want to.

Often, when angry people have been backed into a corner about eliminating their anger (like when facing divorce or incarceration or at mandatory anger management programs) they develop a delayed response strategy to reducing their anger. They silently calculate little increments of anger reduction—yes reduced, but only enough to garner encouragement and praise for their effort—all the while calculating their next fit of "reduced" rage and then plead they're trying. They reduce it as much as they can get away with. Why? Because anger works to get them their own way. Therapists, spouses, court officials, relatives, and children are frequently duped and lured into this game of manipulation.

There's a cycle here. The more you tell yourself it's difficult and will take a long time, the more reluctant and fearful you are. More fear means more resistance, then the more difficult the potential transformation is. You still haven't done anything about changing you're just thinking about how horribly long it will take, and so it will take forever because you never begin. Stop telling yourself it will take forever. Just make a decision and do it. Use the skills and be less angry.²⁶

Myth #5 : You cannot remain competent or calm in a stressful situation.

Invariably, the stressful situation is a circumstance when you are not getting your own way. Remaining competent depends on what you believe about your feelings and your response to them.²⁷ If you believe other people are responsible for how you feel then they will dictate whether or not you remain calm or "lose it". This is complicated, but as long as you never abdicate personal responsibility you can positively influence your responses to your emotions. It depends on your belief about who's the boss (of you). Once you know the skills, exit relationship addiction, and understand responsibility, you can manage any crisis.

Myth #6: Everyone has a breaking point.

Yes, maybe in physical torture and hostage/terrorism, and yes if you repress emotions underneath anger; but you're in charge of you. No matter how much you wish you weren't—you are. Someone once said that personality is a matter of moment-to-moment choice. If you decide you can't handle it, you won't. If you believe you can handle it and use the skills, you will.

Myth #7: Anger cannot be eliminated, only suppressed or vented onto someone.

An infant spills a glass of water and you smile and wipe it up. A ten year old spills a glass of water and you get angry. Think of the times you wanted to be angry with someone but weren't because you knew it wouldn't work. You choose to be angry (or not). Choosing to be angry allows choosing to be not-angry. Why do people consistently get angry?... because it consistently works to get them their own way.

²³ *Buckaroo Banzi*, a film starring Peter Weller, Metro Goldwyn Meyer, 1984.

²⁴ This is briefly explained in [Appendix IV](#) of *Addictions & Spiritual Transformation*.

²⁵ This was explained from a slightly different perspective in *Addictions & Spiritual Transformation* beginning at p. 261.

²⁶ People with selfish, scarcity-oriented perceptions are very reluctant to sincerely change, or to become sincerely spiritual. They presume it'll never work out in their favor.

²⁷ This is discussed from another perspective in the free download *EFT Manual*.

Myth # 8: An eye for an eye is best—fight anger with anger.

Most of the time when you get angry with another person they get angry, fight back, argue, or are passive and secretly resentful. Using anger to fight anger makes it worse. If the other person is too afraid to show their anger at you for being angry they'll resent you and manipulate, which of course resolves nothing. Cultural anger always wounds everyone connected with the incident. Using anger to fight anger escalates the danger, complicates the issues, and makes everything worse.

Myth #9 : The real reasons for anger are the ancient, forgotten ones from childhood... it's how I am.

This is somewhat tricky. Waiting around for forgotten memories goes nowhere. While waiting for the memories, and being “willing” to be not angry providing we get our own way, ends in a victim/blaming/guilt cycle based on assumptions and rooted in irresponsibility. You can't change not having memories. You can't change your childhood. Take responsibility for yourself now, choose different behaviors now, and you'll change now.²⁸ Commit to responsible healing not righteous justification. Yes, it can be important to discuss the past for clarity and understanding, and to do some emotional healing. You can greatly reduce (or eliminate) anger without complete recall of your history or having your persecutors take responsibility.²⁹

If you think therapy is expensive and painful, try divorce, anger, illness, violence, and hatred... for the rest of your life.³⁰

Myth #10: Angry people are mentally ill; they can't help themselves.

Yes, some angry people are “mentally ill”. The phrase “mentally ill” has been used to label all manner of unorthodox, harmless behavior, and everything else from mild depression to pathological violent behavior. Here are a few facts to mull over:

- In 1966 there were 44 anti-psychotic medications. Today there are 174.
- In 1952 there were 106 mental disorders listed in psychiatric reference texts. Today there are 374.
- The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (psychiatrist's reference text) in the 1950s had about 130 pages. In 2008, the fourth edition has 886 pages.
- Anti-psychotic medications generate more money in sales than the Gross National Product of each of over ½ of the countries on earth.
- It is reliably estimated that over 3,000 people die *each month* from the side effects of anti-psychotic medications.

Psychiatrists and drug companies are making *billions* of dollars by convincing “us” that the ordinary conditions of life indicate mental illness. The medical label “mentally ill” must be used with extreme caution.

Angry people have often been told they are helpless about reducing their anger, so why should we be surprised when they are unwilling to take responsibility? When we believe *cultural* anger is an issue of instinct or insanity rather than power brokerage, religion, values, and fear, those who advocate for the righteousness and necessity of anger, competition, power, and aggression, get off the responsibility hook.

Anger is not an issue of insanity, and neither are we limited to responding to it with drugs or more anger. Rather, angry people are poorly informed, catered to, rescued out of responsibility, insecure, often held incapable of making personal change, and taught they're a slave to their passions. Most of us simply don't understand anger. Individually and culturally we need a perception adjustment regarding knowledge, insight, skills, abuse, and responsibility.

²⁸ Sheldon Kopp once wrote that as a child, having an abusive childhood, was a good reason for an unhappy childhood, but a poor excuse for an unfulfilled life. [Cited in a footnote, p. 80, *Addictions & Spiritual Transformation*.]

²⁹ It is *much* easier to make yourself sick and be sick in this culture than it is to become and be healthy. Our culture is designed for dysfunction.

³⁰ See the footnote, p. 403, in *Addictions & Spiritual Transformation*.

All this may be well and good, but what do you do? One of the difficulties in trying to eliminate anger is figuring out which beliefs you have that need to be changed. Your ego is very crafty at concealing and reframing all of its justifications for anger. Whatever these are, they need to be identified and eliminated.

For this, there are several different types of therapy that are sometimes quite effective. However, as an experienced therapist who has used various treatment strategies (as both a client *and* as a therapist) from talk therapy and venting through to acupuncture and art therapy, the most effective is a wise and informed combination of body energy techniques (*Emotional Freedom Techniques*) and talk therapy that addresses values, vows, beliefs, and perceptions. Outside of that...

Do *whatever* you can to challenge your own anger: don't let yourself get away with being angry. Don't approve of anger in others. Don't accept it in your personal life or in your lifestyle. Be committed to a no-anger lifestyle. Read the books I've recommended (listed in a footnote at p. 18). If you do approve of anger it will certainly be used against you, and your life will be reduced to a struggle for control, revenge, and contractual compromise.

Good collaboration skills in problem solving, a belief in equality, teaching ourselves it is right to not get our own way all the time, and using non-abusive communication skills, will go farther to eliminating anger than mental hospitals and medication. With minimal proof beforehand, you have to decide to give up your anger—just stop being angry. Look for feelings associated with the anger and your need to get your own way. When you first begin, it may not work all the time. It will improve. You can choose to not be angry.

Within you lie the resources of character that will allow you to face your destiny with grace and integrity. Finding these resources may be the only authentic purpose to Life.

Types of Abuse

This list was developed in 1988 when I was facilitating an educational/intervention course I developed for perpetrators of family violence. The participants, both men and women, itemized those behaviors they deemed abusive. It was intended to deepen the awareness of abuse by giving it some behavioral boundaries. A common defense to covert abuse, to avoid responsibility, is to quarrel over definitions and specifics. *These six identified categories are only guides—all of the types of abuse listed will fit into more than one category.* And, it is important to remember there are variations of abuse not listed here.

There are many situations where it appears that people agree to, or approve of, being treated in a way that is here listed as abusive. Experience and research show that people do not approve of being abused—no one does. Once people have access to their rights and freedoms, and begin to comprehend the concept of dignity in egalitarian relationships, all of these behaviors are seen as abusive. Subtle pressure, the way we are taught, cultural indoctrination, how we act out social roles, physical strength, anger, how people were abused themselves, psychological concerns, having limited options—all of these contribute to the insidious nature of abuse.

Psychological Abuse

- exerting power or control (dominance)
- intimidation
- locked out of home
- threats of violence—includes unsafe/reckless driving
- threats of violence or suicide to self (includes unsafe driving)
- acting inconsistently/erratically to keep others confused
- threats to children, pets, property, significant others

Emotional Abuse

- ignoring, suppressing, disagreeing with feelings
- withholding feelings, affection, support, appreciation
- ridicule / insult / degrade a person's significant others or significant things
- public or private humiliation or ridicule
- refusing to socialize with
- deliberately forgetting
- threats to use information from past

- threats to use information from past and/or breach of confidence
- disrupting routines
- threats to abandon
- threats to harm, punish, or withhold
- threats or denial of access to support or family
- punishing children unfairly or unequally

Financial or Material Abuse

- forcing unequal financial responsibility
- demanding unequal financial rewards
- unequal access to education
- damage or destroy personal property
- withhold personal property
- prohibit or restrict employment
- withhold money
- unequal, rigid budgets
- financial secrets
- unequal access to funds, unequal pay
- forcing excessive financial responsibility

Physical Abuse (With Or Without Injury)

- pushing, grabbing, shoving, shaking
- kicking, choking, slapping, biting
- kept from leaving (or locked out)
- withholding health care/medication
- refused help during sickness and poor health
- hit with things/throwing objects at
- abandoned while in danger
- forced to eat/not eat/take medication
- subjected to reckless or unsafe driving
- murdered, stabbed, shot, kidnapped, raped

Verbal Abuse

- constant arguing/nagging/berating
- accusing/blaming/blocking/diverting
- undermining integrity, character, effort
- trivializing, countering, debating
- ordering around
- fits of rage

- prohibit or interfere with emotional growth or health
- disrupt or interfere with leisure activities, career, pursuit of hobbies and interests, community participation, personal empowerment, career, education, employment
- brag about or describe past affairs
- jealousy used to manipulate others
- manipulate with lies, deceit, secrets
- unequal mobility or access to transportation
- intimidating into or forcing changes in dieting, eating, clothing styles, grooming, recreation, cosmetics, hair styles, jewelry, interests
- having forbidden, taboo subjects
- vent anger or rage at other directly or indirectly
- telling derogatory or demeaning women / men / racist / sexist jokes

Sexual Abuse

- use as sex object
- intimidate partner into dressing more or less sexy than they want
- minimize sexual or intimate feelings
- criticize other person sexually
- touching or fondling against will or without permission
- withholding sex or intimacy as punishment or manipulation
- using or calling derogatory sexual names
- not respecting sexual boundaries
- having affairs; adultery
- forced into unsafe or deceitful sex
- impose different sexual rules and standards
- use pornography; sadism
- sex when ill and dangerous to health
- socially dangerous or embarrassing sex
- sex with or without birth control that is against other's wishes
- sex without knowledge or informed consent
- forced to have sex with objects, other people, weapons, animals
- sexual accusations
- comparing partner to others

When defining what abuse is, men and women (generally) have a different perspective. Men tend to describe abuse as the exercise of power and control (dominance) over others through fear, disapproval, coercion, and threats of pain and suffering, or being punished for non-compliance or disobedience. Men see it as the “putting on” or “imposing” of values or behaviors, or demanding compliance.

Women tend to describe abuse as actions, words, or behaviors (the exercise of power and use of force) that take something away from another person—loss of rights, self-esteem, entitlement; taking away (absence of) safety; unequal personal influence; being viewed as a lesser “person” in worth, dignity, and respect. Women see abuse as a denial or a disempowerment to personal self-determination—not being treated as a whole, equal-to-others, person. *Both perceptions are valid, one is simply a reflection of the other.*

People with power must learn through insight to freely choose to share power, to invite and accept political and social equality. Giving away power (or sharing influence) is often seen as a risky or an outright dangerous thing to do. This is especially difficult in relation to money, sex, race, and religion. Refusing to give up “privilege” is about fear, self-protection, guilt, and shame.

Hiding behind tradition, being righteous, political double-talk, applauding benevolent dictatorships (very dangerous), approving of violent competition, approving of racist or sexist “humor”, not challenging hypocrisy, defending abuse with claims that “the other person abuses me too”, or whining “I’ll stop when they do” are all excuses that rationalize clinging to power and justifying anger.

As much as perpetrators must be held accountable, people who claim victim status, must accept responsibility for continuing to place themselves in abusive situations. Achieving a non-violent, non-aggressive, egalitarian life is difficult (even formidable), but that is not a defense to do nothing. As a part of the human condition, achieving peace is the unavoidable obligation we live with and largely ignore.

It means taking personal responsibility for past abuses (especially emotional abuse); it means making amends where necessary; it means negotiating ourselves out of “privilege” and not assuming it as an entitlement; it means working towards sharing everything—especially influence; and it means responding appropriately to anger generated by abusive behavior. Rage and dominance should no longer be options in interpersonal relationships and problem solving (at any level).

“I am expert in recognition of a simple, eloquent truth. That truth is that it is sinful for any of God’s children to brutalize any of God’s other children.”
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.³¹

Feedback

There is significant misunderstanding about what feedback actually is, and what we are to accomplish with its use. What you will now read about this is subtle.

There are two ways you can attempt to define the limits of your interpersonal interaction with others. The first is you can define your life by your actions—you hang up, you leave, you act, which is self-empowerment: You’re in charge. You are responsible. You live with the consequences of your actions. You set your boundaries by self-determination. The second way is you can tell another person what to do—stop that, go here, sit there, don’t touch. This second way is that your boundaries—the limits of your personal interaction with others—are governed by the other person’s cooperation or obedience to what you have demanded. One way guarantees success, the other guarantees nothing but conflict.

I most often hear people believe feedback is a communication skill that helps you change someone else’s behavior. This is evident in statements like this: “I gave them feedback and they didn’t stop.” This identifies that achieving control of someone else was the motivating factor for giving feedback. Feedback is not to acquire control of any situation, nor is it to change another’s behavior. Feedback is to help you maintain harmony and balance within yourself and to acquire information with which to make informed choices.

Feedback is often defined by therapists, clinical social workers, and performance coaches as:

- (i) a description of emotions,
- (ii) a description of an external circumstance (someone’s behavior); and,
- (iii) a needs statement.

I will present that this “three part formula” is ineffective and self-defeating. Feedback is not a polite way of telling people what to do. Needs statements that are made without collaboration or invitation are convoluted ways of making demands, and thereby implying the future agenda of the relationship is not open to negotiation.

There are six parts to this discussion of Feedback. **Part I** is a definition of what feedback is. **Part II** is how to give feedback. I’ve identified some guidelines for giving feedback which is **Part III**. **Part IV** is about setting boundaries. **Part V** is how to receive feedback. Finally, **Part VI** outlines the dangers and complications of making needs statements, and the rewards and responsibilities that accrue from being effective at providing feedback.

³¹ By quoting this passage, I do not imply Christian hegemony. To me, it’s a simple, eloquent truth about meanness, abuse, and violence. The quote is taken from *Martin Luther King, Jr.*, a biography of Dr. King by Marshall Frady, Lipper Viking, p. 188.

Part I — What It Is

From Random House Webster's Dictionary©1992: *feed•back* (fêd'bak') *n.* 1) *the return of part of the output of a circuit, system, or device to the input, either purposely or unintentionally, as in the reflux of sound from a loudspeaker to a microphone in a public-address system.* 2) *the furnishing of data concerning the operation or output of a machine to an automatic control device or to the machine itself, for monitoring or regulating operations.* 3) *a reaction or response to a particular process or activity: to get feedback from a speech.* 4) *information derived from such a reaction or response: to use the feedback from an audience survey.* 5) *a self-regulatory biological system, as in the synthesis of some hormones, in which the output or response affects the input, either positively or negatively.*

In science, feedback is simply information about the responses or reactions engendered in units that receive signals. What follows is that same definition recast into personal relationships terminology: Feedback is simply information given about the responses or reactions (in a person) engendered (in that same person) who has received signals (words and behavior) from someone else. In other words, in communication, feedback is information about how something a person does or did was received and perceived by some other person. In none of these definitions does it state or imply that feedback must cause some change in external circumstance. For our purpose here—the receiver of your feedback doesn't "have" to respond in some way particular to the feedback.

Feedback is advising someone what emotions or sensations you experience as a result of their behavior. In the circumstance of verbal communication, talking is behavior. Words, tone of voice, and expressions are behavior. Feedback is emotional self-care. Emotional self-care is not repressing feelings, and allowing yourself to verbalize and experience your own emotional truths. Doing emotional self-care is exactly that—appropriately discussing, disclosing, and demonstrating (without abuse or covert manipulation) what your emotional experience is in relation to the reality around you.

Feedback is also a way of setting boundaries. A "boundary" is a stated emotionally-defined limit of participation—what for a person is a safe degree of interpersonal interaction. Using feedback to set your interpersonal boundaries is the least threatening way to tell others they have acted or spoken in some way that's an invasion of what you consider safe or respectful interpersonal interaction. Feedback is also the most inviting way to tell someone they can come closer. Feedback, as I describe it, is the most effective, most respectful, and least complicated way to advise somebody how their behavior affects you. When done properly it will contribute to significant changes in yourself. It *may* contribute to a change in others, but remember that change in others is decidedly not the point of giving feedback.

In therapy, when a therapist facilitates emotional disclosure from a client, the formerly repressed and now expressed emotion is often in relation to a behavior by some third party outside of the counselling dyad. The client's emotional disclosure to the therapist is not done so the client may manipulate the third party who at some point in the past originally provoked the reactive emotion under discussion in therapy. The client's emotional disclosure in therapy is [supposed to be] for their own healing. Emotional disclosure is about self-empowerment, facing reality, losing illusions, taking charge of your life—emotional *self-care*.

Giving feedback is virtually identical in purpose—for self-empowerment and taking charge of your life, but from a different perspective. ***Feedback, at it's most effective, is a non-controlling skill that we use to offer accurate information to someone, specifically about how we emotionally react to something they have said or done, so we can take care of ourselves, not so they can take care of us.***

It's apparent from the thousands of conversations I've had about this that people associate "feedback" with something negative. It's similar to the word criticism—cultural use of language has implied that criticism is "bad"; but criticism is only a considered judgment as to the merits of something. There is positive criticism, but the phrase "positive criticism" doesn't seem to ring true, and yet it is. ["Ego" has similarly taken on negative connotations.³²] It's the same for feedback—an implication that feedback is "negative". As a result of this slant, there's a defensive posture around using feedback. This severely limits our willingness to impart information in ways other than ordering and demanding or passive-aggressive manipulation.

When people conduct their lives from a position of power they soon and gradually adopt the related belief that people's rights and freedoms are a distant second to (a) expediency and goal achievement *and* (b), the perpetuation of their own power. [This is evinced in how some therapists advocate for the use of a needs-statement in giving feedback.] When people communicate, for the most part, from a position of power, there is a perception that being

³² See the footnote, p. 433, in *Addictions & Spiritual Transformation*.

able to simply demand or order someone around is easier. For power brokers, this is true, it is easier, but successful only in the short term. In egalitarian relationships there is a decided presence of comfort and permanent resolution of the conflict because neither person has to repress their response for fear of censure or punishment—they have access to their Rights and Freedoms.

Sometimes conflict results from errors and misunderstandings when giving feedback. Should conflict or misunderstandings arise from giving it in the manner I present, that's one of the relationship dynamics feedback is designed to identify. And, this short paper will later outline some of the power struggles and tension that accrue from feedback being done maliciously or incorrectly.

Millions of words have been written about the games that happen in communicating. Games is a polite euphemism for the power struggles, hidden agendas, and manipulation tactics in relationships. Games generate or maintain varying degrees of tension and conflict when people struggle to maintain the status quo, or to remain dominant in some circumstance; or to maintain some illusion (or delusion) in a relationship. Your willingness to give feedback correctly, to communicate honestly, respectfully, and accurately, is always directly related to how willing we are to challenge the illusions and delusions in your life.

To anyone who isn't dedicated to emotional health and integrity, feedback is risky business. You'll find out very quickly who cares about you and who doesn't; friendships and relationships you assumed were solid will crumble (loss of an illusion); and when you receive feedback, you'll be put to the test of actually demonstrating how much you care.

Nobody's mouth is big enough to say the whole thing.

Alan Watts

Part II — How To Do It

Here's the specific formula of what you say when you provide feedback, nothing more, nothing less:

"I feel ___*specific feeling*___ when you ___*specific behavior*___."

Be very accurate in describing *both* your feelings and the behavior of the other person. Giving feedback, or doing emotional self-care, or setting boundaries (it doesn't matter what it's called) is best done as the emotions are being experienced. It's an in-the-present communication skill. Here are some examples:

"I feel **afraid** when you **yell at me**."

"I feel **safe** when you **respect me**."

"I feel **embarrassed** when you **tease me**."

"I feel **hurt** when you **ignore my feelings**."

Assuming that the speaker in these examples is honest, these represent accurate facts—there are no opinions, no judgments, no labels, no threats, no demands. This is a crucial point to remember: Feedback deals with facts. In the four examples immediately above, only simple and clear facts are stated.

Emotions are facts, no different than a fact in chemistry or physics. Adopt an attitude that the facts are friendly.³³ For example: should I feel embarrassed when you tease me, your motive for teasing me or your evaluation that my embarrassment is exaggerated, has nothing to do with the two facts (i) that I am embarrassed and (ii), you did tease me. It's the fact that feedback deals with facts that makes this so effective and significant.

I agree some people may have *apparently* exaggerated emotional responses to routine situations. Whoever was doing the teasing may have sincerely meant well, and this can be clarified later; but at the moment it happens, the degree of embarrassment and the teasing are facts and not to be debated. Certainly a survey of several thousand mental health professionals may indicate that the majority would not have thought the circumstance worthy of embarrassment, and that my embarrassment might be an "unhealthy" response to ordinary circumstance, yet this has nothing to do with the legitimacy of my embarrassment or the fact that you teased me in that given moment. Emotions and behavior are facts: "I feel embarrassed when you tease me."

³³ "The facts are friendly" was a therapeutic perspective said by the American therapist, Carl R. Rogers.

Giving feedback in this manner prevents emotions from being suppressed (self-care) and brings clarity to your interaction with others. Expressing your emotions in this way keeps you in charge of yourself, without manipulating or threatening others.

Certainly in three of the examples given above the person giving feedback might also feel angry, and could have used “angry” rather than afraid, embarrassed, or hurt, but the consequence of always describing your emotions in terms of anger keeps others on the defensive. Anger, in its various forms, is the emotion that initiates and maintains separation. That is its job. Always using “anger” is also an indirect tactic to establish and maintain control. When anger is expressed, and especially if it is the predominant emotional expression in any relationship, then intimacy is unavailable.

Feedback appears to be simple and straight forward, yet it’s one of the more difficult communication skills. It is difficult for several reasons. It appears too simple; people usually want to add more than is required. You have to risk self-disclosure and be vulnerable. It takes effort, practice, and confidence to describe your internal experience (sensations and emotions) and others’ behaviors *accurately*. Feedback demands personal responsibility without blame, is non-controlling, establishes truth, and requires a consistent effort at self care. In spite of how demanding it is, it does have significant payoffs and is worth the effort.

There are three reasons for talking about your feelings in a non-blaming, non-controlling way as they relate to a description of circumstance (feedback).

- You look after yourself—on several levels that’s the primary reason.
- You provide accurate information to someone else about yourself and their behavior.
- You set the stage to gather accurate information so you can make informed, responsible choices.

Feedback is not a tactic to force the other person to change their behavior. People will frequently complain: “I talked about my feelings and the other person didn’t change.” Or, “I gave them feedback and they didn’t stop doing it.” Complaints like this really mean the person who gave feedback isn’t interested in self-care, they’re primarily concerned with establishing and maintaining control of the other person (using Feedback as a method to get compliance). They’re angry or hurt the other person isn’t obedient—that talking about their own feelings by using feedback didn’t give them a dominant position in the situation. Feedback is not a polite way to control others.

Feedback is: “*I feel __specific emotion__ when you __specific behavior__.*” Anything else sets the stage for defensive posturing, control struggles, debates about interpretation, and prohibits the gathering of accurate information and collaborative problem solving.

Part III — Guidelines For Effective Feedback

1) Focus feedback on specific behaviors. If you call someone a liar (without being specific to a situation) they can easily interpret what you said as character assassination and will receive it as an unfair attack against themselves (which it more than likely is). However, if you point out you feel hurt or afraid because they are dishonest in some specific situation, they can begin to act responsibly for that behavior regarding that situation. For you to accurately describe a person’s behavior to them thusly is being fair. This avoids evaluative labeling which would in turn lead to defensiveness and anger. When someone accurately describes our behavior it helps to build trust.

2) Work at articulating your emotions in terms other than anger. When people are angry they always experience at least one other emotion; and it’s always some variation of fear. (You may not feel it, but it’s there.) If you express emotions in terms of degrees of anger: annoyed, irritated, frustrated, irate, angry, furious... make an effort to focus away from your anger and onto the related or underlying emotions. Anger motivates us to control or influence circumstances, which is expedient in overt violence, but completely ineffective in interpersonal problem solving.

To make it more complicated, some people have a very hard time expressing anger. If this is you, make an effort to include some annoyance or anger [if you feel it], when you give feedback. This will impart a strength to how you describe the circumstances and will give some credibility to your position. However, in this special circumstance, expressing anger is to experience your own process, and not to dominate the other person.

3) Focus feedback on observations in the present. It’s very difficult to respond to and resolve conflict that happened “awhile ago”. At its best, giving feedback is discussing feelings and behaviors as they happen, or as soon

after as is possible. As you develop this skill you will become more spontaneous, which is important; however, if for now the best you can do is to give feedback the next day or hours after the incident, then start there.

When developing your self-awareness and skill at feedback, there may be hours or days between an incident and your awareness that feedback would have been appropriate. Give the feedback, even if it is days late. This develops insight, gives you practice, and enhances the connection between your intellectual and emotional expression.

4) Do not generalize or make global statements. If a person makes general statements: You always... or, You never... , the statement is not accurate. The person it's directed at will more than likely become defensive because of the accusation's inherent inaccuracy. (Remember: People defend against the part of a stereotype that isn't true.) Even if the generalization is true to some noticeable degree, the other person will get defensive and problem solving will disintegrate into arguing. For example, to say: "You are always mean," is not constructive and very probably not true. Whoever you accuse of this will be openly or subversively defensive. But to say: "I feel hurt and afraid when you yell at me," is a responsible and accurate description of circumstance. ***People can't respond to everything, they can only respond to one thing.*** Be specific—don't make global statements. [Being specific is an important aspect to the success of *Emotional Freedom Techniques*.]

5) Don't give advice or make needs statements. Giving feedback, without advice or demands for behavior change, allows the other person to be responsible and to participate as a free agent. In the example from #4 above: "I feel hurt and afraid when you yell at me," if that were changed to: "I feel hurt and afraid when you yell at me and I need you to stop yelling at me,"—the demand for compliance is a one-sided (imposed) agenda that will invite defensiveness. As uncomfortable as it sounds, other people are entitled to be rude or shout and stomp about and ignore your feelings. People are free to choose their response to your feedback, whatever that may be.

Everything you do may seem insignificant. It is important that you do it anyway. Gandhi

6) Feedback keeps the rights of the other person in mind. Everyone needs to maintain their dignity. Everyone is entitled to participate in finding a solution to the problems that affect their lives. (See Arguing Fairly)

When people are hurt or otherwise bothered by another's behavior they tend to retaliate. Even though someone may have hurt you, your feedback is most effective when you respect the other person's rights (even though they may have not respected yours), and for you to maintain your dignity. This is hard.

Even though you may be hurt, it's important to be responsible—no secrets, no demands, no manipulation, no cruelty, no sarcasm. Even when your ego tells you you're justified in being mean because they did something horrible to you; even if four-thousand people and 97% of the therapists in the northern hemisphere agree that whatever they did to you is a bad thing, still, it is incumbent on you to be honest (meaning accurate) and responsible. It's a magic opportunity for self-respect and love when you give feedback that is free of anger and respects the rights and freedoms of the other person.

This is important: When you give feedback that is ignored or ridiculed... if you say to a friend: "I feel humiliated when you tease me," and they continue to tease you, there are now two issues. One—the humiliation about teasing; and two—feeling hurt or scared that they didn't respect your feelings. They ignored your feedback (absence of respect) and that behavior provides new information about your friendship with them. This new information about the other person will help you make an informed decision about that relationship. Now your feedback might be something like: "I still feel embarrassed (or humiliated) when you tease me, and I also feel hurt that you ignored my feelings."

Keep talking about your feelings and be specific about their behavior. Do not deviate from this formula and if possible do it without anger. The other person may get angry and badger you with sarcasm about you using this simple formula. That's because if and when you say it cleanly, it demands a shift in the ongoing cycle of disrespect or arguing. If you are consistent in using this simple formula it will "force" a change.

Be accurate in your description of circumstance. It's only in this manner that you can gather authentic information that allows you to make an informed (maybe difficult) choice. Often, rather than give feedback, the hurt person will abandon correct feedback and explode the situation into arguing and name-calling. This is a struggle for dominance and revenge.

*It is a true sign of emotional health and personal integration
when a person chooses loneliness over conflict.*

Do not concentrate on why a person behaves a certain way. That analyzes them, trivializes the concern you expressed, and avoids the truths of the immediate circumstances. People get defensive when you analyze them, and besides that—it's only your self-centered interpretation of their behavior which will be self-serving to your own agendas. Analyzing (i.e. why do you do that and when will you stop) prevents exploration of feelings and prevents people from being supportive. It denies rights and freedoms.

You will very often have more than one feeling about the same incident. You may be confused about what you feel. You have the right to explore what feelings you experience. You are responsible to articulate your emotions clearly (which for a time may require in-depth therapy). Go slow if you have to. When you are giving feedback, if the other person cares, they will appreciate and support what you are doing.

Giving and receiving feedback in the manner I describe will provide accurate information about your relationships. It will allow you to make informed, self-improving choices. Most importantly: how the other person responds will provide information about their attitude towards you and the relationship.

In a Buddhist way, what someone thinks of you is none of your business. How someone responds to your feedback is their business. Expecting them to respond in a certain way is dangerous. Do not end up in a power struggle about them not responding the way you want.

Part IV — Setting Boundaries

Giving feedback is also setting boundaries, which at the minimum, is you telling people that their behavior either encourages or discourages closeness. "Setting boundaries" establishes the emotional or physical distance between people. You can either increase your distance from someone ("stay away" boundary) or decrease the distance between yourselves ("we're closer" boundary).

Stay Away Boundary: "I feel angry and insulted when you touch me without invitation."

In a situation where you are establishing an emotional "distance"—increasing the boundary—do not make a needs statement. That will allow the receiver of your feedback to respect your feelings without necessarily being defensive. (I discuss this later.) The other person can demonstrate how important you are by the degree of respect they show in response to your feedback. If they respect your right to define the depth of the interaction, you can then collaborate on developing a safe relationship.

Should they not respect your feelings (tease, ignore, or do it again) there would be two issues. You still feel angry and insulted when you are touched without invitation, and now you feel afraid of them, or maybe betrayed, that they don't respect your feelings. Now there would be factual evidence they really don't care about you, and they're not willing to improve the relationship by at least offering respect. [As I described earlier, their repeatedly ignoring or discounting your feedback may demand that you possibly leave, or end the relationship. Often people abandon correct feedback and explode the situation into arguing, name-calling, or instilling guilt to avoid the truths about untenable situations.]

There are times when leaving immediately or calling for help is appropriate—when an assault is imminent; when you are significantly threatened. Even in those circumstances, making demands will invite defensiveness and challenge the dominant position the other person has assumed. People don't like to be told what to do—especially

aggressive people who don't respect others in the first place, which is why you are in danger. As best you can, leave the situation and get support.

This does not mean you aren't supposed to defend yourself if you are being hurt. Keep this discussion in the context of the ordinary course of human affairs. Although, with some sadness I admit that violence is becoming more the ordinary course of human affairs; however, from my personal experience in law enforcement, prison work, and therapy/teaching, I can attest to the power of this style of communication in potentially violent situations. It works.

It may be necessary to limit your participation in a situation. You can establish your own boundaries without making a demand of the other person. This requires an assertive, self-empowering statement from yourself. For example: "I feel afraid when you yell at me and *I'm leaving*." The regular print is feedback in the proper formula. The italics "*...I'm leaving*" is you acting on your own behalf—limiting your participation. "I feel afraid when you yell at me and *I'm leaving*." (Then leave immediately.)

When you say "I'm leaving," leave. Don't use this as a tactic to manipulate or threaten them. If you don't leave this establishes a pattern of empty threats and you will not be taken seriously. There are no demands made of the other person that will necessarily invite their defensiveness. This is significantly more self-empowering and self-determining than a passive demanding, like: "I feel afraid when you yell at me and I need you to stop."

Come Closer Boundary: "I feel safe and honored when you share your feelings openly." Or consider after you have given feedback that has been well received: "I feel safer and respected when you appreciate my feelings."

In these two examples, feedback promotes intimacy or friendship; it invites closeness. Giving someone feedback doesn't necessarily mean bad, it can mean good too.

Part V — How To Receive Feedback

Someone gives you this feedback: "*I feel hurt when you tease me*." Resist giving a self-defending response. If you want to enhance the relationship, it is your responsibility to honor the other person's feelings. Respect what they're telling you. You don't necessarily have to agree, but they are entitled to their feelings.

If you receive feedback DON'T...

- accuse the person of being too sensitive;
- say they deserved it;
- insist it was harmless and only in fun. [Teasing, "friendly" insulting, poking fun, stereotyping, racist/sexist "humor", are a dangerous and subtle machination of shame];
- do it again;
- disagree with them;
- argue you did it before and it was okay then;
- claim they misunderstood; or,
- evade responsibility by refocusing the exchange onto some other "issue":
"Ya, okay, you're right... *but* last week you... .

Any of these responses always make the situation worse. Don't cover up your own embarrassment or guilt at having hurt someone. Any response other than complete acceptance is just trying to take the heat off yourself. Acceptance and respect doesn't mean agreement or endorsement.

After you respect/accept their feelings (Emotional First Aid), which shows that you care, and the tension is reduced, you can request a discussion to help you understand, to prevent a recurrence, and demonstrate your degree of caring. You are not entitled to demand an explanation. People do not have to defend having feelings. But, by the same token, if someone gives you feedback about fears or other "negative" emotions they have about your behavior which you sincerely think is innocent, thank them kindly (no sarcasm) and you are now in a position to decide wisely how you will conduct yourself. Maybe it's right that you should leave because of their feedback to you.

When someone gives you feedback properly, it's factual information about their feelings and your behavior. It isn't necessarily good or bad, it's how you respond to it that counts. All feedback (given properly) is simply factual information that people can use to evaluate how they impact on the universe. You choose to do something with it or not. The person who gave you feedback has the freedom to feel what they feel and say it. Yes it may be

This easily engenders a debilitating self-destructive view of self-sacrifice that allows the supposed moral authority and the higher good (whatever it is claimed to be) to exist unexamined. In your not examining these dynamics in the light of freely chosen values (and freely chosen values are not possible in dysfunctional families or addicted relationships), your complicity will leave you forever lonely and unfulfilled.

I believe on a personal level that caring for others is good; egalitarianism, altruism, and charity are good; and personal responsibility in all things is essential to “the good life”. Within cultural/political or religious perspectives however, and within the myths of unconditional love, approach them with caution, not because they are inappropriate to value, but because in this society addictions are a plague, we are bombarded with a scarcity-and-fear mentality, taught that collecting wealth and shiny things is to be admired, and are deeply immersed in the dominance model of problem solving.

Our culture, at the beginning of the 21st Century, is in a massively addicted, irresponsible mess. Addictions and gross irresponsibility are an epidemic. Anything you are expected to value, in any culturally cooperative way, serves the culture and its government and not you. Therapists, big business, physicians, religious leaders, and other educators who haven’t become disengaged from their complicity in this will disguise and further entrench relationship power struggles. It’s worthy of careful examination.

More often than not, we trade our integrity for the illusion of love.³⁵ Feedback, given with a needs statement attached to it, should be heard with this cultural/obedience-oriented subtext: If you were a nice person you would stop making me feel this way and do what I ask. If you don’t do what I want, you don’t care and you’re bad.

In the red sweater example, the man who made the needs statement about the red sweater has identified his “discomfort” as the responsibility of the woman—she stops wearing the sweater and he feels good. It is actually a subtle and inappropriate demand concealed in accepted therapy jargon. The man has said he “needs her not to wear it”. It shifts the focus from facts (feeling uncomfortable is his subjective fact and wearing a red sweater is an objective fact), into a power struggle about her wearing or not wearing the sweater. One of the attendant cultural implications is, should she continue to wear it she doesn’t care—the misapplied cultural notion of love and caring. The tag-on needs statement effectively and powerfully refocused (shifted) the problem from his discomfort to her potential lack of caring for not obeying.

“I feel uncomfortable when you wear that red sweater and I need you not to wear it.” It sounds like an open and shut case. As a result of his values and beliefs, he’s externalized the problem—her wearing the sweater. According to him, the solution is straightforward: stop wearing the sweater and his discomfort will go away. Period. He doesn’t have to do anything except tell her what to do.

He trusts either subconsciously or consciously-and-silently that our powerful cultural myths of romance and unconditional love and the rituals of “sacrifice-for-partner” and “altruism for the good of the relationship”, will (i) supercede her individual rights; and (ii), give him the authority to make the demand. (i.e. “obedience-as-an indication of love” concealed in therapy jargon), and of course, with the backing authority of therapy jargon or a therapist, he will win the day.

Her choices are to obey or argue. If she obeys she sacrifices her dignity and loses her freedom. If she argues *he* can hide his controlling insecurities inside the cultural myth of: “If you loved me, then you would,” and take the righteous posture that she doesn’t care. These are some of the derivative issues:

- She cannot demonstrate caring (for him) if she’s forced into defending her right to wear what she wants. She’ll shift the struggle off of his emotional issue (discomfort) onto her emotional issue—anger about his assumption he has the authority to tell her what to wear, and fear about losing her freedom to wear what she wants. When she defends her dignity and her right to wear what she wants, conflict will result—it reduces itself to who’s feelings are more important.
- Obedience by her will establish and promote bargaining and compromise as the standards of behavior in the relationship—I sacrificed something for you today (not wearing the sweater); you *will* sacrifice something for me tomorrow. This will eventually lead to the

³⁵ Too often “we” sacrifice our integrity for conformity to a set of dysfunctional, self-denigrating group rules which can be simplified to “Don’t be *You*, be *Us*.” These groups (from children’s organizations, business and spiritual collectives, to social networking or political clubs) are comprised of very insecure people who punish non-conformists—all well concealed under altruistic righteousness. There is a profound and painful cost to living by consensus... and there’s punishment and rejection by “the group” if you don’t.

these concerns disappear. Eventually, feedback will immediately provoke interest and tender caring in your devotion to living at peace within yourself, and only then will harmony with your partner be available. [All our relationships are aspects of metaphors for the dynamics of our own personality.]

Just leaving that feedback hanging in the air: “*I feel uncomfortable when you wear that red sweater,*” can be disconcerting to a lot of people. It’s awkward. Unless a person knows how to respond to the feeling content (Emotional First Aid) they’re left with the traditional cultural stance of negotiating for power.

These are the advantages of him giving her Feedback *without* a needs statement:

1) It will not disempower the woman. She’ll have no demand to debate or need to defend herself and her right to wear what she wants. She will then be able to demonstrate caring and interest by voluntarily responding to his feelings (Emotional First Aid). She won’t be coerced into obedience. Compassionately responding to his feelings doesn’t necessarily imply she’ll change her clothes.

2) He can remain focused on *his* feelings, which are really an independent issue that’s *his* to deal with. The man won’t sidetrack onto her disobedience, or sidetrack onto proving his point to win the power struggle, or sidetrack onto defending against her retaliation to his compliance statement. The only appropriate focus for him is his feeling uncomfortable and where that comes from within him. (It has nothing to do with the red sweater.)

3) It will promote additional exploration of the man’s insecurity, which is indirectly related to the “wearing of the red sweater”. In actual fact, the red sweater has nothing to do with the insecurity. Without a needs statement, since there’s no implied demand, she feels no threat, therefore there’s no defensiveness or retaliation by her because she’s not being controlled, hence no power struggle. Emotional safety is at least available and further exploration by him *inside himself* is encouraged.

4) They will both have personal influence and can participate in defining the relationship. Feedback with a needs statement is a relationship on his terms; feedback without a needs statement is a relationship of collaboration.

5) Without a needs statement, if the woman responds in an inconsiderate or uncaring way, the man will see clearly her non-supportive behavior and make valid personal choices with that new information. If she responds in a considerate, loving way, who knows what joy will accrue.

Adding a needs statement to Feedback is a shift from emotions to contract, or a shift from process to power-based goal. Our culture cannot negotiate feelings, but it can negotiate contracts. The well-intentioned people who advocate for including needs statements have unwittingly ignored emotional process and reinforced the cultural focus of goal achievement. On a larger scale it looks like this: Get out of emotions and into problem solving. Identify the feeling, get it over with, and get into contracts, bargaining, and goal achievement (the needs statement).

When counsellors and educators instruct others to make a needs statement *prior* to safety being established, emotional motivators being uncovered, or individual rights being upheld, I see that as them (the counsellors) being uncomfortable with process and emotion. In order to demonstrate caring, people must respond to emotions in appropriate ways. That means staying with the feelings so that others can identify and respond to them, otherwise crucial information is lost.

Giving Feedback, or doing Emotional Self-Care, or Setting Boundaries is most effectively said in this manner: “I feel specific feeling when you specific behavior.” Then wait and see what happens.

Setting an example isn’t the best way of influencing people, it’s the only way.

A. Einstein

The Attending Behaviors

There are some misconceptions about what it means to listen. It's more than just "hearing words" and as much as they may claim otherwise, when in conversations many people don't listen, they wait for another opportunity to talk. Some people become discouraged when they see how much effort goes into listening properly.

There are six behaviors that show that we are really listening (or attending) to another person. People new to these skills have, at times, described them as pedantic; however, they're crucial to the complex art of intimacy and effective problem solving. It's amazing what problems and pitfalls a person can avoid by learning how to listen.

The Attending Behaviors are:

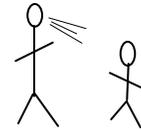
1) **FOLLOWING** (two types): (i) Verbal Following is making noises and sounds, or saying short phrases, that show you have heard. Examples might be "wow!", "uh-huh", "humm", "I see," or an occasional, very brief observation about the topic. The skill is in demonstrating through comments that you are paying attention.

(ii) Non-Verbal Following is attentive, slight body movements that indicate your awareness of what is being said, i.e. hand movements, head movements, mild gestures, shrugs, nodding, facial expressions. Avoid sudden or startling movements that interrupt. In these ways, the speaker knows you are hearing what they are communicating.

2) **I - THOU**: There should be an equal relationship between the speaker and the listener. (The spiritual principle of egalitarian humility applies here.) Martin Buber developed the concept.³⁶ In unequal transactions, demonstrated by **I-thou** or **i-THOU**, whether you're speaker or listener, you've defined yourself as "lesser", and then have less or no influence in the interaction. **I-THOU** communication is both persons having influence and general equality when they communicate.

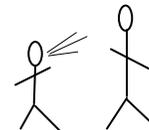
I - thou —

When the speaker puts themselves in the dominant position, or they take more emotional authority or privilege than they are entitled to. ----->



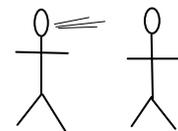
i - THOU —

When the speaker puts the listener in the dominant position—gives away their own influence and abandons their own sense of entitlement. ----->



I - THOU —

When both persons have equal responsibility and input into the conversation, with respect for emotions & rights. Both maintain their dignity. ----->



3) **BODY POSTURE**: This includes the way you sit or stand. How you hold yourself; your general posture, will convey your level of interest. Face the person who is speaking.

4) **EYE CONTACT**: Making eye contact involves exactly that, looking directly (but not staring) at the person talking. Usually the person talking will glance away while they formulate another thought. It's the listener's job, generally, to make the effort to maintain eye contact in a relaxed way.

5) **RELAXATION**: It's important to be at ease; relax "into" the conversation. I understand in some situations this may be quite impossible. Be that as it may... the effort is to let the communication flow as naturally as possible. If there are any hidden agendas—a secret goal of the conversation that one person conceals from the other—there is no relaxation.

³⁶ *I and Thou*, by Martin Buber; translation by Walter Kaufmann, Scribners, 1970.

6) **PARAPHRASING**: This is a slightly longer version of verbal following (#1 above). If you briefly rephrase, or state in your own way, what you think the other person said, you can determine whether or not you heard what they intended. If the other person believes you misunderstand they can speak directly to the misunderstanding that's revealed when you paraphrase. Paraphrasing reflects back to the speaker two important things: (a) you hear the nuance of their message; and (b), you are interested in them and care about what they say. Some ways of starting paraphrasing sentences are: "I hear you saying...", "I take it you mean...", "It sounds like you are feeling...", "In other words...".

Yes, this sounds pedantic. If you are emotionally interested in the conversation, your interest will put the required respectful inflection in your voice.³⁷

As the listener, it may be appropriate that you ask questions that clarify points of confusion. There are cautions. Are you confused because you weren't listening? Does your question imply confusion on the part of the speaker? Does the question demonstrate your impatience? My experience is, if people are invited to talk freely and I actively listen, without impatience or judgment, eventually everything everybody says will make sense.

There are times, probably more than we would care to admit, when we find ourselves in conversations, where we are acting like we care but really don't, and are impatient or secretly distracted. Being viewed as a good listener requires a sincere turn of heart. Often it's important to examine your own insincerity first. When people are interested they do most of the Attending Behaviors already. It's a matter of adding the behaviors you don't do, and fine-tuning the ones you do; or, figuring out why you are generally disinterested in what someone is saying. It's your responsibility to communicate properly. Doing these six things shows that you are attending to the other person and that you care.

Asking Questions / Inviting Statements

(Gathering Information, Interviewing Skills, and Social Conversation)

Open question: a question that requires more than a one word answer.

Closed question: a question that requires a one word answer.

Inviting statement: a statement that promotes disclosure of information.

Uninviting statement: a statement that discourages disclosure of information.

Open questions or making inviting statements are important skills in interviewing people, gathering information, and being good at social conversation. For shy, generally quiet people, this can be quite difficult. It's awkward to reduce this to writing which, in itself, eliminates the emotional content and emotional interest which is so important. Anyway... Here are some examples:

Open question:	What do you like about this manual?
Closed question:	Do you like this manual?
Uninviting/closed:	Anybody that likes this manual is stupid, right?
Inviting statements:	Open questions:
That's interesting, tell me about...	What do you think is interesting about... ?
Please tell me how...	Would you explain more... ?
I would like to hear more...	What are the things you like about... ?

Granted, as much as you try, some people are not communicative. Your efforts to invite conversation may fall far short of a graceful interaction. They may be excessively shy and withdrawn, or generally belligerent and rude. However, most people aren't.

I used an earlier version of this manual in a training program for a group of people who were considered to be seriously bereft of social skills, and conversation was a dreaded chore—they had been long-term residents (5 years plus) of a medium/maximum security prison who were soon to be released. Over two weeks we practiced so-

³⁷ For those who are quite serious about investigating this i.e.: therapists, life skills coaches, ministers, counsellors, etc., there's an interesting discussion of paraphrasing as an intervention in Sheldon Kopp's book *Back To One: A Guide For Psychotherapists*, Science and Behavior Books, 1977.

cial skills and listening/asking/talking in a friendly way. I made a note of many of the topics that were introduced for discussion.

This is a partial list: playing bridge, raising children, holiday rituals, misogyny and the representation of violence in Sam Peckinpah's movies, exotic pets, lapidary, swimming, martial arts, the philosophy of Heraclitus, economic greed and seasonal celebrations, the literature of Kafka, stamp collecting, clothing styles, the socio-economic conditions of The Dark Ages, the influence of the Medici family on the art of the renaissance; the importance of Don Quixote in the history of literature, the parallels in the philosophy of the Buddha, Jesus, and Gandhi, the social merits of television, and is tattooing assertive individuation or self-abuse.

The point is that "social" conversation doesn't have to be fluffy and inconsequential. Yes, three hours of chit-chat about the recent rain will leave you with a feeling of empty dullness. Make your life interesting and have non-judgmental, friendly, lively discussions with strangers and friends about unique things.

Opening Lines

One curiosity I've always had about people, expressed in an opening line for conversation, is to ask, "So, what do you do when you're not doing this?"

Sensitive conversations that start off in a bad way quickly disintegrate into an histrionic mess: someone might be shocked and emotionally hurt, we might give or receive a punishment or reprimand (not good in any event but it does happen), somebody wants a divorce, has been fired or laid off, someone will be angry or hurt because a mistake was made. What is often overlooked in teaching others how to develop strong and supportive relationships is how to begin a sensitive or potentially painful discussion.

Undisclosed emotions of one kind or another, always complicate problems. (The Volcano) Suppressing feelings is dangerous. Here are some ways you can begin that sensitive conversation:

"I have something difficult to talk about. I'm scared and I don't know what to say."

"I'm feeling ashamed about something and I need to talk about it—but I'm afraid to start. I'm scared."

"I'm worried (or scared, or frightened) about telling you something. I don't know how to start because I'm afraid I won't say it properly."

Each of these examples introduces the topic in the least threatening way (a variation of Feedback because it presents factual information). The emotional pressure from the undisclosed feelings is reduced and gives the other person some warning. They can prepare for the conversation.

There is never a perfect time for a sensitive conversation. Waiting for the perfect time is one justification for avoiding a sensitive or an embarrassing issue. In my experience, all that is required is some time allotment of about 20 minutes to begin it. No really big discussion is ever concluded in the first conversation, anyway.

Time Out

A Time Out is temporarily excusing yourself from some scene of tension—to stop it from escalating before it gets out-of-hand. Taking a Time Out means you take responsibility and disengage from the tension or argument—you temporarily leave to figure out your own part of the conflict.

People are taught that only losers and cowards walk away from fights. Your perspective of life may include a need to win, or you're invested in making some point to maintain some superior position or avoid responsibility. In these situations righteousness is dangerous. One of the people arguing will want to fight to the bitter end—to force the other person to change, surrender, capitulate, pack, stay, admit the dirty deed, pay the money, leave, quit, sign the paper, or apologize—which is why you ended up in a fight in the first place. Time Outs are difficult.

Here are two examples of what to say when you take a Time Out.

"I'm feeling angry. I'm taking a time out so I can calm down. I'll be back in about a half an hour."

"I'm really confused and hurt. I'm taking a Time Out so I can figure out what I'm doing wrong. I'm going for a walk, I'll be back in about an hour."

Talk only about yourself. That puts you in charge of the only person that you are really in charge of: yourself. Do not name-call or blame. Do not shout or scream. If you are involved in a relationship where there is name-calling, shouting, insulting, throwing things or punching walls, that is all abuse. Both of you will need the help of a professional to exit this pattern. These fights are invariably about a pattern of life and values that were established before you created the relationship.

A Time Out is a direct communication about yourself. There's nothing unclear about it. When you're on a Time Out do **The Seven Time Out Things**:

- figure out your feelings associated with (underneath) the rage and anger; the dynamic of The Volcano applies. Remember that anger, impatience, and arguing are always associated with fear;
- don't justify your behavior and blame the other person; avoid destructive Self Talk;
- figure out what your hidden agendas are. What are you not saying?;
- don't drink or use drugs. That makes it worse;
- don't drive—there are enough angry people on the roads. If you're angry enough to need a Time Out you shouldn't be driving;
- don't go some place and sit and brood; do something *mildly* physical but not aggressive: walk, jog slowly, swim; and,
- learn and use EFT.³⁸

A Time Out is a contract—return when you say you will. That shows you're being dependable. When you return discuss what you learned about yourself. Use “I” statements and don't blame. This takes time and effort. Possibly most important is to not blame which demonstrates your sincere commitment to love and responsibility. Set people free from your abusive control tactics. It is not easy. Concentrate on your emotions. Decide: What's your commitment or responsibility towards non-violent self-care? Resist the impulse to win the argument.

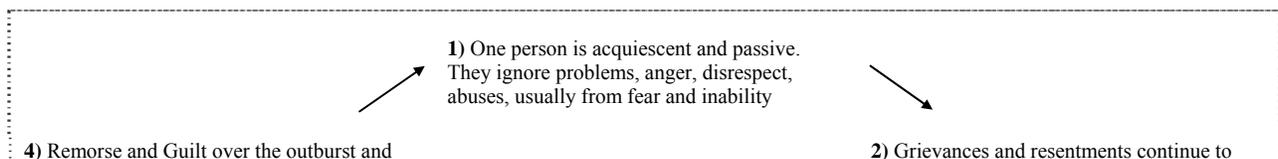
The other person is entitled to take a time out also. People express fear the other person will leave or insist Time Outs are a trick to win the argument. **Winning isn't resolving.** People who view arguments as win or lose situations will often react strongly to a Time Out. It is easily perceived as yet another manipulation tactic on the other person's part. “If you leave I can't win,” is the secret thought.

Reassure them once it is only a Time Out and you will return, then leave. Don't get caught up in justifying your need to take a Time Out, which immediately degenerates into a squabble about Time Outs. Return when you say you will. This helps to build trust. You are choosing a behavior that demonstrates caring and a willingness to resolve the issues. This is one part of positive conflict resolution (Applied Problem Solving).

Arguing Fairly

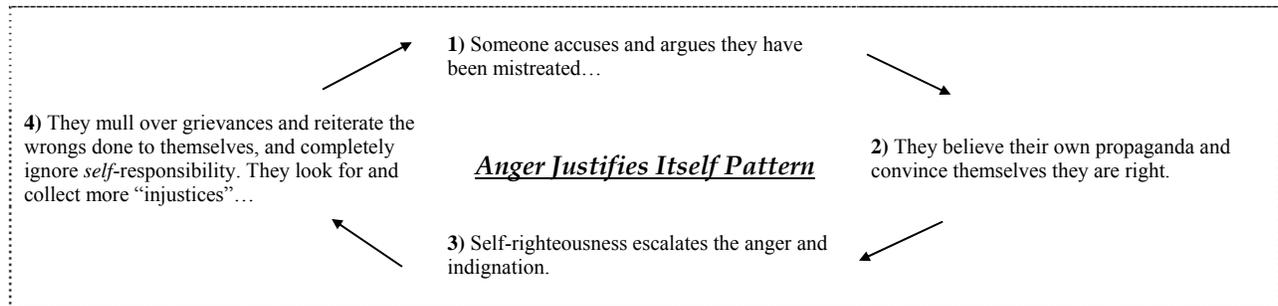
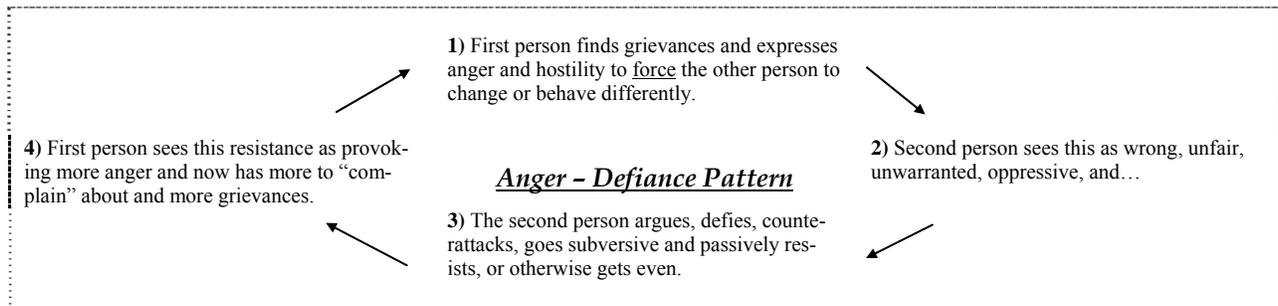
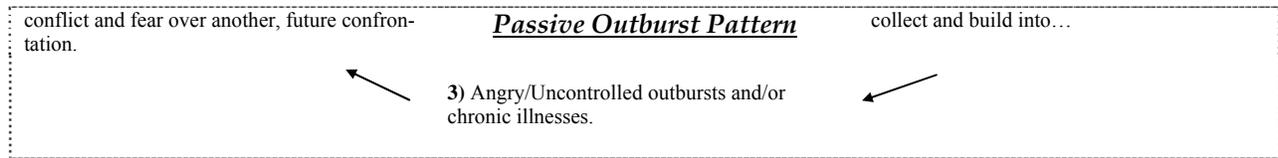
People need to learn how to stop arguments before they turn abusive. At a more spiritual level, people need to learn to stop arguing—disagreeing... fine, but arguing as it relates to anger and winning is completely unnecessary (but that's at a much higher level of awareness). Some of us are stuck in arguing, are quite sick of it, but don't know how to stop. Getting out of this cycle is complex and at the outset depends on learning how to argue fairly and how to take a Time Out.³⁹

Here's a bit of information on arguing styles... at least recognizing what's going to happen next may help you to exit the pattern. (Which is your favorite pattern? Which is your partner's favorite pattern?)



³⁸ An *Emotional Freedom Techniques* manual is a free download at www.GracefulTransformation.com

³⁹ For an observation on arguing, see the footnote in *Addictions & Spiritual Transformation*, pp. 334-335.



When you realize you're in an argument take a Time Out. Do The Seven Time Out Things listed in p. 37. Then when you return:

1) Get off the “argument” subject. Bitter arguing and recrimination is *never* about the other person or about the argument, it's about something underneath the verbal rhetoric. This “underneath issue” is difficult to figure out because it's often a hidden agenda buried under fossilized pain and trauma. Work at being aware of the feelings associated with anger and your need to win. It takes courage to be honest—if there are hidden agendas this won't work. Remember The Volcano. Also remember from the discussion on feedback that needs statements promote defensive arguing.

2) Admit and describe your fears or other feelings about the real issue you discovered in step one. Don't discuss whatever apparently started it, and don't discuss being angry—this keeps both of you on the defensive. Use feedback with consideration for the other person. Do Emotional First Aid. Be responsible and don't blame or manipulate. (You're mad; you want to win; doing what I recommend here is hard.)

3) Invite the other person to describe their feelings and listen to what they say. (Attending Behaviors) Their feelings are as valid as yours. Acknowledge what they are telling you and attempt to understand it from their point of view. Understanding does not mean agreement or endorsement. Help each other, but don't take too long. This isn't about contract negotiation or concessions, it's about collaboration, which is a concept quite foreign to power-driven societies like ours.

4) Examine your own behaviors and your need to control. *What did you contribute to the problem?* Arguments are about “who's going to be the boss”. It is possible to achieve a win-win situation (collaboration), and nei-

ther person needs to settle for being obedient. If you insist on being right this will end up in a blaming/guilt game and the person with the best memory or most threatening anger will “win”.

The complicated part is sorting out your feelings and identifying the actual issue; the difficult part is giving up your need to win and sharing your secrets around what the argument is really about. This can be a slow, risky procedure, and in many situations this will be impossible for someone to figure out without some expert guidance and body energy healing.

5) When the emotions are taken care of, and both people share their hidden agendas, the real problem will be exposed. Now it is possible to solve “the real problem”, having regard for the rights and freedoms of the other person. During problem solving, stress your common and complimentary interests. That builds empathy and trust, then collaborate on opposing interests.

Conflict that is approached in a hierarchical model (instilling fear, using power, authority, knowledge, control—any dominance model), always seems quicker but leaves resentments with consequences that reappear again and again. Emotions are denied, dignity is lost, and getting even becomes the predominant attribute of your relationship. Even with long periods of ersatz harmony, part of you is waiting to prove your point, find fault in their behavior, or get even. The relationship evolves into a series of “making deals”. These are pseudo-intimate relationships that are styled after union/management contract negotiations. Both people manipulate and barter for privilege and advantage while making as few concessions as possible.

This is fertile ground for repetitive arguments that are won by the person with the best memory who will over-power the other’s position with an articulate identification of accumulated transgressions.⁴⁰

This process of Arguing Fairly appears to be difficult and tedious. It is—the first several times you do it. Making a relationship intimate and safe takes a lot of effort and hard work. In order to be in a safe, healthy relationship, you must allow each person to contribute equally to the solution of the problems that concern their own life.

Small Group Needs

Everybody is a member of a small group—our families, at work, a small circle of close friends, or two people (a couple in relationship) is a small group. As a member of a small group there are three things that you (we) have a right to advocate for on our own behalf. These are your Small Group Needs; and of course, they are available to other members of the small group.

Inclusion This means being a part of something, not just a hanger-on. It means participation and having an active sense of belonging—being included and not simply an observer or an annoyance within the group.

Affection This is having a sense of safety and consideration, knowing your personal involvement is respected; giving and receiving support and a mutual/authentic demonstration of caring.

Influence There must be a shared sense of power—having power is important, having more than someone else is abusive. You need to be able to exercise a fair degree of influence.

Be sensitive to maintaining and encouraging these in your relationships with others. If you are experiencing problems in a small group:

- Which one of these needs do you not have?
- What fears do you allow to intimidate you into giving them up?
- Who is voluntarily giving these up? (which has subversive consequences)
- Are you ignoring or denying these needs to other group members?
- Who is demanding you surrender your share of these needs?

⁴⁰ From a different perspective, this is discussed in *Addictions & Spiritual Transformation*, p. 263.

- Who is demanding you take more than your share of these needs?
- How does everyone lose when these do not exist for everyone?

Right Association

In the last paragraph of Rights and Freedoms I mentioned the possibility of foregoing relationships with others. This is indirectly related to the *implied* Buddhist doctrine of Right Association. In what might be referred to the original teaching of Siddhartha Gautama Sakumuni (who was eventually referred to as The Buddha), there is a specific discourse on The Four Noble Truths, which are:

- I) The Truth of the Nature of Life—Life is Dislocated (misrepresented as: life is suffering ⁴¹).
- II) The Truth of the Cause of Dislocation
- III) The Truth of the Elimination of Dislocation
- IV) The Truth of the Eight Fold Noble Path (to eliminate dislocation). The Eight Fold Noble Path, in their three groups are:

<i>Conduct</i>	<i>Wisdom</i>	<i>Discipline (Mental)</i>
1) Right Speech	4) Right View	6) Right Concentration
2) Right Action	5) Right Resolution	7) Right Mindfulness
3) Right Livelihood		8) Right Effort

In this there is no mention of Right Association. It is implied and would appear (from my research and experience) that the crucial nature of Right Association was *so* obvious Siddhartha Gautama took the position that it didn't need mentioning. It may have been obvious 2500 years ago, but not today. In this modern age of gross irresponsibility and violence, predominately from self-righteous greed, addictions, and delusions about technology, there must be a specific discussion of Right Association.⁴²

One of the “givens” in all human endeavor is Right Association. This is the single most important ongoing requirement for healing, acquiring wisdom (in any form), and for success in personal transformation. People naturally understand, but without explanation or instruction, that to aspire to anything contains within it the necessary requirement to reorganize their conduct to associate with people who evince similar aspirations, and to then distance themselves (by default or intent) from people who have different aspirations.

Right Association is imperative in creating intimacy and establishing excellent communication skills.⁴³

Summary

This package covers what you need to know in order to communicate responsibly and aide you in negotiating yourself into healthy relationships. You may need well-structured therapy, but at the minimum reorganizing your communication skills is essential.

This started with an overview of communications and emotions and was followed by information on hiding and translating feelings, and how thinking, values, and myths set up tension and conflict. There were skills on how to communicate clearly, how to set boundaries and give feedback, and how to respond to the emotions of others. There is clear information on how to resolve conflict in a responsible, non-blaming way. Your Small Group Needs, along with your Rights and Freedoms, offer guidelines of what to work towards to achieve a non-abusive, safe relationship.

The only thing I haven't stressed, which is the key to making this work, is your own hard work and determination; and of course, Right Association. So, with all that, there isn't any secret information that I've left out that is the “key” to making it work. There are no shortcuts to achieving fulfillment; no less risky way to disclose your emotions; no more expedient way to make a relationship safe. This is how simple it is.

⁴¹ In *Facets of Personal Transformation* (scheduled for publication in 2010) there will be a chapter Buddhism. In the section ‘Religion of Secular Endeavor’ there will be discussion about the appearance of the word “suffering” in relation to Buddhist doctrine. Using the word “suffering” in the first Noble Truth misrepresents what was intended and misrepresents what is. The consequences of this have been disastrous.

⁴² This is discussed briefly in *The Worlds Religions*, Huston Smith, HarperSanFrancisco, 1991, pp. 104-105.

⁴³ For more on Right Association, I refer you to the index of *Addictions & Spiritual Transformation*.

*Words cannot describe everything.
The heart's message cannot be delivered in words.
If one receives words literally, they will be lost.
If one tries to explain with words, they will not
attain enlightenment in this life.*⁴⁴

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⁴⁴ Zen Flesh, Zen Bones, A Collection of Zen & Pre Zen Writings, Compiled by Paul Reps , Anchor Books, 1989