

One in a series of articles by

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Connecting With Others: AWAKENING TO THE LIFE WITHIN

In every moment, we experience our needs as either being met or not being met. How we respond to this phenomenon determines how situations unfold and resolve.

In the case of unmet needs, we are often asleep to the negative thoughts we feed ourselves that perpetuate the cycle of negativity and violence in our lives and give shape to responses that are often alienating. In order to increase our self-awareness and empower ourselves to choose different responses that will enrich our lives rather than create suffering, the following exercise has been helpful to me and others. (Rachelle's note: I've attended a workshop with US trainers Susan Skye and Robert Gonzales. I am very grateful to them for the time they devoted to exploring in great depth the exercise I'm now sharing.)

During the next week (or next year, if you're really ambitious), notice every time you experience unpleasant feelings, especially anger, guilt, shame and depression. In a small notebook, write down all the thoughts that are associated with those feelings.

For example, you might experience anger with someone in your family over the holidays and have thoughts like, "My sister is so insensitive and ungrateful. That will be the last invite she gets from me." The next

step is to read each thought aloud preceding each one with the words "I'm telling myself . . ." In this case it would be, "I'm telling myself that my sister is so insensitive and ungrateful. I'm telling myself that will be the last invite she gets from me." This helps us to witness the thought process and detach from it or at the very least place some distance between our essential self and the thoughts.

Now comes the sweet part - we tune into our needs which are beautiful expressions of life moving through us - in this case, the needs might be for mutuality, consideration, awareness and appreciation. I then reflect only on these needs and how much I value them, not just for myself but also for every human being on the planet - that is I wish that everyone's needs for mutuality, consideration, awareness and appreciation are met - I notice a shift of energy within me. My feelings shift from anger and hostility to sadness, discouragement and perhaps even curiosity at some point - what pain is stirring inside my sister's heart that precipitates her behaviour?

There's a bitter sweetness when my attention is placed on needs - yes I am sad but I am no longer holding on to alienating judgments about my sister - I have moved to a place of equanimity while being fully in touch with what is alive in my heart. I no longer feel constriction in my body but rather an opening to life. I know that the next time I speak with my sister, this is where I want to be because I trust that from this place, I will be fully aware of my needs and better able to connect to hers. It is from this place that we will truly resolve our differences in a compassionate way.

With every intention, word and deed, I am creating the very world I live in. Every response I put forth has creative force to generate either connection or



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alienation. My prayer is that I will be awake enough and conscious enough to remember the incredible power I have in each moment to choose that which will best serve the life in me and in others.

As so beautifully expressed by Thich Nhat Hanh: "Shining the light of awareness on the roots of violence within our own hearts and thoughts, we can stop the war where it begins, in our minds. Stopping the war in our minds and in our hearts, we will surely know how to stop the war outside."

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