

Diane Hamilton
Week 4, A Zen Approach to Conflict
October 27, 2014
“Negotiation from the Heart”
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Welcome back. This is session four of Tricycle Magazine's online course, “A Zen Path Through Conflict.” What we're trying to do is learn conflict resolution skills and get down to the nuts and bolts of what it takes in order for us to be able to move through conflicts with more ease, grace, and wisdom.

In this fourth session, we are going to be looking at negotiation. In the first session, we talked about how conflict is actually a wonderful creative opportunity. We learned that turning into the skid is the secret to changing our ability to work with conflict. The second session was all about supporting ourselves in our perspectives. We learned how we can become very intimate with what we think and feel as well as our habitual patterns. We also talked about changing those patterns and communicating what matters most to us and to others.

In the third session, we spent time talking about listening—the single most important skill of conflict resolution—and how to open up space to allow for more perspectives and more truths. Once we do that, it creates one more opportunity. If there are multiple perspectives and multiple truths, then we're going to have to learn how to negotiate those truths. That's really what we want to focus on today. How do we negotiate?

As we begin, I'd like to recommend a book to you that's very important in the field of negotiation. It was written in the 1980s by Roger Fisher and William Ury from Harvard University. It's called *Getting To Yes*. It was a very important book for me when I was trained as a mediator, and my understanding is it's still one of the best books written on negotiation. *Getting To Yes* is an instructive title. The idea is that even if we disagree, we can get to a place where we'll be able to say yes to each other and support an outcome that didn't look like it was going to happen.

I'm going to begin this particular session by talking to you about a situation that I'm in right now. I'm a Zen teacher—some of you know that—and I also do retreats on communication and negotiation skills, as well as retreats in nature. I have a little retreat center down in the canyon lands of southern Utah. One of my co-teachers is an icon, you might say. He's famous in those parts as a primitive

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skills expert. You can also say that he is a bit of a wild man. Undomesticated is a word that comes to mind. He’s certainly not one to be reined in. He feels very at-home out in the wild and does not want to be told what to do.

When he and I get together to lead a course, one of the things that happens is that I bring in very conventional ways of being, like using a clock. I have this value that time is oriented to work for us. I believe that certain things—like the beginning of the day, the middle of the day, the end of the day, the sun coming up, the moon coming up, the sun going down—are orienting. He's actually fine with the sun coming up and the moon going down. He's just not fine with anything in between.

We have this ongoing challenge where I want to use a clock and he wants to use his hand on the horizon to figure out how many hours are left. Maybe he wants to use some sort of a sundial. What results is that we often miss each other in terms of time. I am usually standing there pointing at my Swiss watch saying, "You said you were going to be here two hours ago." He then says, "Why are you upset? According to my watch, we're on schedule."

This may look like a somewhat irresolvable conflict. My position is that you need to use a clock. His position is that we should do this program without using mechanical devices. We're all trying to get away from technology, he says. People made a long trip to get out of the city and they don't want to be on their computers. They put their cell phones down. Let's put the clock away too. We know what daylight is like. We know when the sun is high in the sky and when it's low. Why do we need more than that? From the outside, this may look like an irreconcilable difference.

One of the things that William Ury and Roger Fisher point out is that when we go to negotiate, what we tend to do is come from our positions. My position is “let's use the clock” and his position is “let's not.” If we come from positions, it looks completely unresolvable. That said, what we have to do in the negotiation process is first be willing to acknowledge that there may be validity to both of these points of view. Then, we ask what is it that each person is really wanting and needing.

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What is important to him—and the reason that he doesn't want to use a clock—is giving people the opportunity to be weaned from their computers, cell phones, handhelds and even their watches. He loves the fact that the daylight is a guide. Using daylight, we don't have to divide the day up into micro-units of 12 and then more micro-units of 12 and then more micro-units of 12. In this respect, the whole day is divided up into these tiny little increments. With daylight, you can have an experience of wholeness and this flow of one moment moving into the next and the next and the next. That activity can flow from that. Then, when it reaches a certain time in the day, it's time to take it easy. Then all of a sudden it's time to get busy again. There's something really beautiful, organic and cohesive about not using a clock and that really matters to him. He likes having that experience and he likes giving it to other people.

Now, in our situation, he will be taking people out to the field and I will be home holding down the fort. I have a different set of interests, right? My interests are in coordinating the entire group so that we can meet up at a certain time. So, that said, I have an interest in making sure that if I take a group out while they're gone, we get to use the full amount of time. Unless we use a clock and agree, then there's some chance that I'm going to bring people in earlier or that I'm going to have to cut short our activity because we're not coordinated. Also, because I'm often in the main camp when this is happening, there's a question in my mind: at what point do I start to worry if there's an emergency?

On my end, they are all kinds of considerations for using a clock. Most of these have to do with cohesion, coherence, efficiency and knowing when something has become an emergency. Those are my interests. Given these two sets of interests, what ideas can we come up with that will actually help solve this problem? Or is it an either/or situation? Often we come to a negotiation feeling like it's an either/or problem.

As you're listening right now, I am curious if whether or not you've already taken a side in this negotiation. In other words, if you were to ask yourself who you're most identified with, is it the mechanistic clock girl? Or are you identified with natural flow man? Whose side are you actually on here? You might also be able to see a path in which the strengths of both of those sets of interests could possibly be used.

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As you're listening, it would be really helpful to think about whether or not you have a bias towards one of these positions. Also, for just a moment, see if you can pick up the other position. What's it like to pick up the wants and the needs of the other side? If you're in favor of keeping track of time with a clock, see what it's like to feel how important it is to flow, to experience a day that isn't broken up into parts and dictated by small devices.

If you're aligned with that already, think about how important it is to coordinate movements, maintain cohesion, be efficient and recognize when something is past the point of normal so you can start to have an emergency type of response. Just let your mind pick up both sides of this. Once you've done that in a negotiation process, you've moved from positions. You've also now expressed wants and needs and, as you start to generate options, you start looking at all of the overlapping wants and needs.

I think my partner and I would both agree that we want people to have a good experience of being in nature without too much mechanistic interference. I think he would certainly agree that he wants the group to be efficient and remain cohesive. I think we both certainly agree that we want people to remain safe. When we move off our positions, what we discover is that we tend to have many more overlapping wants and needs than what the positions indicate. Once we've done that and looked at the shared wants and needs, then we're in a position to really start to generate options.

Take a minute to brainstorm. If you were in my position and you were involved in this negotiation, what are the two or three things that you might suggest to my partner and me about how we can solve this time issue that's arisen between us? What are some ideas that you might have?

As you're thinking, one thing that comes to mind is maybe he might be willing to use an alarm or a clock at the end of his period away so that he doesn't use the clock the whole time. This way, he uses it as a notice to determine when it's time to depart. This is a much more minimized use of the clock. Another idea might be for him to use a clock, but not share it with participants. In this scenario, he has the time reference point, but they're working without a clock and having the experience he wants them to have.

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On my side, if I were to figure out what I could do to help him out, I might suggest creating a window of time in which we should meet instead of creating a designated meeting time of 1 pm or 2 pm. While a designated meeting time inevitably becomes problematic, a window of time might be more flexible. If we meet sometime between 1 pm and 5 pm, I'm free to stay in the field as long as I want to before we have to rendezvous again.

Maybe we could even have a conversation to determine how two different groups—or sometimes even three different groups—can have more shared presence for one another. What are the ways that we can keep time for each other, either with or without the use of a clock? What ideas might a group have about establishing a sense of a shared enterprise and having more coherence?

You can see that once we get past the positions, we get to the underlying interests wants and needs. When we see how they overlap and how much we have in common, the dispute becomes much less interesting and the problem-solving becomes much more creative and interesting. When you open up and move into this, not only do you get what we call a win-win, where now both of our wants and needs are being met, but something emerges that adds more value to the situation or brings in creative solutions. The conflict that started out to be alienating, problematic and decisive has now become the source of a much deeper conversation about how we actually build a relationship. How do we take care of our movements together? How do we relate to the day and the time in a way that everyone gets to participate?

You can see that a conflict that becomes a negotiation can have really creative outcomes. There's an example, for instance, of how to work with a conflict. It takes being open to the conflict as a creative possibility. It takes being willing to take my own side or your own side. It means being willing to listen and to validate the perspective of others. It also shows that creativity can produce different kinds of options that help solve the issue.

We find ourselves back at the beginning. The question that really comes up is, how does conflict resolution—or communication skills and negotiation—constitute part of a spiritual practice? When we are able to have confidence in ourselves—and confidence in others—that we can work on the problems that

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come up in our lives, we're able to be more at-home in the world. From my perspective spiritual practice, at its essence, is about inhabiting this existence in a full-hearted, direct and undivided way. In this respect, our lives become whole.

Another value that arises is our capacity for peace. Internal peace and harmony are often seen as the crown jewels of spiritual practice. A peaceful demeanor, or a peaceful way of conducting ourselves, generates peace for the planet. This idea that we could learn how to engage with one another in ways that are not as distressing helps us realize this real, genuine desire for harmony on this planet.

I also think that these various truths—my truth, your truth, his truth, her truth and their truths—constitute, if you will, a greater truth. We have to learn how to see the truth of other people's positions in order to get, and participate in, the largest possible truth. These are not small questions. These are not small issues. As I said in the very first session, to the extent that you practice this in your life affects the people that you work with and the people you live with. That, in turn, affects the people they work with and live with. We really do involve ourselves in a much more conscious and heartfelt way of being together. This is a much more awake way of being.

We have an amazing and very inspiring aspiration. What's also amazing is that we actually have the capacity to realize that aspiration. You can realize it's in your life. However, it will take practice. I can guarantee that you'll be discouraged, and when you go to start to change the way you do this, it's going to be difficult. My own experience over the course of 40 years of working with this material is that just like meditation practice, it has this interesting way of filtering into your system until you're swimming in it. After a while, you find that you have become more fearless, more creative and more confident in your relationships. You're also willing to be authentic in ways that you weren't in the past. You also find that you trust yourself and, therefore, you trust other people more. That said, be willing to practice and understand that it is a path, not an outcome. It's actually the thing that we experience on the way when we hold such a worthy and, to some degree, noble aspiration of that harmony and peace.

There are lots of really good resources out there. There are great books. *Getting To Yes* is one and *Difficult Conversations From Harvard* is another. There's also

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my book, *Everything Is Workable*, published by Shambhala, and many others in the realm of communication and conflict resolution. These days, there are also great training programs. You can go to my website if you're interested in doing more training. Thank you again very much for your time, your attention and for the quality of your awareness. I wish you all the best.

