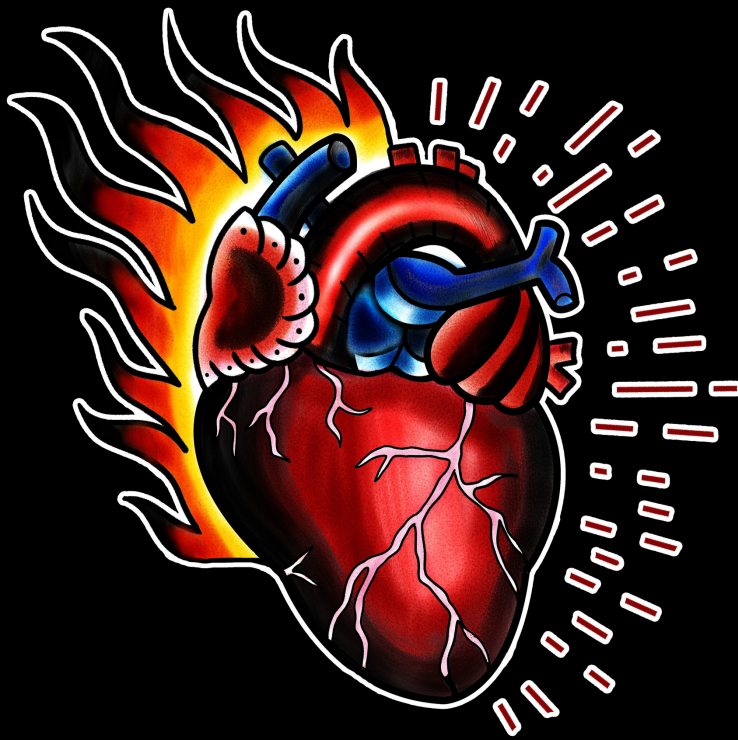


# so you're ready to choose love

Trauma-Informed Conflict Transformation for  
Social Justice & Spiritual Growth



A Loving Justice Workbook

by Kai Cheng Thom, MSc

# Open Source Knowledge Share

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[www.kaichengthom.com](http://www.kaichengthom.com)

[www.arisembodiment.org](http://www.arisembodiment.org)

With deep thanks to:

Chanelle, Kota, Jon, and Leslie - my support pod & dear friends, all whom teach me new ways of doing conflict all the time

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The thinkers and innovators of Transformative Justice, Black and Indigenous women and femmes, women and femmes of colour, thank you for the world you are working to create

# Introduction

Hello Dear One,

If you are reading this, then you are probably in some way similar to me - an asker of questions and seeker of answers. **What can we do in the midst of conflict and harm? Who are we to be when our most essential values are challenged?** In my own life, I have experienced conflict as both a painful trauma and the greatest of spiritual crises.

**In our darkest moments, we discover who we are.** It is often said that conflict is invitation to transform the system. I also believe that conflict is an opportunity to transform our selves. Yet this is no easy feat - we need support, we need skills, we need spiritual practice to find our best selves in the hardest times.

**This e-book is a resource for personal growth through conflict.** I designed it as a practical companion to my more theoretical 2018 essay collection, *I HOPE WE CHOOSE LOVE: A trans girl's notes from the end of the world*. The exercises and readings in it are informed by my lived experience and formal study as a mediator, somatic practitioner/healer, and sex educator. They are also heavily influenced and indebted to the work of Black, Indigenous, and fellow People of Colour spiritual teachers and Transformative Justice thinkers.

**This workbook is not a solution to all your conflict and Transformative Justice problems.** It will not teach you how to run an accountability process, nor will it replace the services of a professional therapist, mediator, lawyer, or healer. My hope is that it will provide some opportunities for growth, expansion, and connectedness to self, other, and spirit.

We live in strange and terrifying, yet wondrous, times. Our planet is shaking and shifting beneath our feet. The buried histories of colonization, oppression, collective traumas, and resilience are rising up in waves all around us. It would be easy - and understandable - to give in to hatred and despair. Yet I still believe we have a choice. There is always a choice. **I still hope we choose love.**

Kai Cheng Thom, 2021

# The New Culture

What would it be like to live in a community where shame, blame, conflict, and harm were held with courage and kindness, humility and truth? What would it mean to start building a world where we all had the social and spiritual skills to care for ourselves and one another in the midst of disagreement and even violence?

How do we begin to embody our core values? These questions lie at the heart of conflict transformation and social change work.

For generations of queer and trans people, sex workers, racial justice and disability justice activists have been working to create a **cultural paradigm** that weaves together the ancient knowledges suppressed by colonization and the technological and social realities of our contemporary world. Captain Snowdon of the **Institute for the Study of Somatic Sex Education** terms this practice **New Culture Skills** - the development of skills and lenses that we need to create a better world. Core tools and concepts for new culture-building around conflict transformation are:

## *Abolitionism*

Rejecting a world where prisons & policing are the answer to conflict and harm

## *Decolonization*

Working to restore the sovereignty of colonized communities & champion suppressed ways of knowing

## *Valuing Complexity*

Finding wisdom in paradox and multiple truths

## *Add you own...*

## *Indispensability*

Believing that each and every person is inherently precious and non-disposable, even when they have done something bad

## *Embracing Failure*

Releasing the drive towards perfection and purity; creating space to be human, flawed, and sacred all at once

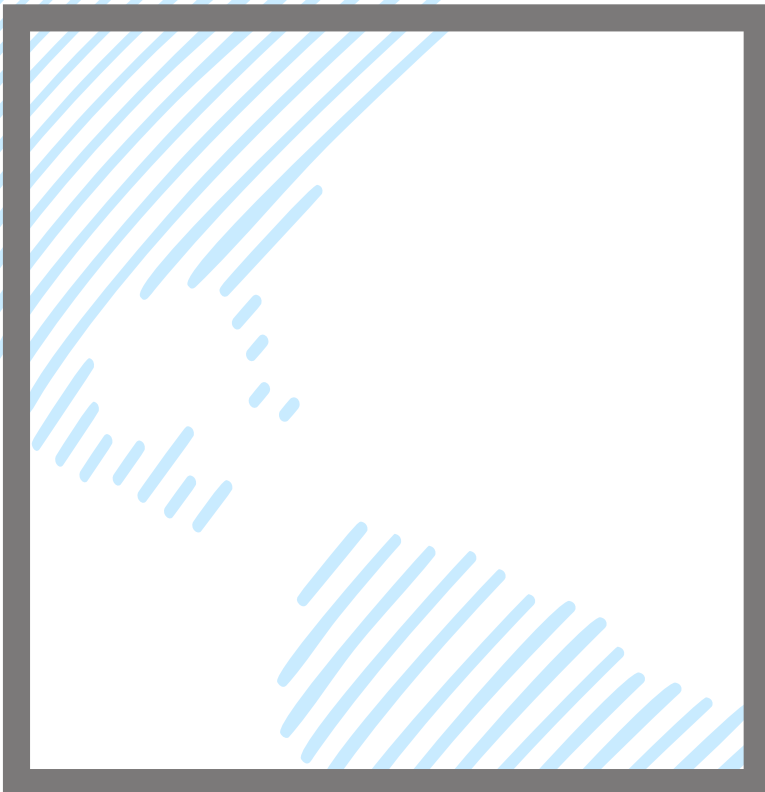
## *Honoring Messiness*

Holding space for rage, grief, not-okayness, fucking up, saying NO!, changing minds, flailing

# The New Justice

The dominant, colonial culture is based on a Eurocentric notion of justice. It is legalistic and based around a competitive, punitive model. Yet many other communities and cultures - particularly Indigenous communities and cultures worldwide - hold a perspective on justice that is collaborative and reparative. Today, the movement to revolutionize justice and conflict resolution systems are led by Black and Indigenous communities. Intersectional feminist, queer and trans communities as well have played a central role in shaping the dialogue on justice and social change.

*The Justice I want to See Looks Like...*



"NO ONE ENTERS VIOLENCE FOR THE FIRST TIME HAVING COMMITTED IT" – Danielle Sered



**The new justice that we seek is in many ways rooted in ancient tradition - in the work of decolonization and liberation.**

## *Partial Reading List*

- Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective (Blog)*
- Emergent Strategy* by adrienne maree brown
- We Will Not Cancel Us* by adrienne maree brown
- The Revolution Starts At Home* ed. Ching-In Chen et al
- Are Prisons Obsolete?* by Angela Davis
- Fumbling Towards Repair* ed. Shira Hassan & Mariame Kaba
- We Do This Til' We Free Us* by Mariame Kaba
- Creative Interventions Toolkit* by Mimi Kim
- My Grandmother's Hands* by Resmaa Menakem
- Love and Rage* by Lama Rod Owens
- Beyond Survival* ed. Ejeris Dixon & Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha
- I Hope We Choose Love* by Kai Cheng Thom
- and many more...*

# Re-Membering the Body

The body plays an essential role in our ability to navigate conflict, relationships, and social change. Yet we are often discouraged from paying attention to and valuing the body's intelligence. Below are some practices that can awaken and strengthen our mind-body (**somatic**) awareness). Write down the ones that work for you - every body is unique.

## Sound

Humming, singing, making music, laughing

## Ritual

Symbolic actions of spiritual significance

## Movement

Dancing, running, working out, mindful movement e.g. yoga and martial arts, playing with pets

## Touch

Self-massage, sensuality & sexuality, holding a grounding object

## Sensing

Visualization, listening to music or environmental sounds, engaging smell and taste, body scan meditations

## Breath

Calming: Slow and gentle breathing, extended exhales, gentle breath holds

Activating: Rapid breathing and strong breath holds (do not do this without proper training)

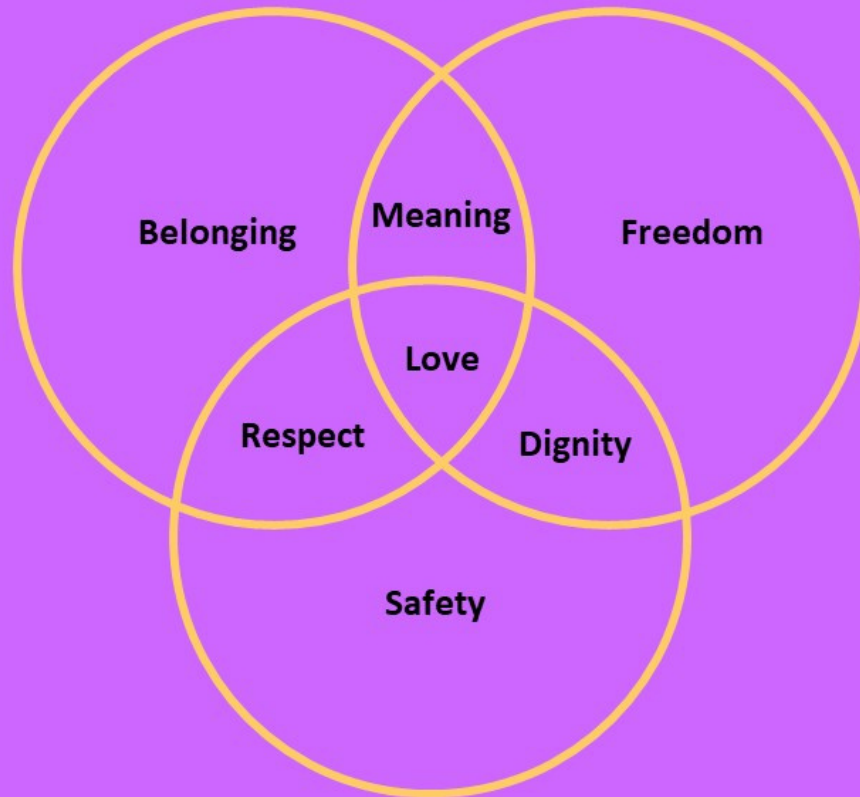
## Stillness

Still meditation, forest bathing, yoga nidra

# Understanding Conflict

## Foundational Human Social Needs

by Kai Cheng Thom©



Serious conflict occurs when we sense - rightly or wrongly - that our basic human needs are being threatened or going unmet. The body, in its brilliance, constantly scans the environment for danger often without us even knowing it - a function called **neuroception**.

Basic needs can be physical, like the need for food/water/shelter/clothing, but they can also be social and emotional. Humans require belonging, freedom, and safety in equal measure, but all too often, survival in the dominant, colonial culture requires that we sacrifice one need in order to meet another. We are encouraged to give up freedom for safety, or safety for belonging. In order to encourage transformative change in response to conflict, we need to create the conditions in we can at least imagine all of our basic needs being met.

**Journal Prompt:** Can you think of a time when you sacrificed one of your basic social needs for another? What was that like? What did you learn from that experience? If you could go back in time and tell your younger self something about that, what would it be?

# A World Without Prisons or Punishment

**Imagine:** In the middle of the night, a powerful enchantment has been cast: Punishment and prisons no longer exist anywhere in the world! Instead, new systems for addressing conflict and harm have sprung up to replace them. When you wake up, what do you notice that tells you this change has happened? In your close relationships? Neighborhood? Government? Workplace?

**How does this enchanted world feel in your:**

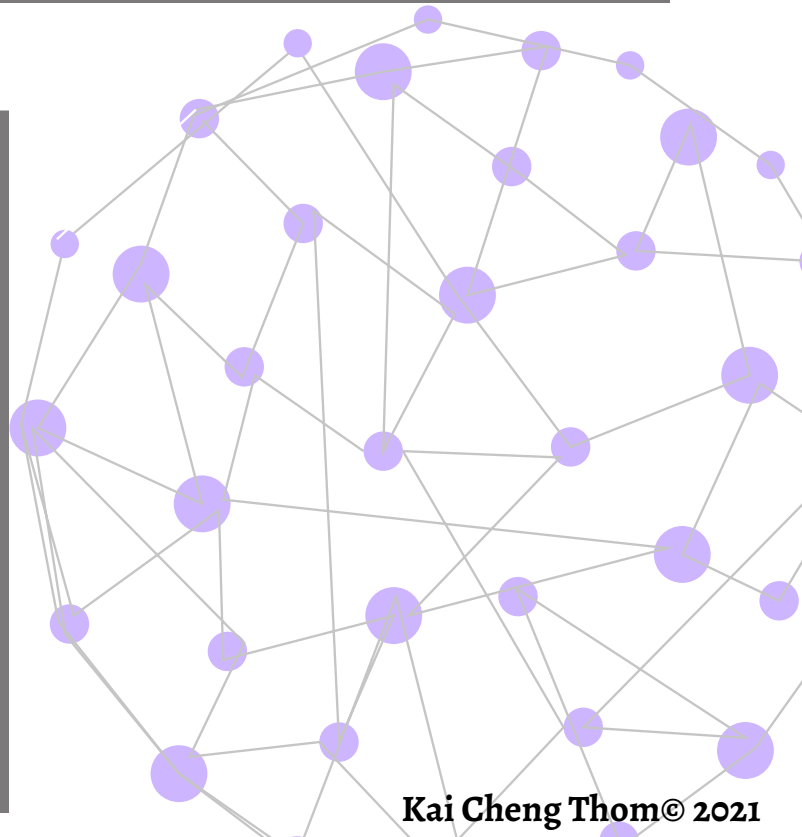
Body:

Mind:

Spirit:





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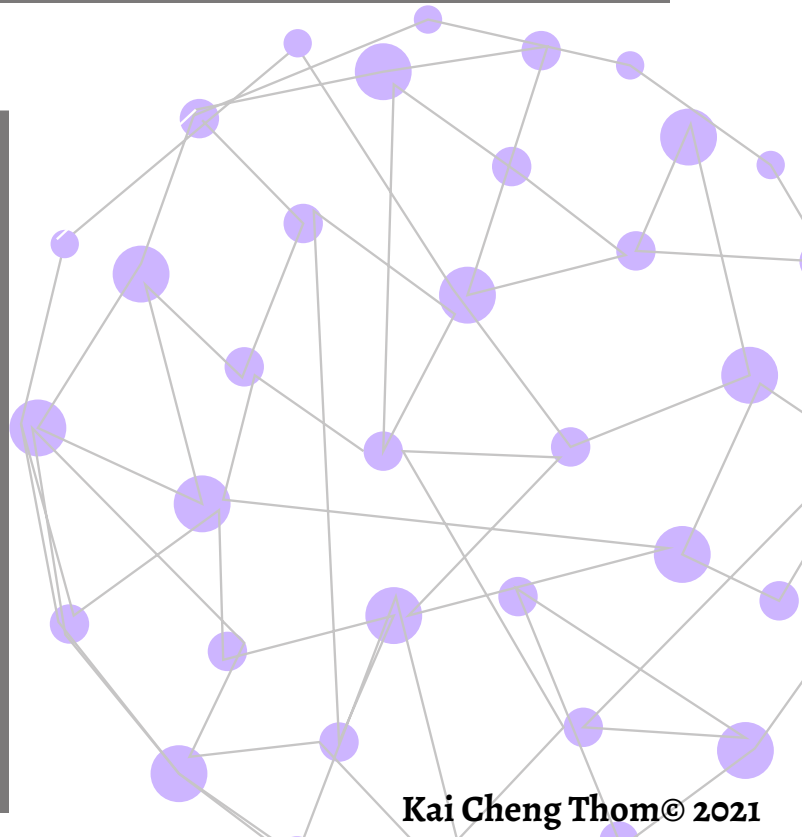
Body:

Mind:

Spirit:



# Mapping the Terrain

Close your eyes and think of a time when you were in a conflict and really succeeded at being the kind of person that you want to be. What did you do? What did you learn from this experience? How did it feel in your body? You can also imagine a situation where you saw someone else role model the way you want to be in a conflict.



Now close your eyes and think of a time when you were in a conflict and responded to it in a way that you now regret. What did you do? What did you learn? How did it feel in your body?



# Embodiment Exploration

Compare the two conflict experiences you described on the previous page. How were they different on each level of embodiment indicated below? What do you notice?

## Conflict 1

Sensations

Emotions

Thoughts

Actions

## Conflict 2

Sensations

Emotions

Thoughts

Actions

# Resource Remembrance

Having compared two conflict situations - one in which you were able to successfully embody the person you wanted to be, and one in which you struggled to do so - what have you observed and/or learned about the resources you need when in a conflict situation? Sometimes, the resources we need are within ourselves - skills for emotion regulation and self care.

Sometimes, we need support from a community. Frequently, systemic factors such as power, privilege, and oppression also have a significant impact on how we are able to respond to conflict.

## Resources I need In Conflict Situations

Inner Resources (Things I can do for myself)

Community Resources (Things others can do for me)

Systemic Resources (Things that can alleviate systemic oppression and power dynamics)

# What Is Loving Justice?

## THE LOVING JUSTICE FRAMEWORK

by Kai Cheng Thom©

*The Loving Justice framework can be applied to the actions of (alleged) perpetrators of harm, survivors, justice facilitators and enforcers, and community members.*

### IS IT HONEST?

- Has the whole story been told?
- Have conflicts of interest and power dynamics been declared and adequately neutralized?
- Have commitments and responsibilities to self and others been carried out appropriately?
- Is the action clearly justified by the circumstances and the evidence provided? Is there adequate transparency for decisions that significantly impact people's lives?



### IS IT HUMBLE?

- Has there been sufficient self-reflection prior to, during, and after the action?
- Is there openness to the possibility of personal error?
- Is there willingness to be corrected when mistakes are made?
- Is the feeling of the action one that demonstrates humility?
- Is there openness to clearly discussing and justifying the action if asked?

### IS IT BRAVE?

- Has personal responsibility for the action been taken?
- Does the action take a stand against systemic oppression and harmful power dynamics?
- Does the action face up to the actor's personal fears, insecurities and mistakes?

### IS IT KIND?

- Does the action demonstrate attention to the needs and safety of self and other?
- Does the action invite and support positive change, rather than further harm or punishment?
- Has there been respect for the inherent dignity and rights of all involved?

Loving Justice is a somatic and spiritual lens on conflict resolution and Transformative Justice. Prison and police abolitionism have told us why we need to new ways of addressing conflict and harm in our communities. But change is difficult, and our bodies are many ways hard-wired for conflict escalation, punishment, and revenge. It is quite easy to lose sight of our values and who we are in a conflict, especially when serious violence or harm are involved.

I created the Loving Justice framework in the midst of my own spiritual crisis. Lost and emotionally shattered, I made a compass star out of the four values that I hold most dear: Courage, Honesty, Kindness, and Humility. This allowed me to rediscover what I really believe about harm, and to resist my own worst impulses - as well as pressure from other people to do conflict in ways that were not in alignment with my own integrity.

Loving Justice is not meant to be dogmatic. My values do not need to become your values. But I do encourage you to create a guiding star of your own - to make explicit the values that you want to guide you in your darkest moments. **In our darkest moments, we discover who we are.**

# Distilling Values

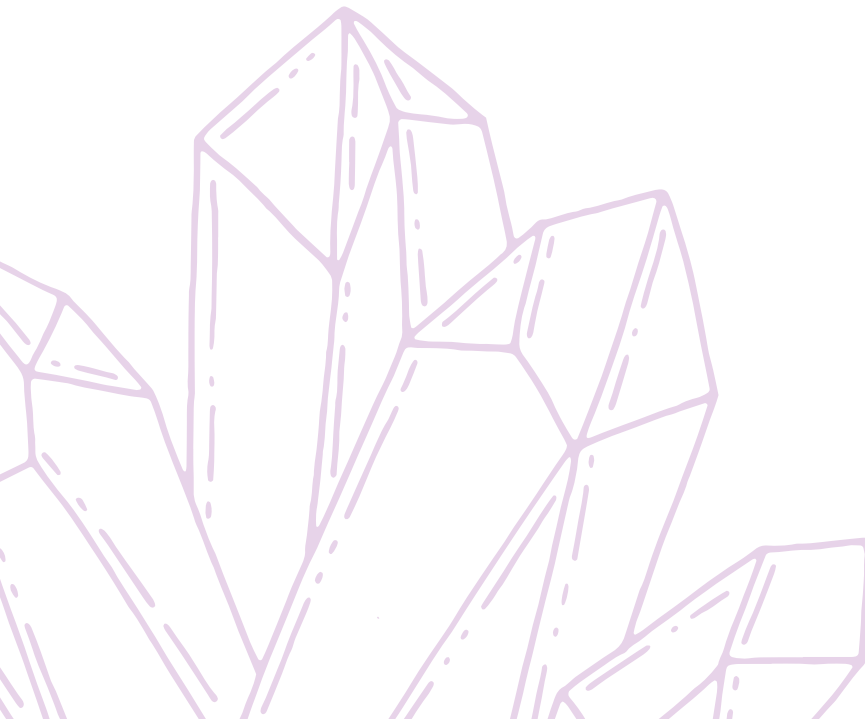
Use the exercises we have completed so far to *distill* a core set of values that you want to embody when navigating conflict. To the right, there are some examples of such values - but please feel free to follow your own unique path with this exercise. The more authentic these values are to you, the more powerfully you will be able to embody them.

You are lovingly challenged to contain your core conflict values to a small number - perhaps between 3 and 6. This will help make this exercise practical and useful as a tool for everyday life. Come up with a definition and a real-life example for each value.



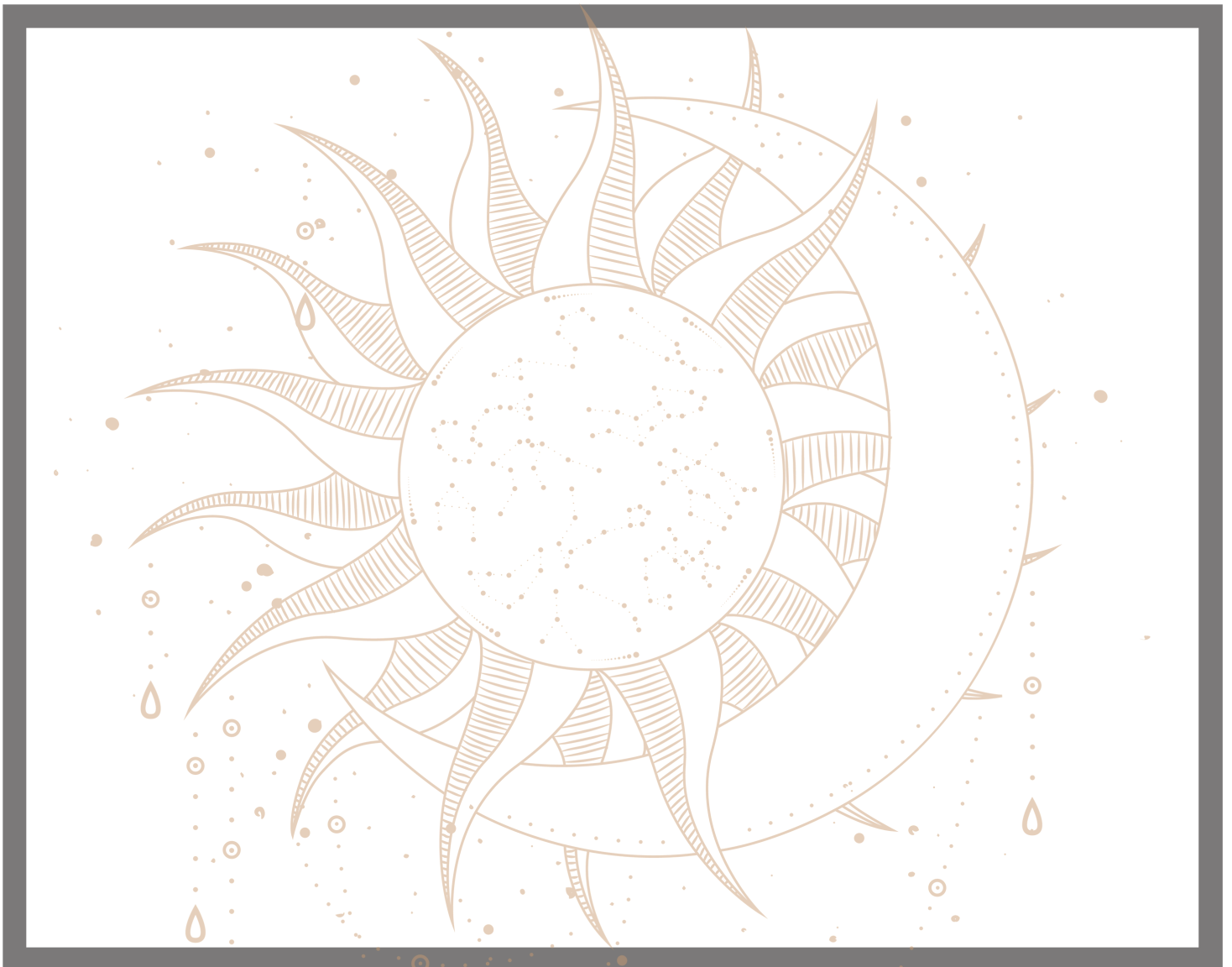
## My Conflict Values:

Five empty rectangular boxes for writing values.



# Your Conflict Compass

Use the core conflict values you have distilled from the previous exercises to create a drawing/painting/collage/digital image/other piece of visual art in the shape of a compass. This compass represents your guiding star - the wisdom you will return to in moments of confusion and emotional intensity.



**Meditation:** Imagine yourself sitting at the centre of your compass and breathe into the experience. Spend some time facing in each direction that your compass indicates. What is this like? Where do your values come from? Where do they want you to go?

# Voicing Values

Spend some time reflecting on one of the values in your compass. What is the color, texture, shape of this value? Where does it live within you? What is its highest intention for you and your world? If this value had a voice, what would it say? Without self-censoring or editing, write down or draw what comes to you in a stream of consciousness. Repeat for each of your guiding conflict values.



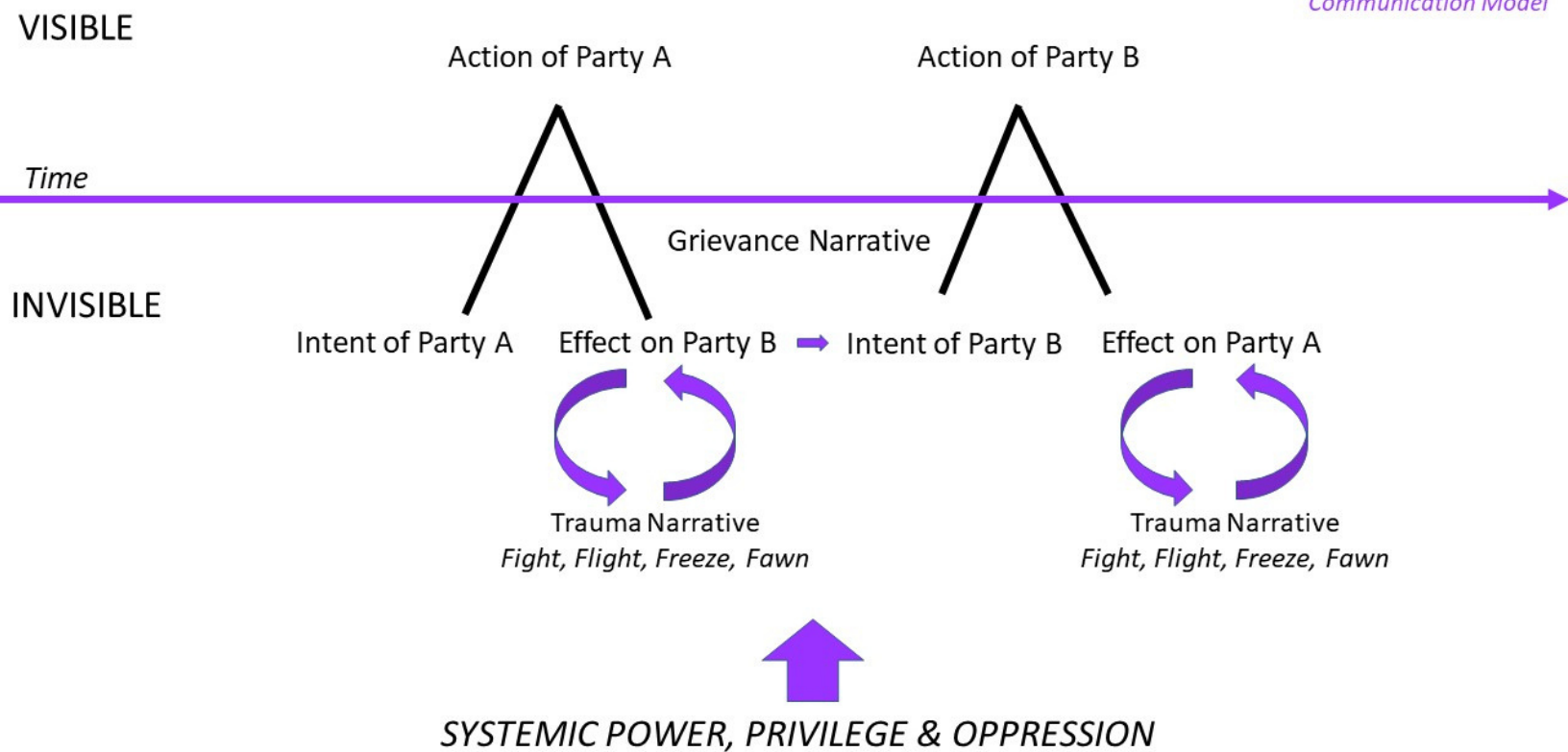


# Trauma & Conflict

## Trauma-Informed Conflict Sequence

by Kai Cheng Thom©

Inspired by Betty Pries  
and Credence & Co's  
*Intent, Action, Effect*  
*Communication Model*



This diagram is a map of the sequence in which interpersonal conflict often plays out. The first person (Party A) has an intention which is unknown or invisible to the second person (Party B). When Party A acts on their intent, it has an effect on Party B, which is unknown or invisible.

Party B may also have a traumatic response (being "triggered") to Party A's action - the physical experience of being in life danger and having a primal survival instinct (*Fight, Flight, Freeze* or *Fawn*) flare up. These powerful physical sensations are often painful and terrifying, and from them a story about Party A - a *grievance narrative* - arises. Party B then responds from their grievance narrative, which has an impact on Party A, and so on.

All of the above is also likely to be impacted by social and historical power dynamics - systemic power, privilege, and oppression. For example, Party A might make a racially charged joke with good or neutral intention. But this joke has an invisible impact on Party B, whose experiences of individual and collective trauma are triggered by a lifetime of experiencing racism. Systemic power, privilege, and oppression are therefore deeply connected to conflict and trauma.

# Trauma & Conflict

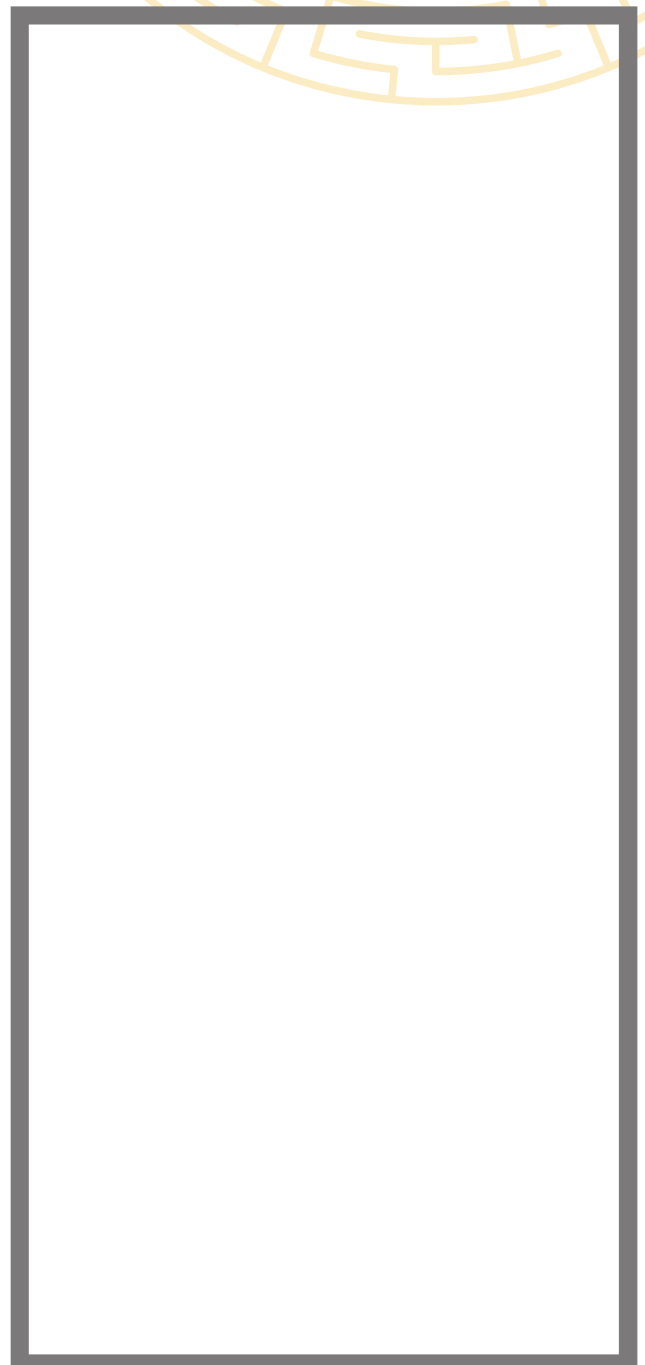
## Scenario: Elaine & Gavin

Elaine is a young racialized trans woman born in Canada working in a non-profit organization. She has had many negative experiences in the past with employment discrimination – she has frequently been hired, she suspects as a “diversity” hire, and then not been treated well by her coworkers and managers. Elaine’s current workplace has pledged to be trans inclusive and anti-racist. However, Elaine has noticed that most of the managers are white.

Gavin sits next to Elaine. He is an older man of colour. Ever since Elaine arrived, he has greeted Elaine by saying “hello sir.” When Elaine points out that this is misgendering, he either appears not to hear or quickly apologizes and says “I’m sorry if I said something that offended you.” Elaine is becoming more and more disturbed and angry about this situation. She goes to a manager to complain, but honestly, she doesn’t have much hope for change.

The manager speaks to Gavin and tells him that his behavior is a problem. Gavin is very upset that Elaine “went and ran to a manager behind his back”! He points out that he has been working in the organization for nearly 15 years and has repeatedly been singled out as a “problem” by white managers while other workers have been given a pass for much worse behavior and promoted over him. He states that he was not raised in a community and culture where trans people were very visible and the new gender diversity language is a learning curve for him. He hates being treated as a “scary” man of colour

Use the Trauma-Informed Conflict Sequence model to analyze this scenario. What do you think is going on? What might help?



# Window of Transformation

<b>DESTRUCTIVE CONFLICT</b> FIGHT/FLIGHT	<i>I MUST DESTROY THE OTHER OR BE DESTROYED IT SEEMS POINTLESS TO ENGAGE IN GOOD FAITH, THE OTHER BECOMES MY ENEMY I FEEL DEHUMANIZED &amp; DEHUMANIZE OTHERS IN TURN I FEAR BEING PUNISHED &amp; RESIST BY GOING ON THE ATTACK MY SENSE OF SELF AND SOCIAL SURVIVAL ARE UNDER THREAT I START TO FEEL MY BOUNDARIES ARE NOT BEING RESPECTED</i>
<b>THE WINDOW OF TRANSFORMATION</b> by Kai Cheng Thom© <i>Based on Dan Siegel &amp; Pat Ogden's "Window of Tolerance"</i>	<i>MY BOUNDARIES ARE RESPECTED &amp; MY QUESTIONS ARE WELCOME I SEEK SELF-ACCOUNTABILITY, GROWTH, AND CHALLENGES JOYFULLY I AM ENCOURAGED TO BE CURIOUS &amp; SEEK NEW WAYS OF INTER-BEING I HAVE ACCESS TO BASIC NEEDS, PERSONAL HEALING &amp; SUPPORT I FEEL SAFE ENOUGH TO HEAR &amp; INTEGRATE FEEDBACK</i>
<b>PERFORMATIVE CHANGE</b> FAWN/SUBMIT	<i>I START TO FEEL OVERWHELMED BY INSECURITY &amp; SHAME I TRY TO APPEASE BY MAKING COMMITMENTS I CAN'T KEEP I LOSE OR AM DENIED ACCESS TO MY SENSE OF DIGNITY &amp; BELONGING MY RELATIONSHIP WITH ACCOUNTABILITY LOOKS A LOT LIKE CODEPENDENCY I'LL DO ANYTHING TO BE "GOOD" AGAIN</i>
<b>FRAGILITY</b> COLLAPSE/DISSOCIATE	<i>I COLLAPSE INTO MY SENSE OF VICTIMHOOD, I FEEL I AM BEING BULLIED (THIS MAY OR MAY NOT BE TRUE) I BECOME IMMOBILIZED &amp; DISCONNECTED FROM THE CHANGE PROCESS</i>

The "Window of Transformation" is Kai Cheng Thom's adaptation of the "Window of Tolerance" model of the nervous system, created by Dr Dan Siegel, MD and Dr Pat Ogden, Psychologist.

The Window of Tolerance suggests that **the nervous system responds to threatening situations and trauma triggers by activating certain survival states**: *Hyperarousal* (high energy) and *Hypoarousal* (low energy). These states can be further divided into sub-categories of *Fight*, *Flight*, *and Freeze*. Psychotherapist Pete Walker suggests that *Fawn*, a state in which the body-mind automatically attempts to please others in order to reduce threat, is also a primal nervous system survival state. Somatic therapies asserts that trauma can prevent individuals from accessing their physiological Window of Tolerance, a state in which all emotions can be felt safely while staying in curious relationship with others.

The Window of Transformation is a blending of somatic theory with Transformative Justice and conflict resolution theory. What if, rather than seeking "Tolerance" as a goal, we looked within the human body's powerful defense and attachment systems for the potential for profound personal and political change in the face of conflict? **Safe-enough, loving relationship can help us access our Window of Transformation** - so can challenge and healthy boundaries. What supports your body in finding the will to transform for the purpose of finding liberation?

# Finding Your Window

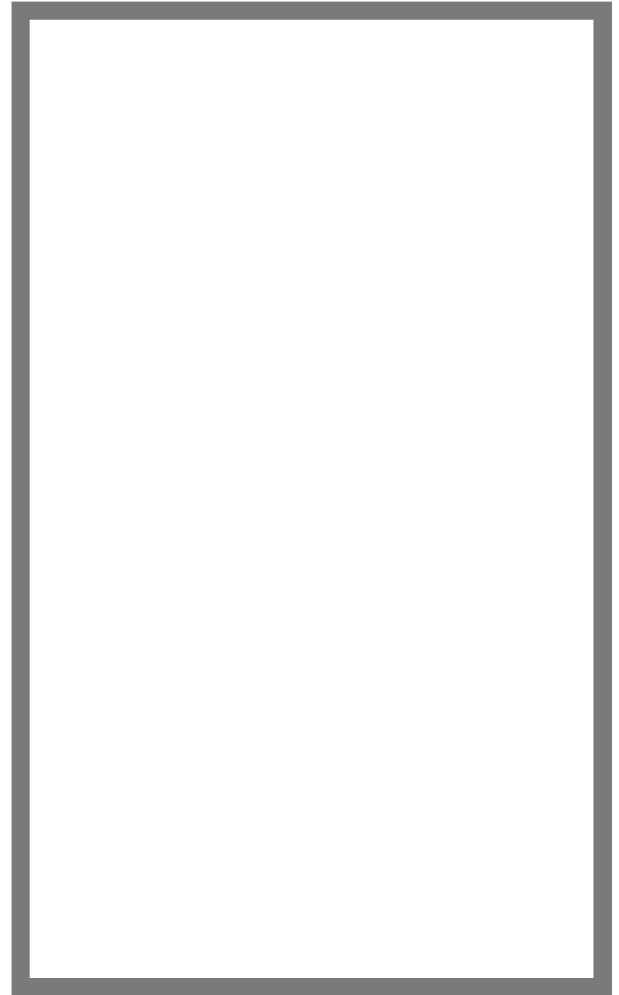
Reflect on your own conflict style and patterns. Do you tend to go into "fight" mode, "flight" mode, "freeze" mode, or is it fairly easy for you to find your Window of Transformation? Does it depend on the situation? (It does for most people!)

Classic conflict resolution theory tends to valorize collaboration and compromise, while demonizing the instinctive human strategies of Fight, Flight, Freeze, and Fawn. Yet these instinctive strategies can be life-saving in situations of threat, violence, and abuse.

Finding the Window of Transformation is a process that must involve conscious choice, consent, and mindful/heartful intention. **Conflict is an invitation to transform ourselves and others.** Do we want to do this? And how can we support others to transform while honoring their boundaries, consent, and inherent worthiness?

*Conflict Response Strategies I want to Practice More Often*

*My Habitual Conflict Strategies & How They Have Helped Me In the Past*



# The Sacred Layers

## The Sacred Layers of Loving Justice

Kai Cheng Thom©



It is easy to lose sight of the many layers of humanity when caught up in the life-or-death surge of physical sensations and emotions that conflict can evoke. We can forget the sacred spark of human sacredness that lives within us all. We can forget the inner self - the inner child - that is longing for safety and love. We can become hyper-focused only on the shadow sides of humanity - the unwanted parts of ourselves and the ugly parts of those we are in conflict with.

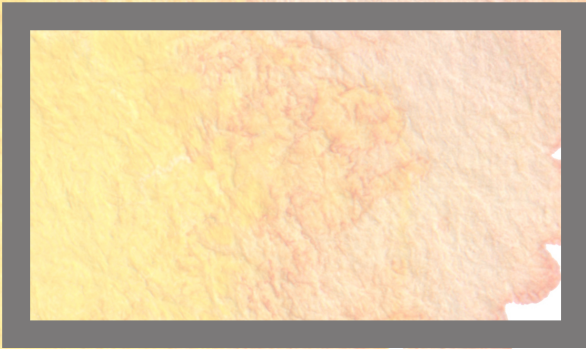
The Sacred Layers of Loving Justice are based on Jungian concepts of the self. They are a reminder to slow down and look deeper - deeper within and deeper into the people we are in relationship (even the relationship of conflict!) with. When we believe in our own best selves and invite them to the table, the best selves of those we are in conflict with are more likely to show up too.

**Meditation:** Practice compassionately and lovingly looking into and through your own sacred layers of self. What does this feel like? What sensations, feelings, thoughts arise?

# Sparking the Sacred Flame

Think of someone you have had a conflict with. Breathe gently and imagine seeing deeply into the sacred layers of their self. The spark of human sacredness illuminates them from within. Describe what you see when you look at their...

*Mask*



*Shadow*



*Inner Self/Inner Child*

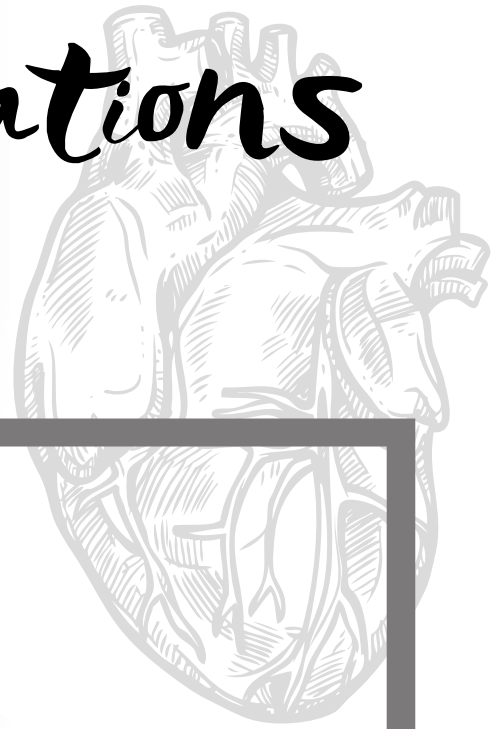


What has changed (if anything) about your understanding of this person after doing this exercise?



# Brave Conversations

Think of someone with whom you have (or had) a relatively minor conflict in your life. Imagine that you are going to have a conversation with them about trying to resolve the conflict. What comes up for you?



Sensations:

Emotions:

Thoughts:

Addressing conflict often triggers our survival response, causing us to lose access to the Window of Transformation. What are some ways that you can help yourself to feel safe (enough) before the conversation? What can you do for the other person in the conflict?

*For Me*

*For the Other Person*

# Invitations to Change

A Brave Conversation can go in many directions. However, it is often helpful to have a specific frame or structure in mind. Many such frames exist in the fields of psychology, spirituality, self-help, and peace studies, for example, Thich Nat Hanh's *Beginning Anew*, which partially inspires the template below.

Use the template to walk through an imaginary Brave Conversation with someone you know. What would you say? What are the important questions and points to get across?

**Invite** - Respectfully ask the other person to address the conflict with you in a neutral (safe-enough) space and time. Let them know what you are hoping for.

**Acknowledge** - Thank the other person for taking the time to meet with you and apologize for anything that you already know you should apologize for. Let the person know what you honestly appreciate about them.

**Explore** - Invite the other person to tell their story of the conflict. Ask questions and show compassion. Once they have felt fully heard, tell your side of the story. (It's usually a good idea to let them go first, but use your best judgment.)

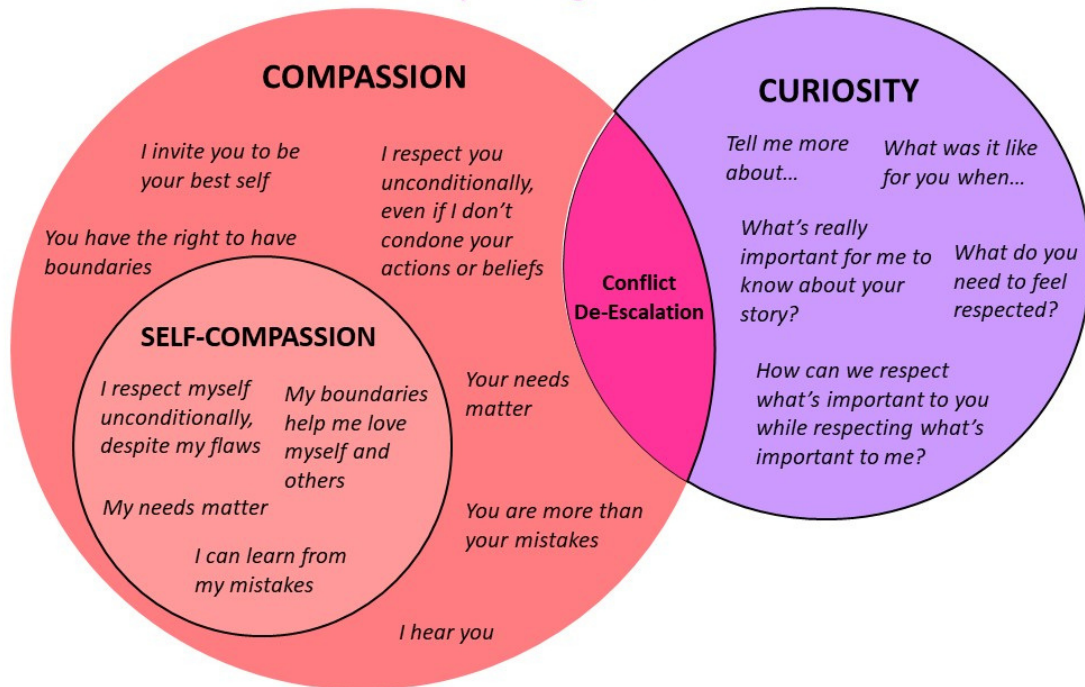
**Problem-Solve** - Work together to find solutions. Humbly ask the other person for support in moving forward



# The Two Keys

## The Two Keys of Loving Justice

by Kai Cheng Thom©



When we put **compassion** and **curiosity** together, we often get conflict de-escalation. Remember that compassion goes in two directions! Curiosity often does as well. Think of some compassionate statements and curious questions you could ask someone you are in conflict with. Tip: Try using them on yourself, too!

## Compassionate Statements

## Curious Questions

# The Knife of Discernment

Sometimes, it is not possible or desirable to pursue conflict resolution with someone.

Sometimes, a Brave Conversation might look like telling them the relationship is over or asking them not to contact you anymore. A Brave Conversation may not even be possible if the situation is not safe enough. **Discernment** is a key skill that is about exercising our ability to make care-full, informed choices about what to do with a conflict.

*I will try to have  
Brave Conversations  
when....*

*I will pursue other  
options when....*



# Using the Tools

When we bring together the Two Keys of conflict de-escalation (curiosity and compassion) with the Knife of Discernment, we get three practical tools for managing Brave Conversations:

- 1) Compassionate Statements
- 2) Curious Questions
- 3) Firm Boundaries

Let's go back to the fictional example of Elaine and Gavin. Elaine is a young trans woman of colour working in a non-profit; and her coworker Gavin is an older man of colour who has been misgendering her repeatedly, resulting in Elaine reporting this to a manager. Let's look at some potential dialogue in a Brave Conversation between them:

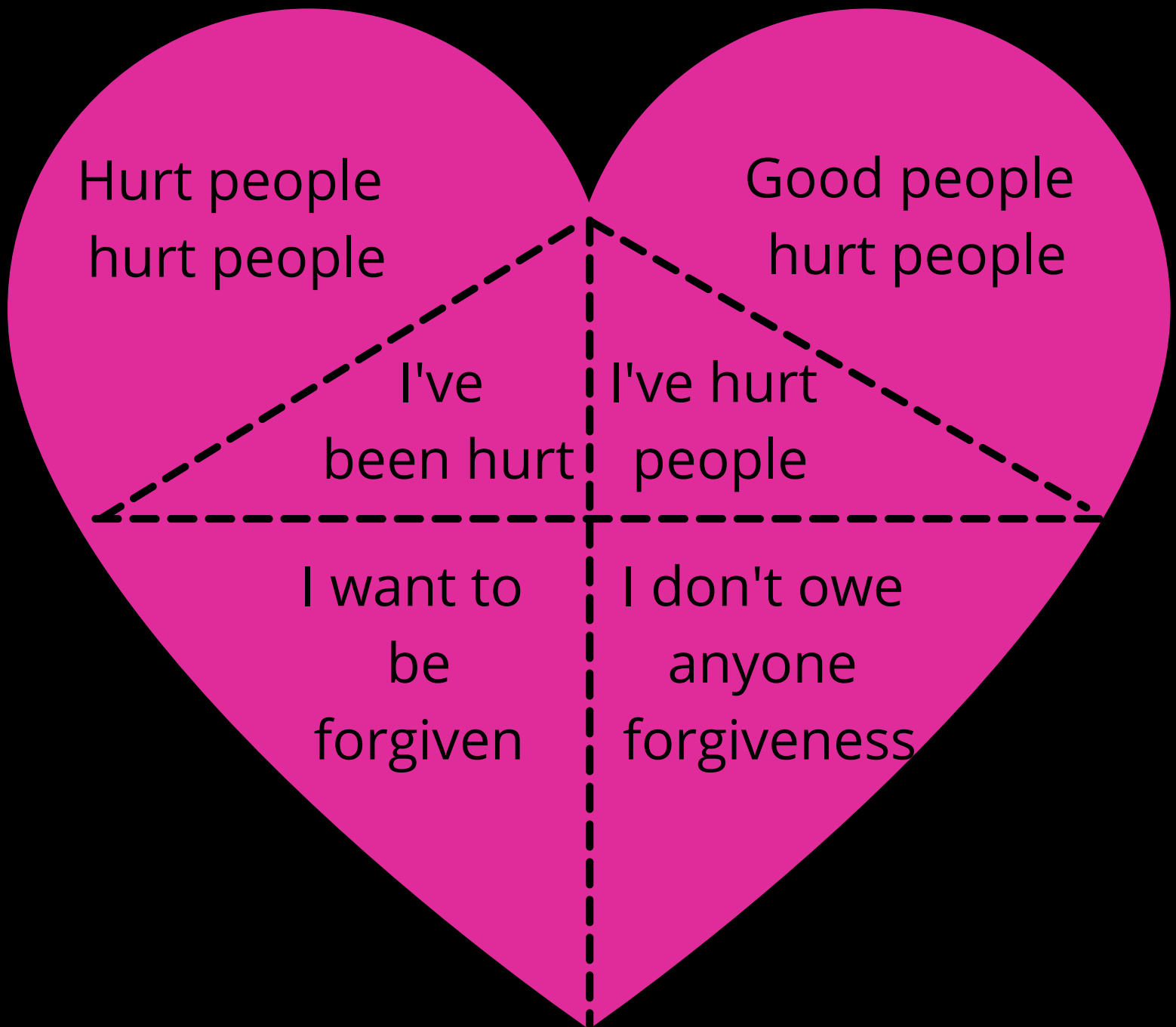
Gavin: "Elaine, this conflict has been tough on both of us, and that I've made some mistakes with your pronouns that have hurt you (*compassionate statement*). If you're open to it, I'd like to hear how this has made you feel and how I can make it up to you (*curious question*)."

Elaine: "Thanks, Gavin, I appreciate that. I know that some of the ideas about pronouns and gender diversity are newer to you (*compassionate statement*), but I absolutely need folks to use the right pronouns for me at work (*firm boundary*). I guess I just want to know why we haven't been able to work his out before? What's getting in the way? (*curious questions*)"

**Activity:** Continue this imaginary dialogue between Gavin and Elaine, using the three tool and any others that you have. You can do this by continuing to write out a script, or you could role-play the scene with a colleague or friend. Where does this take you? Where do you get stuck?

**Reflection:** How can you bring Curious Questions, Compassionate Statements, and Firm Boundaries into your own real life?

# The Loving Justice Heart Map



*How many truths can you hold in your heart?*

# Making Room for Multiple Truths

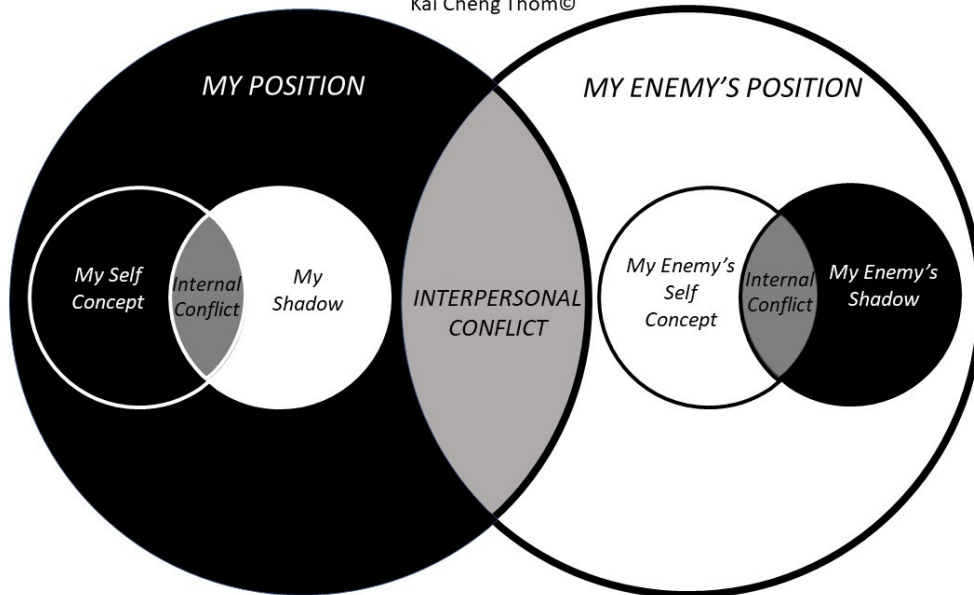
Choose one of the conflict situations you have been working with and write down as many truths/perspectives as you can think of. Try to include even those truths that seem contradictory or hard to integrate with your world view. What is this like? How does your perception of the conflict and the other person change?

A large pink heart shape is divided into four quadrants by a vertical dashed line and a horizontal dashed line. Each quadrant contains a rectangular box for writing. A small vertical line is present in the bottom-right quadrant.

# Embracing the Shadow

## THE LOVING JUSTICE CONFLICT LENS

Kai Cheng Thom©

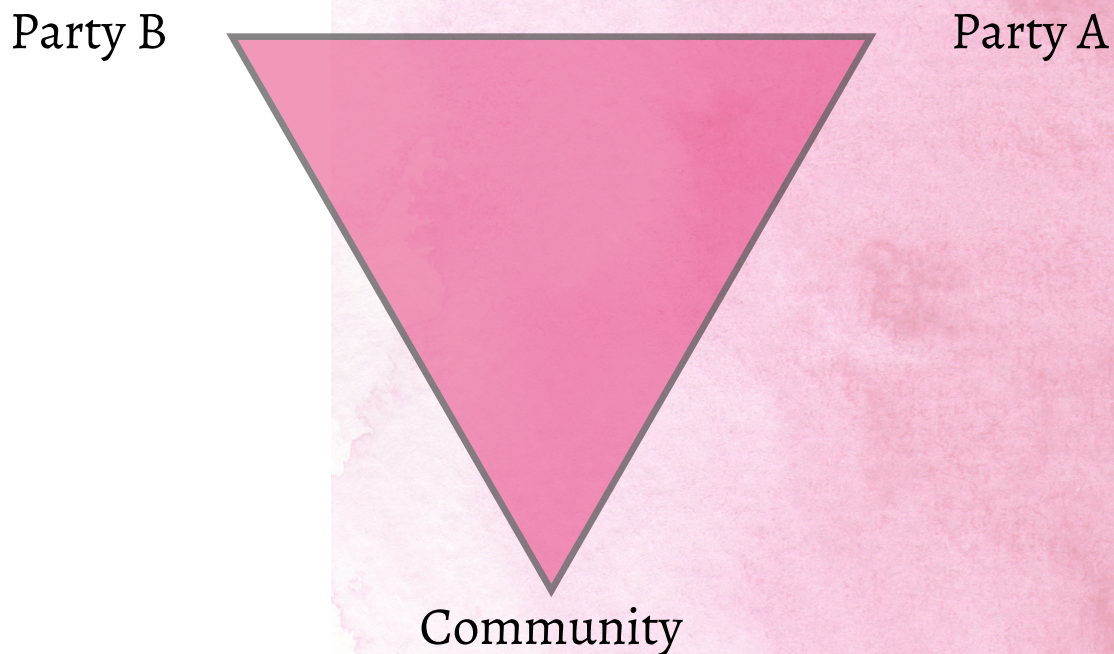


Conflict with others inevitably creates a conflict within ourselves. **What triggers us in other people is what we fear to see in the mirror.** A part of most serious conflicts is trying to off-load our own shame and blame onto the other party. This forms the basis of many abusive dynamics. When we become more aware of and loving toward our insecurities and unwanted parts, we become much more able to engage in generative conflict.

*Things That Trigger  
Me In Others*

*Things That I Struggle  
With In Myself*

# The Sacred Conflict Triangle



When conflict escalates, it almost always becomes **triangulated**. Triangulation happens when the people in a conflict try to relieve their anxiety and get their needs met by bringing in backup. Triangulation is not necessarily a bad thing! When the community around a conflict is triangulated, they have a **sacred responsibility** to respond wisely and ethically.

However, it is very easy to get triggered and lose sight of our **Conflict Compass** when we are triangulated. Being triangulated can feel overwhelming and it often brings up our own stories and memories of similar conflicts. We can end up taking sides in an unhelpful way, which **entrenches** and aggravates the conflict. Or we can end up freezing, checking out, and allowing conflicts to get worse when we could have helped out.

**Embodiment Exercise:** Have two friends make up a non-serious or silly fictional conflict and have them simultaneously try to get you on their respective "side" by trying to persuade you at the same time. What comes up? How does this feel in your body?

# What's the Point?

When we find ourselves at the point of a conflict triangle, it can be useful to have a plan in place - particularly when the conflict involves violence, abuse, or other forms of risk. In marginalized communities where access to social services is low, community intervention can be enormously important. Consider the following categories:

## *Safety*

What will make this situation more safe?

## *De-Escalation*

What will lower the level of conflict intensity?

## *Basic Needs*

How can everyone in the conflict get their basic needs met?

## *Health Care & Healing*

What kinds of health, mental health, and healing support are needed?

## *Justice*

What would accountability in this situation look like, and who needs to be involved?



# Conflict Coaching

Practice using these conflict coaching questions by talking to a friend about a conflict they a'd like to work on with you. Use your knowledge of the situation to choose between Supportive and Challenging Questions.

## **Supportive Questions**

What kind of support do you need from me?

What do you need to feel a little bit safer/more comfortable/more supported right now?

What did this trigger for you?

When you look at yourself through your most compassionate eyes, what do you see?

What would the wisest person you know say about this situation?

What are you worried will happen?

What is the best case scenario for the future of this situation?

## **Challenging Questions**

Is that always true? What purpose would that serve?

If you could go back in time, what would you do differently?

What do you think the other person's story about that is?

Is there anything that you and the other person agree on?

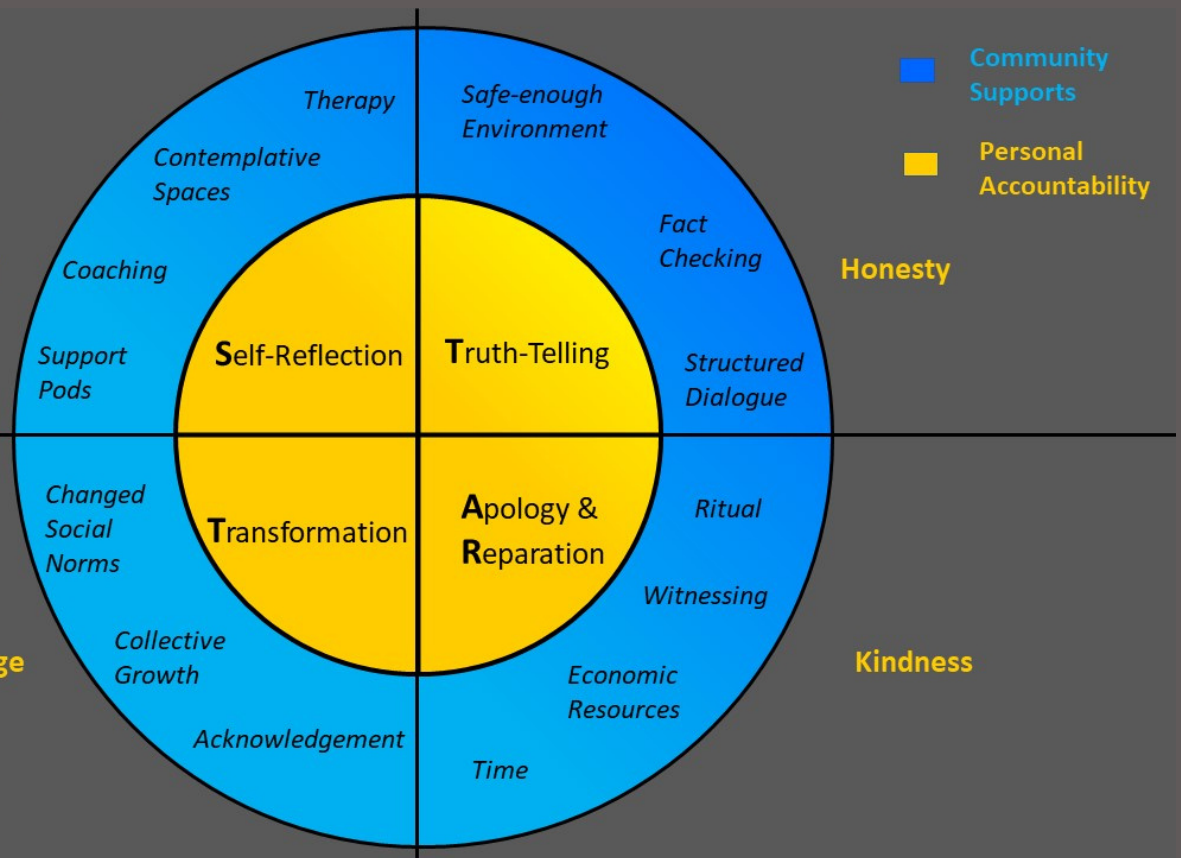
What will happen if you keep on using the strategy you're using now? What needs to change?

Is there anything you want to change about how you're responding to the situation?

Who do you want to be in this conflict?

# Account-Ability Modeling

**Accountability Needs  
Community: The START  
Model of Loving Justice**  
Kai Cheng Thom©



If you have ever been involved in a conflict online, you have likely seen the term "accountability" being used. Accountability means many different things to different people: Accountability can be a stand-in word for punishment, for apology, for repair, for change, for transparency, and much more. Sometimes, we use one definition of accountability for ourselves and another definition for everybody else. People of privilege are held to one standard of accountability, while marginalized people are held to another.

Accountability is often seen as a solely individual responsibility: If you do something wrong, then you have to be accountable (whatever that means). But what if accountability was actually a collective endeavor? What if we acknowledged that in our worst moments, most of us need help - a community - to hold ourselves accountable?

The START Model of Accountability is based on the four core values of Loving Justice. It acknowledges two layers of accountability - one that is individual, and another that is communal. It seeks to clearly define accountability, as well as the supports that are needed to make it happen. What do you need to stay accountable to your own values?

# Account-Ability Building

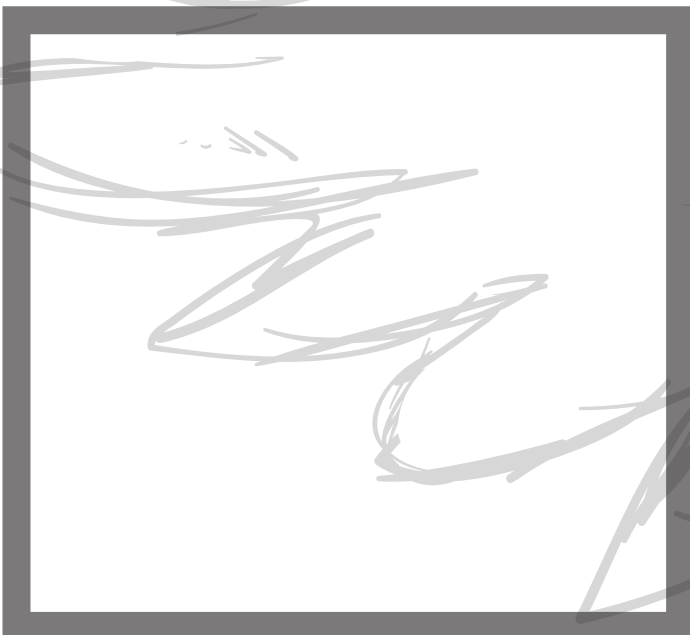
Accountability can be thought of as a capacity and a skill - a powerful set of restorative and transformative actions that we can take when we have accidentally or intentionally done harm. It may be helpful to divide the term "accountability" into its two constituent words: *account* (the story) and *ability* (the capacity to do something). How do we grow and strengthen our *account-ability*? Through practice and receiving support from those around us.

Think of a time when you struggled to be accountable - when you weren't able to show up as the person you wanted to be. What happened?



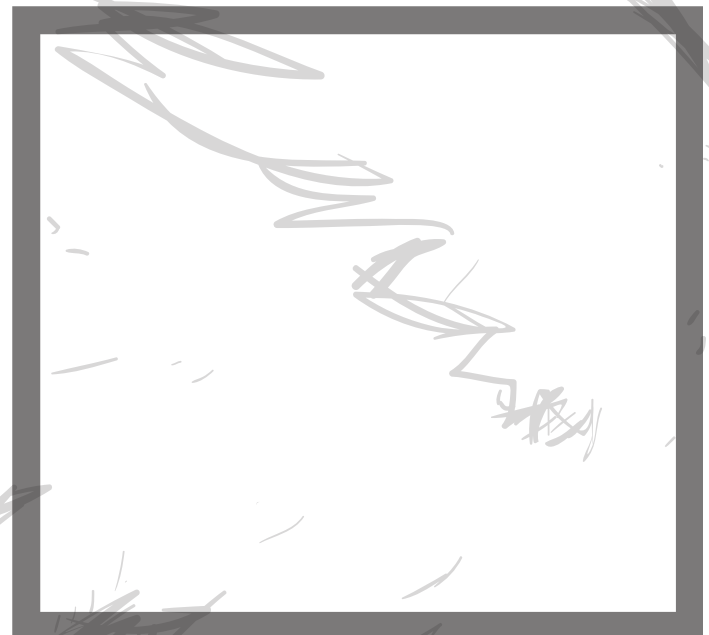
## Personal Accountability

What individual actions would have helped you to be more accountable?



## Community Supports

What kinds of supports from your community would have helped you to be more accountable?



# The Wheel of Forgiveness

by Kai Cheng Thom



Forgiveness is one of the most mysterious aspects of conflict transformation. It is also one of the most controversial. Forgiveness cannot be forced. It is not a necessary or compulsory aspect of conflict resolution. Yet many people find themselves compelled to forgive and seek forgiveness. This diagram is one attempt define forgiveness in terms of action and relationship. Note that half of forgiveness is not about the person who has harmed us. It is about coming to terms with our experience of our selves.

# Finding Forgiveness

How do we come to forgiveness? In the first place, forgiveness is a choice. Yet it is also more than a choice - it often counterproductive or even self-harmful to try and force yourself to forgive someone before you are ready. Real forgiveness can require a deep exploration of self and spirit.

The following exercise is one that can be helpful in taking a step along the path to forgiveness. It can also be quite emotionally powerful. Take your time with it, and take care of yourself as you move through it.

Think of a conflict where someone acted badly toward you. Now imagine that this person has come to see where they went wrong and wants to be accountable. In a perfect world, what would they say to you? Write the words down below. How does this feel in your body?



# Choosing Love

What does it mean to choose love? To me, choosing love is deciding to believe in the goodness of oneself and other human beings, even when we haven't always acted in ways that support this belief. This isn't to say that we should act naively or that we should ignore harm. Rather, choosing love is about breaking the cycle of harm. We will never solve the problem of violence with violence. We will never transform ourselves or anyone else into a better person by meting out pain and punishment. Only love can do that.

I invite you practice a meditation adapted from the Buddhist tradition of loving-kindness with me:

Begin by finding comfortable position to rest and contemplate. Close your eyes if you like. And imagine a candle flame, glowing in your heart. This candle flame represents your own inherent sacredness: Your worthiness and goodness, which nothing can take away.

Imagine as well, a cloud of pain and confusion surrounding this flame - your own woundedness. Your own struggle. And with every gentle, compassionate breath, invite the cloud inside and transform it so that it becomes a part of the light of your flame.

Spend some time here, loving yourself.

Now turn your attention to someone in your life that is important to you. Imagine their flame as well, glowing in the centre of their heart. Imagine their pain and confusion as cloud, surrounding the flame. And with every loving breath, take a bit of their cloud into yourself and transform it into light....

Now turn your attention to someone in your life who has caused you difficulty or struggle. Imagine their flame as well, glowing in the centre of their heart. Imagine their pain and confusion as cloud, surrounding the flame. And with every loving breath, take a bit of their cloud into yourself and transform it into light....

And now, imagine an entire world of people with burning flames in their hearts - like a galaxy of stars shining through space. Imagine each of us breathing, taking in and holding one another's pain, confusion, and woundedness. Transforming that suffering into light.

Into love.

thank you  
for choosing love