



CONFLICT AS OPPORTUNITY

3.5 hours

conflict- from *con* which means, “together” and *figere* which means “to strike”; to fight, battle, contend; to clash, be antagonistic, incompatible; in opposition;

resolve- to loosen, untie; to break something into its constituent parts; a solving, as of a puzzle; the answering of a question; to solve in a new way: *re-solve*;

Our culture is permeated with conflicts of all kinds. In the family, workplace, government, schools, religions, and *in ourselves*, the experience of conflict surrounds us. The recent interest in ADR (Alternative Dispute Resolution), is evidence of a search for “alternatives” to the 5000 year old domination model which is based on the threat of force to “resolve” conflict. Ancient wisdom from cultures that practiced community dialogue and restorative justice, is slowly gaining recognition and acceptance. Looking at conflict as an opportunity allows us to speak our truths, learn what harm we may have done, and to make reparations. In order to create the possibility for this to happen, we need to confront and overcome our own fear of conflict, and create a framework for dealing with it.

Often the desire for harmony and order supports an environment in which those who cause conflict are seen as the troublemakers, “the problem”. One example of this can be seen in the approach to the issue of bullying in the schools. We frequently encounter the attitude that the bully is “the bad guy”, and the victim is the powerless weak one, while the community itself that allows these incidents to be repeated over and over again, is never held accountable. We endlessly wonder “what’s wrong with our children?” We never ask ourselves how this behavior is reflected and reinforced over and over in the media, in government policy, and in our actions as a nation in the world community. We live in a culture of violence and yet we avoid it as an area of collective responsibility. Asking ourselves how we avoid conflict and how this may interfere with our relationships, is one way to take responsibility. The hope is that in bringing the conflict into the light of day, we will find resolution by illuminating the issues, not eliminating them.

We illuminate the issues by developing concrete skills. Among these are:

- Naming issues and obstacles
- Looking for common values and goals
- Identifying either/or thinking
- Claiming responsibility and authority

Conflict resolution among those who come with “good faith” intentions, should never be confused with conflict *management* or suppression of dissent.