

Chapter 10: Basic Terms

The artist was Jawlensky, known for the freely-associated imagery of his paintings. The first-grade children had been shown a picture with a Spring chicken molting flowers. They were asked to draw three pictures in pencil, and then to combine them by tracing onto a transparency sheet with indelible markers.

As they stained their compositions with magic markers, I was called over to look at the work of one particularly withdrawn girl. It was beautiful, a home scene with a garden of flowers and trees, a family and pets. The sun shone brightly overhead.

But on every flower had been drawn a crying face. The sun was frowning. After glancing at my partner, I bent down and asked "That's a beautiful picture. What is it?" She explained. I paused. "Can we put some flowers with smiling faces?" The child, without showing expression, shook her head. "OK. I'm sure you will later. Thank-you for sharing."

That child and her sadness were in my dreams for weeks. Clearly, she had had experiences that had blocked her from an innocent appreciation of life. Did she need to explain those experiences to someone? In working through such dreams, I very rarely find that I am taken through a detailed history. The people that lead me into them are looking for a way forward, a reason to trust in love again. Often, that means simply being regarded and spoken to in ways that allow them to feel whole.

When we are oriented to Scripture as children, it is usually a simplified version. The stories have clear lessons. As we grow older, the complexity of actual history enters the picture. The stories are rounded out with less sympathetic characters. As the history deepens, we are separated from the grounding of our childhood. The stories are called into doubt, and so we may doubt the lessons we gained from study of them.

But that child had reached me. Through simple pictures, she called forth from me the best that I had to give her.

What follows are the pictures that I drew to share with my children my experience of spirituality. While simple, they capture the reality of the struggles I have every day with the adults around me. I hope that my children will find the messages they transmit apply equally to their adult lives.

If so, then I will have succeeded in capturing in them one aspect of the spiritual message of Scripture.

Power and Love

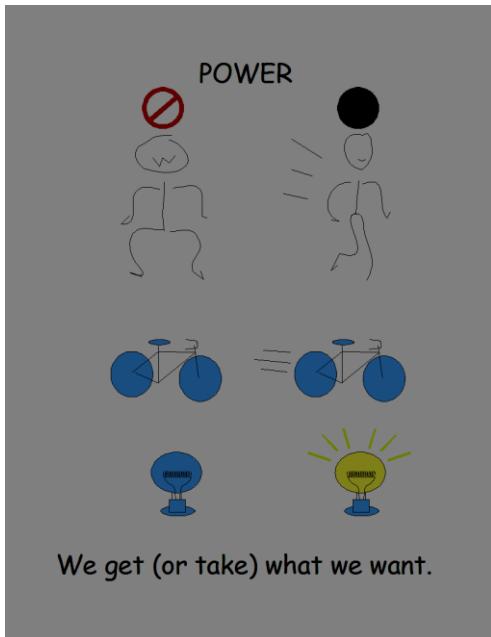
Every one of us is born into the world with talents (things that we do well). Some of those talents are showy, and draw attention to us. The people possessing such talents change things. Other talents are quiet and still, enabling us to see clearly the world and the people in it. That special knowledge helps people make things work.

If our special talents are to make a difference in the world, we need power (Illustration 7).

When we are young, we get and exercise power through our bodies. When our bodies lack power, we call ourselves “tired” or “sick”. When we do have power, we run and jump, or give someone we love a hug.

The power within us can be given to other things. Our bicycle doesn’t move unless we peddle it. Our blocks lie in a senseless jumble until we set them in order.

As we come to understand how to transfer power from ourselves to the world, we also realize that there is power outside of us. Often that power is unreliable or even frightening. Mommy falls asleep and doesn’t come when we call. The wind blows and thunder rages.



But there are some reliable things that don’t require our attention while they work. A light bulb is a common example. It is proof that power can be stored outside of us, and controlled to serve us. If we want light when it is dark, we push the switch (or button, or slider). Power goes into the bulb, and light comes out.

Given the significance of power in material affairs, we are motivated to determine what powers we are allowed, and which we can manage successfully. Ultimately, whether we have sufficient power is a personal matter. Some of us are happy with a meal on the table and a loving embrace, but never grow through engagement with a goal. Others have thousands at their beck and call, and never find satisfaction in life. What determines our success in life is strength – power over the self.

Illustration 7

which come from our parents and doctors. The bicycle comes to us as a gift, and needs occasional maintenance. The light bulb “burns out”, and must be replaced. Some of these things we can do. Many we cannot.

If we are thoughtful, we ask why people do these things for us. While an explanation may come first, in the end it boils down to “because I love you”. Love causes people to give power to us. (Illustration 8)

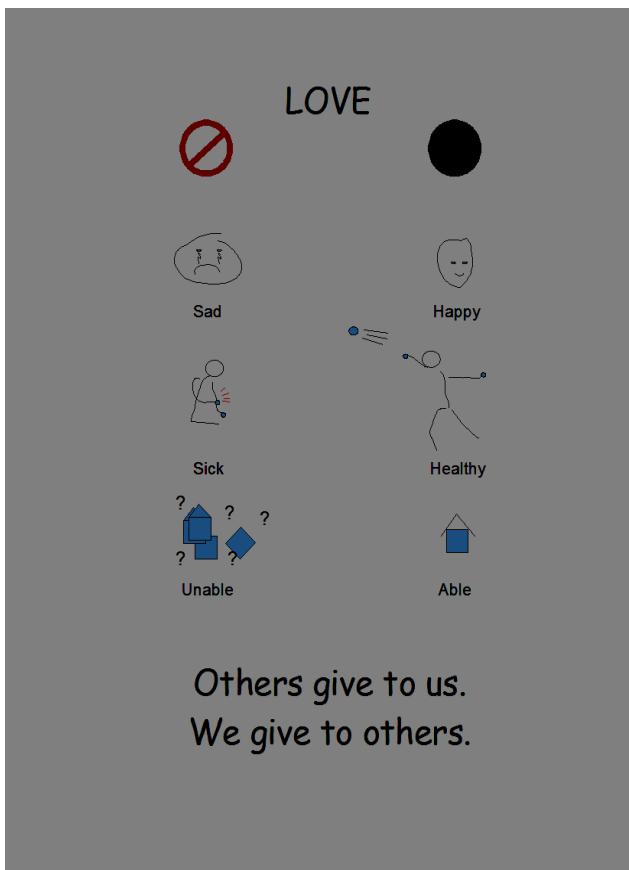


Illustration 8

us: health, happiness and ability. We can't always have those at the same time. Staying in bed while we are healing makes us unhappy. Once we learn a skill, such as shooting a basketball, we can only reach the limits of that skill by working at the skill until we are tired – sometimes very tired. That can make us weak temporarily and therefore more likely to become sick. If we are too lazy to practice, our trainers may try to take away other privileges (such as playing video games) in order to motivate us to practice more. This usually leads to unhappiness for everyone.

So when we think of love, we can see that health is the most essential. Ability is harder to achieve than happiness, but is necessary if we are to be able to be healthy and happy when we are old enough to be responsible for ourselves. Ultimately, we should recognize that the people that love us most might choose to ignore our need for happiness while they are trying to teach us a skill. In the workplace, our peers and bosses often assume that we will give up happiness during the work day so that we can make enough money to be happy at home. That doesn't mean that they don't love us.

Making these judgments about power and love is difficult. When we find someone that combines them both well, we are usually glad to have them guide some part of our lives. Teachers, coaches, parents and friends can all do that for us. We give those people authority over us (Illustration 9). We trust them to love us, and allow them to lead us, even when they demand things from us that might make us feel bad for a short time.

How does love move into our lives? What are the results of people loving us? First, we know that we make mistakes, and those mistakes cause us to be injured. When people love us, those injuries are treated and we become healthy again.

This is more work for them than making us sit still all the time, but sitting still causes us other problems. We become bored. This tells us that love also affects our emotions. When people love us, they spend time with us, and that attention makes us happy. When we are unloved, we are always alone. That loneliness often causes us to be unhappy.

Happiness is temporary, but love also changes us inside in ways that last throughout our lives. If we are given materials to make a bird feeder, we can't put it together unless somebody teaches us how to use tools. When a loving person teaches us, they give us the ability to build bird feeders and many other things.

So these are the three things that love brings



Illustration 9

survival skills, we have the opportunity to focus more on spiritual growth. It is sad, but our natural tendency is to continue to focus on material matters, and particularly the pleasures and thrills of the blood rites. Turning our attention to spiritual pursuits often requires a disciplined application of will. Given what has been said before, the choice should be a no-brainer. In actuality, we almost always avoid doing things that don't produce any immediate, concrete consequences.

Spiritual engagement is also a terrifically messy process. Our bodies are fairly well localized. We can analyze their structure and behavior. Our spirits, while rooted to our bodies, float around and get tangled up in each other. That interaction deeply affects our minds. Engaging a spiritual purpose can involve a terrifying loss of our sense of self.

Of course, as long as we stay rooted to our bodies, the energy that moves through our spirit is grounded in the flesh. When we know how to listen, that information warns us when we are being influenced by an outside party, and guides us to ensure we don't overextend ourselves as we support our friends. In this section, our goal is to sharpen our understanding of the signals our body gives us regarding our spiritual experience.

Me, My Soul, and I

Each of our bodily systems has a purpose – each is specialized for a different function. It would

Commanders in the police and army have the hardest job in this case. In order that the rest of us can be safe, commanders sometimes must send people to places where some of them are almost certain to die.

Establishing and maintaining the balance between love and power is perhaps the greatest challenge we face in life. We have a society that is obsessively focused on controlling behavior through the application of power. I believe that our survival as a species will be secured only if we strengthen the principle of love. The obstacle is that most of us are afraid to love, often having had our overtures trampled on by people that have power. In the next section, we'll look at the tools reality provides our spirits to protect and empower our capacity to love.

Relation

In the early years of life, spirit is focused on the survival of the body. As we develop

be surprising if spirit wasn't organized to draw upon and stimulate those functions. While the connection to our bodies begins to fray as we extend our spirits, our body is obviously the base from which our spirit grows. We therefore start with a simple model of spiritual structure, closely tied to our bodies. (Illustration 10)

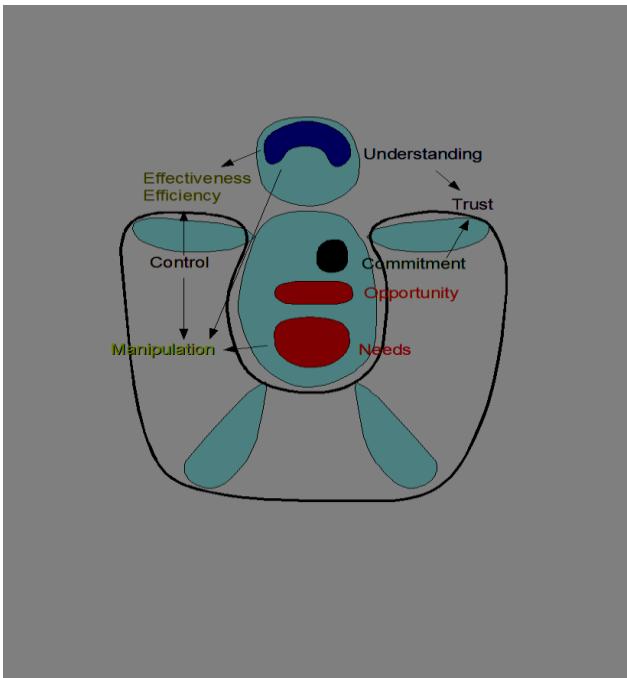


Illustration 10

our environment.

In our lower abdomen, we have the organs that manage our basic needs. Hunger, elimination and the need to rebalance our spirit with a sexual partner are all located here.

The brain is the center of our understanding. It is the gateway through which knowledge enters our lives. Working with that knowledge, it imagines relationships and things that we believe will improve our lives. Most of our capacity to communicate with our partners is also located in our heads.

In our extremities we find the capacity to change the material world. The imaginings in our minds are possibilities that, through coordinated action, we bring into reality with muscle and bone.

As we move through the world, we leave traces of ourselves on everything that we touch or see. When there is a steady rhythm to our lives, those traces become patterns in time. Those patterns become the foundation for the instincts (or habits) we use to structure our lives.

In the drawings that follow, we use the concept of a "bubble" to describe the capabilities (both material and spiritual) that we have to draw upon in relating to the world. (Illustration 11)

In this picture, we shouldn't gather that one part of our bodies is any more important than any other part. Instead, it is the dynamic between them that is important. They work together to enable us to express our talents, and we can best love ourselves by maintaining balance between them.

At the core of our being is our heart. The heart moves food and oxygen through our bodies. Those resources deliver us energy. When energy is given or taken from us, we feel it in our hearts. When we are conscious of that, we can better manage the way we share our energy with others.

Below our hearts lie the organs that process food and store energy. These are slower to react to stress than our hearts, and manage the resources we need to respond to opportunity in

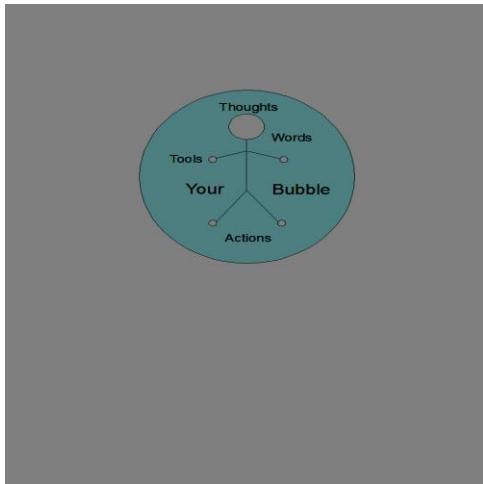


Illustration 11

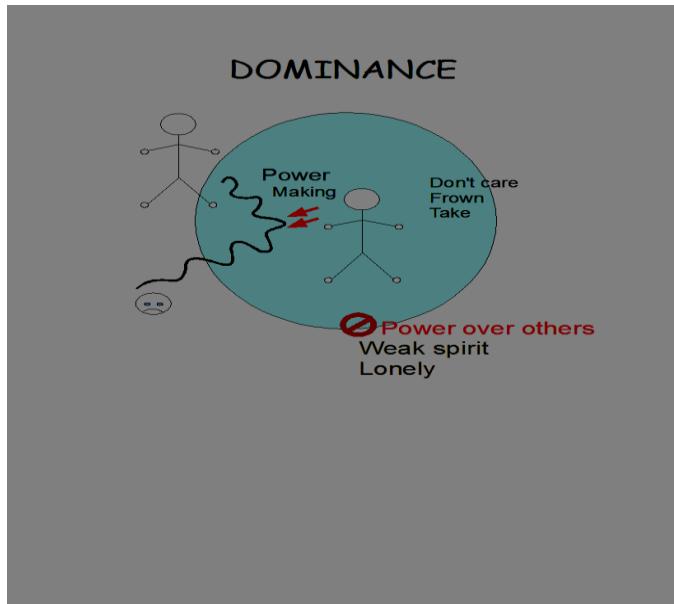


Illustration 12

Managing Us

None of us come into the world alone. Even when we desire solitude, in practice very few of us can lead an isolated life. We work to make money; we get food from a store; we need clothes to wear. Even if we avoid physical and visual contact with others, threads of spirit arrive along with those material goods. We become mixed up with each other.

Given that unavoidable inter-relatedness, we might expect to benefit from control of our relationships.

Here we arrive at the most fundamental of our spiritual choices. It is so fundamental that I am driven to conclude that it must be deeply connected to the purpose we have in this place.

We may choose to use power to convince people that if they don't do as we want they will suffer a painful loss. (Illustration 12) We are perceived by the person we control as a bully: mean, threatening, and obviously unpleasant to be around. If the person we control has any sense of self-worth, their goal eventually will be to escape our control. If they have any real value to us, we must in turn commit more and more energy to maintaining control. Ultimately, of course, if our partner's desire to escape is strong enough, the struggle will end in liberty or death.

In extreme cases, the escape is a spiritual death. We grind their personality away until our spirit takes control of all of their higher thought processes. Their bodies become simple extensions of our will. We have succeeded in consuming the other party to the spiritual relationship. As we use up our associates, our struggle to control them leaves us weak and lonely.

The second choice is through deeds and words to create the possibility for our partner to grow. (Illustration 13) In other words, we offer them power. If they value our offer, they will be drawn to us. They may walk away for a time, testing the waters, but if we offer them something they

really need, they will come back to us again.

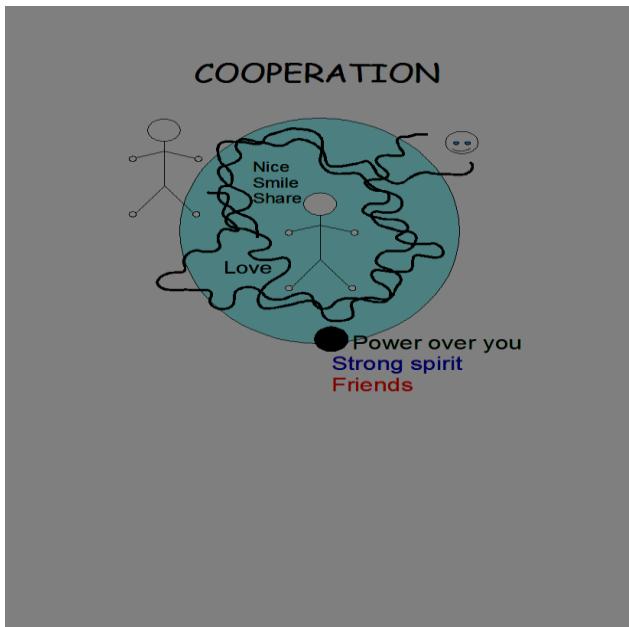


Illustration 13

once, requires great effort to repair. It is our strength of character – the power we have over our selves – that protects us against that compromise.

The great challenge, in any successful relationship, is to renew our dreams. It is when our dreams are receding that we have the strongest temptation to resort to power, or to abandon the investment we have made. During those trials, we often need to make a conscious effort to expand our dreams into new territory, embracing others in our circle of love.

The value of this approach, in a relationship between peers, is that they are asking the same set of questions: what can I offer my partner, and what do I gain from them? Since we all have different talents, it is almost always the case that they will bring something that we lack. When we create that larger whole between ourselves, new dreams open up before us. Our involvement in those shared dreams creates deeper and stronger spiritual ties between us. The energy established in that imagining becomes irreplaceable.

The destructive temptation, in moments of crisis, is to mix the two modes. This is disastrous. The commitment to shared dreams requires absolute faith that we will not abuse our partner's trust. Breaking that trust, even

True to Love

When someone loves us, they offer us power without expectation of a return. If we do not honor that gift, we can wound deeply the giver.

Two common forms of betrayal are represented below.

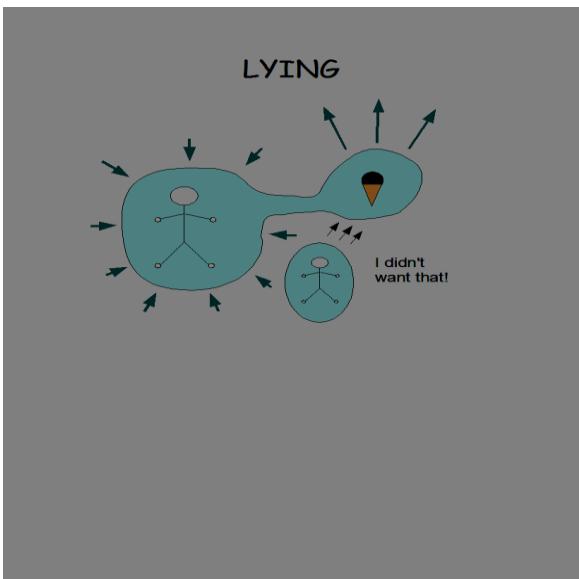


Illustration 14

In the first is lying. (Illustration 14) A child tells his mother that he wants some ice cream. She takes him to the ice cream parlor, purchases the treat and serves it to him, only to find that he rejects it.

The obvious loss is the material one – the money that was wasted on the ice cream could have been used for other things. More serious is the spiritual loss. The boy's mother exercised her spirit to create an opportunity for her child to experience happiness. It is a future carefully crafted to fit the dimensions of the child. When he pulls away from that experience that spiritual structure collapses, and the energy expended in its construction is lost.

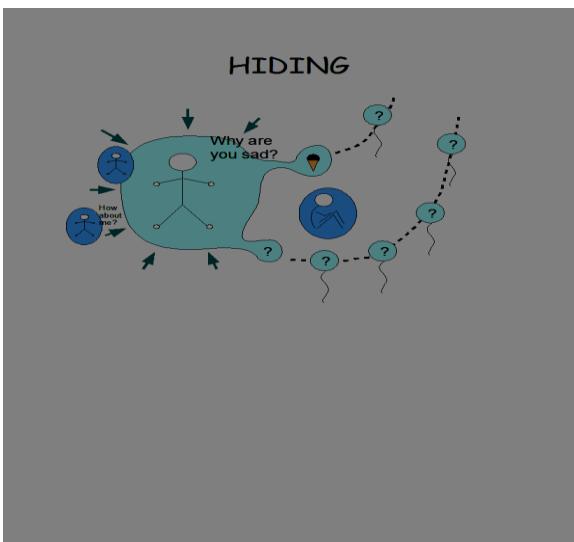


Illustration 15

Worse than lying is to hide. (Illustration 15) In this case, our lover recognizes our need, and keeps floating spiritual balloons into the void around us. They desperately seek a way of connecting with us. In this process, the engagement is never resolved. The expenditure of spiritual and material resource can be unbounded.

In extreme cases, the lover can become trapped in dependency with a liar or hider. Because the liar and hider avoids a commitment to reality, they fail to develop parts of their personality that are required to interact successfully with reality. The longer they follow the strategies of avoidance with reality, the more they depend upon others to make up for their lack of skills.

The sequence is shown in Illustration 16. The personality of the dependent party may be normal at birth, but as they grow physically, their personality does not keep pace. The only means they have to survive is to attempt to absorb the personality of a more competent individual.

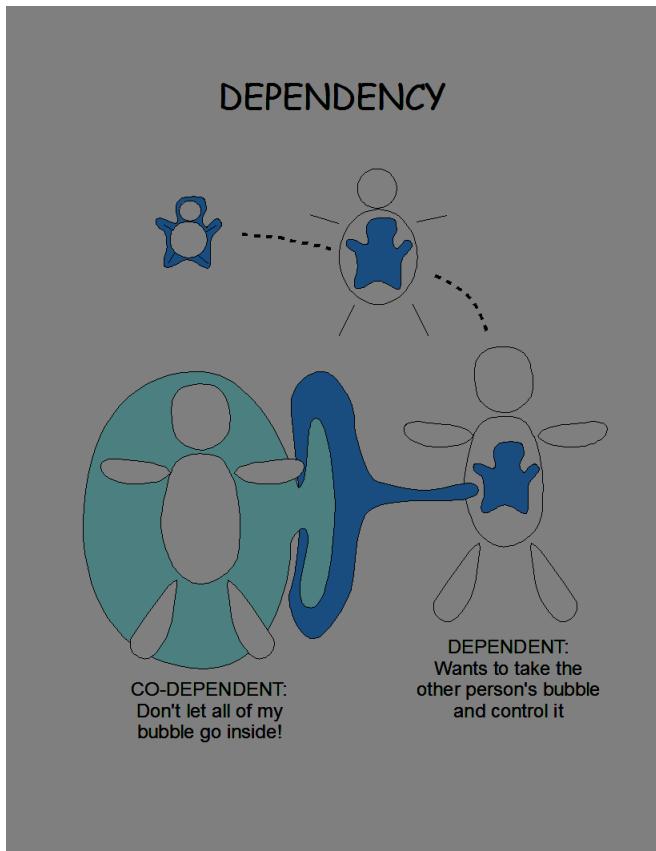


Illustration 16

they conclude that they simply aren't ready.

The most difficult challenge to manage is when the new environment contains a powerful predator. The bully attempts to surround the personality of his prey, usually by using physical or verbal abuse to create fear.

I can explain abstractly how to deal with this problem, but it is perhaps best illustrated by a story. At a night club, I noticed an aggressive young man latch onto a beautiful young lady. His sexual intention was obvious, and the young lady simply collapsed into herself, attempting to withdraw from his intentions. Undeterred, he pressed in, looming over her.

At that moment, I reached into her and said, "Hold your ground." She straightened up, expanded her personality into the space of sociability that she had abandoned, and pushed him out of her. Surprised, he straightened up, looked at her with respect verging upon awe, and after a few face-saving words let her pass.

The only way to help the dependent party through this trap is to love ourselves. We must refuse to comply with their needs, and focus on taking care of ourselves. While the immediate consequences may be painful to watch, the dependent party is forced to wrestle with their deficiencies, and therefore has the chance to grow out of them.

Where individuals are concerned, unconditional love can only blossom in a relationship between peers. When a relationship is unbalanced, we often can manage developing dependency through discipline. (Illustration 17) We open the protective cocoon and offering the individual we love the choice of heading out on their own. When reasonable caution is exercised, this should not be construed as a threat. Growth is a normal part of life, and we should celebrate when a loved one makes a successful transition to greater independence. We should be ready to take them back in, through, if

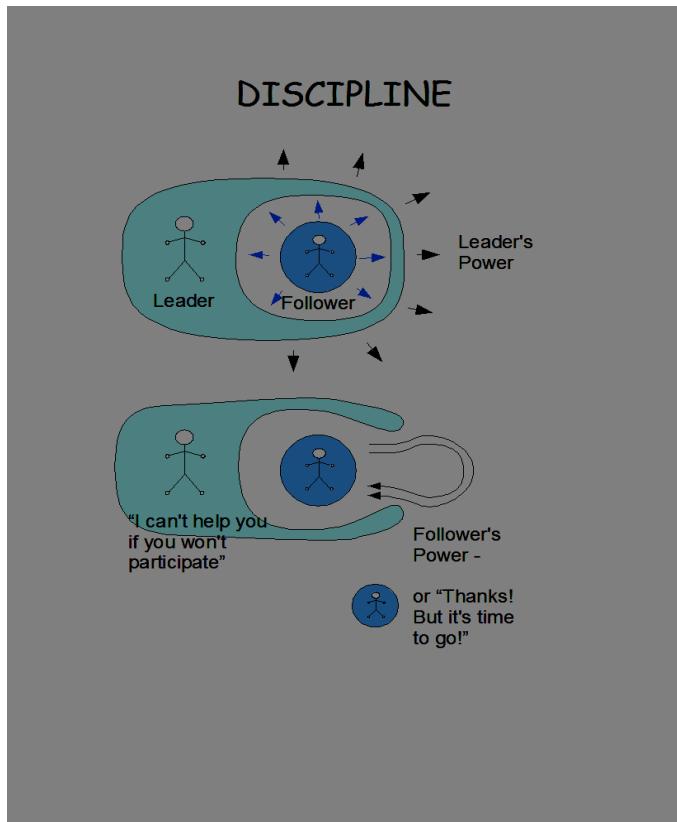


Illustration 17

from their future the strength necessary to survive.

The consequences of this choice are poorly understood in psychological circles. The survivor has flash backs of trauma at the best moments of their lives. This is interpreted as a cause for concern. It should be considered a normal part of the process: those are the moments in which most energy was (or will be?) available to see the victim through the threat to their future. The appropriate response in those moments is for the survivor to reassure their past self that they are there for them, and will see them through.

This is the effect of the trauma counseling developed by Judith Herman [6] and others. In the process, the survivor is guided through memory recovery, until they take complete ownership of the experience of abuse. Then they bring it to closure, and refocus their attention on the future.

Until that process is completed, the survivor is in an extremely vulnerable state, being incompletely grounded in the moment occupied by their peers. That is considered a defect, but as we enter a period of rapid change, those that have evolved that skill may play a valuable role in guiding us towards a sustainable future.

I know that I have found that to be so.

That young lady didn't allow herself to be isolated by the predator.

At a younger age, I witnessed a similar situation on a dark street one night. When I approached the young man, he gathered himself and barked a threat. I raised my hands and walked away. I left that young lady in a trap.

When the trap does close around the prey, the only resource left to the prey is their love for themselves. As the predator squeezes their personality into a smaller and smaller volume, that self-love can fail them. When it does, the victim is destroyed, allowing the predator to steal their future. If they hold onto themselves, however, something more interesting, profound and hopeful can happen. The pressure surrounding them can be used to pop their personality out of the confines of time in this three-dimensional reality, and they can reach forward and draw