

# Psychological Dynamics in Violent Conflict

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Thanks so much, Diana, for inviting me tonight and thank you, John McDonnell, for hosting this event. I feel really privileged and happy to be able to join with everyone here in thinking about conflict prevention and this notion of developing a culture of peace that the UN is thinking about and which is being supported by the organization for a Ministry for Peace.

Thanks everyone for coming. In planning for tonight, I thought I'd share a few ideas from my book (Audergon, 2005) and from my work as a conflict resolution facilitator in case these might be in any way useful in all the ongoing work and thinking around conflict prevention and peace that many of you are involved in.

To introduce myself a bit, my work is as a psychotherapist and conflict resolution facilitator and I also work in theatre. I'm from the United States, and my husband Jean-Claude is from Switzerland, and we've been living in London for several years. Our background is in Process Oriented Psychology, (known also as Process Work) developed by Arnold Mindell, and we teach here in the UK and internationally as well as doing conflict resolution work; both together and individually.

To break the ice a little in this great room here, how about taking a minute or two to turn to someone near you or behind you or in front of you and meet one or two people, someone you don't know, or who you are seeing again, and just say hello and maybe introduce yourself.

When thinking about coming here this evening, I kept returning to this idea of developing a culture of peace that the UN has set out as a goal for this decade and that Diana and others have included in the idea of a Ministry for Peace and a Commission for Peace in the UK. I was thinking about the all the great work many people are doing and let myself dream about a society in which many more people would be asking questions and getting involved in conflict prevention and conflict resolution and looking at conflict in new ways through education, media, politics, and community forums. And thinking about all the violence in this world, I feel a lot of agony and I know most of us, probably everyone here shares this feeling. And I know many of you here are suffering from and working with difficult conflict and violence, very close to home, in your communities and neighborhoods and countries.

The subject of violent conflict and war is so huge that anything I say can only be inadequate, but I want to just pitch in a few thoughts into the big bucket. I'll be talking for about an hour. And at the end of the evening, there will be time to talk together in small groups and as a whole group about your thoughts and experiences in relation to the ideas.

There's four things I'd like to talk a bit about:

- I. First, I want to share a little about my post-war work in Croatia because it was a very important part of my life personally and for my learning.
- II. Then I want to take a look at this idea that human nature—our emotions and behavior—are like fuel that can activate us and silence us into violent conflict. And when we are unaware of these dynamics, the more easily they can be exploited.
- III. The third idea I want to spend some time with is looking at some ways that conflict perpetuates, particularly in relation to the dynamics of collective trauma and the importance of accountability and include along the way some thoughts and examples of working with these dynamics.
- IV. And last, I'd like to touch a bit on the idea that our awareness, as individuals and communities, makes the difference in being able to facilitate conflict rather than perpetuate it or feel only overwhelmed and sunk in it.

## **I. Post-war Work in Croatia**

So, I'd like to share a little about my work in Croatia. I went to Croatia for the first time in 1996 with my friend and colleague Lane Arye after the war in the former Yugoslavia. And we went there many times over the next five or six years. It was a project organized by an NGO (non-governmental organization) in Croatia called Udruga Mi, and it was supported by the UNHCR (The UN High Commission for Refugees) and several other sources. It involved four day forums of about 80 people twice a year with regional meetings in between as well as a training group and journal.

The people who came to the forums were from a wide range of NGOs, governmental organizations, and international organizations from all war-affected regions of Croatia—all working with very painful and complex issues of reconciliation. They were Serb, Croat, and Muslim, and other ethnicities such as Hungarian and Roma. They did various kinds of work in their communities, different kinds of social work, education, counseling, humanitarian aid, lawyers, and there were several mayors of small towns.

Underlying the project was an idea that the people working in the field were meeting with painful and apparently intractable conflict and that their work in their communities might be furthered if they could discuss and work deeply among themselves on the kinds of issues they faced in their communities. And also, that the kind of post-conflict work they were involved in and that we then were involved in together is also an important part of conflict prevention.

Another idea behind the project and underlying our facilitation approach is something which Mindell calls Deep Democracy—which means that communities can find ways forward within even the most difficult situations, that the wisdom and direction forward

arise from within the community if there can be facilitation of the interaction of all points of view, feelings, and experiences; including those experiences that are normally kept out as too extreme or irrelevant or too emotional.

We gathered for the first time in Osijek, a town that had been on the front line of fighting between the Serbs and Croats. We learned that this was the first time Serbs, Croats, and Muslims were meeting in this way together. And as we began the forum, one of the first things people began to say was, “Let’s not talk politics. Let’s not talk about the war. We are humanitarians here. We are peaceful, we are not the intolerant ones.”

One thing very important about this was that their need for unity was something essential and important to acknowledge after the devastation they had all been through in the name of ethnic and national difference. But, while they talked about their unity as humanitarians there was a very heavy tension and a lot of fear in the atmosphere.

When we began the forum, we had asked people if they’d like to just go around the room and say their names and where they were from—and this was very naïve because people could not do this. Their names were how they usually knew who was Serb, Croat, and Muslim; and put that with where you lived and people could guess into a whole story about the person during different periods of the war.

So we began by talking about the tension and fears and also the reasons to not talk about the war. Then someone said very shyly, “I feel a little more comfortable with my own ethnic group than with others.” What seemed like a small admission of national affiliation opened a sort of flood gate. People started to accuse each other in outrage and with questions and suspicions about why people fled or why they didn’t and where they went—and then also began to talk about the terrible suffering, loved ones they’d lost, standing in long refugee columns without water with screaming kids. And people couldn’t listen to each other’s stories because if someone told about the suffering and atrocities they or their families had endured—it was felt to be accusatory (and sometimes was) to the other’s whole group—who in turn would make accusations and need to tell their stories. It was a kind of escalation that brought the conflict that they’d feared into the open and we were at a new point. We all began to then work together on the charged issues, taking a lot of care around the volatile feelings and the community wide trauma.

There were many stories about how we all did this, and I’ll come back to a few this evening. But what I wanted emphasize here was how the group first identified only with their tolerance and humanitarian side and the conflicts were located outside of them in the intolerant people of their communities. And when the conflicts came up among them, they were really afraid that it could trigger a repeat of the war or that they could be in danger for their lives if people in their communities knew that they were speaking together in this way.

At the time, no one had imagined that that after the war Croats, Serbs, and Muslims could talk in a real way together and come through it. Later, people often said that it gave them a sense of hope that they never dreamed they would feel again. And they talked a lot about a sense of responsibility that came out of engaging deeply with the issues that they had suffered from, that they had often felt just happened to them, and that grappling with their part and this sense of responsibility was not about guilt but rather a sense that their

input made a difference right there in the forums and that they could make a real difference in their communities.

One of the things I learned from the groups in Croatia is that if people feel they cannot engage in their deepest concerns and conflicts in community that this, maybe more than anything else, creates hopelessness and isolation. And one idea in thinking about a culture of peace is that we need more opportunities throughout society to learn to facilitate the many conflicts that involve us and find out how we are a part.

## **II. Human Nature is the Fuel of Violent Conflict**

So, I'd like to now look at this idea that human nature is the fuel of violent conflict. What I mean by this, is pretty straight forward—we get easily activated and polarized in relation to each other. And we usually don't have to go much farther than our own kitchens to discover this about ourselves. And the kinds of psychological dynamics that get us worked up, or that make us go silent, are easily activated and also exploited in violent conflict. When we don't know all that much about our emotions, what makes us tick as individuals and collectively, the more this can happen.

And all of us easily misuse our privileges and authority and people in positions of authority sometimes do whatever it takes to get us to go along. One way is through stirring-up fear for the purpose of an authority or government to say, there's a crisis or danger and we need to crack down on the danger.

An example that I want to bring, because it shows this dynamic very strongly, is when the Reichstag was set on fire in Germany just after Hitler became Chancellor in 1933. It's still disputed as to whether it was set by the Nazis under Hitler or by a communist who was arrested and executed. But what followed is that, that night Hitler convinced the 86 year old President to proclaim a state of emergency. Freedom of speech and assembly were banned, thousands of people were arrested with no guarantee for legal trials, and the motors were in motion for the Third Reich to assume full power and authority and all that followed.

This tactic of either instigating violence or exploiting an actual violent incident in order to crack down is a state terror tactic, and it has been used all over the place against political movements and social activist groups that are felt to be threatening the status quo. It happens towards groups that are violent and towards pacifist groups. If the group can be made out to seem violent it gives the excuse to bring in police or military to crack down. One current example of where this is going on is towards the anti-globalization movement.

Many people are talking about how the Bush Administration used this tactic of exploiting people's fears around the terrorist attacks of 9-11 as a way to further its political agenda: to say, we have to protect the world from the threat of terrorism and will use pre-emptive war to assert control where we see fit without needing to concern ourselves with international law. And the whole Weapons of Mass Destruction business appears, at this point, to have been a classic attempt to work up terror, to give cause for the attack on Iraq.

There are lots of other ways, in addition to this working up of fear, that emotions and psychological dynamics are needed for violence to take place. And I think most of us easily recognize the various ways this occurs. And a lot of people are talking about these things and it's in the news these days. But it would be useful if there was a lot more public awareness about it: Awareness at a political and also a psychological level, to know how we take part.

For example, our capacity to dehumanize, not only those who we kill but also how we dehumanize ourselves to be able to kill. Or the way we become desensitized and human rights violations get so normalized that we don't react much. And a main cause of violence is, when human rights violations are not responded to early on they can escalate into large scale violence. Torture tactics are based on knowledge of psychology—aimed to stretch a person's physical and psychological endurance, to remove their spirit to resist. Or, another area is the whole problem of disinformation where we need to look not only at those sending the information but to the psychology of those of us receiving it.

A really clear example of how our psychology is used to stir violence is in the way we demonize others. Most of us know the experience of hiding under the covers from the Bogeyman from time to time. This scary figure is found in many cultures: he lurks outside the window and snatches kids away. Our fear of the Bogeyman is actually a very healthy part of our psychology. We need to hide from him and get to know our fears and also our courage to meet the frightening and unknown parts of ourselves that threaten our innocence but also help us to grow out of our innocence. Also to recognize that we can be this Bogeyman.

And while this is an important part of us on a psychological level, when unconscious the Bogeyman is of course easily projected; and this part of our nature is easily stirred-up to promote human rights violations, atrocities, and genocide. There are so many examples: Jews were seen as the Bogeymen with stories that Jews ate children, and these stories still go on. Gay people are seen as the Bogeyman: falsely accused as child molesters. Black people in the states and elsewhere were often falsely accused of rape and then lynched in the name of protecting the innocent. Indigenous peoples around the world have been seen as wild, in need of being murdered to protect and develop so-called civilization. So, in the very act of violence we see ourselves as innocent, projecting the evil onto the ones we are killing.

It's interesting to stop and also look at how some of the ways we are most easily stirred-up into violence involve really beautiful parts of our nature. Our longing for community and a sense of belonging to a greater purpose can be fanned into nationalist movements and violence. Or, many of us long to transcend the everyday mundane world and connect to something meaningful beyond life and death, and this longing can also be stirred in violent conflict

Or, another big one is how we get moved by our ideals of justice. Our sense of justice is so important to most of us. It can carry us through long-term struggles for freedom. Throughout history people have sacrificed their lives for justice, and this willingness to give our best or even our lives for justice is something extraordinary that can, of course, be terrible when misused and worked-up to support retaliation. Or it can be worked-up to

get involved in very unjust wars or to carry out atrocities while believing we are doing it in the name of justice.

### **III. Accountability and the Dynamics of Collective Trauma**

#### **A. Perpetuation of Conflict**

I'd like to now move on from here to look at some ways that conflict gets perpetuated, first looking at dynamics of collective trauma.

I want to mention that even talking about trauma in this lecture may be difficult for some of us, particularly for anyone who has personally suffered traumatic experiences themselves.

1. In violent conflict there is always trauma in individuals and in whole communities.

For an individual, at the point of traumatic experience, there is a shock and the experience is too much. It is so shocking and terrible that you can't fully perceive it and there's no way to respond or react and part of the personality has to move on to deal with whatever comes next in order to survive. And the traumatic experience remains frozen in time. So there's a split between the part that goes ahead and cannot witness it and the traumatic experience that remains. It's experienced as a feeling of being cut off or numb or even unable to remember the event. And the traumatic experience not only remains but replays and intrudes in the persons life as flashbacks, nightmares, or a visceral experience of replaying events or fragments of memory. These are all well known experiences of what is called Post-traumatic stress disorder PTSD.

And now imagine not only an individual but a whole community that is traumatized in war, this same dynamic happens. There is a split. After a war the community needs to go ahead and to try to survive, to rebuild economically or get back on its feet, and the trauma that has affected everyone is there in the background and it creates widespread hopelessness and depression, also economic depression, and also comes up in eruptions of violence.

You can also look at this splitting at a wider collective level. After an atrocious period of history, part of society wants to go on and forget it and say it is all in the past or it never happened. Those who have the social power, or who may be part of the group that committed the violence, want to ignore it and move on. And those who have suffered the violence cannot move on.

This splitting can in part be understood as a dynamic of collective trauma and it is one way to look at our problem with collective memory; the story gets forgotten or revised or written right out of history. We don't tell the full story of the violence or the story of those we have conquered.

2. If you think about how trauma replays in individuals, in flashbacks and nightmares, you could say that trauma replays on a collective level through repeating violence.

One way this happens is that the original violence and tactics of demonizing, dehumanization, and power that created the suffering were never grappled with so

the trauma keeps on going. Just one example of this is how the genocide of Native Americans in the US has never been really told and grappled with as a great trauma of US history and the oppression towards Native Americans still continues and it's barely mentioned. The suffering goes on and the collective splitting-off goes on. And it gets played out elsewhere, too. In the Vietnam war, in certain "free-fire zones," where civilians were killed the soldiers called it "Indian Country."

Another way trauma repeats is when those who were traumatized are activated into revenge. This happened in the former Yugoslavia. In World War II, the Ustase regime in Croatia carried out atrocities against Serbs, Jews, Roma, and others. And in the recent war in the former Yugoslavia, the trauma and injustice from this period was intentionally opened arousing Serbs to carry out atrocities and ethnic cleansing of Croats in 1991. Then in 1995, when the Croatian military took back the territories that Serbs had taken, Croats carried out atrocities and ethnic cleansing of Serbs by awakening the trauma of 1991.

Another related dynamic is that people who've been traumatized resolve that they must never go through the pain again and will stand up against it. This resolve to protect our own group from suffering can then result in perpetuating the suffering in others and continuing a cycle of violence.

After the Six Day War in 1967, when Israelis had feared for their survival but then not only survived but went on to take the territories now known as the occupied territories, a Knesset member said "We were not so few in number as there is a tendency to believe. By our side fought the six million, who whispered in our ear the eleventh Commandment, 'Do not get murdered.'"

3. Trauma also repeats as long as there is no witness.

On an individual level, the experience is too much to bear, too much to witness. And this happens also on a collective level. Without a witness, the reality of what happened or what is happening gets negated and there's a feeling of everyone being cut off and isolated, those who suffered and those who stood by. I want to share a story in relation to this from our very first forum that I mentioned in Croatia, in Osijek.

There was a small group from Sarajevo at the forum that hung out together becoming friends. Many of the participants even felt this subgroup as a kind of clique. But one afternoon something very different came out. A woman from Sarajevo said in the group that she felt the participants from Sarajevo were being kept at a distance. She said, "You keep us at a distance. You look at us like museum pieces. You look but don't touch."

A woman from Croatia got up physically and crossed the room to face her and then said, "It's true. I'm remembering how I watched the atrocities in Sarajevo on TV. At that point the war in Croatia had stopped and, though I lived in a town she named that was only about 200 kilometers from Sarajevo, it seemed so far away. I couldn't feel it. I couldn't feel anything." And then she said, "I remember thinking I was glad it was there and not here." As she said this, acknowledging the truth about keeping the woman from Bosnia at a distance, both women had tears fill their eyes and at this

moment the distance went away. And I remember looking around the room. (And I've seen a lot of emotion in groups, but had never seen something quite like this). Every participant in the forum had tears streaming down their face. The professional translator began to cry and was very upset that she wasn't able to keep a professional distance like she'd been taught to do. When we assured her it was okay, she collapsed on the floor and wept. Others pitched in to keep translating and Lane and I continued to facilitate with tears rolling down our faces as several people went on to speak very personally about how they had distanced themselves from their own and others' pain and felt so isolated. And they also talked about the isolation and agony of the region being swept up in violence as the world was looking on watching TV.

This feeling of distance from events, whether they are close to us or happening across the world, is something many of us know: watching TV and feeling cut off and numb inside our hearts. And I think it's important to recognize that this response is in part related to dynamics of trauma.

4. One more thing I'd like to emphasize about trauma: there's a need to speak about the traumatic events in history and current, in community and in society; and there needs to be a lot of care as to how it happens so it doesn't just repeat the trauma and so that there is a witness and some way to include the reality of these experiences into history so they are not left split-off and repeating.

For individuals, it's important to be able to tell the story when they choose, and there's many important aspects to this that I can't go into here but just to say that telling the story creates a narrative: telling it, rather than the story just happening again in fragments and flashbacks out of one's control. And it's essential that others can listen and respond in a feeling way.

Just as it's important for an individual to piece together the fragments of their lives by making a narrative and telling the story, it's important for us as a society and world to tell our stories and the different versions of our stories in order to put together the fragments of our collective stories or history. You could say that traumatic events of the past persist until our history and stories are fully told and heard. There's a Sioux Indian saying: A people without history is like the wind on the buffalo grass.

B. Talking about trauma also brings up the question of *Accountability*

1. Another way conflict gets perpetuated is that there's insufficient accountability for past and current conflicts.

Conflicts begin, get further polarized, and escalate around lack of accountability. When we are not accountable concerning our social privileges in relation to others—based on social power and past and present discrimination—or when we don't recognize how the misuse of power and privileges creates conflict.

You could say our need for accountability is a search for justice and a search for closure. What *accountability* means is that someone acknowledges the events that occurred, rather than denying them or creating a completely different version. And it also needs some kind of grappling of conscience, remorse for what has happened. And it takes some kind of action to stop doing it or to make reparations. Or



sometimes accountability includes punishment. You could say that, just as traumatic stories repeat, stories of injustice persist as long as they remain unaccounted for; and violence easily repeats here.

2. The need for accountability is the driving force behind Truth and Reconciliation Commissions and also the International Tribunals and ICC

At the end of Apartheid in South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation process was an amazing model of a process of accountability in society. There are also many T and R commissions in other places. But one of the things that stands out in South Africa was the huge collective support for the process. And there was the incredible leadership of Mandela and also Desmond Tutu to find a way forward in society without repeating violence.

And After the war in the former Yugoslavia and then in Rwanda, the International Tribunals were set up for the purpose of holding those most responsible for war crimes accountable and to address the problem of impunity: to say just because you have the power or a government is behind you, this doesn't mean you can get away with it. So warlords or political leaders could be brought to trial. The ICC (International Criminal Court or world court) was also set up with this same idea: as a world we cannot tolerate impunity for crimes against humanity.

The idea of both Truth and Reconciliation commissions and the Tribunals is to promote not only closure but prevention of further violence.

3. I was interested reading that the president of the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, while speaking about the limits of what the Tribunals can do, talked about the need for a process of accountability across different levels of society, as he said, to be able to "piece together the fabric of society thread by thread."

One idea is that, in thinking about a culture of peace we need processes of accountability throughout society around the many issues that concern us as multi-cultural civil societies and in relation to conflict resolution and conflict prevention.

4. In our conflict work in different countries, we see all the time that conflicts cycle at the point where someone calls for accountability and it remains unanswered. And on the other hand, when someone is able to stand accountable in some way, this can be a point of real transformation and community building.

I remember at one forum a man stood up and said, "How are we supposed to now go and kiss good morning at the bakery, when you don't know if the person you're greeting was a sniper shooting at you? And we know every man of a certain age was involved in the killing." And these men of a certain age were in the room. But there are a lot of things that block us from being able to be accountable for what we have done or what our group is doing.

One thing that blocks us is that we tend to not be aware of the areas where we have privilege and power but are aware of where we suffer and don't have as many privileges as we want. (It's a constant dynamic, If you have a blister on your foot you'll be painfully aware of the blister but not your privilege to walk, if you have this privilege.) And conflicts, whether personal ones or collective, are rarely about

just two sides in disagreement. There are almost always dynamics of privilege and power involved.

In the United States, many people identify only with the threat and suffering from 9-11 but are not aware of their privileges, power, and dominance in relation to others; not only the government.

Or in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, most Israeli Jews tend to identify with their oppression from the pogroms in Europe and then the atrocity of the Holocaust that led to the creation of the state of Israel as a refuge for Jews and continue fearing for their survival. And with this identification most Jewish Israelis have great difficulty to perceive and to assume accountability for the horrendous oppression of Palestinians, as well as the oppression of Arab Israelis in Israeli society.

Another thing that blocks us is that we have difficulty being accountable for something our group did if we didn't personally do it. And we tend to not recognize the privileges we have that are often on the backs of those who don't share the same privileges. Or we don't consider using our privileges to take accountability in relation to others.

Another reason it's difficult for people to speak about and acknowledge violence perpetrated by their own group is because of issues of loyalty. This can run very deep.

In Croatia, people said that if they tried to create bridges between communities they were attacked as betraying loyalty, and terror tactics were also used to enforce loyalty. But you could also feel a more subtle enforced loyalty even in our groups.

In one forum, when the group was at a sort of impasse, each side demanding accountability from the other, an older Croat woman stood up and did something unheard of at that time. She spoke about a Croat soldier who had entered a Muslim home and killed a woman and child. Then she said, "I was a person who wanted military action to liberate Knin (a region of Croatia that had been held by the Serbs). That was war. But I did not want Savka and Jovan to be thrown into the well." (These are Serb names.) And there was a hush over the room, and then a Serb woman stood up and had tears in her eyes and said, "No one can tell me that an 87 year old Croat man should have had to suffer at the hands of Serb soldiers. They beat up an 87 year old man, and how do I explain to a Croat mother why her four year old had to die?"

This step of being able to talk about what one's own group had done was very transformative for the group. And in a wider collective sense, this ability to talk about what your own group has done is something very important for accountability. For example, it was an important moment, when Willy Brandt knelt at the Warsaw memorial to acknowledge and show his remorse for what Germany had done during the holocaust.

One more reason I want to mention that makes it difficult for people to speak about accountability that everyone will be familiar with is that everyone thinks the other side should do it first.

In one forum someone made a sort of joke that the situation between Serbs and Croats was like being with a lover and you have a fight and then you slam a few doors and go sleep in separate beds. And then you lie there feeling cold and you ask yourself if you should maybe get up and go to the other's bed, but you just can't because it's the other person who is more at fault than you and really should come to you. And you lie there wishing they would come to you first and you wonder...

#### **IV. Awareness Makes the Difference**

I want to go now to this last idea that if our human nature is the fuel, our awareness makes a difference in being able to find ways to facilitate conflict rather than perpetuate it.

If you think for a moment about difficult issues and conflicts in your personal life, or organizations you're a part of, or your neighborhood and society, you notice moments that we call "hotspots" (Mindell, 1995, 2002) where something is touched and it sort of sizzles, and then everyone backs away from it and sort of go on as if it didn't happen.

In a meeting, something hot is touched and people giggle or it goes quiet for a moment. Everyone feels it but then the meeting goes on as if it didn't happen. Or in society, a hot issue comes up and there is a rash of stuff in the papers about it and then it recedes and life goes on.

At a hot spot there's something that needs attention, a burning issue just under the surface. And hot spots will keep coming back until they are thoroughly addressed. And each time they come back, they come back a little hotter and conflict can escalate or violence can erupt. So, ignoring hot spots is another way conflict gets perpetuated.

Hot spots are like little rips in the fabric of the status quo. And we get nervous that everything is going to fall apart. But you can look at hot spots also as essentially creative moments, especially if they can be caught earlier, and if we go into those spots and work on the issues there, a hot spot can be a doorway into a deepening of community relationships and society. Staying with a hot spot takes a kind of heart to stay involved when things get tough and some combination of experience and belief that even the most difficult conflicts can transform.

In a culture of peace, or a culture of conflict facilitation, we could say that hot spots need facilitation from everyone. And more than anything else, this takes getting to know ourselves as individuals and as groups—how we get worked up and how we go silent, how we are involved with dynamics of social power, how our personal and collective history makes us feel passionate about some things and oblivious to other things, how we can find the behavior that we see in the other in ourselves and be able to step into others' shoes, and how underlying roles (mythic roles that structure the perpetuation of conflict such as the oppressor and oppressed or the insider and outsider) play out inside of each of us.

The kind of awareness I'm thinking about is an ongoing process and it's a combination, a mixture of a psychological, spiritual, and political kind of awareness. And there aren't many leaders with this kind of awareness. More of us need this kind of awareness.

Gandhi talked about this. Gandhi believed that spirituality and politics were ultimately the same thing, that self-realization couldn't happen without being involved in the world, and that all spirituality culminated in politics. The idea of non-violence was not about being passive but about stepping out of the violent system, not repeating it.

And I always turn to Mandela: on Mandela's 85th birthday, Desmond Tutu talked about how the transition that occurred in South Africa with relatively little violence could never have happened without the fact that when Mandela got out of jail after 27 years he had no bitterness. In his autobiography, some of you will remember how Mandela tells how when he got out of jail he was devoted to freeing both the oppressor and the oppressed. He said one thing he knew as much as he knows anything was that the oppressor needed to be liberated as surely as the oppressed. I like to think that he not only stepped out of prison but set an example that it's possible to step out of the prison of history.

I'm going to stop here and suggest that people get together with a few people near them, maybe in groups of three or four and talk for a while, about ten minutes, about your thoughts, ideas, and experiences around all of this. Or you might want to ask if you can imagine, or in what ways might you imagine, that awareness could influence politics. And then those who want can come back and we will talk together as a whole group before ending this evening.

*Small groups got involved in interesting conversations about these ideas and then we met back in the whole group. There were some questions and a stimulating discussion grew about the importance of linking psychology and politics, and psychological and political awareness. At the end, John McDonnell, MP, warmly thanked Arlene and everyone there and spoke about an idea to set up a forum to process the collective psyche that allowed Britain to go to war in Iraq, despite the 2 million demonstrators against it.*

For further information please see:

[www.warhotel.com](http://www.warhotel.com), [www.cfor.info](http://www.cfor.info), and [www.processwork-audergon.com](http://www.processwork-audergon.com)

email: [arlene@cfor.info](mailto:arlene@cfor.info)

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