BEYOND RESOLUTION: THE INVITATION FOR SELF-GROWTH INHERENT IN CONFLICTS

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines self-growth as a predominant process inherent in disputes and whether exploration of this aspect by disputants in private sessions may contribute to a more intentional growth and effective conflict management. This approach draws from spiritual and therapeutic concepts that view interpersonal conflicts as mirroring internal disharmony of the disputants emanating from the conditioned mind and inviting us to connect to our innate inner guidance of the un-conflicted core ('Self') to balance the disharmony. While any conflict resolution process is likely to foster some level of awareness, addressing the tension between the mind and un-conflicted Self may contribute to a shift in the perspective on the conflict from mainly an external crisis to an internal invitation to a growth process mirrored by the disruptive relationship. This can then loop back to the relationship to support more awareness of the goals and conflict management process, open the door for more self-growth, and sometimes even transcend the conflict altogether. The Self-explorative process suggested in this thesis involves finding opportunities in private sessions to connect to the Self and receive inner insights and guidance. The process uses elicitive questions, guided meditations and teaching to establish conscious communication with the Self and bring harmony to the Self-mind tension. This

process can be an addition to private sessions such as conflict coaching that can provide additional skills to manage the conflict. It offers individuals who are willing and ready another dimension of exploration not offered within mainstream conflict resolution practices and can benefit people who are interested not just in resolutions but also in exploring their opportunity to transform through conflicts and establishing communication with their Self for further growth.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal conflict is not just a conflict with others; it is a conflict with ourselves.

This thesis is a theoretical analysis of how conflicts are an opportunity for self-growth. Its main premise is that interpersonal conflicts are both a result of our inner imbalance and an invitation to learn about ourselves and grow through the process. This imbalance stems from the constant tension between our ego, or conditioned mind, and the 'Self.'[1] The conditioned mind is the part that defines our individuality but at the same time keeps us separated from others. The Self is the whole, un-conflicted aspect of our being that is aware of the cosmic nature of life and that forms the bridge between our individual physical consciousness and the connectedness to all. Interpersonal conflicts that are created and managed by the conditioned mind will usually follow a pattern of a power game and a desire to eliminate the crisis by finding a quick resolution. This pattern stems from the nature of the conditioned mind to gain control over situations through power as well as to control the space of conscious awareness by infusing it with limited beliefs and thoughts and avoiding deeper reflection of the Self that might lead to a shift of awareness. That is one reason conflicts often turn into violent events or at least use power games in pursuit of a winning solution rather than being perceived as a natural process of learning, growth and expansion of consciousness. Through connecting to the Self and receiving inner guidance and insights, we are able to regain inner harmony and view the conflict as an opportunity to learn about ourselves and grow. This can also lead to managing the conflict not only from our conditioned mind but also with the guidance of our Self that can introduce different perspectives into the process. These perspectives invite us to explore the role of the

[1] I chose to use capital 'Self' to distinguish this term from the common use of the word 'self,' which refers to aspects of the psyche and conditioned mind. The Self is our higher consciousness, the unconditioned and un-conflicted aspect of our being.

conflict in our life, the role of the other in reflecting to us our inner imbalance rather than being a counterpart to control and win over, and the opportunity to regain connectedness with the other through a resolution that takes into account these elements rather than simply being a crisis control. Conflicts, according to this viewpoint, are positive processes that mainly come into our lives in order to accelerate our expansion of consciousness. I believe resolution that is mainly focused on the facts and story of the conflict, or that is managed mainly from the conditioned mind, might not always address the growth element and thus can result in repeating conflicts that invite exploration of similar lessons. The work with the Self can promote new identity that can assist in managing or even transcending the specific interpersonal conflict and shift the perspective on conflicts in general.

According to Occam's Razor,[2] the simplest explanation for a phenomenon is always the correct one. Interpersonal conflicts can be complicated and involve multiple elements that are in conflict between the counterparts, such as interests, opinions, emotions, needs, values and identities. The complexity of a resolution process can be affected by the multiple elements it seeks to address, making the process more or less complex depending on these elements. Yet these elements can sometimes be the complicated outcome of a more simple-to-define inner process of the individuals in the form of inner imbalance and a lesson to learn through the conflict. One way to explain this inner imbalance is through the tension between the conditioned mind and the Self, which creates an inner struggle between the desire to remain unique and separated from others and the higher understanding that we all come from the same source and are therefore connected. This tension, when controlled by the conditioned mind, leads to the complexity of the elements of the conflict, as this mind tends to portray our uniqueness through

[2] Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Occam's razor. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved April 19, 2022, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Occam%27s%20razor

elements that are different than others. This is a natural process that allows us to express our individuality. However, when we focus on our separateness rather than our connectedness, we tend to over-identify with these elements and defend them through power struggles rather than view them as an invitation for defining ourselves through expanding and learning about our true nature. This can lead to over-focus on meeting the elements we consider important rather than asking why we identify with these elements and the purpose of experiencing them in interpersonal conflicts.

The source of our conflicts can be described through a lesson that we are invited to learn, which is usually simpler than its potential complicated outcome elements. The focus of the resolution process can be directed toward addressing the complex elements, thus making it complex as well, or exploring the inner imbalance and lesson, making it simpler. This is not to say that exploring these imbalances and lessons is always simple, as the conditioned mind will try to delay the process, but that the source of conflicts within oneself and the insights that come from this exploration can simplify the process in two ways: first, by explaining potentially complex outcomes with simple inner imbalances and lessons, and second, by focusing on self-transformation rather than changing reality that requires collaboration with others, which provides individuals more control over the process.

While simple in theory, connecting to the Self and gaining higher insights seems to be challenging in practice, as can be evidenced by the way many conflicts are escalated into violence, managed through the adversary system, or even collaboratively managed mainly to find resolution. The main reason for this challenge, I believe, is the control of the conditioned mind over the way we manage our lives and conflicts in particular and the conscious disconnection of many people from their Self. This control diverts most efforts for conflict resolution toward

finding solutions rather than self-reflecting on the inner imbalances, which is, I believe, the biggest obstacle to the potential growth inherent in conflicts. This thesis invites people in conflict to connect to their Self and shift their perspective about the conflict in a process that can sometimes be simpler than trying to reconcile all the conflicted elements that resulted from the disconnection. This connection and shifting of perspective is created by using meditations, elicitive questions and guidance to enter the space of consciousness, where the conditioned mind and Self can intersect, and allowing them to interact in harmony rather than creating imbalance through the over-control of the space by the conditioned mind. It is not intended to diminish the importance of addressing elements of conflict that are important to the counterparts but simply to offer the exploration of a different perspective that has the potential to shift the perspective of such elements and sometimes to redefine them so their fulfilment can serve a higher purpose of growth rather than just a power game of egos.

The process of exploring the Self is referred to in this thesis as the Self-explorative approach. It draws from other theories and models and can expand the various services offered by what Mayer (2004) calls 'conflict specialists,' acknowledging that conflicts contain many aspects to address rather than just resolution. It relies on scholars and practitioners like Burton (2001), who claims that peace begins at home, and Cloke (2013), who argues that conflicts with others represent conflicts with ourselves. It follows the emerging trend led by scholars like Bush and Folgers (2005) that views transformation as an important, if not the main, goal of the conflict management process, understanding that we are individuals but are also connected to each other. This thesis also draws from conflict coaching and overlaps with some coaching methods in both ideology and technique. Yet it aspires not only to assist clients in meeting their goals, but also, if they want, to challenge them so they can awaken to a higher version of themselves through the

reflections on the conflict. This is a spiritual aspiration woven into conflict resolution, which offers those willing to walk this path an alternative to traditional coaching or other conflict resolution processes into a deeper Self-exploration intended to focus on their inner imbalance and growth before they go back, transformed, to manage the interpersonal conflict. While this thesis is a theoretical review of existing literature, it also draws upon many years of my personal experience exploring the Self and practically applying its wisdom in conflicts.

CHAPTER II: EXISTING MODELS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

This chapter will provide an overview of the Alternative/Appropriate dispute resolution (ADR) field and conflict resolution in particular, mediations, and conflict coaching. The first section will describe the development of ADR and the conflict resolution field. The second section will describe what mediation is, with a focus on transformative mediation. The third section will focus on different mediation styles in the context of pre-mediation private sessions. Finally, the fourth section will provide an outline of conflict coaching.

ADR and Conflict Resolution

ADR is a term commonly used to describe various methods of resolving disputes without the use of litigation, using the services of a neutral third party. McManus and Silverstein (2011, p. 102) argue that while ADR can come in different forms, all sharing the attempt to obtain non-litigation relief, the three main categories of ADR common in the United States are adjudicative, evaluative and facilitative. Adjudicative ADR refers to a process whereby a neutral facilitator serves as the adjudicator or decision maker. The most common form of adjudicative ADR is arbitration. Evaluative ADR refers to a process in which lawyers and litigants present their case in order to receive feedback on its strengths and weaknesses. The case can be presented to a fellow attorney, possible jurors, a retired judge, or an expert in the field. Facilitative ADR refers to a process in which a third party promotes a discussion, dialogue or settlement. The most common form of facilitative ADR is mediation.

According to Kriesberg (2009, p. 1), ADR, referring to a specific kind of work, the non-litigated relief, is situated among a larger field of study referred to as conflict resolution. There is a lack of consensus about the characteristics of conflict resolution: For some it means the way of settling conflicts through joint efforts to reach mutually acceptable agreements; for others it has a

broader meaning of constructive methods that can be applied to all stages of conflicts to conduct and transform them and maintain and secure the relationships. Kriesberg further argues that while there is no one comprehensive theory of resolving conflicts, there is a general agreement that conflicts can be managed better than they are currently and that destructive conflicts can be avoided or at least limited. New approaches to conflict resolution, as suggested in this thesis, may contribute to the field by offering different perspectives emanating from conflicts other than resolution only.

As an interdisciplinary field or, as viewed by Burton (1996) as a-disciplinary, the conflict resolution field varies in its application to conflicts in all stages and forms. According to Kriesberg (2009, p. 15), contemporary conflict resolution began as a way to stop violence and promote peace and the groundwork was first laid in the ’50s and ’60s. During the ’70s and ’80s, partially because of the expansion of ADR and the rise of litigation in the United States, the conflict resolution field expanded and became institutionalized. By the ’90s, with the shift in the world environment and a decrease in the number and magnitude of international and domestic destructive conflicts, the use of conflict resolution methods also shifted into managing conflicts at later stages than prevention of violence, as well as sustaining agreements. Kriesberg further argues that the practice of conflict resolution grew and developed in areas such as negotiation, dialog, reconciliation, trainings and workshops, with practitioners specializing in different areas of conflict resolution. The conflict resolution field diffused and expanded internationally and became institutionalized, such as in mandated mediation programs in the legal system.

Kriesberg (2009, pp. 16-18) further argues that with the expansion of conflict resolution, questions are asked as to the direction the field should take. Some would like to focus on specific areas, like negotiation, while others would like to focus on the original vision of the field as

interdisciplinary field applied to a wider range of conflict resolution matters. Another question stems from the tension between academic and practical application of the conflict resolution methods. He further argues that while academics stress the goals and values that should be realized, emphasizing the long term goals of transformation, practitioners are more focused on the short term goals of settling conflicts. The different views on how to apply the conflict resolution methods, both from the perspective of their intended values and goals as well as their practice, led to the development of different mediation styles, as will be discussed in the following chapter. Another emerging technique is conflict coaching, which will also be discussed later. While the conflict resolution field continues to grow, the internal conflicts among its practitioners and scholars keep growing as well, contributing both to its development and the constant seeking of new ideas and methods to approach and manage conflicts.

Bush and Folger's Transformative Story

Mediation is commonly known as a voluntary process in which a neutral third party helps the opposing parties in a dispute reach a mutually acceptable agreement. The main elements of mediation are being informal, being voluntary, producing a mutually agreed-upon resolution facilitated by a neutral third party, and remaining confidential. Nevertheless, as mentioned by Bush and Folger (2005), there is great divergence around the goals and styles of mediation, as well as the values underlying each approach. In addition, the requirement for neutrality attracts criticism as being an impossible goal to attain due to the inherent implicit and explicit biases of mediators (Harding, 1991; Davies & Seuffert, 2000; Izumi, 2010; McCorkle & Reese, 2019). The level of exploration of conflicts in mediations is therefore restricted by its boundaries. Pre-mediation sessions, as offered by conflict coaching as well as those discussed in this thesis, overcome some of these boundaries and thus can offer a deeper level of exploration and

managing of conflicts beyond just finding mutual resolution. Nonetheless, the transformative mediation model of Bush and Folger (2005) also offers transformation during mediation, focusing on shifting the relationship rather than just seeking a solution. This model, although not the first or only transformational process within conflict resolution, became one of the main mediation 'stories' according to Bush and Folger (2005),[3] paving the way for conflict resolution processes that acknowledge the importance of healing relationships and not just settlements.

The Transformation Story by Bush and Folger (2005), focusing on transforming the interaction between the parties and strengthening them and the society at the same time, correlates with Bush and Folger's transformative model of mediation, which assumes that the parties have a capacity to understand each other and decide how and whether to settle the conflict. Based on this capacity, this model suggests that the mediation purpose should focus on empowering the parties and helping them recognize each other. Through these two dimensions of the process, they can find their own settlement but even if not, they will improve the quality of their interaction. While this transformative model was first described by Bush and Folger in their first edition of *The Promise of Mediation* in 1995, which placed the Transformation Story as an established story in the mediation field, the concept of conflict transformation was not new and is used by other scholars and practitioners in different ways. As will be shown later, transformation of conflicts can take different shapes and forms, each contributing to the Transformation Story and expanding its definition. The Transformation Story and the transformative model of

[3] The four stories of Bush and Folger (2005) are: (i) the Satisfaction Story, which is the main story and is intended to reduce the suffering of the parties and satisfy their needs by providing out-of-court justice in an informal, cost-effective and consensual process. This story, as similarly presented by Fisher, Ury and Patton (2012), is focused on reaching the kind of collaborative, integrative problem-solving process that results in a mutually agreed-upon resolution, thus producing a creative win-win situation for the parties; (ii) the Social Justice Story, which is focused on organizing individuals around common interests and creating stronger communities, which promotes fairer treatment of its members; (iii) the Transformation Story, which is focused on transforming the quality of conflict interaction so that conflicts can strengthen the parties and the society at the same time; and (iv) the Oppression Story, which describes how mediation, although started with good intentions, turned into a power instrument of the state against the individuals and the strong against the weak.

mediation are presented as one by Bush and Folgers but should be distinct, allowing more models and approaches to reside under the umbrella of the Transformation Story.

Mediation Styles

Another way to describe mediations is according to styles. The 'four stories' of Bush and Folger (2005) or the three categories[4] described by Seaman (2016) describe where the mediation field stands today as well as, at least with respect to Bush and Folger, where it should go based on goals and values. Mediation styles combine theory and practice to describe the way mediations are conducted. Some focus on three main styles: facilitative, evaluative and transformative (Bush & Folger, 2005, p. 100; Alfini et al. 2001. p. 140; D'Alo, 2003, p. 205, as cited in Bush & Folger, 2005,). Some add a fourth, newer narrative style (Linden, n.d., as cited in Foster, 2003). Zumeta (2000, as cited in Foster, 2003), summarizing the three main mediation styles, indicates that the facilitative, which is the mainstream mediation style, is creating a framework for the parties to promote a discussion and for the mediator to ask questions that will reveal the needs and interests underlying their positions in order for the parties to reach a mutually acceptable agreement that will meet these needs and interests. In the evaluative style, the mediator uses his or her skills to evaluate the respective positions, point out strengths and weaknesses of such positions and make recommendations in order to help the parties consider the practicality of their position and avoid taking the case back to court. The transformative style, a newer style developed by Bush and Folger (1994, 2005), focuses on promoting the interaction between the parties. Finally, the narrative style, as explained by Linden (n.d.), is based on the

[4] Seaman (2016, p. 11) categorizes the mediation field through three broad categories: instrumental, moral and political. Instrumental refers to addressing issues and being problem-solving oriented, thus correlating with the facilitative settlement-driven style. Transformative and to a lesser degree narrative mediation styles, both termed 'relational styles' (Kressel, 2006, p. 744, as cited in Seamen, 2016), tend to have more of a moral objective. While the transformative style deals with the crisis in the relationship between the parties, the narrative style focuses on their story. The political category refers to the recognition of political and underlying systemic causes of conflicts, correlating with an 'explorative' mediation method that seeks dialogic exchange to recognize the political and systemic contexts of the conflict.

premise that the parties' positions are based on their life's discourses and thus uses conversations between the parties to expose the true nature of the conflict. As the name suggests, Foster (2003) posits that the narrative style uses storytelling as a way to allow the parties to express their feelings and positions. Borrowing from narrative therapy (Billikopf-Encina, 2002, as cited in Foster, 2003), the narrative style relies on the idea that people are caught in the conflict cycle, as they feel they are bound to it, and through the storytelling the mediator helps the parties see the conflict from a distance and create a new story that will lead to an agreement. The purpose is to get the parties to detach from the conflict in order to reach an agreement.

Mediation styles, mostly the facilitative, transformative and narrative, share some similar elements with pre-mediation sessions offered by a few conflict coaching models as well as the Self-explorative approach of this thesis. Asking questions to explore interests and needs, promoting transformation of the relationship and deconstructing conflict stories in order to reconstruct them in a more effective way are techniques used by both these mediation styles as well as some pre-mediation sessions. The difference is the level of exploration that is offered through private sessions and the attention to one party's goals and skills that can be offered only through such private sessions. While both mediations and private sessions eventually create a new conflict story, the one created by a private session has the potential to be more explorative and deeper, which can be later used in the mediation. The Self-explorative approach of this thesis offers an even deeper perspective on this story by exploring its origins within oneself, which is more restricted during mediation.

The use of one mediation model or a combination of them is a matter of style. According to Linden (n.d.), some mediators are purists, using only one style of mediation, while others use the different mediation styles as a toolkit, selecting the appropriate style for the appropriate case.

While according to Linden (see also Zumeta, 2000, and Foster, 2003) using just one mediation style might be a close-minded approach, others, like Bush and Folgers (2005, pp. 45, 228), argue that it is not possible to combine mediation styles and that the mediator should focus on one style only, preferably the transformative style. Riskin (1994) and Imperati (1997) argue that the mediation styles are more of a continuum from one style to another and have few real distinct differences. According to Zumeta, in practice many practitioners who utilize the transformative style also combine it with the facilitative style, in support of the continuum between different styles. Conflict coaching practices, especially those providing certification, also adhere to a specific model. However, in practice conflict coaching can be used as a 'toolkit' approach, utilizing different techniques in different situations. Yet, as Bush and Folger (2005) argue with respect to mediation, combining mediation styles might affect their coherence, and the same argument can be made with respect to conflict coaching. This makes sense from a purely theoretical perspective, as combining evaluative or facilitative styles, in which the mediator is taking a more directive role, with transformative style, in which the mediator should stay out of the parties' way (Bush & Folgers, 2005, p. 83), can create confusion in session progressions and outcomes. Moreover, as the mediator's influence on the process is substantial, its effect depends on the theory of practice of the mediator (Della Noce, 1999, as cited in Bush and Folger, 2005).

However, this style-theory dichotomy is not immutable. Stemming from the two dominant ideological frameworks—problem-solving, individualist framework and transformative and relational framework (as explained in more detail below)—this dichotomy takes mediations in different directions according to the mediator's ideology and style. Therefore, can a 'toolkit' approach also support empowerment and recognition while opting for more directive settlement involvement by the mediator? Or, taking it to pre-mediation sessions,

can combining conflict coaching techniques promote the coaching goals even when not adhering to a specific model? According to Bush and Folger, at least with respect to mediation, the mediator's role is to provide the space for transformation and any intervention might prevent this process. A similar argument can be made in favor of adhering to a certain conflict coaching model and its guidelines, as improper intervention by the coach might turn the coaching into consultation, or a potentially transformative process into an evaluative and disempowering one. Yet, as argued by Linden (n.d.) and Foster (2003), it is not clear that combining mediation styles, as many mediators do in practice, and using tools from each style will adversely affect the transformation of the parties. It is even more unclear when transformation is used in a broader sense than as defined by Bush and Folger, to accommodate a positive shift in understanding the conflict and the relationship between the parties that can come from dynamics other than empowerment and recognition as defined by the transformative model. According to Bush and Folger (2005, p. 231), combining mediation styles is a natural process in the evolution of the practice, until finding the right style to fit the purpose and objectives of the mediator, which can explain the practice of some transformative mediators who use the toolkit approach. However, if empowerment and recognition are at the heart of the mediation, then combining other styles might hinder this process, as Bush and Folger argue. But if transformation is defined in different terms, as other scholars and this thesis suggest, then there might be a place for such combinations or more flexibility in the process. Moreover, the Self-explorative approach supports the 'toolkit' approach by acknowledging the need to apply them in different cases. When the goal is to connect to the Self and shift the perspective of the conflict, achieving this goal is not limited to a strict model that must be followed, and the intuition and approach of the practitioner can be expressed in different ways.

Conflict Coaching

Conflict coaching is a practice that emerged in the mid-1990s that describes a process of assisting individuals to engage in conflicts and manage them more effectively through private sessions. It combines executive coaching[5] with ADR (Noble, 2012; Brinkert, 2016) but is also applied to conflicts outside the workplace, like family conflicts (Eddy, 2012). Conflict coaching can be used in the context of mediation, in which case it is called 'pre-mediation sessions' or 'pre-mediation coaching,' or in any other context of conflict resolution. Brinkert defines conflict coaching as a "dyadic process in which a coach trained in conflict resolution or executive coaching works with a client to develop the client's conflict-related understanding, interaction strategies, and interaction skills" (2006, p. 383). Noble (2004) describes conflict coaching as a one-on-one process intended to "resolve a dispute (past, present); prevent an unnecessary dispute; prepare for a conflict conversation; and/or generally improve his/her competency in conflict management" (para. 2), as well as to increase confidence (Noble, 2012). Based on the nature of coaching, she also views conflict coaching as oriented around tasks and results intended to assist individuals in identifying and meeting their goals. Conflict coaching, according to Noble, is different than counseling or therapy, as it offers a short-term process that is future-focused rather than digging into the past and is defined by the goals of the client. Peltier (2010, p. xxxix) also lists the main differences between coaching and therapy, as discussed below. 'Mediation coaching,' according to Noble (2004), is one application of the broader conflict coaching intended to assist a party to mediation in matters that are not normally dealt with by the mediator. The coaching can provide a wide range of assistance, from forming mediation strategy and goals to teaching skills for better communication, before, during and after the mediation

[5] One-on-one sessions intended to help someone become a more effective manager, usually within the context of a specific workplace issue (Peltier, 2010).

sessions. Eddy (2012) describes ‘pre-mediation coaching’ as a process that is sometimes used by the mediator to get to know the parties and prepare them for the process, by a lawyer to prepare his or her clients for the mediation, or even by a mental health practitioner to deal with emotions and other mental issues. The goal, according to Eddy, is to help the participants experience a less conflicted interaction with each other during the mediation session.

Noble (2004) sees the ultimate goal of mediation coaching as the effective engagement with others in mediation sessions, helping people learn about themselves and shift their engagement in the current dispute and future ones. Accordingly, conflict coaching is intended to address a certain conflict and assist one or more parties to manage the mediation sessions effectively. Within the bigger scope of executive coaching, conflict coaching is intended to assist executives in managing conflicts in the workplace (Jones & Brinkert, 2008). Wilson (2020) argues that conflict coaching may not always help disputants solve their conflict because it focuses on only one party, but it may provide a new perspective on the conflict and the skills to manage it. This implies a broader tension raised by Blackman, Morsardo and Gray (2016) in the context of executive coaching between the benefits of coaching to the individual and to the organization.

According to Feldman and Lankau (2005), coaching approaches vary depending on the background and qualifications of the coach. Peltier (2010, as cited in Feldman and Lankau, 2005) identified five major coaching approaches: psychodynamic, behaviorist, person-centered, cognitive therapeutic and system-oriented. The psychodynamic approach is used to uncover unconscious thoughts and promote better understanding of how the client thinks, feels and behaves. The behaviorist approach focuses on observing behavior rather than analyzing internal processes. The person-centered approach is focused on the client being accountable for the

experience without direct intervention by the coach. The cognitive therapeutic approach focuses on changing negative and irrational thoughts rather than working on emotional reactions. Last, the system-oriented approach views the client's behavior as attributed to not only internal causes but also systemic and work environment elements which need to be addressed effectively in order to manage them. Among the five approaches, the Self-explorative approach presented in this thesis most resembles the psychodynamic approach, with a deeper exploration of the Self and not just the unconscious mind.

Mayer (2004) describes three dimensions of coaching. The first dimension explores whether the focus is on the individual or the system, ranging between personal, interpersonal, group and system. The second dimension relates to the approach to coaching: directive or elicitive, ranging from confrontational to advising to dialogue to elicitive. The third dimension is the depth of exploration chosen by the coach, including behavioral, emotional, cognitive or the integration between them. Coaches, according to Mayer, work on all dimensions. While Mayer believes that being confrontational and elicitive at the same time will not work, it is possible to shift styles within the process. Drawing upon Mayer, this thesis uses personal focus, working on few dimensions and shifting between being elicitive, directive and teaching in a way that elicits self-learning (rather than giving advice). Moving along all dimensions, as posited by Mayer, allows flexibility and the ability to be engaged with clients based on their needs.

Drawing upon Brinkert (2016), there are two main models of conflict coaching primarily used in the workplace: the Comprehensive Conflict Coaching model (Jones & Brinkert, 2008) and the CINERGY™ Model (Noble, 2012). Brinkert posits that both models use various conflict resolution methods in a holistic way. Other models are also used within and outside of the organizational world, for example Eddy's (2012) 4 Keys Skill and Hardy's (2022) REAL™

model that, like CYNERGY™, can be applied to both organizational and private conflicts. While coaching models can begin as one of Peltier's approaches, some shift to a different approach during the process (like the Comprehensive Conflict Coaching model that starts as person-centered and shifts into system-oriented) and some apply more than one approach (like REAL that combines psychodynamic with person-centered). Below is a short description of each of the four models.

The Comprehensive Conflict Coaching Model

The Comprehensive Conflict Coaching Model ("CCC") (Jones & Brinkert, 2008) is based on the premise that conflicts are created and resolved within the framework of social interaction and communication and, similar to Hardy (2022), it draws from the narrative theory. Conflict coaching is intended to help the parties understand that social interaction in order to reduce or manage the conflict. Similar to Bush and Folger (2005), CCC is also focused on how the parties communicate within the social relationship. According to Jones and Brinkert (2008), conflict coaching is aimed at fostering client empowerment when the coach can provide advice, if he or she is qualified to do so. This model is less elicitive and focuses on promoting self-reflection through a facilitative approach that includes active consultation. The CCC begins with assessment of the client's readiness and willingness to take part in the coaching process. It then moves to applying a four-stage process: Discovering, Exploring, Crafting and Enacting.

In the first stage, the coach will help the client create a narrative around the conflict by breaking it down into three steps: initial story told, refining the story and testing it. Through telling the story, refining it by adding more details and telling it from the other party's perspective, the client and coach both gain understanding of the story and perspective of the conflict. They then test the narrative and assumption the client makes about the other party, with

the goal of shifting the client's perspective of the narrative. The second stage involves exploring the conflict through three perspectives that are considered to be the source of the conflict: identity, emotion and power. The third stage involves creating a new narrative that includes a preferable outcome. The fourth step includes teaching the skills to help the client manage the conflict and reach his or her goal. In this model the coach can be more assertive in directing the client to test the story in the first stage to explore other perspectives (similar to the REAL model described below) and, in stage four, can also actively teach the client different skills and strategies to meet the goal. This contributes to this thesis by supporting active guidance and skills teaching during private sessions.

The CINERGY™ Model

The CINERGY™ Model (Noble, 2012) draws upon three pillars—coaching, ADR and neuroscience—to provide a seven-stage coaching method that helps clients increase competence and confidence in efficiently managing and engaging in interpersonal conflicts. It supports clients in becoming who they want to be in the context of the conflict through the seven-stage process of exploring themselves. The first stage is intended to clarify the client's goals. The second stage involves inquiring about the conflict. In the third stage, the client is deconstructing the elements of the conflict using the "(Not So) Merry-Go-Round of Conflict" (Noble, 2012, p. 51) in order to increase self-awareness, see the conflict from the viewpoint of the other and reassess the goal. In the fourth stage the coach helps the client explore possible plans to reach the goal, examining its risks and opportunities. In the fifth stage, the client selects a plan of action or several choices and the coach assists in preparing the client to execute the desired plan through practicing skills, engaging in role-plays and offering feedback. The sixth stage involves considering the potential challenges of the plan. The seventh and final stage involves obtaining

the client's commitment to the plan, identifying the insights from the process, discussing the next steps to take, and acknowledging the client's efforts.

Other than being a conflict coaching model, Noble's (Not So) Merry-Go-Round of Conflict is a framework for analyzing disputes that helps clients explore the conflict through different lenses and shift their perspective about the conflict and the other person, increasing awareness of and finding similarities in the way the other party is perceiving the conflict. It consists of seven stages in a circle of cause and effect. In the first, the precipitating interaction is identified. The second state identifies the 'trigger point' and the underlying value, need and identity of the client. The third stage explores the reaction to the other party. The fourth stage explores the assumptions made about the other party. The fifth stage marks the boundary, which is the point where the conflict leaves the space of internal conflict and is expressed externally. The sixth stage involves exploring this external expression. The seventh and final stage explores the consequences of this external expression. Noble's (Not So) Merry-Go-Round of Conflict contributes to my thesis by dividing interpersonal conflicts into internal and external, indicating the cause and effect of the conflict and examining the conflict path of the other. Differences between this model and this thesis involve the trigger point, which I see as deeper than values, needs and identities, involving the tension between the Self and the conditioned mind (as discussed below) that creates an opportunity for learning and growing rather than a crisis to be resolved. Also, I see the path of the other as being part of a shared journey that the parties subconsciously choose through the conflict in order to experience and learn together, rather than just being similar paths emanating from their internal conflict. The CINERGY model as a whole contributes to my thesis by exploring the clients' inner world and not just their stories, and supporting who they want to be in a more explorative way than CCC or REAL, which both work

with stories. Unlike CINERGY, I tend to put more focus on the interplay between the Self and the conditioned mind and explore the realms of possibilities that emanate from the Self or even the mind before the stage of creating the conflict story and beliefs about it (which is also done by CINERGY to a certain degree). I also believe in the combination of elicitive and guided questions as well as teachings that can promote self-learning (rather than giving advice), which is usually less common in coaching.

REAL Conflict Coaching System™

Hardy (2022) proposes a way to work with people's stories in conflict, the REAL Conflict Coaching System™ ("REAL"). It draws from three disciplines: narrative therapy, coaching, and conflict resolution. Hardy posits that people typically tend to present their story in two ways: melodramatic, in which they feel helpless and want someone to save them, and tragic, in which they present themselves as the hero in order to improve their conflict situation. Melodramatic stories are comforting and view the conflict in black and white, or the 'good' versus the 'bad,' blaming the bad for the situation and aiming at a happy ending for the good. They see conflicts as a bad thing and as adversarial in nature, which prevents them from growing and learning. According to Hardy, melodramatic stories lead to less effective management of the conflict, thus suggesting a more constructive way to present people's stories by shifting it to be realistically tragic, called 'tragedy with a twist' (Hardy, 2022, p. 74), referring to the choice of the hero of a different ending than the dramatic one. Tragic stories, according to Hardy, are found to be more constructive than melodramas in managing conflicts, as the hero can self-reflect and grow through the suffering. It is a contemplative process in which the hero has agency to actively make choices, regardless of the resolution of the conflict. The tragic story, unlike the melodramatic, acknowledges the complexity of the conflict and its causes, as well as

the agency of the hero. In some ways, shifting to the tragedy hero story empowers the hero and his/her recognition of the other, similar in some ways to Bush and Folger's transformative mediation model. Conflict coaches, according to Hardy, can assist in shifting the stories without becoming part of them, through a six-stage story shift technique intended to develop "the five Cs: clarity, comprehension, choices, competence, and confidence" (Hardy, 2022, p. 158). Clarity is being mindful about what happened in the situation. Comprehension is being aware of the various factors affecting the situation. Choices refer to the client's acknowledgement of their past choices and available alternatives. Competence refers to acquiring skills to manage the conflict. Confidence is the practice and development of these skills so that the client can implement them effectively. This process is also reflected by the name 'REAL,' which represents the four pillars of the model, describing stages of the hero in the tragedy story: reflection (the hero learns about the entry and exit points of the problem), engagement (the hero is engaged rather than avoiding the problem), artistry (the hero improves the ability to do better) and learning (the hero learns and grows).

Hardy also suggests that people create stories based on partial information that creates a less-shared story with the other. Shifting the stories can help create more similarities between the stories and support a more constructive conflict management. The main contributions of this model to my thesis are introducing a semi-structured model that promotes a shift through natural rather than heavily structured conversation and shifting the story to create more similarities to the other's story, which is the first step for deeper exploration into a shared story, as I suggest.

The 4 Keys Skills

Eddy (2012) suggests another conflict coaching method, mostly in family coaching, called the '4 Keys Skills,' which is intended to prepare 'High Conflict People' (HCP) to manage

mediations more effectively. HCP is a term coined by Eddy (2019) to describe disputants who have high-conflict behavior that is meant to increase rather than resolve conflicts. Eddy's 4 Keys Skills method is comprised of four elements: 'Flexible thinking' is a method of making proposals, asking questions and responding to the proposals. 'Manage emotions' is a way to deal with hard emotions in order to allow rational decision making. 'Moderate behavior' is the ability to create a better communication environment using "I" statements. Last, 'Checking yourself' is a skill to check whether the other three skills are being used when discussing difficult issues. Interestingly, according to Eddy and Lomas (2021), mediations involving HCP should avoid the interest-based negotiations suggested by Fisher et al. (2012), as well as self-reflection and exploring negative emotions (as opposed to the transformative mediation model of Bush & Folger, 2005). The main contributions of this model to my thesis are the use of flexibility in thinking, examining emotions, and using "I" statements, which promotes self-reflection.

The different conflict approaches indicate the flexibility in the traditional model of coaching, adopting more elicitive and therapy elements to be incorporated into coaching. Drawing upon the models and approaches mentioned above, this thesis proposes an approach that combines elicitive, direct guidance and teaching that encourages further self-learning, using each at the right time of the process, to provide holistic engagement that captures the nature of working with the Self while in the context of conflict management. This approach can be incorporated into conflict coaching or other private sessions as an additional process to further explore the roots of the conflict within oneself and gain insights from the Self regarding the conflict and its management.

CHAPTER III: CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

This chapter will provide an overview of conflict transformation. The first section will describe what conflict transformation is. The second section will describe self-growth approaches to conflict, including a discussion of the psyche, the Self, self-growth, mindfulness and meditations and methods of self-inquiry.

What is Conflict Transformation?

Overview

Conflict transformation is a broad term used to describe a wide spectrum of fundamental change that occurs within conflicts. It was mostly used in the context of global peacebuilding and based on the work of Bush and Folger and is now also commonly used in the context of private mediations. According to Miall (2004), there is no one definition that is agreed upon by all for this term, as it is a multi-dimensional task that should be constantly changing in response to the changing nature of conflicts. Miall notes that conflict transformation holds its own place with distinct elements from conflict resolution and conflict management, similar to Bush and Folger (2005) naming one of their 'four stories' of mediation transformative. He holds the view that these three schools within the conflict resolution field have different approaches to conflicts.

According to Bloomfield and Reilly (1998, as cited in Miall, 2004), conflict management theorists see conflicts and violence as an ineradicable result of differences in values and interests, emanating from political power, that cannot be resolved or removed but only managed and contained to reach temporary constructive compromise. On the other hand, Miall views conflict resolution theorists as arguing that people cannot compromise on their fundamental needs and that conflicts can transform if parties are assisted in exploring and reframing their positions and interests in order to foster new thinking and relationships. This is done by exploring the root of

the conflict and finding creative solutions that shift the destructive pattern into constructive solutions (Azar & Burton, 1986, as cited in Miall, 2004). He further posits that unlike conflict resolution theorists, conflict transformation theorists move beyond reframing positions and win-win outcomes into transforming the very basic structure of the parties' relationships beyond the specific conflict. As conflicts are a catalyst for change, constructive solutions should come from long-term transformation within the society rather than specific solution to conflicts through mediations. It requires a different set of 'lenses' through which we see the conflict (Lederach, 1995), which can eventually 'transcend' them (Galtung, 2000) rather than just resolve them.

The shift from one theory to another involves a deeper exploration of the roots of the conflict as well as a wider perception of what the solution is: compromising, alleviating violence, finding a win-win solution that will meet the basic needs of the parties, or shifting the basic perception of the conflict and redefining solutions. There is no clear line between the three theories (conflict management, resolution and transformation).

Whatever the classification is, transformative theorists view conflicts through wider lenses, as Lederach noted: "Conflict transformation is a way of looking as well as seeing" (2003, p. 9), when seeing refers to looking beyond and deeper. Through his three lenses approach, Lederach suggests exploring the immediate situation, underlying patterns and context, and finding a conceptual framework for the conflict. This approach is situated in the global peacebuilding field in which structural and individual factors interplay and need to be addressed together to promote a transformative solution.

An interpersonal conflict, even if it involves more than two people, is ultimately a conflict between individuals. While the larger the group the more elements can be involved in the conflict, and the more challenging it is to promote a change, eventually the conflict mirrors

each of the individuals involved. Therefore, even if more elements need to be addressed in a larger group conflict in order to create a meaningful change, the exploration of the source of the conflict within each of its members can promote group transformation through individual processes alongside the group processes. This premise is based on the concept that peace is an inner state of being and should be first searched for inside. As Geshe Kelsang Gyatso (2007, p. 19) said:

> Without inner peace, outer peace is impossible. We all wish for world peace, but it will never be achieved unless we first establish peace within our own minds…Only by creating peace within our own mind and helping others to do the same can we hope to achieve peace in this world.

Inner peace is also a well-known concept in the conflict resolution field. In Burton's article 'Peace Begins At Home' (2001), he acknowledges that personal problems lead to conflictual relationships, stemming from the idea that unmet needs lead to conflicts. Lederach (2005) emphasizes the importance of focusing on the personal aspects of the participants in a conflict, exploring who and how we are in the world. The application of this concept in practical work intended to regain inner peace differs among theories. Conflict management and conflict resolution theories are focused on dealing with the outcome of the disruption in the inner peace and providing a compromise or a settlement that meets the interests and needs of the parties involved. Conflict transformation theorists aim at changing the underlying causes for such disruption to create a more sustainable solution that also shifts the relationships and even the parties.

Peacebuilding theories attempt to capture the complexity of conflicts and deal with all underlying causes, mainly political and structural, that deprive basic needs and translate into

violence. This is an attempt to combine top-to-bottom and bottom-up approaches. In the process, the personal aspect is one of several addressed. Even the transformative model of Bush and Folger (2005) aims at creating a structural shift through private transformative mediations. In this thesis, I focus on a bottom-up approach but with a deeper exploration of the 'bottom' aspect. Like other transformative theories, I rely on the premise that fundamental shifts by the individuals participating in a conflict can promote structural shifts as well, while offering a deeper exploration process based on the connection I see between inner disharmony and interpersonal conflicts.

The Nature of Conflicts

Scholars like John Burton and Johan Galtung offered theories to explain the sources of conflicts, mainly in the context of peacebuilding and violence among groups. Burton (1979) suggested that frustrated basic human needs will translate into violence in order to fulfil them. These include the need for identity, recognition, and security, as well as developmental needs. Much like Burton, the philosopher Simone Weil (1986) also refers to the needs of the soul alongside the needs of the body, based on some absolute truth emanating from some reality outside this world. Unlike disputes about material issues that can be compromised through negotiation, according to Burton basic needs cannot be compromised and should be met, and conflicts are the result of unmet needs. Galtung (1969) addresses the correlation between the causes of the gap between the potential and actual fulfilment of needs and the intensity of violence used to meet them. Dugan's (1996) Nested Theory of Conflict is an approach intended to identify the source of the conflict based on one of four levels: issues-specific, relational, structural: sub-systems and structural: systems. These levels are 'nested' together. She posits that when approaching a conflict it is important to first know the level of its source. From a social

psychology perspective, in answering the question 'Why people do what they do?' Furr and Funder (2018) argue that it is the interplay between the person's disposition (traits) and the situation they are in that affects their behavior. These approaches to conflicts aim to capture the complexity underlying the roots of conflicts at both the personal and structural levels.

Burton (2001) also claims that a deep analysis of a conflict can reveal common goals of human development and autonomy. Conflict is created over the means to achieve these goals and values held in common. Recognition of the other will help all parties involved understand the conflict and find ways to meet their needs. Burton (1997) adds that dealing with conflicts requires a comprehensive, holistic framework in order to capture its complexity. He posits that breaking down the knowledge about conflicts by using limited scientific approaches tends to provide limited views of them, leading to superficial and limited attempts to resolve them without understanding their complex variables (Burton, 1997, p. 130). Third party intervention is needed not because of lack of agency by the parties, as also argued by Bush and Folger (2005), but because of the emotional stress and the difficulty in seeing the big picture that can prevent parties from resolving the conflict by themselves. Transformation, according to Burton, is the process of changing the underlying structures that caused the conflict. These structures, sponsored by elite institutions, deprive people of their basic needs and trigger extreme defiance against the system. A conflict resolution process, according to Burton, must then include transforming these structures as the source of the conflict. Unlike approaches that try to emphasize the distance between basic human needs and the means to get them (i.e., fight physical violence), Burton and Galtung posit that we should focus on maximizing the fit between these needs and resources (Sandole, 2001). This can be achieved by understanding the needs and their underlying complex causes.

Another transformative approach is by Galtung (2000); it is based on the premise that conflict is a result of incompatible goals and solving the conflicts requires transcending the parties' goals. While transformation usually refers to a change or a shift in behavior, emotions or perception, transcendence, as Galtung calls it, aims to create a new reality altogether. Rather than compromising on the conflicting needs, Galtung's transcendence approach calls for changing the reality around the opposing needs into a form of shared needs that can be then met. This is done by applying the TRANSCEND Method (Galtung, 2000), which is an approach based on concepts drawn from the main religions of empathy, consideration of conflict as a source of both violence and development, mutual causation and shared responsibility, and the importance of dialogue and non-violence. Burton's transformation, or Galtung's transcendence, is a shift from a destructive to a constructive outcome of conflicts (similar to the reversing of the Negative Conflict Spiral of Bush and Folgers, 2005, p. 50). While this approach is meant to deal with violent conflicts among groups, Galtung's concept of creating a new reality, or transcendence, coincides with the concept presented in this thesis that deeper exploration and connecting to the Self can change the perception of reality and shift the goals.

Transformative approaches tend to query the connection between the external reality and its effect on the individual's needs, values and identity in order to meet rather than compromise them. One example of this approach is the Four-Worlds Model of the Perceptual-Behavioral Process by Sandole (1987). According to this model, each participant in a conflict receives stimuli from two external 'worlds,' the natural and human-made worlds, which then triggers 'discharge potentials' of the participant's senses that becomes information. This information is then processed in one of the internal 'worlds,' the biological/physiological and mental worlds, for creating the perception of the situation. The interface between Sandole's 'worlds' correlates

with Burton's basic human needs theory that acknowledges the interplay between unmet needs and our beliefs, values and emotions, which are also affected by our culture (Sandole, 2001). In other words, Sandole argues that there is an interplay between the individual, the internal 'worlds' or needs of that individual, and the outer 'worlds' or structural/cultural aspects of the society in which the individual resides. The interplay between the worlds is examined in the context of cause and effect in order to find effective solutions that will transform the cause. Yet, unlike the premises of this thesis, questions like 'why' the individual is taking part in the conflict and 'what' he or she can learn from it, or what the different dimensions of the inner world are, are beyond their scope and even ideology. These questions, as suggested by this thesis, can foster greater self-transformation and help influence the group in general.

Conflict as a Positive Process

Many in the conflict resolution field agree that conflicts are not necessarily a bad thing based on the idea that conflicts can be an opportunity for a positive change (e.g., Burton, 1997; Galtung, 2000; Lederach, 2003). Those advocating the positive effects of conflicts make similar points, with some variations according to the underlying ideology. For example, Bush and Folger (2005, p. 256) focus on the positive restoration of social interaction, personal strength and interpersonal understanding. Lederach (2003, p. 4) sees conflicts as normal and an 'agent of change.' Hamilton (2013, p. 2-7), based on a Zen approach to conflict resolution, focuses on the attainment of patience, mutual understanding, creativity, harmony and inner peace, with the ultimate goal of overcoming the fragmented reality of the divided mind and attaining undivided consciousness. Adams (2020), based on Carse (1986), argues that a conflict is not a finite game that ends when one of the players wins, but an infinite game that is meant to continue for the purpose of playing. Adams posits that conflicts have the potential to improve organizational

culture if they are handled as a continuous process with inherent positive effects rather than a one-time problem to be solved. Mayer (2004) metaphorically described conflicts as a river, always flowing, with entry and exit points, arguing that focusing on resolution only (exit point) might ignore the conflicts' deeper aspects. According to these approaches, conflicts are not a bad thing; instead, they are an opportunity to learn and change our current habits and behavior.

The Transformative Mediation Model of Bush and Folger

The transformative mediation model of Bush and Folger (2005), which they initially outlined in their first book in 1994, created a new style of mediation that brings a transformative approach to private mediations, rather than the application of transformation mainly in the peacebuilding context. What started in their first book as a call to transform people shifted after heavy criticism into altering relationships. Mayer (2004), for example, argued that transforming people should be a secondary goal, offering his 'engagement' approach in which practitioners should meet people where they are and help them develop tasks around the conflict. In their 2005 book *The Promise of Mediation*, Bush and Folger shifted their focus to transforming relationships as the main goal, rather than pursuing solutions. This shift in goals, in spite of some continuing criticism (Bush & Folger, 2013), contributes to the trend of focusing on transformation as central to the conflict resolution process, or at least to not focusing on resolution as the main goal (like Mayer, 2004), as also supported by this thesis.

Bush and Folger's model (2005, p. 22) is based on the idea that conflicts have the potential to transform the interactions between people and also change their mindset. This transformation is achieved through promoting two dynamics in the mediation process, which Bush and Folger call 'empowerment' and 'recognition.' Empowerment means restoring the parties' sense of self-worth, strength and decision making capacity. Recognition means

acknowledging, understanding and feeling empathy for the situation and the views of the other. According to this model, as posited by Bush and Folger, focusing on these two dynamics in a mediation process can help the parties transform their interaction from destructive to constructive. Placing these two dynamics as central to the process naturally omits the focus on settlement as the main goal of the mediation, unlike evaluative and facilitative mediations. According to the transformative model, when parties to a conflict are empowered and recognize each other, they have the capacity to reach a settlement independently, or to decide that a settlement is not the best outcome for them. Unlike other mediation styles that view an unsettled mediation as a failure, in this model the success is measured by the transformation of the interaction rather than by the settlement.

The main premise behind the transformative model theory, according to Bush and Folger (2005, p. 49), is that parties to a conflict are interested in dealing with not only their rights, interests or power, but also their interactions with each other. Based on cognitive psychology research, they conclude that the primary negative effect of conflict for the parties is their sense of powerlessness and alienation (2005, p. 48). Therefore, conflicts force people to behave in an uncomfortable and repellent way, thereby disrupting their social interaction. According to this model, conflict is basically an 'interactional crisis' between people (2005, p. 46). Based on this theory, Bush and Folger developed the Negative Conflict Spiral (2005, p. 50), which describes how the growing weakness of one party triggers greater hostility toward the other, and that such hostility circles back to the first party and weakens him or her even more. What is commonly described as conflict escalation is expressed in this model as the "vicious circle of *disempowerment* and *demonization*," illustrated by the spiraling down of the amicable pre-conflict interaction into negative and alienated relationships within the conflict (2005, p. 51).

According to Bush and Folger (2005, p. 55), the purpose of the transformative mediation is to reverse this spiral through empowerment and recognition so the parties can feel strong and responsive and have a positive and constructive interaction. This is done, in their view, by shifting the weakness into strength (empowerment) and self-absorption into responsiveness (recognition).

Bush and Folger's (2005) ideology behind the transformative model is based on several premises. First, human beings are inherently capable of being strong with, decent to and compassionate with each other. When triggered by a challenging negative conflict, in spite of their weakness and self-absorption, people have the agency to use their strength with and responsiveness to others in order to deal with the conflict, based on their social or moral impulse (Della Noce, 1999, as cited in Bush & Folger, 2005). Why people are so deeply affected by the negative conflict spiral and why they care about reversing it has to do, according to this ideology, with the very essence of human nature: Humans have a dual sense of individual autonomy and social connection (Della Noce, 1999, as cited in Bush & Folger, 2005). Bush and Folger (2005, p. 61) contend that this individualistic identity, together with the relational one, is the reason people are so disturbed by negative conflicts, as they compromise both of these identities. While I agree with the dual identity concept, I hold the view that both identities interact and that relations stem from the individual to allow the individual to experience itself through relationships. This distinction leads to different views of the role of conflicts and the focus of the transformation, as explained later.

Another premise behind the transformative model of Bush and Folger (2005) is that conflicts are essentially a positive phenomenon, a concept that is also shared by other settlement-based approaches. Yet Bush and Folger consider the two approaches to be different in their

views on the process of conflict resolution: While the settlement-based approach is threatened by the detrimental effects of an uncontrolled conflict process that can jeopardize settlement, the transformative model embraces any process as an opportunity for transformation, regardless of the settlement outcome. The two approaches, according to Bush and Folger, also substantially differ in their ideology. While settlement-based approaches are based on what Bush and Folger (2005, p. 244) call the *ideology of individuality*, or the *ideology of social separation and conflict control* , the transformative approach is based on the dual identity of people being both individualistic and having social connections. The settlement-based approach, or even other conflict resolution approaches, holds a pessimistic view of people as incapable and lacking agency to interact without harm and therefore they are likely to sabotage the ultimate goal of a settlement if not managed (2005, p. 247). The transformative approach holds the opposite view, believing in people's inherent capacity to manage their affairs and reach agreements if "patiently supported rather than tightly controlled" (2005, p. 250). While managing and controlling the process might seem necessary to prevent oppression, the difference between the settlement-based and transformative approaches is likely to remain, even around mediations in which the oppression element is not prevalent.

Finally, Bush and Folger (2005, p. 248) hold the view that the transformative model is based on a more accurate definition of human nature as being socially connected rather than solely individualistic, which led to a shift in the conflict resolution field in general toward this model. According to them, this shift is not simply a move away from the settlement-based approach due to its inability to deliver its intended visions, but also a shift in perception toward a more positive view of human interaction in general and conflicts in particular. This shift is based on an optimistic ideology of human nature that recognizes the connectedness between people

while at the same time acknowledging the duality between this social connection and our sense of individuality. This optimistic ideology of Bush and Folger, as well as their transformative model, contributes to this thesis by placing transformation as the main goal of the conflict resolution process as well as by referring to the dual human nature of being individualistic and relational. Also, seeing human nature as positive supports a conflict resolution process that is intended to empower this nature rather than control it. Last, Bush and Folger, like me, believe in the connection between all people that leads to a vision of utilizing conflicts to improve relationships (and people) and not just pursuing settlements.

Taking Bush and Folger's transformative model a step further, Seaman's (2016) explorative mediation method supports a dialogue between the parties so they can look at each other and themselves. According to this method, solutions in mediation may not constitute resolutions, as there are underlying issues that should be resolved through the parties' mutual exploration. Bush and Folger's transformative model, according to Seaman, might support better communication and solution through recognition, which is a prerequisite for dialogue, but without the explorative dialogue, the underlying issues are not resolved. Solutions, according to Seaman, are a byproduct of the mediation and not their main goal.

The explorative mediation method, like the transformative model and unlike the facilitative and narrative styles, supports the parties' control over the process and follows their lead. Unlike the transformative model, the mediator in the explorative model is more positively engaged in mirroring the conflict to the parties so that the "multi-dimensionality of the conflict may be explored and clarified" (Seaman, 2016, p. 225). The mediator will seek opportunities to explore moments of disempowerment and recognition (as in the transformative model), as well as various emotions that come up, during the dialogue in order to bring awareness to their

underlying causes. This is a different approach than the idea of separating people from the problem suggested by Fisher et al. (2012) and more in line with Stone et al. (1999), who suggest that each difficult conversation should include three parts: the 'what happened,' emotions and identity conversations. The mediator will also be active in explaining different ways of communication and will keep the communication authentic without trying to cover over the conflict, while being reflective of his or her own biases and influence. According to Seaman, one outcome of explorative mediation is for the parties to form a new identity around the conflict, which can be a result of opening up the conflict through the exploration process rather than closing it down in other mediation styles. Seaman is aware that not all parties will be willing to go through this process, as some are solution-oriented, and some may not explore the full benefits of this method, but even small progress can be beneficial. Seaman's method is even closer to the concepts of this thesis than Bush and Folger (in spite of the different venues in which they are applied) by offering a mutual exploration process to form a new identity, to support a mediator who actively mirrors issues, and to address parties who are willing to undergo the process.

Self-growth Focused Approaches to Conflict

The Elements of the Psyche

This thesis focuses on the transformation of individuals in the context of conflicts. To better understand this transformation, a brief overview of the elements of the psyche is needed. Freud's (1923) personality theory viewed the psyche or personality as comprised of a combination of three systems: the id, ego and superego. According to Freud, the id is the primitive, instinctual, impulsive, illogical and irrational part of the mind. Freud (1920) argued that when the id is satisfied we experience pleasure and when it is denied we experience tension.

The superego, according to Freud, is the person's moral conscience that controls the id through morals and values acquired between the ages of three and five. It has two components: the conscious and the ideal self, which is an imaginary picture of how the person ought to be in terms of aspirations, behaving in society and treating others. The ego is the realistic part mediating between the two and making the decisions to satisfy the id's pleasure demands. The id and superego, according to Freud, are subconscious and are not affected by reality, while the ego is the part of the id that is formed by external events. Freud's elements of the psyche remain within the material world and include no supernatural elements. They are somewhat similar to the 'conditioned mind,' a term coined by Krishnamurti (1996) to describe the sum of our thoughts, opinions, beliefs and emotions acquired through society and personal experiences that shape our consciousness. According to Krishnamurti, this conditioned mind is only a limited aspect of our being, which limits our freedom to experience and explore reality.

The ego, being realistic, can choose between different options for solving the problem, until the best one is found. From a conflict resolution point of view, it appears that choosing between potential resolutions mainly involves the ego and is driven by the desire to please the id and avoid pain. On the contrary, a choice suggested by the Self, our unconditioned mind, as explained below, will not always aim to create pleasure in the short term if the growth process involves elements that can feel painful before they feel good. The difference between choosing what makes us feel good at the moment and what fosters our growth, even if it is painful, defines one of the differences between ego-based and Self-based choices.

Jung (1947) also viewed the human psyche as comprised of three elements: the ego, the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. The ego, according to Jung, is the conscious mind that holds the thoughts, memories and emotions and is responsible for the

identity. The unconscious is comprised of the personal unconscious, which contains forgotten information and repressed memories, and is similar to Freud's unconscious, but Jung viewed the unconscious as more apparent than the repressed version of Freud. Jung's most original contribution, according to McLeod (2018), was his idea of the collective unconscious, which is the unconscious shared with other people as an inborn reflection of the memories from one's ancestors and past life. Jung asserted these memories were imprinted into the personality archetypes. Jung (1934) identified four main archetypes: the 'persona,' which is the mask or face we present to the outside world, hiding our true self; the 'anima,' which is the projection of our opposite biological sex; the 'shadow,' which is similar to Freud's id and is the animal side of the personality; and the main archetype, the 'self,' which is the aspect of the personality that provides a sense of unity, union of male and female and totality, and which is the goal to be attained by everyone. According to Jung, people's problems stem from alienation from their archetypes. From a conflict resolution perspective, identifying with one's identity during a conflict can reflect the ego's identity rather than the 'self's' archetype identity and therefore a limited version of the individual. Finding the true or deeper identity is one of the goals of the Self-explorative approach of this thesis.

Jung also believed that life has spiritual meaning beyond the material world, arguing that our main task to is fulfil our innate potential (Dunne, 2015). This transformation journey, which he called 'individuation,' is a journey to meet both the self and the Divine. According to Jung (1939), individuation is a psychic process in which the individual self develops from an undifferentiated unconscious, integrating different elements to create a well-functioning whole. Unlike Freud's theory, this worldview stems from the belief, which for Jung was knowing,[6] in

[6] Freeman, [Youtube]. (1959, October 22). *Face to Face* [Video] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2AMu-G51yTY&ab_channel=KidMillions).

the existence of God or Divine force and the journey of humans to know this force as well as our material world existence. This knowing led Jung to support the theory of 'wholeness,' referring to the idea that people strive for harmony between their conscious and unconscious minds. This thesis draws from this theory, suggesting the harmonization of the conditioned mind with the Self.

Ken Wilber (1993a) describes the psyche as a spectrum of consciousness that, in its simplest form, starts with the level of the 'Mind' that identifies with the universe or the 'All.' The next level is the 'Transpersonal Bands,' in which the person is not identified with the All but also not yet limited to the boundaries of the physical. According to Wilber (1993a), Jung's archetypes occur on this level. The next level is the 'Existential level,' where humans identify with their psychophysical identity of space and time. The next level is the 'Ego,' in which the individual identifies with the ego or self-image of the organism. The last level is the 'Shadow,' in which the person dis-identifies with certain aspects of the ego and creates an inaccurate self-image.

According to the Jewish Kabbalah,[7] as interpreted by Isaac Luria (*Ha'Ari Hakadosh*, the holy lion),[8] the soul consists of three parts: *Nefesh*, *Ruach* and *Neshama*.[9] The first we receive when we are born; the other two we can attain through intention and spiritual work. *Nefesh* is the lower level of the soul, having animal-like desires and instincts. *Ruach* is the middle level that can distinguish between good and evil. *Neshama* is the level of the soul that connects us to God consciousness. *The Zohar*,[10] which is the most famous Kabbalistic book, defines two more parts of the soul: the *Chaya*, which gives the consciousness of the divine life force, and *Yechida*, the

[7] Retrieved from: https://www.safed.co.il/kabbalah-and-the-inner-spirit.html
[8] More on Isaac Luria on Luria, I. b. S. (2005). *Kabbalah of Creation: The Mysticism of Isaac Luria, Founder of Modern Kabbalah*. United States: North Atlantic Books.
[9] These Hebrew words have no synonyms in English, as *Nefesh* and *Neshama* both mean soul. *Ruach* means spirit.
[10] https://www.kabbalah.info/engkab/the-zohar/download-the-zohar

highest level, at which full unity with God is achieved. There are three more parts of the soul that are not permanent but develop according to the circumstances.

Another description of the psyche is offered by Holden (2016), who maps the mind into five aspects: Higher, Conscious, Heart, Subconscious and DNA. The Higher Mind holds the truth and connection to the unified field of energy or the infinite universe. The Subconscious Mind holds beliefs—our limited perception of reality, which is not always the truth. Based on research of the HeartMath Institute, Holden argues that the heart has its own brain and that the Heart Mind is the first to receive information from the Higher Mind and translate it to the Conscious Mind. Using the unconditional love nature of the heart, we can paint the thoughts created by our Conscious Mind with love, if we choose to operate from our heart. The DNA Mind is the consciousness of the DNA and it can be programmed through our thoughts. Holden suggests meditations and mindfulness exercises to tap into our Higher Mind and utilize our other minds to heal our body.

The Self

Trying to find one definition for the elusive nature of the soul or Self is challenging, especially when different people use different terms to describe it and some theories or bodies of knowledge add elements that are not recognized by others. One common thread between some of the versions is the existence of the part of our consciousness that is connected to the universe, the unified field of energy or the Source. In an attempt to find a more comprehensive theory to explain consciousness, Wilber (1993b) argues that both Freud and Jung misunderstand the true nature of consciousness, Freud by attributing all elements of the consciousness to the brain and Jung by focusing too much on the transpersonal and not attributing the element of the 'pre-personal' (id) to the brain. Jung, according to Wilber, confuses personal and collective

consciousness and sees both as transpersonal, which is why Wilber calls Jung's archetypes 'infantile mythic forms' (1993b, p. 128). Whole development, according to Wilber, needs to proceed along the path of pre-personal, ego and transpersonal and not stay on the Jungian 'ego-Self axis' or ignore the Freudian transpersonal. Holden (2016) also combines all five minds to create a holistic interplay between them based on the idea that our entire body has consciousness and each element of the mind is responsible for different aspects of receiving and translating the vast consciousness into our conscious mind. This discussion shows the complexity of the definition of the Self and also reflects the conflict between the two worldviews, the material and the transpersonal.

Drawing upon spiritual or transpersonal knowledge, as well as my own personal experience, this thesis uses the term 'Self' in a similar way to Wilber's 'Mind' or Holden's 'Higher Mind' to describe the aspect of our being that embodies unity consciousness. It is the un-conflicted layer of our being that is eternal, evolves from past life experiences and collective consciousness, and mediates between the infinite Source and the physical existence of the being, residing both in the physical body and outside it. It is the Source's consciousness within us that remains aware of its nature (as opposed to the conditioned mind that is part of the Source but is mostly unaware of it). As such, the Self embodies infinite wisdom as opposed to the limited conditioned mind that holds separateness consciousness, which creates tension between them that comes from the conditioned mind resisting the Self (and not vice versa). In this tension, the conditioned mind will try to mask the existence of the Self that constantly tries to connect with this mind by denying its existence and creating constant noise through ongoing thoughts stemming from the separateness consciousness. In the context of conflict resolution, the conditioned mind will try to avoid the wisdom of the Self by treating conflicts as crises that need

to be quickly resolved rather than opportunities to reconnect to the Self and grow, sometimes through a longer process. What allows us to connect to the Self is our power of will, which is our inner voice or guide that sees beyond the mask and can lead us to connect to the Self. By connecting, we can receive guidance from the un-conflicted Self rather than the conditioned mind that created the conflict and wants to quickly resolve it in order to avoid the benefits of growth that might reduce the control of the conditioned mind over our consciousness. By masking the invitation for growth, the conditioned mind keeps us busy in the process of finding a solution to the crisis, which provides an immediate sense of pleasure for the id or pre-personal element of the psyche. A longer process of growth may not fulfil the id's desire for pleasure and may threaten the false existence of the conditioned mind, forcing it to accept the reality of unity consciousness. Therefore, the conditioned mind, without the assistance of the Self, will operate from this limited perspective of conflicts and try to eliminate them rather than accept their invitation for self-growth.

Trying to manage conflicts from the same conditioned mind that created them limits the ability to promote growth and transcend the reasons that created these conflicts in the first place. The Self manages conflict differently, by showing what needs to be balanced internally, what lessons there are to be learned and how to approach the conflict as an opportunity rather than a crisis to eliminate. As part of the conditioned mind's control over the conflict management, it creates identity, values and sometimes needs that are then defended by some conflict resolution approaches. Drawing upon Jung and Wilber, this thesis argues that relying on these identities and values only, without exploring for deeper ones that come from the Self, can limit the potential growth from the conflict and sometimes even the scope of the resolution. This is because the limited perception of our identity and values, if different than our true innate identity and values,

can result in repeating conflicts, inviting a deeper exploration in order to expose and live by them. Once we connect to our true identity and values, our needs might shift and our entire perception of relationships might transform in such a way that future conflicts will be utilized to accelerate this growth process and not be viewed as a crisis that threatens our self-definition.

Self-Growth

The Self-explorative approach suggested in this thesis draws from the work of other approaches that focus on self-growth. The term 'self-growth' used herein refers broadly to an increase in awareness of the multi-dimensionality of our being and how this awareness contributes to a change in the perspective, behavior, thoughts and/or emotions in the context of managing the conflict. Self-growth involves the participation of some or all layers of being, including conscious communication between the mind and the Self. It inevitably overlaps with some aspects of therapy, which is defined as a process by licensed psychologists for treating emotional and behavioral problems (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001, as cited in Feldman & Lankau, 2005). Yet self-growth within the Self-explorative approach is intended to bring awareness to aspects of ourselves rather than focus on treating them, and to utilize this awareness to manage conflicts.

Trying to avoid having conflict coaching be considered therapy, conflict coaching theorists, just like Bush and Folger (2005), with respect to their transformative mediation model, find distinctive elements between the disciplines. Peltier (2010, p. xxxix) indicates the main differences between coaching and therapy: Coaching focuses on short-term changes rather than long-term emotional changes, is action- rather than reflection-oriented, future- rather than past-focused and has other distinctive elements stemming from these basic differences. Being reflective, exploring the past and focusing on long-term changes places the Self-explorative

approach farther away from coaching and closer to spiritual processes and even therapy. From a spiritual/healing perspective, self-growth is a holistic process that is intended to expand awareness in a process that can include removing barriers that may block this expansion. This process can touch on emotional and behavioral issues and might resemble therapy and still avoid the full extent of therapy that requires a license to practice. Therefore, while the Self-explorative approach is not therapy, as this term is used for legal and licensure purposes, elements of therapy are inevitably included in every self-growth process. To some degree, the Self-explorative approach shares similar elements with the psychodynamic approach described by Feldman and Lankau and based on Peltier (2010), which is a coaching approach that uses psychoanalysis methods, though they are distinct in their underlying ideology and depth of exploration. Despite the importance of defining the type of service provided by the practitioner, as Peltier argues, when it comes to processes that are intended to expand awareness, definitions can limit the scope of exploration rather than support the unlimited potential of consciousness. When issues that surface during Self-exploration need clinical support or trigger a spiritual journey beyond the scope of the conflict-oriented Self-exploration sessions, they can be addressed by a qualified practitioner in a separate process. In fact, this can be a desired outcome of the Self-explorative process by opening the door to more exploration in different venues.

Self-growth is a process of learning and expanding. Yet learning does not necessarily mean acquiring new knowledge. The Bible says, “There is nothing new under the sun” (Eccles. 1:9, ESV), referring to the idea, shared by Cloke and Goldsmith (2003), that learning is a process of awakening dormant knowledge rather than inventing something new. Socrates, in Plato’s *Meno*, echoes this idea by saying, “For all enquiry and all learning is but recollection” (2005, p. 47). So is self-growth, which promotes the awakening process into our true nature. Conflicts

come to show us what we already know but forgot, and reflect it through relationships. Such awareness expands the view of ourselves to include more than the limited version of what we think we are. This 'limited version' can transpire through the values, needs and identities that stem from the story told by parties to a dispute. Noble (2012) notes that values refer to our beliefs. Needs refer to what is known as Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of physiological (deficiency) and psychological (growth) needs. Weil (1986) also refers to the needs of the soul. Identity is the way we see ourselves in the world. Collaborative and transformative approaches to conflict resolution try to explore these different parts of a person in order to assess what part of the client's story is triggered by elements that threaten needs and require systemic change (like the need for shelter), what values are threatened that can be met by recognition from the other (like religious beliefs), and what part of the story can be reshaped to trigger less identity threat (like respect for professional status). Addressing these threats is at the heart of conflict resolution.

Yet deeper exploration can reveal other aspects of ourselves that are not apparent from the client's story or even its modified version and that can be accessed through meditation and elicitive questions that bypass the conditioned mind and draw directly from the Self. As Holden (2016) posits, the Conscious Mind holds limited beliefs which are not the truth held by the Higher Mind. The Self, Higher Mind, or soul has infinite knowledge. Socrates, arguing in favor of enquiring into the soul (and disagreeing with Meno's paradox), said to Meno, "The soul, then, as being immortal, and having been born again many times, and having seen all things that exists…has knowledge of them all…for as all nature is kin, the soul has learned all things" (Plato, p. 47). As clients' stories usually draw from the conflicted conditioned mind, they usually present a limited version of reality, as the same conflicted mind that created the conflict tries to explain it. Working only with this limited mind can shift the story to be more supportive of

collaborative resolution but not necessarily to support more growth toward the awareness of the Self (which can still take place to some degree within the collaborative process). As Cloke and Goldsmith (2003, p. 10) note, our mind organizes experiences into either pleasure or pain. Conflicts can sometimes be associated with pain; therefore, the conditioned mind will try to avoid it by presenting a story that will bring back pleasure as fast as possible, to satisfy Freud's id. Yet pain forces us to self-reflect and grow faster than pleasure. Conflict stories that focus on growth through self-reflection tend to extend the pain more than those seeking fast resolution, which is why the conditioned mind will prefer the resolution path. Naturally, when people operate mainly from the conditioned mind they will tend to avoid self-growth and touching inner pain, and instead seek fast resolution. For those who wish to reflect their Self and not just the conditioned mind, conflicts are an opportunity to explore their higher aspects of being and expand their identity, beliefs and sometimes needs beyond those dictated by the conditioned mind. This process is at the heart of the tension between the Self and the conditioned mind and presents a choice we are all invited to make by our Self, when interpersonal conflicts serve as a reminder of this choice. This process, even if using different terms and explanations, is shared by other theories and practices offered in the context of spiritual journeys in general and conflict resolution in particular.

For example, Hamilton (2013) posits that every conflict is an opportunity for self-transformation. Fox (2013) claims that the real negotiation we conduct is not with others, but with ourselves, as our optimal reaction to a situation comes from our shift within. According to Fox's Winning from Within method, "balancing your profile and connecting to your core" (2013, p. 17) is not a goal to reach but a journey to take, a journey taught not just by skills but through inner change. The first step in this shift requires seeing one's role in what Fox calls the

'Performance Gap' (the gap between optimal and actual reaction to situations) (2013, p. 9, 13). From a mediator's perspective, Bowling and Hoffman (2003) emphasize the importance of the personal growth of mediators, focusing on their personal awareness and psychological, intellectual and spiritual development in order to gain deeper connection with the parties. Gold (in Bowling & Hoffman, 2003) argues that mediators can draw from their spiritual center to bring healing to the parties. She posits that a mediation process shares fundamental principles with healing and that one of the mediator's roles is to help the participants listen to their higher intelligence and foster some form of healing. Nazari's book *Enlightened Negotiation* (2016) incorporates spiritual principles into the negotiation and conflict resolution process so that our negotiation process will come from a place of oneness, dignity and fairness. Among these principles are mindfulness of ourselves and others (see also Keel, 2013), intention of what we want to create, and finding the source of our strength. Coleman (2011) posits that we need conflict resolution models that do not view emotions as just the energy driving conflicts but also as creating the context of conflicts. Similarly, *Difficult Conversations* by Stone et al. (1999) advises us to "bring feelings into the workplace" (p. 278). The authors also suggest that each difficult conversation is comprised of three stories: the 'what happened,' the feeling and the identity conversations. The last one urges us to ask questions about who we are and "what am I saying to myself *about me*" (p. 14). Accordingly, they offer cognitive therapy methods to explore and balance cognitive imbalances.

Conflict coaching approaches, even if focused on goals related to resolving the conflict, provide some level of self-growth that depends on the model used. While Jones and Brinkert (2008), for instance, focus on social interaction and the parties' interpretation and respond to their communication, they promote individuals' empowerment and self-discovery as a way to

support better relationships. Noble's CINERGY™ (2012) fosters self-reflection and growth (such as attention, creativity, gaining insights, mindfulness and positive reappraisal), with a focus on meeting goals related to conflict management. Later in the coaching or conflict resolution process, these elements can support a shift in the relationship.

Within mediations, Bush and Folger (2005) also promote empowerment as a vital component in their transformative mediation model, intended to create a personal shift that will change relationships. Seamen's explorative mediation (2016) supports self-reflection in mediations so that the parties can learn more about each other and themselves. Lang and Taylor (2000) teach mediators 'artisery,' which is the art of exploring, reflecting, and using questions to elicit ideas and expand awareness in the mediation process. Mayer (2004) suggests approaching conflicts not just for the sake of resolution but with more depth so we can understand the conflicts better. Cloke (2013) advocates for focusing not on the success of mediation by its ability to promote resolution but by how much the parties learned from it. Whether in mediation or private sessions, these approaches call for a different voice that is more focused on the parties' growth rather than on settling for resolution only.

Spiritually-Based Approaches

The approach in this thesis also draws from the work of spiritual teachers and ideologies. The word 'spiritual' can be misleading. Commonly referred to as anything beyond matter, distinguishing between matter and spirit inaccurately describes matter as lacking spirit. As explained by Stubbs (1994), if all is energy, or consciousness, then matter is the condensed version of this energy (i.e., vibrating in lower frequency) which can be grasped by our five senses. It is the energy we can measure on the electromagnetic spectrum. Yet the energy of the Source is infinite, expressing itself in different forms, and humans have the ability to consciously

grasp some part of this spectrum. Expanding our awareness means grasping more of this spectrum and, therefore, ourselves. Wilcock (2011) in his book *The Source Field Investigation* refers to this energy as the 'Source Field,' using more than 700 scientific studies to support its elusive existence for the human senses. While we all exist in the infinite energy, our ability to grasp higher versions of this energy with our conscious mind requires the use of sensors or receptors in our body that are mostly dormant for most people at this time, but are gradually awakening. This awakening is a process that we all share, yet it can be accelerated through intentional self-growth intended to remove the barriers that prevent conscious communication with the higher frequencies. The practice of meditation can be useful in this process. The Self is the aspect of ourselves that holds both material and spirit consciousness (and sees them as one). There are levels of the Self, pointing in the direction of both the physical and the universe. It is more associated with the transpersonal worldview than the physical one, yet it resides in both the physical body and non-physical realms. Connecting to the Self can help our conscious mind to embody this awareness of unity and expose the illusion of separation that creates conflicts. This thesis is another step in this process of shifting our attention to the Self and infinite wisdom through the door that is opening when we are in conflict with others.

The infinite wisdom is accessible to us all. Some of us are not aware of it and how to draw from it into our conscious mind. For that, other teachers who have more access to this wisdom are sharing with us what they have been able to retrieve. These teachers include Buddha, Jesus, Moses, Mohammed and many others, as well as modern teachers. In fact, every person we meet has something to teach us. The messages around their teachings may vary in focus and method but are all based on one similar 'truth,' which is that we are all part of the infinite Source, and this Source is pure love. While love has many definitions, in this context the

meaning is unity, the force that binds everything in the universe and acceptance of all. As Hillel the Elder, a Jewish scholar who lived in the first century, said, "That which is hateful unto you, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole of the Torah; the rest is commentary. Go forth and study."[11] The rest of the teachings, then, are ways to experience this love and the constructive or destructive results of being or not being in this love consciousness. Conflicts are a way to show us that we are not embodying this love and instead are holding separateness awareness, first within ourselves (Self-mind) and then as reflected through others. We all know within ourselves that there is nothing new to teach us but, as Cloke and Goldsmith noted, only to remind us of what we already know. That is why this thesis is simply a reminder to shift our attention to our inner wisdom. It can be achieved through the use of some techniques like elicitive questions and meditations as one of many paths to connect to the inner wisdom.

Two of the main modern spiritual teachers who contributed to the ideas of this thesis are Jiddu Krishnamurti (1996) and Satyam Nadeen (2000). Hundreds of others have contributed as well, together with my own self-discovery, and it is difficult to give credit to each one within the scope of this thesis, but their contributions are embedded in these words. Krishnamurti describes the conditioned mind as our barrier to the exploration into our inner self and the 'truth.' Knowing the self can only be accomplished through relationships. It is a dynamic process that is different than acquiring knowledge. Knowing ourselves requires a spirit which is not arguing and defending one side but free to observe reality without ideas, opinions, judgments and values. In the context of conflict resolution, our values, identities and, to some degree, needs can reflect our limited rather than free spirit with which we explore the world. This journey, according to Krishnamurti, is the essence of our path to find our free self that can allow us to live life from a place of freedom rather than from the limited version of the conditioned mind.

[11] *Talmoud Bavli*, Shabat, 31a.

Nadeen brings a unique approach to the concept of enlightenment, or the 'shift,' in which the focus of our consciousness shifts from the mind (the conscious self) to the Witness (which some call the observer or the Self). He argues that the shift is an effortless process that simply requires our full attention, acceptance of all the experiences and feelings of our life without trying to change them, and the understanding that "Consciousness is all there is, and *I am that!*" (2000, p. 5). Nadeen explains that going through the 'dark night of the soul' (our problems in life) is a way for the Witness to capture our attention. The mind is busy judging, doing and fixing problems up to a point where we stop and listen to our Witness in silence. This dark night of the soul, according to Nadeen, is the most effective way for the Witness to capture our attention. Once we shift this attention, the Witness and the mind navigate our reality together. Our problems are not over then but are approached with a different perspective. In the context of conflict resolution, conflicts are the way for the Self to tell us to stop for a second, be silent and listen to our Self and not only the conditioned mind. Nadeen believes that this process happens effortlessly, unlike other teachers, who believe in focused efforts. Regardless of the approach to enlightenment, the shift into the Witness is an opportunity inherent in our experiencing problems or conflicts.

Mindfulness and Meditation

"**Without internal silence there cannot be an interior experience of truth**."

(Väyrynen, 2011, p. 46)

Mindfulness is an emerging technique in conflict resolution. It is defined by Riskin, based upon the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn, as "being aware, moment to moment, without judgment, of one's bodily sensations, thoughts, emotions, and consciousness" (2006, p. 241). This can be achieved by meditation. Riskin suggests 'insight meditation' or 'vipassana,' in which you focus your attention on breathing, then on body parts, emotions, sensations and thoughts, in order to

achieve a ‘bare attention,’ which is a nonjudgmental awareness that passes through all the senses and to the mind. Weil sees attention as a suspension of thoughts that empties the mind not only from the observed but also from the observer, thus allowing it to be ‘penetrated by the object’ (1986, p. 5). Davidson et al. (2003) showed that mindfulness meditation can create happiness, reduce stress, and boost the immune system. Noble (2006) also emphasizes the importance of being mindful during conflict coaching. Keel (2013, as cited in Brinkert, 2016) offers the use of Buddhist mindfulness techniques in conflict coaching. Bowling (Bowling & Hoffman, 2003) says that thinking prevents presence. Listening to others and ourselves requires presence, which is why mindfulness is important both for the practitioner and the client. When the mind is busy producing thoughts, it is harder to listen to the Self. Through meditation, it is easier to quiet the mind and create a silent space in which the Self can be heard. As Bowling notes, mindfulness and meditations are not the only techniques to develop presence, but they are very useful ones.

According to Goleman (1995), meditation can also help improve our emotional intelligence (EQ), a key component in predicting success in any occupation. Goleman defines EQ as the ability to identify, assess, and control one’s own emotions, the emotions of others, and those of groups. It encompasses five competencies: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills. Mindfulness meditation can help develop the first four and these, in turn, with or without the help of coaching, can help produce the fifth (social skill).

Meditation can be used for different purposes and applies different techniques, each promoting different goals. Kristeller and Johnson (2005) define three types of meditation: concentrative, which uses repetitive mantras to focus the mind on them; mindfulness, in which the mind is kept open to whatever comes without the use of directed mantras or external voice; and focused, in which the person is directed by someone else during the process. There are many

ways to express each type. Cloke (2013) notes thirty varieties of meditation emanating from Buddhism, among many more. Kristeller and Johnson conclude that beyond relaxation and benefiting ourselves, meditation can be used to promote connectedness with others when they are focused on opening the heart and being attuned to the other. Therefore, if we think about others and send them positive thoughts while meditating, as also suggested by Riskin, we can connect to them in a compassionate and empathic way.

Another aspect of meditation is the effect of emotions on our genes and their bilateral effect based on Epigenetic studies (Church, 2007; Holden, 2016). Epigenetic studies show that we can record positive or negative feelings in our genes, either by self-creating or inheriting them from our ancestors. Church posits that Epigenetic studies show what the Buddha said thousands of years ago: We are what we think.[12] The more we transform our negative emotions into positive ones, the more our genes are recorded with positivity, which can transfer into our communication with others. Shreshtha et al. (2016) claim that our spiritual intelligence, as partly affected by our emotions, is likely to lead us into using more ethical strategies during conflict resolution, thus connecting increased awareness with better conflict management. According to Holden, we have a 'DNA Mind' that permeates our DNA and which is affected by our thoughts that turn genes on and off. Based on other studies, he further argues that meditation can affect this on/off process. Based on these studies, I argue that the self-growth process, as promoted by the Self-explorative approach, can have additional benefits stemming from the genetic recording of the positive outcomes of such a process, thereby affecting the management of the conflict and future conflicts.

[12] *Dhammapada*, 1-2, (Chapter 1).

Meditation is one technique to open the doors not just to our Self but also to our limited conditioned mind. Even Freud noted that "man is not even master in his own house…his own mind" (1917, p. 252). Ramana Maharshi (1955) said that in order to be salvaged, the mind should be subdued. Kornfield (1993) argues that in order for mindfulness to work, we have to direct our attention both to our mind and our higher self and not just use meditation as a way to escape our suffering. He also argues that good meditation or therapy uses awareness as a healing tool and focuses not on stories but on fear and attachment, using mindfulness to expose these aspects. Kornfield believes that in order to gain freedom we need to be aware of all aspects of ourselves and use silence and meditation when needed and therapy at other times in order to expand our consciousness. Similarly, Cloke (2013) posits that deeper transformation can be accessed through skills of meditation but also through mediation and gaining insights, as each contributes to Buddha's 'middle path' of ending suffering. Cloke further argues that there are two middle paths in conflicts: compromise and engaging with the conflicted parts of ourselves through awareness, relationship and compassion. These skills "allow us to escape the ruts our conflicts draw us into and reveal to us that it is the mind, and not just the flag or the wind that is waving" (2013, p. 142). Based on the famous koan (a question or story that conceals a paradox) of "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" Cloke asks, "What is the disagreement between one party?" (p. 143). This can lead to the understanding that there is no real interpersonal conflict between the parties but an opportunity to shift the perspective into the self and find the duality of the conflict as an expression of deeper underlying truth, as "what is the point or purpose of their conflict, if not to lead them to this truth?" (p. 143). This correlates with the premise of this thesis that interpersonal conflicts mainly exist within the inner imbalance of their participants as expressed through their relationships, in order to lead them back to their inner world. While the

interpersonal conflict is subjectively experienced as a crisis, it has no life of its own outside the subjective feeling that is controlled by the conditioned mind's interpretation of the experience. As such, the resolution needs to first come from within.

From a scientific perspective, as described by Holden (2016), meditation can open new neural pathways and allow us access to additional parts of our brain. While the conscious mind uses part of our brain to perceive reality (and conflicts), according to Holden these additional parts, or the 'Higher Brain,' hold higher consciousness that expands the realm of possibilities of reality. This Brain can offer a different perspective on a situation or conflict than the mind's perspective. From a spiritual point of view, the Self is a consciousness that exists on a wide spectrum between the physical and spiritual realms and exists in the part of the brain that is usually unconscious among people who are mainly driven by their conditioned minds. When we open the door to other dimensions of consciousness we connect to this spectrum and allow the brain to increase its potential and consciously communicate with the Self. Connecting to the Self elevates the conscious mind to a higher level so the overlap between them expands. Meditation helps to bypass the conditioned mind and connect to the Self so that its consciousness becomes conscious.

Drawing upon the scholars and studies mentioned above, the premise of this thesis is that conflicts are an invitation to look inside the inner world and address different aspects of our awareness (sometimes called 'parts'). Some might be accessed through meditation, some through self-inquiry or conflict coaching, some in mediation, and some might require the depth of therapy or spiritual journey. Meditation is especially helpful in allowing access to hidden parts of our brain and Self. It is also useful to cultivate compassion that might shift the interaction between the parties and within the conflicted parts of each individual. Because of the various

techniques and approaches, the basic question that every person involved in a conflict is invited by to ask is whether they want to be able to make conscious choices based on a mind free of preconditions or to simply focus on eliminating the temporary suffering caused by the crisis. The answer will guide the path they choose when faced with the opportunity embedded in the conflict.

Therapy Approaches Working with the Self

While therapy in general is oriented toward self-growth, some psychotherapy practices go further, directly working with the Self; among them are Internal Family Systems (IFS) and Attachment Focused Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (AF-EMDR). IFS was developed by Richard Schwartz (Anderson et al., 2017) in the 1980s as an evidence-based treatment that is based on interaction between different 'parts' of the subpersonality. These are countless parts of our internal system that interact internally and externally with others (see also Cloke, 2013; Holden 2016). In addition, we all have a core, non-part innate presence responsible for our sense of joy, calmness, clarity and balance that Schwartz calls the 'Self.' IFS promotes the connection to the safe 'Self' in order to draw on its qualities and influence the more traumatized parts and heal them, so we can live with more curiosity and confidence. Schwartz found that the traditional therapy is more symptom-oriented, results-focused and problem-solving focused, in a way that could not explain his discoveries about the different parts of the personalities of his clients. This 'essence' that he found could be better explained by psychotherapy and spiritual-based approaches that refer to the soul, the divine core seat of our consciousness. Schwartz discovered that once the traumatized parts make space, we can have access to the 'Self' and uncover who we really are. This process involves listening to the parts instead of denying them so they can transform and allow the embodiment of the 'Self.' It further

requires the therapist to be mindful, attuned, aware and calm as the journey is shared by both the patient and the therapist. The therapy process includes methods to transform the protective parts that block access to the 'Self,' including the use of meditations. According to Schwartz, this process is similar in essence to other spiritual or psychotherapy processes promoting the connection to the core wisdom, though using a different language. IFS contributed to this thesis in three main ways: first, the acknowledgment by an evidence-based therapy of a 'Self' which we can connect to and receive wisdom and guidance from; second, the acknowledgment of parts of ourselves that block access to the 'Self' (similar to the Self-mind tension); and third, the use of guided and open-ended questions and meditations to connect to the 'Self' (although the technique and goals are different, as IFS is therapy-oriented and the Self-explorative approach of this thesis is focused on conflict resolution processes).

AF-EMDR is another evidence-based therapy method which was developed by Laurel Parnell (2017), based on the original work of EMDR by Francine Shapiro. In its essence, AF-EMDR is a healing method for relational traumas (traumas related to relationships) and attachment deficit (a deficit in the connection with others). EMDR uses "alternating bilateral stimulation to reprocess emotionally charged memories" (Parnell, 2017, p. 6). AF-EMDR uses a combination of Resource Tapping (pairing imagined positive resources with alternating bilateral stimulation) and talk therapy to process trauma. Stimulation can be in the form of tapping on the knee, triggering eye movement and so forth. One of the premises of EMDR is that we all have an innate 'essential spiritual self,' which is the essence of who we are, the pure and conflict-free part of ourselves that has never been touched by the other traumatizing experiences. This whole, higher and deeper self can be accessed during therapy to "actualize this wholeness" (2013, p. 128). According to Parnell, the language we use to describe this self depends on the cultural

background and belief system of the patient. AF-EMDR can sometimes use meditations as part of the therapy process. AF-EMDR contributes to this thesis in two main ways: first, like IFS, in the acknowledgement of the innate spiritual Self that is masked by traumatized parts or aspects that are responsible for the disharmony, and second, AF-EMDR, as in the premise of this thesis, finds opportunities within sessions to address this Self, either through a direct question or after patients experience their Self.

Both IFS and AF-EMDR, unlike Freud's id, see our core self as positive and a source of goodness. A similar approach is shared by Bush and Folger (2005) with respect to human nature. These approaches offer the connection to this goodness as a source of support for the other aspects or parts of ourselves that created disharmony. How to foster this connection varies among different approaches, although the use of questions and meditations is prevalent in some of them. As questioning is an intuitive process involving art and knowledge, there is more than one method to perform it. Two questioning methods are discussed below.

Methods of Self-inquiry

Self-reflection is a natural process that occurs throughout the conflict methods. It is sometimes more focused and can be assisted by a practitioner. Lang and Taylor (2000), as well as Cloke (2013), suggest that even mediators are encouraged to self-reflect in order to help themselves and the parties explore deeper aspects of the conflict. A deeper dimension of exploration is found in several questioning styles or methods intended to promote the self-inquiry of our deeper aspects of being. For example, the 'Diamond Inquiry' by Dominic Liber (2021), based on the 'Diamond Approach' by A.H. Almass, offers guidelines for asking questions without a set formula, based on the premise that our current experience is connected to our inner self but we usually are not aware of it. Through the inquiry process we can find inner

truths that can help us gain insights and grow from the experience. 'The Work' by Byron Katie (2002) provides a worksheet with a few questions about a situation, followed by a set of four questions that inquire how false our thinking is and offer a direct observation of 'what there is,' a truth behind the fallacy of our mind. These questioning methods and two additional ones are further described in Appendix A.

While Liber offers a method for asking questions, it is not a set formula but guidelines for inner inquiry, allowing intuition to guide the process. Katie's The Work offers a more structured self-inquiry method. Some, like Krishnamurti, do not offer any method but advocate a direct and authentic active observation of our true nature and how the conditioned mind masks this nature. Others, like Nadeen, suggest that there is nothing for us to do other than wait, as enlightenment is not something we can work on but that happens naturally when we are ready. I believe that we can accelerate our self-growth through active inquiry into ourselves and that different methods (or the lack thereof) can fit different people. The Self-explorative approach offers guidelines and examples of open-ended questions to guide the process, not a questioning formula that has to be strictly followed. I believe that practitioners need to be present with clients and listen to their needs (use the 'toolkit' approach) rather than applying a structured method that has no flexibility that might not always be suitable for specific clients. As Lederach (2005, p. viii) said:

> In the professional world of writing, we view with caution, even suspicion, the appearance of the personal, and lend a higher accent of legitimacy to models and skills, theory, well-documented case studies, and the technical application of theory that leads toward what we feel is the objectivity of conclusion and proposal. In the process, we do a disservice to our professions, to the building of theory and practice, to the public, and ultimately to ourselves. The disservice is this: When we attempt to eliminate the personal, we lose sight of ourselves, our deeper intuition, and the source of our understandings--who we are and how we are in the world. In so doing we arrive at a paradoxical destination: We believe in

> the knowledge we generate but not in the inherently messy and personal process by which we acquired it.

Exploring the Self is one element within the bigger picture of conflict resolution. Yet it is a vital one, as I believe the inner imbalance is the source of all other elements and that understanding it can aid in transforming those other elements. The idea that our external reality is created by our own mind is well rooted within Eastern and other spiritual approaches, and self-inquiry is one way to explore the relationship between our conditioned mind and the reality created, as reflected through interpersonal conflicts. As noted by Geshe Kelsang Gyatso (2007, p. 21):

> We may think that our suffering is caused by other people, by poor material conditions or by society, but in reality it all comes from our own deluded states of mind. The essence of spiritual practice is to reduce and eventually completely eradicate our delusions, and replace them with permanent inner peace. This is the real meaning of our human life.

To sum up, self-reflection in the conflict resolution process is a common practice among conflict resolution practitioners who are focused on the growth process of the parties as an important element in managing conflicts. The Self-explorative approach presented in this thesis is situated among these practices, suggesting that the self-growth aspect is predominant in the conflict resolution process, not just to promote more effective conflict management but as a goal by itself, inherent in the conflict. As such, it offers a deeper Self-exploration intended to bypass the fallacy of the conditioned mind and enlighten this mind with the wisdom of the Self. This process is offered during private sessions to parties in a conflict who are willing to explore deeper into themselves by using the conflict as a mirror. This exploration has the potential to

help them grow and make free choices based on greater awareness and uncompromising observation of the interplay between their conditioned mind and the Self.

CHAPTER IV: THE SELF-EXPLORATIVE APPROACH TO CONFLICTS

We are all Masters. Some of us are simply in the process of realizing it.

This chapter will provide an overview of the Self-explorative approach suggested by this thesis. The first section will describe the concepts, ideology and assumptions behind this approach. The second section will describe how to apply the Self-explorative approach in practice. The third section will describe differences between conflict coaching and the Self-explorative approach. The last section will discuss challenges and opportunities of this approach.

The Concept of the Self-Explorative Approach

Ideology Overview

The conflict resolution field draws from different disciplines and creatively offers theories and models that infuse elements from these disciplines into the management of conflicts. This field mostly addresses the basic desire of people to resolve their conflicts and regain the state of un-conflicted relationships, which is associated with more pleasure and less pain. Depending on the approach to conflict management, the process can involve some level of personal or relational transformation and can result in increased self-awareness. Some approaches will integrate therapeutic elements and even spiritual ones, mainly from Buddhism. Some approaches will see the conflict as a one-time event that ends with its resolution. Some will see it as an infinite game that needs to be continuously played.

It appears that the mainstream conflict resolution field is cautiously accepting new concepts that might over-challenge the parties, as it aims at addressing the concerns and desires of the parties in a quest for the most effective resolution. Self-inquiry and exploring underlying needs, values and identities are still used in the service of a more efficient and sustainable resolution or, for some transformative approaches, better relationships that can lead to better

resolutions. Collaborative and transformative approaches, especially conflict coaching, also strive to promote better skills for management of future conflicts, still with the vision of addressing the clients' goals.

Within these approaches, the Self-explorative approach of this thesis lies in the intersection between transformation, the desire for resolution and the unique viewpoint of the meaning and purpose of conflicts in our lives. The basic premise of this approach is that conflicts are a 'built-in' mechanism in human relationships to show us, through relationships, the interplay between our Self and the conditioned mind or ego and, on the cosmic level, between us and the universe or the Source. This interplay became a tension when humanity forgot its initial purpose to allow the illusion of separation of humans from the Source as a way for the Source to experience itself. The Source is infinite; therefore experiencing itself is possible only through the creation of parts within its consciousness that are not aware of this infinite nature (see also IFS and AF-EMDR). These parts are the beginning of the duality of the infinite that could interact between themselves through relationships. Each part, being a fragment of the infinite Source, has the desire of the Source to explore and know itself, using relationships as its means. To allow a game of exploration that feels real, some parts had their infinite nature hidden and have been given free will to play the game as independent individuals. In other words, the Source is playing hide and seek with itself. To allow this free will to fully express itself, the ego or conditioned mind was created to form the individual nature of humans. As a result, the illusion that we are separated from the Source and each other became real, which in turn created the tension between the Self and the conditioned mind when the ego fully identified with its separated nature and forgot it is a game. Therefore, we are experiencing reality both from the consciousness of separated individuals (controlled by the conditioned mind) and the infinite consciousness

(controlled by the Self). Regardless of our consciousness, we are still bound by cosmic laws that define the rules of this game, for example, the law of cause and effect (that we will experience the results of our thoughts and actions), the law of mirroring (everything mirrors us), and the law of attraction (everything we experience is something we attracted to our lives, teaching us both to create our reality consciously and to look at ourselves through the reflection of others).

This ideology, shared by many spiritual approaches and some religions in one way or another, seems to be less implemented in our everyday lives, simply because we played the game so well that we forgot it is a game. Belief in God or the Source that is shared by many should logically result in the belief in connectedness of all and eliminate violence immediately. However, despite messages by Moses, Buddha, Jesus or Mohammed, religions created more separateness than unity, as we tend to interpret our reality mainly through the conditioned mind, without the wisdom of the Self. As the conditioned mind controls most of our current interactions, the conflict resolution field has evolved as a way to deal with the outcomes of this separateness. Individuality became a realized human nature that is worth defending rather than a means to an end of supporting the illusion required to interact within infinity. This realization by itself, if adopted, has the potential to shift people's perspectives about themselves, each other and the way they manage conflicts.

This game of exploring our nature is played at all dimensions of our relationships: with each other, with the infinite consciousness and within ourselves. The world of duality exists both within us and outside us, creating parts of our personality that interact with each other to express this inner relationship. Naturally, some parts hold the individualistic aspect of our personality (the ego or conditioned mind) and some parts hold the infinite consciousness (the Self, in its different elements, and higher aspects of our being). Relationships with others stem from the

relationships between our parts, which mirror each other to help us both see ourselves and regain unity consciousness within the game of duality. While the conditioned mind or ego is used to allow us the experience of being individuals and separated, the Self allows us to feel the connection to the infinite Source. Both are necessary to allow our existence through duality by creating the illusion of separation, yet only connectedness is our true nature that exists beyond the illusion, as separateness can shift with the realization of the game.

Conflicts are the outcome of this interplay between the separation and an awareness of the connection to the Source and to each other. They are a result of the conditioned mind that believes we are all separated individuals who need to define and defend our values, identities and needs in order to maintain this individuality. When this self-definition clashes with those of others, we have a conflict or dispute. These conflicts are a 'built-in' mechanism inherent in relationships to show us how we interact with each other and the world and how we create our illusory reality so we can learn to create from a higher consciousness. Yet the creation of a variety of individual personalities contributes to the diversity of experience of the infinite. Individuality is vital to enrich relationships, and the illusion of separateness allows us to experience our personalities as real. Yet we have a choice as to how far we take this illusion and how to create our reality and relationships based on our chosen consciousness. The more we identify with our separated aspect, the more we feel alone, fight over resources in a struggle for survival, and suffer the pain of inner and outer conflicts. Using our free will, we can minimize this pain by choosing to let go of the exclusive control of our conditioned mind for processing our understanding of reality and allowing our un-conflicted Self to lift the veil that blocked our perception of our true nature as one with the Source and each other. This shift in perspective has the potential to allow us to embrace the illusion and keep playing the game of duality but from

unity consciousness, which will inevitably alter the way we approach and manage conflicts. Our potential evolution is not necessarily in the elimination of conflicts completely but in seeing them from a different perspective. This perspective accepts the duality of individuality and connectedness, not as two different human natures but connectedness as our true and infinite nature and separateness or individuality as the illusion needed to allow relationships. The latter serves the former and has limited existence only within the limited conditioned mind, which makes it less than a human nature and more like a vehicle to allow connectedness to express itself. This understanding can transform our definition of our identity, values and needs to meet our true nature of being one with all, but first within our own perception of who we are. Our inner unity might shift our fragmented definition of our identity and values (and some of our needs) into a more whole perception that honors our individuality within the unity existence. Within the context of conflict resolution, this means exploring these elements from the perspective of the Self as well as the definitions of the conditioned mind. This thesis offers a shift of focus from the ego-based way we manage conflicts to viewing them as a tool to see our true nature and making choices on how to manage them from this perspective. This can take place if we balance between our individualistic desires and our true nature of connectedness rather than choose one over the other. The concept of connectedness is explained in the next chapter.

Connectedness, Consciousness and Remote Effect

The idea that we are all connected through a unified consciousness is new to many modern scientists, but not to spiritual and indigenous knowledge. Connectedness refers to the existence of an invisible field of consciousness connecting all human beings. Certain indigenous

people like the Aborigines experience *dreamtime*[13] and believe in an ancestral, timeless, land-based field connecting all tribe members to a common memory consciousness, similar to Carl Jung's (1947) concept of collective consciousness. In the broader sense, connectedness describes a psychological and physiological connection between people, even when they are distant from each other. Sperry (1996) claims that historically this concept was not part of common belief systems, perhaps because maintaining a sense of individuality was deemed important for individual survival purposes. As argued above, I believe many humans forgot their connectedness as a result of surrendering to the conditioned mind.

However, in recent years, scientists have started to pay attention to this concept and to investigate its existence in different ways, for example, the Unified Field Theory that tried to explain the existence of fields between forces, and quantum physics that marked the change of the traditional locality theory, showing that remote particles can communicate and affect each other instantly. While the nonlocality theory was challenged by Einstein, Podolsky and Rosen (1935) in what became to be known as the EPR Paradox,[14] it was shown to be a solid theory by many theoretical and experimental studies. Some of these studies focused on showing that nonlocality applies not only to microscopic but also to macroscopic systems.

Attributing quantum qualities to the brain, Grinberg and Zylberbaum (1994) claim that the brain has macroscopic quantum components, which means that two people who had an interaction ('entangled') and then separated showed nonlocal correlation between their brains, that is, their brains affected each other from a distance. This study supported the authors'

[13] https://www.aboriginal-art-australia.com/aboriginal-art-library/aboriginal-dreamtime/

[14] The EPR Paradox describes the incomplete nature of quantum physics that claims the existence of the nonlocality effect of entangled particles (i.e., they can affect each other regardless of their distance and when measured, one can determine the state of the other). The first theoretical explanation to this Paradox was found by Bell (1964), followed by a series of experiments between 1980 and 1982 by Aspect (1990). Recently, it was evidenced again by three experiments (see Miller, 2016).

'syntergic theory'[15] that the brain has a neural field in a quantum state (i.e., superposition of possible outputs), which is collapsed by the conscious mind to create our thinking or intelligence. Grinberg and Zylberbaum conducted this study in an attempt to explain the work of a healer who used energy to heal people from a distance. The underlying premise of the study was that the brain in superposition has multiple capabilities and if we can access them before the system 'collapses' and the conscious mind is creating a thought, we might increase our capabilities. This theory shares some similarity with two of today's four main leading theories that explain how neural activity creates consciousness, as described by Melloni et al. (2022): the global neural workspace (GNW) and the integrated information theory (IIT). Both these theories view consciousness as stemming from the neural activity of the entire brain, yet they differ in the way this information is processed and creates subjective experience.[16]

Another study by Grinberg et al. (1987) showed that when two people are engaged in a nonverbal, empathic communication, their EEG ipatterns in both hemispheres are similar, i.e., they share the same brain waves. This study shows that there is no need for verbal, visual or physical contact in order for direct communication to occur. Braud et al. (1993) showed that people remotely staring at each other can transmit thoughts and emotions and affect each other nonverbally. Richards et al. (2005) replicated previous findings about the correlation of neural signals between people who are connected but are physically and sensorily isolated from each other, using fMRI and EEG. A recent study by Thomas et al. (2020) also showed the macroscopic distant effect of entangled objects, taking nonlocality a step further into large

[15] A theory by Grinberg arguing that there is a continuous space of energy which we can only perceive part of.
[16] According to GNW, the brain has a central neuron field that processes any information received and turns it into consciousness. IIT views consciousness as the total unified information in the brain that is then defined in some parts of the brain to create the subjective experience. Melloni et al. (2022) found that although the four theories contradict each other, each is supported by evidence because the methodology chosen by the researchers determined the outcome of the study.

systems rather than microscopic particles. Kotler et al. (2021) and Lépinay et al. (2021) further demonstrate the ability to extend quantum entanglement to massive macroscopic systems. These studies bring science closer the idea that people sharing an emotional or mental connection, like, as I believe, within a conflict, are 'entangled' and can affect each other from a distance through some kind of unified energy field. Sperry (1996) shows the existence of a unified field based on several case studies in which remote communication occurred. Wilcock also draws upon hundreds of studies to conclude that "our mind-to-mind connection, sharing our thoughts and experiences, has now been proven: at the odds of more than a trillion to one against chance" (2011, p. 37). Kenny (2004) shows the existence of a collective consciousness. According to these studies, a person meditating or emitting sensory stimulation can affect another person whom he or she is trying to communicate with, even from a distance. Distant Healing Intention, the ability to heal people from a distance, was evidenced according to Kenny by dozens of empirical studies, which further supports his analysis of the existence of an energy force that connects us all. He further posits that isolated people have been shown to share thoughts and experiences. This correlates with Bohm's (1980) theory of wholeness, referring to the behavior of parts influenced not just by their interaction but also by a deeper level of reality hidden from us, connecting to Jung's wholeness theory that suggests the tendency of the conscious and unconscious minds to seek harmony since they are not operating as separate systems. As stated by Schrödinger (1945, p. 145), "The overall number of minds is just one….In truth there is only one mind."

While concepts like collective consciousness and remote effect by macro-systems like the brain have not yet been accepted by many scientists, the findings presented above imply the possibility that the brain is a 'collapsed' system when creating thoughts and that there is a

superposition state that can be reached. If this is the case, I believe it is possible that conflicts are a result of the collapsed system or the conditioned mind, while in the non-conflicted Self these conflicts exist as one of many possibilities. In other words, our perspective of a certain conflict is one of many potential perspectives which can lead to different outcomes. While different perspectives are explored by many conflict resolution models, such exploration is still within the 'collapsed' brain, meaning within the limited scope of the reality that was already created by the consciousness. I believe there are even deeper perspectives that are accessible through the Self or hidden parts of the brain, rather than through the conditioned mind, which can draw from the potential consciousness that has not been captured by the brain or mind.

Another inference made based on this body of research is the plausibility that parties to a conflict who are 'entangled' or connected to each other by resonation of the brain waves or some other consciousness energy field can affect each other from a distance. This concept has two potential implications. First, what each party projects to the other, even outside of a joint meeting, affects the other. Therefore, the use of remote meditation and visualization tools may possibly assist in starting the dialogue even before the face-to-face meeting occurs, creating space for active and empathic listening and compassion. Second, the outcome of the Self-exploration process can lead to transformation of one party that can affect the collective consciousness field and be transmitted to the other remotely. If the conflict is transcended within this party, then not only might the other party remotely respond to this shift, but the nature of the conflict that 'entangled' the parties might shift, affecting their relationship. Potentially, just as with remote healing, this can lead to transcending the conflict altogether by one party transcending his or her inner imbalance.

Another intriguing field of research that challenges our common view of reality as a 'real' external experience is the holographic nature of our brain. In his book *The Holographic Universe*, Talbot (1997), based on David Bohm and Carl Fribram as later developed by others, argues that our perception of reality is not objective but a compilation of waves that become our subjective reality through the interpretation of our senses. In other words, reality as we know it is an illusion. This theory explains many phenomena that the mainstream scientific community finds difficult to answer, like telepathy, connectedness, psychokinesis and other mystical and supernatural experiences. Similar to the multiple possibilities of reality that exist within the Self or the brain as a quantum system, according to the holographic theory looking inside the brain reveals a different perspective of reality stemming from the distribution of information over the entire brain so that each neuron is connected to all the others through interference of waves (much like the GNW theory). The subjective reality is the interpretation of our senses regarding these multiple possibilities' interference. Yet, according to Talbot, this interference also creates other aspects of reality that are not always understood by our limited mind (like synchronicity or paranormal experiences), which we tend to ignore or dismiss. I believe that identifying solely with one version of our subjective reality is therefore a limited view of reality and if we can dive deeper into the brain, we can find other potential possibilities that are as real as our illusion of reality—sometimes even more real if they embody our higher Self. The first step in changing our perspective is to understand that our perception of reality is limited and to then allow a deeper exploration of other possibilities. This might lead to exposing the illusion nature of our conditioned mind, which interprets reality based on its nature to define and defend our individual personality. Then we can start exploring the paradox of individuality within infinity and allow the expansion of this reality to the point where we utilize the conflict to deepen our exploration

of ourselves rather than defend our self-definition stemming from our limited perception. This exploration cannot change the fact that every perception of reality is subjective, as this is how our mind works, but it exposes us to the idea that we can access more than one subjective reality within the same brain, and the choice of reality we make, or even the mere acknowledgment of multiple realities, can affect the way we approach relationships. The more this reality stems from the projection of the Self, the more it is based on wider perception of reality which makes it more real than an illusion as it is emanating from a higher dimension of reality that is less dual than the physical world. This, in turn, can loosen our attachment to just one version of ourselves, as defined by our identity, values and some needs, and expand our vision of who we are in the context of the conflict and in general.

The Three Assumptions

Based on the ideology above, one of the main questions I explore is which part of us creates and responds to conflicts. There is not always a distinct line between the conditioned mind and the Self, as from the Self's perspective they are connected and interact constantly. Yet this interaction can create tension when the conditioned mind is not aware of the Self, resulting in conflicts which we can explore through questioning our inner imbalances. Through questioning and/or meditations we can bypass the conditioned mind and connect to higher aspects of our being. This process stems from a few assumptions that emanate from the ideology of this thesis. These assumptions can guide the self-inquiry process that is intended to clarify the interaction between the Self and the conditioned mind and help us make more conscious choices based on understanding this interaction.

The first assumption is that every interpersonal conflict is a manifestation of an inner conflict or imbalance of the individuals. This assumption stems from the cosmic law of cause

and effect, which dictates that our reality is our own creation and therefore our inner imbalances can manifest through conflicts with others. This manifestation is both an inherent outcome of this law and also an invitation to see ourselves as reflected in our environment (related to the law of mirroring discussed below) so we can experience and know ourselves better. This law invites us to create our reality more consciously by showing us how our inner world manifests through relationships. Accordingly, interpersonal conflicts are both an outcome of our self-creation and an invitation to grow from it by exploring the dimensions of consciousness we used to create our reality and how we feel about it. Most conflict management approaches, especially in group conflicts, do not view conflicts as completely self-created but as an outcome of the combination of circumstances, systemic, structural, cultural, relational and personality causes, trying to address all aspects to reach resolution. The level of accountability and responsibility attributed to the individuals range between the approaches but usually the direct link between the cause and effect law and how it manifests into the self-creation of our reality is less explored. I believe that both group conflicts affected by systemic or structural causes and interpersonal conflicts are a manifestation of inner imbalances of their participants. However, group conflicts might invite people to not just explore their inner imbalances or lessons but also to be active in promoting a change from within. In some cases the calling to promote a change can be the main reason for taking part in such conflicts when inner imbalances are less prevalent. Yet, even then there is a reason for the individuals to take part in the conflict and explore their lessons and callings as the mere participation in the conflict is an invitation to manifest the law of cause and effect by projecting the harmonized Self into the group conflict.

The other aspect of the cause and effect law, the invitation to see ourselves and grow, is generally not prevalent in most conflict resolution approaches, aside from a few transformative

approaches. Most conflict resolution approaches follow people's subjective feelings that view conflicts as a crisis. This viewpoint is the interpretation of the situation by the conditioned mind that seeks pleasure and avoids pain. This mind also prefers that we avoid seeing our true nature through the conflict, as it means the dissolution of the illusion that is necessary for its survival. The conditioned mind denies the cause and effect law, as it requires taking responsibility over our creation, and instead puts the blame for situations on others. Understanding the cause and effect law and how we manifest our inner imbalances can shed new light on the purpose and meaning of conflicts and help shift our perspective toward an opportunity to grow while regaining the un-conflicted state rather than just seeing conflicts as a crisis to be resolved without the growth element.

The second assumption, stemming from the first one, is that interpersonal conflicts are an invitation for self-growth. This assumption is based on the cosmic law of mirroring, which is the invitation to look at ourselves through relationships. Based on the first assumption, one of the main goals of conflicts is to reflect inner disharmony and the limited creation of our reality from a duality consciousness. Based on the ideology that we are in an infinite process of evolution into expanding our consciousness, every experience supports this evolution, especially conflicts because of their reflective nature that comes from the distress they cause. This distress, like having a disease, forces us to stop and contemplate the situation in order to release the pain and regain pleasure. The growth is more meaningful when we learn from the experience rather than focus only on alleviating the pain.

The third assumption reflects the shared lesson between the parties in a conflict. This assumption stems from the cosmic law of attraction, which says that we attract into our lives experiences and people that resonate with our own projections, thus reflecting ourselves through

the interaction. If two people attract each other into a relationship, they resonate similarly around the issue that attracted them, which also applies to group conflicts. A conflict between them reflects resonance on specific issues that they both share and are invited to look at based on the first and second assumptions. Sometimes the lesson can be reflected through similar experiences and sometimes through opposite ones that still reflect similar lessons (as when a lesson on boundaries can be reflected through lack of boundaries or placing too many). According to this cosmic law, we attract into our lives each interaction and experience with others and nothing is coincidental or circumstantial. Accordingly, there is a higher purpose directed by the Self in the interaction, such as helping us to see ourselves through the other, experiencing our creation and regaining inner harmony so that our creation of reality can be more conscious. Some interactions are pleasant and reflect our inner harmony. Conflicts usually reflect the opposite. Conflicts also help us regain our innate state of unity through interaction that reflects separation and can evolve to connectedness. I believe this process is more effective when the conflict is managed to promote not only resolution but also a shift in consciousness.

Self-explorative Approach in Practice

"**For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven**:"

(Eccles. 3:1, ESV)

Overview

The Self is a door to infinite consciousness, thus there are infinite ways of expanding our consciousness rather than an exclusive method or technique that fits all. The process posited by this thesis offers a few suggested guidelines and phases to *connect* to the Self and *shift* perspective on a the conflict. The goals set by this process are not meant to indicate its completion, as the journey is never-ending, but merely to indicate its progress in the direction of

expansion. The Self and the conditioned mind communicate constantly, mostly on a subconscious level. The purpose of expanding awareness is to surface this communication to the conscious level and make choices based on inner harmony and increased awareness. The conscious interaction between the Self and the conditioned mind can take place in the silent inner space where the conditioned mind is less busy responding to reality. This silent space is also less influenced by difficult emotions that take over the conscious mind and is a more neutral place to begin examining limiting beliefs. One of these beliefs is the conditioned mind's constant response to 'external' reality without understanding that it actually created some of it, which leads to an incorrect perspective on conflicts. Conflicts usually create internal noise and overflow of thoughts and emotions. The silence allows for something new to emerge, inviting new narratives and perspectives.

Spaces allow for two elements to meet and interact. Just like the inner space allows for interaction between the different dimensions of consciousness, the interpersonal conflict is an invitation for two or more individuals to meet in a space where they can interact with each other. This space is a projection of their inner space and can be influenced by the shift created in the inner space. The more the inner space is consumed by the conditioned mind, the more the shared conflict space will be controlled by juxtaposing stories rather than by exploring the inner space of each party. Allowing more emptiness in the inner space for the Self to be present can result in projecting this inner space into the shared space between the parties. When guided by the Self, the inner space can project elements like higher perspective, connectedness and compassion, which in turn can shift the interaction around the conflict from a separateness-based interaction to an invitation for unity and understanding of the cosmic laws around the conflict. Creating this

inner space during a joint session is possible but might pose some challenges, hence the invitation for private sessions prior to the joint ones.

How we manage the inner or mutual space affects the outcomes of our interaction with the other and ourselves. Mindfulness and meditation are techniques to create the inner space (or space between people, if meditating with the view of the other or together), as are elicitive questions that direct this intersection of the different layers of consciousness. As tools to create this space, such meditations and questions can take different shapes and forms to fit the needs and level of consciousness of each person. They can be used as single techniques or in combination. Once this inner space is created, the Self-explorative approach is focused on '*connecting*' to the Self and '*shifting*' the perspective about the conflict to reflect the Self's perspective. This shift can come when the Self is asked to provide a different perspective that is then adopted by the client (i.e., when a former belief of the conditioned mind is replaced by another). Based on the outcome of this shift, the client can decide how to move forward in relation to the specific conflict.

Self-exploration can be a standalone process or part of another process like conflict coaching, in which case it offers an alternate method of exploring the Self and converging back to the main process with the outcomes of exploration. Self-exploration does not always require the assistance of another party, but usually, for inexperienced people, being both the observer (the conditioned mind) and the observed (the Self) can be challenging. A third party can assist by directing the process and helping to bypass the barriers of the conditioned mind, at least in the initial stages, until the client can independently establish a sustainable connection with the Self. The Self-exploration, starting in the context of a specific conflict, invites people to continue this process after the conflict is resolved. This process can take the shape of therapy by a qualified

practitioner, a spiritual journey, or any form of self-reflection. The conflict is an event in the ongoing journey of self-growth and expansion of awareness and as such is a catalyst in this journey. As Carse (2012) and Adams (2020) noted, it is not a finite event.

The Phases

The phases of the Self-explorative approach, which usually takes place before mediations or other conflict resolution processes but can be applied during and after as well, are as follows:

1. *Connecting* to the Self (through elicitive questions and/or meditations). This phase is the beginning of the journey into the Self, using elicitive questions to bypass the conditioned mind and explore deeper aspects of the being. The connection starts by creating a quiet inner space through elicitive questions and/or mindfulness and guided meditations. When using questions, the process can start with mindfulness meditation to quiet the mind, create a silent inner space and bring the person's awareness to the present moment. If using guided meditation, the process starts similarly, with exploration of the silent space through similar mindfulness meditation. Once the client is comfortable in this space, the Self is invited and the client can establish a connection so that the Self is experienced directly by the client. When the client familiarizes him/herself with the Self, he/she can communicate with the Self directly, through asking questions and receiving answers, drawings, or artifacts given as a gift by the Self. The practitioner can help interpret some of the messages if the client finds it difficult, still making sure the answers come from the Self and not from an outside source. Connecting to the Self, at least in the initial stages, is easier through meditations because the conditioned mind captures the entire inner space with constant thoughts and feelings, including the conflict story, thereby masking the Self

and limiting the ability of the client to see the big picture.[17] Guided meditation can direct the thoughts created by the conditioned mind to focus on the meditation, thus allowing for fewer unrelated thoughts to interrupt. Elicitive questions are more prone to the conditioned mind's manipulations and therefore require the attention and skills of the practitioner to allow answers to come from the innermost Self. Mindfulness meditation can be useful to quiet the mind and allow for deeper reflection to emerge. However, the interchange between elicitive questions and meditations is a matter of choice by both the client and the practitioner, according to the situation and level of comfort using each technique.

When a connection is established, the client can also explore different limiting and erroneous beliefs created by the subconscious mind and replace them with truths that come from the Self and the Source. A useful question can be 'ask your Self to show you its perspective on…[the new belief],' followed by 'are you ready to let go of [the old belief] and replace it with …[the new belief]?' If the answer is yes, then the next guidance can be 'now replace the… [old belief] with the… [new belief]' followed by 'ask the Self to show you what you need to know in order to embrace the… [new belief] in your life'. Next is bringing this shift into the physical plane by asking 'now see the change coming down to your physical body. Where or how do you feel this change in your body?'.[18] This is important in order to deal with the process of creating inner shift.

[17] This is the conditioned mind's way of presenting the client as the hero or victim, while portraying the other as the villain (see Hardy, 2022). Also, when in stress, we tend to operate from the amygdala and not use the full spectrum of our brain, thus limiting the way we see details and make inference of the data we collect (Stone & Heen, 2005).
[18] This is a modified and simplified version of a process offered through ThetaHealing®. See https://www.thetahealing.com/about-thetahealing.html

2. *Shifting* the perspective of the conflict after receiving the Self's perspective in the first phase. The connection to the Self can provide a higher perspective on different issues, including the conflict. There is no defined line between phases 1 and 2, and connecting to the Self can provide the Self's perspective, or deeper inquiry may be needed even after an initial connection using elicitive questions. This phase can involve some teaching or guidance, which should be focused on dormant knowledge awakened by the practitioner, if qualified, that can be obtained by the client once stronger communication with the Self and the Source is established. This is based on the premise that we all have potential access to the infinite knowledge, yet some of us have gained more access than others. The content of the teaching depends on the knowledge and qualifications of the practitioner and the awareness level of the client, assuming that if the practitioner and the client met, they have something to teach each other.

   At the end of this stage, the client is invited to answer the following questions: First, what is the new story of the conflict as explained by the Self? Second, what are the lessons that the conflict came to teach in order to promote the client's self-growth?

   Another indication of the shift can be the resonance by the client with the three assumptions mentioned above (that interpersonal conflicts are a manifestation of inner imbalance, that interpersonal conflicts are an invitation for self-growth and that there is a shared lesson between parties to a conflict). Acknowledging these assumptions might indicate the understanding of a higher perspective of the conflict and a willingness to approach it differently.

3. Redefining goals around the conflict, either within mediation or otherwise. Based on the new perspective of the conflict story, what are the new goals as set by the client? The new goals can be compared to the initial goals to indicate any shift, yet the goals can remain the same, just with more awareness of the lessons learned and the deeper perspective on the conflict. If the process started as conflict coaching, it could converge back to continue the coaching based on the new perspective and understanding of the client.
4. Setting strategy on how to manage the conflict. At this phase the practitioner can help the client define strategies and acquire skills to manage the conflict.

The process described above is semi-structured, allowing intuition to play a major role in finding a way to self-reflect and apply higher wisdom to the conflict management. As such, it encourages wider implementation of questioning and meditation techniques. Some examples of questions or inquiry styles that can be applied are provided in Appendix A. While leading guided meditations and intuitively navigating within the inner space created require more practice, mindfulness techniques, like breathing and being present meditation, are quite popular and easier to practice, as described in the meditation in Appendix B, followed by an example of a guided meditation. Moreover, as meditation can be utilized in many ways, exploring the elicitive questions by itself can be a form of meditation, especially when following a mindfulness meditation to create the inner space for questioning. They should be used as guidelines and not as set rules on how to ask questions. As Schein says in *Humble Inquiry*, asking questions "is the fine art of drawing someone out" (2013, p. 2), and as an art, rather than a strict method, Liber (2021) noted that this inquiry has no formula.

Self-exploration, just like conflict coaching, is a transformative process that is best achieved through one-on-one sessions in order to allow a focused, discrete and deep process that can be more challenging to achieve in joint sessions. As it is more intuitive and less structured, it is based on finding opportunities within private sessions to ask elicitive questions, offer mindfulness meditations or, if the practitioner is comfortable, lead the exploration through a guided meditation. Assessment of the readiness of the client is also intuitive and comes from the response to questions intended to explore more deeply or by simply asking the client about his/her willingness to explore more deeply. Alternatively, the assessment tool in Appendix C can be used to measure the readiness and willingness of the client. After starting the deeper exploration, the process can continue intuitively to the point where either the client or the practitioner feels it is time to stop. This can be challenging if the client is facing difficulties bypassing the barriers of the conditioned mind, which is why as a general guideline it is recommended to start with small steps where the client feels comfortable and gradually explore more deeply, utilizing multiple sessions. Using the elicitive questions only or focusing on mindfulness might be easier for people who are not used to meditating, yet guided meditations have the potential to expand the exploration, as they can touch a deeper dimension of consciousness not controlled by the conditioned mind.

Power and self-love

When we are in conflict we are triggered by internal imbalances. Some imbalances might need further therapy and some can be addressed in the process of conflict management in order to provide a wider perspective on the conflict. Two of the main imbalances that pose a challenge to moving forward with transforming the conflict are related to personal power and self-love. Conflicts can make us feel weak, and in an attempt to regain strength we might revert to one of

the three main approaches to managing conflicts: power, rights and problem-solving (Mayer, 2004). However, these approaches can provide us with a false sense of power because they are conditioned upon the results of our actions. Using power over people or imposing our legal rights can give us a sense of power but it comes from this external power or rights rather than our inner sense of strength. Weil (1986) views rights as subordinated to obligations, meaning the rights of one person cannot exist without the obligation of the other toward that person. Therefore, imposing rights without the acknowledgement by the other of their obligation that gives power to this right is somehow a false sense of power. A similar outcome results from the problem-solving approach, which provides a solution to address the outcome of our weakness rather than its source. True strength comes from our core, our sense of power within ourselves that is not conditioned upon external events. Bush and Folger (2005) place mutual acknowledgment as vital to restoring the parties' strength. Through connecting to the Self and shifting perspective on the conflict, this weakness can be identified and the client can be invited to find inner strength that draws from his/her Self before and sometimes instead of drawing from the other in transformative mediation. Outside of the conflict management process, methods like IFS or AF-EMDR or other healing methods can further aid in finding this strength.

Interpersonal conflicts also reflect to us that we are not loved by the other, which is a reflection of our own lack of self-love. Since conflicts come from our conditioned mind, which spreads fear-based feelings around the conflict, connecting to our Self, which is pure love, and shifting perspective over the conflict and our sense of being in general can contribute to knowing who we truly are and regaining our sense of self-love. Once we transform our fear into love, we transmit this love to others, and especially to the counterpart in the conflict, which can have a healing and transforming effect based on our ability to affect each other from a distance. Self-

love can also transform some of our values and needs, as they are a result of lack of self-love, thus shifting our perspective on the conflict without trying to address these elements through a settlement with the other.

Addressing these two aspects within the Self-explorative approach can add another dimension of different perspective to the conflict. Without getting deeper into therapy, these two aspects can be explored by way of asking the client directly (questions such as 'How do you feel that you gave up your power to the other?' or 'How much do you feel that you love yourself?'). Alternatively, these aspects can be addressed when connecting to the Self and asking for the Self's perspective on these questions. Understanding the giving away of power in the context of the conflict and the lack of self-love can lead to an important shift in the perspective on the conflict and transform the individual's sense of self and the relationship with the other.

How the Self-Explorative Approach Is Different from Conflict Coaching

Conflict coaching is focused on helping clients reach their objectives, usually resolution of the conflict. The Self-explorative approach is focused on growth as a main objective, alongside resolution. While both are goal-focused, conflict coaching is oriented toward meeting the client's goals while the Self-explorative approach can sometimes challenge them in favor of different goals stemming from the growth process. Nevertheless, there is a wide overlap between conflict coaching and the Self-explorative approach. Like the latter, conflict coaching, according to Noble (2006), uses open-ended questions to promote self-reflection in order to explore hopes, needs, values and expectations and unbundle the complexities of the conflict. The answers, Noble notes, come within a deeper rather than a superficial level of awareness. Similarly, the Self-explorative approach is also focused on touching this deeper realm, but with a more intentional exploration of this awareness (the Self). While coaching, through self-reflection, has

the potential of shifting the initial goals as well, the level of shift might be different than in the Self-explorative approach, stemming from the different process used to obtain the Self's perspective and the different basic assumptions about the conflict. Moreover, although both approaches might share a questioning style, the Self-explorative approach also focuses on some questions not necessarily explored by some coaching models, such as 'What is the purpose of the conflict in your life?' or 'How does the conflict serve you?'. If the client is less inclined to answer these questions, different questions might be 'Did you have similar conflicts in your life?' and 'What is the common theme in these conflicts?'

Coaching and the Self-explorative approach also focus on different elements of the psyche, both with the objective of creating a new perspective on the conflict. While coaching usually draws input from the conditioned mind, with some attempts to explore more deeply, the Self-explorative approach explicitly aims at connecting to the Self in order to foster balanced communication between the conditioned mind and the Self. This can shift the focus from relying on the conditioned mind for a new perspective, usually intended to produce a more effective resolution rather than self-growth, to obtaining the Self's perspective, viewing the conflict in terms of self-growth and suggesting a broader perspective on resolution as well. In other words, while coaching is intended to help the client meet his/her goals that derive from the conditioned mind, the Self-explorative approach aims at exploring goals that come from the Self, thus promoting self-growth and expanding the potential conflict management options. While some conflict coaching models also promote a similar shift in perspective during the process, coaching to meet the client's goals has a different focus than the Self-explorative approach and draws more limited boundaries around this shift. This translates not only to different goals but also to the level of inquiry and the exploration techniques used. Coaching will normally follow the

coaching guidelines of supporting the clients to meet their objectives without the coach's own perspective. Self-exploration is more focused on helping the clients bypass the conditioned mind so that they can 'coach' themselves through their inner guide. Instead of just helping them reach their initial goals, it will support their self-inquiry to challenge these goals based on their Self's perspective. It will attempt to show the client that the initial goals were set by the same conditioned mind that created the conflict and that opting for resolution utilizing this mind only can hinder the potential for self-growth and may invite additional conflicts with similar lessons to learn. Drawing upon Krishnamurti, we are free to choose only after we understand how we are not free when surrendering to the conditioned mind. The Self-explorative approach, unlike conflict coaching, challenges goals that come from a limited mind and offers a direct inquiry into this limitation.

The two approaches also differ in measurement of success. Conflict coaching promotes effective management of conflicts, with effectiveness measured in relation to the client's goals and skills in the current or future conflicts. The Self-explorative approach views effectiveness in terms of promoting self-growth and the transcendence of inner imbalance that will shift the nature, not just the management skills, of the current and future conflicts. The different focus calls for the use of different techniques, as discussed below.

In spite of their overlap, the Self-explorative approach and conflict coaching also differ in some techniques. While coaching will use questions or work with the story of the client and sometimes reconstruct this story to reflect a deeper truth, Self-exploration will take this process a step deeper into obtaining the Self's perspective on the story. The difference is that conflict coaching might remain within the realm of the conditioned mind to create a new story while the Self-explorative approach will aim at bypassing this mind and shifting perspective altogether

through the use of guided meditations and directing the client into the space that fosters inner communication. It will also focus on finding the lessons inherent in the conflict to promote self-growth and not just effective management of the conflict. Eventually it focuses on balancing both the conditioned mind and the Self in order to approach and manage the conflict based on the three assumptions of this thesis mentioned earlier. In addition, unlike coaching, it uses teachings that are intended to elicit self-learning rather than give advice, which is a way to reawaken dormant knowledge within the client that can promote more awareness.

The use of direct guidance can also distinguish the Self-explorative approach from most or all coaching models that adhere to the coaching guidelines of avoiding guidance by or advice from the coach. Another difference is that while coaching is usually future-focused toward meeting goals, Self-exploration can use some elements from therapy, like comparing past conflicts to find a common thread that can lead to a better understanding of the current conflict. While not intended to provide full therapy (unless the practitioner is qualified), it will use any information that may be relevant to promote understanding of how the conditioned mind works in comparison to the Self. Unlike coaching, which is confined within the boundaries of the models and questions asked, when opening the door to the Self the information received is unexpected and can lead to different directions that should be allowed to be freely explored rather than limited by a strict model.

Another difference stems from coaching's focus on the strengths of the client and how to enhance them to meet the goals. The Self-explorative approach, as with therapy and spiritual journeys, acknowledges that growth is sometimes achieved through working on weaknesses, focusing on seeing them as catalysts for change and finding strength from within. It also assumes that the conditioned mind can sometimes 'trick' the individual into focusing on his or her

strengths and avoid examining the weaknesses as a way to promote quick resolution instead of deeper self-inquiry. Uncompromised inquiry into the inner world requires acknowledging both the weaknesses and the strengths, and how each supports the self-growth process. This stems from another difference related to the length of the sessions. While coaching is intended to be short and focused, Self-exploration has a starting point but not a defined finish line, as self-inquiry is an ongoing process. While it is set up around managing a specific conflict and can end when the client (or practitioner) feels they have gained enough from the process in the context of the conflict, it has the potential to encourage the client to take this process further through therapy, spiritual journey or self-exploration. Exploring conflicts can have the potential and invitation to expand this exploration beyond the scope of the specific conflict in an infinite journey of growth mirrored and directed by other conflicts and interactions. Resolution of the specific interpersonal conflict is one outcome of this process, yet understanding the infinite process of growth can assist in shifting the perspective not just on the specific conflict but on every other conflict that will follow. Resolution without the conscious self-growth element can sometimes delay this awareness expansion and invite another conflict experience to trigger self-growth, based on the assumption that if the inner imbalance is unsolved, it will create more external imbalances in the shape of interpersonal conflicts. While conflict coaching might provide insights and skills on how to manage future conflicts more effectively, the Self-explorative approach focuses on completely shifting the perspective toward acknowledging the purpose of conflicts as a catalyst for self-growth and in some cases even on transcending the conflict altogether through this inner work. This shift can take place at varying levels, with or without understanding or adopting all the ideology behind the Self-explorative approach. In that respect, it is less a ‘manual’ on how to manage conflicts and more a way to assist the clients in

finding inner guidance when managing the current and future conflicts. Having said that, both approaches are client-oriented and honor the client's wishes and agency. The more the client chooses to inquire deeply, the more the two approaches will diverge and vice versa.

Challenges and Opportunities

The conflict resolution field is intended to help disputants more effectively manage their conflicts. It is mainly based on listening to people's narratives and goals and helping them reshape these narratives, explore their interests, values and needs, and gain wider perspective over the conflict in order to reach more collaborative and sustainable solutions. The Self-explorative approach expands the field by offering another dimension of self-growth, thus challenging some aspects of conflict management. While some conflict resolution approaches support self-growth as a byproduct of the resolution process, it is not commonly viewed as the main purpose of conflict. This can situate the Self-explorative approach among therapy and spiritual journeys rather than as part of the conflict resolution field. Nonetheless, the Self-explorative approach introduces concepts from therapy and spirituality into conflict resolution through the focus on self-growth within conflict management, thereby placing it in the intersection between these disciplines. While some try to avoid this link (like Bush & Folger, 2005), I believe it is inevitable as, according to my ideology, the main purpose of conflicts is to help us grow. Moreover, one does not have to be religious, spiritual or accept my ideology to connect to the Self or accept cosmic consciousness concepts. They are accessible to everyone, regardless of their beliefs, and are becoming more acceptable among evidence-based therapy models, science and many self-help approaches. Meditation and mindfulness are ways to connect to the Self and are emerging as mainstream practices even in the conflict resolution field, allowing such a link to occur without always naming it. This thesis simply makes this connection

between conflict resolution and therapy/spirituality more intentional. If individuals are willing to self-reflect and/or meditate, they are making some conscious connection to their Self. Meditation has the potential to bring us closer to an understanding of the cosmic laws about how we create our reality, how we are all connected and affect each other, and how the way we manage conflicts under the mind-Self tension might be limiting our potential to gain more benefit from conflicts. I believe the conflict resolution field is pursuing resolutions mostly to address clients' expectations and also because it is easily measured to indicate the success of the field. Yet our job as conflict practitioners or theorists is to offer people other perspectives within the resolution process, among them the shift of focus from resolution only to self-growth and resolution. Staying within the comfort zone of promoting effective resolutions only keeps the conflict resolution field from crossing the boundaries of disciplines that require special training and licenses (like therapy) or from controversial scientific evidence that supports concepts with the potential to challenge the way we perceive relationships and conflicts. Yet this field should constantly explore outside these boundaries, within its legal limits, as have some theorists and practitioners like Bush and Folger (2005), Mayer (2004), Cloke (2013), Riskin (2006), Bowling and Hoffman (2003) and more. This thesis joins their attempts under the premise that humanity is experiencing a giant shift in evolution and spiritual (not religious) growth. As the famous saying attributed to Andre Malraux goes, "The 21st century will be spiritual or will not be."[19]

Drawing upon the previous challenge, conflict resolution practitioners might argue that when disputants come to retain their services they have a specific goal of resolving the conflict rather than focusing on their self-growth, which is reserved for therapy or spiritual processes. This is a compelling argument that honors the client's wishes and acknowledges the limitations

[19] Although some disagree with this attribution. See https://www.fredericlenoir.com/en/editos-world-of-religions/malraux-and-the-religious/

of the conflict resolution process. However, the Self-explorative approach is neither intended to replace therapy or spiritual journeys nor to suggest that resolution is not important. It rather uses the conflict as an opportunity to also focus on self-growth under the premise that conflicts invite self-growth that can even support a more sustainable resolution. If conflict resolution practitioners only respond to clients' explicit requests, they might overlook the potential benefits of conflicts that are less likely to be gained when focusing only on eliminating the crisis. Clients might not be aware of the self-growth invitation of conflicts and therefore might not ask for it, just as they are not aware of all aspects of their underlying condition when going to the doctor with symptoms of illness. Deeper exploration is an invitation clients should be offered, which they can accept or deny. This is not a call to impose this invitation or present it as the only path, but only to offer another perspective that might help clients become aware of elements of the conflict and themselves that they currently are unaware of. Offering services that include the invitation for self-growth might increase awareness among clients so they can ask for it when seeking conflict resolution services. Diversifying the conflict resolution field can drive it forward and just like people are invited to expand beyond their conditioned mind, so the conflict resolution field is invited to expand beyond its current understandings of how conflicts are created and managed.

Elaborating on the previous objection, some might argue that conflict resolution practitioners need to respect the client's wishes and not impose a process that the practitioner might think is good for the client. While these wishes can be honored by obtaining the client's consent to the process, the bigger challenge might appear during the process if the client resists seeing beyond the conditioned mind. Therapists have ways to bypass this barrier so that healing can occur. During conflict resolution sessions, this can be more challenging. To face this

challenge, practitioners should not force a process on clients but only reflect the inner struggle and the barriers of the conditioned mind to the client. Also, practitioners should not work harder than the client and if they find it difficult to pass the barriers of the conditioned mind, practitioners can adhere to the elicitive questions guidelines, focus on mindfulness meditations to gradually expand awareness, or let go of the process, as the client might not be ready. More experienced practitioners can attempt to bypass these barriers but not to the point of pushing the client beyond what he or she is willing to go.

Another potential objection is that applying the Self-explorative approach requires not only adopting its underlying ideology but also its special qualifications to guide clients in the search for the Self. Such qualifications usually need extensive training and their application requires more than the few sessions designated for private conflict sessions. While this argument has a grain of truth, the basic levels of Self-exploration are intuitive and can be performed even by the individuals themselves. Self-inquiry methods suggested in Appendix A, as well as basic mindfulness and meditations, can be easily applied by practitioners and individuals. Some methods to connect to the cosmic Source and obtain a higher perspective on issues, like ThetaHealing®, are accessible to everyone without the need for extensive training and a license.[20] More advanced meditations or techniques require more training and practice. The Self-explorative approach is based on the idea that we are all masters who have inner wisdom to guide ourselves, and with enough willpower and some guidance, we can reawaken our inner strength and wisdom. Because the Self-explorative approach adheres to no strict structure, it seeks opportunities within a session to achieve a deeper inner view that might shift the perspective on the conflict. Sometimes a small but eye-opening reflection by a practitioner can

[20] The basic ThetaHealing® course takes three days of training and provides the knowledge on how to connect to the 'Creator of All' and receive perspective on a situation. See https://www.thetahealing.com/about-thetahealing.html.

trigger a deeper understanding by the client and start a self-inquiry process that can later be pursued outside the conflict session. Clients are not required to fully accept the ideology behind the Self-explorative approach in order to participate in the process. They only need to come with an open mind and some level of readiness to explore deeper layers of awareness. In other words, they need to open the door to the exploration process even though they are unaware of what is behind this door, which is usually the case for seekers of higher truths. If they come with some belief in the power of conflicts to shift their perspective on themselves and others, the Self-explorative approach can provide an uncompromising and direct view on how our different layers of personality work to promote or prevent our growth, and how we can choose to select between them.

The Self-explorative approach is suitable for people who are ready to take responsibility for the conflict rather than blame others or the system. Not all people are ready for that, such as deeply traumatized people who need to heal their trauma before they are ready to look at their own contribution to the conflict. Others might not be interested in self-growth and might prefer to focus on resolution of the conflict only. A potential objection to the Self-explorative approach might be the risk of losing clients when implying that the conflict is their own creation. One way to avoid this is by using the assessment tool in Appendix C to check the readiness and willingness of the clients. Another is by starting the exploration process slowly, gradually building trust, and feeling the readiness of the client to explore deeper. When using elicitive questions and meditations, much like coaching, the insights should come from the client and not the practitioner. The understanding of the client's contribution to the conflict as stemming from his or her inner imbalance should come from the client, with the guidance of the practitioner. The impact of self-revelation is greater than information provided by the practitioner that can be

rejected by the conditioned mind and prevent further insights. When to say what is an art rather than a rule book and following the elicitive questions guidelines can help prevent unnecessary giving of advice. Moreover, the Self-explorative approach is not intended to replace existing conflict resolution methods but to offer another dimension of exploration for people who are willing to explore conflicts from a perspective of self-growth. It is therefore not in conflict with other methods over the prevailing ideology or values.

Another aspect of the previous objection might come from conflict transformation theorists like Burton, Lederach or Galtung that argue in favor of transforming the systemic and structural underlying causes of conflicts in order to prevent or resolve them. They might argue that these causes are not in the control of the individuals or stemming from their inner imbalances and thus an approach that relies on these inner imbalances to transform the conflict might not address its true causes. This argument probably stems from an ideology that assumes there are circumstances outside of individuals' control that create their reality and force them to be in a conflict. I argue that taking part in a group conflict affected by systemic or structural causes can have a dual purpose: to reflect potential internal imbalances of the individuals in the group and to invite these individuals to transform the conflict from within. In other words, these circumstances provide a setup for people to see themselves, grow and learn how to create a different reality, as systemic and structural conflicts are a mirror to the group consciousness. Their participation in the conflict is not coincidental but an invitation, just like interpersonal conflicts, to bring harmony to their personal inner imbalances as well as the group disharmony. Inner change of the individuals can invite a shift in the entire group, which can lead to a shift in the systemic and structural causes as well, with or without the help of outside intervention. Addressing all elements of the conflict is therefore important and the Self-explorative approach

can provide a deeper understanding of the underlying causes that can reveal the consciousness and lessons of the group members that can explain the conflict from a different perspective. The Self-explorative approach can supplement other transformation approaches by providing another dimension of understanding and managing conflicts. Through the inner transformation, we can create different reality that is based on our connection with our Self rather than just our ego, which can then affect the collective consciousness of the group. This, I believe, is the main purpose of any experience.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

This thesis is a theoretical analysis examining the invitation of interpersonal conflicts to promote self-growth and how the exploration of deeper aspects of oneself can assist in this process. It introduces the Self-explorative approach, which provides another dimension of managing conflicts from the perspective of the Self. It also addresses the tension between the Self and the conditioned mind as the source of conflicts, offering to balance this tension through listening to the guidance of the Self. This can promote conflict management not only with a view toward more effective resolution but also with the potential to transcend the conflict through regaining inner balance and inviting a continuous self-growth process.

Introducing concepts like the Self outside of its spiritual context is not without challenges. Based on evidence-based therapy models and scientific studies that go beyond the conventional theories to explore metaphysical phenomena, this thesis can be positioned among academic and philosophical research as well as spiritual knowledge. While it relies on sound arguments commonly found in the spiritual and some therapeutic worlds, it still needs further evidence in practice when applied to conflict resolution by different practitioners. By suggesting a more intuitive and flexible model, the Self-explorative approach is open to implementation in various ways and to various levels of inquiry. Similar to therapy or a spiritual journey, the seeds that are planted during the session may not always bloom fast enough to measure, which makes measuring success or failure a challenge. Yet a shift in perspective that yields a simpler explanation for the complex elements of the conflict and a more compassionate and accepting conflict management process can indicate the acceleration of a process that we all go through, a process of our infinite expansion of consciousness.

APPENDIX A: QUESTIONS EXAMPLES

Elicitive questions can reveal our thoughts and emotions and even go deeper to our Self. They can expose the way we think and how far our thoughts are from reality. One of the main purposes of elicitive questions is to shift perspective from a conflict as an external crisis to an internal event that can help us grow. Although the questioning stage is very intuitive, below are examples of four approaches to self-inquiry that can be used in addition to or instead of inquiry based on intuition. More advanced methods of meditation or therapy that can foster connection to the Self are beyond the scope of this thesis. Some mindfulness techniques can be adopted from Riskin (2006) and others. Nonetheless, questions alone can provide enough access to some level of the Self to shift perspective on the conflict. The methods below are meant to be used alone or with the help of a practitioner.

The first set of questions is an adaptation I made to conflicts of the Six-Step Process for Spiritualizing the Emotional Self by the spiritual psychologist Joshua David Stone (1994) and essentially asks the client the following questions (to say or write):

1. What is your story of the conflict?
2. What is your response to the story (how do you feel about it)?
3. What are the qualities that you have been given the opportunity to learn from the story?
4. How does the other person help you learn these lessons?
5. [If responding positively to question 4] Can you thank the other person for teaching you these lessons?
6. How do you want to move on with the conflict?

The second style of self-inquiries is found in the Diamond Inquiry (Liber, 2021) based on Almaas' Diamond Approach. It is an intuitive style that has no set formula but instead uses more general questions to guide the inquiry into the inner world. This inquiry begins with checking 'where am I?' or 'what is on my mind now?' which is equivalent to telling the story about the conflict. The next question is 'what is that?' which is asking 'how do I experience that [conflict]?' Next come 'what's it about?' questions, which are intended to explore why that is happening (the conflict). This interplay between 'where,' 'what' and 'why' questions can continue without a formula to explore the first layers of the conflict. The next level is to dive deeper into the thoughts, emotions and bodily sensations the client has about the situation. This is still checking on the physical and emotional aspects. The next level is to touch the inner nature, or the Self, through what Liber calls 'presence.' This presence can be found beyond the thoughts, emotions and sensations. This presence is touched when we feel simple love and understand that this love is who we are. The actual process follows the steps of the questions of where, what and why, exploring the thoughts, emotions and sensations, contemplating them until new insights emerge and the feeling of an internal hug comes and strikes as 'this is what I needed.' This feeling or knowing marks the connection to the inner self. Taking it into conflict, this insight can come as a deep understanding of the role of the individual in the conflict or a deep-level answer to a question they have.

The third example of powerful questioning is found in Byron Katie's (2002) "The Work" method. In this method, the individual takes a stressful situation and fills in the blanks in six questions found in the Judge-Your-Neighbor Worksheet.[21] Then for each question the following four questions are asked:

1. Is it true?

[21] https://thework.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/jyn_en_mod_6feb2019_r4_form1.pdf

2. Can you absolutely know it's true?
3. How do you react, what happens, when you believe that thought?
4. Who or what would you be without the thought?

These questions are intended to show the person how far his or her perception of the situation is from reality, and that 'what there is' is different than what we think, but is preferable as it causes less suffering. It is a useful and well-researched method to help inquire into our true self.

Last is the extensive questions book *Conflict Mastery* by Noble (2014), dedicated to questions to be used in conflict coaching. Based on premises like peace begins with ourselves and the invitation of conflicts to be attuned to our inner self, Noble structured a before-, during-, and after- conflict line of questions to help people cultivate confidence and compassion and manage conflicts more positively and effectively.

APPENDIX B: MINDFULNESS AND A GUIDED MEDITATION

Basic mindfulness meditation on the breath offered by Riskin (2006, p. 243):

> Sit comfortably with your back and neck erect—either on a chair with your feet flat on the floor, or on a meditation cushion on the floor with your legs crossed—and your hands on your knees or your thighs. Begin to settle yourself by bringing attention to sound. As best you can, observe sounds as they arise, stay present, and fall away, and do this without worrying about the cause of each sound and without judging the sounds. However, if thoughts about the source of sounds and judgments arise, simply notice them, and return the attention to sound.
>
> After a few minutes, bring your attention to the sensation of your breath at the place where it is easiest for you to notice. This might be at the nostrils, as the air enters and leaves, or the chest or abdomen, as they rise and fall with inhalations and exhalations. Focus on the sensations of one inhalation at a time, one exhalation at a time. When you notice that your mind has wandered, this is a moment of mindfulness! Gently escort your attention back to the breath. If you have a lot of trouble concentrating on the breath, you might try one of the following: (1) Silently note "rising" and "falling" or "in" and "out" or "up" and "down" with each breath; or (2) Silently count each exhalation until you reach ten; when you reach 10, or go past 10 or lose count, begin again at one. During such activities, the words should be in the background, the sensations in the foreground.

Riskin suggests starting this meditation for five minutes at a time, moving to ten and fifteen minutes as you become more comfortable. A more advanced version, according to Riskin, involves asking where the mind is gone when it wanders.

Below is a basic guided meditation for establishing connection with the Self. I have used this meditation, in one or more versions, for many years with novice and experienced people.

> I invite you to find a comfortable seated position, with your palms up and open or face down. You can close your eyes. Let's start with three deep inhales through the nose, and release through the mouth. Let's take another inhale and focus your conscious on your feet; exhale, releasing the feet, surrendering to this moment. Let's take another inhale and focus your conscious on your chest; exhale, releasing the chest. Take another big inhale and focus on your conscious on your shoulders; with the exhale release your shoulders. Take another inhale and focus your conscious on your neck and head; with the exhale, release your neck and head. Continue with the deep breaths. This is your time to come home to this moment; this is your time to relax and reconnect with the energy that's around you all the time. Inhale; be conscious of how this air goes to your lungs. If the mind wanders, it's perfectly ok. Simply return home to the moment. I now invite you to draw your energy inward, to your imagination and inner world. Imagine yourself sitting or lying in a comfortable place that you like. It can be a warm beach, green forest, beautiful meadow or any other place. This is your personal space. You are here simply to relax. Look around—what do you see? How does it feel to be there? Inhale the air in this place through the nose; release through the mouth. Let's check in with the body as we are sitting on the ground. You are connected with this earth. Feeling anchored with Mother Earth, use your senses to touch the ground, feel the breeze, see the beautiful colors and notice the smells. How does that feel? You are now sinking deeper into the ground; you are feeling protected, snuggled by the warm, loving ground. Deep inhale through the nose; release.

Now I invite you to visualize a big tree next to you. It has a wide trunk with a door in it. Open the door and walk inside. See yourself coming out into a whole new space with endless blue sky and many marvelous sights: rivers, cities, forests and whatever you can imagine. You can fly over this space and then you find yourself surrounded by a big cloud. Now visualize some figure coming toward you and lightly touching your hand. After the touch, the cloud will vanish and you can see your guide. Is the guide a woman or a man? What does he or she wear? How does she or he look? Feel? Your guide will introduce herself to you. Look in her eyes. You can now travel together in your dream space. When you feel ready, find a comfortable place to sit and then take a few minutes to ask her any question you want. Now the guide gives you a present in a box. Take the box, thank the guide, and open it. What do you find inside? This is something that can help you in your path now. Embrace it into your heart and let it assimilate inside. When you feel comfortable, say goodbye to the guide, knowing that you can always come back to this place and interact with her. Take a deep inhale through the nose, and release through the mouth. Go back to the door in the tree and walk out. Continue with the breaths and when you feel ready, I invite you to say goodbye to this lovely place and gently bring your awareness back to the room. Gently wiggle your toes, roll your shoulders and when you're ready, open your eyes.

Depending on the awareness and comfort level of the client, the first interaction with the guide or Self can include basic questions, or no questions at all. When coming back to this meditation, the practitioner can guide the client to ask more focused questions about the conflict, limiting beliefs and the lessons to be learned from the conflict. The level and nature of questions are limitless and should be intuitively used based on the awareness of the client and practitioner. The meditation above is one of many ways to meet the guide and can be used in any variation that suits the practitioner and client, as long as it establishes connection with the Self.

APPENDIX C: ASSESSMENT TOOL

1. How would you describe the current conflict?

   _____

   _____

2. What is your perspective on the reason this conflict started? _____

3. What kind of assistance do you wish to receive with respect to this conflict?

   _____

4. How much do you believe that your conflicts with others are created by your emotional or other internal issues?

Strongly disbelieve	Somewhat disbelieve	Neither believe or disbelieve	Somewhat believe	Strongly believe
1	2	3	4	5

5. How much do you believe you can control or direct the management of the conflict you are involved in?

Strongly disbelieve	Somewhat disbelieve	Neither believe or disbelieve	Somewhat believe	Strongly believe
1	2	3	4	5

6. If you answered 4 or 5 to the previous question, please also answer the following questions (6 and 7):

a. How much do you believe that you can affect the conflict by changing something within yourself (like beliefs, opinions, perspectives, emotions or behavior?)

Strongly disbelieve	Somewhat disbelieve	Neither believe or disbelieve	Somewhat believe	Strongly believe
1	2	3	4	5

b. How open are you to reflect on personal issues within yourself that are related to the conflict?

Strongly opposed	Somewhat opposed	Neither open or opposed	Somewhat open	Very open
1	2	3	4	5

c. Have you ever meditated? [ ] yes [ ] no

d. Are you willing to try incorporating meditation in our process?

[ ] yes [ ] maybe [ ] no

7. Is there anything else you want to tell me about yourself that can help our process of exploring this conflict and finding effective ways to manage it?

_____

_____

_____

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