



## From Conflict to Grace

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This is the story of how three people were touched and transformed by their willingness to look upon conflict with gentleness and the intention to learn. It is also the story of how Inner Bonding makes us accident prone.

Recently, I had a difficult interaction with a woman I had just met. I'll call her "Susie". Susie is a friend of a good friend mine, and the three of us met at a coffee shop. I entered the conversation with an open heart. And, so, it seemed, did Susie. However, as I was sharing, Susie cut me off with angry questions and with an underlying energy that felt attacking and judgmental. Of course, from Susie's perspective, she would likely have seen it differently. She may have believed she was simply being honest and direct, unafraid of sharing that she didn't agree with me. But, those of us who are attuned to energy understand that everything we do, say and think *rides* on a current of energy—and a person's energy changes according to their *intention*. Susie's intention, it seemed, had changed from when we began our conversation. Her heart had closed and she was now in the intention to control. It became apparent to me that she had been triggered into her wounded self and was now verbally and energetically attacking me. She must have had a "very good reason" for judging me and attacking my perspective, but because I was caught off guard by her initial openness, I wasn't quite prepared to be compassionate with Susie at that moment.

Instead, as my vulnerable, open-hearted self was caught off guard, my wounded self instantly became alert and my body contracted. "Ouch", I wished I could say, but the words wouldn't come out. I turned inward to see what was going on inside of me as I temporarily tuned out of the conversation. I noticed two parts of me competing. The first part wanted me to stand up for myself. It wanted very badly to address what had just happened. It did not want me to pretend that I was enjoying a conversation that was no longer pleasant for me. There was judgment and criticism in the room, and it no longer felt like a safe environment for open sharing.

The part of me that wanted to address the energy behind the content of this interaction was the healthiest part of me that I could contact at the moment. This part of me wanted to take action. It had learned—and taught—how to set boundaries, how to say, "No", how to use Nonviolent Communication to talk about what I observed, felt and needed. It was the most loving aspect of my Loving Adult that I could find right then.

But, I didn't take action. This is because there was another part of me equally as strong as my shaky Loving Adult. And, this was my wounded self. My wounded self was triggered into its old pattern of simultaneously wanting to cry from the shock of feeling attacked and wanting to attack back, to judge Susie and to make her wrong, as I felt she had done to me just moments before. Because of my training with Inner Bonding, as well as my years of practice with the Buddhist precept of "Right Speech", I did not want to spew venom back at Susie. I wanted to take responsibility for my feelings and act from my Loving Adult, but I wasn't quite there yet.

So, the best option in the moment seemed to remain silent and to take care of myself internally.

Because I was essentially dropping my friend off to be with Susie, it was relatively easy for me to exit this uncomfortable situation by saying goodbye a few minutes after this difficult interaction. This felt good to my Inner Child who wanted me to be in my integrity and not keep her in a situation where she felt that I could not take proper care of her.

Soon afterwards, I was alone in my car, contemplating this situation. At first, my wounded self went into strategizing. What else could I have done? How could I have spoken up for myself? How could I have stayed in my integrity without forcing myself to wear a happy mask for even a second? I did that “situation review” that wounded selves like to do. I rehashed the story, combing the scene to figure out what I could have done differently so that I wouldn’t make the same mistake in the future. My wounded self, like most, felt attacked and diminished. It was taking Susie’s behavior personally, and, as such, felt separate, vulnerable and afraid. Believing in its own story, my wounded self was now trying to convince me to “protect.”

While I was letting my wounded self obsess in this way, my Inner Child was being dragged under the car. Eventually I noticed her pain and brought her back up into the front seat.

I stopped and breathed with my Inner Child. Through that action alone she began to feel safe. As I continued to focus on my breathing, feeling her presence in my belly, I could no longer maintain a focus on my obsessive thoughts. I had to pick one or the other—being present with my Inner Child (the choice for love) or allowing my mind to be consumed by thoughts of protection and control (the choice for fear). This time, I picked love.

In choosing love for my Inner Child, I spontaneously opened to a moment of grace. Now grace is not always what happens to me when I open to my Inner Child. Often I have to go through the Inner Bonding process to find out what I did or said to cause my Inner Child’s pain, and then talk with my guidance about the truth and the loving action that I need to take. But, if you have been doing Inner Bonding as long as I have, you may have had moments like the one I’m about to describe. This was a moment when I just “showed up” for my Inner Child. She felt my presence and love so deeply that she felt safe and soothed. And, in that place of peacefulness, my guidance came to me—into my body, my mind, my spirit—and enlightened me about what had transpired with Susie just moments before. It was a moment of grace.

I experienced this grace as a *shift in my thoughts*. If you’ve read my article, *There is No Emptiness in You*, you know that I am a student of *A Course in Miracles*. And, *The Course*, as it is often referred to, talks a lot about how our whole reality changes when we remember that we have never been disconnected from God, or from each other. Well, after my Inner Child was back in the front seat, I had a “God moment”. I remembered, not just on an intellectual level, but on a physical and emotional level, that in my deepest reality, Susie is a *part* of me. I smiled, as I continued with the realization. “Susie is not separate from me. In fact, Susie showed up in my life today for my benefit. She appeared in my reality to *lovingly* point out to me an unhealed part of myself. If Susie hadn’t shown up exactly as she did, I may have gone around carrying this wound for years without even knowing it.”

All of a sudden, I was in a state that was beyond compassion for Susie. I was in a state of deep gratitude and—dare I say it?—love? Yes, love. Susie is a part of me. At the deepest

level—the soul level or the heart level or the level of Source Energy—Susie was offering me a gift. Susie *felt* the unhealed wound within me. She *knew* that if she poked at my wound just a little, that I would react.

Now, I'm guessing that Susie's *wounded self* wanted me to react so that she could react in turn and that our wounded selves could engage in a round of battle that would create the kind of "negative pleasure" that wounded selves like to feed on. But, I was no longer thinking of Susie's wounded human self. I was feeling Susie's soul, her essence, her higher self. I knew that *this* part of Susie understood that our interaction was filled with pure potential. My reaction, for example, had the potential to awaken me to my unresolved pain, which, in turn, could be the catalyst for my choice to return to Love. And, for what other reason are we here on this planet than to return again and again to our lovingness?! Susie, it seems, was offering me an opportunity to fulfill my highest purpose.

And it worked! It doesn't always work. Believe me. There are lots of catalysts out there that just seem to push me deeper into the choice to control. But every once in a while I wake up. And, guess who I have to thank for my temporary awakening? Susie, of course. Thank you, Susie. Thank you. In this moment—which, by the way, is the only moment there is—I know who you are. You are the perfect child of God, of Love, of Source Energy, who came to remind me to clear out the cobwebs in my *own mind* and return to the place where there has never been any emptiness in me—or you.

More than halfway through my writing of this article, my friend called me and apologized for Susie's behavior. I told her that Susie's behavior was not her responsibility and talked about what a gift the situation turned out to be for me.

Well, apparently, I was not the only one for whom this situation was a gift. While I was doing my own Inner Bonding work, my friend and Susie were each having their own moments of grace.

After I left the café, my friend, who has been practicing speaking her own truth, spoke up and talked with Susie about her behavior with me. That conversation concluded with my friend walking Susie through her very first Inner Bonding dialog, where Susie was able to cry out her pain and her very good reasons for closing her heart to me. In the end, it had actually *not* been the most loving action for me to defend or speak up for myself to Susie. It was most loving for me to take care of myself the best I could in the moment, which then created room for my friend to have a moment of healing with her friend, Susie. My friend got to have a positive experience of speaking her truth, and Susie got to meet her Inner Child and understand the cause of her pain.

One interaction. One conflict. Multiple opportunities for healing. Each of us touched and transformed by our willingness to look upon a difficult situation with gentleness and the intention to learn.

Grace happens. It cannot be forced. It can only be invited by our intention. We cannot pretend that we feel loving toward someone whom we feel has harmed us. Nor can we make ourselves remember the truth of our Unity when we feel very small, afraid and separate. We can only have the experience—through grace—that allows us to remember that beyond our frail humanity is the part of us that is connected to All That Is. This part of us is strong and wise

and has always been whole and complete. The moral of this story is: do more Inner Bonding. Grace happens by accident. But, Inner Bonding makes us accident prone.

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