

## Ken Cloke: There Is No Them. There Is Just Us. by Awakin Call Editors

“If children are playing on a playground and they’re fighting, the very first thing that we tend to do is separate them. Separation works to stop the fighting, but it doesn’t work to settle the issues that they’re fighting over. So there are relatively primitive and relatively advanced methods for handling any particular type of conflict. And those are endless -- throughout our lives, we have nothing but opportunities for transcendence and transformation! To change the form of the thing, and by changing it, we learn from it and discover some higher order of capacity, to come to terms with this thing that was giving us the most trouble.”

Ken Cloke is Director of the Center for Dispute Resolution in Southern California. He specializes in mediation, negotiation and resolution of complex organizational, interpersonal, and public policy disputes. What follows is the edited transcript of an Awakin Call with Ken Cloke where he shares fascinating stories of his approach, and stresses the benefits of dialog in our lives and in the world. You can access the recording of the call and the full-length transcript [here](#).

Alyssa: I thought that we would start out by talking about the profound shift in your life, when you transitioned away from more traditional legal roles. Can you tell me what catalyzed this shift in your thinking about ‘conflict’.

Ken: Well, I think in the first place, every one of us has many experiences with conflict going back to the time when we were infants, to the time when we were in school when our parents didn’t understand us, when we found ourselves at odds with people that we were attached to, or had strong feelings for. And I think that incipient sense of being out of sorts, of having conflict, not feeling that it’s comfortable or natural or conducive to learning -- it’s something that all of us can understand and relate to. The more difficult realization comes when you figure out that the conflict is inside of you. The one that you hate is inside you, and hatred becomes a vibration, a kind of soup in which you are immersed and that you have a choice in how to handle it. The choice isn’t immediately obvious because it’s being made by the limbic system inside your brain that has recognized some threat. That perhaps, it feels assaulted and responds in a primitive manner, without realizing that what we are basically confronting is a lack of skill.

The very first skill that we need to learn in order to handle our conflicts differently is a very simple one: Are we going to engage in the conflict and behave badly, or are we going to try to stop and figure out what’s actually going on here? It’s especially

important in families, because families are simultaneously cauldrons of conflict and centers of profound, positive, emotional connections. And the question then becomes, how do we exactly handle this? We often handle it through the passage of time. We get upset, stroll off, cry or pout... whatever it is, but time passes and we return to a non-conflict state. Without having learned very much except, perhaps, to count to ten.

More advanced skills come later in our lives. Particularly they come in relationship to our friends or peer groups, where we experience a variety of different conflicts. For me though, it was a kind of 'surge-place' that conflict came from, which was out of the experience of social conflict. With experience, I began to realize that counting from 1 to 10 is pretty basic, and more fundamental and skillful than that is asking your opponent a question that could reveal where this conflict came from, for them, as well as for you.

And those skills continue. Through our lives, we pick up first this one, and that one and one turns out to be useful, and another one turns out not to be useful in some different circumstance or situation. And it's exactly the same in mediation -- the very thing that you do that works miraculously with someone at 9:05, completely falls apart at 9:10. So what is conflict then, really? Well, I think we can think of it simply as a place where we're stuck because we don't have the skills to handle it at some higher level. And each of those skills is a kind of transformation in the form of the conflict. Once we exercise those skills, the conflict itself changes and we become unstuck at that level of conflict, by exercising those skills.

If children are playing on a playground and they're fighting, the very first thing that we tend to do is separate them. Separation is a useful thing to do, as it stops the fighting. But if kids are going to talk about why they're getting into conflict with each other, then they have to do more than being separated -- they have to actually come together. Separation works to stop the fighting, but it doesn't work to settle the issues that they're fighting over. So there are relatively primitive and relatively advanced methods for handling any particular type of conflict. And those are endless -- throughout our lives, we have nothing but opportunities for transcendence and transformation! To change the form of the thing and by changing it, we learn from it and discover some higher order of capacity, to come to terms with this thing that was giving us the most trouble.

Alyssa: That's a wonderful starting point -- there's so much there, that I want to follow up on. You mentioned that the conflict exists inside each of the parties, and inside the mediator and what a mediator does at 9:05 may not be appropriate at 9:10. You have to be attuned, to be really present in the conflict. I was wondering if you could maybe give us some examples of your mediation practice, of when your presence elicited different outcomes?

Ken: Sure, let me give you a little bit of theoretical justification for what I'm about to say. Basically, the kinds of conflicts that we are thinking about are conflicts between human beings. And this is a place now where we can see that there is a connection between conflict resolution and some core spiritual ideas, particularly, Buddhist ideas

about human suffering.

The first of those ideas is impermanence. The second of those ideas is that one of the sources of suffering is attachment. But if we think about this for just a moment, we can see that as living beings, we have life energy flowing inside of us and the natural state of that life energy is slow. So any obstacle that's placed in the path of that flow is going to create a distortion. And if we go back to what I said before, that conflict is a state of being stuck, which means that we have created a diversion of our own life energy and it's now flowing in some different direction. So what happens in mediation is that using empathy, storytelling, and a variety of different techniques, I basically try to feel their energy flowing inside of me, and to find the place where that energy has become knotted and obstructed, where there's some barrier. To feel a place, where all of a sudden there is unexpected depth. For example, a power word that someone will use, a word that has immense energy attached to it.

The example that I would like to give is an example that comes from mediation between kids that I did many years ago, when I was helping to create school mediation programs. This was one in which two girls who had been friends, were talking and one of them accused the other of having taken something that she had said in confidence, and shared it with other people. And I asked her how that felt to her and she said, "It was really upsetting and I was very angry." Well, inside of me I can feel very upsetting and very angry, but that wasn't 100% what it actually felt like. And so I find a place in me where I may have experienced something like that; I think of what words I would use to describe that and the one word that has emotional power is betrayed. So I asked her, "Did you feel betrayed?" and immediately there was a release of tension. That was the thing that turned the corner in the conversation. But I need to ask myself the question: why was it so difficult for her to come up with the word 'betrayed'. And the answer, of course, is that the word 'betrayed' betrays her, meaning the word betrayal consists both of disappointment and desire. And it's the desire piece, the place that is most tender and where she is most vulnerable to disappointment. The place where she wants the other girl to really like and keep her confidences, so that she can feel a sense of intimacy and connection with her, that's the place in trauma.

And so, what I began to realize is that it's always the most tender places inside of us that is the most hurt. That's the first thing that we do in conflict. To protect those places, to distance ourselves even from forms of conversation that will require us to become vulnerable in the presence of someone we no longer trust. And yet, there is at the same time, a desire for release from suffering, a desire for honesty, communication and connection.

And so that opens up the possibility of a very different conversation between these two girls. So I turned to the other girl and I said, "Was it your intention to betray her?" And she said no and started to say why not. I stopped her, and said, "Don't tell me. Tell her." And now that the two girls are talking to each other, they are both being openhearted, and honest with each other. She apologizes for what she did in a very sincere way. And recognizes the pain that her friend had experienced.

And so in a very similar type of way, in every conflict conversation, we are defending ourselves against the very thing that we want the most, against a heart-to-heart conversation with a person who has hurt us. And it's natural for us to want to avoid that conversation because they have in fact betrayed our trust somehow, because they haven't met our expectations, because we don't know any longer who they are, or believe that they don't know who we are. And therefore we don't show them who we actually are. We shut down internally inside and that creates a source of suffering, because it's a kind of attachment. And it's even worse because it's an attachment to something that is over, that we then keep with us in our lives. It becomes a source of personality, just as the flow of a river when it's blocked by a rock will be distorted. And in exactly that way, our lives are formed not just by the conflicts that we've experienced, but by the ones we've not resolved.

Alyssa: Wow, that's a very powerful example! This reminds me of a part in your book, "Mediating Dangerously," where you say every mediator at some point encounters a party whose problems reflect his or her own incomplete issues from the past, issues that require resolution. And those moments where the mediator can, maybe work through some of his or her own issues are unique opportunities. I'm wondering if you could speak of any gifts of that kind that you might have received.

Ken: Thank you. Well, let me say two things. First, a very simple way of thinking of this is that babies when they are very young don't play with each other. They engage in what's called parallel play. That is, they play side by side, and if one baby is playing with a toy and the other baby takes it, there's no conflict because the baby hardly even knows that the toy has disappeared. But at a certain point, as the babies develop, they become conscious of each other and begin to transition from parallel play. But in order to make that transition, they have to figure out what to do when the other baby takes the toy and doesn't give it back. And that's a skill that is acquired.

And it's acquired in part, because of the desire for a relationship, and in part, because of the fact that you do not yet have the skills to handle that relationship. So every conflict those babies experience is in the transition from parallel play to cooperative play. And it's the same with us, as we are still in that transition. This means every conflict in our lives takes place at a crossroads that is defined, on the one hand, by a problem we are now required to solve in order to grow and develop, and on the other hand, by the fact that we do not yet have the skills we need, in order to solve it.

But when we acquire those skills, it's not that we actually resolve the conflicts on the playground with the kids that we fought with, it is that we outgrow them. We no longer experience those conflicts at all, because we have transcended the source of the conflict by the development of skills that are adequate to that form of conflict. That doesn't mean they're going to be adequate to all forms of conflict. I think that what we get in life is just an endless series of conflicts that require higher-order skills. This is a little bit like Maslow's hierarchy of needs, where the conflicts that you get when you are in survival mode are pretty primitive. But the conflicts you're going to get when you move into self-actualization or art, those are significantly different conflicts. And we are defined in part by the conflicts that we experience and in part by our attitude towards those conflicts.

If we think about why, for example, do people get into dissatisfying relationships with other people, and then they break up and then they meet the same type of person again, and get into the same type of conflict once again. I think the reason for that is because we just haven't learned the core skill, which is not one that is only external. It is internal as well, because of the ability to stop and say, "Wait a minute. Here is what I experienced. What did you experience?" In this conflict, even though you're my opponent, I need to find out what happened to you, because that is the place where my deepest learning is going to take place. Every conflict, every resolution is somehow connected to who are you and who is this other person. And how deeply can you imagine what it might be like to experience what they have experienced and turn that into a form of growth and learning.

The second example is a story. I did a mediation involving a woman who had been the head of the teacher's union in a school for 20 years. And was a very strong, powerful union leader who had fought for the various teachers in her school district for many years and then stepped down and returned to the classroom. And as soon as she did, the problems began to occur. She began getting into arguments with the other teachers, shouting and yelling at them and using world-class swear words in front of elementary school kids. So the principal was getting ready to fire her, because this had happened now on 4 different occasions. They decided to try mediation, so I brought them all together and I asked the 4 teachers who were there to say what had happened to them individually. And with each one she said, "No, that isn't what happened and they are the ones who started it, and it wasn't my fault etc." And I can see this as just going nowhere.

So I went again inside myself and I said, "What would have had to have happened to me, to make me act like that?" I stopped her in the middle of a sentence, and said, "Excuse me. Can I ask you a question?" And she was a little shocked, because she was on a roll, and said, "Okay." I said, "Has anyone in this school ever thanked you for what you have done for them?" And she just started to burst into tears, and the other teachers were just stunned, because they had never seen her even blink in the face of opposition. And to see her dissolve in tears was completely shocking to them. So I said, "Instead of telling her all the things that she has done wrong, I'd like you instead to thank her for what she has done for this school. Say one thing that she did that made a difference for you, in terms of your life."

And they began describing these things. And now they're all starting to cry. And immediately she confesses to the whole thing. She apologizes profusely and we have this really powerful, heartfelt conversation. At the end of which I say to the teachers, "Ok, are we done yet? Does this feel like it's a resolution to you?" And she stops me and says, "No, I'm not done yet." And I think, "Oh dear. What's going on now?" She says, "I need to go to the parents and the other teachers and apologize for what I did." And the other teachers say, "We're going with you. And instead of you apologizing, we need to apologize too because we knew that for 20 years, you had been out of the classroom and this must have been incredibly difficult for you to come back into a classroom after all that time. And we knew that and we didn't help you. We need to apologize for that." And so you can just imagine what the faculty meeting and parent's meeting was like, when these teachers came forward and made these statements.

Preeta Bansal: I'm really struck by what you said earlier about how all of us in our lives will be confronted with an endless array of conflicts that increasingly draws us to develop skills of transcendence and transformation. Is there a way to get this societal learning out there so that people can transform their own approach, relationship and views of conflict?

Ken: Yes, I'm busily exploring this right now. First, let me say that one of the most interesting aspects of conflict is that it is self-similar on multiple scales. This is the scientific description of a fractal. A fractal is something that is self-similar, on large and small scales. So what is true often between individuals may also be true of societies, which can also develop higher-order skills for handling conflicts. So in the US today, we are experiencing intense political conflicts as a result of the recent election and as a result of a series of problems that haven't been adequately addressed.

And the question becomes how do we learn some skills to be able to manage that? And once again, I think that there are certain core skills. One of those is dialog, without which we can say that democracy is limited. So the greater the skills in dialog, the more opportunity there is for democracy to work and to deepen its creative possibilities. Something I've done for many years now is to bring people together who disagree with each other over a variety of different issues, and help them figure out how to talk to each other, learn from each other and problem-solve together. At the simplest possible level, we can think of politics as a form of social problem solving. If we do that, then we can ask the question, "What would make problem-solving more effective on a social level?" And clearly one of those things is being able to talk about social problems with each other, especially when we have disagreements.

So, for example, with 'Mediators Beyond Borders', a group of people and I went for about 4-5 years, once a year, to Athens to train Greek mediators on how to conduct dialogs between Greek citizens and immigrants. The first thing that we did was to ask a series of questions that help people understand each other. Here are two of those questions. One: Have you ever in your life either in a family, neighborhood, school or workplace, been the new one and everybody else has been there for a while, and you've just come in to this place? What did it feel like? How did they treat you? How did it feel to not know what the rules were? To be seen as an outsider as opposed to an insider? What emotions occurred? How did you handle them?

Two: Have you ever in your life, in your family, neighborhood, workplace or school, been the one who's been there for awhile and then new people come in who have different skin color, men, women whatever it might happen to be, and how did that feel, to have these new people with different ideas coming in? Did you feel like what you believed was going to be overwhelmed or disregarded?

And then within two questions, basically, everybody can start to understand what it feels

like to be in the other one's shoes. And then we can begin to talk. About what real life experiences people have had. We don't want to deny there are problems because that doesn't serve anything. What we want to do instead is to explore those problems together.

Alyssa: I was going to ask you, in the example you gave with the teachers, there was resolution and it seemed like they were getting true justice. But in some contexts, as you've noted in your book 'Mediating Dangerously' we have to be careful because we don't want to suppress conflict and trade justice for harmony. I was wondering if you could speak to that.

Ken: Great question! Some of my thoughts on this are in 'Mediating Dangerously', but I also wrote a book two years ago called 'The Dance of Opposites,' and there's a chapter there on mediation, law and justice. And the statement that you made about trading justice for harmony comes from Laura Nader, a social anthropologist who's Ralph Nader's sister. And I think it's a valid critique if we are trading justice for harmony and we haven't dealt with the underlying problems -- we might do that for some tactical reason because the possibility of war is so great -- but fundamentally, real peace comes with justice. So, now we have to ask what is justice?

Aristotle defined justice as due proportion. He said that, in a sense, justice is someone else's self-interest. But the truth is it's a combination of our self-interest and someone else's. So what makes an outcome 'just' is that it doesn't settle the conflicts alone through some form of compromise, but actually resolves the underlying reasons for the conflict. And that's a significant shift in the way that we think about justice, and in order for that to happen, Aristotle, is right -- we have to take into account the other person's self-interest. Unfortunately, the law as a process consists basically of deciding which of two truths is the correct one. If there is only a single truth, then the law is going to be successful in resolving that dispute. But if it turns out that there are two truths, then trying to decide which one of them is the single truth is going to destroy the complexity of the problem. The only way you get a resolution then is by finding a creative combination of those two truths that hopefully turns it into something higher.

Here's the example I'd like to give. There are two ways of combining things. You can take hot water and cold water and add them together and get lukewarm water. Or you can take water and add flour and heat and make bread. And this is what we're looking for. So now let me get to your question -- are there situations in which it is better to experience the conflict and have it continue, than to have an outcome, which is unjust, and the answer is -- often. But it's never quite so simple. And if what you are asking for and consider to be 'just' is something that is 'just' in your self-interest alone, and that is not going to be considered 'just' by the other person, they will have a reason for refusing to go along.

But here's a place where conflict resolution really helps us immensely, and it helps us to recognize that conflict is a relationship. And that means that there are always two truths, always more than just one perspective -- it is in fact our inability to recognize that

truth is complex, multi-dimensional and nuanced that gets us into such difficulty. So we need to ask ourselves what is the other person's truth that needs to be incorporated in our solution?

Now, here is another workplace example. A man was about to be fired by his employer as a security guard at a newspaper and the reason was because he was so angry all the time that the women who worked at this newspaper preferred to walk to their cars through skid row alone, rather than be accompanied by him. So the publisher came and talked about how angry he was and how inappropriate his behavior was.

And I said to him, "Is it true that you're angry?" And he says, "Damn right!" And I asked, "What are you angry about?" And he says, "I have been passed over for promotion." It turns out he's in his late 40s, and he's been passed over by younger people many times and the reason is because he's angry all the time. So I said to him, "If you were promoted, would you be able to give up your anger?" And he said, "Yeah." "What kind of job do you feel you could be promoted to?" And it was very funny -- he said he wanted to be the head of HR! So I turned to the publisher and said, "Are there any jobs on your desk or other people's desks that he could do?" And he said, "Well, yeah, but I'm not here to give him a promotion. I'm here because he can't deal with his anger." So I said, "Well what if we created a situation where it is half of one and half of the other as a transition, so he can imagine moving into this new job and have a reason to give up his anger, and at the same time he is in his old job and shows that he is able to give up his anger." They thought that was an interesting idea so we developed this job description where for 3 months he would do both jobs, but he would have to have zero anger.

But as I am writing up the agreement, he starts expressing his anger again at the publisher. And I said, "Wait a minute, we just solved this problem. Why are you still angry?" And he said, "Well, because they did this, they did that." And I said, "Are you going to be able to successfully let go of this anger that you've experienced?" And he stopped for a second and said, "I don't know." Now that's the moment of truth! So I said, "Would you like some help to figure that out?" He says, "Yeah." I said to the publisher, "Do you have any kind of programs for people that can get them counseling/coaching/therapy?" He says, "Yeah, we've got an employee assistance program." "Would you be willing to go through that?" "Yes." "OK let's put this on hold and give you a chance to go through that program and see what happens." He comes back 2 weeks later, and says he's resigning because he's realized how much anger he has from his former life, from the way he was raised, from his expectations; so he's decided he's going through therapy and then going back to school to get a degree.

Now what I was trying to do before sounded like a good idea, but wasn't what he actually needed. He came up with a much better idea eventually. So that's an example of a place where a mediated solution wasn't going to produce the highest level of justice for him and he kind of knew that inside himself. And that was an important realization for me, to stop and check in with myself to make sure that I was really getting the right information from people, before jumping to conclusions.



Alyssa: Great, thank you! One thing I noticed, in each of your examples is that at one point in the conflict, you really sounded like you must pause and attune to what was going on within you. I was wondering if you could speak to some of your personal practices to cultivate that awareness?

Ken: Thank you, it's a beautiful question. In the first place, I meditate at least an hour every day and this is really essential because, in the first place, it is filling myself with emptiness. The emptiness is not a void -- it is a place of fullness. What you are filled with is a kind of sensuousness, if you will, a sensation of how the life energy is flowing inside of you. And that gives me information about what is happening with other people because all of us have the complete ability to become tuning forks, particularly when it comes to emotion and storytelling.

A second thing that I do is what I call calibrating my intuition. Intuition is simply the sum total of all of the information that is available to us at any moment, that we're not necessarily conscious of. And conflict resolution is a highly intuitive methodology and so what we need to do is to figure out how to access what we know, but don't know that we know. One way of doing that is by tuning yourself to the story and seeing if you can finish it before they do.

The third thing is what I call the #1 rule in conflict resolution, which is to show up. And that means as much of you, as you can possibly bring to the conversation that you are having in that moment -- all of you, and if there's any part of you that you can't bring, that's a kind of attachment. What you want to do then is to take a look at that and see what blocks are in the way. This is another point, which is that every internal blindness results in something that you can't see externally. If there's something you can't see inside yourself, you won't be able to see it outside and vice-versa. If you've missed something in a conversation, there's some reason why you missed it and if you focus on it, if you really try to get to the bottom of it, then you have become more attuned to parts of yourself, personalities even, that exist inside of you.

Good actors are able to do this. Acting essentially means that the roles we act out already exist inside of us in some form. There's another part to this, which is simply following the little trail of breadcrumbs that people leave in their conversations. And I mentioned before about places where there is great depth or a peak in the conversation -- like any of the power words, insults or places where people get highly energized. And if you just follow those, you'll be able to do something creative with it.

There is another point about this, which is, it is important to have as much training possibly as you can get, and then to jump in there. Leap before you look, if you will. You can do as much looking as you can but none of the looking is actually going to help you, once you make the leap. And to place yourself in a position where you don't know the answer, couldn't conceivably know the answer, nobody could know what's going to happen next, and follow it. In order to do that, you have to first polish your own

intention and attitude, so that it is really impeccable and spotless. This is something where it just has to be genuine for you.

Preeta: Yeah, that's wonderful. I'm wondering that these tools for transformation are obviously tools you have developed over the course of your lifetime, and if you could speak to what in your life led to their development?

Ken: Well, I would say there are several things. The first is that I have to give credit to the women in my life for teaching me the importance of emotional intelligence. And I kind of remember the very first time in junior high school when I realized that girls knew stuff that I didn't. I was on the phone every night talking to girls who somehow just seemed to have some deep knowledge. So I would say out of intimate relationships, has come a lot of learning.

The second is the social experience of being in the civil rights movement, the antiwar movement, and the student movement of the 1960s. I was very much an active participant in that. I believe in the values that all of those things stood for, but what I realized was that it's a little bit like separating the kids on the playground. You can get a certain distance through demonstrations, confrontation. If what you want to do is to stop people being lynched, that's one way to do it. But if you want to change people's hearts and minds, you have to actually engage them in conversation.

The third source for me was being a judge and trying to do justice, but somehow not being able to do that, not understanding even how to get there because the law is so formal. There were two personal experiences that I had. One was an offer from the governor of California at that time, to be appointed to the Superior Court, and I had to give the answer the next day. I was torn about whether to do this or not. I had a sort of prophetic dream that night. I dreamt that I was on the stand as a judge and there was this kid who was testifying about some crime he'd committed and I realized he was lying. And then I looked at the defense counsel, realized he was lying, looked at the prosecutor, realized he was lying, and looked at myself and saw I was lying too. So I got up from the bench, took the kid by the hand, sat down with him on the floor, and said, "Tell me what happened. Tell me who you are." It was a really intense, powerful dream and I knew I couldn't do this. So I called and said that I wouldn't the next day. The second major one was that I was appointed to be the first judge on the television program 'People's Court'. And we did a pilot for the program in the course of which I mediated a dispute. I'd done some mediation as a judge and here there wasn't any point in judging because it was very clear to me that the 2 people could reach an agreement. I got them to a place of agreement and they were thrilled but the producers fired me because they wanted to have victory and defeat -- that was one of the important dramatic elements for them!

I would say the strongest part of the lessons for me was after I became a mediator and began doing juvenile victim-offender mediations between kids who committed crimes and

their victims. And those were just so incredibly powerful. Having been a lawyer who handled criminal cases sometimes, I knew what happened to kids who went to prison. This was just completely different. Nobody went to prison. People apologized, they gave retribution and restitution, and there was redemption for the kids as a result. Because they got to a place where they could pay back for what they had done, and they had to do that, in order to be free of it. They had to make themselves whole. 'Making the victim whole', that's the way it was phrased, but the truth is, it was never as much about the victim as it was about the perpetrator, and helping that kid get to a place where they didn't have to walk around covering up their guilt forever, with further criminal acts. So those are some of the main ones.

Questions/comments from other callers follow

Carol: Must people have a true interest in resolution for successful mediation to occur?

Ken: No. Here is what I would say, probably as characteristic of this. Almost everybody wants to be free of the conflict and almost nobody wants to come together to talk about it. So they don't have to believe in it. All they have to do is to be willing to come together and willing to say what is true for them.

For example, I do marital mediations and I also do divorce mediations. Divorces are places where people have just given up or they've become so exhausted trying to solve the problem, that they just can't do it anymore. One part of every conflict story is the idea that nobody could do anything about this. Mediation can't possibly work and I can't tell you how many times I've been told that. And sometimes, it doesn't work -- because the mediator may lack the skills, or because it's too deep, or because it's gone on too long and people aren't willing to change, or because they don't know how to, or are afraid to. There are thousands of different reasons, but what is most important is that out of this conversation comes some deeper understanding of, at least, why is it that we actually are stuck, and that's a step forward.

Lisa: Has this work helped you with your own conflicts inside yourself?

Ken: Oh my God, yes! One of the really delicious reasons for learning mediation is that you get to work on yourself. In fact, you have to work on yourself! We think of conflicts, like we think of a lot of things in the world, as external. The truth is that everything external is processed internally.

What happens for me is that, especially earlier in my experience, there would be places where I would get stuck, where I couldn't figure out what was going on and would make mistakes. You can't do this work without making those kinds of mistakes. But every single one of those mistakes is one that I take to heart and work on. Then it happens, of course, that you are busy meditating at work and then go home and discover

that you haven't really walked your talk, as completely as you ought to have. Aren't there some things that you could do better in your relationships with other people? And the answer is, yes absolutely, and I continue to work on that, even today.

Mish: First, it seems like some thrive on confrontation and some shun it -- wondering where does one's basic nature determine how you handle conflict? Second, do you feel that there is a direct correlation between one's aversion to conflict and the number of wounded places within?

Ken: Beautiful! In the first place, we all have a different chemical and genetic makeup and they've shown with mice that some are more risk-averse than others. On top of that, there is what is called epigenetics, which is the influence of environment on genetics -- that is what happens in your environment can change the expression of your genes. So, for example, if you have a male mouse, which is subjected to stress and there's no connection with the female mouse next door, except through the air system, so the odor that comes from the urine of the male mouse is transferred over to the female mouse. The babies born to the female mouse will have higher levels of cortisol, a stress hormone, than if there had been a male mouse that hasn't been subjected to stress. So there's genetic predisposition, there's epigenetics and there's experience. So that's the first piece -- that there's some kind of natural sensitivity we have to conflict, that every one of us can improve upon as we go through life.

On the second question -- the more wounds you have experienced, the more the threshold for your pain is altered and the more sensitive you are. My approach to what happens when there is 'catastrophic suffering' is forgiveness -- as a spiritual practice and a form of conflict resolution. What these sufferers have uniquely available to them is the ability to dedicate some part of their lives to making sure that no one suffers the way that they did. And everybody who has really suffered will instantly recognize the truth of this. This is the way out, instead of pretending that somehow you can go on with your life and everything will be OK. You have been given a kind of gift. It wasn't a gift you wanted. It wasn't even a gift that you would necessarily choose, but once it has been given, what to do with it?

And that becomes possible in conflict resolution, especially with kids who've committed crimes or people who've experienced great trauma in their lives. With 'Mediators beyond Borders', we have a project in Rwanda that is using 'Trauma-Informed Mediation' because everybody in Rwanda has been traumatized. And there are conflicts in which people get re-traumatized, and so we're combining mediation and trauma professionals, and teaching both sets of skills simultaneously. We need to be deeply respectful of suffering and not blame the victim for what has happened. But having said that, we also need to say to them -- there's something that you can uniquely contribute that the rest of us can't. People who have gone through a war in the Middle East where there is an organization called 'Combatants for Peace' and it consists of the members of the Israeli Defense Force, Hamas, Fatah, Islamic Jihad forces -- all of them former fighters who'd fought each other, coming together to say that we've got to do something different. Nobody can say that like they can, just like nobody could produce peace in Northern

Ireland, other than the IRA and the Ulster Constabulary. They were the ones who did it and it was out of their suffering and their pain that the peace process came to a realization.

Preeti: As we close, I have one question -- How can we, the larger ServiceSpace community, support your work?

Ken: Actually, if we can describe it as our work. Here is my belief about this - globally, we are now facing problems that can no longer be solved using law or military force or ordinary diplomacy. We require something new, and I believe that what we have to do as a species is to figure out how to solve problems collaboratively.

It's easy to do it with North Korea. It's happening right now with Iran, with Russia, and I would say that the most important thing for us to do, is to resist the notion that someone of us is the enemy. My way of saying this is the following: All of these are conflicts between them and us, but we have to get to a point where we realize -- there is no them. There is just us. When we realize that, we begin to move in the direction of dialogue and conflict resolution and communication. So whatever it is people do, that will be terrific. You can support organizations like 'Mediators beyond Borders' or 'Partners for Democratic Change' or 'Essential Partners', which does dialogue work. Help turn our political process in a conflict resolution and dialogue direction. If we can do that, then we will have done something really amazing.