

Brief Encounters from the Taos Institute

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Relational Practices in Peacebuilding, Mediation and Conflict Transformation: From the Intimate to the International

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The topic of the upcoming Taos Institute Conference is of great significance for our time. It is a bold invitation for us to bring our best ideas and practices together and to explore how they can serve a peaceful harmonious world.

As a starting point for our dialogues consider the following notions adapted from Taoist philosophy. Union requires differences and opposition. In order to unite there must be something to unite, to bring together, ideas and actions that are different, even in opposition. Union, unity, collaboration and all of the many relational practices we value can exist only because of differentiation. Think of the ocean and the land. They are very different elements yet together they create a union, a rhythmic ebb and flow of life. Reflecting upon human patterns, we can make the case that people and groups whose views and life stories are different and opposed to one another are in a dance giving life and meaning to each other's views and stories. Imagine, the image often used to describe union - two arrows coming together.

Questions for reflection and dialogue: How do you help people discover and acknowledge differences in their views, stories and strengths? How do you help people co-create unity from opposition? While differences and opposition are life giving and essential for union, conflict is defined as irreconcilable differences. Think of fire and water. In whatever form they are in, any attempt to bring them together results in the destruction of one or the other. They cannot co-exist. Imagine, two arrows moving apart.

Questions for reflection and dialogue: How do you help people discern when it is time to terminate their relationship? And how do you help them do so in a way that honors differences and leaves everyone whole?

I look forward to what we can learn and create when we bring together, or in today's lingo - mashup - practices from the varied relational settings in which we work. How might practices meaningful and effective in family therapy resonate with global consultants and international mediators? How might practices honed in the fires of religious conflict and ethnic violence serve couples, consultants and educators? How might practices useful for establishing positive union management relations create relational resiliency across borders?

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