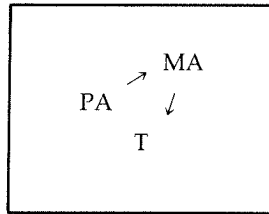


## Chapter 8

# WORKING WITH COUPLES

The following couple in their late fifties came to see me because of their long-standing difficulties. She is a psychologist and claims to be fed up with his jealousy. He says he's not jealous, but that she won't relate to him. In his opinion, she doesn't love him.

After they enter my office, she sits back looking smug and professional. He is dressed like a business man. She tells me that he does not admit his resistance to her. I tell her to say this to him. He responds that he does not know what she is talking about; he has no resistances. I reformulate the question and ask him if there is anything which he cannot talk to her about. With this question, I am looking for the edges which keep them separated from their dream field. He hesitates, then admits that he cannot talk about painful subjects with her because he feels she's not interested.



They are both obviously on their best behavior; in fact, their positions give the impression of highly intelligent people drifting emotionally apart. After listening to them

intellectualize and attribute blame, I watch them draw away from each other and so I separate them emotionally to work with them individually. I ask him if he had any dreams recently. He tells me he dreamed about a dying man who won't tell anyone that he knows he's dying. We all agree that this is probably a part of himself in great pain. The projection is that he thinks *she* will not be interested in his pain. 'Pain about what?' I ask him.

He tells me that it is very difficult for him to admit that he has a wife with a career who is not there for him when he needs her. He looks down at the floor and says that without her full attention he cannot live. With this he begins to cry. She is listening to everything very quietly and then turns her body towards me, still looking at her husband. I tell her to follow what her body is trying to do, noticing that his getting over an edge brings her to one, too. I ask her to turn entirely towards me. She hesitantly says that she doesn't want to get emotional, she doesn't want any tension. She says she has had so many arguments with him that she is utterly hopeless about their relationship. She no longer wants to get upset and isn't interested in pain.

I tell her to say this directly to him, namely, that her double signals indicate that she wants no trouble. Tell him that what he projects – that she cannot speak about pain – is true! And I tell him to repeat to her that he too does not want to talk about pain, he'd prefer to die silently. Consciously focusing on avoiding pain quickly brings about the opposite. She screams and yells that he is power crazy, and he yells back that she is yelling at him. After a long and emotional exchange, she quiets down and asks me if she can consult the *I CHING* about herself. She gets number 39, 'Obstruction.' The lines speak of a great man who would like to disappear from the world, but the way is blocked and he must return to help people in adversity.

She tells me that this fits. Being a psychologist, she sees that she must return to her marriage and work things out. In fact she would prefer to work them out in herself. She gets up, not realizing that the *I CHING* recommended the opposite, namely that she 'return to the world to help,'

thanks me, and walks toward the door. Suddenly her husband explodes and yells to her that even though she looks like she is taking things internally, she is really ignoring and hating him. She hesitates, admits he's right, and sits down again. He talks again about his pain and how hard 'life' is. Then all of a sudden, *he* gets up and wants to go, claiming that it is just impossible to communicate with her when she's not interested. I point out that *he* is about to leave, that he is projecting his lack of interest on to her, and recommend that he do what he is telling her to do: sit down and work on his communication. He starts to cry heavily at this point, and for the first time, she is moved by his pain, she sits next to him and puts her arms around his shoulders.

This work has several interesting points. The first one is that the man has a block to expressing his feelings and projects this upon the wife. He projects on to her the one within him who won't talk about pain, and this is reflected in the dream. But his inability to express his feelings gives him a quiet, non-demanding appearance which is the perfect excuse for her, too, to avoid difficulties.

She, however, is not merely dreamed up. The *I CHING* has told her to go into the obstructions, bear the tension, and work it out. She, too, now in her late fifties, has a problem which she shares with him: neither wants tension. Both have become hopeless and want to die. This manifests itself in the *I CHING* hexagram and in her double signals which turn away from pain.

#### HOPELESSNESS

Both the man and the woman have the same unconscious problem. One deals with it by putting on a persona, the other gets depressed and folds out of this world. Both have similar edges. World-weariness is characteristic of many people, especially people over fifty. But surprisingly enough there are also many young people who are hopeless and want to avoid pain, believing that nothing good can come of it.

In part, hopelessness is due to the fact that without encouragement and the right relationship tools people have

no choice but to give up. They can only go so far alone. They assume that their partner cannot be changed or that change will result in greater pain or that there is no need to change their relationships. Because she is a psychologist, the woman in this couple has the added difficulty of believing she is wiser and more intelligent than her partner. She attempts to change herself without regard or reference to her partner.

#### INTROVERTING AS EASING TROUBLE

Hopelessness prompts people to introvert and work solely with themselves. The woman's attempt to introvert by consulting the *I CHING* angered the man and disturbed the relationship. Likewise, his desire to leave almost ruined their chances of getting together. At a certain point in a relationship, the very tendency to withdraw and reflect on what is happening can be destructive by increasing existing problems. This contradicts the idea that individual change is the highest possible good! There is a time and place for this sort of change, it is a matter of the Tao. Individual change can thus be used as an escape or as a method for avoiding pain. Introverting becomes problematic if it becomes the goal and not one phase of a relationship.

#### COLLECTIVE DREAMBODIES

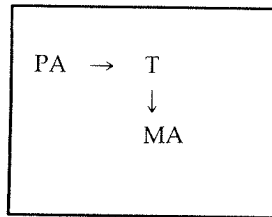
Two empirical facts are outstanding. First, we cannot tell who is the cause and who is the effect of the problem in this example, and second, there was no solution to the problem they presented. He dreamed her up to avoid pain just as much as she dreamed him up to give up and die. Neither her initial complaint of jealousy, nor his complaint of lack of love was directly solved. These facts lead us to conclude that (a) there is no linear causality; no one person does something 'bad' to someone else, and (b) there is no one problem that needs solving. The very idea that one is wrong or that there is a problem which one day must be solved belongs to the primary process of a couple and has minimal bearing upon the emerging secondary process.

In this couple's dreambody, the primary parts which

avoid pain must learn to communicate with the double signals. All parts of the dreambody need to develop awareness as parts of a greater unity. He plays the part which masks over pain, and she plays the part no longer interested in working things out. By working on both of their edges to pain, the two of them communicate better with one another when they are together and feel better about each other when they are alone.

#### RUTH AND DAVID

In the following case which was taped by one of my students it becomes apparent how the members of a couple become functions of the overall process. The part transcribed here is only one part of a longer session in which many topics were considered. Ruth and David are in their later middle life and have five children. They have both been in therapy before, individually, and now as a couple. They are discussing their sexual contact which has been absent for almost a year. As the conversation begins, David is on the floor, Ruth is sitting higher up on a chair, and the therapist is sitting between them, forming a triangle.



As you read, notice how difficult it is to follow the verbal content and sense of the conversation.

Therapist: So, how is it going between the two of you in your sexual life? What is missing?

Ruth: Things are a bit unerotic.

David: (irritated) Wait, things are still new, sex is just beginning.

Ruth: (with raised voice) I only said that I have been in a

hole for a week, I am depressed. I noticed that I need a lot of love, and I don't have it.

Therapist: Why not reach out to David?

Ruth: I can only do that when my partner does it, too.

David: (coughs) I cannot do everything at once.

Ruth: I can't animate him, I need someone to care for me. I want to be spoiled and not have to fight for it.

Therapist: Spoiled by him?

Ruth: Yes, from you (to David). If I cannot get my happiness, then (softly) I will go and seek another relationship. Then, (laughing) but look, even that wouldn't help. (Her voice drops.)

Therapist: How do you fantasize this affair?

Ruth: It is sad, it won't work. Yet, I see candles, and atmosphere, and a bubble bath.

Therapist: David should help you with that.

David: (clowning) I can't help with a bubble bath. (All laugh)

Ruth: (turning to David) What happens in you when I speak?

David: (ignoring her question) First I have to get rid of this cold and stop drinking (coughs).

Ruth: (continuing previous statement) The most important thing for me is love which would help me. I wish I was not like that, but what can I do?

Therapist: Ask him.

David: (coughs) Let me get over my cold first.

Therapist: (to David) What do you mean?

David: I am suffering from a fever.

Ruth: Last week you had no fever.

David: Depressed . . . (coughs again).

Ruth: My love and life are going by . . .

Therapist: Uh huh. (to David) What are your feet doing?

David: (feet jiggling) I walked into something with my shoes, I got dirty from the stairs. . . .

#### PRIMARY AND SECONDARY PROCESSES

I present this undramatic verbatim report because it shows numerous, typical relationship patterns. To begin with,

there are two simultaneous and separate processes happening. The primary process is the discussion of sexual difficulties. Ruth complains of the lack of eros in the relationship, and David defensively claims that it's just beginning to grow.

The secondary process includes all that is unintentional. For example, in the beginning Ruth's voice rose while announcing, 'I only said that I have been in a hole for a week.' David had experienced her comments about their sex life as a reproach and reacted defensively. She, in turn, spoke to his defensiveness by raising her voice aggressively. Since he is upset but wants to remain cool, she becomes aggressive. They are primarily talking about sex, but secondarily fighting about who is right or wrong. The secondary signals are fighting signals, not communications about sex.

Their double signals also appear in the way they are sitting. The therapist is on the chair, the husband is on the floor, and the wife is on the chair above her husband. She sits higher up than he in a more dominant and extraverted position. His sitting position is a sign of his defensiveness. The therapist could have chosen to work with these positions by switching them around at the beginning.

#### **SYMMETRICAL REACTIONS**

When Ruth complained that she needed more from David and the therapist encouraged her to reach out directly to him, she responded that she could not because he would not do the same. This is a typical symmetrical reaction: 'If you do not change, then I will not change, if you cannot, then I cannot!!' Symmetrical behavior is not simply a power entanglement which keeps people from growing, but is due to a shared dream and edge. Both are unable to reach out and be direct. Hence, to begin with, they need encouragement to be consciously indirect, and to realize the trouble they have in being direct.

#### **SYMPTOMS AS DOUBLE SIGNALS**

When David is attacked for not being erotic, he coughs. He

says that he is not well. He asks that she let him get rid of his cold before he approaches her sexually. It seems as if his cough is somatized defensiveness. Symptoms arise or coincide with a situation in which an individual is not strong or aware enough to consciously support a particular signal, in this case needing time to gain strength to defend himself.

### THIRD PARTY POLITICS

Though Ruth admitted that she could not animate her husband, she continues to try by using a form of blackmail, a threat pattern which I call 'third party politics.' She warns him that she will find another lover to meet her needs if David does not. Third party politics happens all the time. Whenever a party feels too weak to get its point across to a second party, it brings in an absent third party, a party which supports it in some way. The power of this tactic lies in the fact that the second party cannot defend itself against the third one since the third is not really present. If we look at Ruth closely, however, we find her lover in a double signal, in her production of erotic fantasies which attempt (inadequately) to care for her.

### CLOWNING

When the therapist asks David to help Ruth with her bubble bath, he clowns. He makes jokes instead of telling Ruth to stop threatening him. His clowning maintains the primary process of discussing absent topics and avoiding expressions and feelings. Such clowning is important; it indicates an attempt to cover up hurt and fear. The therapist could have simply said to the clown, 'Clown around until you discover what feelings you can disguise by joking.'

### THE QUESTION

When Ruth realizes that the third party threat is not helping, she turns to David and asks him what he's thinking. But this question is a trap; it can never be satisfactorily answered since she really wants to make a statement like, 'You ass, be nice to me!' David responds to the question by saying that he is troubled by coughing and



drinking. Why is he asking for time? Ruth ignores his reply and comments that she needs more love. She doesn't hear his answer because she wasn't interested in her own question! Be careful, most questions are primary processes which hide statements! \*

#### DREAMS

We could easily guess what this couple is dreaming knowing that double signals are dreambody manifestations. David dreamed that a young man was angry about doing social work and was repairing a machine that could be used as a weapon, and Ruth dreamed about a man she likes who is himself at home but falls apart in groups. David's dream shows that he is irritated by his sociability and preparing for war. Internally he is arming himself for a battle. Ruth's dream implies that she, too, does not yet have the strength to be genuine with others; it is easier for her to be 'at home,' that is, to fantasize about life.

#### AMPLIFYING THE TOTAL PROCESS

To amplify the total process, I would recommend to David that he behave as sweetly as possible. He should be polite, stay on the floor, and ask his wife to boss him around, telling her that he's a defenseless man, not yet ready to interact directly. Whenever she provokes him, he should tell her that he prefers coughing to defending himself. I would tell Ruth to demand that he be responsive and wake up but to tell him that she herself doesn't have the strength to do what she wants others to do.

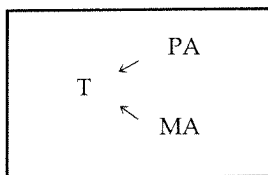
#### WORKING WITH EDGES

Asking this couple to jump over their edges and be direct would probably not work. Pushing takes a lot of energy and doesn't hold. I prefer to paint the picture the way it is now and depend upon the intelligence of the collective dreambody itself and reorganize its parts. The creative potential of the individual will then awaken and make readjustments. This couple obviously needs to be more direct and conscious, but they cannot do so without

realizing how and where they are indirect and unconscious.

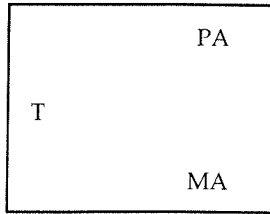
If people go over their edges too quickly, they either hurt each other physically or cannot benefit from what happened. Frequently they are simply not able to carry out the new behavior because it lies too far over the border of the edge. Direct interaction requires behavior patterns this couple does not yet have. The development of these new patterns is implied in their dreams and double signals but is not yet conscious. In David's case, he first has to repair his weapons before he can defend himself. Ruth has to learn what it means to be herself in public. Developing new internal patterns is a task which occurs most rapidly when old patterns are first brought to awareness and consciously lived.

#### DON AND PAULA



A young married couple walked into my room, sat quietly on the sofa and floor, and looked straight ahead at me and sideways at each other. They said they had come to the end of the road together, they simply could not get along anymore. Paula said she couldn't develop together with Don because he wouldn't allow her to be herself. She said she had dreamed that she was violent with him on a street car in Zürich and then affectionate afterwards. He said that he dreamed he was scared of falling off a chair.

After hearing their stories, I recommended that they speak directly to one another. Paula immediately stood up and approached him, pushing him backwards with anger. He said he wanted to stop the work because he was afraid of what he would do to her. As he spoke, she moved back against the wall, looked down, and became depressed.



As they were both visually oriented, I imitated them and told them to watch and tell me what they saw. As I played her, Paula said, looking at me, that if she really believed what she was saying, she would just let go and fight with him. He said he wanted to respect his fears. I sat down and they both began to physically fight with each other. The fight soon turned into a dance, a form of archaic, kinesthetic communication. They fought and laughed, she bit and screamed while he struggled and wrestled with her in a very friendly, ape-like way. A few minutes later they were both lying on my floor, exhausted and satisfied with what happened.

#### **ANALYSIS**

Paula said she needed to be violent with him but had been afraid to because she thought women were supposed to be delicate, feeling, and motherly towards their husbands. I told her that public opinions must be changing, even within her, otherwise she wouldn't dream of fighting with him on the street cars in Zürich!

In the Paula and Don unit, he is that part of her which has been too shy to express itself in public, and she is the part of him pulling him to the floor. Both have an edge against aggression. She believed a woman should not be aggressive, and he believed that if he was really aggressive, he would lose control of himself and kill her or hurt himself.

#### **AGGRESSION**

When I played their roles, I gave them a chance to see how they looked in their relationship. They had been unnecessarily verbal with each other. Together, they are a dreambody

whose parts are trying to be more primitive and kinesthetic. They represent two different parts of the same dream: one part wants aggression and the other part represses it. As a body with two parts, one is violent partly because the other is physically shy. She dreams him up because she is afraid of herself, and he dreams her up to be violent because of his own hesitations.

#### THEIR MYTH

When I asked them about their early dreams, only Paula could remember one. In the beginning of their relationship, she dreamed that her grandmother who had died long ago was back in life. Her association to her grandmother was that she had been the wildest one in the family and consequently the one her mother liked the least. From this dream, we can guess that one of the governing patterns behind this couple is the return of an archaic, female principle. For Paula, this meant being her physical self in relationships. Don said that for him it meant not having to be unnecessarily sweet and well-behaved with Paula or with anyone else. He added that he had originally chosen Paula for her primitivity *and* lady-like behavior. Paula interrupted him at this point and insisted that she liked both her primitive and lady-like sides, but the latter could come into being only when the former was allowed to live first.

The background problem bothering Don and Paula is that strong kinesthetic communication outside of sex is forbidden in our culture. People touch each other either sexually or violently. Animal play and non-verbal expression in relationships is usually repressed.

Another interesting part of their work is the fact that getting over their edge and fighting resulted in playing. Why is that? People believe that if they go over their edges they will go crazy, be deserted, or become violent. But if their dreams pattern behavior on the other side of the edge, when they go over their edges, the wisdom of the flow, the Tao itself, takes over and relating in the deepest sense begins. When people no longer have control over themselves or their relationship, the world does *not* stop, in fact, it

begins anew. It creates itself, reorganizing in an unimaginable way. This self-organizing principle of the universal dreambody lies behind my trust and belief in process: it is characteristic of the deepest experiences people can have together.

#### CHANNELS OF THE TIME

Paula's dream governed their relationship for years to come. Paula said that her grandmother had separated from her family in order to 'do her own thing.' Paula, too, sometime after the work we did together, left Don after a wild fight and then remarried him, just as in her dream she loved him after fighting with him. Here we see how the myth governs not only the momentary situation, but the whole relationship process.

Since her first dream happened on the streets of Zürich, and her grandmother was an unusual woman for the times, I must also ask myself how closely this couple's process is connected to the problems of our times. My guess is that the personal psychology of this couple is also a picture of our period in history, of the collective situation of European women in the 1980s.