

Vicious Circles

The family:

The husband accuses his wife, that she spends too much money; and that therefore he has to cut her short. Both know, he adds, that she cannot manage the money problem in a proper way.

She: But you don't give me a chance, so that I can prove I can manage.

He: I would like to give you the chance, my dear, if only I knew I could trust you.

She: If you were not so hard to me I would be spending less.

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Jim goes out for a drink every Friday night; and normally comes home about twelve at night. XX this time he comes home at 2.30 in the morning. His wife is furious and cries to him : "Don't tell me that you have been only with your friends all night".

He: That was exactly what I was going to tell you.

She: Don't tell me lies.

She: I want you to say to me, that you love me still.

He: dear Mary, I do love you, you know that.

She: But you must say it out of yourself; not because I ask for it.

The hospital

The doctor is convinced, that the patient is dangerously ill and needs to be operated (tumor). The diagnosis "Cancer" is more or less a sentence to death. At the same time the doctors give the impression that it can be cured. At the same time the patient know what it is all about and ask the doctor to deny what it is all about.

The Courts:

About an accused man is said: "We all know, that the background and biography of this man is the cause, that he cannot live a normal life; and can not participate in a normal way in the society.

To defend society against his deeds and to defend him against himself we have to sentence him to prison.

Couple X and their children live in peace with the family of the husband and in war with the family of the wife. This situation is there from the beginning of their relationship. In the course of time however the relation of the wife with her parents and family ameliorates. Now the husband and wife start quarreling about this and are getting openly into difficulties with each other. The "common enemy" fades away.

3. How does it work?

When we are reading about this curious behaviour of others, of ourselves, may be we are wondering how it is possible that we are doing like this. We are doing it, "deep down" we are knowing what we are doing. We are unhappy about it. We would like to get out of it. And in the same time we stay. It seems to be impossible to change things..

Maybe we can ask ourselves if we even wish to get out. Naturally we wish, with our whole heart. It is awful to be in circles in this manner.. And in the same time we are at home in them. In all the insecurity we feel secure. We don't know another possibility to live. We don't know how to get out and too we don't know how life will be if we get out..

We have many experiences with the "circles". If people are in them and they are very unhappy, they are seeking for help. Maybe they find a real able man or woman who can really help. The result is very often that as soon as they feel that things are changing or even that they could change, they make a row with the helper. It is so insecure to get out of the situation that as quick as the possibility to get out shows up, we fly back...And so things never change, neither in families, nor in N.I.

That is the reason that England never can do any good. We always are calling that it is the responsibility of the bloody English, but as soon as they come trying to give a solution we show them, that their solutions are no solutions at all. So it is clear that as long as we don't understand our problems better, the British should stop trying to find solutions for us. We always will prevent that they will make sense.

When we try to make ourselves clear what is going on, in fact it is a circle. Everything everyone is doing in this relationship is the course of the next thing, which is again the cause of the next, this being mostly exactly the same as the first. She is angry and he is depressed, because he is depressed she is (more angry, because she is (more) angry he is (still more) depressed, and so things are going on. The RUC makes life difficult for the IRA, the IRA makes life difficult for the RUC, the RUC and so on. The circles are endless, everywhere. What we learn from it being a circle is, that there is no cause. Everybody is cause in his turn. And so we shall never have any solution as long as we are seeking causes, hoping that we can take them away. It always only means that things in the circle are going faster. I say to you, and I really have this very conviction: You, you are the cause, change yourself at last. And you are sincerely very astonished because you know for very sure that I am the cause. And so we have our conflict until eternity.. Loving it, because it is our way of life, and hating it.

A very good remedy against all possibilities to solve any problem is to give unclear messages to each other. We are saying something, denying it in the same time. You are a very nice fellow, but, I love you, if you. If you change, if you are doing what I wish. You, Roman Catholic, are wholly free when you do what I wish. And the reverse. With my voice I say that I wish a solution of the problems, with my face I say no.

It is a very big, and very exciting learning-process to find the "doubleness" of our own message to others, and to find what we are doing with it. There are millions of such messages every day in every country. Every day there are millions of them in N.I. About N.I. I wish to be a citizen of the Irish Republic, but I wish to stay Northern Irish because I can't afford it. I wish to have peace in N.I., but I am glad when the IRA gets a big blow.

And so we build our own prison, meaning well and doing harm. The conflict stays as long as the people who are in the conflict obey to the rules of the conflict. Because we don't even know the rules, we "only" are always following them, we have conflict until eternity..

Only if we find the rules, accept that they are the rules of everyone of us, not only of the others but primarily ours, our own rules, then we can find ways out. And even then it is not

so easy. One of the problems is that we are doing these things, not only without knowing it, but also without our control. Even when we know that we are doing these things, thinking these ways, mostly we only see it, hear it when others are doing it and when we try to prevent doing it ourselves we always again come to the conclusion that we did it already again, again, again. We do it spontaneously and when we try to prevent at most we do it spontaneously in another manner.

We can't prevent. We have to relearned doing things, living with each other, with ourselves, in a new way. Only then there will be a new community in N.I. In the same time we are relearning, we leave the conflict behind us and we find peace.

4. Going the way out.

To get out of the circle, to get out of the conflict, is a way. A way of living, a trial and error, and in the same time a way of hope. It is necessary or in any case it is very useful to know about what we are doing in our conflicts, and in the same time that is not of enough help, when we don't have a little bit of a travel guide. We shall try to write some pages of that guide.

But first of all still a few words about the first three chapters. To know can mean, to know with your head. You can know "how things are" and see how they work with other people, but this knowing is not of any help for ourselves. The things we are doing with each other don't come from our heads. Although maybe we are thinking about them, they could, if they are of any importance --and our conflicts are! -- from the depth of our being, from our very existence. And so we have to know about these things with our very existence too! They have to sink into us, mostly slowly, gradually, now and then firstly, until it is in our bones and blood. Only then the learning-process is finished. In fact it never will be wholly finished. It is a way of life, giving happiness and fulfilment with adventures and risks.

The learning-process is in the doing, going the new ways, knowing about our old manners to get over the conflict and now knowing that is are the best means to stay eternally in them.

A last point in t his introduction. All conflict are between men, between men and women, between two people, between groups. In the end the difference is not that big. The ways of handling the conflict are exactly the same, when it is a conflict of a couple or when it is a conflict of two nations.

The way to get out of it too is exactly the same. To stop entertaining the circles, to find a new way to get along with each other. The only difficulty is, that if the conflict is between groups, everything can last longer. You have to begin finding other possibilities to live with the members of your own group, so changing them with you, and in the same time being already another woman, another man, when you meet the "others". All real changes in the life of mankind have begun with men, women, who changed. Changing structures, about which we are speaking so much in our time may be useful. In fact however, deep down, nothing changes. A deep-rooted conflict never can be changed without we are changing ourselves.

4.1. The Scapegoat, our own black side.

We all have our difficulties with our own black side. Naturally we agree that we are not perfect. When we don't specify, we can speak about that very openly. "We are not better than all the others!" Naturally not...

Things get worse when they come nearer. So worse that not only we don't wish to speak about it with others, we don't want to think about it either, even we forget wholly who we are, what and how is our black side.

Nevertheless there is a very good possibility to find out our own black side. When a child says something nasty or bad to the other, it gets the answer: What you are saying you are yourself! You are seeing in me what you should see in yourself. You don't like it to see it in yourself and in the same time it is in you, with you. You have to get rid of it and so you are giving it to me. What you are saying you are yourself!

And so it is. This is so to say a very hard and an iron rule. When we are angry on our fellow people, on the people we are in conflict with, when we are saying and thinking bad, awful things about them, we can be very sure we are speaking about ourselves. If not we would not be angry, we would not be indignant or outraged. We would be astonished that human people can be like that or simply we would not see it at all. We are indignant, in fact about ourselves, about our impossibility to cope with our own being.

It is a hard, a very hard rule, we agree. When we accept the rule our whole way of life is endangered. Everything about which we did not even think because it is quite natural is gliding out of our hands and our hearts. At last we see ourselves and we get afraid. Helpless. In the same time, when we find the possibility to accept the rule, to live up to our standards, we stop always moving in the same circles. We have a possibility to see the others as they are. We have the means in our hands and hearts to find new ways of being together.

In fact we are speaking now about what mankind did as long as culture exists. Always men laid the possibilities they have and with which they could not get along, which endangered their life and the life of the community on innocent people, who they drove out of the community, bearing the black side of everyone. So we built culture and society and we are doing this until this day. We, all.

In the same time there might come a situation, and again and again it happened, that this means did not do. Then there came open conflict. In a couple, or civil war, war between nations. Everybody trying to get the bad side to the other, harming, killing him. In N.I. we have this situation. The old rules, lying the faults upon some who were driven out, don't work enough. In this manner we can't prevent the conflict in N.I. And so we have the conflict. We try to get over it in doing in the old ways, making the others black, ourselves white, and so fighting them, and now we know, in this manner we will have the fighting until eternity.. We will kill each other, make our children unhappy, giving them an impossible future. When we will overcome, if we wish that there will be a new N.I. the only possibility is that we become other women, other men. That we stop turning around the eternal circles. We are the white, you are the black! Oh no, you, you are the black, we are the white! Oh, non, no, we, we the white, more white still, you, O you.. response, it is unsettling for the man in power, for power only functions if there is someone to be forced. He is so to speak robbed from his power. However he is not robbed from his power in such a way that the other

person now has the power. In that case the players in the game only exchanged places. The peasant does not have the power of the soldier; he does not even try to conquer this power. He does not want to have power, and exactly this is unsettling and robs also the other person from his power. Both parties are now in a state of powerlessness and at this very moment a meeting between two human persons can take place.

Acting in such a way asks a great creativity from the “present”, the willingness to take risks, but above all a kind of inner refusal to assume power. As long as he strives after the power of the “soldier” he stays in the same game of the soldier and the vicious circle remains closed.

4. Another language

Going the second mile is speaking a different kind of language. The “present” does not speak the same power language of the “soldier”. Just in such a way the circle can be broken. By “language” I do not only mean spoken language but any token of human communication. A gesture, a glance can say more than words as everybody knows.

In order to keep the game going, one ought to use the same words and expressions. Supposing an arbiter at a football match suddenly starts using words of the chess game in the middle of the match. Or the world champion chess uses the word “penalty” instead of the word chess” (by the way, I do not know the English words in football, match or snooker...), the game would break down, unless the opponent starts using the same terms.

We are so used to a certain kind of language, that often one term provokes the other. We associate – as in certain games – one word with another. In a power game words have a meaning that is understood by all. One does not have to think of them, they present themselves. They strengthen one another. If someone sells out “loyalty”, he is pretty certain the other party will say : united Ireland. It is all in the game. Also family rows often go through the same ritual phrases” “You keep me always down”...”you never listen”. How do you recognize the “power language”?

Word in power language often have something impersonal and mechanical. E.g. someone who talks about himself in the third person : not “I”, but “the police”, “the movement”, “the state”, “the minister”, “the church”,... as a policeman, or a clergyman I think....The person is hidden behind his function, the peasant behind his being a peasant, a soldier behind his being a soldier, a woman is only a woman...being your father...being your daughter...

Most tech critic words are “power language words”, not only the word used in factories making cars, but also the words used in social services and in politics, or in churches.

“Power words” do not take into account that a human being is a whole end that he is living with other human beings. He is only “the terrorist”, the policeman”, “the bishop”, “the Catholic”, “the Protestant”.

Breaking out of the circle means learning a new language in which I do not easily use words such as “one”, “we” but rather “I”.

Using the new language means that I do not play the same game any more, I use other words, and this is an invitation to anybody else to use new words also.

5. Isolation

The most classic solution, of a problem is “separation” or “isolation”. This is more a pragmatic solution. Do not try to solve anything, but I separate the two. Two of my children are fighting with each other in the living room. To have some peace, I tell one to go upstairs, and the other to go to the garden. The row stops for the other party is absent.

This way of solving conflict that is very common in families and small groups is also used in societies. In Belgium civil war between the Dutch speaking and the French speaking group is avoided by giving each party its own territory, counsel etc. In Holland the tensions between protestants, catholics and liberals was solved at the end of last century by stating that if one group received something from the state, the other party had the same rights.

If one party got money for a school, another party had right to receive a similar amount for a similar goal. In this way “three pillars” emerged. Every party felt quite safe for he could not be wronged, and in the last couple of decades people feel sufficiently safe to leave “their pillars”. My children may feel safe in their own territory, and may even forget what the row was all about. The circle is broken because both parties leave the field.

Ib Vicious circles in Northern Ireland

Vicious circles do not only occur in families or small groups but also in society. Each society has certain vicious circles inherited from its tradition and creating new ones at the same time.

Let us take in connection with family problems the relationship between men and women in general. Visiting Short Strand at a funeral it struck us that men and older boys were standing in the streets so as to protect the area and that the women stood in the door, protecting the house and the small children. Out talks with men and women alike confirmed that there is a sharp role division in N.I. between men and women. This division is not very different from other western countries but it has its own characteristics. Men are supposed to be strong and the provider of the family, women complain that they themselves do not have power but only responsibility. This “game” men and women are playing continually : man has the power and the wife has the responsibility. Women refuse to see their “responsibility” as a power tool.

So one sees that the terrorists groups consist out of men, and peace groups very often cut off women. Men and Women giving each other the black card and though complaining they are not willing to change the game and its rules. A similar play, is played by catholics and protestants, and the paramilitary organizations. The IRA is said to have power for it uses arms, the UDA wants to be responsible and is asking for an independent Ulster that no one wants.

Catholics complain that the Protestants have not moved a bit concerning the status of N.I. and the loyalty to the crown. As proof they quote Mr. Paisley and other Ulster politicians. The protestants complain that the Catholics do not change. Proof: the rules of the Catholic Church on mixed marriages.

Catholics : if the Brits go out all will be well. The British : the IRA etc stops bombing, all will be well.

Often do we hear the phase: if only the other party...

By waiting for the other party nothing happens.

The Protestants complain that Catholics do not take their seat in the assembly and are not willing to accept responsibility. The Catholics complain that the assembly is an instrument of British, c.q. Protestant power game.

In other words the other party is always the guilty party, the obstacle, and it should be clear to anybody that because of that the “just” party cannot do anything all. At the same time by not being obliged to do anything, life is in a quaint way rather quiet and safe. At least one knows the rules of the game, and this knowledge gives a kind of peace. Stepping out of the game could provoke completely unexpected situations, this is threatening. Perhaps the new situation could mean the end of physical violence, but it would also require a completely new way of identifying oneself, being a new person, a new society.

When we are thinking about what we are doing to ourselves, we must conclude that we are making invalids of ourselves. Quite unnatural people, having only the half of our possibilities, laying the other half on others and so losing it....

When we learn to be honest, knowing that we are speaking about ourselves when we are speaking about others, we become complete women, complete men, with new possibilities to fulfil our lives, and with peace together.

It is a double learning. At last giving ourselves the chance to be who we are, who we can be if we stop mutilating ourselves. And in the same time we give the other, the others the chance to become themselves.

What you say are you yourself! Go the way, find the adventure. Find yourself, and peace.

III The Way Out

3) The second mile

“If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two” is one of them at famous texts in the Sermon on the Mount. This advice was given by Jesus in a concrete situation. It thus is not an abstract saying or a kind of behaviour that has only to be reported. Probably it refers to the right of Roman soldiers to force a peasant to carry his weapons. What to do in this situation? Doing what is being asked, means staying in the vicious circle. One carries the weapons and afterwards another peasant is forced to do the same, and one day later another soldier forces you to carry his weapons. Refusing does not help either end and confirms the circle. The peasant loses his life, and next peasant is forced to carry the weapons. What to do in a situation in which the other part seems to have all the power, and in which the burden falls on you?

What Jesus suggest is the following. Refuse to give the burden back after one mile and demand to carry it a second mile. This is most unusual responsibility.

V No Way Out

Violence

Hitting the other seems to be the perfect way of solving a conflict. There is only one small problem: it is very likely that the other party hits back. Examples of this abound. The great temptation is to think that the next blow will be so decisive that the other will not be capable to hit back again. If Mr Jones knew throws in Mr James' window, he may be pretty sure that Mr James will throw in his window or will do something equally unpleasant. Mr Jones realizes that this thus does not work. A more radical solution seems to be needed: he burns Mr James' house down to the ground, and hope hopes to have solved their ongoing conflict forever. Indeed he succeeds to get Mr James out. But Mr Williams with whom Mr Jones has a conflict too, feels now very threatened by Mr Jones. To make sure he decides to burn down Mr Jones house and to destroy his garden at that. Violence thus escalates.

The story can also have another ending – actually those stories seldom end, for somehow the violence guarantees that the story goes on and on. Mr Jones starts burning down Mr James' house, but it's just began raining so heavily that the house was only damaged, and the “radical solution” was not achieved.

Fighting for peace

Another attempt to solve conflicts is to mobilize everything you have in order to assure peace. Mr Jones and Mr James are already fighting for years, throwing in each other windows and picking each other's flowers. Mr Weston gets enough of it, for their conflict lowers the value of the houses in the neighbourhood. So he calls in a lawyer, a policeman and a minister and together they approach Mr Jones and Mr James. Mr Jones and Mr James feel equally threatened, and make a common front over against Mr Weston. They accuse him of misjudging the situation: Mr Weston demands peace but what about justice? Moreover they think that Mr Weston forces his peace down their throats. This cannot be accepted. And they are right: though Mr Weston does not throw stones, he remains part of the game by using other forms of power. It is quite clear that Mr Weston does not want to run the risk to lose his case, and so he loses.

NO WAY OUT

On the foregoing pages you read about “vicious circles” and open or hidden conflicts. The vicious circle is a never ending conflict, in which the parties reinforce the acts and behaviour of the others; in order to keep the wheel turning and the conflict going.

The partners in the conflict say they want to conflict come to an end, and they want a real solution; but very often they say it in such a way and they make it clear in such manners, that nothing really happens.

The following joke may illustrate this.

Mr Olivier and Mr Peters had a long-term-bad relationship; both felt the other should change his attitude towards him in order to get peace again. On Christmas day they decided both that the quarrel had to come to an end; and after the church service they shook hands and greed to make a new start. On the first morning of the new year they met by chance shook hands again and Mr Peters said to Mr Olivier: “I wish you for the New Year the same as you wish to me”. And Mr Olivier reacted immediately: “So, you are playing the old game again?”

Here follow some advices, which you can use to keep the situation as it was and to make sure, that nothing will change:

- Work hard for a **solution**. You may be sure, that all the steps and hard work you take to solve the conflict you have with another party on your terms will deepen the conflict.

An Anglican and a Roman Catholic Dean met on a ecumenical occasion. Both agreed to take steps in the direction of reconciliation of the Anglican and Roman Catholic community, for, as the Anglican Dean said “We are serving and believing in the same God”. “Yes?, answered the Roman Catholic Dean,” You in your way and we in His”.

Town-renovations: A quarter of the city is old and needs to be reconstructed. The houses are bad and worn-out. The inhabitants are complaining that they live in bad housing-conditions. Sociologists and community-workers may tell, that these bad housing-conditions is one of the main causes of criminality in the neighbourhood and the lack of quality of life the inhabitants of this city-quarter apparently suffer from.

The politicians of the city decide to break down the old houses and to build better ones. When the work starts rioting and protests start. They love the old worn-out houses and don’t want to leave them. “They are destroying our area”.

The conflict was solved on the terms of those who had the power to impose a solution. Those, on whom the solution was imposed, had the power to sabotage the imposed solution and they will continue to do so as long as it is not clear, that the problem, which is to be solved, is for both parties the same problem.

Perhaps the politicians and the community-workers may conclude that those, living in the old quarter are stupid, lazy or extremely conservative. And other politicians and community-workers may take their stand at the side of “the underdog” and make an organization to keep the “renwers” out.

A little story:

Once upon a time there lived far, far away a man who had offered great services to the gods and to the community. The gods decided that our man should be paid for his services and they gave him the opportunity to wish something and promised him, that, whatever he wished, his wish should be fulfilled. For the gods love him very much.

The man started thinking, what to wish. A ship, full of gold and silver, Eternal Youth, Three beautiful women, who would never age? It was difficult, what to choose. And he meditated during a long time in absolute loneliness.

At the end he found the solution for his problem, which was imposed upon him by the gods. He wished that every wish of his should be fulfilled. And the gods granted unto him his wish. And so our man found himself in the position, that every wish that he might wish, could be fulfilled, and from that moment on the man has never wished anything anymore.

In this little story it is clear, that “the gods” kept their power completely by granting the man, that everything he might wish should be given to him. For it was impossible for the man, to utter a wish spontaneously. He was completely blocked by all the power he had got.

It is impossible to work out a solution within the framework of the vicious circle. For those, who are bound together in a vicious circle are dependent of each other. And it is very often exactly this interdependency, which is ignored by the seekers of the solution. And as long as the interdependency is not broken – in some way or another – the game will continue. Many times you hear saying in N. Ireland: “Life would be normal, if only the gunmen would stop their business; and it is against the gunmen that we should be defended”. And it is clear, that those people – fully understandable – seek for a stronger and more consequent security-policy. What they miss to see is, that “gunmen” and “normality of N. Ireland” belong together. There wouldn’t have been “gunmen” if there were not a N. Irish-state; and there wouldn’t have been a N. Irish State, if there had not been “gunmen”.

The “if only” of many good citizens is continuing and reinforcing the situation, which they say they want to change. It is the same as the complaint of the husband, who tells his bosom friend, that his marriage would be a very happy one, if only his wife would change her attitude towards him, and change her odd opinions about sex and money. By this “if only” he can continue to complain, and cause the situation in which the wife “holds the baby”.

A conclusion might be in such a situation that both have a firm interest in the continuation; and that their solutions, explanations about the growth and coming into being of this situation serve no other purpose, than the continuation.

Tell the other **The Truth** about his role and guilt. He will start to defend himself. Go on, telling him, that he is a stupid coward not to see, and not willing to become aware his disastrous role in the conflict I have with him; and he will even try harder to defend himself. At the end you have the proof what you knew: he is a coward. If only he was not such a coward, you could have spoken to him reasonably; and then the conflict would have been solved easily.

5.3 How everything begins? First with us and then together? Or together and so with us?

When we try to find a common point, which we find back in everything we wrote until now, it is the question about the beginning. When we suppose that everything begins with us, that our thinking and our doing have ourselves as a centre, things, and so too our lives, always will stay as they are. We will have our conflict and never solve it. We will have our incomplete lives. We will have our unhappiness. We will always go on, finding the cause of the difficulties of our country, of our lives, in the others, the guilty. Always we will be very convinced, that if they had not, or were not.

We will always stay white, seeing the others black, ourselves as innocent, at most reacting on the atrocities of the others. We always stay people having only a part of their possibilities and using most of this part to handle the conflict. No, we are together from the very beginning on. Only knowing that if there is any guilt it is the guilt of both of us, if there is any cause, we together are the cause, only so there is a way out. We can't solve the conflict trying to change them. **AS LONG AS WE ARE NOT CHANGING NEVER WILL ANYBODY CHANGE.** Only if we take the risk to change, all and everybody will change.

Still in another manner: As long as we are equal, the conflict will last. Only when we become unequal, unequal compared to the people we were, unequal to the people they were, there is a future, for everybody.

6. The proof in the pudding is in the eating.

If you stayed with us until now, it is clear that nothing is gained as long as we only are reading, thinking, feeling. We only can change changing. Taking steps forward and coming into new land, on new ground.

We know, although we don't know how, that it is hazardous. In fact we don't have any experience. We don't know about the land we are coming into. In fact, a new world. Very exciting. Very fearful.

We can try to say still something about ourselves, going this way. We need courage, inner freedom to do the unusual, in the eyes of ourselves, in the eyes of others. To take the risk to seem queer. You only can have the courage when you see something, although you don't know how you see and what you see and nevertheless you see.

You know in the same time about the risks. The unexpected is exciting, and in the same time dangerous. Who are you after the step? Who are the others? Can I cope with it?

It is still in another sense dangerous. Maybe people who see the challenge you are, get fearful, or annoyed (that is the same). Maybe they hate you because you force them to see themselves in a new way they don't like (as we did not, before.)

Maybe and so, in the end, we need, to go onward, step by step, carefully or maybe sometimes reckless and then a step back, belief. Belief in the reality of what we are seeing for our eyes. Belief that there is land before us. A deeper, a more human reality than all so-called we live in together with our conflict.